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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion Sunday

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you and praise you that we can come before you to celebrate the most awful event in the history of mankind and that is the cross because it's also the most wonderful event in all of mankind. And so we just again come before you this day and we pray for the grace and the strength and the insight and the wisdom that we need to be able to open up your book, once again to look into it, once again to grow deeper in our depth of understanding of what you did for us at the cross, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once again as I said it's the first Sunday of the month, this is the day that we've set aside for remembering Christ and his cross. Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples for a last time Passover supper and it's recorded in Matthew 26. It says this, 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." Well Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood, then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And he asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular basis and this is what we call "the Lord's table." And we celebrate it once a month and we do that by first meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross and then by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas that he's convicting us of sin, 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 are following the life of Christ. We're following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark and we're starting a new chapter. We start this Sunday chapter 6. As one commentator said of chapter 5 which we just left, it could be considered the faith chapter. This chapter, chapter 6, could be considered the unfaith chapter. Chapter 5 opened up with the demon-possessed man of the tombs being healed and that was followed by the woman with the issue of blood

and Jairus's daughter both being healed through deep expressions of their faith. Well this next chapter that we're going to be looking at could best be summed up by these words in *Mark 6:6* about Jesus. It says: *He was amazed at their lack of faith.*

So let's pick up on *Mark 6* starting at verse 1. It says: *Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.* Well, we're looking at this passage at what may be the very first biblical expression of cancel culture. Jesus arrives in his hometown and he preaches in the synagogue. Just imagine this. You imagine you have God himself speaking in a synagogue about God. I mean understandably his listeners are blown away. *"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?"* I mean his hometown people saw the knowledge that he had, the wisdom that he shared and the miracles that he performed and they were astounded. But then something happened. They began to compare his performance with his

credentials. *"Isn't this the carpenter," they asked?* I mean how could a carpenter, a mere tradesman, how could he have this knowledge and wisdom and power? And worse yet, they said, was his pedigree. I mean this guy's the illegitimate son, so they thought, of this local peasant family. We know exactly who this guy is. We've known him for years. He's an uneducated nobody. How could he possibly have any legitimacy whatsoever? *"Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?"* At a minimum that means that Jesus came from a family of seven siblings, that's four half brothers and at the very minimum two half sisters. Of course they were half brothers and sisters because only Jesus had God himself for a father and Mary his mother. But that didn't mean that he didn't have a large earthly family, most of whom incidentally shared something with the hometown crowd. It's described in *John 7:5*. It says: *For not even his brothers believed in him.* Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him. It almost seems like his sisters joined with the townsfolk against him. Again it says: *"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"* And they took offense at him.

This is not the first time this has happened. We saw previously in Mark 3 when a huge crowd had gathered around a home that Jesus was

ministering and his family gathered outside and literally made the claim that Jesus has lost his mind. This is *Mark 3:20*. It says: *Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."* His own family thought he was crazy and they took offense at him. I mean how do you take offense at someone for speaking truth, displaying wisdom and doing miracles? Well, I mean if you're committed to believing something that is not true and you've seen that your logic is not going to stand up to Jesus' superior wisdom and you can't deny Jesus' miraculous powers, well then how could you not take offense? I mean, folks, that's SOP. That's standard operating procedure for the world. *1 Corinthians 1:23* says: *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.* I mean those who preached righteousness through law keeping, well they stumbled over Jesus demanding a heart for worship rather than obedience and those who mocked obedience found Jesus' perfect obedience to be thoroughly off-putting, especially since he was this low level tradesman who was the illegitimate son of a peasant family. It says: *And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household."* So Jesus starts describing how the more intimately you are connected to non-believers, the more they're going to resent you living out the gospel. Jesus starts with an

outer circle of intimacy that he calls your hometown. You know, that's where he went to high school, it's where you put down your roots, it's where you found your friendships. But then he takes that circle and he shrinks it down into another concentric circle that he refers to as your relatives. You know that's your Uncle Tony, it's your Aunt Susie, your cousins, it's all the people that you've known since birth. But then he takes that circle and he shrinks it down to yet another concentric circle to include your household. And that's literally your brothers, your sisters, your mom and your dad. And each one of these shrinking circles brings people more and more to a position where they know -- quote -- "the real you." And Jesus is brutally frank with this audience. He says they're going to be the toughest one you're going to be likely to face. You know a prophet may well find honor in all kinds of different places but the chances of him finding it at home are actually very slim. I mean just consider the fact that Jesus was excoriated by those closest to him, and he was perfect.

So how did Jesus handle presenting his gospel to those who were closest to him? Well, if you look at the way he approached his hometown you can see the three things that mark Jesus' approach was first truth and then wisdom and then power. Again this is verse 1. It says: *Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the*

synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. So first it's truth. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. What are the "things" that Jesus got? Well plainly and simply it was the truth. It was the truth of who he was and what he was there to accomplish. Second was wisdom. They said, "What's this wisdom that's been given Him?" This was their clear acknowledgment of the wisdom that Jesus possessed. They had seen Jesus' extraordinary wisdom over and over again as he interacted with them. And third was power. They said, "What are these remarkable miracles he's performing?" I mean those closest to him saw him do the impossible. And we can learn much from his example about how we are to go about the impossible task of ministering to those in our family because we want to do it like he did it. Jesus exercised truth, wisdom and power, and those of us who come from families who don't share our beliefs can look to his example for how we minister our beliefs to our families.

And so the first thing that we need to share with our families is the truth. I mean if you were raised in a Christian family you don't really have this issue to deal with, but if you're someone who's come to Christ later on in life, you're probably going to find that your family has no real idea what the gospel actually is. I mean the biggest problem that I found with my folks was their understanding of what they thought the gospel was versus what the

gospel actually is. And the hardest task is just getting the opportunity to explain just what the real gospel is. It's been my experience that the resentment that comes from close relatives is really based on the same circumstances that Jesus found. People say, "You can't fool me, I've known you your whole life. I know where you've come from and suddenly you're acting like you're better than us." I mean you don't have to be actively thinking that you're better than anyone for people to arrive at conclusions like that. If you don't have the opportunity to share the gospel with somebody, you know what's going to happen? They're going to make up their own gospel and their gospel is going to invariably be based on what everybody genuinely thinks the gospel consists of, and that is that good people go to heaven and bad people don't, and that somehow or other you think that you are -- quote -- "gooder" than they are. That's the baseline that most everyone operates from. So the very first part of the truth of the gospel is asking for the opportunity to share the real gospel.

The second problem is knowing what that real gospel is. And that's true especially today. Today there's been a general division about what the real gospel is. I mean there's this broad and narrow way of understanding the gospel. And people divide that understanding, they say is it the broad kingdom-centered gospel that Jesus spoke about repeatedly or is it the narrow Christ-centered gospel that he

also referred to. Jesus' first public statement about the kingdom gospel occurred at the very start of his public ministry. This is what Jesus said in Luke 4. He said: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* So kingdom folks understand the gospel to be all about reconciliation and renewal, a Christ led healing of all the social, physical and spiritual brokenness of this planet. Well cross-centered folks see the gospel as much more targeted. It's a Christ-led healing of the brokenness of sin that separates us eternally from God and his kingdom, and those who preach an exclusively kingdom-centered gospel see the cross-centered gospel as narrow, as highly reductionistic, as something that takes the broadest understanding of the healing of the entire planet and it reduces it to simply an individual ticket to heaven. They see it as a gospel that creates a people who don't care at all about the world all around them as long as they punch their celestial ticket and made sure they got a first class seat to the -- on the road to heaven. On the other hand those who preach the cross-centered gospel oftentimes cast a suspicious eye toward the kingdom gospel folks thinking they're trying to remove the offense of the cross and the offense of sin from the gospel. They point out what the cross-centered gospel is and that is God is the creator of all

things, and that the crown of his creation fell and separated himself from God in the fall of Adam and because man fell he's no longer in fellowship with God. He needs help. He needs divine intervention, if you will. And that came in the form of God himself leaving heaven, being born in human flesh and living out his life perfectly so that he could offer that life up on the cross as a substitute for our life of sin. See the gospel of the cross says that when you by faith trust in Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross then his righteousness becomes your righteousness and you now stand before God perfectly fitted for fellowship and for heaven.

So which is the real gospel? Is it the broad gospel of the kingdom or is it the narrow gospel of the cross? Well the answer is both. Greg Gilbert writing in *Nine Marks Journal* says this, he says: "Now let me make two other things explicit. First, the broad use of the word 'gospel' necessarily includes the narrow. Jesus does not just proclaim the onset of the kingdom, as many have said. He proclaims the onset of the kingdom and he proclaims the means of entering it. Look closely: Jesus did not preach the gospel saying 'The kingdom of heaven has come!' He preached the gospel saying, 'The kingdom of heaven has come. Therefore repent and believe!' This is crucial, the difference indeed between Gospel and not-Gospel: To proclaim the inauguration of the kingdom and

the new creation and all the rest without proclaiming how people can enter it—by repenting and being forgiven of their sins through faith in Christ and his atoning death—is to preach a non-Gospel. Indeed, it is to preach bad news, since you give people no hope of being included in that new creation. The Gospel of the Kingdom is not merely the proclamation of the kingdom. It is the proclamation of the kingdom together with the proclamation that people may enter it by repentance and faith in Christ."

So the real gospel is not one or the other but both. It is narrowly restricted to those who understand the nature of their sin and it is broadly concerned with reconciling the entire planet. The gospel that Jesus proclaimed is the gospel that we proclaim to our families and it is a gospel that requires faith and repentance, both of which come from God in the form of unearned gifts. I mean *Ephesians 2* tells us: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* And *Acts 11* demonstrates that repentance is also God's gift. You know once Peter was reporting to his fellow Jewish Christians about how the Holy Spirit had come down on himself and a number of Gentiles that he was leading to Christ, and they responded this way -- this is the primitive church, the very beginning of the church, and they responded to this newfound faith of the Gentiles this way. This is *Acts 11*. It says: *When they heard this, they*

had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life." So because both faith and repentance are gifts from God, the first person that you have to ask for for these gifts is not your relatives, it's God. You see it's God who gives us opportunity. It's God who gives us the opening via his Holy Spirit and please, do not be afraid of having to do this perfectly. I'm very concerned that people think that unless I've got my Ph.D. in theology I'm not equipped to share the gospel with somebody. What you need is a heart that's overflowing with love for Christ. When it comes to sharing the gospel with close relatives, rather than barge in with guns blazing, we're far better off asking God to examine our heart, making certain that our position is to give the whole gospel and then asking him for help for the right time and the right opportunity and the right words.

And that leads to the second part. The second thing that Jesus demonstrated when he shared the gospel with his close relatives was wisdom. The people around Jesus, they marveled. *They said, "What is this wisdom that's been given him?"* And wisdom, as I've said many, many times is simply skillful living. It's the ability to present Christ to your family skillfully and by that I mean spiritually skillfully. Not technically having every single "T" crossed and "I" dotted. And I say skillfully because I can

certainly remember things that I did in my immediate family in my enthusiasm as a new believer that were not wise or skillful, and for which I paid a price for many, many years. I mean I still remember many, many years ago showing up at my family's home for a Christmas celebration with our kids. I remember my dad approaching my son and asking him "So, hey, what did Santa bring you for Christmas?" My son who was probably about four or five at that time, he looked at my dad and he announced with some level of disdain that I had actually engineered into him, "Grandpa, there's no such thing as Santa." My father looked at me like I was the Grinch that had stolen Christmas. And you know, I at that time had a pretty strong streak of self-righteousness and I was quite happy to engage him in how the myth of Santa had replaced the birth of Jesus Christ with materialism and all kinds of other bad things but what I actually wound up doing was souring my family on the real gospel for a good number of years. What I was doing, I didn't even realize it, but I unconsciously was reinforcing the notion of the gospel of the "gooder people" who go to heaven while proclaiming the evils of Santa Claus. And the message that I was proclaiming was you may be good people but I'm definitely gooder. It's exactly the opposite of the gospel that proclaims: *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no not one."* I mean was it wise for me to approach this this way? No. I mean there's all kinds of different ways I could have approached it. I could have said that

we tell our kids that Santa is a really fun story about a man who really was a believer in Jesus who wanted to demonstrate the gifts that God gives by giving out gifts to youngsters and so we tell our kids the story of Santa as a fun story, but we try to emphasize that the day really is about the birth of Jesus Christ. See, I hadn't yet really computed and thought and read and understood and internalized what 1 Peter says in *1 Peter 3:15*. He says this: *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* I'd spoken the truth, but I genuinely came up short in both gentleness and respect and I actually wound up paying for that for a good many years.

I've mentioned before how important it is just to ask God for wisdom, understanding the only requirement that God has of us is that we ask for it and we believe that he's going to give it. But I want to share with you what I always ask for also when I ask for wisdom. I ask God that he would show me my own sin and folly. I ask God for the ability to see my own sinfulness. And folly is really those times where I refuse or misuse wisdom. You have to understand, this is -- this is asking God a loaded question. And if you ask God a loaded question, you're going to get a loaded answer, but I think it's crucial. You see so much of what happens,

especially in families, we get so used to operating in the way we always have that we don't pick up on the cues that God is giving us to change. And we don't pick up on them because oftentimes they're just too painful. James says: *You do not have because you do not ask*, and this is one case to which I think we don't ask because we don't really want. This is knowledge that is painful, but it's incredibly helpful.

I'll give you an example. One thing that God showed me when I asked repeatedly and you have to start off slowly with this and just you know, I go back to that -- what was the movie where the spirit is showing Marley and he says, you know, "Spirit, show me no more. I can't take any more." I mean literally what you do when you ask God to show you these things, in bits and pieces he'll begin to reveal things about you you might not find pleasant. And one thing that God showed me when I asked was a sin in regard to my preaching. See I always asked God, I said, God, I want to get better and better at proclaiming your word. I want to get better and better at delivering it. And when I started to ask him to show me my sin, he basically showed me that a significant percentage of my desire to preach better had nothing to do with him. It had nothing to do with advancing his kingdom. It was just an attempt on my part to be thought of as smart or clever or a good speaker. I mean essentially Christ had said, since I had asked, that a part

of me was actually using him to advance me. No way, no way, I protested. I just want to preach your gospel. God essentially said, I love you, Tom, but a chunk of your desire is for you and not me or my kingdom. That's a hard truth. But I can't begin to tell you how liberating it is to understand that God knows and sees every single part of me and he still loves me enough to say, "I see it, now do you see it?" And what God did in my case, God will do for you. He'll do for anyone who sincerely asks. I mean God didn't say it verbally but he definitely communicated this is where you're at, Tom, I mean, I still love you just as much, I just want you to be able to see it as I see it. And that's not pretty, but it's enormously helpful. And he did the very same thing when I asked him about how to minister to my family. I mean he showed me that a significant chunk of the way I minister to my family was designed to make me look good and not advance his kingdom. And that was painful, but it was also true. You see, much wisdom comes from simply being willing to agree with God when he speaks things into your life that you don't want to hear. And wisdom includes being willing to see stuff that we don't necessarily want to see. And really the only way we're going to be effective with our families is if we have the God-given wisdom to uniquely see not only our own folly but the unique circumstances that our families are in because those are oftentimes bound up together. And what God wants to do is he wants to grow us while he's using us as his

ambassadors. So I'd like to you take a moment right now and if you were raised in a Christian home, you can praise God for the incredible blessing that you've received, but if you were raised in a non-Christian home, ask God for wisdom. Ask God to make you effectively a prophet who is not without honor except in his own hometown and please don't sweat the details. God will give you the details. And finally just consider the profound humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. Understand this is the one prophet worthy of the honor of the entire universe willing to forego that honor for literal scorn from his own family because of how much he loved us.

And consider also God's warning about taking communion. It's found in *1 Corinthians 11:28*. It says this: *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 repeat this warning every month, I say that communion is an incredibly serious undertaking and if you are going to enter into it in an unworthy manner, you are courting disaster. I say if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't cleared the deck, if you haven't just

reconciled with those that you are at war with, if you haven't brought yourself to the altar ready and willing to be the sacrifice that you need to be, then just pass the elements on and don't participate. Err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

But as I always say, if you're thinking, okay, I have to be absolutely spotless in order to take communion, that, too, is a mistake as well. We often said being a child of the King doesn't mean you don't fail and you don't sin. And then I quote Dane Ortlund again every month because I think it's the most apropos thing I've ever read about this, and 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." I mean what he's basically saying is when you fail you understand that you've sinned, and the reason why you understand that you've sinned is not because you've suddenly gotten brilliant, it's because now you have God's Holy Spirit who lives inside you and it is God's Holy Spirit who convicts you and so you grieve as children knowing that you have a father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, who has said 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, as we said being a child of God does not mean that you're sinless. It also means that you know that you have an advocate who speaks for you in heaven itself. This is *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 that's our key, what that says is because we have Jesus' righteousness, this alien righteousness that God has given to us, because we have that righteousness now we're now free, we're free to eat at his table. So if you love the Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you at the cost of his blood. You know, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die so that we can be made worthy of heaven, so that we could participate in this communion. And as you are about to approach it, again ask God for the grace to make truth and wisdom a part of your ministry to your family. Just take a moment to think on that.

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."*

Well we've looked at how Jesus dealt with his close relatives and

family and we saw that the first thing that he spoke was truth, truth about who he was and what his mission was and that our task is first and foremost to be able to present the truth of the gospel which includes the kingdom and the cross. Secondly, we saw that Jesus demonstrated extraordinary wisdom. And our call to wisdom is in how we present the gospel, but both having the truth of the gospel and having the wisdom that we need in presenting the gospel alone is not going to genuinely convert anyone and certainly not those of our close relatives. See, there's a third element that's absolutely necessary, and that element is power, miraculous power. You see, the great blessing and the great struggle in presenting the gospel is that its effectiveness always comes down to the miraculous. There's nobody who ever enters the kingdom of heaven without having first been the recipient of a miracle. And I say that because human beings not capable of processing the truth of the gospel regardless the wisdom of those presenting it. ¹

Corinthians 1:18 says: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. What God is saying is absent that miraculous power received as a gift from God, the gospel becomes mere foolishness to those who are perishing, and I know that because I know as a non-believer I distinctly remember hearing the truth of the gospel presented to me with great wisdom but not yet with the miraculous power of God's Holy Spirit. And it made no difference how

patiently or cogently it was presented, I just swept it away as utter nonsense. When God in his mercy granted me that miraculous power, suddenly my eyes were opened and my ears could hear and it all made sense when it made no sense at all just a few days previously. That power to transform the gospel from what sounded like utter foolishness to what now made absolute sense, that power comes from God alone because turning the truth of the gospel and the wisdom of his presentation into belief itself is something that only God can do. Again: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God --not by works, so that no one can boast.* I mean God makes it quite clear that faith is a gift that comes from God and no one gets there through works, including the work of believing. That's so liberating to know. I mean for years I thought if I can just get the argument better, if I could just make the logic a little bit tighter, so tight that no one could resist it, I'd wind up having everybody I spoke to accept the gospel. I eventually learned that's simply not the way this thing works. God has told us over and over again that we are his ambassadors as though he's making his plea through us because that's exactly what we are. But the power to make that plea understandable and the power to make a will that is dead set against God and his kingdom willing to accept that truth, that's something that comes only from God. God summed it all up by telling us that we are to be this aroma of Christ.

Literally what he is saying is the way you present the gospel is by mirroring the life of Christ that is in you to those around you so much so that your life becomes literally an aroma of Christ. God says people are going to get that aroma from you if you are really one of mine. And if they're given the gift of faith by God, that aroma will be the sweet, sweet smell of life itself. And if they do not receive the gift of faith from God, that very same aroma of Christ is going to have the stench of death all over it. God is very clear about telling us that the decision between the aroma being the sweet smell of life or the stench of death does not reside in human hands; it resides only in God's divine hands. What basically God is telling us is that our job is to simply be his ambassadors and present his case. It's the Holy Spirit's job to make that case the sweet smell of life to those who are being saved and the stench of death to those who are not. Here's how God puts it in *2 Corinthians 2:15*. He says: *For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?*

Paul asked that question. He asked that question because he knows no one is equal to that task. That it is impossible for human beings to bring other human beings to Christ. Jesus himself said that, not me. You know it happened as he was instructing his

disciples in how to present the gospel. This is *Matthew 19*. It says: *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."* When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, *"Who then can be saved?"* You see, the disciples thought like everyone else. They thought the rich were especially blessed by God, therefore they were on the fast track to heaven. Jesus' statement was stunning to them because it was directly the opposite of what they thought. I mean Jesus' response to their astonishment pointing out the impossibility of humans leading humans to Christ. Verse 26: *Jesus looked at them and said -- with man this is hard. With man this is really difficult. With man this is -- no. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

So what role do we have in presenting the gospel to our family and to those that are closest to us? We're nothing more and nothing less than ambassadors for Christ as though he were making his plea through us. And so the question that you have to ask yourself is, okay, what kind of ambassador am I? And you know what the best possible ambassador is? The best possible ambassador you can be is somebody who simply cannot contain his love for Jesus Christ. The truth of the gospel along with the wisdom to know my own sin and

folly combined with the power of a life overwhelmed with the love of Jesus Christ is all an ambassador God could ever ask for. It's all you can do. The rest is up to God. I mean if folks look at me and see nothing but religion and rules, they're going to think that the kingdom isn't really worth pursuing. If they see the love of Christ and the power and wisdom of Christ in the way that you live your life, they're not going to have an answer for that. In other words the idea that your family carries of the kingdom of God rests in the new creature that you have become. If that new creature is a hypocrite or someone who's much more concerned with worldly and earthly things than the kingdom, then that person is really no different than they are. So why should they see the kingdom as anything worth pursuing? Trust me, I think most of you know your life as a believer in a family of unbelievers is going to be put under a microscope because nobody wants the discomfort of thinking they don't measure up. And your life if you are a new creature in Christ is clearly going to point out the differences in your life and theirs spiritually.

So here's where it's critical that two things happen. That number one, that your life does represent a complete and radical change from the life they've known of you and the life they've come to expect of themselves. And secondly, that they understand completely that this change came about through the power and by the

grace of God's Holy Spirit and not by my now successful efforts at being "gooder" than you. Jesus was pointing that out when he said *a prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown*. And by saying that he said this is inherently a difficult ministry. It requires an extraordinary amount of wisdom and grace but not nearly the amount of wisdom and grace that we've been given to enter into the kingdom in the first place.

So as you begin to think about taking the cup, take a moment or so to ask yourself what kind of ambassador for Christ am I? 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 head, heart and hands. And it's really kind of the part where I really try to think of some kind of practical way that we can put into action what it is we are thinking of and how we resemble and how we remember Christ. And what I would like to do this time is just to take a moment for each of us to pray targeted specific prayers for our family. And what I'd like you all to do is pray for individual members of your family. If you were raised in a Christ-loving home, God bless, that is a wonderful thing, but I'm sure you've got cousins, distant

cousins and uncles and aunts and people who are outside of the kingdom, people to whom you can minister to. So what I would ask that you would do right now is to focus on someone in your family or a number of people in your family and pray exactly what I have been suggesting, that what we're talking about here is truth, wisdom and power. Pray for the truth of the gospel that you have to be accompanied by wisdom. And that doesn't mean that you have to wait until next Thanksgiving, you can just share. You can, I mean, literally Internet wise, text wise you can do whatever. It means that you can just ask God how he wants you to interact with your family. And so we start with truth, we go through wisdom, and then we ask for power. And so I want you to just focus on someone specifically in your family or a group of people specifically in your family this morning as I pray.

Father, I just first of all praise you and thank you for the gift that you've given to us. It's a gift that you have not yet given to whomever you're thinking of. And Lord, I want to be part of that. I want to be an ambassador and whether it's face-to-face, person-to-person, household-to-household or whether it's over the net, whatever it is, Lord, I want to have the ability to share the wisdom of who you are and to have wisdom in sharing it as well. And that includes being open and honest about my own shortcomings, about the times I may have used you to advance me instead of your

kingdom. And pray for that wisdom. I pray for that grace. And finally, Lord, I pray for a miracle. I pray for a miracle either in arranging opportunities or going the whole way in having somebody fully come into the kingdom through the gift of faith given through me. What a privilege that would be, Lord. I pray for my relative, I pray for my cousin or aunt or uncle or brother or mom or dad, whoever it is, Lord. Give me the gift of being able to communicate your gospel in a way that brings honor and glory to you, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.