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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion Sunday

Mark 9:42

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for the grace that you have bestowed on us over and over again. I just thank you for the fact that we live still in a place where we can freely worship you and we acknowledge even now our brothers and sisters all over the world that are willing to worship you knowing it might cost them their liberty, their very life, and so we just pray for them as well. We pray this morning, Lord, as we open up your book that you would give us the presence and the power of your Holy Spirit, that you would walk alongside us and make it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as we know, this is the Sunday that we worship Jesus Christ in particular, that we focus in on the cross and what it is that Jesus had done for us. And so we focus on this meal that he had with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them. This is described in Matthew 26. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take,*

*eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked his disciples to take the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat that remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis. This is what we call refer to as "the Lord's table." And so we celebrate it once a month and this is how we do it: We meditate on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, we examine ourselves, that means we ask God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our lives where he's convicting us of sin, we take the time to confess our sin and then we participate in the elements. Jesus said in *John 6:53*: "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."*

And so we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark for quite a while now. We're at the point now that it's been three years, Jesus has been instructing his disciples and preaching the gospel announcing that the kingdom of God has arrived, and that

kingdom was going to be won or lost outside of Jerusalem where Jesus would offer his life up on a cross.

And now as his public ministry is winding to an end, Jesus is beginning to give intense instruction to his disciples. The disciples have been fighting and bickering among themselves. And last time we looked at a statement that was made by the apostle John that could be interpreted a number of different ways. He observed something and he wants some information from Jesus. In *Mark 9* he says: *"Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."*

Well, we saw the believers not just trying to cast out a demon, he was apparently succeeding. The fact that the exorcist that the disciples had encountered was successful goes a long way toward suggesting that he was indeed a legitimate member of the kingdom. We saw folks who tried that who weren't. What Jesus said next made that a certainty. In verse 39 it says: *But Jesus said, "Do not stop him. For no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me."* If you've done a mighty work in God's name you're going to find it very hard to be against God, because to do something in Jesus' name is to do it as if you were Jesus, with his heart, with his soul, with his mind and in his

strength.

Well the disciples wanted Jesus to weigh in on the very first person that they had encountered worshiping Jesus in a way differently than the way that they were used to, and Jesus insists that they let him continue, stating: *"For the one who is not against us is for us."* What Jesus is telling us is you guys don't get it. This guy's on our side. See there were so many different issues that the disciples had not yet learned. In fact they'd just been caught up short by Jesus for arguing among themselves as who would be the greatest in the kingdom. If you recall, Jesus took a child who was there in his midst and he lifted the child up in his arms and then he set him in their midst to illustrate what true leaders in Christ's kingdom should emulate. And he said in *Mark 9:35*: *"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."* And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."*

And so why a child I asked the last time. Well for one a child is absolutely powerless. This is someone who can do nothing on his own to secure his future. He has to trust in his parents. And so too an unbeliever can do nothing on his own. He lacks the ability,

he lacks the will to become worthy of God on his own. He has no choice but to trust in his heavenly Father, that he has provided a means for him to establish his righteousness, his worthiness before God, and that's exactly what the cross was designed to provide.

But next Jesus says this in *Mark 9:42*. He says: *"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."* Well having a child right there in the midst of the disciples gave Jesus the perfect opportunity to explain a spiritual principle about the dreadful consequences of causing someone to stumble. And Jesus makes it crystal clear that being tossed into the sea with a thousand-pound weight around your neck would be a far better fate than what awaits those who cause little ones to stumble.

You know, just last week there was a memorial service that was held in Maryland for a deeply troubled friend of a lot of ours who took his own life. His mental health had suffered greatly for years and years owing to the sexual abuse that he had suffered at the hands of a priest when he was just a young boy. He and his wife used to come to this church. And the priest who assaulted him has long been dead but if you were to ask who took this man's life, most would say it was this priest. And knowing the havoc that this man

wreaked, I would have agreed with Christ that a millstone around his neck would have been most appropriate. Few of us are that steeped in sin and wretchedness to assault one like that but I think one thing we're all guilty of is not realizing how much of an influence we have for better or for worse on the little ones that surround us.

D.L. Moody once commented on a meeting in which two and a half people gave their lives to Christ. And someone said, "Oh that's great, two adults and a child." And Moody said, "No, no, just the opposite. Two children and an adult." See, it's the adult who only has a half of his life to go, the children have their whole lives in front of them. And every one of us has the opportunity to be an influence for good in those lives. I mean I'll never forget, I'll never forget hearing Paul McArdle at the end of his life, he was somewhere in his mid-80's and we were at a Wednesday night prayer meeting and he was describing how profound an influence a kind Sunday schoolteacher had on him when he was like seven or eight years old. And it's for good or for evil we can profoundly influence people for their entire lives. And so we put a lot of effort into children's church and Sunday school because we think it's incredibly important. And also because I think we have precious little time to do the very opposite of what the world is trying to do 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And whether it's

Walt Disney's lesbian kisses buried now in a Buzz Lightyear cartoon or the fact that DC Comics has just come out with a story telling us Superman's son has now announced he's bisexual or the vile books that have been discovered in a school library or the uproar that was caused by a bill recently passing in Florida that was wildly mislabeled the "Don't Say Gay" bill when it said nothing of the sort. The bill that passed in Florida simply said -- quote -- "classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards." That's it. And the state of Florida outlawed discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity from kindergarten to third grade and people were outraged. I mean it's apparent that many people have no problem whatsoever attempting to cause little ones to stumble.

And whether it's the porn industry or LGBTQ activists or the entertainment complex, these folks have no idea that they are actively tying millstones around their own necks when God comes to judge. *Romans 2:5* says: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: To those who by patience in*

well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.

But you know, it's not just sexual sins that cause folks to stumble. That's what our concern is, is causing little ones to stumble and it can be good things that cause little ones to stumble as well. I mean aspects of freedom in Christ that you might be able to enjoy as a mature Christian but that might cause someone else to stumble. Paul took up the case about eating meat that had been offered to idols. Typically meat that was sold in the marketplace was meat that had previously been offered up first to the idols and then to the marketplace. And now mature Christians understand these idols are nothing, they don't exist; but Paul said if a brand new Christian didn't have that kind of understanding, if he saw you eating meat and he saw you doing that in an idol's temple something that was offered up to an idol, he might be tempted to sin against his own conscience. He says your conscience might not be bothered by that at all. But somebody else's conscience might be staggered by seeing you do something that he thinks is wrong and evil and Paul's highly concerned that we be on the lookout constantly for weaker brothers who might be stumbled by

our exercise of our freedom. In *1 Corinthians 8* he said: *Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?* I mean to put this in contemporary terms, what he's saying is the last place you want to take a young man struggling with alcohol is to a bar. It might be fine for you to go if you have a handle on alcohol itself but Paul expects all of us to take an extra measure of care and concern about even the possibility of causing somebody younger and weaker in the faith to stumble. There's all kinds of different ways for that to happen.

Another source that causes little ones to stumble was addressed to me years ago by my very first Bible teacher. He was a very humble but a very brilliant man. He was a psychiatrist who was completely committed to undertaking and helping biblical families. He was a major in the Army and he went to this little church that we went to in San Francisco and he was based on the Presidio which is a military base right in the heart of San Francisco where we had a little Bible study. And shortly after we moved he came to visit us in New York. We were sitting down and chatting and I just -- I wanted to get his kind of big picture on what his whole ministry

and all of the different families that he had ministered to, so I was asking him what did you think -- what is the most important aspect of parenting. And he said that he had seen lots and lots of Christian families and a great deal of success and failure within those families and that he had determined it wasn't so much whether you hold your children very tightly or very loosely because he had seen wonderful examples of that working and terrible examples of it not working in both sides.

And so I asked him, well, what is it that you think makes the biggest difference? And he said something that I'll never forget. He said, if mom and dad are more than one person, then it doesn't matter how loosely or tightly they hold their children, it's not going to work. I mean he was talking about what he called "personal integrity." And you know the word integrity comes from the word integer which is a mathematical term, which means it's a number that's whole, it's a number that's not divided. A person of integrity is a person who's not divided into this, that or the other type of person depending on what the circumstances are. The personal integrity that he was talking about is the very opposite of what we call hypocrisy. I mean hypocrisy literally means two faces. I mean the actual word came from Greek theater when the actors wore or carried a series of masks that were designed to represent the character or characters that they were playing. And

the idea of having two or more faces all in the same person became what's known as hypocrisy. And what my friend was saying is if your child sees one mom or dad at home and a different mom or dad at work and a different mom or dad at church and especially a different mom or dad when they're upset or angry, if he sees that kind of differences in who mom and dad is, then all the training in the world is not going to make a lot of difference.

Now I want to be careful also that people don't think that if they're struggling and kids are wandering away from the faith it's automatically because someone's been a hypocrite. I think some of this has to do with the culture that we're in and with the times that we're in. Jesus spoke prophetically about what would take place at the end times in *Matthew 24*. He said: *"And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold."* And Paul said: *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.* God says hearts are going to wax cold and I've seen that among even the most solid of family, I mean, my oldest son has walked away from the faith. So I know exactly what I'm talking about. My point is nobody's perfect but every one of us has played the hypocrite at one time or another. And what marks a

successful parent is the ability to recognize that and to say, I was wrong, I'm sorry. Will you forgive me.

You know, at the beginning of every communion service I explain basically what it's all about and part of that I describe is examining ourselves, that's allowing God's Holy Spirit to speak to you and to convict you. That's one of the reasons that we're here this morning. I mean, one of the prayers that I pray every single day is about examining myself. It's a prayer not just for wisdom but for God to point out to me my own sin and I call folly, stupid stuff that I get wrapped up in. I ask God that every single day. It's a prayer well worth praying but it's not a fun prayer to get an answer to. God shows you stuff you don't want to see. And so I would like each of us to seriously consider right now asking God to show you, have I caused a little one to stumble? Have I played the hypocrite in my own family? And so if you need to ask for forgiveness from God or from your family, do so right now. See, so much of parenting is forgivable and fixable if we simply are willing to listen to the Holy Spirit's conviction. So just take a moment and consider that.

1 Corinthians 11 says: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself,

not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

And as I say each month, communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. I plead with you if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before bringing the sacrifice of yourself to the altar first, then just pass the elements on and don't participate in them. Err on the side of caution; get right with God first.

And as I always say each time also you can also make the mistake of thinking that you've got to be spotless in order to take communion, that you're unworthy to receive communion. The enemy loves that mistake as well. Being a child of God doesn't mean you don't sin, it doesn't mean you don't fail; it means you recognize the salvation you've been given is a gift. And each month I repeat this statement that Dane Ortlund says because he puts it so well. He 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 do fail we are aware that we've sinned and why? Because we have God's spirit within us convicting us. That's the Holy Spirit of God. And we grieve as children knowing that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, who says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin, it means that when we sin, we recognize we have Jesus himself speaking in heaven on our behalf, an advocate, someone who speaks for us. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And that's the key right there. You see, we have Jesus' righteousness, not our own. We have an alien righteousness that's been given to us. It belongs to Jesus. He gives it to us. And because we have his righteousness we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love the Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and then died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of this moment.

So take a moment before we participate and ask God's spirit to examine you this morning. *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.

Jesus goes on to say Mark 9:42, he says: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.' And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where 'THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.' "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

Well one thing we know about Jesus is that he knows what he's

talking about. I mean we speculate on all different kinds of things not the least of which is whatever heaven or hell is actually about. In Jesus we have someone who not only knows about heaven or hell, we have someone who's the author and creator of both. You don't get a better expert on heaven or hell than Jesus. And here we find Jesus trying to stretch language as far as he can into hyperbole in order to capture some of the horrors that await people who reject the cross and Christ's payment for them. Who stand before God clad only in their sin and rebellion. Jesus starts off talking about offending little ones by saying better to hang a millstone around your neck. And then he speaks in far more general terms about sin itself, saying whether it's your hand or your foot or eye, if anything is an immediate cause for you to enter into sin, cut it off, tear it out. And what Jesus is trying to communicate here is something that the vast majority of people think absolutely nothing about, and that's the horror of standing before God guilty of sin.

You know, it's notable that Jesus refers to the hand and the foot and the eye as those three encompass three main areas that provide venue for sins. I mean the foot represents where you go, the hand represents what you do, and the eye represents what you see. In each case Jesus is using hyperbole to say that no effort should be spared to avoid sinning through these venues. And you know it's

sad to say over time it's been realized that there's actually people who took Jesus at his word who actually cut off their hands or plucked out their eyes in an effort to avoid sinning and that's not at all what Jesus' intent was. You can pluck out both of your eyes and still conjure up nothing but sinful images in your head, I mean, you can cut off both of your feet and still go places you know that you shouldn't. And you can cut off both of your hands and still be engaged in activities you know you shouldn't be in. What Jesus is trying to say is that no effort should be spared in trying to avoid falling into sin and in each case he's anxious to point out that hell is not is a temporary state but something far more permanent.

Three times Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah commenting on the fate of those who reject God. And three times Jesus says, "*The worm doesn't die and the fire is not quenched.*" Now this unquenchable fire referred to the very same valley we've spoken about that was used to offer human sacrifices to the gods of Molech and Ashteroth. This is known as the valley of Hinnom. When the Jews returned from Babylon they thought the most appropriate use for such a dreadfully awful place was as a garbage dump. And it was there that they dumped the bodies of the poor and convicted criminals along with sewage and refuse and garbage and all of it was dumped and set on fire burning literally in an unquenchable fire. And the stench and

the visual of constant burning provided an excellent picture for Jesus to describe hell itself as a place where the fire is never quenched and the image of maggots and corruption never dies.

Well that notion has become a very hard sell today. I mean, ever since Rob Bell's book *Love Wins* came out, the notion of eternal punishment in hell has come under withering attack. I've heard folks say that only vicious and hateful people could believe such a doctrine and people who relish the idea of people paying an eternal price for their sin. I know for is a fact I don't relish this idea at all. In fact I hate it. I mean I, like everyone else, I know dear ones who have died leaving me absolutely certain or as near certain that I can be that they had rejected any hope of the gospel. The very last thing I would ever want is to even think of them being in hell for eternity. I just believe I'm forced to that position by the overwhelming testimony of scripture itself.

Universalism has become incredibly popular in the last few years and there's a number of different varieties of universalism. I mean there's a Buddhist version and a Jewish version but I want to focus on the Christian version, the one that we contend with is the Christian ones that say that the cross of Christ will ultimately save those who utterly reject that cross during their lifetime. One form of universalism is referred to as purgative universalism

which states that for those dying outside of the gospel there's going to be a time spent in temporary hell being purged, being cleansed, much in the same way as Roman Catholics view purgatory, but in the end all are going to be reconciled to God through Christ. It's a notion that has an awful lot of emotional appeal. One of the hardest things for us to grapple with is the notion of the eternality of hell. We grapple the very notion that sins committed by finite creatures could have infinite repercussions. And we struggle to imagine a good kind and loving God endorsing the notion that hell lasts forever.

I have a number of dear friends who believe in universalism and I certainly understand its appeal. And they have verses that they can quote that certainly seem to back that claim and I have verses such as the one that we're referring to this morning where the worm doesn't die and the fire is not quenched that back up my side of the argument. I can also point out that universalism is now a massive off ramp that put many folks on the road to either abandoning their faith or becoming progressive Christians.

The first modern iteration of universalism occurred in the 1800s where the Universalist church which was started in the late 1700s had joined with the Unitarian church which started in 1825. They formed the Unitarian Universalist church which is still around

today and if you know anything about that church you know it's about as far removed from any notion of the gospel as you can possibly get. And the sad fact is many folks have left the faith by first becoming Universalists. Like I said, many today have moved from universalism to progressive christianity which is just about the same thing.

And so the debate about universalism's truth is raging today. And if you really want to learn more about it, you can read "*That All Shall Be Saved*" by David Bentley Hart which is a passionate work consisting that yes, indeed hell will one day be emptied and all will be reconciled to Christ. And on the other hand you can read the two volume 1200-page "*The Devil's Redemption*" by Michael McClymond which is a refutation of universalism whose title "*The Devil's Redemption*" addresses the notion of some universalists that even Satan is going to be saved someday. I've read some of both books, I haven't read both of them completely. I've read many different reviews of each and I get the sense that in the end if you're a universalist, you're going to love Hart's book; if you're not a universalist, you're going to find McClymond's book compelling. I mean, both sides trot out compelling scriptures, but I have to say just about every scripture that I've seen brought forth as supporting universalism in my mind looks twisted and tweaked in order to fit a previously determined notion and I'm sure

they would say the exact same thing about my views.

What is most compelling to me is an argument from scripture that supersedes the many scriptural arguments that I've heard, and it's best summed up by Paul's reaction to the Jews who refused the gospel. This is what he said in *Romans 9:1*. He says: *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.*

And so we say why did Paul have such great sorrow and continued grief in his heart? Well, because his fellow Jews were on their way to hell itself. But if it's a hell that's only a temporary wait station, one that's going to eventuate in heaven for everyone, what is the point of Paul's great sorrow and continual grief? I mean, concern may be that his fellow Jews are going to have to undergo a purgative process but it's a purgative process that will result in them being universally welcomed into heaven itself. I mean, it may take millions of years of cleansing but against the backdrop of our own geological time frame which tosses around billions of years as if it's nothing, what's the big deal? I mean God himself says: *A day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day.* So certainly up against the backdrop of

eternity such a time frame is almost meaningless, so why such grief for Paul? In Acts 20, he said: *"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."*

I mean we know Paul poured out his entire life traveling the ancient world seeking the lost. It's what our missionaries do for the lost even today. The lost do the hiding and we do the seeking. Instead of playing hide and seek for his entire life, why didn't Paul simply say, "Ollie, ollie in free"? I mean, even the whole counsel of God he knew in the end all of us are going to wind up in the exact same heaven. I would love to believe that hell is temporary. I would love to believe that even unbelievers are annihilated. I mean it would be a far better outcome to me than an eternity in hell, but then I have to explain away Jesus saying in Matthew 25: *"Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* Or John quoting an angel in Revelation 14:9 which says: *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up*

forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." Or Jude who said Jude 1:7: Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

The point is if universalism is true there's really no ultimate point in even sharing the gospel. I mean there's really no point in Christ appointing the disciples and the disciples losing their lives in order to share the good news or missionaries sacrificing their own lives if in the end all of us wind up all together in heaven. I mean the very word "gospel" means good news and good news makes no sense unless it's understood against the backdrop of bad news that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The reason why God himself became a man and lived a perfect life and then offered his life up on a cross was because we were the recipient of the ultimate bad news of an eternity outside of the love of God. If universalism is true then all people eventually come to a saving knowledge of Christ when compared to eternity and that means there really is no such thing as bad news and no real need to preach the gospel.

And on the one hand I will admit this is a very weak argument,

because it doesn't address the most important question. The most important question is which one is true. Either hell is a temporary place that will one day be emptied or hell is an eternal place with awful eternal punishments. I've looked at all the arguments for universalism from scripture and as much as I wish it were true, I remain unconvinced. I look at the evidence that Paul and his disciples understood hell to be a place of eternal torment and I still find that evidence compelling.

And so as we approach the cup I would invite any and all to examine the evidence. Check out the scriptures, read the books. Arrive at your own conclusion. I personally hate the idea of an eternal hell, but I have to say it's what motivates me day in and day out to see each and every person I meet as someone desperately needing the gospel. I think Charles Spurgeon put it best, he said: "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for." So I'd like us to just take a moment to just think about the possibility of the externality of hell and reflect on how that affects us as we share or don't share the gospel.

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 feet and really actually no surprise here what I'm going to implore of you, that you develop a strategy, a way of looking at your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues, understanding that the stakes are so high. You know, Janice and I, we walk on Old Mountain Road. We've been doing it every -- well not every day but many days for the last 25, 30 years, and I've talked to people who know people who say, oh, I know those people, they're the ones that are walking on Mountain Road. But in the course of that time we've evolved to a place where we pray for this whole street as we're walking down it. And we pray for opportunities and you know, I met the guy, this one guy who just walking down the street, one day he stopped 'cause he'd seen us so many times. I was able to give him my card, telling him I'm a pastor. We talked to another woman the other day and was able to just say, I said, "God bless." That's just getting to the place where we can start to talk about God. And we have another person that I was able to give the whole gospel and wasn't interested. But that, that's 20-some-odd years, one spot, just working it and working and working, asking God for opportunities.

You know, one of the things that just impresses me is when Jesus said that what the gospel really is is breaking into the enemy's house and stealing people from him. And so when we go up and down that block, that's what I pray, I say, "Lord, I want to plunder the enemy's house. I want to steal him blind." And I have to tell you, the pickings are slim. There was a time when you shared the gospel and people who responded. This is a time where people's hearts have waxed cold, it's hard. You don't get the kind of results that you would think you would get. But I would just encourage you think about these folks, think about what awaits them. Let it break your heart.

So I just want us to take a moment or so once again just to think about friends, neighbors, colleagues, those who don't know Christ and just pray for an opportunity, just for a shot, Lord, give me a shot just so I can at least start to go where the gospel would lead them. Let's do that.

Father, I just want to lift up each and every person in this room today, each and every person that they will have some contact with, there's probably a thousand people, if we just examine each and every person and the contacts that they have. And Lord, among those people there are people that you have called, there are people that you want to bring into the kingdom and I just again, I

pray for each and every one of us, that we would have in our own hearts that burning desire to share, to rescue, to plunder the enemy's house. And so I pray that you would give each of us not just the heart to do it but the actual opportunity, and that you would give us not just the opportunity but that there would be fruit that comes out of it when we see others come into your kingdom. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.