

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**August 5, 2018**

**"By His Stripes"**

**1 Peter 2:24-25**

**Prayer:** *Father, again we thank you for who you are, we thank you for what this day represents, it is a time for us to reflect on the cross, on what you've done for us on the cross and the gift that you've given us of your Son. Father, we want to do that well and to do that well we need the presence of your Holy Spirit. So we pray this morning, Lord, as we open up your book, as we look into your word we would have the privilege of the presence of your Spirit, and that you would give us the ability to make this of lasting value and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I just said, this is the first Sunday of the month, this is the Sunday in which we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples, and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper and Matthew 26 describes it. It 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, then he asked the disciples to eat the bread, to 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 this is what we call "the Lord's table." And just to go over what it's all about, we celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us and then by examining ourselves and that's asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our own lives where he's convicting us of sin, then 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."*

Now we've been working our way through the Gospel of John. We've worked our way up to the 19th chapter and last time out we looked at that hideous opening line of chapter 19 which says: *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.* And we followed the story in John's gospel up to the point where an enraged and frustrated Pilate finally asks: *"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We*

*have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. That's where we are in John 19. I want to shift gears a little bit here because it just so happens that the passage that we've been working on in 1 Peter this last month, that the section that it's coming to right now dovetails perfectly with where we are in John's account of Jesus's crucifixion. So if you've been following at all where we've been for the last few months, then this passage I'm going to read to you should be very familiar to you. It's 1 Peter 2:22 which says: *He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* And this is the passage we've spent a lot of time in these last few weeks but it's followed by this remarkable statement that dovetails perfectly with where we're going this morning. This is verse 24. It says: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."* For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. Now you may not realize it but this passage is highly controversial in many different circles for two completely different reasons. One is the issue of penal substitution which is a fancy theological term that we're going to look at later on; the*

other is the issue of faith healing. So let me take this last one first.

*"By his wounds you have been healed"* is part of the prophet Isaiah's description of what Jesus would do for us on the cross. This has become a loaded phrase. It means different things to different believers. And there are very many people, particularly in the charismatic fold, who believe that God is making a categorical statement that Christ was not only providing forgiveness for us on the cross but also the ability to be healed of any diseases. These folks understand that Christ went to the cross to heal us physically as well as spiritually. And even more striking is the fact that this same old testament statement by Isaiah, it appears here in 1 Peter in the New Testament, but it appears in an even more striking way in Matthew's gospel. Let me just read to you where it pops up in Matthew's gospel. This is *Matthew 8:14*. It says: *When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases."*

So we ask, doesn't this passage prove that Jesus not only saved us from death on the cross but that he also saved us from diseases as well? I mean, isn't Matthew directly connecting Isaiah's statement of Christ's work on the cross to the healing of physical diseases? Of course he is. But I would also add the story doesn't begin and end in Matthew's gospel. You see our problem often stems from the fact that we pick up only little bits and pieces of the narrative from the gospels and they wind up being disconnected from the grand story that God is telling us that started in Genesis and ended in Revelation. The big picture is that the gospels are not the beginning but the culmination of Christ's coming to earth in order to wage war on Satan. Even this passage that we're's briefly looking at in Matthew hints at that warfare, I mean, Jesus is not just healing sick people here, he's also driving out spirits. And much of what Jesus says could be understood in either of two ways, I mean, he was either laying the groundwork for a principle in which all disease is already healed and we simply have to access it by faith, or as I believe, he was launching out his attack on the kingdom that the enemy was now possessing by demonstrating categorically that he alone had the power over disease.

Here's why I believe Jesus was not guaranteeing us a disease-free life but was securing for us something of even greater value. First of all, we know that the healing that Jesus brought was only

temporary. We know that because every single person that Jesus healed wound up at some point dying like all of us have to. Jesus' healing, like his feeding of the crowds or turning water into wine or even walking on water was designed to show his complete mastery over the physical world through miracles that were designed to be temporary. I mean the crowds that Jesus fed would one day grow hungry again, the water that became wine would run out, even Jesus walking on water was designed temporarily to show his complete mastery over the elemental laws of physics. The fact that Jesus healed many in his day has more to do with him demonstrating his power over death, disease, and Satan himself than has to do with him guaranteeing that the curse of the fall no longer applies and that sickness is now a thing of the past. You see, Jesus, the creator and sustainer of life, the very one who spoke the world into existence was now on earth miraculously involved in reclaiming his territory. And by using the term "*by his stripes we are healed*," God is bringing us right back through the Old Testament to the prophet Isaiah who was pointing forward to the cross. It's the public arena in which this victory is going to be won. See, the bigger problem we have with seeing this passage is saying that God has already given us the healing from diseases is that famous description given by George Bernard Shaw who once said: "The statistics about death are one out of one." Everybody dies. I mean out of the millions of people who've lived these last 2,000

years, only one that I know of departed on a flaming chariot. Everyone else left this world in the same prosaic way that everyone else does. Everyone leaves this life by dying. For some it will be cancer, for some it will be heart disease or diabetes, maybe an accident, but for the vast majority, we will all leave this earth because of an illness. Every single person that Jesus healed 2,000 years ago is now dead. That's a fact. The man born blind, the man who was lowered down through the roof by his friend, even Jesus' beloved friend Lazarus, they all had to experience death, and for most people death comes through sickness. Our sickness overtakes us. Even the most impassioned believer who believes that by Christ's stripes we are healed acknowledges that Christ came to the cross to conquer sin itself and the death penalty that sin incurred. And yet none of them are going to deny that we're all going to die. God made it clear that when Adam fell, death entered into the world and it spread into the entire world and that includes everyone. *Romans 5:12 says: Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* I mean Jesus became sin for us to die in our place because we all stood guilty before God. And death is the penalty for sin because God says *the wages of sin is death.* But here's an important point to consider. Nowhere does God ever say the wages of sin is death and sickness. He doesn't say that because sickness itself is not sinful, and for most of us,

sickness is what's going to take us from this life to the next. Listen to how Sam Storms who again is a charismatic, this is what he's kind of struggling with, how he explains the struggle he has with seeing Christ's healing on the cross as being one from disease. He says this, he says:

We know what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God made "him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin." He was declaring that the guilt of our sins was imputed to Christ and that it was because of that guilt that he was punished in our place. But what can it possibly mean to say that God made him "to be sick" on our behalf? Kenneth Hagin says that God "made him [Jesus] sick with your diseases that you might be perfectly well in Christ." But there is no guilt in disease or sickness. Having diabetes or a head cold is not sinful. The Bible tells us to pray, "forgive us our debts" and urges us "to confess our sins" but nowhere does it say that we should pray, "forgive us our arthritis," or, "Lord, I confess I have the flu." Sickness is not sin. The Bible never issues the command "Thou shalt not commit cancer" or "Flee the flu." Nevertheless, many insist that Jesus bore the penalty for our sins and sicknesses. But if sickness is not a sin, how can it incur a penalty?

You see, Jesus died to conquer death and he never promised to

eliminate sickness. That doesn't mean for a second that I don't believe that God can and does miraculously heal. The reason why this is so controversial is that there are good people on all sides of this issue who genuinely disagree on what the scripture teaches. So just so you know where I am coming from, I have to agree, I agree with Chuck Swindoll who said I believe in faith, healing. I don't believe in faith healers. And what he meant by that is there's no doubt that God can, will, and does continue to heal, and he heals those who put their faith in him and ask for that healing but he's not under any obligation to do so. And furthermore those who claim to have a significant special power to guarantee healing I believe do far more harm than they've done good and the harmful part comes from the belief as they preach that the healing has already been given to you which leaves anyone not receiving this healing with a double burden of believing that healing was offered to them, they simply didn't have the faith or the means or the ability to access it.

Now I'm sure most of you know of Joni Eareckson and that was the case with Joni Eareckson. She describes what it was like. If you don't know, Joni Eareckson was paralyzed at age 16 in a diving accident, she's completely paralyzed from the neck down, has been in a wheelchair for fifty years. She describes how that worked in her life and the havoc that it wreaked in her life. This is what

she says. She says:

Often I meet people who ask, "Joni, don't you want to get healed? Well, duh--I wouldn't be human if I didn't want to get healed. And, in fact, there was a season in my life when I begged God to heal me. The I would say for the first five to ten years in my wheelchair, it was the major deal in all my prayers, and when it appeared that I would never walk again, I still kept praying for healing; I at least wanted my hands to be healed. And one of the key verses I used in my prayers was John chapter 14, verses 13-14 where Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." Well, that was quite a promise! Jesus will give us whatever we ask, as long as we ask in his name?! Well, I kept doing just that -- asking in His name, but nothing happened, so I dug deeper, confessing and repenting of whatever extra sin might stand in the way. But still, my feet and my hands didn't respond. I wondered what I was doing wrong. I don't know, maybe you've experienced the same thing with that verse. You've asked for something important -- like healing or whatever -- and you ask it in Jesus' name, and you ask it, that it might bring glory to God, but still, all you get is silence or, perhaps, the reply from God, "no." 'But Jesus,' you think, 'you said you would do whatever I ask in your name. What gives?!' So I went back to John 14, and this time I read all around it. I

discovered that the context is all about "giving the gospel." After all, this chapter was our Savior's last chance to teach his disciples about "the main thing." And the main (as we'd all agree) is his Gospel. Jesus was so passionate about his disciples giving the good news, that he inasmuch said, "Look, if there are mountains in your way, I'll move them. If there's an obstacle in the way, I'll help you get rid of it. If it means the advancement of God's kingdom, I'll do it." Jesus was adamant about this because this is what would give his Father the most glory. Once this fact sank in, it made my wheelchair seem insignificant in comparison. My problems didn't seem so important. What's more, I began to grasp the fact that my paralysis was part of God's strategy to further his gospel. After all, it says in 1 Peter 2:21 -- which is our verse that we've been looking at -- "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps." Just as Christ suffered yet trusted the Father, I am to follow in his steps on the road marked with suffering and trust my heavenly Father, even with quadriplegia.

So what does this mean to someone who's struggling with sickness and pain? I mean, can they ask God for healing? Well the answer is absolutely. Many a time we have prayed passionately for God to heal and we have been witness to some spectacularly miraculous healings, I know myself, I had one 40 years ago. My granddaughter

Leah was healed from myasthenia gravis as an infant through prayer. So I am not in any way denigrating the idea of physical healing. It's just that Jesus' sacrifice was so much deeper, it accomplished so much more than merely prolonging our deaths. And so we need to focus on the eternal life that Jesus purchased for us at the cost of his own life.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I just want us to take a few minutes to ask God's Holy Spirit to help you just consider the death that Christ died for you. And as they're distributing I want to read you the warning that God gives us concerning communion. *1 Corinthians 11 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.* I often say communion is extremely serious business, if you enter into it in an unworthy manner, you were literally courting disaster and this passage here says, you know, many of you are weak and sick and some among you sleep, well that means death. That's how seriously God took taking communion worthily. So if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King and you

haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring any sacrifice to the altar, then don't participate, just pass the elements on when they come to you. As I often point out as well the other side, there's a mistake equally bad on the other side. You can make the mistake of thinking well, unless I'm absolutely spotless, unless I'm flawless I'm unworthy to receive communion. Well, the devil loves that mistake as well. You see, 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 your salvation is a gift and it's a gift that no one is capable of earning by being good, and I repeat once again Dane Ortlund's quote, he says, "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we fail we're aware that we have sinned and the reason why we're aware that we've sinned is because God's Holy Spirit comes to live within us and he it is who is convicting us of sin. And when we sin, we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. We remember *1 John 1:9* where God says: *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 are flawless, that you are without sin. It also means that we understand that when we do sin we have an advocate

with the Father, someone speaking on our behalf in heaven itself. 1 John tells us: *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.* So it's because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own that we are now free to eat at his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. We say it all the time, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So this morning I just again want us to take a few moments to focus on the healing that Jesus purchased for us on the cross.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 23rd verse 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 the next issue that we want to look at this morning is this issue of penal substitution, another fifty-cent theological term, I get it, I understand, but it's important to understand what is being expressed here. Look at verse 24 in our text this morning in 1 Peter. It says: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the*

*cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."* Penal substitution is simply the belief that Jesus substituted himself for us and then bore our penalty for sins on the cross. I mean even though Jesus was one hundred percent innocent, he stood in our place to take the punishment of our sins. The prophet Isaiah puts it this way in *Isaiah 53*. He says: *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* So Isaiah's telling us that Jesus was pierced, that he was crushed, that he was punished for our iniquities on the cross. Well this is a view that's come under fire from many different sources lately and usually what is being attacked is the straw man that suggests that God was only able to forgive man by pouring his rage and violence out on his Son. At its very worst his attackers describe penal substitution as cosmic child abuse suggesting that God's solution to our sin was to attack Jesus on our behalf.

So what does it mean when God says of Jesus *"he himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross?* I mean what does it mean when God says in *1 John 22: He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.* Well

there's that fifty-cent word, another fifty-cent word, propitiation, what does that mean? Well the dictionary defines propitiation as "the appeasement of anger of the gods or God." That's not very helpful. The actual Greek word comes from the covering of the tabernacle which was the place where the sacrificial blood was sprinkled. You see, God had appointed animal sacrifice as a picture of the role that Jesus would take when he came to earth. An innocent animal would have the sins of the people placed on him by the high priest and he would actually, he would place his hands, he would take his hand and he would objectify, quantify and place the sins of the people on this particular "innocent animal." An animal would be killed. And its blood would be sprinkled on the altar signifying the animal's role in taking the place of the sinner. Instead of the sinner dying, the animal would die in its place and all of this was to picture the role that Jesus would have taking the place of us sinners, dying in our place and having his perfect blood shed to pay the price of our sin. Now some folks object to the picture that this paints. They say it shows God having to resort to violence against his own Son in order to satisfy his wrath against sin. Instead they say that the cross was the ultimate culmination of Jesus' final victory over sin, his final victory over Satan and this view is called the Christus victor view, that the cross represented Jesus' ultimate triumph over Satan. Well, the fact is both of

these are true. Both of these views are absolutely true. There's no doubt that the cross was after all the greatest victory that was ever won. I mean *Colossians 2:14* is very clear, it says: *Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* I mean no doubt Jesus triumphed over the devil at the cross. No doubt he disarmed the powers and the authorities who were arrayed against him at the cross and no doubt he made a public spectacle of them, I mean, they thought that it would subject him to the ultimate in shame by dying the death of a common criminal. Little did they realize that he was using the very platform that they had designed for his ultimate shame as the perfect platform for his ultimate triumph. I mean there on display for the entire universe to see he would cancel the charge of indebtedness that stood against us and condemned us and he would do it, as the scripture says, by nailing it to a cross by substituting himself bearing the wrath of a holy God.

Now there are those who object to the very idea that Jesus would claim victory by absorbing the penalty of our sin suggesting that it's a deficiency on God's part to have to punish someone in order to forgive. I think this view distorts our understanding of

justice. I recently saw a very helpful teaching about penal substitution that compared it to the collapse of the financial institutions that occurred at the end of the Bush administration. You're all familiar with that terrible few years. And if you remember the crash occurred because of downright fraud and abuse on behalf of banks and mortgage lenders. And because of their fraud, because of their abuse, thousands of people lost their homes. Because of their fraud and abuse, thousands of businesses collapsed, thousands of people were bankrupted and the government was faced with a monumental problem. You see in essence the bank that had caused this, the banks that had caused this \$7 trillion collapse were still existing and they were worthy of being punished but if the banks were going to take on that kind of punishment then it was likely the entire economy was going to collapse. This is the time when we started to hear about the fact that these banks that got us into this mess were so large that if they were to collapse, everything else would collapse with them. I don't know if you remember the phrase they were "too big to fail." That's what people said. So the government simply bailed them out. And even now there still lingers a nagging perception that what we had and what the government delivered was forgiveness without justice. I mean no doubt some institutions and some people got away with murder because they couldn't receive justice without destroying the rest of the economy. But not so when it comes to sin. See, God's

nature is such that everything about him is perfect, including his justice. We can't help but think of the wrath of God in terms of anger, somehow in terms of vengeance but God's wrath is not at all like human wrath. God's wrath is the only proper response of a holy God to sin. Just try to picture a God without wrath, and what you will come up with is a God without love. Because we are made in God's image, we have a sense within us of how wrong it is to respond to evil with indifference. Just picture the response of someone who had witnessed the slaying of those children at the Newtown Elementary School or the wholesale slaughter of people sitting at a concert in Vegas and all they can muster is a shrug of the shoulders and an indifferent "whatever." You would quickly conclude that there was something seriously wrong with that person. I mean terrible inexplicable evil requires a response, and to have none would indicate a serious moral problem. Now picture God's sense of righteousness which is flawless. It's perfect. He not only responds to the obvious evil of the slaughter of innocence, he also has to respond to anything that comes short of his glory. And he tells us flat out that anything that is less than flawless, less than perfect, less than the measure of his own transcendentally perfect glory is sinful. I mean he puts it this way in *Romans 3:23*, he says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* You see, God's perfect justice requires that each and every instance of falling short must receive its just retributive

response, otherwise God is not perfectly just. But God is not only perfectly just he's also perfectly loving, and so he must serve mercy as well as justice. So God says in *Romans 3*, he says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but then he adds: and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* Well there's that word propitiation again. To appease or assuage the anger of a god or gods. You have to understand it's not anger that needs to be assuaged here, it's wrath. And the wrath is simply the cosmic response that is demanded by God's justice. God's cosmic problem is that he desperately loves the sinners he must righteously judge, but someone has to take responsibility for sin.

Let me give you kind of a backwards example. A while back my son Luke heard a ticking noise in his car. He took it to the dealer and he took it to the dealer knowing that he had 102,000 miles on a 100,000-mile warranty car. And sure enough the dealer said, well, you have a failed connecting rod bearing and that's going to require the replacement of the entire engine that will cost thousands and thousands of dollars. And the car manufacturer rightly pointed out that Luke had over 100,000 miles on his

warranty. 2,000 miles over the warranty. And Luke and Emily rightly pointed out that they were loyal Hyundai owners and they were just looking for grace. And lucky for them -- actually lucky for me 'cause I bought the car from them, they received that grace and Hyundai agreed to accept full liability for the engine. Just for a minute I want you to just focus on this whole idea of this liability issue. I mean for a couple of days it really, it hung between two different parties. And while both parties argued over who was going to own it, it just kind of hung there waiting until Hyundai agreed to own it. Now expand that to something far more desperate far more often. The MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas recently sued all of the victims in the mass shooting that occurred there in a legal effort to distance themselves from any legal obligation to the 58 who were killed and the hundreds who were wounded. And again the result was just outrage but the point was not lost that the ensuing battle was going to be over who owns this multimillion dollar liability? To whom does it belong? And even now it hangs in the balance while all of the parties battle over who eventually is going to own it.

Now expand that notion infinitely. Understand the problem that God is facing. There's a sin liability and it, too, is hanging. The sins of the entire world are there and justice demands a payment for it. This is not a situation where you can say God the Father

is angry and we need to assuage his anger. Rather the sin liability cries out to justice itself, someone has to take it. For us to take it would mean hell itself because the liability is so great and no one could ever pay that debt. Even if I had lived a flawless life, which I clearly have not, I could only pay down the debt for one person 'cause I'm just one person. But what if God, what if the infinitely perfect God of all creation were to say to himself and to the universe, you don't need to argue about who's going to own this. I'm going to own this so that you can be with me forever. What if the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together agreed that the liability would be owned and paid for completely by the Son? And what if Isaiah prophesied exactly how the Son would do it? This is what he says: *Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* So rather than see God as angry and vengeful and taking out his anger and his wrath on his Son, it is far more helpful as seeing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit addressing this concept of cosmic justice and knowing that for their perfection to be maintained, then justice itself had to be addressed and addressed

perfectly. Instead of seeing God lashing out at his Son, it is far more reasonable to see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit loving us so completely and so fully while also loving the perfection of their own holiness and justice such that they knew the only way for justice to be served was for them to insist that perfect justice be reconciled and then own that obligation themselves. They took on that individual obligation that each of us had to reconcile our sin and that's what they did for us. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were determined to serve justice and still rescue us from the demands of that justice. So Jesus substituted himself for us. That's the essence of what penal substitution stands for. But interesting enough it's also the essence of Christus victor, the victory that Christ won for us. As I said the last time, by paying the price of our sin on the cross, Jesus took from Satan the only power that he ever really had over us, it's the power to accuse. I mean the word "Satan" means "accuser." And our sin gave him the power to accuse and accuse he does. I mean we know a perfect God could not abide sin, and so the ruler of this world made it his business to lock all of us up in sin so he could successfully accuse us. And the Christ who we thought he was destroying was actually destroying the one power that Satan had over us by taking on our sin so that Satan could no longer accuse us. Again to revisit this scripture, he says: *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of*

*your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. That's as great a victory as you'll ever hear. I mean the priests and the leaders as well as the crowd that Satan effectively used to ensure that Jesus would die on a cross, they were unaware that they were being used by God to win a greatest victory the universe has ever seen. And three days later when Jesus rose from the dead, Satan finally realized that when it came to believers in Jesus Christ, the sin that Satan uses to accuse us has now been dealt with. It's now been paid for. It was now paid for in full and Christ was the victor. So consider what Jesus has gone through for us.*

As the elders begin to distribute the cup, take a moment to consider that. Again, we just want to consider our Lord and Savior who took on the greatest monster the world has ever known and without lifting a finger in his defense he rendered him powerless. Just take a moment to thank him. *1 Corinthians 11* 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 are just trying to kind of touch on some kind of practical way of what it means to remember Christ. And I just wanted to talk first of all a little bit about the changes that are taking place. There's big changes taking place here at Grace and if anybody who's been aware, there's big changes taking place in the church in Port Jervis. We are now a very little church that are bound on our north and south sides -- or west and east sides by two very large churches, Grace Community has come into town as has Goodwill. And we pray for Jake at Grace Community, we pray for Jose at Goodwill, we pray for Tim Dunn at Milford Bible. I don't know if you know, Tim is from Ireland, he's still having some struggles with Immigration, they're trying to give him a hard time about that. He's a wonderful pastor, doing a wonderful work there, so we pray for him as well. We pray for Tory right down the road here at First Baptist. We are all aware that we are all given different parts of the vineyard that we are to operate in. And so at this time where we're undergoing a lot of changes, we have -- I mean instead of Jan, now we have Fred for music, we have Vanessa and Steve are doing the events and Lauren is going to be taking on the administrative tasks.

And so people can ask at this point, okay, so where are we going, what are we doing, and what is going on, what have we done lately?

And I just want to report to you that it does not look like much to the world but there's been some spectacular answers to prayer that we have seen. We've seen families reunited, we have seen saints equipped for battle, and I was thinking about the way the world's economy works, the way people look at churches and they have a tendency to look at churches like businesses like anybody else, they tend to say, oh, this is successful, this is not successful. And I was struck with I was looking at the scripture in *Luke 15:10*, it says: *In the same way I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*, and I thought here's something that we've been able to be privileged to be part of and I'm not going to kind of give you all the details because they're not ready at this point to be given, but there's something that's taking place where the angels in heaven are stopping and rejoicing. Now that may not look like much here on earth, in fact it doesn't look like anything here on earth but it is huge, it's gigantic, and it all stems from prayer. I've said right from the start, this church would not be here -- we've been here for 25 years. The only reason we are here is because of prayer. And that is a huge, huge part, and as we're looking forward to where we're going next, that has to be a huge part of what this church has to be or it will not survive. We can't compete. We're too little. We have to occupy the place that God wants us to occupy and occupy it to the very best of our ability

and we can't do that without prayer.

And so I'm putting in a plug once again for corporate prayer and I know there's a lot of folks that are taking it in different ways and I think it's wonderful if you are praying, that's a wonderful thing, but I have to tell you I have a confession to make. At one point when Pastor Papaf was here, it would have taken some -- some extra work but they said, hey, you know, we could get him to come to the prayer meeting. And I know Pastor Papaf and I've been there at their church in India, and I know that it's not uncommon for him to have over a hundred people praying all night for us. And I thought he's going to come here, he's going to see two people, three people, and I'm going to be ashamed, and I don't want that. So I said, no, why don't we just skip it. And so I'm not -- am I trying to lay guilt on you? A little bit. But this is what I was thinking to myself, you know, if people said, you know, I'll come to prayer meeting once a month and people just kind of rotated through that, we would quintuple the amount of people who are praying and it wouldn't be that great a burden to say, yeah, I can do that twelve times a year. And so yeah, I am laying a little bit of a guilt trip on you folks. And look, I understand that there's prayer that's taking place that's not corporate, but there's something unique, something special about gathering together and saying we here are praying as part of the body for the body. And

I'm so thankful that the elders, we get it, we pray corporately for every one of you, we pray through the entire list of every single person that comes here because we recognize that that's incredibly important.

And so what I hear, what I sense God is trying to say to us as we are venturing forth into this new direction is don't forget prayer, don't forget what got you here, don't forget what keeps you here, because if you forget that, you can have all kinds of successes and it won't amount to a hill of beans. And so what I'm asking for this morning is not just prayer at home, corporate prayer which I appreciate but maybe think about can you make it maybe once a month for corporate prayer just to encourage the folks that are there? Let's pray.

*Father, I just want to thank you for this church. I just thank you for this church is directly result of the grand women at the very beginning who held us up in prayer constantly and I'm reminded of that constantly, and I thank you for that. And I just continue to pray, Lord, as we venture into areas where we could make all kinds of mistakes, we could do things backwards or upside down or in a way that offends folks and we don't have the wisdom, we don't have the ability, we don't have the skill set on our own to be able to pull this off, but you do. You have all the wisdom we need and*

*it's waiting for us and it's available to us through prayer. And so I pray, Lord, for us as a body, that we would re-energize ourselves at this notion of the importance of prayer. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*