

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, NY

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COMMUNION SERIES ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST

John 5:24-29

Prayer: *Father, we do thank you for your grace, we thank you for this opportunity that we have each month to come before you, to come as it were to the foot of the cross and to meditate on what you have done for us at the cross. Father, I pray as we open up your word, as we look into it, as we examine ourselves, that you would accompany us by your Holy Spirit, that you would grant us the ability to hear your word and not only to hear it but to seek to do it. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, it is the 1st of July, and once again it's the first Sunday of the month, and as I've said, this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. Jesus, on the night before he died, he met with his disciples for the very last time, and he celebrated a Passover supper with them. Matthew 26:26 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 the bread and the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood, and then he asked his disciples to repeat that offer, to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat that performance on a regular basis, and that's what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month. And we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, also by examining our consciences, examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of areas where we are sinning, and then by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements.

John 6:53 says this: *So Jesus said to them "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

We've been following the life of Jesus for this past year or so, and last time we looked at Jesus turning a corner by healing

someone on the Sabbath. And this led to one of the most extensive discourses Jesus ever had with the religious leaders, and in that discourse, Jesus spoke of his relationship to his Father, of his identification with his Father and he made the case over and over again, that he did precisely what his Father did, because he and his Father were one. And the scripture itself is clear, the religious leaders saw this and understood this to be Jesus clearly claiming to be God.

John 5:18 says this: *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

I want to look at this discourse as it continues even after Jesus had proved over and over again that he and his Father were one, because afterwards he begins to speak about life itself. And he speaks about crossing over from death to life, and he speaks of the life that he offers not just in the presence but in eternity.

Let me just read to you John 5:24-29: He says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He doesn't come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and*

*is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

Jesus properly puts the cart before the house when he says *whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life.* Now, some folks misunderstand these words as presenting kind of a time line for belief. The first thing you do is you hear the gospel, then after you've heard the gospel, you decide you're going to believe it. After you decide you're going to believe it, then you get eternal life. That's not what Christ is saying. The fact is, whoever hears Jesus' words the way Jesus intends them to be heard will be saved. That's because "hearing" to Jesus includes not just the sensations that come from soundwaves hitting your eardrums, it also includes the mind and the heart that allows the ears to make sense of what it is that's being heard.

Now, Jesus spoke countless words to those who never heard a thing he said. Matthew 13:13-17, he said this. He said: *"This was why*

*I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

You see, when Jesus says *whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life*, he is expressing something that happens simultaneously. To hear is to believe. To believe is to have finally heard. And when that happens, you make a transition, a spiritual resurrection that very few people even think about. You move literally from death to life. Again, to quote, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me as eternal life, he does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life."*

I have no idea why people are so fascinated these days with the

idea of zombies. That seems to be a very, very big thing. But I can tell you that it perfectly expresses the spiritual condition of every single person who doesn't know Christ. They are literally, spiritually speaking, the walking dead. Just as the fish doesn't realize that it's wet, so too the walking dead do not realize it, and they just accept it as perfectly natural. And today's gospel plays into that very well when it says "Accept Christ, or you will face eternal punishment." That's unfortunately backwards. You see, everyone without Christ is already facing eternal punishment. You don't need to reject Christ to be on your way to hell. You and I have already been born that way. In only two verses after God's famous declaration in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* Only two verses later, in John 3:18 is this awful declaration. It says: *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

Understand, these are not my words; these are God's words. God is perfect and we are not. Because of Adam's sin, everyone of us can say along with David in Psalm 51:5: *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* And because we are born in sin, we don't act like God, and we certainly don't think

like God. In Isaiah 55 God says: *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.*

And, you know, if you want proof that we don't think like God thinks, just consider the average person's reaction to what I've been talking about. I mean, how many unbelievers do you know who would respond positively to the news that their very best effort is not acceptable to God, that a perfect God cannot and will not accept imperfect works no matter how well-intentioned they might be, that they were born already dead. And that without God's help, they would never seek life in the first place. You know, I can sum up in one sentence how an unbeliever will react to that information. They don't want to hear about it. You can create a scenario which paints God as being arbitrary and capricious, dictatorial and unkind in the way that he relates to his creation, but in order to do that, you have to leave out a lot of key parts of the puzzle that Jesus was speaking about. And the very first thing that you have to leave out of that puzzle is the fact that God came to a planet that was filled with people who, when given the opportunity, didn't just set out to kill him, they set out to torture him and humiliate him. And only after they had accomplished that, they demanded his death. And you know, it won't

do us any good to imagine an us-them scenario that has us as the people who would never, ever raise our hand to God and them as some wicked type of exception to that rule. There is no exception to the rule. If you and I had been there, we would have been in the thick of that crowd, screaming as they did when Pilate said, "I'm innocent of this man's blood," screaming, "May his blood be on us and on our children!"

So I cannot begin to imagine why God would have anything whatsoever to do with even approaching a people who would rise up to murder him if they got the chance. And they got the chance, because God gave it to them. He had come to die for these same people, one of whom was me. I didn't want to hear that there was a God who I was answerable to, that I am no different from all of those other unrighteous servants that Jesus spoke about when he said in Luke 19:14: *But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him saying "We do not want this man to reign over us."* I just didn't want to hear it. And that brings me right back to the same problem that Jesus was addressing this morning when he said, *"Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."*

You see, no one wants to hear God's word unless God first does a work in his life. I was 24 years old before the first time I ever "heard" the gospel. I mean, I certainly heard the physical



soundwaves that make up the gospel, they bounced off my ears literally thousands of times, but I never "heard" the gospel. Until by the grace of God, I believed it.

And Jesus goes on to say in his discourse: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word, and believes him who sent me as eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. You see, when we hear the gospel for the first time, when we really, really hear it, we move from the place where we were, which was death itself, to a brand new place that Jesus calls life. "He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life."*

It's this idea I would like to look at this morning. We use different terms to describe it. We talk about new life, abundant life, eternal life. The question I want to address this morning is this: What does this life look like to us in the 21st century? How do I know I have this life in the first place? Well, the easiest way I know is to look at how Jesus describes this life and then ask myself "Do I fit this description?"

So let's look at some of these scriptures and let's -- we'll start off with an easy one. This is Luke 14:26, this is Jesus' words describing people who have this life. He says: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and*

*children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Do you think Jesus actually wants us to go out and hate our families? Does he want us to hate our own families and hate our own lives just in order to love him? Well, the answer is found in Matthew's gospel where Jesus reiterates the same idea. This is Matthew 10:37. He says: *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

See, Jesus doesn't want us to hate anyone. He is insisting, though, that new life is a life that puts a relationship with Christ at the very top of every other relationship, and that includes family. You know, there's no one who understands human nature better than Jesus, and he understands all too well that if he does not occupy the very top position in your life, then every single attempt at him exercising his Lordship will be met not just with resistance, but with ever increasing resentment.

In Matthew 6:24, he said this: He said, *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* So those who have found new life in Christ value him more than their families.

In Matthew 10:39, Jesus says this: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* What did Jesus mean by whoever loses his life will find it? Is he saying you have to be a martyr in order to prove that you have this new life? Well, the answer's no. What he is saying is this, Jesus is saying if you find yourself within yourself, within our own resources, your own abilities and your own good efforts, you will be lost.

This was a question that was circulating all the time while Jesus was preaching, and at one point someone directly asked Jesus the question that we're batting about this morning. He asked it this way in Matthew 19:16. He said, *"Now behold, one came and said to him 'Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?'"* Do you remember Jesus' answer to him? It's pretty important. This was the rich young ruler, a man who was decent, moral, filled with much, much earthly goodness, and he wants to know what everybody wants to know. *"What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* And Jesus starts laying out all of the commandments as an answer to the question, and the rich young ruler insists that he's done all of these things all of his life. And we all know the story of what happens next. It's Matthew 19:21-22, it says: Jesus said to him, *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have*

*treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

You know the problem was? The problem was the rich young man had asked the wrong question. You see, as soon as you reduce new life in Christ down to a requirement or a set of requirements, you have started down a pathway no different than the one the young man was asking about. You have turned a relationship into a regulation. And so much of what religion offers is an attempt at answering the question: What do I have to do to gain eternal life? What do I have to do to get into heaven? That's the question everybody wants to ask. What is often behind that kind of question that is never stated is this question: What is the bare minimum that I must do in order to qualify for heaven while still being able to enjoy everything that earth has to offer? That's the question. You see, the rich young ruler didn't want just the bare minimum. I mean, his was a robust attempt at earning his salvation, and he was prepared for all kinds of religious tests. And Jesus gave him the test of poverty, and I have no doubt that if he had met the test of volunteer poverty, Jesus who have had yet another test for him because of the very question that he asked. The question that he asked proved that he did not understand what new life in the kingdom was all about. So Jesus puts the one good thing that he had to do quite succinctly. He boils it down to two words: Follow

me. Follow me.

So what does that mean to us here in the 21st century, 'cause not much has changed in the 2,000 years since the rich young ruler asked those questions. Folks are still looking for the very same answers. Just tell me what I need to do to get right. That's our contemporary translation of the question "*What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*"

Do you see why that's the wrong question to ask? You see, instead of a relationship, the rich young ruler was looking for a regulation that he could fulfill that would enable him to earn his place in eternity. And so the question that we ask in the 21st century is this: Just how gospel-centered must I be in order to have eternal life? That's the question. I said it before facetiously, but I just know in my heart of hearts that there are a lot of folks who would love it if we published a list detailing exactly how many times per week you must invoke the name of Jesus, how many church services you have to go to, how many times in a month you must include Christ in a conversation in order to meet the minimum requirements for getting into heaven. That would be a best seller if it was true.

As silly as that seems, that was the underlying question the rich

young ruler was asking. Just tell me, good teacher, what do I have to do? But didn't Jesus respond to that by trotting out all the commandments? And when the young man said, "All these I have kept from my youth," Jesus did exactly what he did in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the law and he expands it and he enlarges it till it becomes obvious that you can't do it. It becomes obvious that it is absolutely impossible to live up to.

Here's one sample from the Sermon on the Mount taken from Matthew 5:27. Jesus says this, he says: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

During the whole of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeats two terms over and over again. He says, "You have heard that it was said." And then he says, "but I say." And do you see what he's doing there? What he is doing is he's comparing the letter of the law which the Pharisees were terrific at, and the spirit of the law which they failed miserably, and he said to them you think it's this, but I say it's this. And those who thought that the commandment forbade the act of adultery, to those, Jesus just expands and enlarges the law so that even lustful thoughts were now

even as tantamount to adultery. He's addressing the exact same mindset in the rich young ruler. The rich young ruler wanted to know just tell me, what do I got to do? Just tell me what do I have to do. And he addresses him by exploding the premise of the question in the first place. You cannot "do" your way into heaven because no one can "do" perfection.

Jesus clearly answered that mindset directly in Matthew 48 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It was the perfect summation of the sermon because it summed up the absolute demand of the law. He could have boiled it down to this one sentence that Jesus says in Matthew 5:48: *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Jesus is demanding the impossible. And you know, again and again Jesus did that and again and again he had to reiterate with the disciples what they could not grasp.

Listen to what he says in Matthew 19:24. He says: *"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And when the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished saying "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

See, the rich young ruler wanted to make the impossible possible by

sheer human effort. And the reason why there is no good answer to the question: *What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?* is that the question itself is proof that the questioner just doesn't get the gospel.

So the answer to the question just how gospel-centered do I need to be, well, it's the very same answer that Jesus gave the rich young ruler. *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

As the elders come forward to begin distributing the bread, I'd like us to meditate for a while to consider the implication of the question: How gospel-centered do I need to be? As the elements are being distributed, once again as we do each month, I want us to consider the warning that God gives about communion itself. He says in 1 Corinthians 11:28: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*



You know, I say this every month. I say communion is an extremely serious undertaking, and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to court disaster. I mean, God said, "*for this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.*" God said for I have killed some of you for entering into communion unworthily. That's a very serious thing to consider. So if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, just pass those elements on when they come to you. Again, I say no one's going to think you're strange, no one's going to think you're odd. In fact, they will think you're wise.

1 Corinthians 11:23-24 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.*

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I'd like to look at the last part of the life that Jesus was referring to, which is the resurrection part. See, there are two completely separate and distinct resurrections that Jesus is referring to. He has spoken at first of the death that we were all walking in before we came to Christ, and that that is the first resurrection we experience.

It's not a physical resurrection. It is a spiritual resurrection. John 5:24 says: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life."* Jesus has spoken of the present day life in Christ we've all received once we've experienced that spiritual resurrection. In verse 25 he says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted of the Son also to have life in himself."*

See, we are those who have heard and lived because of nothing other than the grace of God. The judgment that should have fallen on us fell instead on him. Jesus says the Father has life in himself, and the Son has been granted the power of life. Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have all had to embrace death itself in order to purchase this eternal life for us. The Father had to watch as we humiliated, then tortured, then executed his son. The Son had to spend every single moment of his adult life on earth consciously awaiting an execution that he would orchestrate, and he did that by looking not at the cross, but through it. He saw through it to the resurrection that would verify his deity and would rescue his chosen ones.

Hebrews 12:2 says: *Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

His Spirit had to guide the whole process, from wicked Caiaphas' unwitting prophesy in John 18 that *it would be expedient that one man should die for the people*, to the crowing of the cock that proved to Peter that the Lord he had just betrayed truly was sovereign over every single event that had transpired.

Acts 2:23 says: *This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.* And you know, that word "you" applies to us more than it applies to anyone else, because it was my sin and yours, not Roman soldiers that drove the nails into his hands. It was us to whom is written, *you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

And he who has been judged for us will in turn execute judgment on all the earth. Verse 27 says: *And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.* Some of that judgment is going to come as a stunning surprise. Jesus speaks of a future life that we are all going to be part of, some for better,

some for far, far worse. In verse 28 he says: *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.* This is not the first resurrection. This is the second resurrection. And for those to whom it is still the first, this will be a day of shock, of awe, and terror.

Remember, the first resurrection Jesus already described in John 5:24: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. And when this spiritual resurrection event happens, you become a new creature. That's part of the answer to the question. 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. You see, a new creation in Christ doesn't seek out what the rich young ruler sought, because he sees Christ as far more than a means to an end. He values Christ above his own family, knowing that Christ seeks to make him love his family far more than he can ever imagine. He serves but one master and sees his life as belonging lock, stock, and barrel to his Lord. He cannot imagine trying to cut a deal with the Lord of his life, because Jesus is the Lord of his life. Not so with those who resurrections first and foremost unto

judgment. They will awaken to the exposure of their own deception, but by then it will have been too late.

This is the warning from Matthew 7:12-23. 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 see, the kingdom of God is not a matter of what you do. It's a matter of who you know. And those who truly know Jesus are those who have truly heard Him. Again: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.*

Those who have heard that are not looking to cut a deal like the rich young ruler was, because the Spirit of the living God within them starts to think like the Son of God would think. How can I glorify and serve my King? And so if you are wondering if your life has passed the minimums for a gospel-centered life, you are wondering the wrong thing entirely. Jesus has the same answer for

you that he had for the rich young ruler. It is the savor of life unto life to some; it is the stench of death to others. It is the same two words: Follow me. Before you take the cup, take a few moments to consider the choices you may have made in the past and consider the choices you're going to make in the future.

1 Corinthians 11:25 says this: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* Take, and drink.

Well, this is the part that we call heads, heart, and feet. This is the part where we try to have some practical application of what it means to remember Christ. And some of you might be saying well, you know, you still haven't answered my question, what does a gospel-centered life look like? And I'd like to let the scripture give you sort of an idea, sort of an identification from a very practical standpoint. This is from Hebrews 13:1-7. Let me just read this to you. If you're wondering what a gospel centered life looks like, it says: *Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the*

*marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*

Now, if that's not a scary scripture to read, I don't know what is. But here's what I would do to answer that question from a practical standpoint. Just take a minute and think of believers that you know. Just picture the believers that you know and think of the ones that you would unequivocally identify as leading Christ-centered gospel-centered lives, then imitate them. And I suppose you need to ask yourself: Am I numbering myself among those people? And if you can't give a "yes and amen" to that question, I will leave you with these final words from Acts 3:19. It says: *Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.* Let's pray.

Prayer: Father God, I do thank you for the gift of eternal life, for the two resurrections that we will experience, a spiritual one

first, and then a physical one second. And Father, while we are here on this earth, I just continue to pray that you would give us the means to live a Christ-centered gospel-centered life. Not one we're asking, okay, what do we need to do, what do I got to do to get in, but one that flows out of a relationship with you, one that flows out of a desire to serve you, honor you, and glorify you. Lord, we know that only happens when Your Spirit indwells us and that only happens when we hear the gospel as you intend it to be heard, because when we hear it that way, we believe it, and we become new creatures. Grant us that privilege, Lord. If there's anyone in this building this morning who has not become a new creature in Christ, I pray that you would grant him that privilege. I pray that you would grant her that privilege. If there's anyone who seeks and is questioning, I pray that they would just take a moment, sit down with me, sit down with any of the deacons, any of the elders, I pray that we would get this settled right here and right now. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.