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

**March 1, 2015**

**When Jesus Confounds**

**John 12:12-25**

**Prayer:** *Father God, we do again thank you for the precious blood of Jesus. We just thank you, Lord, that it is our hope, it is why we're here, it is what gives us a future, and Father, we just thank you for that incredibly precious gift. And Lord, this is a day in which we focus on that blood and the cross that produced it, and again we just pray as we open up your word to look into it that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit deepening and widening our understanding of what it is you've done for us at the cross, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Once again, this is the first Sunday of the month, and as we remember each first Sunday, we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples for the last time there to share one final Passover supper with them, and it's recorded in *Matthew 26:26*. It says this: *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 takes the bread and the wine and he offers them up as symbols of his flesh and blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of this night on a -- this sacrifice as well and to repeat it on a regular basis, and this is what we call the Lord's table. We celebrate it once a month by meditating on what it is that the Lord Jesus Christ did by examining ourselves, by asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

We've been following the life of Jesus and we've worked our way so far up to the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John where we are encountering Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It's actually the story of two different crowds. There's two different crowds that are going to meet in Jerusalem to form one very large crowd. And the first crowd is the one that has assembled outside of a

certain house in Bethany, it's really assembled outside of a party that's being held for Jesus in order to celebrate the resurrection of Lazarus and the healing of Simon. The word of Jesus's miracles has gotten around and has gotten out and the crowd that has formed outside the residence is abuzz with that information and it is this crowd that is beginning to move into Jerusalem. And once again it gets to Jerusalem it's going to meet the crowd that's already assembled there and as you well know, Jerusalem swelled every year at this time with the influx of people coming to celebrate the Passover. Well, the news of Jesus and his miracles had this Jerusalem crowd abuzz as well. *John 12:12* says this: *The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

Now this is John's account of the gospel. In many ways it differs from the other three gospels. It's really in this particular instance a very brief summation of what took place and there's a lot of the details that are left out. So if you just read John's gospel, we have this picture of Jesus kind of walking into

Jerusalem, and he's discovering a donkey and he just kind of hops on the donkey and rides into town. Well, that's not really how it happened. The other gospels fill in a great deal more detail. First of all, there was not one donkey but two, and Jesus specifically sent his disciples ahead of him to where they were with instructions how to untie them and how to even explain to the owners why he was taking them. This is in *Matthew 21:1-7*, it says: *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethpage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"*

Now this last verse describes the dividing line between two different ways of understanding the Lord Jesus Christ. There's this crowd that met outside at Bethany and joins up with this crowd in Jerusalem and this crowd consisted primarily of the "hosanna" believers. Now "hosanna" is a term that means "save" but it means "save now." These are the folks who understood only the first part of verse 5 which says: *"Behold, your king is coming to you."*

These were the folks who knew all about Jesus's reputation, they knew of his frequent clashes with the ruling class of the religious people and they knew that word had now gotten out that this Jesus, well, he actually had the power to raise the dead. So he's the driving force behind this crowd that is moving its way into Jerusalem, and like many a military ruler before him, Jesus was supposed to triumphantly enter into Jerusalem on the biggest, baddest stallion there was in order to claim what they thought would be the right to rule at last as the Messiah. Well, it was the second part of that verse that had that crowd utterly confounded. It says this, it says: "*Behold, your king is coming to you,*" but then it says "*humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.*" *The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them.* Well, the disciples did just what Jesus told him to do because they were wise enough to obey their master. But understand, once again, Jesus does something that flies in the face of everything they've expected. Now there's reasons why Jesus did what he did, I mean, he was managing expectations, he was managing circumstances, and you have to understand first, this entire process was completely orchestrated by Jesus who was the high priest orchestrating his own sacrifice. Please don't fall for the nonsense that Jesus was a victim, that he was either a victim of the Jewish leaders or that

he was a victim of the Roman government. You can't be a victim of circumstance when it is your hand and power guiding the circumstance in the first place. And Jesus proved that he was the one that was guiding the circumstances by predicting well ahead of time what would take place. In *Mark 10:32* it says this, it says: *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."* See, Jesus had the circumstances of his death down pat even to the spitting and the mocking. See, you can't be the victim of circumstance that you have perfectly predicted ahead of time. And so what we see operating here is that Jesus's sovereign power had people doing precisely what he would have them do, operating completely under the power of their own free wills.

John's gospel gives the impression that Jesus just kind of happened on a donkey, then he decided to ride it. Well, the details that Mark's gospel provides shows that Jesus's sovereign governing power was orchestrating every single detail down even to the animal's

location and the reaction of the owners to the disciples taking it. This is what it says in Mark's gospel, this is Mark 11, verses 2 to 3. Jesus is giving the instructions. He says: *"Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"* See, nothing, nothing in this entire process was ever left to chance. Jesus wanted to be seen riding on a donkey, and he wanted to be seen that way for two different reasons, first it was to quash any sentiment that he was about to take -- have a military takeover, but another even more fundamental reason was to fulfill the prophesy of Zechariah 9:9 which says this: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* See, the last thing that Jesus was interested in was political power, but it's what everybody else wanted. They expected a stallion and Jesus gives them a donkey. I mean, they thought that any military ruler would exalt himself by entering Jerusalem just like a conqueror would and so Jesus's choice of a donkey, well, first of all, it puts that notion to rest. A stallion would have been the most appropriate way for Jesus to come into town; a mule would have been a compromise. I mean, David was a king and David

himself rode on a mule, but a donkey was, is, and always would be a pack animal, a beast of burden. You know, the riding of a foal of a donkey would just compound the starkness of the image. It's kind of like Arnold Schwarzenegger driving a tricycle. It's just -- it's silly. It's hard to even imagine. You know, for me, I get the sense of that because for me getting used to this knee scooter was a real lesson for me. I mean, it was not as hard for you guys as it was for me, I mean, last time I was on one of those things is when I was seven or eight years old. Just kind of tooling around on that thing made it seem profoundly silly. But you know, Jesus didn't care. You know, the one thing that you can say about Jesus is that he cared not a fig about maintaining some kind of an image. Jesus's choice of one of the humblest of animals, it just drove a dagger into the idea that here's Jesus, your conquering hero. And it drove a dagger not only into the huge crowd that had gathered around him but it also, and far more importantly, drove a dagger into that notion for the disciples as well. You see for them, Jesus's actions were establishing a pattern that they had grown very, very used to. Jesus routinely confounded the disciples. It says in *John 12:16-19*: *His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*



Now we know that Jesus many, many times before had confounded the disciples. There was the time when he gave the story of the parable of the sower and the seeds and the soils, and we all know about that story because we've heard it for 2,000 years and Jesus is speaking about four different kinds of soil that the word of God lands in and there's wayside soil, there's rocky soil, there's thorny soil, and there's good soil. And he's basically saying the wayside, rocky, and thorny soils represent the way the word of God is snatched away before belief becomes permanent and that only the good soil produces genuine belief. Everybody's heard that. I mean we're all very, very familiar with that. We know that story because we've been told that story by Jesus himself, but he gave that explanation to the disciples alone afterwards. Not so the crowd that he was addressing. Jesus confounded the crowd and he confounded the disciples by speaking to them only the parable with no explanation whatsoever of what it meant. You know, if you look at Matthew 13, it paints the picture, I've mentioned this before, that the crowds at this time were so gigantic that Jesus had to speak to them from a boat in the water, otherwise he would have been overwhelmed by the crowds and so you can just picture the disciples gathering this gigantic crowd all breathlessly anticipating Jesus's words of wisdom and so from the crowd he stands up and he basically gives them a five-minute lecture on gardening and then he leaves. And his last words were: "Let him

who has ears to hear, hear." And that's it, that's all he said. I mean, he said he's describing the soils, he's describing the seeds, and no other explanation whatsoever and he leaves. It was confounding to the disciples, it was confounding to the crowd and we know it was confounding to the disciples because in *Matthew 13:10* it says: *Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"* They were blown away. Your great moment, Jesus, here it is and what are you doing? Nobody understands what you're saying. Jesus had left the disciples completely and utterly mystified. But afterwards, afterwards he explains the parable to them in private, and he says in *Matthew 13:11*: *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."* Jesus was content to leave them mystified. You know, we just covered the story of Lazarus and how confounding Jesus was then and there. You remember the story. He learns that his dear friend is sick and dying, and what does Jesus do? He does nothing. Only after he flat out tells his disciples that Lazarus is dead then he decides, by the way, we're going to go visit him. Then he decides he's going to go to an area that's so dangerous that Thomas reacts to this piece of information by saying in *John 11*: *"Let us go also that we may die with him."* You know, Thomas is speaking for the disciples, he just seems he's giving in to a behavior that he cannot make heads or tails of because Jesus had confounded them.

I guess my question for us this morning is has Jesus ever confounded you? I mean, have you ever come across something that Jesus said or did that so confounded you that you just simply dismissed it or him? May I suggest to you that that's an incredibly dangerous habit to get into. You see, if you simply read the gospels, you will be confronted by very many confounding things that Jesus said and did. For instance in *Matthew 10:37* it says -- these are Jesus' words, he says: *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* In another instance in *Luke 9:59* it describes this, it says: *To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."* Yet another said, *"I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."* Jesus said to him, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* Then again in *Matthew 10:38*: *"And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."* Now each of these statements may be highly confounding, but none of them, none of them may be dismissed. I'm sure Jesus's disciples were astounded that Jesus would stymie the crowds by entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. But if anything, by now they were probably used to it. And one thing you can say about the disciples is that as confounding as Jesus was, he

was never, never dismissed. The disciples just continued to follow Jesus even though the parables sort of made no sense, even though there was many demands that couldn't be met and there were risks that seemed incredibly foolhardy. They continued to obey. We would do well to remember that. You see, when Jesus speaks or acts, he is speaking and acting profound and absolute truth. But still we have a tendency to dismiss that which confounds us. Oh, that's just Jesus, and sometimes Jesus was very obtuse or maybe there was a problem with language back then or maybe Jesus is simply being misunderstood, he didn't really mean that looking back from the plow makes me unworthy to follow him. I mean, he had to be speaking hyperbole when said that he expected us to love him more than our sons and daughters? Not so. Jesus made no idle demands. He made no verbal sleights of hand that were designed to be interpreted any way this particular culture wants. I mean, just what do you think Jesus meant when he said in *Matthew 10:38*: "*And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me?*" In light of that statement, why do so many of us consider taking up his cross as optional?

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, I would like us to take a minute this morning to consider how confounding Jesus actually was, and the bigger and broader question is how do I respond to those confounding statements he makes? And as the bread

is being distributed, consider also the warning that Jesus gives about communion itself. Is this God's word in 1 Corinthians 11:28, he 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.* You know, once again I say this every time, communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. I say if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, that you are one of his own or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just pass the elements on when they get to you. You don't need to take them. I've said no one's going to look at you or think that you're strange. Instead they may well think you wise. But as I say each month, on the other hand you can make the mistake of thinking that unless you're spotlessly perfect, well, I'm not worthy to receive communion. That too is a mistake. Being a child of the King doesn't mean that you never sin and that you don't fall, but what it does mean is this, it means that salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by being good. As Dane Ortland puts it: "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." This also means that when we fail, we are aware of the fact that we have sinned and we're aware of that fact because we have God's Holy Spirit living within us, convicting us, and so we grieve as children who know that we have a father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. And God 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 spotless and sinless. It means that when we sin we understand we have an advocate with the Father, someone who speaks out on our behalf in heaven itself. *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 so because we are in possession of Jesus's righteousness and not our own, we are now free to eat from his table. So if you love the Lord Jesus, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. You know, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven itself. So as the bread is being distributed, as you're sitting there for a moment, just take some time to ask yourself, do I take Jesus seriously when he says things that are directly confounding? Do I take Jesus seriously when he says things that

are incredibly threatening?

1 Corinthians the 11th chapter, the 23rd verse says this, it 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." Take, and eat.*

So Jesus enters into Jerusalem and he's not riding on a stallion, he's riding on the foal of a donkey exactly as Zechariah predicted he would. We pick up on our text at verse 17 which says this: *The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they had heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." See, the crowd remained undeterred at the sight of Jesus on a donkey. They continued to bear witness, I mean, not as we think of that term but by keeping the rumor alive that this Jesus, in spite of his bizarre appearance on a donkey, this is the guy who raised somebody from the dead.*

Our text goes on to say in *John 12:20*: *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip,*

who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Now the Greeks represented the Gentiles, the outsiders. Mostly us. And they wanted to see Jesus. And there's a reason why Philip went to Andrew and why Andrew and Philip both went to Jesus. You see, Philip and Andrew were the only ones of the disciples who had Greek names and so in all likelihood they were selected for this task to request of Jesus a meeting. But you see, it wasn't as simple as it might seem because Jesus had repeatedly told his disciples that their ministry was not to the Greeks, not to the Gentiles, but to the Jews. In *Matthew 10:5* it says: *These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* In *Matthew 15:22* it says: *And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

So here's a dilemma. I mean, how is Philip honor this request of the Greeks when he knew that Jesus had instructed them to aim their ministry first to the Jews? So the Greeks ask Philip, Philip asks



Andrew, Andrew and Philip together approach Jesus. We pick up at John 12:20, it says: Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

Now I want you to draw a picture of what the scene would look like. You're in the midst of this chaotic assembly of these huge crowds, and Jesus is beginning his Passover sacrifice in earnest, and he does it by making once again this incredibly confounding statement. In a sea of Jewish pilgrims is this contingent of Gentiles seeking out Jesus, and Jesus instead of seeing this as a source of ever expanding influences, instead he recognizes this is the beginning of the end. He recognizes that the only hope for the Gentiles is the death of the one who had come to take their place. But he states what he has to do as yet another confounding statement. This is what he said, he said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless

*a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* Now think about that. Who in that crowd including the disciples, who there would have had any inkling as to what Jesus was talking about? I submit to you no one. I mean, to us it makes perfect sense, we've had 2,000 years of Bible study, teaching, and instruction. We know exactly where the symbolism points and what Jesus was about to accomplish. Not so Jesus's hearers. Jesus, the perfect son of God, had completed his mission on earth, he had lived out the sinless life and he was now about to offer that life up on a cross. He was there to die. He was there to enter into the ground like a kernel of wheat, and just as a tiny seed can blossom only by being buried, so too would Jesus likewise be buried in death only to bear much fruit in the resurrection. So no doubt Jesus knew exactly what he was doing, he knew where he was going, he knew what he was saying even if its meaning made no sense whatsoever until much, much later. But that's how it was with much of what Jesus had to say. Again, *John 12:16: His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*

But you see, Jesus didn't stop there. Jesus didn't limit his confounding statements to just statements about himself. He also had much to say to and about us, and it's confounding as well. He

said again: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* But then he immediately added these words: *"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."* Now those, too, are confounding words, not so much because they're hard to understand but because they're harder still to obey, to take seriously, to order your life around. I mean, just what is Jesus getting at by saying if I love my life, I'm going to lose it; if I hate it, I'll keep it eternally? I mean, just what is that supposed to mean to me as a follower of Jesus Christ? Do I have to hate my life in order to please Christ or is he just being confounding again? I mean, can we agree that at the very least Christ is telling us that if we love and protect our relationships with this world more than our relationship with him, then this world will be all we have because we're not really one of his. Is that too literal an interpretation? I mean, is that putting too hard an edge on what it is that Jesus said or is that exactly what he said? Jesus was about to be mocked and flogged and crowned and crucified. He was giving up his perfect life so that we could meet the just demands of God's holiness by offering God his perfection instead of our sin. And he willingly agreed to be that seed that would be planted

and buried in the ground that would yield fruit that 2,000 years later would include all of those who today hate their lives in this world. That is all those who believe Jesus when he says: *"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."* Now you know for many, a statement like that is absolutely confounding, and we try to figure out, wait a minute, how do I make this thing work, I mean, how do the demands of following Jesus stack up with this statement of Jesus in Matthew 11 where he says: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Well, is that true? You see, the answer is remarkably simple and potentially terrifying, but it is not confounding. The answer to all of this is found in another verse, it's found in *John 10:27* which says this: *"My sheep, hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."*

As the elders begin distributing the cup, let me state this as plainly and as simply as I can. Let me attempt to get at the heart of what I believe Jesus is trying to say. What he's saying is if you are one of his sheep, if you are one of his, you have been

given the gift of the Holy Spirit who lives inside you, who is now in the process of changing your very thoughts, your will, and your desires so that each and every day you are being shaped and molded uniquely into the image of Jesus Christ. If you have the Spirit of Christ within you, then what may appear as a colossal burden to others will appear to you as a burden that is easy and a yoke that is light.

See, if I was standing before you this morning and I was speaking to you in Dutch or Portuguese and you were trying like hard to understand what I was saying and maybe if you really worked at it, you'd pick up a phrase or two, something that I was saying that you maybe might have been able to understand, you'd be listening but you'd be laboring under a very heavy burden. But if Dutch or Portuguese was your native language, well then hearing what I was saying would be absolutely effortless. That's the difference.

Listen to what Jesus says in *John 10:27*, he says: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" You see what Jesus is getting at here? You see, the question is not and has never been am I trying hard enough. The question is: Am I one of his? That's the question. See now, you may be thinking they Jesus is making all of these confounding demands, and I need to know at least the very least I need to do to get by. I mean, tell me how much I can get away with in loving this world before I've gone too

far. Show me where the border between believer and unbeliever is so I can get as close as possible to the edge of that border without falling over. Well, if that's what you're thinking and you are not one of his sheep, then you'll be okay with plotting out the least painful way you think you can have it all even though God said that's impossible. *Luke 16:13* says: "*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*" See, if you are not one of his sheep, you will be constantly looking for the angle that enables you to do that, to serve God and serve mammon simultaneously. And the idea of foregoing one for the other will seem like a heavy burden and a yoke that's way too much to bear. But if you are one of his sheep, if you hear his voice, if it's not Dutch or Portuguese but crystal clear English, if you hear his voice and you follow him, then you will never stop asking yourself how you can serve him better. Not in order to earn his favor, which you and I can't, but because we know we've already found it.

So here's the question: How do I know if I'm simply kidding myself that I'm one of his own or just a sheep trying to figure out how best to live my life for the kingdom? Well, I think one of the greatest evidences that you are not one of his is that not only do you not hear his voice, but far more importantly, you don't care

that you don't hear his voice. See, God said all who seek me shall find me, and the desire to seek him is in itself a gift from God. And if you don't have that gift, you will never sweat not having it. I mean, there's no one walking around saying, "Oh, I wish I had a desire for God and his kingdom, but I don't." Those people don't exist. Because those who don't have that desire see it only as a heavy burden and an unbearable yoke, and they're more than happy to be free of that burden. You see, God in his mercy has allowed those who are not his to not care that they're not his. But if however you feel that burden, if somehow or other you are unable to shake the hounds of heaven that God has set after you, realize what a privilege you are receiving. If you are one of his, God will not let you go. I think one of the most confounding things of all is this, in giving us the gift of salvation, God has given us a gift that nobody else wants. I mean, if you doubt that, just go out in the street and try to give it away. Folks resent you for even trying. And so we broadcast the gospel wholesale knowing that it's only by God's Holy Spirit that people can make it stick and understand retail. And if it sticks with you, there's only one reason why and that is the grace of God. *Ephesians 2:8* says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*

So as you approach the cup, consider the profound mercy of God when

he says: *"Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* But consider also the profound and confounding demands of God who also says: *"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."* Consider the implication of those words.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 25th verse 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 I call head, heart, and feet, where we try to have some practical application of just what it means to remember Jesus. And I'm thinking of a verse that we just covered here, it's *John 12:21*, and actually there's a -- I was preaching at one of the churches here locally and they took that verse and they -- they had an incredibly appropriate use for that verse. If you went up into the pulpit, right there so only the preacher in the pulpit could see was a statement taken directly from *John 12:21*, it just says: *"Sir...we would see Jesus."* What an incredibly appropriate thing to put so that the preacher alone can see, and I thought about what



practically we're trying to say here, and that applies to all of us. Sir...we would see Jesus. We want to be a church in which people see Jesus.

I got a disturbing and difficult phone call the other day, just yesterday. How many of you here know Russ Cheney? How many of you remember Russ, Russ? I got a call from his brother yesterday. Russ died. He was 45 years old. They found his body, they don't know what the circumstance was, they're doing an autopsy. But if you knew Russ, those of you who did, you knew Russ was an outsider. He was marginalized. He was that guy that was socially awkward, he didn't quite fit, he's the kind of person that very easy to kind of push to the side and just say this guy's strange and different and weird, and I always think about people, when I see people like that coming into this church, I think Jesus, you sent that person and you want to see who's real in this place. You want to see the people who will treat him so that he would look at them and see Jesus. I was wondering why, why Bruce, Russ's brother, called me. And he said that he left instructions that he wants to give a donation to us with what little money he had. Russ had no money. I mean, he went around to flea markets and tried to buy stuff and sell stuff. I have no idea what money he had, but he said that we meant a great deal to him. You know, he left here and he went down to Kentucky and he called me from Kentucky, he got in trouble in

Kentucky, then he moved down to Florida and he was always kind of marginally on the outside but what was amazing to me was they said they were going through his effects and what he had there in his effects was a church directory, and that's how they found our number. That meant something to him. Russ just kind of went out of our lives, there's Russ, he came and he went. But to a real extent, many of you in this body meant Jesus to him. You know, he didn't quite make it to super stardom as a Christian but he got the gospel. He understood what the gospel was. And whether or not Jesus just took him because he just wasn't getting on track, I have no idea, but it's incredibly moving to me that he thought enough of us to want to give a contribution. That's what his -- that's what his folks were saying. We need to know who to -- how do we do this? They wanted to send us a check of sorts. So there are people in this church that were Jesus to him.

You know, we went to visit Leon. Again, he's up at Valley View and I started telling him about the people that were praying for him, and he just burst into tears. It means so much to him to have people caring for him, that people would come and visit him, that people would kind of work through his frustration, I mean, it's been weeks and weeks and weeks and his brain's not working right, but it's incredibly important that we be Jesus to him at that point. So he's in Goshen now, he's a lot closer than he was

before, he was 46 miles away. He's right down the road. And Bill, I see Bill is here. Are you there, Bill? Yeah. Bill went to see him yesterday. Bill -- if you all know Bill, you probably hate me for doing this, but Bill had a stroke just like Leon had, couldn't speak at all for a year. Speaks fine now. I think God is sending Bill to Leon just to minister to him, to give him hope. But this is what the church is supposed to be. We are supposed to be Jesus to those people outside those doors, and so when you're thinking about, okay, I hear what you say, Tom, you say we're needing to try to figure out what it means to be one of his sheep, what it means to be is what God is saying to us is when the world looks at us, what they are saying is, sir...we would see Jesus. That's what matters to him. Let's pray.

*Father, we just again thank you for your grace, we thank you for who you are, we thank you for the church and what you have done in giving us a body of believers from every single race and background and ethnicity and economic group, Lord, we just thank you for the diversity that we have in this body. This is a group of people who are drawn together because they love you, and they want to represent you. Give us the ability, give us the means to be able to be in a position where people will look at us and see Jesus. I pray this in your name. Amen.*