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

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**"Blessed is the Man Who Remains Steadfast Under Trial"**

**James 1:12**

**Prayer:** *Father, we thank you, we praise you for your goodness, we praise you and we thank you that we still, as been said in a world that seems to be going crazier every single day, that we still have you, we have your rock solid word; we are thankful and we praise you for it. We pray this morning as we still have the freedom to gather and open up your book, that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, direct us, give us the ability to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been revisiting the book of James and so our text for this morning is *James 1:12*, which says: *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.* James is summing up in one sentence what we've been -- what he's been writing in the last eleven verses and what actually I've been preaching about for the last few weeks.

If you remember he started out by saying: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Now James sums up just what the blessing of steadfast faith produces. It says: *"He will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."* Verses 2 and 4 look at trials as a present reality; our verse this morning is actually looking back at the effect that those trials successfully completed produce.

And so probably the first question you would raise about this verse is just what is this crown of life that God is promising to those who love him, I mean, is the crown really is crown like we think of it or, you know, some have suggested that that is the case, that the crowns that we earn are really the crowns that we're going to lay at Jesus' feet as we worship him in heaven. Others suggest that the crown itself is life itself lived to the fullest while here on earth and continuing on forever.

We forget that the moment we entered into the kingdom of God we also entered into eternal life. Remember, remember Christ said in

*John 3:36*, he said: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life," not "will have" eternal life but has right now here in the present eternal life. And the nature of that life is what James is speaking about this morning. He says, "*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.*"

Well the Greek word for "blessed" is the word "makarios" which is often translated "happy." You can actually translate *James 1:12* by saying "happy is the man who remains steadfast under trial." And, you know if you've been following us the last few weeks following this series in James, you know that the word "happy" is almost a bad word. We've taken great pains to distinguish between the word "joy" and the word "happiness" and we've concluded that happiness, it depends on what's happening right at the moment. If good things are happening, well then we're happy. If good things are not happening, we are not happy.

And once again we're encountering a word in the Greek that doesn't translate well into English. You see, "makarios" does refer to happiness but it's a unique type of happiness. *Precept Austin* says this, it says: "Makarios is derived from a root makar, which means to be happy, but not in the usual sense of happiness based on positive circumstances. Makarios describes the person who is free from daily cares and worries because his every breath and

circumstance is in the hands of His Maker Who gives him such an assurance."

You know the Greeks use the word "makarios" to describe the happiness that only the gods could enjoy. It's the same Greek word that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount, and I've heard people translate that by saying, "*Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" or "*happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*" or "*happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that the happiness of those who are poor in spirit, mourning and meek is not the same kind of happiness that we associate with good circumstance. It's a happiness that we characterize by the use of the word "joy," that no matter what the circumstances are, our God is a good God and he is still in charge.

And so we accurately call a person who has that attitude, we call him blessed. We say, "*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.*" And the Greek word for "steadfast" here is that word "hupomone" which we've seen before. We saw it in verse 3. I said back then it's the combination of two Greek words "hupo" which means "remains under" and "mone" which means "to remain."

Hupomone means to resume under. And again, it's the ability to hold steady, to remain steadfast when the pressure of trials is putting you under.

Hupomone conveys the idea that you're not only accepting a trial, you are staring it right in the face. It means that you refuse to back down from it and you choose to stay with it, allowing God's grace to transform you through it. And it means far more than mere patience. And again that's why James is saying, "*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.*" You see, that blessing, that blessing that James is speaking about is a lot more than first meets the eye and it is a gift from God.

I mean, how do you suppose anyone remains steadfast under trials? You know, are those that remain steadfast just blessed with more guts, more backbone, more ability to stay the course than others who abandon the gospel? Or is the blessing to remain steadfast, is that actually a gift from God?

I mean, the question is where does the ability to persevere in the faith, where does that come from? Jesus tells us it doesn't come from us. He tells us it comes from God. In *John 6:39*, Jesus said: "*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last*

day."

You see, the fact is the ability to remain steadfast comes from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We persevere not because of some kind of spiritual backbone that's found in us but rather because we've had one transplanted into us at salvation. You see, God having chosen us, we belong lock, stock, and barrel to the Father and he's not about to let us go.

Jesus said in *John 10*: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."*

You see, there's a reason why James says, *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial"* and the blessing is that that steadfastness, it doesn't come from ourselves. It comes from God himself who will not let us go. The blessing is that no one can snatch us out of Christ's own hand nor could they ever snatch us out of the Father's hand, and there's a reason for that. It's because before time ever began, God chose us as a gift to his Son. That's a fact, we've been given by the Father to the Son. And because we are God's own gift to his Son, it is his power, not our

own, that's going to keep and preserve us.

Speaking of us, Jesus said in verse 29: *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all."* Now, who's the Father given to Christ? Well, he's given his sheep. They who hear his voice, they who follow him, they're the ones that he's given eternal life to, they're the ones that he will not let slip away because they are a gift from the Father to the Son.

Now you might be thinking at this point, well, wait a minute. I've been given as a gift? Who asked me? What part did I play in this? What about my free will?

Well, you know, the dear ones who first taught me the Bible taught me that God was a perfect gentleman and that he would never, ever force himself on anyone. I believed that because it seemed to make sense, but did it? God needs my permission to make me one of his? Well you can't find that anywhere in scripture. But on a human level, it truly does seem to make sense. But once again, if you take a step back and you look, you realize, God's never asked my permission for anything. And why should he, I mean, he's God.

God never asked me when I would like to be born; he just chose August of 1949. He never asked me what nation I wanted to be born

in or what parents I would like to choose, he never asked me if he could select my brothers and sisters or my intellectual capabilities. He never asked what talents, skills, personality or looks I might want either. And I just arrived here like you did, not having a clue how that happened and certainly not in any position to grant permission for anything. God did all of these things in my life and in your life and he never bothered to ask me if it was okay.

So why should he ask my permission to make me a gift to his Son? And we know that he did, and the reason that we know that he did is because Jesus said so. At the end of his life Jesus summed up his ministry in what he called his high priestly prayer, and in that prayer Jesus speaks three separate times of the gift that he received from his Father; and the gift that he's speaking of is you and me. He starts with the particulars. He starts with this small group of a dozen men that God originally gave to Jesus.

In *John 17*, it says this: *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."*



Jesus says he's been given the power to give eternal life to all that the Father had given him, and that gift started with the disciples. In verse 6, Jesus 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. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you."*

And in verse 12, he says: *"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 would be Judas -- that the Scripture might be fulfilled."*

But then Jesus expands the gift to include every other believer down through time. This is what he says in verse 20. He said: *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

See, we are those, we are those who believe in Christ through the word that first started in them, that is the disciples. So we, too, are a gift of God given by the Father to the Son. Now you think this is a gift that God is going to leave to chance? I mean, do you think that this is a gift that God is going to put in the

hands of fallen, sinful man, that having chosen us before time itself even began he's going to leave that gift to chance and good fortune, the ones whom Jesus died to redeem?

Why do you suppose God says this in *Romans 8:35*: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In order to understand why we believe in this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, you have to take a few steps backward to get a wider and broader picture of what God's intention was when he created you and me. You see, from before time had even begun God had chosen to separate out of the pool of all of humanity those that he would choose to bring honor and glory to himself and his Son. And God chose for himself an innumerable people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. And he chose those people not on the basis of who they were or what they had done but rather on the

basis of what he would do through them.

And God makes that clear in *2 Thessalonians 2:13*. This is what he says. He says: *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Okay. How did God do that? Well, let me answer that question with another question, and that is how is it that you're sitting here in this little church in Port Jervis, New York, this morning? Was it your choice to come to Christ? In a very real sense it was. But what you have to ask stepping back one step is was it your cleverness or your spiritual insight that made you decide that the gospel had merit when your friends and your relatives and all those around you thought that it was just a bunch of religious mumbo jumbo? I mean, was there something inside you that made you see the gospel as something of supreme importance when all of those around you thought that understanding was way, way over the top.

Well, the answer is simple. Yes, there was something inside you but it wasn't you, it was God's Holy Spirit. God chose you and called you through the gospel. I mean, it was Jesus who said, "*For*

*many are called but few are chosen."* He also said, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."* And that word "draw" is not meaning suggesting or enticing or asking. It means "to drag."

The reason why James can say in our text this morning *"blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial"* is because the same supernatural power that drew me is the same supernatural power that's going to preserve me. I mean, each of us have our own stories that we could tell of how we came to know Christ, but once again, when you take a step backwards you find that all of us came to Christ not through our own power but through the power of the gospel. Every one of us in our own way wanted nothing to do with that gospel until God opened up our eyes and our ears. And that's why Jesus would say in *John 10: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

You see, by the grace of God at some point in our lives, we miraculously began to hear that good shepherd; the gospel began to make sense when it couldn't make any sense before. And if you ask why the gospel didn't make sense, the answer goes back to the spiritual blindness we all inherited the moment that Adam's teeth touched that fruit. And since then the gospel hasn't made sense because it cannot make sense. God says *the cross is foolishness to*

*those who are perishing.* It's a gospel veiled and hidden by the devil himself.

Don't take my word for it. Listen to what Paul says in 2 *Corinthians 4.* He says: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* But we see the light of the gospel, we see the light of the gospel because and only because God has miraculously opened our eyes.

In one way or another we learn that God was a perfectly holy God whose creation had rebelled through Adam and we also learn that because of the fall in that Garden of Eden every subsequent son or daughter of Adam has inherited a predilection to rebellion that had all of us shaking our fists straight from the womb. We were fallen, imperfect creatures, an imperfect creation of a perfect creator who he had chosen to redeem us not for our sakes but ultimately for his glory.

And when the grace of God came to us individually we began to understand that not only had God chosen us from the beginning but that God had also understood from the beginning what he would have to do. In order to redeem those that he had chosen, God himself

had to become one of us, he had to live a perfect life and then offer that perfect life up as a sacrifice in exchange of his righteousness for our sin. And we all know that happened on a cross in Golgotha 2,000 years ago. And it's still offered as a free gift to anyone who places his trust in Christ's sacrifice. And that sacrifice was never a result of Jesus as a victim of Rome or a victim of the Jews. His was a sacrifice planned before time itself had even begun.

I mean before the moment Adam first breathed, God the Father knew that Adam's sin would cost him his only begotten son. That's why Revelation 13 refers to Christ as *the lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world*.

Paul tells us, that's when God chose his own. In *Ephesians 1:4*, he says: *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

And God didn't look down through the corridors of time to see what

he thought were superior specimens that he can then call my own. In fact he did the very opposite. Listen to what *1 Corinthians 1:26* says. It says: *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

So there's nothing that we can boast about here, including the ability to remain steadfast under trial. And the reason why James says in our text this morning that such a man or woman is blessed is because the power doesn't come from us, it comes from the only one powerful enough to guarantee results. That's why God and not I can say with absolute confidence *that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* I could never guarantee that, but God can.

I mean, consider if it was your power that brought you to Christ, then how do you know if that power is going to keep you in Christ particularly when you're undergoing a trial. I mean, if it's God's power that brings us to Christ then it's his power that's going to

keep us in Christ. And that's why James says: *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

And again, that brings us back to this crown, this crown of life. It is what God promises to those who pass the test. But there's a question. It says: Is this crown of life, is it a reward that we get for having passed this test or is the test itself something entirely different?

You see, I think we make a big mistake. It's one of the big errors that people make when it comes to the testing of our faith is that we imagine that God is the one doing the testing in order to find out just what we are made of. I mean, there's no doubt in my mind that it's God doing the testing but there's also no doubt that it's not so he can find out what we are made of. God is omniscient. He's omnipresent. He knows the beginning from the end. I mean, do you think God needs to put us through a test in order to learn some new piece of information about who we are? I mean is the test God's way of getting new data about our character, about our faith?

Listen to what the psalmist says about the mind of God in *Psalm 139*. He says: *O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You*



*know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

So I would suggest to you that the prime beneficiary of the knowledge that this test produces is not God. He already knows everything that is possible to know about you and me. The one who benefits, the one who learns, the one who gains understanding is not God, it's me. God is certainly the one who puts us through tests but the purpose of a test is two-fold. It's designed to grow us and glorify God.

Then what is the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him? Well again, it's life itself. It's life lived to the fullest while we are here on earth and continuing on forever. You see, the net result of steadfastly remaining under whatever tests God has brought you through is the experiential knowledge that he has by his grace brought you somewhere you could never go by yourself.

Paul summed it up in his testing and trials. He summed it all up by saying this in *Philippians 4:12*. He said: *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every*

*circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

I mean, how do you think Paul knew that he could do all things through Christ? The answer's simple: He was tested in all things. And it wasn't that Christ learned something about Paul, it was that Paul learned something about Christ.

Paul learned that Jesus Christ was an army of one and the only army that he would ever need to get him through whatever life could throw at him. And through the beatings, through the stonings, through the floggings, the nakedness, the hunger, and the abandonment, Paul by the grace of God could look around and see I am still standing. I mean, you could you say of Paul: *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

See, Paul knew that the mark of a believer is just what Jesus said it was, it is the mark of endurance. When Jesus said in *Matthew 24: He who endures to the end will be saved*, he wasn't laying out a requirement; instead he was describing a God-given characteristic. The sheep endure to the end only because of the

shepherd. That's why Jesus said: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."* And so we endure to the end because there is no one that could snatch us out of his hand.

But then that raises a very big question. The question is: How do I know that I'm one of those who's going to endure to the end? Perhaps the scariest aspect of what James is saying in our text this morning is the thought that might linger in the back of your mind. James is saying, *blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.* What if I'm not so blessed of God? Well, let me allay you of those fears.

You see, God is quite clear in telling us in many different ways that there are those who are going to appear to be believers, who are going to start out filled with promise and end up walking away from the gospel. Jesus used the story of the sower and the seed to describe believers who start out looking strong and vibrant and they end up being choked by the weeds or burned up by the sun. Jesus is warning the church that there's going to be those in their midst who would start out well and never finish. The apostle John

describes the very same thing in *1 John 2:19*. He says this: *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

Understand that everything that Jesus and James and John and Paul are telling us about believers who don't remain steadfast is that they were never believers to start with. John says: *If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

And what the apostle John said 2,000 years ago, it's just as true today. I've known folks who at first appeared to be rock solid who have walked away from the faith. Perhaps you do, too.

Perhaps you wonder in the back of your mind could this ever happen to me? Could I, too, one day just walk away from the faith? Well, here's why I think you shouldn't be frightened of that. You see, there's one characteristic that you're going to find in every single person who ultimately walks away from the faith. It's the single greatest characteristic that makes them out as someone who was never there in the first place; and it, too, is the sign of God's mercy.

What marks out a false believer is not a lack of faith so much, not even a matter of doubt, I mean, we spoke at length about doubts that all of us at one time or another have to wrestle with. What truly describes the heart attitude of someone who walks away from the faith is that he no longer cares that he no longer cares. He no longer cares that he no longer cares. You see, when you struggle with doubts, when you wrestle with emotions, when you are troubled that you're no longer feeling like the gospel makes sense, you are actually showing real signs of spiritual life. You're giving evidence that the Spirit of God within you is wrestling with your spirit.

I've run into a number of ex-Christians, although I don't believe there's any such things. You can't lose something you never even had in the first place. And what stands out about these folks is not so much that they've left the faith but they've left the ability to care about leaving the faith.

They may look back at their -- quote -- "Christian days" as times when they were kind of swept up and into this Jesus thing or overly religious but the thing that stands out in their loss of faith is that it's not a loss they're lamenting. Those who are not blessed of God with the grace to persevere are those whose loss of faith is to themselves no great loss at all. In fact, many of them see

their loss of faith as a gain, a gain of great liberation, they see themselves as now free from the superstition that once held them down.

And if you doubt that, just Google the words "ex-Christian." I did that. I got 15,400,000 hits. Lots of websites featuring ex-conversions, de-conversions and un-baptisms. An un-baptism is where you formally and publicly go under a hair dryer to figuratively remove any trace of the water that you once went under baptism for. And these websites represent people who think they've left the faith when in reality they were never part of it in the first place. *"If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."*

And so if you fear that someday you're going to walk away from the faith to your deep sorrow, have no fear. If you're not one of his, you're going to be able to walk away from Christ without giving it a second thought. Instead of a deep sorrow you're going to feel deep relief that you've left something that no longer makes sense.

See, in my opinion there's really no huge group of ex-Christians who are deeply lamenting the loss of their faith. That's not to say that there are some, and where there are such people, it may

well be that the grace of God is giving them no comfort in abandoning the faith because they truly are lost sheep just wandering away from the fold that eventually are going to come back. God has always managed to find them and bring them back and there's a reason for that.

You see, it all comes down, when it all comes down to it, our salvation is ultimately not really about us. It's about Christ. It's about God the Father. It's about the Holy Spirit. It's about what they did before time began in order to bring honor and glory to themselves through us.

I mean, when you become a child of God you are fulfilling in time a choosing that took place before time itself even began. When you became a Christian, God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit entered into your spirit to begin the process of transforming you into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And that's not a stop-and-start process that you can just walk away from when the going gets tough. And trust me, God is not in heaven biting his nails hoping that we pull through. He's already told us what he starts, he finishes.

Again, Paul put it this way in *Philippians 1:6*: *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* Again James tells us: *The*

*man who remains steadfast under trial, receives the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.* And like I've said, that crown is simply life itself lived to the fullest here on earth and to the glory of God in heaven.

I've been privileged, I have seen the crown of life. I've seen it in the lives of saints in this church that I've been privileged to see come to an end in Christ. I saw that crown in Bob and Helen Sorenson at 102 years of age, I saw it in Bertha Moore, I saw that crown in Jean Warner and Dagmar Roman. I saw it in Rosie Zaorski while she was dying of an incredibly awful disease, and I saw it three days ago at Barbara Flanagan's funeral.

Years ago I met a pastor friend of mine to discuss a funeral of someone who had passed away. I didn't know the person well and he did and I assumed that the pastor would be very upset and he wasn't. And I knew he knew the man well. He knew he was a person who had placed his whole faith for his whole life in Jesus Christ. He knew he was a person who had remained steadfast under trial but the pastor said something that struck me as really odd. He said it so matter of factly that I thought maybe he doesn't really care that this guy just died. He said it was okay, he said, because, we were talking about it, he said, "Well, this is a guy who died with his boots on." I didn't know then but I think I know now what he



meant.

This man, like Bob and Helen or Donna or Bertha or Jean or Dagmar or Rosie or Barbara, they all died with their spiritual boots on. They all died fully prepared and raring to go. Every one of them by God's grace alone had remained steadfast, every one of them deeply loved Jesus. And every one of them had the crown of life that gave them complete and utter confidence that they could face anything and everything that life could throw at them, including death itself. It's the blessing that the crown of life that God gives to those who remain steadfast. I mean, they know that -- they know by experience that Jesus Christ is an army of one and that through him they can do all things, including facing death itself.

We had the privilege in our church of seeing the grace of God poured out on those who have remained steadfast through great testing. We've seen that testing and that steadfastness if you remember in Jeff and Donna, Eric and Bethany, Betty and Horace, Doug and Melissa. We've followed it in the lives of Doug and Christi. We speak from experience. It's an experience of God's overwhelming grace that overflows in encouragement to each of us, and I use that word "encouragement" literally. I mean, seeing the blessing of steadfastness in my brothers and sisters literally

encourages our hearts. You know what that means? That means that it fills our hearts with courage and that, too, is by design.

I said a few weeks back that when it comes to trials and testing, every one of us in this room at some point is going to have our turn. I know I have in the past and I know I'm going to in the future, and the same is true for you. But this much I know, and I know this by experience, that our God is a good God, our God is a sovereign God, our God will never leave or forsake us, and our God will bless us.

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let's pray.*

*Father, I thank you for the privilege that we have been given. I thank you for the gift of salvation, and in addition to that gift, the crown that you've given us, the crown of life. Lord, I just praise you and thank you for making us a gift that you've given to your Son. And I pray for the grace and the strength and the wisdom to live up to that incredible honor and that you would give us the grace to do just that; and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*