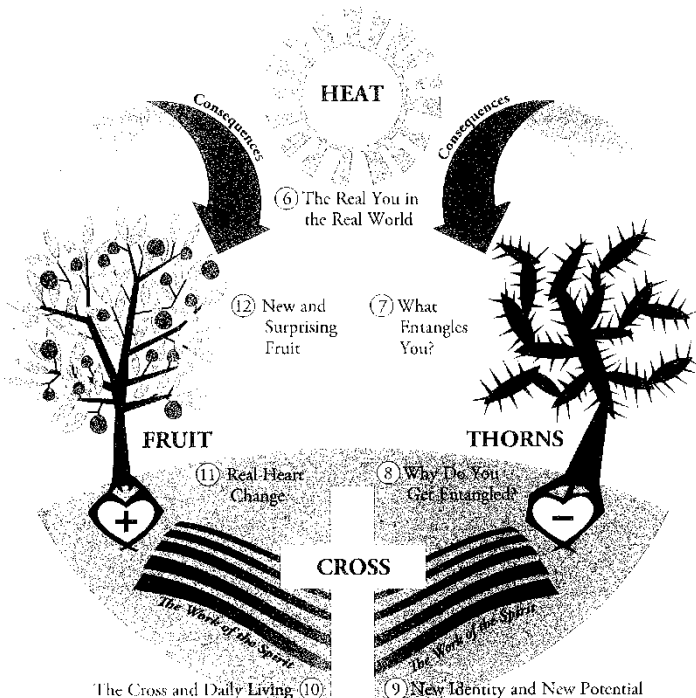


So I have just one caveat. I'm going to begin the message with an illustration, but I need to say it this way. Any resemblance to real persons, either on this platform or off this platform, is purely coincidental. You need to know that going in. So the picture the scene, if you will. A hypothetical husband arrives home from work well after his expected time. His intention was to join his family for dinner. He actually had planned to be on time. He wanted to be on time. But this hypothetical husband had an unexpected conversation at the office on the way out of the door. It delayed his departure. His cell phone battery had died because his charger was left at home that morning, so there was no communication line open to him. The traffic on the route home was moving very slowly, not rapidly like is the custom. And the gas light had been on since that morning, so he made the executive decision to stop to refuel because, he reasoned, once he was home with his loving and beautiful family, he wanted to be able to stay home. Makes good sense. And upon entering the front door our hypothetical husband and father quickly assesses the situation. He realizes he's missed dinner. And he's missed it by such a considerable amount of time that the table is cleared of all the dishes and there is a couple of leftover scraps of food on the counter that he can cobble together to make a plate if he wants to reheat.

So in the same amount of time that our world's fastest computers process information, the hypothetical husband's mind is racing with the situation before him, and he processes the scene. The unfulfilled expectations of a family dinner, the melancholy of recognizing that the dinner did in fact occur, except without him. The high probability of a disappointed wife, the growing realization that he's failed to manage the last couple of hours well. And it's during this processing, this nano-second processing that's taking place, that the hypothetical husband finally hears the first words of greeting from his wife from the other room: "You missed dinner." Three words. Three simple words. Not really said with a lot of inflection. There's no animation to them. They're actually, just a statement of fact: You missed dinner. There's no arguing with that. That's truth. But what is happening in the hypothetical husband is those three words amount to an indictment, coupled with condemnation. Among the things in question for him are his ability to manage his time wisely, the integrity of his words with which he promised to be home at a certain time, his responsibilities as the patriarch of the family, and his scriptural admonition to love his wife the way Christ loved the church and laid down his very life for her. There's a lot of law in the hypothetical husband's head.

What we're simply witnessing in the hypothetical husband in view is heat. Heat is being applied. The heat from within and the heat from without. Those circumstances of life that are unavoidable and outside of our control, as well as those loops that play in our head, those scripts that we've rehearsed and heard so many times before about who we are and what we do.

We're in the middle of this sermon series called *Hope for Change*. Is there any hope for this hypothetical husband that he might change? Any hope at all? Two weeks ago Pastor Lovelace presented the topic of heat. You can see this diagram, I think it's coming up. You see, the heat is those circumstances that come our way. Pastor Lovelace elaborated on that for us, that we see that heat is whatever life throws at us. Put the Presbyterian way, if you will, the heat we experience is the circumstances that we encounter as a result of God's sovereignly ordaining all that comes our way. That's the heat. And it's good to be reminded often that the heat we experience is under God's sovereign control. It's his heat. He's in charge.



It's also good to remember that the heat we experience comes in all various shapes and sizes. You heard this elaborated on two weeks ago. It could be a flat tire in the middle of a torrential downpour. It could be a flat tire in the middle of a sunny day. It could be a nasty comment from a coworker or a neighbor. A concerned friend who brings your attention to a sin that you've committed against them. It could be a betrayal by someone that you believed would be with you until death parted the two of you---but they're still alive, but they're not in your life. A diagnosis from a doctor that's accompanied by the term 'inoperable.' Or it could be a bad hair day. Heat is all manner of things big and small, and it's the weight we place to that heat that makes a big difference for us. The other thing we need to remember about heat is that it is inevitable. It is unavoidable in this life. If you live, you'll experience the heat.

The whole foundation for this sermon series is that what we do with the heat that comes our way makes all the difference. When we experience heat will we bring forth from our flesh the thorny responses that we heard Pastor Rickett enumerate for us last week? Complaining, laziness, anger, envy, avoidance, pride, indifference, blame-shifting, judgmental spirit, a critical tongue, a lack of self-control, lack of self-control associated with food, a lack of self-control associated with drink, lack of self-control with people, with virtual reality. The question was put to us last week: Where do your actions and responses fail to demonstrate Christlikeness. I took note of that question. We're to be displaying Christlikeness. It's why we were designed. It's who we are. We were built to bring God glory, and most notably and most particularly, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Or when we encounter the heat, will our lives, by the grace of God, resting in the finished work of Christ on the cross, will we produce fruit in humble reliance on the Spirit of the living God who indwells all believers? Well, that's the question before us today. Heat is inevitable. Thorns or fruit? Now there's the question.

We turn to Galatians 2 and Paul's word to church that was filled with both Jewish converts to the Christian faith as well as Gentile believers, and they were mixed in among them. We pick up the reading in Chapter 2. Paul has elaborated for the Galatian Christians that the pure gospel is our only hope. He's even had to rebuke Peter openly, and to his face, because Peter was withdrawing himself from the Gentile believers when the Judaizers---these men who would come to apply the law when they came among the church there. We pick up Paul's argument here. This is his actual response to Peter. We'll just pick up in verse 19.

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

May God's Word be blessed by God's Spirit. Let's pray together real quick. Gracious God, help us, please, to understand the cross of Jesus Christ and our place in your plan of salvation. And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.

So you hear the context as these Jewish believers are somehow convinced that the law needs to be re-applied in order to earn favor with God. Somehow they could not embrace the gift of condemnation-free, fully forgiven, God-pleasing righteousness that the 'It is finished' substitutionary, atoning life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ indiscriminately gives to any and all who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. They didn't get that. They have wandered from that. They hold forth the law of God as that which, when kept,

can justify a person before God. In other words, they were teaching that there is a way to obey enough, that through your effort and mind, we can be made right with God.

Paul has taken up that argument in a very forceful way. In chapter 1 he says even if an angel from the living God comes and preaches another gospel to you, let him be accursed. The only hope we have for salvation is found in Christ alone, not in our works, not in our efforts. And that's what Paul is confronting.

So with the law of God---the perfect and blameless law of God---in view, Paul is addressing at least two of the fundamental questions to every person that breathes air. How can a perfectly righteous God ever come to accept an unrighteous person like me, like you? How can a perfectly righteous God ever come to accept an unrighteous person like us? And another question that follows that is answered in this text is: How am I ever to understand who I am, why I was made, what is my purpose? (I know there's three questions there, but you get the point.) It's the fundamental issue of our heart. What am I supposed to do with this existence that I've been given? Whether or not I wanted it, I'm here. I walk the planet with you and you walk the planet with me, and we've got questions---and the Word of God has answers.

And maybe today this answer is the very first time you're hearing it. Maybe today that wonderful exchange takes place where God's Holy Spirit works in your heart and he brings to your awareness your need of Jesus, and you surrender. You say, 'Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord.' Or maybe today this message---these answers---maybe it's just a refreshing reminder for you. Maybe you've believed this truth, you've walked this way for many years, and God wants to say, 'Here is my loving embrace again. Hear what Jesus has done for you.'

Where does Paul take us for the answers to life's most foundational questions? To the cross. He takes us to the cross of Jesus Christ, the place of torture and suffering and shame. Paul takes us to a wooden beam where the sinless Son of God was nailed and hung, stripped naked before a mocking crowd. He was abandoned by his friends. He was forsaken by his Father because of the sins of his people, not because of anything he had ever done. Paul takes us to the cross of Jesus Christ, the place where God's love and God's justice meet perfectly. The place where justice smiles and asks no more. The place where the clearest demonstration of the love of Almighty God is clearly defined and displayed in all its glory. Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for another. Paul takes us to the cross. And that's where our hope is found.

The cross is central to the way that God justifies sinners. It's central to the way that we relate to our Creator. The Westminster Confession, the Shorter Catechism, Question 33 responds like this to the question, What is justification?: It's an act of God's free grace. An act of God's free grace where he pardons all our sins, he accepts us as righteous in his sight. And it's only for the righteousness of Christ that's been imputed to us and received by faith alone. When the writers of the Heidelberg Catechism are trying to get at the same question, 'How is a sinner like me justified before a holy God like God?' they answer it in this way in Question 60, and I've paraphrased it: That even though my conscience rightly accuses me of grievously sinning against all God's commandments, never having kept any of them, and even though I'm still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving any of it, and out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I'd never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. That's the gospel. That's good news! That's freedom. That's hope. Because it's not about us being able to do it or to keep it.

That's why Paul is so adamant to that first century church and to us as we read this. We must maintain the pure gospel. If you believe something else, and you end up on that day of judgment believing something else, you are hopeless. I shudder to think of that. To think that we could ever approach God on our own, on the basis of our obedience, Paul says, is ludicrous. You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Having begun

by the Spirit in your walk of faith, are you going to be perfected by your works of the flesh? It's just a no-brainer. There's no way that that can be the wisdom of God made manifest.

So Paul says I've died to the law that I might live to God. Notice what Paul is not saying. Paul is not saying that the law died. Paul is saying I died to the law. The law is perfect. The law is holy. The law is righteous. The law reveals who God is. But the law brings condemnation to lawbreakers like you and me. Once we are in Christ, secure and forgiven, what the law does for us is show us how to please God. We don't throw out 'Thou shalt not lie, Thou shalt not murder, Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery,' Those are our marching orders! Paul says he's not saying that the law has died. He's saying that he's died to the law.

What Paul is saying is he's died to the false idea that anyone could ever be saved or justified by law-keeping. You can't do it! He's free from the condemnation that is due to all lawbreakers---you and me, law-breakers, sinners. Paul says this is a gloriously wonderful good news. Prior to believing that good news that Christ lived and died in his place, Paul is saying that he was simply living for himself. He was living unto the law. But now he has died to the law, and now and only now is he able to live for God.

He's given up on the law as a way to get right with God---and by the way, not just the law of God, but the laws that we construct, thinking that somehow in keeping them we'll be right with God. Did you do your quiet time this morning? Have you prayed with your wife before bedtime? Are your children being catechized properly and in good order? Have you taken to heart Pastor Lovelace's teaching in this evangelism series in the middle hour and shared your faith with your cubicle coworker? You see we raise law from everything. Because if I do that, I'll earn God's favor. He'll show his favor to me, and my salvation will be secure.

And Paul says that's not the way it works. The challenge for us---especially us, believers---is to live to God, to live for God, living lives that are pleasing to God, lives that reflect God's character, Christlikeness, lives that---to bring it back to the sermon series that Pastor Lovelace will elaborate on next Sunday---produce fruit in keeping with repentance and faith. That's the life that we want.

I'm not a big fan of church signs with the reader boards. I think it's too hard to encompass things in twelve or thirteen words. But at Harvester Baptist down the street they got it right. There's some good theology down there. If you go down to Dorsey Search shopping center, you check this out. It says, 'The law says do and you will live, but grace says live and you will do.' That's good theology. The law says do and you will live, but grace says live in Christ---dead in your transgressions and sin---live, be alive, and then you'll do. Fruit will be produced.

So Paul goes on to say he's died to the law, and now it is possible for him to live a life pleasing to God. Now it's possible. How? He says, I've been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. This is....this is unfathomable.

I want to make three points from Paul's verse here pointing us to the cross. As we look to the cross of Jesus Christ, we see what Jesus has accomplished for us. We see the first thing is this: There is a death on the cross that forgives us all our sins through Christ alone. All our sins. When we talk about sin and the very purest form of that word we say that sin is any lack of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God. In other words, sin is not being or doing what God requires. If God says, thou shalt do this and we don't do it, we've sinned. If God says thou shalt not do something and we end up doing it---even in our hearts---then we've sinned.

And Paul says listen. The very greatest need that you have is to deal with your sin. How is someone justified before a holy God? It's through the cross. We've all sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God, God's

original design---us---his creatures reflecting his glory. And because of our sin, we hear God's Word with the sober reminder that our sins are deserving of death, and not just the ravages of physical death. My sins and your sins deserve eternal death, a punishment that is unimaginable to contemplate---to be absolutely removed for all eternity from everything good, everything gracious, everything loving, everything that has even the remotest chance of hope. To incur God's wrath against our sin for all eternity. That's what our sins deserve. And I can't handle it. I can't pay that debt.

Paul says to the church in Colossi, in Colossians 2:14. He's explaining the work of Christ on the cross for sinners, that God forgives us all our sins. Listen, he says, "...by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with all of its legal demands. This he has set aside, nailing it to the cross." Amen! The death that the law demands was satisfied in the death of Christ---your death, my death, that the law demands of us, Christ has died.

There's really no illustration to grab a hold of this kind of debt. Sinners in debt to a holy God. If those of us who are mortgage payers, those of us who have homes, and we share our homeownership with the banks, you know, various banks along the way. If somebody just came to you and said, listen, I know you struggle every month with that mortgage payment, and it's a huge debt, an albatross around your neck. I love you, and I wipe it clean. It's gone. Now that's just a pathetic little example of this kind of debt. But if somebody did that for me, I'd do backflips, and I can't even do a somersault. I can hardly get up off the couch. But God says, listen, all of your sin---past, present, future, thought, word, deed---everything that you could contemplate in rebellion against me---has been wiped clean by Christ.

And, Paul says, because I've been crucified with him. When Christ was on the cross, believer, you were on the cross---your sins. Paul wasn't nailed to a wooden beam, Paul didn't receive the spikes, you haven't received the spikes. Paul says that this has taken place in the mysterious working of the Spirit that we received by faith. The law is satisfied. Justice smiled, asks no more. The hypothetical husband mentioned in the preface of this message has that truth available to him every single time he sins, every time he fails to act in a loving way, or when condemnation circles his thoughts and spirit like a flock of vultures looking for some joy to devour. The law's demands on him are satisfied in the death of Christ because he's been crucified with Christ.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The hypothetical husband can actually look now, he can look with 20-20 vision at his actions and his inactions because they are his responsibility, he's supposed to be accountable for them. But being crucified with Christ affords him that opportunity to now own them. He doesn't have to shift the blame off onto others or onto his circumstances. Being crucified with Christ frees us to be honestly agreeing with our reality. If you said that harsh word and somebody brings it to your attention, because you are crucified with Christ you can agree. I said that....and I regret it and I'm sorry. It's caused you hurt. It was not Christlikeness in me. It did not honor our Lord. Please forgive me. I plead Christ's mercy.

I mean, that's the gospel. John says if you confess your sins, he is faithful, he is just, he will forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. We rest in the promises of the Word of God. When life heats up, when we experience the heat of our circumstances, whether they be without---those things that are inevitable---or within---those little loops of accusation---rest assured your flesh is going to want to show itself. Those thorny responses, they're right there on the surface. They're ready. But believing that you are crucified with Christ offers you true freedom. It's the freedom that our souls long for. So we don't have to labor under the guilt, that hanging guilt. Paul says that I been crucified with Christ. Isaiah said it: The punishment that has brought us peace with God was upon him. The death that forgives our sins through Christ alone.

And then Paul says the second point is that this is a life that frees us to serve by Christ alone. See the focus? It's always going to be 'Christ alone.' It's about glorifying God. It is no longer I who live, Paul says, but Christ who lives in me. The hypothetical husband needs to know and recognize he's got no strength, He's got no ability. He's got no desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. Now sure we can all conclude...I don't want to do horrible things so that I end up in jail or suffer the misery of all the people in my life that just can't stand to be with me, but that's still about me. I just want to be comfortable. I just want to be happy. It's not about living a life to God, living a life for God.

You see, that's not the life that we were designed for---living for ourselves, for our happiness, for our comfort. I mean, we can pursue that life, and it's cool for maybe a moment, maybe a while, a season. But because it's not the way we were designed, it won't ever satisfy our soul. And if it doesn't satisfy our soul, it goes against the design of our Creator and it's not going to bring him glory. And it's never going to be for our good. So the believer in Christ has died to the law and the demands of the law by being crucified with Christ, so that no longer do we live to the law, but now, intimately identified with Christ, abiding in Christ, believing in Christ, we are able to live to God.

It's a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in you. And we would be cautious here, I'm not going to do it...don't raise your hand....but if we took a poll and said, how many of you today **feel** like Jesus Christ indwells your living soul? Don't raise your hand, because if you **feel** that, you have to examine that. Because Paul says in another passage that we walk by faith and not by sight----not by our senses, not by what we feel---because the circumstances of life produce all kinds of feelings that are contrary to this truth. So Paul says it's by faith. This is the mystery he talked about to the Colossian church. In 1:27 of Colossians he says that God is revealing the mystery that was hidden for all the ages---this is Christ in you, the hope of glory. The only hope that you and I ever have of glorifying our Creator is that Christ indwells us. We don't feel it, but we believe it. We reckon it to be true, and we act upon it in faith. That's what Paul is talking about. I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

That's a death that forgives our sins through Christ alone, a life that frees us to serve by Christ alone, and it's a love, he says, it's a love that secures our faith in Christ alone. He says, "the life I live in the flesh." We've still got this battle going on. The spirit wars against the flesh within. The battle is in this present age. But Paul says, listen, "...the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." We can't forget the love of God is the motive for God saving sinners. Love gives, love is other-centered, love is considerate of the needs of others, and love meets those needs in the way that those needs need to be met, if I could say it that way. Our greatest need is to be spared the wrath of God, and to be adopted and joined together with our Creator, and God has met that need.

When the heat of life comes our way, we want something else. We start to doubt God's love. My kids---well, they got it from me---we love candy. And if we set out a plate of Skittles and.....I can't think of anything other than Skittles right now....wow....M&M's! If we set out a plate of Skittles and M&M's and Hostess Twinkies and all kinds of other things, they might enjoy that meal...once. If we set it out for lunch they might enjoy it twice in a day. But if you have a regular diet of that, you actually are going to begin to doubt your parents' love for you. Believe me on this. If you see broccoli hit your plate and you see a hamburger and you see meat and vegetables---all that stuff---you doubt, oh, no, this can't be right, I want those colorful Skittles and the marshmallow Gummi bears, whatever. When God brings adversity our way, what he's doing is meeting our greatest need. When adversity, when heat hits, what we're drawn to is where, Lord Jesus, have you applied the cross in this situation?

So Paul says, listen, we live this life and it's received by faith. Faith that God gives. In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul says, it is by grace you been saved, through faith, and this faith is not your own doing. It's a gift of God. You

were dead in your transgressions. You couldn't produce faith. Because if you did, then you would be at the point where we see some of our brothers and sisters sometimes: Look at me, look at my walk with Christ, look at how far I've come, look at my maturity.

Even the faith to believe God is a gift. Repentance is a gift. It's all a gift! And it all then glorifies God. He says the life I live, is a life of faith. It's belief and trust and reliance and confidence and a commitment to the Son of God. He didn't just raise up an Uber-man, you know, somebody who was taller than all of us or stronger than all of us. God himself came down. This is the God-man, this is the unique man, the Son of God, who gave himself for us. He didn't consider equality with God that thing that he wanted to hold tightly to, but he freely, willingly laid it down, and he became obedient---even death, death on a cross, your cross and mine---not for his sins, but for ours. For those thoughts right now that are running through your head. He died for that. He died for that.

And this is the union that we have with Christ. This is the only way to benefit from what Christ has accomplished---is to be united with him by faith. It's a mystery. We don't feel it. We believe it. When Jesus was asked what is the work that his disciples are to do, he said the work of my followers is this: Believe. Believe in the one who was sent. Believe. Trust. And trust that he will grow you. Align yourself with other like-minded believers. Believe this truth. Proclaim this truth. Live out this truth. And when this truth doesn't show up in abundance in your life, allow correction to come your way. It's our only hope for that life to come.

So we're blessed to see that the motive for his self-sacrifice is the love of God. He disciplines those he loves. He chastises those he loves. And the cross demonstrates and demands that we believe that God is love, and in turn, then, gives us the power and the privilege to love one another. Listen to the way the apostle John said it: This is love. The love of God was made manifest among us. It was clearly seen among us that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Familiar language. And this is love, not that we have loved God---we don't generate this love---but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 'Propitiation,' that word which means that the wrath of an angry deity has been absorbed by another, that he's become for us the wrath that we deserve. The Son of God has become the propitiation for our sins. And do you hear from the apostle Paul and from the apostle John and from these other New Testament writers that the centerpiece for them was always the cross upon which Jesus Christ died.

Beloved, John says, if God so loved us, then we ought to also love one another. You see, I think...I don't know about you, but I like to enjoy that salvation. Thank you, Lord God, for this salvation, full and free---for Jesus Christ alone is my hope and my life. But the reminder there from John is that this love that God has given us is not to be hoarded. It's not to be collected. It's not to be enjoyed in a solo state. It's to be spread abroad. It's to be spread among the church to love the brethren. John's whole epistle, the first epistle, is about loving the brethren. But it's [also] about loving those who are not yet professing their faith in Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes---indiscriminately so---whoever believes would not perish but have eternal life. And God says, because you've been loved, you've been called to love. We're tempted to doubt God's love for us.

I want to close with this illustration, a quote from D.A. Carson. He says the God on whom we rely knows what suffering is all about. When the heat of life comes your way, the God on whom we rely knows what suffering is all about, not merely in the way that God knows everything, but by experience. The story is told of a pastor who was meeting with a man in his church after the unthinkable happened. He was cleaning his gun and his young son was there present, and the gun went off and he killed his son accidentally. And the pastor was meeting with this man, searching for words to say. There's not many words that suffice in that horrific of a situation. He felt the Lord impress upon him this thought, and I give it to you. God knows what this kind of suffering is personally, because God killed his Son, also---except that it was not an accident. God killed Christ

on purpose. What we do with a God like that?

That Christ died with purpose, and that purpose was to save people like us? It was his love. Never doubt, never doubt God's love. In the midst of the heat God loves you. We sing this song sometimes: It was love that brought him from above to walk upon the earth. It was love that caused his weariness, his hunger and his thirst. It was love that caused him to be tried and tempted by the foe, and love that brought the nails and cross, and love that bought my soul.

Let's pray together. Gracious God, thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ. And thank you for the reminder again today that it is your work, not ours. Lord, we ask that you would bless us now as we move to celebrate those physical elements that are signs and seals that represent for us in this physical world your body given for sinners and your blood shed to cover all our sin. Lord, I pray that we would be, then, those people, your followers, who receive these elements by faith and rejoice in Christ alone. In his name we pray. Amen.