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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion Sunday

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, I just want to again, I thank you for just the incredible gift that we are enjoying right now. Lord, we are sitting freely in a place where around the world that's not the case. And so we are grateful that we can gather together, that we can worship you, that we can again open your book freely. I pray again this day, Lord, that you would give us the grace and the insight and the presence of your Holy Spirit so that we can open your book and gain meaning that's of permanent value from it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well it's once again, this is the first Sunday of the month, this is the Sunday that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night that he died, before he died, he met with his disciples for the last time celebrating a Passover supper with them. It's recorded in *Matthew 26*, which says this: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."* And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying,

"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and blood, then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis and that's what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month, some folks celebrate it once a week, some folks celebrate it every other month, it's up to each individual. But we do so by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, then we examine ourselves and by doing that we ask the Holy Spirit to point out areas where he's convicting us of sin and then we confess our sins and then we participate 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 we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark, and by the time we've gotten now to the seventh chapter, we see Jesus continuously embroiled in conflicts with the religious leaders. And if you recall last time they'd actually sent a contingent of leaders from Jerusalem to follow Jesus and just look

for any kind of infraction of the law. So Jesus used the opportunity of their complaint that the disciples had actually eaten with ceremonially unclean hands to single-handedly destroy their argument about the value of tradition over the word of God. I mean Jesus just lets them have it. We pick up on *Mark 7:6*. It says: *He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME. AND IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.'"*

What Jesus wouldn't stand for and really what he put his finger on was the religious leaders' hypocrisy. They were far more intent on playing religious games than they were on scrupulously attending to the law. These leaders had managed to make their tradition not just co-equal with scripture but in their view actually superior to it so that tradition became far more important to them than God's word. And at the core of their tradition was this great fear of defilement, ceremonial defilement in particular. And after Jesus finishes confronting the religious leaders, they all go their separate ways but then Jesus calls all of his followers together. He wants to give them a very important lesson. This is verse 14. It says: *And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that*

come out of a person are what defile him."

Well so many of the rules that the Pharisees and the scribes had created for these people, they were based on a fear that they would somehow touch or taste or somehow come in contact with some external force or some kind of thing that would ceremonially defile them, and Jesus flat out says there's nothing, nothing outside of a person that can defile them. He's just contradicted everything the religious leaders had been insisting on for years. You understand Jesus here is talking about spiritual defilement. He was certainly aware as everybody else was that there are things outside of you that can poison you and kill you, but that's not what Jesus has in mind here and that's not what the religious leaders had in mind as well. What he's speaking about here are those things that can spiritually defile you. And he says clearly that none of them, not a one of them comes from outside. That's no piece of news to you and me but it was a stunning piece of information for the disciples, for his followers. It was hard to grapple with as any of the other truths that Jesus had been dealing with that were hard to grapple with, and the disciples were having a hard time digesting it.

We pick up verse 17. It says: *And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable.*

And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) Well Jesus, once again he's astounded at the disciples' lack of understanding. He finds it hard to believe that they don't understand that food goes into the stomach and then out of the body and that the digestive system is in no way connected to man's heart or mind or soul. So the simple fact of taking in food and extracting energy from it in no way and never has been connected with the defilement that Jesus is talking about. In verse 20 he says: *"What comes out of a person is what defiles him."* Jesus has effectively turned the religious leaders' teachings upside down. I mean he's telling the people that their leaders had it perfectly backwards. He says defilement, spiritual defilement that is, it's not outside-in, it's inside-out. Verse 21, he says: *"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."*

Now I want you to notice that every one of these defiling things, they all start in the very same place, at the very first thing that Jesus mentions, at evil thoughts. See, Jesus can say that because

God sees everything including our thoughts. *Psalm 139* says: O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You know Jesus demonstrated on many occasions that he had a singular ability to read those thoughts. When Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, he knew what the Pharisees were thinking. He knew that they thought he was committing blasphemy. In *Mark 2:8* it says: *And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts?"* I mean on more than one occasion Jesus pointed out some defiling things that were occurring in people but it was stuff that was going on specifically inside them in their own thoughts. And Jesus tells a story of the Pharisees who's in the temple with the tax collector and he's thanking God that he's not at all like this awful person. This is the story in *Luke 18:9*. It says: *"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house

justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

To understand, Jesus is describing a man who's defiling himself and he's defiling himself with slander and envy and pride but he hasn't uttered a word. I mean Jesus describes him as a Pharisee standing by himself. Who's he speaking to? He's speaking to himself. There's nothing external; there's not even words, yet he's clearly defiled. In yet another story Jesus describes a man defiling himself through coveting and pride and foolishness to such an extent that Jesus actually calls him a fool, and yet we're introduced to him as someone who's spoken to no one. These are all thoughts that he has inside. Again, this is *Luke 12*. It says:

And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Once again there's no external defilement there, it's all internal.

I mean in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus makes it clear that sexual defilement begins not with an action like the Pharisees taught but with a thought process. In *Matthew 5:27* he says: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* See Jesus knew for certain that our sin problem starts on the inside and that by the time our actions are actually sinful, they've completed a process that began with sinful thoughts. If we go back to this list that Jesus spoke of, we see evil thoughts are at the heart of four different actions and eight different attitudes that Jesus is identifying. Again this is verse 21. He says: *"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery."* Those are four specific actions, and in verse 22 he says: *"Coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness"* and those are all attitudes. Jesus goes on to say: *"All of these evil things come from within and they defile a person."* I mean is Jesus saying that all of us are born just loaded down with these defilements? Well it may not be with these specific ones, it's simply that all of us are born with a bent towards sin, with a bent towards rebellion. I mean it may take dozens of different shapes or pathways but our inclination is always naturally to go there.

Having the privilege of raising a large family and having had the privilege of many, many grandchildren I can tell you from experience that those eight attitudes, by and large they're found right at the very beginning in little ones. I mean you may think of coveting as something you know somebody wants somebody's car or his job or maybe even their spouse, but it's just as easily expressed by my grandkids fighting over a candy bar. Owen and Levi are my four-year-old twin grandkids and they love to play with my garden hose. Every time the car comes up, the kids run out of the car and so it's a race to see who gets the garden hose first because the first one who gets to it gets to spend five minutes spraying or soaking whatever they want then the other one gets a chance. And every time Levi gets it, his little brother Owen, he runs around the corner, he grabs the hose and he bends it in half, and then he just looks, he has this look of glee on his face when he sees his brother howling because the thing is just stopped. You know, I find it hilarious but actually what I'm looking at is an incipient form of wickedness, of foolishness, of envy, and I thank God that Owen and Levi have wonderful parents who know exactly what their job is. It's to train up children away from those inclinations that are natural and to teach them through loving discipline a kingdom way of looking at life. I mean I used to say all the time that the proof of original sin is the fact that you never, never have to teach your kids how to be deceitful or envious

or foolish or prideful. We don't give those lessons to kids, because we know that our kids come by them how? Naturally. We sin because we're sinners by birth. And one of the reasons we have communion is so that we can gather our thoughts and ask God's Holy Spirit to convict us so that we might confess our sins and thus get right with God.

As the elders begin to distribute the elements -- and again there may be a little confusion this morning, we have two different options. This is the first time we're going back to actually distributing the elements but some of you who have any concerns health wise, there's still the original pre-packaged ones that are there. If you want one of those, just let them know and they will make sure that you get one. Okay?

But this is the process that we begin, it's from *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 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.* And I say this each time, I just point out how extremely serious communion is

and just plead with you to say that to enter into communion in an unworthy manner is to court disaster. God has taken the lives of people who have done that before. So if you're not absolutely confident you're a child of the King, if you haven't been faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister by bringing the sacrifice of yourself to the altar to get that squared away first, then don't participate. If you don't feel right about participating, err on the side of caution and get right with God first. And as I also point out, you can make a mistake on the other side, you can think of, well, I have to be perfect in order to take communion and that too is a mistake because being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin and it doesn't mean that you're perfect, it means that salvation is a gift that no one is capable of earning by being good.

And I repeat this quote every week. I hope by now some of you have had it memorized because I think this sums up exactly what communion and understanding is all about, what it means to be a believer. This is Dane Ortlund who 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." It also means that when we fail, when we fail we understand that we have sinned and there's a reason for that, it's because God's Holy

Spirit now lives inside us. He convicts us. And so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us. In fact God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're spotless or sinless, it means that you understand that when we do sin, we have somebody speaking on our behalf up in heaven itself, someone who's holding out for us. And again *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 our point, I mean that's what gives us the ability to be here because we now have Jesus' righteousness and not our own. And because we have his righteousness, we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. As I said, he lived the life that we're all supposed to live then he died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So ask God this morning for the gift of his Holy Spirit as we prepare our conscience to receive communion.

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." So take, and eat.

I'd like to focus a little bit more now on the same need to focus and sharpen our consciences. You see a clear conscience is a self-aware conscience, and one of the greatest gifts that you could ever ask for and receive from God is the gift of self-awareness. What do I mean by that? Well, let me give you an illustration from scripture about what I mean. There's a famous story in scripture about a man who was born blind, and Jesus heals this man and he heals him on a Sabbath and he does so by spitting into the dirt, making some mud out of the spittle and putting the mud on the man's eyes, then he tells him to go bathe in the pool of Salome. Now when this man returns, this man who's been begging in the same place for years in the temple, he's now been given eyes to see. And so he's brought to the Pharisees and once again they immediately go to what matters to them, and what matters to them is the externals. These folks are exactly the way Jesus described them, they're profoundly defiled from within, but they're profoundly unaware of that. They have no clue that they are literally filled with the very things that Jesus is speaking about, that's coveting and wickedness and deceit and sensuality and envy, and slander, pride and foolishness. And these internal defilements, they express themselves in these leaders, they insist

that defilement is outside, that is external. You see, in their mind defilement comes from any ways of violating six hundred or so different rules that they had set up to avoid this external contamination. They don't realize how blinding the internal defilements are. And so they're confronted with a man that they've seen every single day for years and years and he's standing perfectly healed before them and they can't let that stand. Why? Because the person responsible for healing him is Jesus. So instantly they start looking for some external rule violation and what do you know, they find one. Jesus actually made mud on the Sabbath. He broke the rules. It was a violation of their rules, not God's. So the fact that this man who they have seen for years and years begging blind, he's now standing before them fully sighted and that means absolutely nothing. The facts, you know, those empirically provable nagging pieces of evidence that just don't seem to go away, they mean nothing. I mean it's comforting to know that the insanity that we see today where facts mean next to nothing, it's not new. I mean facts clearly meant next to nothing to these Pharisees. These are people who lack any sense of self-awareness and by self-awareness I mean they no longer pay any attention whatsoever to that little voice inside their head that's telling them, hey, you've seen this guy for 20 years, I mean he's standing before you obviously healed of his blindness. Please acknowledge the fact that he's standing right there in front of you

staring you in the face. But they can't acknowledge that. It's too dangerous. It's too painful. And so what follows is a dialogue that they have with this blind beggar now sighted and they're furious that the beggar sees any value whatsoever in a person who doesn't play by their rules. Who cares if this blind man can now see! He didn't graduate from one of our facilities. He's not one of us. We don't even know where he came from. So despite the fact that years and years of blindness has ended and that you're standing here in front of us fully sighted, what matters to us, what counts here is we don't know where this Jesus is from. I mean these folks are so self-unaware that a poor beggar is able to single-handedly destroy them. In *John 9:30* it says: *The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.*

Well their answer is classic, and just like Jesus points out it's oozing coveting and wickedness and deceit from within. I mean there's an old tactic that says if you're losing an argument and

you don't have an answer to it, just attack the arguer, and that's exactly what they do. I mean no one is denying that this blind man is now clearly sighted. So they know they can't go there. So their one other option is to impugn the blind man's character. "You were born in utter sin," they say. I mean that really addresses the issue of the fact that he's now sighted, doesn't it? I mean they add to that response envy and slander and pride, an even further indication of the defilement that's inside them. And the pride inside them produces an outrage that somebody as lowly as a blind beggar would dare to instruct someone as high and mighty as they thought they were. "Would you teach us," they say. Verse 35 says: *Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."*

See this blind man is exactly who Jesus is talking about. He's someone who's physically and spiritually blind who now has been granted sight on both levels. And those who claim to be spiritually and physically sighted are now shown to be completely blind. But it gets worse. In verse 40 it says: *Some of the*

Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" These guys were eye witnesses to what just took place, I mean, they were either the main characters or clearly part of the supporting cast of who was responsible for throwing the blind man out of the temple for the crime of being something they didn't want him to be, that is a man healed and made whole by someone they hated. But here's what I want us to see in this. You see, there was a little voice inside the Pharisees that was no longer capable of pointing out to them what was clearly obvious to everyone else. They were blind not because their eyes no longer supplied the proper data to their brain, I mean, that's physiological, that's excusable. They were without excuse because their eyes were perfectly capable and their brains received all the data they needed, they simply refused to accept the data out of hand. Verse 41, it says: *Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."* And what Jesus is pointing out here is the incredible danger in losing your self-awareness.

You know there's a little voice that resides inside every single person who's ever been born. We call that voice a conscious. I mean it's placed by God inside every human Christian and non Christian alike and it basically tells them the difference between what's right and what's wrong. God speaks of it in *Romans 2:14*.

He says this, he says: *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*

So we all have consciences. The problem with a conscience is it can be seared, it can be twisted, it can be debased by peers, by culture and by media. If you ignore God's pleading to your conscience, eventually your mind, your conscience will be given up to a debased mind. *Romans 1:28* says: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.* And so we look around today, we look around at areas of sexuality or gender and race, we see that exact same stubborn refusal to acknowledge truth that are as plain as a blind man now sighted was to the Pharisees. I mean those truths are now staring us as a culture right in the face. I think it's evident that our culture has become completely debased and separated from any connection with God who would have at least supplied a modicum of common sense. Just like the Pharisees expected, we're not supposed to believe what our eyes and ears tell us, and so we're constantly fed a diet of flat out lies like our

pull-out from Afghanistan was a spectacular success. We're now told that men can have babies and that we can get out of debt simply by printing more money. I mean one of the greatest casualties of this present culture is truth itself. I mean it doesn't matter how blatant or obvious the lie, if it's clever enough, if it's repeated enough, it's more than enough to become the truth. Well one of the beauties of Christianity is that we worship a God who represents truth itself. Jesus said in *John 14:6*: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* So as we pointed out in the preparation part of the service, when you become a believer in Jesus Christ, God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit, he begins to take up residence inside you. I mean you literally have God no longer living in a temple as he did in the Old Testament but now living inside a human body, your human body in the New Testament. *1 Corinthians 3:16* says: *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*

So what's it like? What is it like having the spirit of truth living inside you? And how does God communicate his truth to our consciences? How does he communicate the gift of self-awareness? Well number one, God's truth is highly specific. I mean God wants to grow each one of us; the devil only wants to condemn and destroy. So I've always said that the clearest way to identify a

rebuke from God versus condemnation from the enemy is whether or not it contains specifics. I mean the enemy loves to condemn us by telling us you're just rotten sinners. God loves to sanctify and encourage us by showing us areas where we messed up and ways that we can correct it. I mean if your conscience is telling you that you're worthless, useless and evil, you can probably guess that those thoughts come from the pit. However, if your conscience is telling you that that argument that you got in with your spouse last Tuesday night was your fault and that you need to correct it, you're probably hearing from God.

Secondly, a rebuke or a correction from God, it stings. It hurts. The sting may come from prayer, it may come from reading God's word, it may come from a friend, it may come from a spouse, but understand, God's word is designed sometimes to sting. I mean it's a supernatural book, it's not like any other book and God has the ability to make any verse he wants come alive as you're reading it and speak directly into your heart and to your soul. Many is the time I have heard God speak to me in ways very pleasant and very unpleasant through his word. *Hebrews 4:2* says: *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

You know, a rebuke may also come from a friend or a spouse. Proverbs says *faithful are the wounds of a friend*. That's pointing out that rebukes hurt, they wound. I've often told people the first thing you need to do when you are encountering something painful is to stop for a minute and ask yourself why is this painful? Is it an attack, is it a slander, is someone doing you harm? I mean even if that is so, it's highly worthwhile to ask God to extract whatever truth there is even in a slanderous accusation so that you can gain insight from it as well. I mean it's incredibly hard to do that. I'm not saying this is easy. I understand that. But we need to develop the art of welcoming things that are unpleasant and painful and difficult and then asking God for the wisdom to respond rather than allowing our own self protection to just sweep it away like the Pharisees did. I don't doubt there was some small voice inside those Pharisees that was yelling at them, telling them you're looking at a man who's now perfectly sighted. He was blind. Open your eyes. Recognize what's in front of you. Don't dismiss it. They obviously did dismiss it. So learn to recognize that pain is a signal to pay attention. When God speaks, it's specific and it stings.

As the elders begin to distribute the cup, I want to look at the third part, and that is it sharpens. *Proverbs 12:1* says it as succinctly as it can be expressed. I love God's bluntness here.

He says: *"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."*

Many years ago there was a young man who came to our church who thought that he had the gift of preaching. He was very enthusiastic, so we encouraged him and I quickly learned that this was not where his gifting was and that he had other significant problems. And he was very upset with us and he felt unfairly denied the pulpit, and he gathered a number of people together and sort of attempted a little mini-coup. Actually what he asked for was a special meeting with some of the church leaders and the fellows that he had gathered around him. So we had this meeting and he spoke for a good while. And he was going on and on about the injustices that he had received that he had perceived and why he was a better leader and why he needed to be more exposed than he was, et cetera, et cetera. And when he finished speaking, I had heard about -- I told him that I had just one question to ask him and I beg your indulgence because my language grew a little salty that night. This is the way I put it. I asked him very specifically, I said, "Who speaks jackass into your life?" And so he looked at me like I had two or three heads. And I said, "I'm being very frank here," I said, "Look, I'm fortunate enough to have a wife who when I'm acting like a jackass will tell me, 'Hey, you're a jackass.'" I said, "I just want to know who's telling you

that because you're acting like a jackass and right now I'm telling you and I don't think anybody ever has." And I knew this man, I knew his wife and I knew there's not in a million years she would never have come close to saying that, to speak into his life as I did, and I can assure you it was not well-appreciated. But here's my point, and I think this applies to all of the co-dependent couples that we see and know where there's one party, whether it's the husband or the wife, who's agreed to be agreeable to the extent that no one is willing to take the time or the effort or the risk of being willing to offer a loving rebuke. You know I've counseled lots of couples like that. When I tell them, I said, if that's the kind of decision that you both wind up with, you're both going to go over the cliff but you'll go over together. I mean there's no place whatsoever for verbally beating your spouse up but there's always a place for loving, caring, thoughtful rebuke, and if it's not going to come from your spouse, who else is it going to come from? I mean *Proverbs 27* says: *Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another.* And that knowledge that *Proverbs* is speaking about is the second most important knowledge you'll ever have as a believer. And what is first is knowing Christ. It's knowing that God became a man, that he lived a perfect life, then he offered up that life on a cross so that we by faith could exchange our internal defilement for his perfect righteousness and stand before God now worthy of heaven. But what is second is self-knowledge,

because that's the key to understanding yourself and your ability to grow is limited by your willingness to accept the pain of sharpening and being sharpened by those you love. Jesus loved his disciples enough to gather them together for this incredibly important lesson after this confrontation that he had with the Pharisees, and he opened up his lesson with guess what? A rebuke. He said: *"Are you also without understanding?"* I mean he was showing them their folly.

As Janice is my witness every day when we walk, we pray and one of the specific things that I ask for when I ask for wisdom, and I ask for wisdom every single day but I ask for a particular wisdom, I say, "Lord, show me my sin and my folly." I ask him for that so that when people come into my life and they're showing me my sin and my folly it doesn't come as a surprise. And when God speaks to me, he speaks with great specificity about my sin and my folly and it stings. I'd be the first one to tell you, it's not fun, but it's a good sting because it sharpens my awareness of my sin and his grace.

God sent the prophet Nathan to David because he had locked himself into a place where his self-awareness was completely gone. He had no self-awareness of his sin, even the sin of adultery and murder. And by God's grace Nathan was able to point out to him his

blindness and lead him to repentance. And afterwards David made this prayer and it's a prayer that applies to each and every one of us even now today. This is what David said after his confrontation with Nathan. He asked God, he said: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.* And that's really the question for us. The question is: Do you have a willing spirit? That's a spirit that's willing to hear the specifics, bear the sting, and long to be sharpened by God's word or prayer or friends or spouses. And if you do, thank God for that gift; but if you don't, now is the perfect time to ask God to it, to ask God to *create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." So take, and drink.

This is the part that we call "head, heart and feet," where we try to have some practical application of what it is that we've been looking at this morning, and I want to focus in on this whole idea of sharpening each other and being sharpened, because self-awareness goes both ways. It means being willing to hear God when

he speaks to you. It also means being willing to speak up for God as well when someone close to you desperately needs to hear from God. And you know Nathan is an excellent example of someone who was a prophet and a friend. I mean we know the story about David. David was up on his roof when he should have been out in battle. And he saw Bathsheba and he lusted after her and he lay with her and she became pregnant and she let him know that she was pregnant and so he calls back her husband and he tries to deceive her husband into spending some time with Bathsheba and he refuses to because he's so loyal to David. He says, "shall I take pleasure with my wife while my other soldiers are out there?" So David gets desperate and he arranges to have Uriah, her husband, killed, has him sent to the front lines and then in the middle of the heat of the battle he tells them to abandon him so he gets killed. And he literally uses the Amalekites to murder Uriah. Well David had a debased mind. He was able to get to the place where he ignored God for so long that he had no self-awareness at all. It was gone. And into that bridge steps this prophet Nathan, a friend, Nathan. Let me just read to you what Nathan did. This is *2 Samuel 12*. It says: *And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his*

children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

What Nathan was trying to say is God gave you everything, look at all you had and it wasn't enough, you had to look at somebody else's wife and take that? And you stop and think of the risk that Nathan took and what a true friend he was to David. I mean David had clearly given evidence that he had shut down the ability to hear from God and so it's entirely possible that he could have reacted by having Nathan imprisoned or executed, but the story got to David and it changed his heart. And this is what Nathan said to him. He says: *"Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites."*

You see what's interesting about this rebuke? It's the three things. His rebuke was, first of all, it was incredibly specific, it stung very deeply but in the end it greatly sharpened David. So here's my question for us from this. My question is: Do you have any Davids that God is calling on you to interact with? Is there someone that God is calling on you specifically to start praying about, perhaps invite over for dinner, perhaps re-ignite a relationship that may have gone south for a while, somebody that you perhaps might be able to speak truth into their lives? I mean Nathan earned the right to speak truth to David by being a true friend and a true risk taker. You have to do that as well. You can't just hit somebody over the head. You have to earn the right to a hearing. This morning as we go to prayer, I just want to ask that we might think for a moment of somebody in our own personal lives, somebody perhaps God is tugging in our hearts to say, you know, you really need to touch base with this person, you really need to tell them of the hope that you have in Jesus and the hope that they can have in Jesus as well. So let's pray.

Father, we thank you for self-awareness. Lord, we read story upon story of the Pharisees and the religious leaders lacking any and all self-awareness. We see David lacking this self-awareness and it's easy for us to lack it as well and think that we have it when we don't. And so Lord, I pray very specifically that you would

give us the ability to be sensitive and tuned in and that our first reaction to something painful is not to dismiss it, not to brush it away, not to be self-protective but to look at it and to stare at it and to ask God, God, what do you want me to do with this? How do you want me to respond to this? I pray that you would give us the ability to respond to your specifics, respond to the sting of a rebuke and that you would give us the ability and the grace to let it sharpen us. And I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.