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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we thank you for your provision for us, and we thank you for the great provision which is the cross and your Son. We thank you for the church that you have given to us, we thank you for the means that you have given to us in this Covid season to be able to experience as much church as possible. We just thank you for all of those gifts. And now Lord, we thank you for your word and we thank you for your presence, your Holy Spirit's presence and we ask for that Spirit to be there, to guide us, to open up your eyes, our hearts, our minds, and our ears and to make this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well once again it's the first Sunday of the month and this again is the day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and for the last time there celebrated a Passover supper with them. It's spoken of in *Matthew 26*, which says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples,*

and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and blood, and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular basis and again, this is what we do each month, it's what we call "the Lord's table." And we celebrate it by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, again asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in which he is convicting us of sin, and by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

We have been looking into the gospel of Mark and where we are right now, Jesus is privately meeting with his disciples, he has just addressed a huge crowd that has gathered to hear him speak. The crowds were so gigantic that Jesus had to speak to them from a

boat. And what he said to the crowd had his disciples completely mystified. He spoke about soils and he spoke about seeds, he spoke about different types of plants and there were some rocky soil plants, there were some stony soil plants and there were some good soil plants. He said that the good soil plants would produce a harvest of thirty or sixty or a hundred times. And then he left the crowd with an equally bewildering statement: *"Let him who has ears to hear hear."*

Now in his private meeting with the disciples, Jesus gives them two different reasons why his words were so completely mystifying, and the first thing that he says is all about their, the disciples' privilege. In *Mark 4:11* he says: *And he said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables."* And the second reason he spoke to them was about their inability. In verse 13 he says: *And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"* Jesus then begins to teach his disciples as only he could, and in the space of a few short paragraphs he gives them a parable, a pronouncement, a principle, and a profundity, and we'll look at all of these this morning.

Now one of the things that constantly vexed Jesus was his

disciples' inability to perceive spiritual truth. On numerous occasions we see Jesus actually expressing his frustration that his disciples, they couldn't perceive even the most basic of spiritual truths. If you go back to John 14, you see Jesus speaking to his disciples, this is *John 14:1-9*, it says: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."* Thomas said to him, *"Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?"* Well we have the benefit of 2,000 years of teaching, so we know precisely where Jesus is going. I mean he said he was going to prepare a place and what he's actually telling them is that he was going to heaven. That at first he was going to the cross and through the cross and his victory over he was then going to ascend into heaven where he then would be preparing a place for them. Well, Thomas can't even conceive of what lies ahead with Jesus and frankly neither could you or I. Have we been in the same situation? I mean I certainly can't blame Thomas for thinking that Jesus is talking about someplace else on earth when he asks: *Where are you going?* It says: *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me,*

you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Jesus is clearly, he's telling the disciples that not only is he the ultimate destination for them, but he goes on to say that he's the exact representation of the Father. I mean to know Jesus is to know the Father. Just to see Jesus is to see the Father. Well somehow or other Philip, he just doesn't get it. He fails to get the message and what he says next to Jesus is, with all due respect, arguably one of the most spiritually bone-headed statements anyone could ever make. *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."*

Now you have to understand Jesus has spent the last three years doing the very thing that Philip is asking him to do. And you know I can easily picture Jesus doing one of those kind of face-palm things in frustration at Philip's question. It says: *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"* See, we're back to this idea of trying to teach a dog how to play checkers. See, Jesus is the living God, he's the creator and sustainer of the universe and he knows that we come woefully short when it comes to comprehending even basic spiritual truths. And so knowing that, Jesus responds to the bewilderment of the disciples with four different approaches to instruct them. He gives them a parable, a principle, a

pronouncement, and a profundity.

So let's look at those first looking at the parables. This is what Jesus says in response to his disciples being mystified. This is *Mark 4:21*. It says: *Also he said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."* Again you have to consider the context in which Jesus is speaking now. He's just spoken at length about soils and seeds and he's trying to explain to them that the seed is the word of God. In fact in verse 14 he specifically said, he says, *"The sower sows the word."* And now he's explaining to them that their task is to highlight God and his word through their lives, and so Jesus starts speaking to them about a lamp and a lamp stand. But he and they know that a lamp is also a reference to God's word. *Psalm 119* says: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* So Jesus is telling his disciples that they've been given this incredible gift of the light through God's word. And then he uses this absurd comparison to point out how silly it would be to take out a lamp, go to all the trouble of getting it lit and then putting it under a basket. Now remember, Jesus is training his disciples to take on his role after he leaves. And if teaching these deep truths of scripture to the

disciples was a taxing role for Jesus, imagine how it would be for the disciples to take on that job as they're attempting to teach their fellow humans. And Jesus knows that their only hope is their ultimate weapon, and that is the word of God. And Jesus knows that because all during his time on earth he chose the word of God as his ultimate weapon. I mean remember his recent confrontation with Satan in the desert, I mean, I spoke about it just last month. Jesus is in the desert and three times he has this confrontation with Satan and three times Jesus responds and he responds not by debating him, not by showing him miracles, he responds to Satan by saying, *"It is written," "It is written," "It is written"*. Jesus is teaching his disciples the importance of God's word through the parable of a lamp, pointing out that the only place for a lamp is on a lampstand. And what he's saying is that they need to make their lives the lampstand in which the light that they have been given gets maximum exposure.

Then he follows up that parable with a principle, and it's a principle I've spoken of before. I said this principle is a crucial piece of information that tells us how the kingdom responds to those who reject it. If you don't understand the principle, you're not going to know how to respond to folks who reject the gospel. This is what Jesus says next. He says: *"Pay attention to what you hear; with the measure you use, it will be measured to*

you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Now if those words sound familiar, it may be because Jesus repeated them twice more. He said it once in the parable of the talents and he said it again in the parable of the minas. Those are the stewardship parables. In the parable of the talents, Jesus is addressing directly the one who buried his talent in the ground and he says: *"For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."* And in this parable of the minas in *Luke 19*, Jesus is speaking to the servant who hid his mina, says: *He replied, "I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away."* The fact that Jesus repeats this principle at least three separate times proves its importance. What does it mean? I mean what does Jesus want us to learn through this? Simply put it means the ability to discern truth grows or shrinks depending on how you respond to truth. The more you embrace truth, the more your capacity for more truth increases. I mean again just last week we spoke about the growth of a seed versus the growth of a snowball. I mean, a seed's growth is marked by an ever-increasing capacity for more growth. Also as the seed grows it puts out more shoots which put out more leaves, which takes in more energy which enables it to put out more shoots and more leaves

and so take in more energy and so on and so on and so on. But so it is with the word of God. The more you take in, the more you grow. And the more you grow, the more you're able to take in even deeper and greater truths. You see, the Bible is no ordinary book. *Hebrews 4:12* says: *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

David Guzik captures the power of the word of God as a living seed when he says this, he says: "The Bible isn't just an instruction manual or a list of rules to follow. It lives and works its life into us. It has hidden and mysterious power to change our life. This book has wrestled with me; this book has slapped me around. This book has comforted me; this book has overwhelmed my heart with the joy of heaven itself. This book has healed me; this book has wounded me. This book has smiled on me; this book has frowned on me. This book has wept with me, and it has sung joyfully with me; it shouts to me, whispers to me, and preaches to me. The idea that a preacher lends life to God's word is wrong; the only thing that a preacher has to give to the word is a voice. Like a seed, the word of God has a hidden and mysterious power." And again, part of that power is the promise whoever has will be given more. Again verse 25: *"For to the one who has, more*

will be given." And conversely, the more you reject the truth, the more your capacity for truth will begin to shrink. Again verse 25: *"From the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."*

What God is saying here is that our capacity for truth is fluid. He's saying that it changes and spiritually speaking that's exactly how God describes the eyes and the ears of those who see and hear truth and reject it. They don't just shut out that truth, they also shut down the ability to perceive truth. I've mentioned this before, think of a light aperture on a camera. You know if the light is very bright, you need to shut it down, you need to shut down the aperture so that the amount of light coming in won't destroy the picture. And if the light is minimal, you need to open up that aperture to let as much of that light in as possible. Well, rejecting the gospel literally shuts down in tiny little increments your spiritual aperture, and it makes it harder for the gospel to get in. And we look at the apostle Paul as an example. This is somebody who repeatedly rejected the light. He persecuted the church. And you can imagine each time he did that, his spiritual aperture going down a notch, a notch, a notch. Again verse 25 says: *"From the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* When Jesus finally confronts him on the road to Damascus, he sends him a light, but the light is so bright it is blinding and it blinds him. You could argue that Paul's spiritual

aperture was so closed down that he needed the blinding light of the gospel. You see, rejecting spiritual truths of the gospel will have you growing progressively blind and deaf, like the Pharisees did. And eventually you're going to get to a place where you attribute the very miracles of God to the acts of Satan, as we saw the Pharisees do. And we learned that Jesus from that point on began judging the world. And he began judging it by speaking in parables that even the disciples couldn't understand. In verse 11 Jesus gives his disciples this pronouncement, he says: *And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."* You see, rejecting the truth eventually causes eyes to no longer see and ears to no longer hear and the results for the Pharisees were spiritually fatal. Jesus says consider the grace that has been showered on you. To you have been given the secrets of the kingdom of God. God has placed within you the light of his Holy Spirit. He's given us the good soil that the seed is now growing in. And so we are constantly in this position of having the capacity to grow and we can grow thirty, sixty, a hundred times. In what? In our capacity to grasp deeper and deeper parts of God's word. As verse 25 says: *"For to the one who has, more will be given."*

So consider that as the elders begin to pass out the bread which we no longer do, which you have right here. You can spend the next ten minutes or so trying to figure out how to open this thing. But as you do let me just read. This is God's warning about taking communion. This is from *1 Corinthians 11:28*, it says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* As I say each month, communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. So if you're not confident that you are a child of God, that you are a child of the King and that you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as Savior, do not participate, please. If you need to be reconciled to a brother or sister before you bring the sacrifice of your life to this altar, then don't participate. Err on the side of caution and get right with God first. As I say each month, you can also make the mistake of thinking, okay, I guess I have to be perfect in order to receive communion and that, too, is a mistake. Being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin, it doesn't mean that you don't fail. It means that you recognize that the salvation that you have

is a gift from God that no one is capable of earning. So each month I repeat this quote from Dane Ortlund, and he puts it so well. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we fail, that we are aware that we have sinned and there's a reason why we're aware of our sin, it's because God's Spirit lives inside us, his Holy Spirit convicts us. And so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, who has said specifically in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're sinless. It means we know that when we do sin, we have an advocate. An advocate is somebody who speaks on our behalf. We have an advocate in heaven itself and that advocate is Jesus Christ. In *1 John 2:1*, it says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And there it is. You see, because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, we are now free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you at the cost of his life. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death that we all deserved to die so that we could be made worthy of heaven.

And before you take of this bread, consider the gift of the good soil that God has placed your seed in. Thank him for it, and meditate for a moment.

1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.

Well, so far we've seen the incredible care that Jesus is taking with his disciples. See he knows, he knows how dumb of spirit we are. He knows how hard it is to get truth into our spirit. We've seen thus far the parable of the lamp being placed either on a lampstand or under a bushel. We've seen the principle that Jesus stated that the more we take in God's truth, the more we grow in our capacity to take in even more truth, and sadly the more we reject truth, the harder, the more difficult it is for truth to be accepted on any level. Then we've seen Jesus' pronouncement of this incredible privilege that he's extended not only to his disciples, but to every one of us sitting here who loves the Lord and cherishes his gospel. *To you have been given the secret of the kingdom of God.*

And finally Jesus gives to his disciples a profundity. You might say what the heck is that? What's a profundity? Well, the dictionary defines a profundity as saying: The quality of showing a clearer, deep understanding of a serious matter. Here is Jesus' profundity. This is the next verse, *Mark 4:26: And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."* Well like many of Jesus' profundities, this one probably leaves you bewildered. I mean who doesn't know that scattered seeds sprout and grow? First the blade then the ear then the full grain in the ear. Just what is Jesus getting at? I mean I've actually scattered seed on the ground, and just like Jesus said, I sowed the seed then I went to bed knowing that in a few days I was going to see these tiny little green blades poking out of the soil. And I've seen the first blade appear and I've seen the ear and I've seen followed the full grain in the ear. And again, just like a seed grows, my knowledge of growing stuff grew as I did, I've been doing it for over 40 years. And the more I did it, the more I grew, the more I understood what was going on.

Take for instance, it wasn't until I actually grew a crop of corn

that I understood that that silk, you know that stuff when you husk an ear of corn, that stuff that sticks to the corn, you have got to get rid of it? I didn't realize that those were all tiny little hollow tubes, each of which leads from the silk at the top to one individual kernel of corn and that when the corn goes into tassel or it goes into the silk, the plant itself shoots out pollen, and that pollen lands in that little tuft at the very top of the ear, and then it migrates down each individual little hollow tube till it meets a kernel, and there it pollinates that individual kernel. That's what becomes the corn on the cob. I think about that, that is a brilliant miracle that we just take for granted. I mean if you ever shuck an ear of corn, you see missing kernels, it's because that pollen didn't make it down one of those tubes to where that hole is in the ear of corn. And so the case of an ear of corn, that's how the blade appears, that's how the ear appears, that's how the full grain in the ear appears. And like I said, I have a decent amount of knowledge 'cause I've been gardening for many, many years. And years ago I went to Michigan State in order to get my course work in science so I can go to graduate school. And one of the courses I had to take was a five credit course called Soil Science. Now you have to understand, Michigan State is an ag school, that means its concentration is in agriculture. So Soil Science is a very big deal there. So it's not only a big deal there, it's a very big scientific deal and you had to learn all of

the chemistry and physics of soil and transfer of nutrients from soil to seed. So I learned all the mechanics of how a plant grows. But that was over 40 years ago, and a lot of information has been learned and passed on since then about something as simple as how a plant grows. So I decided to ask "Mr. Google" how a plant grows. And of course I got an enormous amount of information. I started reading from children's books about farming to increasingly complex descriptions of the process to finally where I read in *The Journal of Experimental Botany* how a seed grows. So I want you to bear with me for just a moment because I want to give you their explanation. This is from *The Journal of Experimental Botany*. They say the following:

"The biomechanics of embryo cell growth during seed germination depend on irreversible cell wall loosening followed by water uptake due to the decreasing turgor, and this leads to embryo elongation and eventually radicle emergence. Endosperm weakening as a prerequisite for radicle emergence is a widespread phenomenon among angiosperms. Research into the biochemistry and biomechanics of endosperm weakening has demonstrated that the reduction in puncture force of a seed's micropylar endosperm is environmentally and hormonally regulated and involves tissue-specific expression of cell wall remodeling proteins such as expansins, diverse hydrolases, and the production of directly acting apoplastic

reactive oxygen."

Now is that impressive science talk or what? Are you impressed? You say, what does this have to do with Jesus and his profundity? Well if you go back to the story that Jesus tells, there's one little key phrase that's very easy to overlook, and Jesus utters it at the beginning. Let me just repeat the statement. Jesus says: *"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not now."* You see, in spite of all of our knowledge and in spite of all of our ability, in spite of the years and years of academic inquiry, there's only one person who actually knows how a seed sprouts and grows. It's the one who created it. It's Jesus Christ. That big scientific explanation that I just read, it doesn't have a clue as to how a seed actually grows. I mean it can only do what humans can do and that's carefully observe what God has done and then try to make some sense of it. And the fact is when you do something as simple as putting a seed in the ground, something miraculous happens. I mean life happens. Something that was previously inert perhaps for years gets transformed into something that's alive and growing, and whether you use simple child-like descriptions or fancy biological terms, the bottom line is man knows not how something as simple as a seed grows. But Jesus does. You see, he created it. And what is

unique about us as human beings is that we somehow feel that when we discover the mechanism that God uses to create or sustain something, somehow we think that gives us the credit for having invented it. Believe it or not, Watson and Crick did not invent DNA. They just discovered how God uses it to make blueprints of us in our cells. And so it is with every profoundly mysterious part of a creation that shouts out God's wonder and glory.

In Colossians 2 Paul is praying for the Colossians: *That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* After Job in his bewilderment and pain sought to question God's wisdom, this is what God said. He said: *"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements -- surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid it's cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"* You have to understand something. The very same one who challenged Job's understanding is now sitting in a little room with his disciples and he's trying to explain to them

while he's speaking in parables that nobody can understand. He's left heaven itself, he's taken on flesh, and he's been living with these men teaching them to become his disciples. And Jesus -- quote -- *Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* See, we have no inkling of the enormity of the humility of the Christ that we encounter. He's come here to die for us. He's lived his life flawlessly and he's going to lay it down for us on the cross so that we by faith could claim his righteousness as ours and stand before a holy, righteous God as holy and righteous as well not on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of his. And his patience with the disciples is beyond comprehension, considering how dense we humans are spiritually. If we only knew the enormity of the depth of the wisdom and power that's sitting there in that room trying to reason with the likes of us. I mean Jesus is the only one in the universe who knows how a seed grows or how DNA replicates itself or how atoms keep from coming apart or how black holes can bend gravity. Colossians 1 says: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created*

through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he's sitting in this room trying to explain to the disciples by using an analogy of seeds growing how faith itself grows. Again let me repeat. And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

You see what is going on here is the Lord of the harvest is telling his disciples what we need to hear as well and, what he is telling them is God is the force behind every believer. The force behind the brand new blade, the force behind the ear, the force behind the full grain in the ear and the force behind it all the way up to the point of harvest. The fact is we really know almost nothing about God's creative ways other than what he has allowed us to discover. *Proverbs 25* says: *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.* And you know when it comes to science, God hides and we seek. And that's okay. Jesus is telling the disciples the same principle applies to the mystery of faith. And what he's saying is that God alone can cause the seed of faith to sprout and grow and we know not how. That's a

huge blessing, especially since we are tasked with broadcasting the light of God's word to a people who are blind, deaf and oftentimes hostile. You don't need to know all of the details of how God does what he does. You just need to know that he is our Lord and we have been given the task of being a light put on a lampstand instead of under a bushel. All you need to know is that our task is to broadcast that light to people who can't possibly respond to it without a sovereign act of God. Again verse 29: *"But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

So as we take the cup, just take a moment to ask Lord, who can I be a sower of your word to? Just pray that prayer for a moment. *1 Corinthians 11:25* says: *In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* So take, and drink.

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet where we try to have some practical understanding of just how we can remember the Lord Jesus. And I want to just comment about the supreme court. The supreme court recently ruled against Calvary Chapel in Nevada because they sued the state and they sued the state because Calvary Chapel was allowed to operate at a maximum of fifty people in the

church, while Caesar's Palace was told they could operate at fifty percent of their capacity. This is what Neil Gorsuch, Justice Neil Gorsuch stated, he said, "Although a 10-screen multiplex may host 500 moviegoers at any time, houses of worship are limited to fifty people. No matter how large the building, how distant the individuals, how many wear face masks, no matter the precautions at all, the world we inhabit today with a pandemic upon us poses unusual challenges. But there is no world," Gorsuch concluded, "in which the Constitution permits Nevada to favor Caesar's Palace over Calvary Chapel." Unfortunately he was in the minority and the supreme court ruled in favor of the gambling parlor.

And you know, we all can't help but notice that New York as well has all kinds of restrictions on every type of public gathering, unless of course you're a protestor. And I've said it before with all due respect that I firmly believe that the governors of New York, of New Jersey, and Pennsylvania are feckless hypocrites. I said it before, I'll say it again. But I also want to reiterate the reasons why we still requires masks until you're seated and why we are still socially distancing. You see, our reasoning has never been anything other than a concern for the health and safety of our congregants. Now I'm not a big fan of wearing a mask, I'll have to be very honest about that. I have very little confidence that it affords even a fraction of the safety that people claim that does,

but I want to tell you why I wear the mask. And, again, I want to go back to what Paul said in his response to the controversy over whether or not you are allowed to eat meat that had been sold in the marketplace having been previously sacrificed to idols. Big long argument, Paul arrives as a conclusion, you all have that liberty, you are free to do that. But he says this in *1 Corinthians 8:9*: *Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.* Now a stumbling block is literally something that trips somebody up. It's something that causes them to stumble. And this morning I want to talk about masks because a mask sometimes is not just a mask, sometimes it's a stumbling block, both for those who favor it and for those who are against it. And again let me explain.

I think it's pretty obvious that the enemy is using this virus to divide, discourage, and disperse the flock and he's been extremely successful at it. He is also trying to use mask wearing or not in the very same way. So I just want to describe to you the reason why I'm willing to wear a mask. You see, we have people coming to church who don't see the virus the same as you and I might. You might shrug your shoulders and think this is no big deal. You might think that it's all a political plot, and you might be right. But there are others who see this virus as a threat to their very existence. I just go back a week, I think there are folks who

identify with what happened to that beloved man Herman Cain. You know, he appeared to be in good health, I know he had other issues, he appeared to be in good health. Two months ago, he got COVID-19 and it took him. Some folks identify very much with what that virus did to him. And some of those folks desperately want to come to church. But at the same time they're highly concerned about their health. And the very last thing that I want to do to these folks is trip them up or cause them to stumble into deciding that they can no longer come to church because it's just too dangerous. Again, I might not see it that way, but I know a good number of people in our church who see it exactly that way. And if I can do anything short of standing on my head and spitting wooden nickels to make them feel more comfortable in coming here, I am quite willing to do that, because that's what loving my neighbor is all about.

I also know that there's a number of people who think that wearing a mask is just bowing down to governmental authorities. And I don't know how else to put this other than to say that I and the elders couldn't care less about those officials and their mandates, given how wrong and how hypocritical they've been. But we care about this flock, particularly the older and more compromised members. They are why we wear the masks and they are why we socially distance. If it helps in any way these people to feel a

little bit more safe, a little bit more encouraged to maybe take a little chance with their health and fellowship with us, it is well worth it to do it. And to those who disagree, I say, hey, I agree with Paul, you absolutely have that liberty, I'm perfectly okay with that. But just like Paul, I want to leave you with that same warning from scripture: *Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.* Let's pray.

Father, again, I just thank you for your provision for us. I thank you for how you have blessed us. I know churches that have blown apart because of COVID-19. And the enemy is just delighted. I'm sure he is licking his chops over and over again. I just thank you for the gift of who you are, for your incredible humility. I have this picture of you sitting in this room trying to explain to these incredibly dense disciples who are certainly no more dense than we are, but trying to explain these deep spiritual truths, and the humility that you experience and the humility that you show is just a wonderful example to us, and I pray that you would give us the grace and the wisdom to be able to walk through this -- these days no matter how long they take with the wisdom that you promised to give us if we but ask. And so I pray for your grace, your wisdom and for you to be glorified. And I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.