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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion Sunday

Mark 13 - Jesus and the Temple

Prayer: *Father, I do again I thank you for this time, I thank you for this blessing, I thank you for the fact that you gave it at the cost of your own life on the cross. And so we pray this morning as we are entering into communion that you would give us an extra measure of your grace and an extra ability to just perceive what you've done for us and to make it of permanent value and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well once again this is that Sunday that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples to share one last Passover meal. This is *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, he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically do the very same thing. He asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis, and again, this is what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our own lives where he's convicting us of sin, then by confessing our sins and then finally 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."

Well, we are following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark, and if you remember last time out we saw Jesus so moved by a widow giving the very last of her resources that he gathered his disciples together to point out to them what had so moved him.

Mark 12:43 says: So He called His disciples to Himself and said to

them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Jesus had his eyes focused on the things his disciples would never focus on and his dialogue with them soon after made that obvious. It says: *Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"*

Well there's no doubt that this temple that he's referring to was magnificent. It was actually the third iteration and the final iteration of the temple. If you recall, the first one was built by Solomon, it was destroyed when Israel went into exile in Babylon. And if you remember the book of Ezra, God moved Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, which they did, although this temple was a pale shadow of Solomon's temple. This temple, the one that Jesus is referring to, that was that same temple having undergone a refurbishing by Herod that took almost 90 years. He made it into an astounding piece of architecture.

"Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" says one of his disciples, in all likelihood Peter, and he's

commenting on the magnificence of the stonework, and it was well worth commenting on.

Precept Austin says this, says: "The Temple area was surrounded by great porches, Solomon's Porticos and the Royal Porch (Acts 3:11-12). These porches were upheld by pillars, cut out of solid blocks of marble in one piece. They were 37 1/2 feet high, and of such a thickness that three men linked together could scarcely put their arms round them. At the corners of the Temple angle stones have been found which measure from 20 to 40 feet in length, and which weigh more than 100 tons. How they were ever cut and placed in position is one of the mysteries of ancient engineering. Little wonder that these Galilean fishermen looked and directed Jesus' attention to them."

Well, Jesus who had flung between two billion and two trillion galaxies into the sky, who had created the earth from the Himalayas to the Marianas Trench as well as the oceans, the plains, and the continents along with all the creatures that inhabit them from the colossal blue whale down to the microscopic bacteria that we find in our gut, for some reason that same Jesus seems singularly unimpressed.

It says in *Mark 13*: *Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see*

these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Well Jesus was referring to an attack that would occur some 45 years later in A.D. 78 by the Emperor Titus. He was responding to a Jewish rebellion and by the time he was finished, he had slaughtered over a million Jews and utterly destroyed this very temple.

The Jewish historian Josephus described it this way. He said: "The fateful day had arrived, the tenth of the month Lous, the very day on which previously it had been burned by the king of Babylon. One of the soldiers, neither awaiting orders nor filled with horror of so dread an undertaking, but moved by some supernatural impulse, snatched a brand from the blazing timber and, hoisted up by one of his fellow soldiers, flung the fiery missile through a golden window. When the flame rose, a scream, as poignant as the tragedy, went up from the Jews. Now that the object which before they had guarded so closely was going to ruin. (VI.250-253) While the sanctuary was burning neither pity for age nor respect for rank was shown; on the contrary, children and old people, laity and priests alike were massacred (VI.271). The emperor ordered the entire city and sanctuary to be razed to the ground, except only the highest towers, and that part of the wall that enclosed the city on the

west. All the rest of the wall that surrounded the city was so completely razed to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no reason to believe that it had ever been inhabited"

(VII.1-3).

I mean that temple which was utterly and completely destroyed, that temple had literally tons of gold within it. And there's estimates that vary but they say somewhere between 25 and 34 tons -- not pounds -- tons of gold were inside and that fire caused it to melt and it caused it to flow throughout the entire temple which caused the plunderers to take every single stone apart so they could get at that gold.

So the future had unfolded some 45 years later exactly as Jesus said it would when he said with amazing patience, *"Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

Well if you remember it was just last week I spoke about patience, and one of the things I said was that patience is not just the ability to count to ten (although that's a powerful side effect), it's really the ability to live in a parallel universe.

I pointed out there really are three separate parallel universes that exist today. There's the kingdom of light, there's the

kingdom of darkness, and there's the world that we live in right here and right now.

Jesus' kingdom -- that's the kingdom of light -- it operates outside and above this world and that's the kingdom that is the real one. That's the one that's the eternal one. This one that we're living in right here and right now is the unreal and the temporary one. And Paul understood that. He made it clear in *2 Corinthians 4:18*. He said: *We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

Now this eternal kingdom of light, it runs right alongside the earthly kingdom that we all operate in, and Jesus who had the ability to see both kingdoms simultaneously simply saw the temple from his advantage of timelessness. And what appeared to be massively permanent in the eyes of the disciples was in Jesus' eyes nothing but this little transient blip on the radar. Again: *"Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

And so I wondered, what would it be like if we had the same kind of split screen vision that Jesus had. What would it do? Well, it would absolutely revolutionize our Christian life. You see, if we

could see like Jesus saw, we would see the future unfolding right in front of us and we would also see that much of what we think is permanent is simply not so.

Now I'm spending this summer revisiting messages from the past so it gives me an opportunity to revisit things that I think are crucial to see and examine over and over again. Certainly the impermanence of the temple that Jesus is pointing to, it's an important reminder of what is permanent and what is not. So I went back to the master of understanding the difference between what appears to be permanent and valuable and what is actually ultimately transient and worthless, and that would be Solomon.

It was Solomon who was given every single thing this life could possibly desire who actually discovered that virtually nothing is permanent. He discovered that life consists of endless cycles of wind, water, strife and labor and it all looks so busy and it all looks so worthwhile but it all amounts to absolutely nothing. It amounts to vanity, futility, and as he said, "*A chasing after the wind.*"

The wisest man who ever lived discovered the ultimate weakness of all the pleasures of life under the sun. As singer Paul Simon once put it, "Everything put together sooner or later falls apart." And

solomon discovered what renders every single aspect of life, from the trivial to the crucial, as utterly meaningless. It's what can take a magnificent temple and reduce it to a pile of dust and render the most important and crucial undertakings by any man or woman absolutely and completely irrelevant is the passage of time.

Again, allow me to illustrate. Now I want to start with the trivial, some of you may have heard this before. You know -- well you all know I'm blessed or cursed to be a New York Giants football fan. And I know it's exactly -- I know exactly why I am, because my dad was a huge fan and he used to take me to the games. I actually saw Frank Gifford play in a game, if that dates me. That was probably 60 years ago.

Well Steve Weingartner who's not here, Steve Weingartner absolutely detests football. He thinks it's the dumbest waste of time you could ever undertake. So he's always given me a hard time for watching the Giants.

One day he actually tried to watch a game and he couldn't take it. So after awhile he called me up, he said, "How can you watch grown men in costumes pushing a ball around a stadium just for points? I mean, it's so meaningless," he said. Well, my answer to Steve was not an explanation of or instruction about football. In fact it

was complete agreement on my part. I said, "Steve, I absolutely agree. Football is ultimately absolutely pointless." But then I pointed out what Solomon also points out, and he said, whether it's trivial or whether it's crucial, it doesn't matter, everything in time becomes absolutely pointless. And whether it's nuclear medicine, international politics or the latest innovation in computer technology or watching football, they are all, in the grand scheme of things, pointless, not equally pointless but ultimately pointless to be sure.

This is how Solomon puts it in *Ecclesiastes 2:11*. He said: *When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.* I mean, Solomon understood. He understood that time renders everything from the sublime to the ridiculous as pointless.

I mean, take football. I mean, ask me who won the Super Bowl five years ago? Don't know. Don't care. When the Giants won the Super Bowl I cared for a couple of days but that happened years and years ago and time has rendered that victory basically pointless.

I mean, do I really care that the Giants won the Super Bowl in 2008 or 2012 or whenever it was? No. I mean, I cared then but I really

don't care now, nor does anybody else really.

But pick something more important than football. Pick something that everybody's talking about now. Let's pick politics. I mean, things are starting to heat up right now. We're getting into a presidential election, and I would certainly agree that's considerably more important than a football game. I mean, there's hundreds of millions of dollars are going to be spent on this campaign, it's going to be center stage in all of the media for the next few months.

So I want to ask you a question about politics and time. The question's simple. Who was our 22nd president? Don't know, and I suspect don't care. Well, it was Grover Cleveland. Do you care? No. You see how time has made him more or less pointless? I mean, I guarantee you he was not pointless in 1885 when he was elected but all it took was the passage of time and Grover Cleveland has become almost completely meaningless.

What about something more important than football or politics?

What about someone who labored in the field of life itself? Surely that life will have meaning. I want to tell you about a man -- I've done this once before -- about a man would was world famous, who excelled in celebrating and preserving life itself. This was a

man who claimed to be a Christian, although he actually he held heretical views of Christ. I've spoken about this man before. He was an incredibly significant man in his time and that time was just a short time ago. I just want to see if you can remember it. I want you to see if his life still has meaning.

And just to describe him, he was a theologian, very bad one at that, but he accomplished many, many influential books about the Bible. He was a scholar. He was also the pastor of a Lutheran church. He was a classical musician so gifted that his re-interpretation of Bach revolutionized that genera. He was a philosopher. He started what was called "the Reverence for Life Movement" and lastly later in life he decided to become a physician. He's a man who took up medicine and then became a surgeon. This man had earned doctorates, not just honorary, but earned doctorates in philosophy, theology, music and medicine. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his Reverence for Life and he used the proceeds to set up clinics in Africa where he healed thousands. He spent most of the end of his life working among the poorest of poor in Africa. You want to talk about a significant life and for many years his name was known by everybody, and he only died in 1965.

And so actually I need a show of hands here. How many of you know

who I'm speaking of? I figured you guys. Okay. Three. How many of you have ever heard of Albert Schweitzer? Okay. A few more.

When I first started preparing this message I asked my kids who's Albert Schweitzer and one of my kids who will remain nameless said, "I think he goes to our church." No, no, no. But he only died in 1965. He lived this marvelous life and now he's dead and gone and almost nobody remembers him. I mean, he did wonderful things to help preserve life but look what time has done. I mean, you might counter by saying, well, at least his life had significance. He was able to save countless lives in Africa by opening up all those clinics. But all those people that he helped, they're all dead and gone as well. And all the people and all of the clinics that he established back in the fifties and sixties, they're now all dead. Time has made their lives insignificant.

So you tell me, what was the meaning of Albert Schweitzer's life? What was the point of all the good that he did? It's not even a century since his death and he's pretty much been forgotten. His name is well on its way to Solomon's point in *Ecclesiastes 1:11*. This is what he said: *There is no remembrance of those who came before; and of those who will come after, there will also be no remembrance by those who follow them.*

You see, Steve was right, football really is pointless but time makes everything in life ultimately pointless. That's the big secret that Solomon discovered. You see, Solomon's wisdom was Solomon's curse. He saw what everyone else refuses to look at. He saw what we cover up with busyness and endlessly repeated cycles that appear to give us meaning but really don't. They don't have meaning because they're merely temporary. I mean that magnificent temple that the disciples were raving about, one day it was going to be reduced to a pile of rubble and once again the culprit would be time itself.

Well, you might think, well, okay, that's understandable, that's material stuff such as buildings and monuments but there's some things that are far more dear than you might think will outlast even them and that will be your family. I mean, the legacy that you pass down to your children and your grandchildren, that's got to be of lasting value, or is it? Well, it all depends on how you use the term "lasting." And I've used this example before. All I do is ask folks to remember, remember your great great great great grandfather on your mother or your father's side. Chances are pretty good you can't, and you can't because time has made their lives pointless as well.

You see, Solomon's wisdom saw that and it distressed him greatly.

I mean, he spent most of his time trying to find the point to life, and he learned that much of life was simply a pursuit of pleasure as a distraction from the absolute meaninglessness of life.

Solomon could have written this weeks ago instead of centuries ago because the exact same situation exists today. I mean, he tried to embrace each of life's pleasures with his mind -- quote -- "still guided by wisdom" and after all was said and done, he found that pleasure was a gift of God given only as a means to an end and never as an end in itself, but today it's become the end that everyone aims their life at. Solomon found that pleasure as an end in itself was completely meaningless and that life outside of the kingdom was literally a waste of time. And you might have found that as well. Or not.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I want you to take some moments just to consider the question: What makes my life have meaning?

And as we do, we'll consider *1 Corinthians 11:28*, which says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many*

sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

I mean each month I repeat the same message. I say communion is extremely serious as an undertaking and to enter into communion in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. God has struck some people dead for doing that. If you're not absolutely confident you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself here, then pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

And as I say each time, on the other hand you can make the mistake of thinking, okay, I've got to be spotlessly perfect before I am worthy to receive communion and that, too, is a mistake the enemy loves. Being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin, it doesn't mean you don't fall, it means you recognize that the salvation you have been given is a gift from God that no one ever is capable of earning by -- quote -- "being good."

And so we quote Dane Ortlund, who says: "In the kingdom of God,

the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do."

It also means that when we fail we are aware we've sinned and the reason why we're aware of our sin is because God's Holy Spirit is inside of us convicting us, and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us, who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to give us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you are spotless, that you're sinless. It means that when you sin you understand that there's an advocate speaking on your behalf up in heaven. *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.*

See, it's because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own that we are free to eat from this table. It's his righteousness that gives us that ability, not ours.

And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. As we say, he lived the life we were supposed to live then he died the death we all deserved to die in

our place so that we could be made worthy of this very moment as well as heaven itself.

Understand, God won't love you any more tomorrow than he does right here, right now, today. From the foundations of the earth God loved you to the max and God saw even back then every sin you would ever commit and yet he still chose to shower his love down on you.

So take a moment to ask God for the grace, for the wisdom, and for the courage to see my life as God sees it, to see my life with that same split screen vision that Jesus had.

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

Elders, if you would begin distributing the cup.

You know, the disciples, they were overly impressed with the permanence that that massive edifice the temple presented. It was an obvious a picture of stability and Jesus who alone had eyes to see what the eternal kingdom saw, saw that very same temple as

broken and shattered, as a pile of rubble. Sad to say that analogy fits perfectly with the lives of many of us as we attempt to live it out today, Christian and non-Christian alike.

You know, many years ago I had a sit down with a financial planner. This was a fellow who wanted to develop a course of action for my financial future. Very nice guy, very well prepared. He had lots of facts and figures about where I would be in thirty or forty years if I planned wisely for the future. And as we were preparing, I said, "Well, I'm just curious. You're a man who wants to make sure that people are adequately prepared for a future that's thirty or forty years out, how do you plan for a future that's four or five hundred years out?" He looked at me like I had two heads, but it gave me an opportunity to present the gospel to him.

One of the things I said, I said, "You know, you live your life to provide for your kids so that they can get a decent job so that they can grow up, get married and have kids, so then you can provide for them so they can get a decent job to grow up and get married, and it goes on and on and on just like Solomon said it does, but in the end nothing changes. And life is this profound game where the life of an absolute genius and the life of a fool both wind up in the exact same place, the grave. And that's a

place of vanity, meaninglessness and nothingness. Isn't that incredibly discouraging?

I mean, if some random event doesn't take you out, don't worry, the passage of time is going to make your life utterly meaningless simply because this life that is offered to us is absolutely pointless in time.

I mean, Solomon saw precisely what time was going to do to everything because his wisdom allowed him to see it in the here and now. But as wisdom realized that the only solution to the ravage of time was a God who had conquered time itself. You see, creatures like us, we are rooted in timelessness. So we'll never be satisfied with pleasures that are rooted in time.

I mean, Solomon was someone who tasted all of the pleasures of life, and his wisdom which was a gift from God eventually led him to realize that timelessness was what everyone is looking for. Speaking of God, he said this in *Ecclesiastes 3:11*, he said: *He has put eternity into man's heart*, and it's that discernment of timelessness that brought Solomon to deliverance. It's the thing that pointed to the only thing that made sense.

He put it this way in *Ecclesiastes 12:13*, he said: *The end of the*

matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. What he's saying is aim your life at God and his kingdom, the picture doesn't just become bigger, it becomes timeless. It becomes eternal.

That's what Randy Alcorn was getting at. Just last month I spoke about Randy Alcorn. I spoke about his book *The Treasure Principle*, and in that book he describes the difference between what he calls the dot and the line and I quote him all the time when I do funerals. And he said this, he said, a dot is just a point on a line. Theoretically every single line starts with a dot, I mean, a pencil touches a page as a dot but if it keeps going it becomes a line; and that line, it can go on forever. And so it is with life.

See, we all start with a dot and that dot is our birth. And how we view eternity determines whether or not we live by the dot or by the line. You see, those who live by the dot, they see life as Solomon once did when he spoke about life -- quote -- "under the sun." They see birth, life and death as the sum of their existence. You're born, you're here, you live, you die, you rot, that's it, that's the end.

Those who live by the line, they see birth as that first dot but it's a dot in a line that starts and goes forever. You see, we

start in time at an appointed time and that time is our birthday, but we are eternal creatures designed for an eternity with God. And when Solomon saw that, it moved him from discernment to deliverance. This is what he said. He said: *I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.*

You see, as Christians we are creatures born into time who will live in timelessness in eternity. Whatever God does endures forever, and that changes everything. That's why Paul said in *2 Corinthians 4:17: For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* You see, for unbelievers time is an enemy. It's something that renders everything as ultimately useless. But for believers, time is an ally. Time puts all things into perspective.

Just consider the disciples, for example. Look at the disciples. They were martyred some 2,000 years ago. Each of them was on earth for maybe sixty to ninety years. They've been in heaven now for over 2,000 years. That means that their time on earth, that time that they spent living our lives like we live right now, that represents now about five percent of their total existence. 95 percent of their existence has been in heaven. Only five percent

was on earth. And no matter how difficult life on earth was, it is becoming every day more and more momentary for the disciples, and again, that was only after 2,000 years.

I mean, put the disciples into geological time. Just pick a number. I picked 300 million years. In 300 million years the disciples will have spent 3/10,000 of one percent of their existence on earth and all the rest of it enjoying eternal life and we haven't even scratched the service of what eternal life actually means.

You see, for Christians earthly time is an infinitely diminishing resource. It's no wonder that God repeatedly tells us you're here for an instant. In *James 4* he says: *What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.* And in *Psalms 39* he says: *Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!* And God says that because he sees us through eternity's eyes and this life is but a tiny little blip on the radar of time.

Solomon tells us that time makes everything pointless. Wisdom, work, people, pleasure itself, time steals away any meaning they might have. It is Jesus Christ, the Word, the *logos*, the logic of

existence, that gives it back to us.

Solomon points us to wisdom and wisdom personified is Jesus Christ. *1 Corinthians 1* says: *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

You see, it is Christ alone who gives meaning to life, no matter who's life it is. It's Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his payment for my sins that restores to us what we were designed to be: Creatures made in God's image designed by God to glorify him and enjoy him forever. That's the eternal pleasure that God has reserved for us. And we can't begin to unpack the depths of that while we're still rooted here in time.

A while ago I passed on a question that John Piper asked about pleasure in heaven. It's an extremely important question. I need to ask it again.

Just to paraphrase, he said, if you could have in heaven, if you could have a heaven in which every single aspect of earthly pleasure was yours forever, where real laughter and wine and folly, amusement and sex, it's all yours in abundance, if it was a place

where anything and everything you could even think of was yours but Christ was not a part of it, would you still want it?

Now if you said or thought "yes," I would commend your honesty, but you might as well have just said I just as soon go to hell because hell by definition is where God isn't. I mean, how long do you think the pleasures of an earthly heaven would last? I mean, just consider, after you golfed perfectly for a thousand years, after you've fished and caught every single fish in the oceans for the next thousand years or dined and partied for the next thousand years, what do you do for an encore? I'm only talking about 3,000 years here.

2 Peter says: But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

All right. So what do you do after a mere three days of earthly pleasure? Understand, Jesus gave us eternal life. That's that line, the dot goes into a line, the line goes on forever. And the \$64,000 question is: Doing what?

Solomon was given the wisdom to see that earthly pleasure is no substitute for God himself. In *Ecclesiastes 2:10*, this is what he

said. He said: *And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

I mean, it only took Solomon a few years to see that everything including pleasure and laughter and all the other stuff apart from God was meaningless. I mean, he learned what we are still in the process of learning, and that's the only genuine pleasure that will satisfy eternally is God.

You see, God will be constantly expanding our ability to take in at an ever-expanding capacity the ability to understand the glory of God and that process is never going to stop. *2 Corinthians 3:18* says: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* That's what we have to look forward to.

You see, part of the consequences of Adam's fall is that it literally stole our appetite for God, it stole this idea that there is pure pleasure in God, and in its place it gave us the bitter

empty laughter of cynicism. Even as God's own children, we still, we battle our flesh that still finds Solomon's laughter attractive. So we need to work to get back to this idea that there is pleasure in God. To capture what John Piper's motto says: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."

So how do we grow that satisfaction? Well, folks, it starts right here, it starts right here and right now. I mean, I said it many, many times, there's a thousand other places you could be this morning, but you're not there, you're here. You're corporately worshiping your King. That's a great way to start your week in worship.

You see, the King of the universe for that joy that was set before him, he suffered unspeakable loss in order to replace cynicism with joy eternal for his sheep. And so we take Solomon's advice. We aim our life at God. And we as the church can help, I mean, we aim our lives at discovering and growing in the love of God in Christ Jesus and that means understanding our default drive, it's always away and not towards God. And so to counter it, we nurture our appetite for God just like we nurture any other good appetite. We go to fellowship and prayer and scripture daily for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, instruction in righteousness. We work at developing our appetite for God. We aim our lives at God and his

kingdom for the pure pleasure of it. It's a pleasure whose line goes on forever, but it starts with the dot of the life that we're in right now. It's an appetite that is higher and deeper and wider and broader than we can imagine, and God longs to satisfy it eternally.

I mean, he died on the cross to make it possible for us to literally to have the very last laugh at the sting of death because our King has defeated it. We don't have that bitter empty cackling laugh of the cynic that Solomon experienced but instead the full throated genuine laugh of the victor in Christ. As I said before just last week, I said, "He who laughs last laughs best." So as you take the cup, ask God what steps you can take to grow and develop that appetite that will be fed forever.

As you take the cup, consider *1 Corinthians 11:25* which says: *In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. So take and drink.*

This is the part that we call head, hands and feet where we try to have some practical understanding of what it means to remember Christ. I just want to read to you from *Hebrews 12:1*, which says: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of*

witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Now I don't think that scripture is talking about this gigantic cheering section that's cheering us all on, rather there's this great cloud of believers, it's just referring to those who have gone on before us; but my guess is if there was a group of witnesses that were enabled to observe our daily life, they would be telling us in no uncertain terms that we often opt for the cheap stuff, the quick fix, the temporary, and that which we can physically perceive.

I mean, what do you think those who are literally bathing in what is eternal, what do you think they think of the decisions that we make while we're here bathing in the temporary?

I tell you I was thinking of, I was thinking of Andy, Andy Zahaykevich. He's been in heaven for about a year now. What do you think he would say to us if he had that opportunity? I think I can make an educated guess. I think he would say, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

We all know sin can keep us from that race completely, but the idea of weight is something that any runner worth his salts knows all about. It's not necessarily sin, it's those things that slow you down spiritually, whether it's busyness or distraction or laziness or boredom. If you had a vision of how those spiritual disciplines that you enact today could have an eternal blessing that grew exponentially over time, it would change your life. I just picture Andy smacking his head in frustration and thinking if they only knew what I know now.

So my encouragement right here, right now today is to undertake a spiritual discipline, whether it's Bible study or scripture reading or prayer. Laraine's got a study that's starting up in the next week or so. What it involves is taking the very first step. You know, it's a cliché to say a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, but that's what I encourage all of us to do. Take a step. I don't care how small it is, take a step. Ten thousand years from now you'll be thanking me. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the fact that you supply meaning to a life that is utterly meaningless. And Lord, I just think of what you gave to Solomon, I mean, he got to see what everybody else just refuses to look at. This life is a joke. Every single thing about it is a joke and whether it's football or nuclear medicine, it all

ends up in the exact same place, without you. With you eternity is our prize, it is our goal, it is what we look forward to. So I pray this day you would give us the grace, the strength, the insight and the wisdom to embrace that and to pursue it. And I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.