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

**December 2, 2018**

**The Death of Jesus**

**John 19:28-30**

**Prayer:** *Father God, we just again, we praise you and thank you that it is not death to die for us. And there's only one reason why it is not and it's because of you, Lord Jesus, it's because of what you have done for us, and so we praise you and thank you for the gift of the cross. And Lord, this morning is a Sunday that we dedicate to examining what it is you've done for us on the cross. And Lord, that's a hopeless task without the presence of your Holy Spirit. It's way too huge to even begin to comprehend. And so we pray as we exercise this fruitless task without your Spirit that you would accompany us, and that you would take us into your word and give us a deeper and broader understanding of just what it is you've done for us. And we pray that not only would we have that understanding but it would become a of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once again it's the first Sunday of the month. This is the Sunday that we recognize the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross that he died on. Jesus on the night before he died met with his

disciples and there for the last time he celebrated with them a Passover supper. *Matthew 26* describes it, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

Well, 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. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis. That's what we do, and this is what's called "the Lord's table." And so we celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by then examining ourselves and that means allowing God's Holy Spirit to point out areas that he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins and then 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, we have worked our way through the Gospel of John and we are

now at the 19th chapter, and if you remember last time out, we looked at the actual event of the crucifixion. Today we're going to look at the end of that awful process. We will be looking specifically at the death of Jesus. Our scripture is *John 19:28-30* which says this: *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

Well first we learn that Jesus, who knows all things, knows now that it is finished. Well, just what does that mean? I mean I remember well as a youngster being told that Jesus died on the cross and somehow opened the gates of heaven. What I don't remember is being told how Jesus dying on a cross would somehow cause these gigantic gates that I pictured that were just kind of covering over heaven itself, how Jesus's death would cause those gates to swing open. And what I wish is that someone would have simply told me how Jesus' death could open heaven, that we were sons and daughters of Adam who was the original rebel and that when Adam defied God and ate the forbidden fruit, he lost his perfection in that his nature changed forever and that every subsequent son or daughter of Adam inherited his sin and an attitude towards God of

rebellion. And that God who was perfectly just had an enormous dilemma. He could either condemn all of mankind for its sin at the cost of his mercy or he could permanently just overlook sin itself at the cost of his justice. Well, God's solution to this dilemma was to become one of us himself and then to live the life that we were supposed to live and do it perfectly, and having lived this life perfectly, he then flawlessly served both justice and mercy by offering up his life in payment for our sins on the cross. Now if someone had simply pointed me to *2 Corinthians 5:21*, I would have been able to understand exactly how Jesus opened up heaven by dying on the cross because that verse says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Well that verse tells us that Jesus opened up the gates of heaven by literally becoming our sin. On the cross Jesus became sin for us, and he willingly, willingly took on the wrath of his Father in order to pay the sin debt that was owed to his own justice and holiness.

If you remember we speculated last time how that actually could have happened. For six hours we know Jesus hung absorbing the full wrath of God for our sin. Now we have no idea what actually took place during those six earth hours but we know that God is also Lord over space and time and so we also know that God is quite capable of squeezing eternity itself into seconds. We know that

God says that *with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*. So we know that time is very, very different for God than it is for us. We also know the Lord Jesus Christ while still being a perfect sacrifice in some way during that time became rape and murder and drug addiction and pornography and lying and slander and gossip and every other sins human beings were capable of as he hung there bearing God's wrath for that sin. You know one commentator noted that crucifixion itself was a death that was capable of making someone die a thousand deaths in one death, there was so much physical torment from the nails, from the posture that it forced you into, from the inability to breathe. But all of the physical torments were not unique to Jesus. Every single person who suffered crucifixion suffered the same torments. What made Jesus unique, though, was another statement made by another commentator who said -- quote -- "Only the damned in hell have any idea what Jesus actually went through while he hung on the cross." You see, he pointed out that what is unique to Jesus and not to those who are damned in hell who know nothing of heaven is that Jesus from eternity past had always occupied the highest heights of heaven itself and now on the cross he was thrust down into the deepest depths of the pit of hell. And he was done so for a length of time that we humans can only record as six hours. Now after six of those hours of what we understand as time, Jesus, according to our scripture this morning, announced that that work

had been finished. But so far only Jesus knows that. You see, his work on the cross was unheralded. All that was left at this point was an announcement that Jesus had to make. Now to do that he first has to deal with this raging thirst that made speaking next to impossible. You see by now he's lost a great deal of blood and his body's reaction to that loss is to produce a thirst so intense and a tongue so swollen that speaking is next to impossible. We know that because a thousand years before the cross took place David prophetically uttered the horrors that Jesus would be facing as he hung there.

*Psalm 22* says this is describing what's going on in Jesus's heart as he's hanging. He says: *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.* Well the psalmist then prophetically describes the solution. In *Psalm 69* it says: *They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.* Now sour wine was the drink of the common man, it's what soldiers drank and perhaps moved by a sense of pity but more certainly moved by God's prophetic hand a soldier responds to Jesus saying "I thirst." Verse 29 says: *A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.* Amazingly even that small gesture

of mercy to a dying man was also accompanied by mocking. I mean John's gospel doesn't mention it but Matthew's does. In *Matthew 27* it says: *And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."* I just want you to imagine the depravity that would deny a dying man the tiniest measure of comfort in order to mock him one last time as they wait -- quote -- *"for Elijah to come save him."* Ignoring the mocking the soldier puts the sponge to Jesus' mouth and he partakes of the sour wine. Verse 30 says: *When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* Well once again Matthew fills in some more details stating that Jesus's final act was to herald what was previously unheralded. *Matthew 27* says: *And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.*

When you take a look back and you're looking at the cross, you understand there's so much about the cross that was unappreciated even back then and certainly today and so this morning I want to spend some time looking at some of the unspoken aspects of the cross. Now the cross was viewed by everyone contemporary with it first as unimportant. I mean the illegitimate son of a peasant woman and a carpenter gets crucified for attempting to maintain that he was some kind of king. It was an event so unimportant that

it certainly didn't warrant being noted even by historians. In fact many of the arguments against Christianity state that history itself doesn't even acknowledge him, save for a few like Tacitus or Josephus who were non-Christian historical authors. I mean it's true the world viewed the single most important event that happened in the history of mankind from the dawn of time until the end of time as something of singular unimportance. Jesus was a backwoods hick. He was a nobody getting what he deserved, according to the religious leaders. And because of the cross's relative unimportance, it goes without saying that it was also unappreciated. Jesus' death was unappreciated because the darkness that the world that Jesus had entered into was so complete that human beings had no capacity to understand even the life of Jesus, let alone his death. God said: *And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light.* See Jesus' death was unappreciated also because the god of this world had successfully blinded this world to who Jesus really was. *2 Corinthians 4 says: The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* That's true even today. We simply lack the ability as human beings to fully appreciate what it is that Christ did for us on the cross. And because it was unappreciated, it was also unsung and certainly unheralded until Jesus spoke his last words.



But one other thing about his death has to be noted. It was completely unnatural. You see it's natural for someone who's been beaten and flogged and nailed through his hands and his feet and then hung on display for six hours to simply run out of blood, energy and oxygen and die a natural death. But understand, Jesus was no ordinary human. Jesus was the creator and the moment-by-moment sustainer not just of his own life but of all life in the universe. *Colossians 1* says: *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* You know Paul is telling us that the earth and all of its various physical properties holds together not because of some magical cosmic glue but because the Lord Jesus Christ himself sustains it moment by moment. Peter gives us a picture of what's going to happen when Christ begins to relax his grip. Understand, Peter's not a physicist, he's a fisherman. And yet if you listen to his description, it sounds peculiarly thermonuclear, like something that would happen when he who holds all things together begins to loosen his grip. *1 Peter 3* says: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.* I have no idea what the physics is that

this is describing, but I do know that just as the Lord Jesus displayed his ultimate weakness in letting his fellow creation strip and nail him to a cross, so too will the opposite end of the spectrum be exposed when the king of all creation begins to exercise the power that he's always had but this time in judgment. This time the Lamb of God will be the lion of the tribe of Judah and literally all hell is going to break loose. See, Jesus died an unnatural death and he died an unnatural death because nature never had the power of death over Jesus.

You know, I remember reading a series of books that went into great depth describing the physical aspects of crucifixion and how it inevitably leads to death. I also remember reading a book that said that Jesus actually died of a broken heart. I understand them but I think neither of those are accurate. See, there's nothing in the universe that could ever kill the author of life itself. I mean the only reason that Jesus died is because he voluntarily gave up His Spirit. And Jesus himself made that crystally clear when he said in *John 10:17*, he said: *"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."* Now Jesus voluntarily laid down his life because the law says the only way for sins to be

completely paid for is for there to be capital punishment exacted. *Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* You see Jesus understood that for full payment to be made for your sin and my sin, Jesus himself had to die.

I remember way, way back when when I was in grammar school I had this very well-intentioned nun tell me that the blood of Jesus was so precious that really all he had to do was prick his finger and let a single drop fall and all sin would have been paid for. I think she was mistaken. I mean Peter tells us there is nothing more precious than the blood of Christ and that *you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.* But understand that blood was shed as Jesus died for our sins. *Romans 5:10 says: For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, I want us to just kind of chew in your mind, just kind of do that meditating thing about all of the unspoken things about the death of Jesus. Jesus' death clearly was unheralded, unappreciated, unsung and unimportant. It

was also clearly unnatural because the author of life could never die a mere natural death. And yet his love for us was so great that he voluntarily surrendered his life. Consider that as you consider God's warning about taking communion itself. It's found in *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.*

I say this every month, I say communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. And if you look at the scripture we just read, God's saying because of that I killed some of you. *For this reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep.* That's language that says God is exercising judgment by taking lives of people who've received communion in an unworthy manner. That's how serious this is. And so if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted Christ as your Savior or perhaps if you first need to be reconciled with your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice, that's yourself to the altar, then just pass the elements on. I've said no one's going to look at you or think you strange. Instead they

may think you're wise.

But again, we also say the opposite is also true, the enemy would love to have you think that unless you're spotlessly perfect, you're unworthy to receive communion. The enemy loves that as well. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin and it doesn't mean that you never fail. What it means is that you recognize the salvation that you've been given is a gift, it's a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by being good. I quote Dane Ortlund every month because I think his quote is so appropriate. 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." That also means that when we fail, we're aware of the fact that we fail, we're aware of the fact that we've sinned. Why? Because God's Holy Spirit now lives inside us. It is His Spirit who convicts us, and so we grieve as children knowing that we have a Father who loves and longs to forgive us and cleanse us. 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 are sinless. It also means that when -- we understand that when we sin we have an advocate, somebody speaking on our behalf in heaven itself. *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. That's the bottom line for us, you see, because we have Jesus's righteousness, that foreign righteousness that now belongs to us, because we have that 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. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we deserved to die in our place, just so that we could be made worthy of heaven.*

So before we partake of the bread, I want us to focus this morning on the actual death of Jesus. So unappreciated, so unimportant, so unsung, so unheralded that Jesus himself had to herald it at first. So unnatural that the author of life himself would have to give his life up voluntarily for you and me. Just think on that for a moment.

1 Corinthians 11th chapter, 23rd verse 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.

Well, the death of Jesus was unheralded, unsung, unimportant,

unappreciated, and unnatural. It was also unreported, unbelievable, unstoppable and unimaginable. It was unreported at first because Jesus was deemed to be such a nobody that his death couldn't possibly make any news at all. It was unbelievable to many then and many now who fashioned a so-called Passover plot that suggested that Jesus really never died in the first place. The claim was that Jesus merely fainted while he was on the cross and that in the cool and the damp of the tomb itself he revived himself and launched a movement based on this false claim that he had actually risen from the dead. The idea of a Passover plot, as ludicrous as it seemed, gains traction because people are actually desperate to not have to believe that God himself also died, rose again and will one day sit in judgment. And as astounding as the claims that Christians make that Christ rose from the dead, the claims of the Passover plotters were just as extreme. I mean to suggest that someone who's been beaten and flogged and nailed through his hands and feet and lanced with a spear in his side could somehow, without any medical attention whatsoever but simply because he's in the cool of the tomb repair himself to the extent that he could now fool everybody into thinking that he had now miraculously risen from the dead, that strains even a skeptic's credulity. I mean how in the world would Jesus walk having had nails driven through his feet? I mean how could he possibly hide the brutality of what happened to his hands? But worst of all how

could he possibly convince his closest followers that they should be willing to die for this lie of a resurrected life that he's now promulgating? I mean the strongest evidence there is against the Passover plot is that while you may get folks to go along with a lie up to a point, especially if there's something in it for them, you will never be successful in getting somebody to be willing to die for something they know is a lie. And if Jesus had merely revived in the tomb and didn't really rise from the dead, then virtually all of his disciples except for John went to their deaths knowingly proclaiming a lie. The fact that they all willingly suffered martyrs' deaths for what they knew was the truth, that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, proved that while the cross is still today unbelievable to many, for those who believe, it is still the power to save.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I want to look at some more unspoken conditions of the cross. I'm going to look at the fact that the death of Jesus was unstoppable as well. I've read numerous authors who portray the cross as an absolute tragedy, something that had a whole series of "if onlys." You know if only Pilate hadn't been such a coward, I mean, he might have saved Jesus. If only the honorable Jews who supported Jesus, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, if only they had spoken up, maybe Jesus could have been saved. If only Herod whom Pilate sent Jesus to, if



only Herod had cared to intervene, maybe Jesus could have been spared from the cross. This so misses the point. I mean Jesus came for one primary reason, to glorify his Father by dying, to ransom and rescue his sheep. I mean it may have looked many, many times during the course of Jesus's passion like things could have gone one way or another, but Jesus knew, not just right from the start but right from the beginning of time, that no one and nothing could ever stop the sovereign will of God. Everything about the death Jesus died was choreographed. Every single aspect of it was planned to the tiniest detail. From the donkey that Jesus was to ride into Jerusalem, to the Brook Kidron running red with the lambs of Passover being slaughtered, as Jesus the ultimate Passover lamb is, himself, being slaughtered. You know the year, the month, the day, and the hour were all known by Jesus precisely ahead of time. I mean, he even warned his disciples exactly what was going to take place, and he did it days before it was to happen. *Matthew 16* says: *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."* Well, I think we all know how Jesus responded. I remember the very first time that I read this, I said, man, Jesus is awfully harsh. He's not very happy about someone who is only trying to look out for his

best interests. I mean here's Peter insisting the crucifixion is the very last thing that he wants his master to go through and here's Jesus' response: *But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."* See, Jesus was on an unstoppable mission and nothing and no one including his beloved disciple Peter was going to stop him from embracing the death he knew he had to embrace. Listen to how Luke describes it. It says: *And taking the twelve, he -- that's Jesus -- said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."* But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. See, how anyone could think that Jesus was a victim, how anyone could think, oh, if only, if only. That's beyond me. Jesus knew with absolute certainty that his will and the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit was virtually unstoppable, and so it was. Even though it was unreported and unbelievable, it was still unstoppable. It was also unimaginable in the truest sense of that word.

You know, I appreciate the song, I enjoyed the movie *I Can Only*

*Imagine, but I can tell you for a fact, that God says that our imaginations are incapable of getting us anywhere near what God has done, what God has prepared for us. 1 Corinthians 2 says: But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."*

See, no human being in their wildest imagination would ever conceive of a plan of redemption such as God conceived. No one could have possibly imagined that God himself would take the very place of the very people who had rebelled against him, and that he would come to earth, not as a king or as the most important person ever to bless the planet, but as this humble servant. It's astounding that Isaiah points out that the very author of life who could have chosen for himself any kind of flesh to wrap himself in and to become, that he would have chosen a body that was thoroughly unremarkable and looks that were less than pleasant. But you know that's exactly what Isaiah says. This is what he says, describing Jesus, says: *For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. This is beyond human imagination that God himself would so humble himself that he would willingly submit himself to a life Isaiah describes centuries before Jesus was ever born by saying this. It says: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hides their faces*

he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned -- everyone -- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Our text this morning picks up on the Lord Jesus Christ having become the silent lamb led to the slaughter, having accomplished all things, finally opening his mouth. Our text is *John 19:28*: After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus finished the greatest work ever accomplished by a human in the history of mankind. There is simply nothing to compare it to.

I mean the greatest accomplishment there ever was, was also the most unspoken accomplishment ever. Jesus' death was unheralded because Jesus chose to hide what he was doing until it was finished. It was unimportant because Jesus had so humbled himself that the world couldn't possibly grasp its importance. It was unappreciated because this world's darkness made appreciation impossible. It was unnatural because nothing and no one is capable of taking natural life from the author of life itself. It was unreported because the good news that Jesus was bringing was never considered to be newsworthy. It was unbelievable because the fall of Adam had rendered all of us incapable of belief. That's the bad news about the death of Jesus. But thank God, God's never stopped by bad news. You see, the death of Jesus was also unstoppable because the god of this world was no match at all for the King of creation, and God stated very specifically that this was war and it was a war Jesus intended to win. *1 John 3:8*, John said: *The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

And finally, the good news is that the death of Jesus was literally unimaginable because no human is even capable of grasping the height, the breadth, the width, and the depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. It was a love that would send God from heaven itself to a barn in Bethlehem, to a perfect life, to a horrendous death,

and a glorious resurrection, all to ransom and rescue his own. And I'm sorry but no author anywhere or at any time could ever be capable of imagining so unspoken yet so grand a plan of salvation. So take a moment and consider the God who died for you.

*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.

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet where we try to come up with some practical application of what it means to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, there's something extraordinary in examining the unheralded, unimportant, unappreciated, unnatural, unreported, and unbelievable death of Jesus. It has to do with the unstoppable and the unimaginable grace that you and I have been the recipients of. And the big question that I want to ask us all this morning is do you realize, do you begin to grasp the privilege that you have been given? I mean you get to understand what so many can't possibly understand or get or even imagine. The god of this world has blinded the eyes of unbelievers and yet Jesus is very clear in telling his disciples what a privilege that they've been given and through them he tells us. Jesus did this through a story.

Just to go back to the gospels, this is a story that Jesus told. The disciples were very upset because Jesus at this point in his ministry is drawing these huge crowds and he chose to address these crowds with a story about someone sowing seeds in four different types of soils. I mean we all know this, we know the parable of the sower and the seeds and we who have 2,000 years' benefit of understanding, understand perfectly what Jesus was talking about in this story. He was speaking about four different kinds of hearts, and he was speaking about the way the heart is as the gospel is delivered. He was talking about a wayside heart which rejects the gospel out of hand, so it never, ever takes root. And then he talked about a stony heart in which the gospel takes root only temporarily and persecution and difficulties cause it to fail. And then he spoke about a thorny heart in which the gospel takes root and it gets choked by the world. And finally he spoke of good soil in which the gospel takes root and it grows and it reproduces. No big deal. We get the story. But we get it now but back then, that story made no sense at all. It made no sense to the disciples, it made no sense to the crowd that he was delivering it to. And understand, this crowd was so huge that Jesus had to get into a boat and address the crowd from a lake. They had problems with crowd control. And so he's telling this story and he's basically telling the story about farming with no explanation, no

insight. This huge crowd is gathered, Jesus just gets up there and he says let me tell you about four different kinds of sowing. And he describes wayside sowing and rocky sowing and thorny sowing, and good sowing, and then with no explanation whatsoever he leaves this cryptic remark, he says, "Let him who has ears to hear, hear," and then he splits. The disciples were blown away. They don't know what to do. They've gathered this huge crowd, Jesus comes out and says something that nobody understands at all.

And so we go to Matthew 13. It says: *Then the disciples came to him and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is 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."*

Here's what I want you to grasp from what Jesus is saying right here and right now. He's telling the disciples they're incredibly privileged to be given eyes and ears to see and hear these deep truths that Jesus is proclaiming. But guess what? We have the same privilege. The very same privilege that he spoke of to his disciples has been given to us. We get it. And we get the gospel. God has enabled us to connect the dots and to make it make sense. It makes no sense to that world outside the door. God says, *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is God's power to us who are being saved.* What God's saying is this world is known as the darkness, and the light came into the darkness and the darkness said, "We don't like that. We prefer the darkness." And unless God does a work in your heart, you're going to be in love with the darkness and you're never going to move into the light. And so we have this circumstance, we have this situation. We have been given this incredible privilege. This gospel makes sense to us. That didn't come from us, that came from God. But God also says to whom much is given of whom much is required. God didn't give you this understanding because he thinks you and I are cooler than everybody else. In fact there's no

reason whatsoever why he gave us that understanding. There's none that we could ever come up with. It's locked into God's sovereign will. God says *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*. That closes it off to our understanding. But here's the point. He's given it to us. We get it. It makes sense. We have an obligation, a huge obligation because of the hugeness of the privilege that we've been given. And something as unique about this time coming up, it's Christmastime. You can actually say the word "Christ" as long as you put "M-A-S" after it, Christmas. We'll accept that. It's a unique set of circumstances. It's a unique time. People talk about the holiday season and how am I going to sit with my crazy Uncle Joe and describe politics or all of these other types of things. How about the gospel? You're going to have opportunities to go to parties, you're going to have opportunities to connect with people, you're going to have opportunities to sit down and here's what I'm asking us to do. I'm not asking you to go out armed with tracts and shove them in people's pockets. What I'm saying is let's take some time and pray to God, first of all, thanking him for this privilege that we've been given. We get it. But we get it in order to give it, in order to give to those who are outside that door who don't get it. And so what I want us to do right now, I'm going to lead us in prayer to ask God in this holiday season to give us the opportunity when we're sitting down to maybe have the privilege of sharing the

gospel so somebody else can get it. Let's pray.

*Father, I just again, I thank you for the enormity of the privilege that we have received. I thank you that in our lives you have given us the Holy Spirit to connect the dots. I just continue to pray, Lord, that along with this privilege that we've been given of understanding the gospel, that as we go through this Christmas season, as we rub shoulders with people who don't have that privilege, that you would give us opportunity, that you would put on our hearts and our minds the idea to be praying for opportunity and that you would give us the courage to be able to speak, to give people the hope that is within us to open up to them perhaps the ability to get it as well. And Father, if there's anyone sitting here this morning that still says, "I just don't get it," I pray that you would lead them to speak to myself, to any of the elders, any of the deacons, that we could help them get it right here and right now by the power of your Spirit. Give us the grace and the ability to share your good news this season. We pray this Jesus' name. Amen.*