

Proven Love

Listening to Apostle of Love

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Bible Text: 1 John 1:1-4

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You know, our country has been mourning the loss of comedian Robin Williams this week. When you heard the news that he had apparently taken his life at age 63 on Monday, you probably thought of some role that he had played that made you laugh from somewhere deep inside. Henry Winkler, the Fonz on Happy Days, many of you remember him said he realized he was in the presence of greatness the first time Williams rehearsed on their show. He said this, "I just realized my only job was to keep a straight face and it was impossible because no matter what you said to him, no matter what line you gave to him, he took it, processed it and then it flew out of his mouth. Never the same way twice and it was incredibly funny every time." Many of you remember him in that particular way. Williams' media representative said that he had been battling depression of late which several quickly connected to a line that he had just delivered in a 2009 film, *The World's Greatest Dad*, where he said, "If you're that depressed, reach out to someone and remember suicide is a permanent solution to temporary problems." Reach out to someone. And Robin Williams had done that. It was reported that he had spent time in therapy even as recently as this summer. What a terrible tragedy.

When columnists observed the sad irony of a number of people in our culture whom the world considers to be incredibly funny, but who on the other hand have struggled with depression or substance abuse to the degree that it actually affected their life span. Todd Leopold wrote a piece for CNN entitled "The Dark Side of Comedy." Part of it said, "Show business history is filled with stories of comic kings who fought against depression and substance abuse, not always successfully." Jonathan Winters, Williams' hero was institutionalized for a time. The effortless Dick Van Dyke once said he was mostly drunk for 15 years. John Belushi and Chris Farley died of overdoses. Mitch Hedberg, Freddy Prince, Richard Jeni, all funny men, all gone before their time. What an incredible juxtaposition of thoughts, comic kings. Kings who fought against depression and substance abuse. I think it's also instructive that the conversation turned very quickly to the place of the soul in this conversation. Sure, there were the requisite experts talking about depression as if it is an impersonal disease that somehow invades a person's body completely apart from his or her choices or decision, or control or responsibility, so you had those folks talking. And there were also those who immediately began speaking about chemical imbalances and all sorts of explanations to this that are exclusively physiological. As if you just find the right combination of drugs and everything would be

fine. Although Robin Williams had just been in therapy and presumably he had access to the finest care based on the latest theories. And then his wife reported later this week that he was in the early stages of Parkinson's disease, so there was a lot of that kind of talk going on. But there was also plenty of discussion that sought to go beyond just the physiological. You heard phrases like "a troubled soul," or "a tormented soul." I think that raises a very important question. Are we just the product of our environment and so our choices are predetermined by what others have done to us in the past, or are doing to us today? Or on the other hand, are we just a combination of genetics and chemicals and nerve endings, where our physical bodies exclusively define our existence? Or are we as the Scripture suggests, many even hinted at this week, are we fundamentally embodied souls? Where the most important thing about who we are is our heart, our inner man? And while our past, our environment certainly influences us it doesn't control us. And while our bodies can impact us in all sorts of ways as well, some at this phase of history and science, we may not understand, but we're flesh and blood, does not and never will have the final say in the choices we make every day. Are we fundamentally embodied souls? And is the key question, how we choose to cultivate our hearts?

I would suggest there is a lot at stake on that question because we live in a world where there is a tremendous amount of sadness and loss and division and war. Reasons to be depressed, we got them. It can be potentially depressing to turn on the news and see another round of violence in the Middle East. Who bombed who? Or to hear of Muslim extremists demanding that their countrymen convert to their religion or be beheaded. Or to watch powerful countries invade their weaker neighbors and then arm rebels who shoot down a plane full of innocent passengers. Or cities even in this country with police in full riot gear trying to put down what some are choosing to do. Or to listen to the endless arguments that go with our own political process and that's not to mention all the garden variety problems and trials we all face in our personal lives and families each and every day. So you kind of put that in the mix and it makes you stop and think, when some of the wealthiest and some of the funniest people in our culture conclude that the only answer is illicit drugs or alcohol or even taking one's life, if there wasn't any hope for them, where would that possibly leave us? Well, perhaps the answer is as embodied souls in need of reliable hope.

With that in mind, please open your Bible this morning to the epistle of 1 John. That's toward the back. The epistle of 1 John. That's on page 185 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. So first John chapter 1. Our church's theme this year has been "Loving Our Neighbors" and so we decided to spend this fall listening to the apostle of love and loving our neighbors. Let's listen to the one who is called the apostle of love. That's the term of endearment that was used to describe the apostle John. Who is the author, humanly speaking, of five of our 27 New Testament books so he wrote the gospel of John and then the epistles of 1, 2 and 3 John and then the book of Revelation. I believe that 1 John is an excellent book for us to be studying this fall and I believe that for a couple of reasons. One is: chronologically speaking, you may know this, that 1 John is one of the last books in the New Testament to be written which means by now the church of Jesus Christ is 40, maybe 50 years old. That means that many who would be receiving this book had never seen Christ

themselves and so what they knew about Jesus they had either heard from the apostles, they had heard from other eyewitnesses or they had heard from those who had heard from the apostles. You realize that time can either be your friend or time can be your enemy depending on how you spend it. If a believer doesn't use time well, truth can become stale or lifeless or unimportant and they begin taking the church or the things of God for granted. They develop essentially a, "What have you done for me lately?" approach even to the gospel, to the cross, to the empty tomb. They lose appreciation for their brothers and sisters in Christ over time. That may be true of you this morning. That may be true of you. Or time can serve you well. It can be your friend. Where your love of Jesus is becoming deeper and fuller and richer and God's word is becoming more and more precious and your relationship with God's people are becoming more significant. This book that we're about to study can help people who have placed their faith in something or in this case, someone who lived a long time ago and it tells of a faith that's not trendy. This has a shelf life far longer than the best delivered line in the funniest movie you've ever seen and it can and it will stand the test of time if you'll let it.

The second way this book is ideal for us right now is because it's written to people who are in a culture where some are proposing different faiths or different ways to God or different ways of answering life's most perplexing questions. It's amazing how much of that has gone on in this culture this week. So in John's day there were those who were saying that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God. Can you imagine that? Or that Jesus Christ did not really take on a body or that Jesus did not really die on the cross as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of man or that Jesus Christ did not really rise from the dead. This book is written to help its readers understand and believe that Christianity can stand up to the highest level of scrutiny. This is the real thing. That's like the apostle Paul said in one of his letters, "This is a trustworthy statement and worthy of all acceptance." We're talking about a faith that can and will stand the test of time and people like you and me need that. We needed it badly.

Now, we're going to go through the epistle of 1 John verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter for the next several months so if you're wondering why is he talking about this today, frankly it's not because of anything that did or did not happen in this culture this week. It's because we planned this back last fall, last November, December and that's the way we do it around here. Verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, that's what keeps us off of hobby horses around here. Now, for some of you this is going to be like studying an old friend. You've been helped by this book before, you know it can help you again. For others, it's going to be a maiden voyage. You have never studied a book of the Bible systematically before in your whole life. I can tell you in advance, you're not going to be disappointed by the trip. I also want to encourage you, and for those of you who have been in this church for a period of time, you know where this part of speech is going. I want to encourage you of getting in the habit of reading through the epistle of 1 John in one sitting once a week. You'll be helped by actually reading through a book of the Bible all at one time and before you fuss at me, don't even send me email about that, okay? Because then I will send a return email because I've got one of those too, asking you how much time you spend watching Dancing with the Goofs and then, I mean, are you really going to even make that objection right here? That didn't come out just right, did it? I'm

off my notes or maybe it came out just right. I want to encourage you to read through a book of the Bible like the epistle of 1 John in one sitting each and every week. I would also encourage you if you have access to different translations of the Bible to do it from different translations. But let's commit ourselves as a church family to working hard together and to wring out all the truth that we can from this wonderful book from the word of God.

Now, this morning we're just going to study the first four verses, but I warn you in advance, this is actually the hardest part of the book to understand. So you have to listen carefully but we're talking about the word of God now, right? So we're not just watching some funny movie, we're talking about the word of God so I want to encourage you to lock on, ask the Holy Spirit to give you all the help that you need in order to understand and benefit from and apply all that we read in these verses. 1 John 1:1,

"1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life - 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us - 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that," here is the purpose clause, "you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write," second purpose clause, "so that our joy may be made complete."

We're talking this morning about listening to the apostle of love and in these first four verses I'd like to propose to you that we can find three elements of the faith that stands the test of time. Friends, you need that. Someday there will be a memorial service for you. Do you realize that? That is true. Three elements of a faith that can stand the test of time. John tells us, first of all, that Christianity is reliable. There's a series of reasons in these first two verses for why you can rely on your faith in Christ if you've placed your faith and trust in him. One of them is in the opening words because Jesus Christ was "from the beginning." Now, what other verse in the Bible does that remind you of? If you know anything about your Bible at all, that would remind you of? Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and you might say, "I thought John was talking about Jesus? How did we get to creation? What's the relationship between those two?" Well, Paul answers that in Colossians 1:16, "For by Him," by Christ, "all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth," and I realize, by the way, people love to mock that, they love to make fun of that. Ha, ha, ha, ha, Have you come to recognize that everything that our world laughs at isn't necessarily untrue? And have you come to recognize that those jokes don't last a long time? They don't always sustain you. They don't always sustain us. They don't always sustain the person making the joke. "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him." John said in his gospel, "All things came into being by him. Apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being."

Now, what other verse in the Bible does 1 John 1:1 remind you of? This, what was from the beginning? Surely, Genesis 1:1 but also the gospel of John 1:1 which says, "In the beginning," there it is again, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Don't you love the way your Bible all fits together as a unit? John is beginning this epistle by reminding us both of Genesis 1:1 and the gospel of John 1:1. What's the point of all that? It's that Jesus Christ is eternal. This isn't a funny line in a movie that makes you crack up with laughter but takes you no further toward lasting joy. There's always been a Trinity. Jesus Christ has always been the second person of that Trinity. John Whitcomb under whom I studied much of my theology up at Grace Seminary used to like to say, "Jesus Christ coming to earth some 2,000 years ago was one of his more recent accomplishments," and that's true. And John is telling these believers who are becoming further removed from the actual events of Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection, that Christianity is reliable because this one in whom you place your faith was from the beginning, he's eternal.

Now, look for a second reason in the text and I want to ask you to follow carefully with the logic. I realize it's a long sentence and as Americans anymore, if we can't fit it in a tweet, we don't want to concentrate on it. Do you realize God did not tweet out the Bible and by the way, that was a compliment to you because the assumption was that in the power of the Holy Spirit of God, you would actually train your mind in a disciplined way, think about some thing for a period of time. You're not a dog. Do you realize that? You're not just a combination of chemicals. God gave you a soul and you can in his power, control the choices you make in your heart including listening to extended logic in a verse of Scripture. Aren't you glad God trusted you with that? Instead of just putting a little bowl of dog food at your seat when you walked into the church house today? Here we have it. "What we had heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld in our hands, handled, concerning the word of life and the life was infested and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." What's John's point? The answer is: he was an eyewitness. Do you realize the Bible you hold in your hand is an eyewitness account? And of course, we know it's even more than that. We know that these men were writing as Peter would tell us, as they were borne along by the Spirit of God, these words are inspired of God and John's emphasis here is, "You can trust Christianity because we thoroughly checked this out," John says. "As eyewitnesses we thoroughly checked him out. We heard him. We saw him. We touched him. He truly is the word of God."

One of the first lessons I learned in American history class in college was, you have to get back to the original documents. The best mode of study is to read what those who were there said. What those who were there wrote. Don't be satisfied with someone else's interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. Take the time to read the Declaration of Independence. Don't just be satisfied with what someone says about Thomas Jefferson or Benjamin Franklin. Find copies of their letters to other people and read them. I can still hear Dr. Carter, my history professor at Baptist Bible College up in Clark's Summit, Pennsylvania at 6 o'clock in the morning on Mondays in our discussion group preaching, "Go back to the original source documents. Don't tell me what a writer 500 years later said. Find out what the people who were there were saying." John's point is: that's what

I'm providing for you. And praise God we have it. A divinely preserved, eyewitness account. That's important because I realized some, maybe many, think that Christianity requires some sort of a blind leap in the dark. That's not the case. It's true that the Apostle Paul said, "That the preaching of the cross is foolishness," to what? "To those who are perishing." Think about that for a minute. I understand the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but that certainly doesn't mean that Christianity is inherently foolish. God wants you to use your mind. He wants you to carefully examine the evidence and then to choose to exercise your faith in what he has revealed. It's not blind faith in nothing. It's reasoned faith in the revealed word of God.

Now think about this, remember our approach to hermeneutics, our approach to Bible study and even preaching is: we want to understand what the text says and then we want to understand first, how would it have impacted the original hearers? Before we think about how does it apply to us? What was the point that John was trying to make and the impact he wanted to see in his original hearers? And the answer is: he wanted them to not be stale in their faith. He wanted them not to be complacent because they were one or two generations removed. He wanted them to be convinced about the reliability of their faith and then act in a way that demonstrated that they believed their faith in Christ could be trusted.

Now, how does that connect to our annual theme, loving our neighbors? Well, our neighbors live in a culture, as do we all, that says joy comes through making yourself feel good. That's how you can become happy. That's how you can have joy, is figure out a way to make yourself feel really good. So hit the booze and then you'll really feel great and then you'll have joy. Or hit the drugs or practice illicit sex or you just add, you fulfill whatever choice you think would possibly fit into that sentence and then you'll find real joy. And the challenge is, those choices not only don't produce lasting joy but they also become increasingly addictive. Do we understand that? Satan promises a lot on the front end and he never delivers. Did you recognize that? There's all sorts of choices out there that our world wants to hold up as, "Do this and you'll feel good and then you'll have joy." Not only do those choices not produce lasting joy, they also become increasingly addictive. But ultimately and I know these are hard words but you need to hear them and I would be less than a pastor, if I didn't say them: the problem here is not environment. There's not a whole lot of Americans that have a whole lot to complain about when it comes right down to it. So I cannot say my environment drove me to whatever as if I were a dog who had no control over the matter. So the problem is not the environment nor is it my physical body. Ultimately the problem is the way the person cultivated his soul. It is fundamentally a problem of worshiping an unreliable God.

That's the point of Ed Welch's excellent book called "Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave" and you might say, "Boy that's really a happy title." Well, when we are so immersed with the philosophies of our culture, every so often we have to be jarred and that title comes directly from the book of Proverbs which says in Proverbs 9:13, "The woman of folly is boisterous," and she is, by the way. Foolishness is loud in this culture. "The woman of folly is boisterous, She is naive and knows nothing. She sits at the doorway of her house, On a seat by the high places of the city, Calling to those who pass

by, Who are making their paths straight: Whoever is naive, let him turn in here, And to him who lacks understanding she says, Stolen water is sweet; And bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Now hear this, "But he does not know that the dead are there." You see, keep moving into that addiction where our world suggests that there's going to be pleasure there and joy there because you're going to feel the way you want to feel. He doesn't know that the dead are there. "That her guests are in the depths of Sheol."

Friends, John is offering a different alternative: a reliable Savior and Lord who is worthy of your trust, who is worthy of your allegiance. Here's the catch: much of what that reliable Savior says about the choices you and I ought to make every day, are counter intuitive. In other words, they go against your feelings. They suggest that you are going to have to make all sorts of personal sacrifices in order to love and serve those around you. But if Jesus is who John the eyewitness proclaims him to be, then his way is undoubtedly best. And so because we think our Savior is reliable, we're going to move away from our culture. We're not going to simply live by what we think is going to feel good in the moment. We're not going to pursue temporary happiness. We're going to live life the way our reliable Savior says.

That's why this year we're trying to love our neighbors in part through developing this new Community Development Corporation. That doesn't necessarily feel good. It's certainly not convenient. It takes us out of our comfort zone for sure but we're doing that because the reliable Savior says, "That's the way you live. You love your neighbors in whatever way that requires."

Listen to a brief story now about what that actually sounds like in real time. A program that was just recently concluded by some of the volunteers and listen carefully for the place of the reliable Savior.

"My name is Sean M. and I've been involved in a new ministry called 'Jobs for Life.' It's an eight week course based on biblical principles to help people set and reach career goals.

"My name is Todd B. I'm a 'Job for Life' graduate.

Sean: "When I first heard about the ministry, I thought it sounded great and then I started thinking about the commitment: two nights a week for eight weeks with somebody I didn't even know.

Todd: "I was initially hesitant about participating in this particular program, simply because I had participated in so many other programs similar in nature with less than favorable results.

Sean: "But we've been learning about how to reach out and connect with our neighbors. So I had to step out of my comfort zone and let God work on the details and he did.

Todd: "But I've learned that the 'Jobs for Life' program is a lot different from those previous programs that I participated in. Why? Because the 'Jobs for Life' program's fundamental foundation is Jesus Christ.

Sean: "It's been well worth the time to come alongside Todd and help him in his journey. You see, I found a new neighbor. I have a new friend."

That's exactly what we're talking about this morning. I found a new neighbor. I have a new friend. John M. and Rhonda and their family, they've been members of this church for a long, long time. John is trained as an engineer. John had a medical problem, right behind his ear, where he lost some of his hearing. He has all sorts of excuses not to get involved in an urban program like "Jobs for Life." "I'm an engineer. I'm a hands on guy. I have a hearing problem. I'm going blah,blah,blah, maybe I'll just find my joy in some booze at home. Maybe I'll whatever." No, what John and Rhonda had decided long ago is, along with a whole lot of other people, "I'm going to follow my reliable Savior and if he instructs me to love my neighbors, then I'm going to move out of my comfort zone and it's not going to feel real easy but I'm going to move out my comfort zone, joyfully following him because I'm convinced he is who he says he is." And what comes as the result? Lasting joy. Lasting joy.

A second element is that Christianity is personal. You see, what John said in verse 3, "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." What's the key word there? Fellowship, koinonia, having something in common. And the point here is that Jesus brings three parties together. And who are those three parties according to that verse? Well, you're one. If there has been a definite time in your life where you placed your faith and trust in Christ and you haven't, we would surely encourage you to do that today. But you're one. Who are the other two? The God of heaven and earth and other believers in Christ. You see, one of the wonderful things about Christianity is that it's a set of personal relationships, the possibility of cultivating a personal relationship with God and cultivating personal relationships with other people. Fellowship, what a priceless commodity.

The story is told of a famous British writer who was leaving Liverpool by ship and he noticed that the other passengers are waving to their friends on the dock. He rushed down to the dock and stopped a little boy and said, "If I paid you, would you wave to me?" and of course the boy agreed and sure enough when the man got back to the rail of the ship, there was this little boy waving away. Well, God created us as personal beings. We were designed to crave fellowship. No man is an island unto himself but sin ruins that, doesn't it? It ruins relationships. It separates. It destroys fellowship. We all know that far too well. Some persons lives are littered by a trail of broken relationships and the heartache from that condition is immense but in Christ, the possibility exists for fellowship. Christianity is personal.

Well, what was involved in securing that? There had to be an Incarnation. You see, how could John say that he saw Christ? That he heard Christ? That he even touched Christ?

Well, because as the Apostle Paul said, "Jesus was willing to empty himself, taking the form of a bond servant and was made in the likeness of man." John said in his gospel, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory. Glory of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth." God came down and took on flesh. That's why the book of Hebrews tells us that we don't have a priest who cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities. He's tempted in all points just as we are. You see, this isn't fellowship based on enjoying some really funny jokes together. Not that there would be anything wrong with that, I'm not diminishing that, okay? But when we talk about biblical koinonia, this is founded on the truth that a Redeemer came from heaven to earth with the power to transform us at the level of the heart and make a kind of relationship available that is not possible without him.

We also know that this fellowship was secured by the cross. And Paul says, "Therefore having been justified by faith we now have," what? "Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Compare that to what we've heard a lot this week, that phrase "a tormented soul." We all know what that's like, right? And jokes can't solve that. Booze can't solve that. And with all due respect, the latest opinions of secular therapists can't solve that either because the problem is just too deep. The problem is too pervasive. The problem of alienation from God because of your sin can only be solved through the sufficient blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross of Calvary for us. That's what opens the door to meaningful relationships with other people.

Christianity is a transformation of your heart and life which puts you in a position where you can develop meaningful, personal relationships. John said, "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you so that you too may have fellowship with us." Think about that. Think about the body you're part of right now. People who are as different as you as night and day. They grew up in a different place, right? I grew up in Gary. You grew up somewhere worse but we can have fellowship even when I tweak you and people have a different occupation, people who earn a different income. When you think about it, the church of Jesus Christ is one strange bunch but we can enjoy fellowship that stands the test of time. We can be saved together as we come to know Christ and we can enjoy life together and we can die well together because of fellowship.

Now, why is that especially important? What John's talking about in this passage is far different than Christianity being viewed as simply adherence to a set of principles. Christianity can't be reduced to, "Well, I don't do certain things or I do this list of things." Christianity is not a list, it's a relationship and that's one of the dangers of a church like ours that spends so much time talking about all the principles of the word of God, that can tell us how to live every day, how to function in our marriages, how to raise our children, how to communicate, how to solve problems, how to function in the workplace, etc, etc. I recognize those principles can be a great blessing to us but if we're not careful we'll let the principles replace the person. There's no fellowship with God and we'll become mechanical in our adherence to all these lists instead of, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That's one of the main reasons Christianity has stood the test of time. It's personal. It makes it possible to have a genuine personal relationship with God and genuine personal relationships with others.

Now, as usual there are some questions that go along with that. What are you doing to cultivate that fellowship? For example, what are you doing to cultivate your fellowship with God? C. H. Spurgeon used to like to say, "You'd like God more if you would get to know him better." Do you talk to him in prayer? What does that area of your life say about how personal the relationship is? Do you listen to him? Are you cultivating koinonia with God? What are you doing to cultivate fellowship with others? I would encourage you to get involved this fall in an adult Bible fellowship or a small group for the purpose of building relationships with other people. Men, I would encourage you to be at that "Men of Faith" breakfast next week and by the way, it's going to be manly breakfast. Ain't gonna be no tofu there. You bring yogurt, we're going to smear it on ya. I mean, we're going to have some grease, frankly. We're trying to get to heaven. I don't know why we're all trying to put that off. So cram some bacon in that mouth of yours, for crying out loud, next Saturday. But there's something about getting together with the men and I hope that you are going to be there. I hope you'll take a look at this Faith fall preview and look at the various opportunities to build relationships with other people.

One last effect we'll look at this morning is that Christianity is joyful. John said in verse 4, "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Fellowship is Christ's answer to the loneliness of life. Joy is his answer to the emptiness or the hollowness of life." Don't you love to gather with your church family and sing together on the Lord's day? Isn't that a joyful time? And by the way, I challenge you as we move into the fall, sing. You don't have to sing good, sing loud. Sing to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't you love to serve together with your church family? A number of people were involved in all sorts of serving opportunities this summer. We highlighted one with the "Jobs for Life" group but there's all sorts of them. That wasn't necessarily convenient. It wasn't necessarily easy on the front end from a feeling perspective, but aren't you glad you were involved? Didn't it bring you a sense of joy in making a difference in the life of someone else? Karl Marx used to say, "The first requisite for the people's happiness is the abolition of religion." Karl Marx was dead wrong and every believer in Jesus Christ knows it.

You know, Robin Williams' current wife issued a statement that said in part, "It's our hope that the focus will not be on Robin's death but on the countless moments of joy and laughter he gave to millions." Those are tender words. I thought a lot about that. It would be wrong for me or for anyone else simply to advance a point of view at the expense of someone else and I tried very hard not to do that this morning. But the truth is every death is an opportunity to evaluate the condition of your soul and with so much that has been said on that topic this week, people speculating in all sorts of ways about that event, I felt like I would be less than a pastor if I did not at least use the occasion of a terrible death as an opportunity for you to think about what's going to happen when you die. Solomon said this in the Ecclesiastics 7:2, "It's better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting." Say what? "It's better to go to a funeral than it is to go to a party for that is the end of all men," Solomon said. You realize what that means, don't

you? Unless Christ returns first, you're going to have a funeral and the question is: what's going to happen one second after you die?

You know, personally it's interesting because I'm not thinking right now of one death, I'm thinking of two. I received word earlier this morning that my Uncle Jim, up in Crown Pointe died last night and the family has asked me to do the funeral and so I will be doing a memorial service for him, trying to minister to their friends and family. My Uncle Jim worked in the steel mills all his life. He was a supervisor on one of the sheet and tin mills up there. He was a man's kind of man. He was the kind of guy, he could grow a beard in an hour. He was just a man's kind of man. He loved the Blackhawks. I can't tell you how many times he'd say, "Yeah, went to a fight last night and a hockey game broke out." He used to like to talk about that. He was a great athlete. He played for Lew Wallace High School up in Gary as a man's kind of man, an athlete, but he was a Christian man. He was a godly man, faithful in his church all of his life.

Over six years ago now, my Uncle Jim suffered some sort of a serious stroke. They were never able to fully diagnose it but he had some sort of catastrophic brain injury that left him incapable of any sort of memory. He was really trapped in a body that was not working well for him for over six years. As he continued to deteriorate, he got to the place where his family had to care for him, not just for a few weeks, not just for a few months, for years. And they trusted God throughout that entire ordeal. They trusted God for the timing of his life and for the timing of his death and they had joy through the entire time. That's why I'm going to be able to celebrate with his family and with their church family of the great joy God gave my Uncle Jim. In fact, I'll be able to tell the story of the first time I brought my girlfriend at that time, Chris, to meet the family. You know how terrible that is, right? And I got there, there is Uncle Jim and the first thing out of his mouth, "Stevie, she's not nearly as ugly as you said she was." Don't we all have an Uncle Jim? And that joy, that joy, kept him sustained through his entire life even after the injury and that tells you that Christianity is the real thing. God gave him saving faith. God gave him living faith and God gave him dying faith. I hope that we all possess that.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to think about these important verses. Lord, we praise you for Jesus and thank you that in your providence you gave us a reliable record of who he is and what he's made available to us. So Lord, I pray that if someone is here who's not trusted Christ, that that person would do so right away, seeing a contrast between what Jesus provides reliably and what our world so often offers. Lord, for those of us who would say that we know Christ, I pray that we would leave not more emboldened in ourselves but more in love with our Savior and may we act on the reliability of our faith this week. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.