

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

July 7, 2013

Where I Am You Cannot Come

John 7:34-35

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you and praise you for the ultimate gift that you have given to us in the cross, the gift of your son, the gift of the cross that he went to willingly to pay the price of our sins. Father, we just thank you for that. We thank you for this day that you've given us to remember the cross. I pray, Lord, as we open up your word this day, as we open up your book that your Holy Spirit would accompany us, that you would give us the means of not just remembering your cross but of examining our own hearts, examining where we stand in the body of Christ with relationship to your cross, and that you would convict us, speak to us, empower us through it and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as you know, it's the first Sunday of the month and this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ, and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met for one last time with his disciples for a passover supper. Matthew 26:26 describes it this way. 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 then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and to drink the cup to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He then asked them to repeat this remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis and this is what we call "the Lord's table." And we celebrate it once a month by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us, by contemplating what it is he did and by asking the Holy Spirit to examine our consciences, to enable us to find those areas where we have fallen short, those areas of sin, and by confessing those areas, and finally by participating in the elements. John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

We have been following the Gospel of John, and we've thus far worked our way up to the seventh chapter. We've been following a series of confrontations that Jesus is having, and even includes confrontations within his own family. Jesus has told his brothers

that he is not going to go up to the feast of the Tabernacles because he knew if the authorities knew in advance that he was going to be there, they would surely be there waiting to arrest him. Jesus knew everything that was in the heart of man. John 7:1 says: *He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.* So after his brothers leave to go, Jesus covertly decides to attend the festival. And he arrives there and begins to teach in the temple, and as usual, he draws a crowd and as usual, the crowd is just astounded with his authority. Now, this was a mixed crowd. Some people saw Jesus as a good man, there were others there who saw him as a fraud, still there were others who were what we described as "almost persuaded." And as we said last time as one preacher put it, he who is "almost persuaded" is almost saved and to be almost saved is to be entirely lost. Being almost persuaded also meant that the least of distractions, the least of excuses would be enough to cause them to reject Jesus as the Messiah. We see that in John 7:25, it says: *Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."* That was all the excuse they needed. It was all the excuse they needed to be willing to reject Jesus. We know this guy. Heck, we

know this guy. We even know his family. John 7:28 says: *So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."* We spoke about this last time. We said this is a statement almost of disgust, and it is mixed with a heavy dose of satire and even scorn. Jesus is saying you know me? You've got me all figured out. That's the rhetorical question that he's asking.

Just to give you just a tiny slice of what must have been going on in Jesus' mind, I want to take you back to the year 2003. In the year 2003, NASA -- you'll see some slides up there -- NASA was devoting the Hubble telescope to a tiny little speck in the sky. It was a speck about 1/10th the size of the full moon when you look out at an open sky. And they were interested in this speck of sky because it was blank. There was nothing in it. So what they decided to do was they trained the cameras of the Hubble telescope on this blank little spot in the sky for about four months. And after four months, you should see, this is what Hubble saw. That spot was previously thought to be completely blank. Now, you see the dots that are in that image, each dot in that image represents a galaxy. A galaxy contains up to one trillion -- not a million with an "M" or a billion with a "B" -- one trillion stars. There

are about ten thousand of those dots in that tiny little blank speck of sky that Hubble was looking at. Now, understand that the very Jesus that was teaching in that temple, he spoke those stars into being, he hung those stars in the sky, and he gave names to all of those stars, and he was sustaining them moment by moment as he was standing there teaching in the temple. Psalm 147:4 says: *He determines the numbers of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.* All the people around Jesus are insisting to one another, we know this guy, we know his family, we know all about him. There's very little that we don't know about Jesus. So we think how dare Jesus bristle at that kind of thinking. But you see, in this group there were really two different groups. There were two different groups that knew in their heart of hearts that Jesus was special. There was one group that saw Jesus as an existential threat, and there was another group who saw him for who he really was. In John 7:30, it says this, it says: *So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.* This is the first official attempt by the religious leaders to destroy Jesus, the first time

they actually went into action. Now they have basically crossed a bridge. Their hatred of Christ has descended into an official act. It says, *The Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.* Verse 33 says: *Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."* Very strange words that Jesus said, and again, in order to unpack these two lines will take a while. I want to describe for you that Jesus describes the when, the where, the what, and the why and the fact these folks really have no idea who he really is.

So first I want to look at the when. Jesus says, *"I will be with you a little longer."* You know, the feast that Jesus took part in, this feast was taking place in the fall. It would only be a mere six months later in the following spring that Jesus was going to be crucified. But you know, Jesus knew without a doubt, he knew without a doubt that nothing and no one could touch him before his time and that even the contingent of soldiers who had been sent to arrest him, well, they were stymied at his wisdom because it wasn't yet his time. At the end of chapter 7 we have this statement about the soldiers in John 7:44, it says this, it says: *Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" The officers answered, "No one ever*

spoke like this man!"

Now, interestingly enough, when Jesus' time was up, we recall it was the soldiers who would arrest, torture and crucify him. But we know that time was not yet. And you know the same is true for any child of Christ. We can say without any fear of contradiction, we are immortal until the moment that we die. That's true for every single believer. That is to say, each single one of us has an appointed beginning and end to this life and none of us are going to leave at one moment before that appointed end. Psalm 139 says: *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

So next Jesus describes the where. He says, *"Then I am going to him who sent me."* You know, Jesus could have said "I'm going to New Jersey," or "I'm going to the moon" and it would have made as much sense to these folks as this statement. And six months later, Jesus had a similar conversation about going to the Father with his disciples, and in both cases, it's very obvious from the text they had no idea what he was talking about. They just couldn't understand him. You see, the maker and the sustainer of trillions of stars, the very source of the energy of life itself had reduced himself to the form of a man, and that man was trying to

communicate with mere humans. You know, I say this all the time, you get a sense of what Jesus faced, I always say, you know, just try explaining the game of chess to your pet parakeet or your dog or your cat. There's no there there. It's not going to happen. The distance is way too huge. So Jesus knew without miraculous intercession this is a hopeless task, explaining him to them. In fact, six months later as his life and ministry is drawing to a close, Jesus had the exact same frustrating conversation about where he was going with the disciples who, once again, they understand next to nothing. This is what he said, John 16:12, after this conversation is taking place, he said, "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.*" So Jesus goes on to give them the hope that the Holy Spirit is going to come to fill in the missing parts that would make his ministry make sense. And he says in John 16:13, he says: "*When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.*" Jesus is making the same argument that he made in chapter 7 and it didn't matter. Six months later, the disciples still had no idea

what he was talking about. As we go on in the text, verse 17, it says this: *So some of the disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'?" We do not know what he is talking about."* See, they couldn't understand Jesus at the festival and they couldn't understand him six months later when he told them that he was going to the Father.

As the elders come forward to distribute the bread, I would like us to take a moment or so to consider the struggle that the disciples had in understanding Jesus. You know, they were just being honest when they said, "We do not know what he's talking about." You know, if we were honest, there are many, many times when we would have to say that we are confused and disturbed and disappointed in what we think are God's ways with us. But God has already told us in Isaiah 55: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* We think if we could only understand what God is doing, then we can handle just about anything, so why in the world doesn't God make it a little more clear? Again, John 7:33: *Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, then I*

am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." I can't argue with someone who says that's not very clear. So what do we do about it? You know, we have at all times wondered what the disciples wondered when Jesus said things to them that they simply could not understand. And for us, that's the time to go to the cross. See, at the time that he made that statement, only Jesus knew that the path to the Father who had sent him led through the cross. All of his followers were bewildered and confused by Christ's behavior before the cross. You know, it was only after the Holy Spirit descended that they fully began to comprehend his love and his sacrifice. And whether it's health or finances or relationships, we too by the power of the same Holy Spirit, we have to go to the same cross for those same struggles. And you know, the scripture constantly draws us there. Romans 8:32 says: *He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* You see, God here is using the lesser to greater argument, basically saying hey, look, if I gave you a house, don't you think I'd give you the keys to the house as well? You know, if I gave you a meal, don't you think I'd give you the utensils to eat the meal with as well? What God is saying is if I gave you my only begotten son, would I not also give you everything you need to live this life? You know, sometimes that's a very hard truth to believe. We know Job remained faithful to God

in spite of severe trials that tested him, he clung to his faith for dear life. Many of us have to do the exact same thing. You know, when I am tempted to doubt the love of God in Christ, I just try to imagine the maker and sustainer of the stars, I imagine him having this conversation with this crowd around him, this belligerent, ignorant, arrogant crowd, "We know this guy," and he just tolerates it. Furthermore, I imagine the maker and sustainer of the stars, the maker of a billion galaxies stripped naked and nailed to a cross. Picture God saying to me at that point, "I did this for you. Are you therefore now willing to trust me in --" and then you fill in the blanks. The cross is where we go when we don't have it figured out.

So we consider the love of Christ. We also want to consider the warning that God gives us about communion itself. Let me just read to you 1 Corinthians 11:28. 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 drink 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, I say this each month. Communion, I say, is an 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, just do not take the element, just set it down there and do not participate. Nobody's going to look at you, nobody's going to think oh, there's something really wrong with that person. And I also say that on the other hand, we can make the mistake of thinking that unless we're spotlessly perfect we're not worthy to receive communion, and that too is a mistake. You see, being a child of the King does not mean that we don't sin and that we never fail. What it does mean is that when we do fail, we have the Spirit of God inside us convicting us of sin. We grieve as children who know we have a father who longs to forgive and cleanse us. But we understand what God says in 1 John 1:9, he says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin. What it means is that we understand that when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Again, 1 John 2:1, it 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.* Because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, we are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, do not deny yourself this privilege that God has given us.

I want us to just take a moment to focus in on Jesus Christ, maker of the stars. Just picture that tiny little dot in the universe that was blank, that everybody thought was empty, ten thousand galaxies of up to a trillion stars per galaxy made by the very one who was standing in that temple, the one who the crowd is saying, oh, we know this guy, we know his family. What a savior. What humility that he would tolerate that arrogance, that ignorance. Consider what this God has done for us.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 23rd verse says this: *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.

We've looked at the when and the where of Jesus' strange statement: *"I will be with you a little longer and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."* The when was a mere six months that Jesus would still remain before he was crucified. The where was that he was going to the kingdom of his heavenly Father and he was going there by way of the cross. The what is directed towards verse 34 which says, *"You will seek me and you will not find me."* You know, if somebody wants to go to the Bible and find the

contradiction in the Bible, this might be a good place to start because I think we all know the other scriptures that stand out there, particularly Luke 11:9, it says this: *"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find."* Well, in our text this morning Jesus seems to be saying the exact opposite. In verse 34, he says: *"You will seek me and you will not find me."* So have we found our contradiction? Is this the place to go to that we have to be fearful of? The answer is no, and I think you understand that and the reason why it is no is because we understand that there is no one who truly, truly seeks Christ who doesn't find him. However, there are myriads of people who seek what they think Christ can give them without actually seeking Christ. Jesus specifically identified many in the crowds who were following him as not being interested in him per se but being interested in what they could get from him, something as prosaic as food. He said in John 6:26, he says: Jesus answered them, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."* You know, there are many today who are thinking that they are seeking Christ when in reality they are really seeking some other benefit that they believe he can supply. There are people who come to church not because they're seeking Christ but because they're seeking some kind of an identity, some kind of spiritual peace, some kind of spiritual security, maybe a social group that has values similar to

theirs or maybe a place that they think they can go to to be on God's good side. Jesus demanded of us far, far more than that. He said in Matthew 10:27: *"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. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* You see, these crowds that surrounded Jesus, they really had no interest in that level of commitment. Jesus had been surrounded by crowds that numbered in the tens of thousands, and the vast majority of that crowd, they were not seeking Jesus. In fact, when push came to shove, virtually all of them deserted him. Many in that crowd made up the crowd that said, "Crucify him" or "May his blood be on us and our children." You have to remember that Jesus knew the inside of the heart of every single person he encountered. He knew the people that he was dealing with, and they revealed the what of the state of their hearts and their response to Jesus in our text this morning.

In John 7:34, it says this, Jesus is saying, *"You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."* Verse 35 says: *The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he*

mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and 'Where I am you cannot come'?" Now, this is not a legitimate question that the Jews had raised. This was a sneering, mocking reference to Jesus' failure to move the crowds any more. What they were saying was in effect Jesus, you've utterly failed among us Jews. Perhaps you need to go out to the Dispersion and see if you can get some Greeks to follow you. Like I said, Jews knew exactly who he was talking to. In fact, he had the exact same dialogue of the deaf in the next chapter with the exact same results. If you go forward to John 8:21, it says: *So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come."* So the Jews said, *"Will he kill himself, since he says 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?"* And obviously this is mockery. This is them sneering and mocking Jesus. Verse 23: *He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."* So Jesus here is speaking directly to the false seekers, and he tells them that their seeking was in vain and they will die in their sins, and then he tells them the last part, the worst part, the why false seeking is so devastating part. He says, *"Where I'm going you cannot come."* Now, that's not a sentiment that you hear very often these days. In fact, it's an extremely unpopular sentiment.

John Piper had a very compelling caveat to add to the discussion that often takes place today about hell, and many commentators have said and I have said that the only thing worse than hell for unbelievers would be heaven, that God demonstrates his ultimate respect for individuals by giving them the heart of what they actually desire and that is really to be apart from God. And I believe that. J.I. Packer writes: "Scripture sees hell as self-chosen. Hell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice. All receive what they actually choose, either to be with God forever, worshiping him, or without God forever, worshiping themselves." I put it this way, if you have no desire in your lifetime to associate or be with God, then what makes you think that the act of dying is going to change your fundamental nature so that what you found repulsive in life is suddenly going to be attractive in death? I've said hell is just a continuation of the rejection of the God you rejected in life. John Piper says there's a danger in that perspective. Here's what he says the danger is. He says the danger is that it almost makes hell seem like an attractive choice that people make. Piper says this: "So when a person chooses against God and therefore, de facto chooses hell -- or when he jokes about preferring hell with his friends over heaven with boring religious people -- he does not know what he is doing. What he rejects is not the real heaven. (Nobody will be boring in

heaven), and what he "wants" is not the real hell but the tolerable hell of his imagination. What sinners want is not hell but sin. That hell is the inevitable consequence of unforgiven sin does not make the consequence desirable. It is not what people want -- certainly not what they "most want." Wanting sin is no more equal to wanting hell than chocolate is equal to wanting obesity. Or wanting cigarettes is equal to wanting cancer. Beneath this misleading emphasis on hell being what people "most want" is the notion that God does not "send" people to hell. But this is simply unbiblical. God certainly does send people to hell. He does pass sentence, and he executes it. Indeed, worse than that. God does not just send, he throws. *"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown, (Greek eblethe) into the lake of fire."* Very sobering words.

This morning we remember that the maker and sustainer of the stars became a man to rescue us from that fate. God became a man, lived the life we were supposed to live and then died the death we all deserve so that he could offer up that perfect life in exchange for my sinful life just so that hell could not have a claim on us. And you know, if the maker of the sun and the moon and the stars would consent to being stripped and beaten and mocked and flogged and crucified to save us, do you think what he's saving us from is something worth avoiding? Having paid the greater price, will he

not also give us the lesser things that we truly need to live this life on earth? Again, Romans 8:32: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

As the elders come forward to distribute the cup, I want to consider these words of Jesus, these awful words: "Where I am going or where I am you cannot come." You know, it's easy to come up with a theology that eliminates the idea of hell. Just ask Rob Bell or a host of our popular evangelical authors who essentially eliminated hell from the menu. However, it is virtually impossible to come up with a theology that eliminates hell and still remain faithful to the clear compelling evidence of scripture. Let me read to you Jesus' own words. This is from Luke 13:22. It says: *He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord open to us,' then he will answer to you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from.*

Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out."

We ate your food, we drank your wine, we even listened to you teach in our streets. What's the contemporary version of that? We came to church, we prayed the prayers, we sang the songs, we even gave money in the collection. What more do you want from us, Jesus? He wants your entire life. He wants your heart, he wants your soul, he wants your mind, and he wants your strength. In Matthew 10:38, he said: *"And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* See, what God wants? People say, "What does he want?" He wants me getting up every single morning saying, "Lord, this day belongs to you, and I want every single thing that I do in it to advance your kingdom and to glorify your name." The problem is many people think that's -- well, that's what the Christian superstars do. That's what the holy, godly, saintly types do. We all have a tendency to put those kind of people up on a pedestal. And to do that does two very, very damaging things. Number one, it elevates those folks far, far more than they are comfortable with, but far more dangerously, it also defines them as exceptional. It's also another way of saying

that they are abnormal. See, by doing that, we can still reserve our own commitment to Christ as average, reasonable, normal. It's all the rest of us who are normal and it's really just these holy types that are exceptional. But here's the question: What if the exceptional types that we put on the pedestal are really just normal kingdom citizens? Where does that put us? We can sing the song "Demands my all," but can we say it and can we believe it? I mean, is the bare minimum all that we can muster? I mean isn't that the very attitude that the crowds surrounding Jesus had? They were shocked, they were blown away that Jesus wouldn't accept a level of commitment that was based not on giving but receiving. Jesus, we ate your food, we drank your wine, we even sat there and listened to you teach. We sought you not for who you really were but for what you could supply to us, and Jesus said, "*You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.*"

This is the time that God has given to us to examine ourselves, a time given to question our thoughts, our motives, our deeds, and to invite God into the process by asking his Holy Spirit to convict us of sin. Take a moment to do that. Take a moment so that those words, those awful words "*Where I am you cannot come,*" that you will never hear those. 1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 25th verse says this, it 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." Take and drink.

This is the part that I call heads, heart, and feet. It's where we try to apply something practical to what it means to remember Christ. And you know, we've been speaking about hell and we know that hell is an incredibly awful doctrine. It's not the thing that people want to speak about, it's not something that they even want to keep inside their heads, and yet it is incredibly important for people to have a sense of hell and the reality of hell. And the reason why is as soon as hell goes out of your consciousness, the urgency to share the gospel goes with it. Because the fact is, we all understand on a base level our friends, our relatives, our children, our parents, all those without Christ are going to hell. All those without Christ are going to be thrown into the lake of fire. That's a horrific thought. And believe me, I don't think that you can argue anybody into hell -- into heaven. Out of hell and into heaven. People used to use fire and brimstone, and I think that works to an extent, people are terrified for a day or two but it goes away. You cannot argue somebody into heaven; you cannot argue somebody into hell. But by God's grace you might be able to pray somebody into heaven. You know, I tell people all the time, there is no one who has access to the inside of your loved one's head except your loved one and God. The power that you have

in prayer is that you get invited inside God's heart, and you get to see God move inside people's heads. This is sort of a long-winded commercial for POPs. On Wednesdays, the second Wednesday of every month, we meet, and POPs started out as Parents of Prodigals, it's expanded to others who have loved ones, doesn't matter who they are, what relationship it is, others who have loved ones who care greatly that these folks are going to hell, and so they bring these folks before God, and we pray and we meet and we share with one another what God has been doing. We've seen some extremely powerful things that God has done in this group of I think it's 28 folks that we pray for each Wednesday. And so I would ask you, if you have a loved one and a desire for that loved one to escape the fires of hell -- and who doesn't? -- come to the meeting. One thing that we tried to do is say if you want to be in this, you have to come. You can't just give us a list of names and say, "Here, pray for these folks." You have to invest, you have to be part of this, and as part of the group and as a group, we all understand, we all understand the ache and the pain of having loved ones who have rejected the gospel, who have children or parents or close relatives or friends. So I would say to you, if you can make it, that would be wonderful. But don't throw out the idea of hell because it's such an awful thought to contemplate. It is the driving force behind prayer, it is the driving force behind evangelism, it is the driving force behind getting the gospel out,

because the good news is predicated on the fact that there's bad news. And so I would say, resist the temptation to ignore the doctrine of hell. Let's pray.

Father God, I just thank you for your grace, I thank you for the enormity of your sacrifice. I just -- I cannot imagine the maker of the stars naked and nailed to a cross, but that's the truth. And I think of the awfulness of what you went through and the price that you're willing to pay and I see it reflecting on the awfulness of separation from you and what hell is all about. So Lord, as painful as hell is, I pray that you would emblazon it on our consciences. I pray that we would not be able to push it out despite the fact that so many popular preachers are minimizing it, but that we would see it as a very present awful reality and that it would serve to motivate us, to move us to pray daily for those that we know are walking that line between life and death. I pray that you would give us the ability to remember and to call to mind and to see in the lives of these people actual results, because I believe, Lord, the most important aspect of bringing people to Christ is prayer. So give us the means and the motivation to pray, Lord. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.