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

**August 4, 2019**

**Communion Sunday - Kissing Your Faith Goodbye**

**John 10:27-29**

**Prayer:** *Father, once again we just want to come before you to thank you that we can put our complete faith and trust in you, that you are the sovereign God who rules and controls and reigns and so we're thankful for that, Lord, especially at times like this. Father, we want to come before you this morning to just pray as this is our communion Sunday, that you would in a particular way, in a special way, and have it this time that your Holy Spirit would guide us, guard us, watch over us, give us the means to understand anew and at a more deep level just what it is you've done for us on the cross, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, you know, it's once again, as I've said, it's the first Sunday of the month and this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And to do that we look at a scripture describing the last time that Jesus celebrated a Passover supper with his disciples and that is Matthew 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." 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 drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He then asked them to repeat this remembrance of his sacrifice 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 meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our own lives where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing that sin, 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."*

Well, as you know, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John and we're nearing the very end but this Sunday we're going to take a slightly different tack. I want to look at a statement that Jesus made that has a particular application to our circumstances this morning. This morning I want to speak about a doctrine known

as "the perseverance of the saints." It's the doctrine that says that you cannot lose your salvation. Now, you may have heard of this doctrine described as eternal security. You may have heard of it as "once saved, always saved," or perhaps the fifth point of the five points of Calvinism, the "P" in the acrostic, "tulip." Well, the technical definition of the perseverance of the saints according to the Westminster Confession of Faith is this, and again this is 400-year old language, it's ancient language, you have to pay close attention. It says this: "They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." That's the ancient version. The popular description of this doctrine, according to R.C. Sproul is: "If you have it -- that is, if you have genuine faith and are in a state of saving grace -- you will never lose it. If you lose it, you never had it." And the scriptural basis for this is, among other scriptures, what Jesus said in *John 10:27*, he said 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. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*" Or *John 6:37* which says: "*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have*

come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

Now, there's a reason why I'm raising this particular issue this morning, and just to kind of see where we're at here, I just want to do a quick survey. Just raise your hand if you've ever heard the name "Joshua Harris." Okay. So there's quite a few of us here. If you don't know, Joshua Harris was an icon of the evangelical faith. At age 20 he wrote the book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. It's right up there, you've seen that, many of you. If you haven't seen it, it was a million seller book that he wrote at age 20. It turned out to be controversial because of its conservative slant towards the idea of dating itself. Harris spoke at length about the negative aspects of dating and the positive aspects that purity and courtship had on his marriage and family. And he followed that book up with a number of other books, one of which he we still use for new church members, entitled "*Why Church Matters*," and it's really, it's an outstanding little book that in very simple language speaks to the necessity of joining and being an active member of a local body of Christ. Well, in his mid-20s, Josh became the lead pastor of a large Sovereign Grace Church in Maryland and while there he continued to write and be very active

in the Gospel Coalition, which we are very involved in.

And the reason why I'm speaking about Josh is that two weeks ago he came out with an Instagram post announcing that he and his wife were divorcing. That bombshell was followed a week later by this one as described in *Christianity Today*, which says this: "A week after announcing his separation from his wife, the author of the bestselling book that told an entire generation of young Christians not to date has made the shocking admission that he has abandoned the faith. Joshua Harris, the pastor who wrote the controversial *I Kissed Dating Good-Bye* dropped the bombshell in an Instagram post on Friday that he is no longer a Christian. The post was intended as an appendix to the update about his separation posted to Instagram a week earlier in which he said he and his wife of 21 years, Shannon, had undergone some "significant changes" and decided to continue their life together "as friends." In Friday's post, he revealed that some more information had been "left out" of that announcement. The information that I had left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is 'deconstruction', the biblical phrase is 'falling away.' By all measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I'm not there

now."

I would be lying if I said it wasn't upsetting or even frightening to hear of an iconic figure in the evangelical movement giving up his faith, and it's frightening because deep down each of us is thinking if this could happen to someone as strong as this guy was, what's it to stop this from happening to me? So I want to spend some time this morning examining what Jesus meant when he said, *"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."*

So the question we want to ask this morning is did something or someone snatch Joshua Harris out of Christ's hand? Or did Joshua Harris actually convince himself that he was in God's hand when he never actually was. The Bible says should Harris never repent and return, that it was because he was never in Christ's hand in the first place. See, God says when you are one of his, it is absolutely permanent. When you are one of his, you are sealed by his Holy Spirit. *Ephesians 1:13* says: *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.* Joshua Harris apparently never had that

seal. And the frightening thing is that people can achieve even lofty heights within the Christian community and still be running on human will rather than divine power. Time and time again the disciples warned us to check ourselves to determine whether or not we, too, are kidding ourselves. Paul said in *2 Corinthians 13*: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* Peter said: *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.* And Jesus himself gave us a warning of the possibility of disastrously miscalculating our calling and election. I mean, he spoke of people who genuinely saw themselves not just as followers of the faith but as superstars within the faith who had convinced themselves that by virtue of their religious deeds and mighty works that they were thoroughly grounded in the faith when they were not grounded at all. Jesus says these terrible words in *Matthew 7*, he says: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?' and then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

You have to contrast these words that Jesus just said with our text this morning, in which he says: *"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."*

You see, the difference between lost and found is the difference between being known by Christ and not being known. And the reason why God put it that way is because neither you, nor I, nor anyone else in the community of faith got there by efforts on their own. I mean, they got there because God had chosen to know them before the foundations of the earth had ever been laid. *Ephesians 1:3* says God *has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.* The reason why Jesus can say for certain that no one will ever be able to snatch his sheep out of his hands is because he's the one who put them there in his hands in the first place. We call that the doctrine of election, and it's always been controversial. For 400 years it's been controversial.

In 1619 the Synod of Dort was called in order to resolve the question back then. This is the way they resolved it, and again, you have to pay close attention because this language is 400 years old but this is what the Synod of Dort said about election. It says: *"Now election is the immutable -- and immutable just means unchangeable -- election is the immutable purpose of God, whereby,*



before the foundations of the world were laid, he has, according to the most free good pleasure of his own will, of mere grace, chosen out of the whole human race, (fallen by its own fault from its primeval integrity into sin and destruction), a certain number of persons, neither better nor more deserving than others but with them involved in a common misery, unto salvation in Christ; whom even from eternity he had appointed Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation; and therefore he has decreed to give them unto him to be saved." What those words are saying is, what they were saying is out of the whole human race, according to his good pleasure, God chose a certain number of people, neither better nor worse than anybody else, neither more or less deserving than anyone else, and that he chose them to give to Christ to be saved. And we who love the Lord Jesus Christ are the "they" that the Synod of Dort was speaking about. I mean we love God as the epistle of John says in *1 John 4:19: because he first loved us.* And he first loved us before giving us as a gift to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't know if it's disconcerting to you, at first when you start thinking about it, wait a minute, I'm my own person. I was given as a -- I'm a gift? I'm a gift that was given by God? Yes, that's exactly what God says, you are a gift that God gave to his Son. This is not something the Bible just kind of suggests, it's

something that states unequivocally over and over again. I mean, it's astounding how many references there were in scripture to the idea that the elect are gifts given by God, the Father, to his Son. *John 6:37: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."* Verse 39: *"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."* *John 10:27: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."* *John 17*, Jesus's high priestly prayer to his Father, he says: *"For you granted him authority over all people -- he's referring to himself -- he says: "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him."* Then in verse 6 he says: *"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."* I mean it's almost as if God wanted to make emphatically certain the notion that we are believers only because of what God has done, not because of what we have done. I mean God purposed before time had even begun to give his Son a vast number of people who would be here on earth for the express purpose of glorifying God by being that very gift. Jesus's dialogue with his Father reflects the idea that God has gifted his

Son with the most precious gift he could ever give him, and that is creatures created in God's own image.

Jesus, shortly before he died, this is his high priestly prayer, he's pouring out his heart to his Father and he speaks to him about the gift that the disciples were. He says in *John 17:6*: "*They were yours; you gave them to me.*" We all know the very first creature Adam rebelled and he so polluted every subsequent son and daughter of Adam and that they were all by nature rebels against their Creator. We also know that God gathered up twelve of these rebel creatures and they were known as the disciples and that he gave them as gifts to his Son. And Jesus took full responsibility of these gifts, these creatures, and he took responsibility in his prayer and he singles out the one disciple who failed. Listen to what he says to his Father. Speaking of the disciples, he says: "*While I was with them, I protected them*" -- again, he's talking about the gifts that he was given. These are human beings -- "*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name that you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*" I mean Jesus is obviously referring to Judas who happened to be one of the twelve who happened to be the one who betrayed him, and he's declaring that even his betrayal by a good friend was not the result of Jesus's own failure to protect the gifts that he had been given,

but rather a fulfillment of prophecy from scripture. In fact that scripture was originally prophetically uttered by David centuries before this. David said in *Psalm 41*, he said: *Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.* David had no idea at the time, he didn't realize he was uttering a prophecy concerning the actions of Judas, something that would actually take place a thousand years in the future. And Jesus, speaking to his disciples, says: *"I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'* I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am."  
See, just as David had prophesied over a thousand years before, Jesus was sharing his bread with this trusted friend who was going to betray him. And the only reason he expressed this to his disciples was so that they would eventually understand that nothing, nothing about the cross was accidental or mistaken. I mean that's why Jesus said, *"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am."*

What's the point? Well, the point is God is never taken by surprise by any action done by any of us, including Joshua Harris's. And he still poured out his love on Joshua Harris as well by giving him his many gifts, talents and abilities. And at

this point, to no surprise to God, Joshua has elected to reject the author of those gifts. But understand, these defections are no surprise to God. In *1 John 2* God says: *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.* See, the apostle John made it very clear, anyone who departs from the faith does so because they were never really grounded in it in the first place.

Speaking about this idea of antichrist, *Baker's New Testament Commentary* says: "Notice that in this well-known passage about the antichrist John writes the plural of 'antichrist.' He tells the readers that many antichrists have come. In light of the immediate context, we see that persons who love the world and its pursuits have placed themselves in opposition to Christ and therefore are called antichrists." So what he's saying is John describes antichrist as persons who are so "pro world," that they become "anti Christ." So we ask could that describe Joshua Harris? Well, the article in *Christianity Today* goes on to say this of Joshua: "His announcement will shock many further still with its inclusion

of an apology to the LGBTQ+ community for refusing to affirm their place in the church and marriage equality. This is his words, this is Josh's words: "Martin Luther said that the entire life of believers should be repentance. There's beauty in that sentiment regardless of your view of God," he continued. "I have lived in repentance for the past several years -- repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few. But I specifically want to add to this list now: To the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me."

Well, one commentator, Rod Dreher who happens to be the religion editor for the *New York Times* noted that at least Joshua had the integrity to realize that there's absolutely no way that he could embrace marriage equality and the LGBTQ community and still maintain that the Bible he used to believe in was true. That's something hundreds of evangelical churches have folded on already. In fact, Dreher thought it was more honorable that Joshua Harris abandoned the entire Bible wholesale rather than try to pick it

apart piece by piece. This is what Dreher said, he says: "I have incomparably more respect for Harris for walking away from the faith entirely than bending and twisting it. You can't reconcile Christianity with the Sexual Revolution. If you can make the Bible say that the Sexual Revolution is ordained by God, then you can make it say just about anything. The rock of faith would indeed be made of Silly Putty. There will be a generation of Christians -- Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox -- who try to live within that contradiction, but their rationalizations won't stick. There's just too much in Scripture and Tradition to counter it."

So whether it's love of the world, whether it's a desire to appear "woke" or even pressured from his peers, the bottom line is that Joshua's love of the world has eclipsed any love that he's had for the kingdom. So we say to ourselves, how does that happen? Well, here's a warning according to God. He says this in *1 John 2:15*. He says: *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life -- is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

Thinking about all of this, there's one thing I know I can

guarantee for you and that is that Joshua Harris didn't wake up one morning and decide that the Christianity that he embraced the night before was suddenly false and no longer worthy of belief, because what we do know about the enemy is that he almost always works incrementally. You know it's been years since Josh left the church that he pastored in Maryland to go to seminary, and that apparently started him on a downward spiral. When I first heard about this, I read everything I could about Josh just to find out what in the world that was going on and I read some interviews that he gave over a year ago that indicated back then that he was struggling with his faith. I'm sure the enemy was only too happy to help out because that's how he works. The enemy always, always starts out with a whisper. And if anything, he is patient.

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, I'd like to just ask you to take some time to consider the pathway that Joshua Harris has taken and ask yourself if you might not be looking down the very same road. And as at elders distribute the bread, consider this warning that God gives concerning communion. This is from *1 Corinthians 11*. 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.* As I say each month, communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. God has killed people for that. Understand that. If you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled with your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just pass the elements on. As I said, nobody's going to think you're strange or odd. They may in fact think you wise.

And as I often point out on the other hand, you can make the mistake of thinking that unless you're absolutely perfect, you're not worthy to receive communion, and the enemy loves that mistake just as well. Because being a child of the King does not mean that you never sin and that you never fall. It means that we recognize that salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by being good. And I quote this each time. I'm hoping at some point you guys will have this memorized, the Dane Ortlund quote, because it sums it up so well. He says, "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." And of course that also means we are aware that when we fail, we are aware

that we've sinned and the reason why we're aware that we've sinned is because we have the Spirit of Christ living within us, convicting us. And so we grieve. We also know that we have a Father who longs to love and forgive us, who says in *1 John 1:19*: *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 you're flawless, it means you understand that when you do sin you have an advocate with the Father who speaks on your behalf. As *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And that's the whole point. That's the reason why we're able to be here. We have a foreign alien righteousness. It's not ours. It belongs to Jesus. He's given it to us. And because he's given it to us, we are free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you because he lived the life we were supposed to live and then died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy to partake in his table, so that we could be gifted from the Father to the Son, understanding that the Son loses none of his gifts. So just think on that for a moment.

*1 Corinthians 11:23* says: *For I received from the Lord what I also*

*delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Take, and eat.*

So I guess my question this morning is: Why shouldn't I be terrified at this? I mean, if Joshua Harris can walk away from his faith, how do I know that anyone's faith is safe? And more importantly, how do I know that my faith is safe? Well, the one thing that you have to understand in all of this is that if you love Jesus, it's not because of something you did in the first place. *We love him because he first loved us.* And when Jesus tells us that he calls his sheep by name and that they follow him and that no one can snatch them out of his hand, he's not being poetic or obtuse, he is stating cold, hard fact. I mean we quote *Ephesians 2:8-9* all the time: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* And we quote it perhaps not realizing how critical that little statement buried right in the middle of it is, *"it is the gift of God."* That doesn't mean that God has somehow turned us all into robots who blindly follow him because we have no choice. What it means is that God has opened our eyes and enlightened our hearts as to what is the most glorious, precious and lovely thing in all of existence

and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem is people can substitute all kinds of religious things for the love of Jesus, and they can have no love at all in their hearts for him but feel safe and satisfied that they go to church almost every week, that they do religious things, that they adopt conservative views. If that's all you got, then eventually and permanently 1 John, what he predicted, will take place. You'll go out from us because you were never of us.

So how do you know where you stand? Again, let me repeat Paul's plea. This is *2 Corinthians 13*, he says: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* So how do you do that? Well, first thing you do is you ask yourself this incredibly important question. The question is: Do I love Jesus? Not just any Jesus. There are thousands of Jesuses out there. Anyone that people can conjure up. There's thousands of idols who name themselves Jesus. There's only one Jesus who's the Jesus of Scripture. And so you have to ask yourself: Is that the Jesus that I love and is he the highest love that I have? Not that I've ever achieved that practical application of that, but do I know in my heart of hearts that the one most worthy of the highest praise and adoration is Jesus. I mean if you know that in your heart of

hearts, then you, like all of us, are struggling to put first things first, to make Jesus the Lord of your life. And what matters in all of this is that critical word "struggle." You see, God in his mercy has made the criterion for salvation a matter of the heart. *Romans 10:9* says: *Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

See, if you believe in your heart, then the very last thing you would ever want is to walk away from such a Savior like Joshua Harris just did. I mean I tell people all of the time, I'm approached by people who are fearful of the fact that they might lose their faith. And I tell them that one of the most important signs that you really are losing your faith gets right to the matter of the heart. You know how you can tell you're losing your faith? You don't care. You just don't care any more. God in his mercy has made it such that those who walk away from the faith inevitably do so not out of an anguished heart that can no longer reconcile their faith with their reason or their understanding but much more so out of a heart that no longer finds Jesus worthy of everything. I mean, I've met numbers of people who at one point had this incredible passion for Christ and who later on just walked

away from the faith. Every single one of them did so because they no longer cared enough about Jesus to aim their lives toward him, and some arrived at that place bitterly rejecting what they saw as an oppressive and limiting worldview, some of them just slowly faded away and others, just like the rich young ruler, did so with no little sadness. I think that's exactly what's happened with Josh Harris.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I want you to consider how Josh concludes his very public post. And again, I'm making this public because he made this public. This is what he said:

"To my Christian friends, I'm grateful for your prayers. Don't take it personally if I don't immediately return calls. I can't join in your mourning. I don't view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful. I believe with my sister Julian that 'all shall be well in all manner of things shall be well.'"

See, Josh would seem to be able to walk away from Jesus with sadness and hope as easily as he walked away from his marriage of 21 years to his wife. And he claims that even though they are divorcing, they're going to remain best of friends, and I'm sure he wants to be best of friends with Jesus. But he's excited about the

new direction that his life is taking him, this new direction puts Jesus anywhere but front and center. I mean Joshua is not at all grief-stricken over the fact that he's really announced two different divorces, one from his wife and one from his Lord. And he said by his own words, he feels very much alive and awake and hopeful. That's precisely what the enemy wanted for Josh right from the beginning. And by making it public, the enemy hopes to crush the faith of many who put their faith more so into people like Josh than they ever did in Jesus.

And so I mean this sincerely, I pray for Joshua Harris. I think it was Tim Keller that once said that he was surprised that people who walk away from their faith saying their doubts got the best of them, they never seemed to doubt their doubts. And I just wonder if Joshua Harris has ever asked himself in the last few days what if this decision is not the best one I ever made but the very worst. And so I pray that Joshua Harris ask himself that question, and I know, that door is still open. As long as Josh Harris breathes, that door is still open. I mean it was open when David committed adultery and set up the murder of his general. It was open when Peter denied Christ three times. It was open when Paul set about butchering Christians. And it's still open for Joshua. And should he come back, we will celebrate. But should he not come back, it's not because he's mourning something that has been taken

away from him, it's because he's relieved that something he never truly believed in has finally been lifted away. And I'd be lying if I didn't say this type of repudiation of faith is upsetting to many and frightening to consider.

And so as we are about to take the cup this morning, I want each of us to take this opportunity to ask ourselves where we find ourselves on our own individual faith journeys. See, the bottom line is this, if Jesus Christ does not occupy the highest place in your heart, then whatever does occupy that place, whether it's family or career or success or health or money, then that is really your god, and you're just a future Joshua Harris waiting to happen. And understand, I'm not saying you have to live a perfect Christian life. What I'm saying is if you have the Spirit of Christ within you, then pleasing Him matters more than anything else. And if that's not the case, I just beg you to be honest with yourself and honest to God, because the good news in all of this is you can still cry out to the God of all mercy for a heart that longs for Christ and kingdom and God says: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."* So take a moment to ask yourself: Where am I? Am I among those who have been given as gifts from the Father to the Son?

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same manner he also took the cup*



*after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take, and drink.*

I typically end our communion service with head, heart, hands and feet, which is a practical understanding of how is it that we are remembering Christ. And the most practical thing that I could ask of any of us this morning is that we spend some time examining our faith. *2 Corinthians 5:17* says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* So I want us all to ask ourself a few questions. Are you a new creation in Christ? Have you examined your motives? Have you examined your heart? Have you examined your life? Can you ask yourself one simple question: Is Jesus Christ the most important thing in your life? Because if he's not, whatever is in that slot is your god. And so I ask that you would take this time this morning to ask God to reveal to you if there is something else occupying that slot. If there's something else that really is your god, if you're not a future Joshua Harris waiting to happen. And here's the great news in all of this, communion is a time for self-reflection, communion is the time where you're trying to do business with God, where you're trying to be honest with God. It's a time where you really want to take that time and ask God, show me. Show me if I'm kidding myself. Speak to my heart. There's

still time. There's still time to get this right. And believe me, if you have questions, if you want to work through some of these things, we'd be happy to help you in any way that we can, just stay afterwards. But for now I just want to lead us in a prayer of introspection.

*Father God, we come before you this morning deeply, deeply saddened and hurt and perhaps even frightened by a defection of one of our leaders. Lord, this does not sit well. It's frightening. And we want to come before you this morning to take this opportunity to do what Romans 8:28 says: All things work together for good, and we want this to be worked together for good, and the good that we want in all of this is that you would take this time to ask each of us where we are on our faith journey. Lord, have we substituted something else besides you as the Lord of our life? Are we kidding ourselves? Are we simply saying, well, I go to church, I do religious things, I try to pray occasionally, I -- I'm a conservative. Lord, are those things the things that occupy that slot in our heart that belongs to you and you alone? Father, I pray that you would touch each of us by the power of your Holy Spirit this morning, that you would cause each of us to ask ourselves the deep, deep questions, am I really your son? Am I really a child of God? And, Lord, if I'm not, speak to me, give me the ability to hear my own folly. Give me the ability not to swat*

away something because I've grown so defensive that I can't really hear what your Holy Spirit is trying to say. Lord, if I'm not there, speak to me this morning. I pray that you would give each and every one of us an assurance that Jesus truly is Lord of their lives, and if there isn't that assurance, that you would speak again to hearts, that they would cry out to you, that they would have the Spirit of Christ within them that makes that a reality. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.