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

**September 1, 2019**

**Communion Sunday**

**John 21:18-22**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again, I thank you for Steve, I thank you for this new direction that you're sending him in and I just continue to pray for all the grace, strength, peace, power and wisdom that he needs as he embarks on this new venture. I also pray, Lord, for us this day, as we are again spending time looking into your words, focusing in on what you have done for us at the cross, and Father, I just thank you for the gift of the cross. I thank you for your son. I thank you for what he went through in order to give us the new life that we have. And so we pray this day as we open up your book again, that we would have the privilege and the presence of your Holy Spirit. Guide us as we go into your word, give us the grace to understand it, and to make it of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as we said, once again it's the first Sunday of the month and this is that day that we celebrate Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before that event, he met with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them,

and that's described in *Matthew 26*. 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 his blood, then he asked his disciples to do the same, to eat the bread, to drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we call "the Lord's table." And so we celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating first on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us at the cross and then by examining ourselves and we're asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our lives where we have sin, where he's convicting us of sin, then confessing our sins and then participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you'd the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, we're finally at the end of the gospel of John, we've worked

our way all the way through. It's been a number of years. But before we say good-bye to that wonderful gospel, I want to focus one last time on one little statement that Jesus makes to Peter at the very end of the book. I've mentioned it before but this morning I want to focus in on it. Jesus and Peter have already had their confrontation stemming from Peter's three-time denial of Christ. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he genuinely loves him and three times Peter is confronted with his own sense of grief and failure ending with this affirmation from Jesus of his deep love for Peter and his commitment to Peter and his role as the rock, as the head of this group of men who would form this new church. And he's told quite plainly by Jesus precisely how he, too, is going to one day face crucifixion just as his Lord had. Jesus says this in *John 21:18*. He says: *"Truly, truly, I say to you" -- he's speaking to Peter -- "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."* It's an intensely sober and difficult moment for both Jesus and Peter and yet somehow Peter manages again to blow it. In verse 20 it says: *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said*

*to him, "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"*

One of the amazing things about scripture is how completely unvarnished it is in describing our foibles, our failures, I mean, we look at Peter, he's just experienced this incredible high point of God's love and his mercy and affirmation and yet somehow or other he manages to mess it up. Peter is so us. I mean that's what we love about Peter. And God includes in this mini dialogue between Jesus and Peter, he includes this dialogue because it captures the way many of us think. Peter's just gone through this excruciating time of confession and restoration, he's been assured that his task was still to feed the sheep but he just can't resist this one little question. Peter sees John following the two of them and having been given the sober knowledge of what his future is about, he points to John and he says, what about that guy? It's a question we ask when we see people who despise the name of God doing well. It's a question we ask all the time. It's a question we ask when we see people who are fellow Christians enjoying good health and prosperity and all the other things that we might not be experiencing at the moment. We see these things and we're tempted, along with Peter, to say to God, what about that guy? How come he gets X, Y and Z and I get to get crucified? Well, you know, in our country we've actually developed a whole other gospel that

mistakenly attempts to address this question by stating flat out that health and wealth and prosperity are yours. They're yours by right as a Christian. This is what they say, and they're wrong. I spend a lot of time knocking the prosperity gospel because I think it is a unique threat to the real gospel. We spent three weeks as a church looking at a video documentary entitled an *American Gospel*. It was basically an examination of the prosperity gospel suggesting that it has become a unique type of false gospel identified particularly with the American dream. I had that brought powerfully home to me the night that I arrived in India. We flew into Chennai, which is a very large city in southern India, and we got to spend that night in a hotel. And so I went into the room and there was a TV there and I flicked it on and there on the TV is this American prosperity preacher whose name was Creflo Dollar. You can't make this stuff up. I mean he's going on and on about all of the wealth that he had accumulated and the wealth that awaited every single person who would be willing to access it by faith. It sickened me that this gospel was going out in India to some of the poorest people on the face of the earth. And what's worse, it was being sold as a uniquely American gospel.

The prosperity gospel teaches that all of life as a Christian is a formula. I mean they believe that there is a unique power available to any child of God as long as you get the formula right,

as long as you stick to the script. And the formula tells you that you are entitled, as a child of the King, to health and to wealth and prosperity. I mean, it's your right, you're a child of God. The problem according to this gospel is that we just don't have the faith to claim what rightfully belongs to us. And the idea is, you see, you need to find the faith within you because that faith within you is going to unlock this huge storehouse of treasures that God has for you and for all believers. I mean it's an almost foolproof system. If God should bless you with health, wealth and prosperity, it's because you have been able to access them through faith. But if you, like the vast majority of people hoodwinked by this false gospel don't receive those blessings, then the lack's not on God's part, it's on you. It's your lack of faith.

I mean I would love to say that none of us is so spiritually naive to believe such a thing but I think every one of us to some extent buys into this prosperity gospel. I mean I don't think we're expecting mink coats and Cadillacs but I think all of us, to some extent, expect that life works according to a formula: A plus B equals C. If you believe in Jesus, that's the A part, and if you try to do the right thing, that's the B part, then I should equal C. I should have a relatively pain free, successful life. And spiritually that kind of makes sense. In fact it even seems to be attested to by scripture. If you look at particularly the Old

Testament, look at *Deuteronomy 28*, it says this, it says: *Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all his commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country, blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Psalm 34 says: The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. Proverbs 3 says: Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.*

I mean all of these scriptures certainly point towards a cause and effect that says if you do A plus B, you should expect C. But the problem here is one of context. You know, there's an old cliché that says a text without a context is always a pretext. You can take just about any scripture you want out of its context and make it say almost anything you want. I remember years ago somebody was saying that the Bible clearly says in indisputable language there

is no God. It's right there in *Psalm 14:1*. But what is not stated is the previous line which says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* You can make it say whatever you want. I mean almost all of the scriptures that are used to prop up the prosperity gospel are scriptures that are taken out of context. They're scriptures taken from the Old Testament that were directed specifically at the nation of Israel. You see, God had a unique relationship with Israel and with her people. God was establishing Israel as his people, as priests, as intermediaries between himself and all of humanity. And part of that process involved separating the Jewish people and demonstrating that they were chosen, that they were blessed and that God had separated these people to himself. God told his people that he would bless them so that they, in turn, could bless the world. But note how he did it. He did it through what is called a "conditional covenant." A conditional covenant is one based obviously on conditions. I mean it's an if-then situation. If Israel does A plus B, then God will do C. And God was very clear about that. If you look at *Leviticus 26*, it says this: *If, if you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your*



*land safely.* Certainly makes sense. The problem here is that this is a conditional covenant and it was given for a specific group of people and only for a specific time. Fast forward to the New Testament and you would be hard pressed to find any scripture offering temporal rewards for faithful service. I mean, this was a temporary Jewish thing, not at all God's intent for the Gentile world. And the problem is the Jewish people saw this conditional covenant as a lasting legacy, something that would forever describe how God was going to interact with his people, and that kind of idea infected everything. You can go back to the very beginning and see this attitude infecting even Job's counselors as they try to deal with the awful circumstances that Job finds himself in. I mean you look at it, Job's advisors, they thoroughly bought into this idea of A plus B equals C. I mean, if you believe and live a good and righteous life, then God is clearly going to bless you. And the fact that Job was suffering these unspeakable curses could only mean that, A, he either wasn't believing, or B, he wasn't living a good and righteous life, in their minds. I mean Job's situation, that's the C of the formula, was uniformly terrible. And in their minds the only way that could possibly have been was that his A and B parts had to have been sinful. And that wasn't just their thinking, this was the thinking that Jesus had to deconstruct with his disciples because they thought the exact same way. I mean if you remember when they came across the man who had

been born blind from birth, they, too, were thinking, well, A plus B equals C. They look at this man and he's been born cursed with blindness, that's a really bad C, so they're assuming somebody's A plus B had to be off. They want to know who it was.

*John 9:1 says: As he passed by, he (Jesus) saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* I mean to the disciples that question made perfect sense. I mean you don't get born blind unless you or your parents have failed terribly at A plus B. Verse 3 says: *Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."*

Jesus's answer throws their logic right out the window. Jesus' answers insist that A plus B no longer equals C. The glory of God becomes part of the equation that trumps all the other parts. And that goal, that goal of God's glory will never seem worth everything unless, unless you're a child of God. When Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, when you by faith have given your life to him, his Holy Spirit comes into you, he enters into you and he changes the very desires of your heart. And so what matters to Jesus becomes what matters to you. And nothing matters more to God than his glory.

And so we ask, well, what is this all consuming passion of God's?

Well, God's glory is simply his attributes made manifest. It's the ongoing display of who he is, of what it is that he does, displayed not for his sake but for our sake. See, nothing mattered more to the Lord Jesus Christ than the glory of God. And to put that into context of the war that's going on, the spiritual war that we're in right now, you have to understand because of that, nothing matters more to the arch enemy of Christ than that we misappropriate or misunderstand just what that glory is. Consider what God says about his enemy and the idea of glory in *2 Corinthians 4*. He says this, he says: *The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* See, Satan's goal is to keep everybody from seeing that light, from understanding the light of the gospel, and especially believers from fully grasping the beauty and the wonder of the glory of Christ.

As the elders come forward to distribute the bread, I'd like us to take some time this morning to ask ourselves a very important question. The question is: Is my passion the glory of God in Christ, or am I still stuck in a cycle that says as long as I do A, believe in Jesus, and try my best, that's part B, I can expect that God owes me part C, and that's at the very least, a pain-free life. Consider this morning the glory of God in Christ and ask yourself, does that matter most to me?

Consider also God's warning about taking communion. This is found in *1 Corinthians 11*. God 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.* What that is saying there is that communion is extremely serious business, I mean, if you look at the language there, God basically says he has killed people for not taking this warning. And so to enter into communion in an unworthy manner, we say all the time, it's to court disaster. So what is the requirement? If you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of God, that you're a child of the King, if you haven't been 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. I often say, no one's going to look at you weird. In fact they may think you wise.

And this is how the enemy works. We have that and then we have the other pole, the other pole says, well, I have to be absolutely spotless, I have to be perfect in order to be worthy to receive communion. That, too, is a mistake. See, being a child of the

King doesn't mean that we don't sin and that we never fail. It means that we understand the salvation that we've been given is a gift and it's a gift that no one is capable of ever earning by being good. And I repeat this quote every month because I just think if you understand what he is saying here, you really get the gospel. If you don't, maybe you don't. This is the quote. Dane Ortlund 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." Think about that. But understand when we fail, and we will fail, when we fail, we understand that we have sinned. Why? Because we have God's Holy Spirit inside us, and the Spirit inside us is the one who convicts us. And so we grieve, we grieve as children of the King who has a Father who knows that we grieve and who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. God says 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, again, being a child of the King doesn't mean you're spotless and that you're without sin. It means that when you sin, you understand that we have Christ himself in heaven itself acting as an advocate for the Father, that's someone speaking on our behalf.

*1 John 2:1* 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 because we have Jesus's righteousness and not our own, it's an alien righteousness, it doesn't belong to us, it belongs to him and it's given to us by faith, we have his righteousness, and because we have his righteousness, we can stand before him. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Christ purchased for you. I mean, he lived the life that we all were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could have this privilege, so that we would be worthy of heaven, so that we could value God's glory like he does.

*1 Corinthians 11 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.*

The problem with thinking that A plus B equals C is that it almost inevitably leads to disappointment, either disappointment on my part or what we think is God's part. I mean, we think just like this prosperity gospel teaches, either that we somehow or other have not done our part and so we're not deserving of any blessing from God or maybe we feel that we've done our A plus B exceptionally well and just can't understand why God isn't blessing

us. I mean, what happens when you fully place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, again, that's part A, and you do your very best to live a Christ-like life, that's part B, and you find sickness instead of health, struggle instead of success and what seems to be curses instead of blessings? I think we instantaneously think just like the disciples did. Well, who sinned here? Is it me? Is it my parents? Who is it? Well, what if nobody sinned? What if your circumstances are designed by God to bring glory to him through you? And what if that is through ill health or struggle or even poverty? You see, that was the usual lot of some of the most precious people to God in the New Testament. I think when you look soberly at the vast majority of what the New Testament is telling us, including the lies of every one of Christ's disciples, you will see that most of us have inadvertently become victims of prosperity preaching. We think we are entitled to pain-free lives, lives of at least moderate success. But all you have to do is read the scriptures and see that more often than not strife and struggle and difficulty mark the lives of even the choicest of God's servants. I mean why do you think the apostle Peter said: *Beloved, do not surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* I don't think Peter would have said don't be surprised if fiery trials accompanied a lack of

faith and bad behavior, I mean, reap what you sow. What Peter is saying, though, is what the New Testament repeats over and over again is that you may be a person of deep faith and you may be a person living a God-honoring life, but that in no way is going to prevent you from sometimes suffering deep trials and tribulations. And to find examples of this, we'll need look no further than the most important people there were to Jesus while he was here on earth and that is his disciples. I mean I think of Jesus' high priestly prayer back in John 17. Jesus is pouring out his heart to his Father. It's the very end of his ministry, he's very near death and he's reflecting back on the disciples that God has given to him and how he successfully protected them. He says this in *John 17:6*, he says: *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were and you gave them to me and they have kept your word. While I was with them, I kept them in your name which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."* Well, clearly Jesus deeply loved these men and he was committed to their safety.

How did the disciples fair in terms of the prosperity gospel? I mean, they clearly did A, they had faith in Jesus Christ, more so than just about anybody else extant at that time. I don't think



there's any doubting that they did B., their lives were marked by an astounding dedication to Christ and to his gospel. But when it came to C, the success, the well-being, the good health and prosperity that the Old Testament conditional covenant said would be theirs simply did not happen. I mean in terms of the prosperity gospel, the disciples were a complete failure. I mean just going by popular understanding of what history says, this is what happened to the disciples: James was thrown off a building, and when they found out he was still alive, they stabbed him to death. Thaddeus was riddled with arrows. Philip, Matthew, Bartholomew, Peter, Andrew and Matthias, all of them were crucified. Andrew on an X-shaped cross, Peter upside down. Thomas and Simon were thrust through with spears. The other James was stoned, and Paul was beheaded. Only John died a natural death, having been exiled to the island of Patmos. So much for health, wealth and prosperity. But you see, they are by no means alone. Hebrews 4 lists a catalog of the heroes of the faith and it describes some of the mighty miracles that rescued and kept and protected the saints. It's very uplifting when you read that part but then you get to a second part where the description changes to those saints who didn't have wonderful life-changing stories to tell. *Hebrews 11:35 says: Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in*

*two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted mistreated -- of whom the world was not worthy -- wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

And so in the middle of this incredibly long list of awful things happening to God's people, there's an editorial comment made by God himself. I mean did you see it? It's in verse 37. Says: *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated -- of whom the world was not worthy --* God's opinion of these folks is as good as it could get. He even commends them for their faith, and yet their circumstances are about as bad as they could possibly be. Awful things are happening to people who God says this very world was not even worthy of.

The same chapter then describes those terrible things happening to God's choice of servants but it also describes another group of believers. This is verse 33: *Who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the*

*sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* What's God saying here? I mean, he's saying that some of his choicest servants conquered kingdoms and even stopped the mouths of lions while other choice servants walked around destitute, afflicted and mistreated, and, yeah, some were even sawn in two. That was a fate that was said to have occurred to the prophet Isaiah. So much for A plus B equaling C. I mean my guess is these precious saints who suffered so greatly never heard of the prosperity gospel. I mean, they simply trusted that God was all that they truly needed to get through whatever life was going to throw at them. I mean it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that the scripture is filled with vastly different life stories and that some believers seem to skate along almost untouched by the curse of Adam's fall and others seem to get crushed under the very same weight. And it can make life seem unbearably unfair to those who seem to have received the short end of the stick. I mean there's no question that God places us uniquely in vastly different circumstances, and he certainly doesn't ask our permission. What he does ask of each of us is that we trust that no matter what the circumstance is, that he knows best, not just for us but for everyone else. I mean most of us, truth be told, are just like Peter. We want to ask Jesus, what about that guy? I can just picture Jesus stopping in his tracks, turning around, looking directly into Peter's eye and saying, "*If I*

*will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"* I mean Jesus' response reminds me that I used to say that to my kids all the time. You know when they wanted to know something about their brothers or sisters that really wasn't their business, I'd say, "What's it to you?" I mean I never treated my kids as interchangeable parts where one size fits all, and Jesus treats us the exact same way. See, it's helpful to remember that Jesus treats each of us uniquely as individuals. I mean he tells us that our names individually are written in the Lamb's book of life, that even the hairs on our head are individually numbered, that the number of our days is individually recorded by God before we were even born and that we each have a unique name that he alone knows and will one day share with us. I mean, would it not follow that he would not think too highly of us looking to our left or right, to this family or that individual to draw our conclusions about what we think we're entitled to? Jesus says you are absolutely unique. God says there's nobody that I created in the entire world that is just like you, and my intention is to shape you uniquely into an image of my Son that nobody else can bear. That's our privilege but that's also our charge. And Jesus even today, 2,000 years later is doing the very same work that he did in Peter's life. And he's doing it in the lives of his people here in his church. There is no one who can represent Jesus like you can. There's no one who can represent Jesus like I can. And Jesus, very

clearly, wants us to understand that and to give up forever looking to our left or our right but rather instead straight ahead at him. And when we start thinking about who gets the short end of the stick, we have to remember, there was nobody more entitled to honor, glory, wisdom and power than the Lord Jesus Christ. And there was no one who more willingly embraced dishonor, disgrace and abandonment more than Jesus. Nobody knows better what the short end of the stick is like than Jesus. And he loves you enough to have died for you. And he was perfect enough to be raised from the dead, having paid for your sin, and now he wants to shape and mold you uniquely into his image, for our good and his glory. And sometimes, I'll be the first one to say, sometimes that process leaves us bewildered. And when it does, it's helpful to remember this passage from C. H. Spurgeon who lived over a hundred years ago. It's a passage that Norma put me onto and this is what he said. He said: "Unerring wisdom ordained your lot, and selected for you the safest and best condition. Remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there. You are placed by God in the most suitable circumstances. Be content with such things as you have, since the Lord has ordered all things for your good."

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I'd like us to take a minute just to consider those words. Let me just repeat them:

"Had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there." So you have to ask yourself, do I believe that's true? I think it might be easy to believe that it might be true. I think it's much harder to believe that it would be true for me or for you. You see, unlike what the prosperity preachers claim, God never promises us health or wealth or prosperity, and what he promises us is basically what he promised Israel. He said this in *Isaiah 43*. He said: *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* See, God never promises us a pathway around the river or over the fire, but instead he promises that when we find ourselves in the waters or in the fire, he will be with us. He will accompany us. That's why David could say in *Psalms 23*, and I repeat this all the time, it's such familiar words but you need to think about them as they're being said. He said: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* There's been times in my life when I've been in some pretty deep waters, and I'm sure every one of you can say the very same thing. But it was in those deep waters that I learned the truth of God's promises. It was in those deep waters that I learned that God

never leaves or forsakes us. And here's the key to all of this. What you learn when you're in those deep waters is that the presence of Christ is enough. I don't see how you could learn that outside of deep waters.

But as you receive the cup, take some time to consider the real riches that are yours in the gift of Christ. *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 an understanding of what it means to practically remember Christ and his cross. And again, the whole theme of this day, this morning has been some of the struggles that are around and we look around and we see we have cancers, we have broken bones, we have a terrible stillborn, many struggling with chronic diseases and chronic symptoms. So there's a lot of folks here that are going through deep waters, going through a fire, as it were, and there's some things that people in those circumstances do not need. The first thing that they do not need is to be ignored. I tell you, when people are experiencing real struggle, we get nervous, we get scared. Very oftentimes what people do when they see their brothers and sisters struggling is they don't know what to say, so

they don't say anything. They wind up just ignoring that person which is worse than nothing. So they don't need to be ignored. What they also don't need is pity and platitudes. If someone's experienced a death, you don't need to tell them that God needed another angel, so he took your husband. That's awful. And in some cases it's better to say absolutely nothing, just to be there. You see, what people do need more than anything is empathy. God says *weep for those who weep.*

I've told this story before but it's so indicative to me. There was a person that I met many, many years ago. He's my dentist. And we chatted and I tried to share the gospel with him on numerous occasions. And he had a bad back and one day his back was really terrible, it was awful, and he was not a believer at all but he found it interesting, just chatting about these things. And one day his wife called me and he was in such agony that she said, "Would you just come down here and pray for him?" I said, "Sure." So I came down and I went into the room and he's lying on the bed and he was panting and grunting, he was in so much pain. And I just, I looked down at him -- and this is the Holy Spirit thing, I just started to weep. I barely got out a prayer. I don't know if this guy's a believer or not, he's moved to Florida, he's gone on. But two or three years later I was at a party and he was there and he walked up to, there's a group of people, and he said, "See this



guy? This guy cried for me." That means something. That's what weep with those who weep means. Enter into their pain. That's what they need. But I can tell you what they need even more than that, and it's the only thing that we can truly give, and that's Christ. You can't fix stuff when it's broken, you just can't, and you can't extend yourself to the extent that you think you can, just give of yourself and the more you give of yourself, the more that's going to make it go away. We have limits to how much compassion we can come up with but Christ is unlimited. So what you offer somebody who is struggling is not platitudes, it's not pity, it's empathy and it's Christ. Well, how do you do that? You say, "Look, Christ is your answer. Lean on Him. Trust in Him." Share Christ with those who are in pain. Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for your grace. I thank you that your grace is here even when we're in the valley. I thank you for how you sustain us, how you walk with us, how you give us that constant grace. Lord, I pray for all of those who are struggling today in our congregation, in the body at large and those that we know of, I just continue to pray that in the midst of this struggle they would sense your presence in a very real and tangible way and that they would say in spite of how awful things are, I feel the presence of Christ. I wish that for each and every person that is suffering this day. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*