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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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"Lord, Who Will We Go To?"

John 6:68

Prayer: *Father, we just thank you for the precious blood, we thank you for the incredible gift that we come together once a month to focus on, the gift of your Son given up for us on the cross.*

Father, this morning as we again contemplate what it is you've done for us there, what it is your life was while you were here living it out, we pray that you would give us an extra measure of grace as we commune this morning. I pray that you would guide us into your word, guide us into your truth, guide us by the power of your Holy Spirit into understanding more and better and deeper what it is you've done for us. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, as we say each first Sunday of the month, this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross, and Jesus on the night before he died, he gathered his disciples with him for one last Passover. Matthew 26 says this, 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."

Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and 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 this on a regular basis. This is what we call "the Lord's table," and we celebrate it once a month, and we do that by first, as I just said, meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. Next, we examine our consciences asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our lives where he is convicting us of sin, we confess our sins, and then we participate in the elements.

John 6:53 says this: *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."* Now, we've been following the life of Jesus and we've worked our way thus far up to the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John which, as I've said before, represents this tipping point in Jesus' public ministry. In this chapter, we see in rapid succession Jesus goes from a miracle worker who has fed 20,000 with five loaves and two fishes to a

miracle walker, someone who in the middle of the night walked on water for his disciples, to a misunderstood Messiah whose pronouncements provoked outrage and profound confusion. In John 6 we see within the course of only a few days Jesus goes from refusing to be made into a king to asking his disciples in John 6:67: *"Do you also want to go away?"* And we looked at the reason for Jesus' fall from grace, and we see that it lay in his insistence on speaking the truth to the crowds that surrounded him. He very matter of factly pointed out that their interest in him lay primarily in what they could get from him and the fact that they found him a useful God.

In John 6:26, it says: *Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."* And that observation begins this hostility that continues to escalate as Jesus systematically takes apart their motives. John Chapter 6 really chronicles this give-and-take between Jesus and the crowd. Jesus challenges their motives for following him; they demand a sign challenging Jesus to top the manna in the desert that God gave them. Jesus again who has just miraculously fed them all, well, he challenges them to hunger for and to thirst for the real bread of life. They say, "Okay. Give us this bread." And when they say, "Give us this bread," Jesus insists that he is that bread. He says

in John 6:35: *And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst,"* but then he adds this challenge. Verse 36, he says: *"But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe."* Well, from this point forward, the dialogue gets more and more polarized. The crowd begins to genuinely embrace its unbelief and Jesus' response by growing more and more inscrutable, more and more difficult to understand, more and more difficult to comprehend. The crowd complains they know this Jesus, they know his father, they know his family. Therefore they just don't accept his claims. John 6:41 says: *The Jews then complained about him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And they said, "Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he says 'I have come down from heaven'?"* Again, Jesus responds by telling the crowd that only those chosen by his Father will understand what he's saying.

In John 6:43, it says: *Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."* And so growing even more difficult to understand, Jesus then ups the ante. He says this in John 6:51, he says: *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my*

flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." Well, at this one, the crowd grows even more polarized. They begin to see Jesus not as the useful God that they imagined him to be but as an obtuse and belligerent prophet who is making no sense whatsoever.

In verse 52, it says: *The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* Jesus' response to their unbelief is simply to double down on who he is. This is what he says in John 6:53, it says: *Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

You know, it's hard to adequately picture how profoundly upsetting Jesus' words had to have been not only to the crowd that he was speaking to, but in particular to his disciples. You know, the disciples who were in the crowd were those who had previously been

following Jesus all along, and you know, we have don't know how big the crowd was but if the crowd had numbered in the thousands, then perhaps his disciples numbered somewhere in the hundreds. It is this group that Jesus then directs his attention. And in John 6:60, it says: *Therefore many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"* And you know, it's easy, it's easy at this point to think, well, maybe the disciples were just having a struggle with comprehension, maybe they just didn't get what he was saying, this is tough stuff, this is hard for me to understand, but Jesus was saying something infinitely more difficult than that, and the disciples really -- they really knew that. In fact, the ESV captures it much better. It says this in John 6:60 in the ESV, it says: *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"* Who can listen to this? You see, they might not have understood everything that Jesus was trying to say, but to the extent that they did understand, they were offended. The problem was not one of comprehension; the problem was one of faith. Jesus was successfully deconstructing the false god that they had constructed him to be, and in its place he was proclaiming a God they just could not comprehend. Again, John 6:61: *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the*

Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Well, you know, at this point Jesus asks what is arguably one of the most important questions his disciples will ever hear.

Arguably one of the most important questions you and I will ever hear. It's a question that every Christian at some point in their walk of faith is going to have to grapple with as well. Again, John 6:61: *Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were complaining about this, asked them, "Does this offend you?" He goes on to answer his own question by saying this: "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"* You see, at this point, only a fraction of the gospel had begun to play itself out, and soon to follow, there would be an arrest, there would be a trial, there would be a crucifixion, there would be a burial and then a resurrection and then an ascension; the Son of Man would return to heaven. So Jesus is telling his disciples that they had not yet begun to experience a fraction, a tiny fraction of the Son of Man

and already they are offended.

Now, they had entered into the shallowest end of the pool and they are already drowning, because they're thinking that Jesus was just an ordinary man. They never realized the extent of their ignorance. Let me give you an analogy of how I see this working in my own life. It has to do with Peter Keay who is not here this morning, so I can talk about him. Peter Keay is an excellent, excellent Greek teacher, and Steve Sumnick and Jaysharee Armstrong and myself, we've been taking Greek from him every week now for almost -- almost two years. And I told Peter the other day, I told him that if he had let us know right from the beginning how complex, how difficult, how utterly confounding the rules to this language were, we never, ever would have undertaken trying to learn it. I said to him -- I think it was just last week, I said, Peter, you tricked us. You tricked us into taking this course, so to speak, because you knew if we knew how hard it was, we wouldn't do it. He wooed us into trying to learn Greek by withholding from us how bad, how difficult it could be. And I can safely say after two years of studying Greek, I can fully grasp how ridiculous it is for me to think that I will ever master the Greek language. It's not going to happen, but that's okay. It's been a normally -- it's been enormously good for me to discover my own ignorance, and I have learned some Greek as well on the side, so that's a good

thing. I would recommend highly taking the language, just giving it a shot, but as I said, for me what it's really done, it's given me an insight into the depth of my own ignorance of Greek and what I would have to do to overcome that ignorance. And that is a daunting task, but it is doable. What will never, never be doable, never, is fully comprehending Jesus Christ. We will never begin to fully comprehend the depth of our own spiritual ignorance of who Jesus Christ is and what it is he did for us.

So in effect, Jesus also woos us into his gospel. And he does that knowing that we are children trying to comprehend what is literally incomprehensible. So he tells us things that are beyond comprehension. He tells us we must eat his flesh and we must drink his blood. Now we have the blessing of 2,000 years of insight and understanding to help us make sense of that. You know, we know that as the bread of life, we must take Jesus in, we must assimilate him, He must become part of us, and that makes sense to us. That's reasonable. We can understand that. I doubt very much that made any sense whatsoever to its original hearers. Jesus' hearers were offended by a Jesus they just couldn't understand. But you know, Jesus plainly told them that they were in over their heads. He told them that reason and rationality could not give them what only His Spirit could. This is what he said in verse 63, he said: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at*

all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

You see, when Jesus first spoke of eating his flesh, the crowd could only think of this cannibalistic insanity. Today we have the privilege of having an inkling of what Jesus was getting at. And even though we may understand what Jesus meant by telling us that he was the bread of life, that doesn't mean that we, too, are not confounded with very deep mysteries that can offend us as well. There are so many other aspects to trusting Jesus that leaves our flesh like that crowd 2,000 years ago deeply offended.

So let me repeat Jesus' question from John 6:61. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples complained about this, he said to them, *"Does this offend you?"* So that's my question. My question is does Jesus offend you? And if your answer to the question is a simple "No," if you say, "No, no, Jesus doesn't offend me," I might question how deeply you're asking yourself that question. Jesus is my Lord and my Savior, yet I struggle all the time with the offense of the gospel. I am also offended at the fallen world that I am part of. I am offended as a Christian when I read of little girls being sold into brothels for the pleasure of perverts. I am offended as a Christian when I hear of a young mother of four young kids stricken with cancer leaving a husband to raise the family alone. I'm offended as a Christian when I see people arrested,

brutalized and imprisoned simply for proclaiming the truth of the gospel. I'm offended as a Christian when life just doesn't work out like it's supposed to. There's a part of me that says Jesus, you're supposed to be all powerful. You are sovereign over everything. Somehow your apparent failure to act makes me feel like the disciples must have felt when they were utterly confused and confounded by the Jesus they thought they had figured out. So if you say Jesus doesn't offend me, then you might make me wonder what world you're part of and what Jesus you believe in.

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, I'd like us to take some time to consider which Jesus we are believing in. Is it the Jesus that offended the disciples by being utterly other than what they expected, or is it the Jesus that we trust in no matter how much our flesh is offended, the Jesus who is spiritually discerned.

Again, let me read you Jesus' words in John 6:63: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe."* (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, *"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."*

As the elders distribute the elements, consider also this warning that God gives from 1 Corinthians 11:28, it is this, it 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 see, communion is very, very serious business, and to enter into it as I've said many, many times in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. I've said if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, just pass the elements on, nobody's going to give you a sideways glance, no one's going to think what's wrong with you. Instead they'll think you're wise.

And as I've said, you can make the mistake on the other hand of thinking unless we are spotlessly perfect, we are unworthy to receive communion; and that, too, is a mistake. Being a child of the King does not mean that we don't sin and that we never, never fail. What it means is that when we do fail, we are aware that we have sinned because God's Spirit is within us, convicting us. And

so we grieve as children because we know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, a Father who says this 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 does not mean that we are without sin; it means that when we do sin, we understand we have an advocate with the Father. 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 have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, we are now free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, do not deny yourself the privilege that Jesus has purchased for you.

As you take the elements, take a few minutes and just ask yourself this question: Does Jesus offend me? Take a moment to think on that.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter verse 23 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.

I'd like to take a moment to look at what Jesus said next, because

it is also one of the most important scriptures, I think, in all of the Bible, and it has to do with the offense of believing in Jesus. You see, sometimes life itself challenges us either to believe the gospel or to be offended by it. And whether it's something like the perversion of child slavery or sickness or persecution or simply the struggle to live out our own lives, we all encounter situations that just don't seem to add up. We can all agree with the author of Ecclesiastes who wrote this in Ecclesiastes 8:14, he said: *There is a futility that is done on the earth: There are righteous people who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked people who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile.* You know who wrote that? People wonder who it was actually that wrote that. Well, the real answer is God wrote that. Those are God's words. And whether the offense of believing in Jesus has to do with living in a world where justice often seems delayed or denied or having your own personal struggle with what God has appointed for your life, we still have to deal with reconciling a loving God with a struggle for living. You see, it's one thing to say all things work together for good; it's another thing entirely to have to work that out sometimes minute by minute. You know, the disciples came face to face with the offense of Jesus when he refused to allow them the luxury of creating a God who existed only to take care of their physical needs, when he refused to be a God

who was merely useful, when he said you must eat my flesh and drink my blood, when he offended so many of them that even his disciples have said, "I've had enough" and they left, well, he said that because he knew that the ability to believe in Jesus is also a gift. It's a gift that God alone can give. And so he said in John 6:65: *"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."* After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the 12, *"Do you want to go away as well?"* You see, at this point, Jesus has practically driven everyone away. Even his disciples are deserting him. So he goes to the 12 and he asks the 12 this question: *"Do you want to go away as well?"* May I suggest to you that Jesus doesn't just ask this question of the 12. Every one of us who has embraced faith in Jesus Christ will at some point in our lives be asked this very question: *"Do you want to go away as well?"* You see, the offense of believing in Jesus, whether it's a spiritual offense of being told that my goodness is just not good enough or whether it's a social offense of living in a broken and fallen world where justice is often delayed or denied or whether it's a personal offense of trying to live a life pleasing to Jesus while getting kicked in the teeth. The fact is there will come a time in every believer where that question will loom large: *"Do you want to go away as well?"* And it is this moment, it is this moment that Peter gives the very same answer I know that I've

given. The same answer that all of us who belong to Him are some day, some time going to have to give as well. It's John 6:68: *Simon Peter answered, "Lord, who will we go to? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God!"*

You know what Peter said? Peter said, God, I got no place else to go. There is no place. Have you ever been in that position yourself? Have you ever been so offended spiritually, socially or personally by life itself that you want nothing more than to get up and walk away from this Jesus and his kingdom? Many of us have known people who have done just that. And in fact, anyone who has not been given the gift of faith by God himself is going to eventually find Jesus so offensive and the pressure so great that he or she will walk away.

If you've ever heard how a slaughterhouse works, you get the sense of how and why folks just walk away from the faith. It's kind of like this. See, the animals are put into a pen and the pen has one moving wall pushing towards one closed in wall. The wall just presses in on the animals until the pressure gets so great that one of them opts for the only door that's there, the door that goes into the slaughterhouse itself, and it's a door that leads to slaughter. That's exactly what happens to those who do not have

the gift of faith. The walls begin to close in, the pressure begins to get greater and greater till eventually they opt out through any spiritual, social or personal door they can find, and they literally choose spiritual death, a death that the world dresses up as real life. They choose that rather than bear up under the pressure. And those who have the gift of faith feel the very same pressure that everyone else does, but in the end, they recognize something. They recognize that the only door that they could ever go through is the door of faith. They understand exactly what Peter understood, and they, too, can say with Peter I've got nowhere else to go, and that precise moment and that precise attitude is a gift from God.

I can remember the times in my life when I was tempted to "turn back and no longer walk with him." I know exactly how that pressure felt, but I also know that each and every one of those times it was the grace of God driving me to say "I've got nowhere else to go." I know if I didn't have that grace keeping me, I would be gone by now.

As the elders come forward to distribute the cup, let us consider Jesus and that same question. You know, unlike me, Jesus always had the freedom to go anywhere he wanted. Jesus was flawless, and unlike the first Adam, he was never alone. You see, for all time

he enjoyed the fellowship of the Father and the Holy Spirit. He was not bound by want or by need or by obligation and yet when he chose to fix his love on us, he willingly gave that up. He stepped into time itself, some 33 years before and now by his choosing, he, too, had his choices narrowed to one; he, too, had no where else to go. From a kingdom of infinite trillions of light years across, he came down to one planet in the milky way galaxy to one continent in the Middle East to one city in Jerusalem to one place on Golgotha, and there, too, he voluntarily gave up his freedom to go to be nailed to a cross. And so for six hours, he, too, had nowhere to go. But the difference is when he did that, he was completely and utterly alone. You see, when Peter and the 12 reached that very bottom and the decision to leave started to beckon them, well, they found as I found the grace of God waiting for them, showing them there really was no place else to go. When Jesus reached the place of his sacrifice, he was utterly forsaken and completely alone. Because he was bearing our sin, he had to be cast out from his Father's presence.

Isaiah 53:8 says this: *He was taken away because of oppression and judgment; and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people's rebellion.* See, because he was wounded for our transgressions, we by his stripes are healed. Because he was cut off, we will never

have to be. Because he made a way through his flesh and blood, we can say the words of John 6:68: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the son of the living God."* And so we come to believe but not on our own. John 6:65 says: *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."* Just take a moment and consider the privilege that you have. Consider the privilege that God has purchased for you and consider the price he was willing to pay.

In 1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, verse 25, it says this: *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 time after communion that we call heads, heart and feet. It's where we actually look for a practical application of what it means to remember the Lord Jesus Christ, and I just want to point out that there are three types of people who are struggling with the offense of the gospel. There are those who have not yet gone through it, there are those who have gone through it, and there are those who are right in the middle of it, and I think one of the problems that we have is identifying with not just somebody who is hurting, somebody who is under the offense of either a

social, personal, political or whatever kind of offense they're feeling from the gospel, just trying to work it out in their life, I think we have this sense in our mind, well, I don't have the logic to argue this thing through. God is not looking for lawyers. He's not looking for somebody to represent him. He's very capable of doing that on his own. Other people say, well, I'm not really capable of a good biblical discussion, of having the right scriptures at my fingertips and knowing the right things to say. I don't think that that's necessary as well. I think it's good, and I think that more Bible you know, the better you are, but I think there's a specific thing, it's not logic, it's not knowledge, it's not biblical knowledge. I think what we need, what God is looking for from us is the simple word "empathy." The scripture that really matters here is Romans 12:15 which says: *Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.* It doesn't take any learning, doesn't take any practice, doesn't take any knowledge, doesn't take any skill to weep with somebody. What it takes is empathy. What it takes is using your heart and allowing your heart to be loosed and used by God's Holy Spirit to represent him on earth representing the grief he feels when you are in pain.

We've had a lot of painful circumstances of late, and one of the things that, you know, we were surrounding somebody and praying for

them and trying to uphold them and trying to let them know that we genuinely were in the position of feeling that, and he remarked, and it's a terrible thing that our previous couple of presidents took a term that had real meaning and he bled it of that meaning and that meaning is "I feel your pain." It's a joke now. But the point of it is is what God is asking us to do is just that, to feel somebody else's pain.

You know, there's all kinds of practical things that we are called on to do and there's all kinds of ways to do it, but one of the things that God is calling on us to do is to enter into somebody else's pain. Burst into tears with somebody. Tell them "I ache with you. I know this stinks." You don't need logic for that, you don't need an argument for that, you just simply need to come alongside somebody and represent Christ's heart to them. Just be willing to allow God's Holy Spirit to move you in that way. Let's pray.

Father, I just want to thank you for the incredible gift that you are, and Lord, there's no question in my mind that the gospel offends, Jesus offends, living this life offends, and walking through this life pretending that that doesn't exist will get you nowhere. And Father, I pray that you would give us a community, I thank you that you've given us a community where it's okay to walk

through this life and to bleed on somebody else or to weep and to have other people understand that that's okay. My prayer is that you would give us the grace and the wisdom and the understanding and the ability to weep as well, to rejoice with others but to weep with others, to enter into what others are feeling and to be able to say with absolute sincerity "I feel your pain." I pray for that blessing for each of us, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.