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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

May 6, 2018

Heavenly Affections

John 19

Prayer: *Father, we just again we thank you, we praise you, we bless you and we glorify you for the amazing sacrifice that we are celebrating and focusing on this morning. Father again, we just come before you and we pray, we ask that your Holy Spirit would be here, that you would accompany us as we look into your word and again as we focus on what you've done for us on the cross, give us the ability to understand, the ability to again make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well again this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross being the first Sunday of the month, and we speak of Jesus who met with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them. It's described in Matthew 26. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for*

the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And he then asked them to continue this remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, by asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Now we've been working our way on these Sundays through the gospel of John and we've gotten to the very beginning of the 19th chapter of John's gospel, and the last time out we looked at Peter's denial of Christ, actually his three different denials of Christ and how Jesus just happened to be perfectly positioned so that at the moment of Peter's third denial which was accompanied by vehement cursing, his eyes, that is Peter's eyes, just happened to meet the eyes of Jesus who had already begun to have been beaten and

mistreated. You see, Jesus superintended the exact time and the exact circumstances so that as he was being abused by his captors and denied by Peter, he had the presence of mind to make a rooster crow, and as verse 61 says, it says: *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.* And so Peter the bold one, Peter the stubborn one, the one who had bragged about his loyalty to Jesus now finds himself staring into the eyes of the very one that he is denying. Peter was absolutely crushed and he went out and he wept bitterly.

We spoke of how perfectly Jesus understood his circumstances and his surroundings so much so that in the midst of his beatings, in the midst of his mistreatment, Jesus is still ministering. I mean he's looking to Peter's future. After Jesus rose from the dead he actually cooked breakfast for his disciples and he had this confrontation with Peter in which not once, not twice but three times he forgives him and affirms his love for him. And we know that that confrontation, that meeting of the eyes that took place between Peter and Jesus, that changed the trajectory of Peter's life for the rest of his life.

Just last week I was speaking about this idea of sanctification and that's a fancy theological term for the fact that God never, never leaves his sheep in the state that he originally finds them. Sanctification means that God is going to take every single event

in your life and use it to shape and mold you into the image of Jesus Christ. And anything that is not like Christ in your life, God's Holy Spirit is going to work at rooting out and all that is Christ-like and good and true and noble and beautiful, well God's Spirit is going to pull that into your life. Because if you are one of his sheep and God has fixed his love on you, then these words mean something to you. This is from *Ephesians 1:5*. Speaking of God, it says: *He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved.* What God is saying here is that if you are one of his sheep, he will spend the rest of your life shaping and molding you according to the purpose of his will so that your life will be to the praise of his glorious grace. And as we look back, we see that's exactly what Jesus was doing in Peter's life that night. I mean all it took was one look from Jesus and Peter's life was forever changed. Peter may not have realized it but right then and right there God was taking him on a journey making him more and more like the image of his Son. As I said last week, I mean Peter started out as a loud-mouthed windbag and he ended up peaceful and gentle and mild and kind. You know Peter didn't just become more theologically astute, he became much more like the Jesus he loved. I mean we even have proof of that in the book of Acts, I mean, even after Jesus's death and resurrection, his affect on his disciples

was being felt not just in what they knew but in the way they acted. Acts 4:13 describes a situation where the disciples had been arrested and some observers were observing them and it says: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* See that's what sanctification did in Peter's life and that's what it's bound to do in the lives of every one of God's sheep.

Now this day, this time, this morning communion is a time for self-reflection, it's a time to ask myself how's my sanctification going? You see, the two great events that take place in the life of a Christian is first justification in which God says to himself, to the universe and to us that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross the just demands of the law have now been met, that Christ has paid the price of our penalty in full and that we are judged worthy for Christ's sake of heaven. Justification is something that takes place the moment we are saved, the moment that Christ becomes Lord of our lives. Now the moment that that takes place also begins this other fancy word, sanctification. And that's the life long process of God shaping you into the image of Jesus Christ. One of the things that John Piper expressed very strongly during the T4G conference that we just went to is the idea that sanctification involves more so than anything else a change in

our hearts, a change in our affections. You remember God tells us in Ezekiel 36 that he's going to take the heart of stone that we are born with, he's going to take that out and he's going to replace it with a heart of flesh. Well, Piper says it is this heart of flesh and the new emotions that it experiences that will tell you whether or not you're even a Christian. See for years, says Piper, we've boiled down new life in Christ to this idea of simply making a decision for Christ and the result has been a failure to work out a far more important part of what new life in Christ is supposed to represent and that's this fundamental change in my heart. It's the affections of a brand new heart. Listen to what Piper says. He says: "In the last 200 years, Christianity in America has been distorted -- or, to use a more serious word, ravaged -- Christianity in America has been ravaged by the dominant teaching that decisions for God are more basic in defining a Christian than delight in God. The upshot of the dominance of this viewpoint is the emergence of thousands upon thousands of professing Christians who have made decisions about God and joined churches, but have no new gladness in God, and are not Christians. The effort of this dominant viewpoint in American evangelicalism to define saving faith apart from the spiritual affections is biblically futile. To define saving faith apart from feelings of glad dependence, thankful trust, fervent admiration, pleased submission, contented resting, thrilled treasuring, eager

reverence, and heartfelt adoration is futile. You cannot strip away all those adjectives: glad, thankful, fervent, pleased, contented, thrilled, eager, heartfelt, from faith and have any savings faith left!" He says, "What you have left is what the devil can do."

I mean do you get what Piper is getting at here? What he is saying is that new Christians, they have brand new hearts, and new hearts are going to have brand new affections. And if your heart has not experienced any of this type of new affection, then maybe it's time to question whether or not you have this brand new heart. I'm not talking about some kind of ginned up form of emotionalism but far more a steady state of affection. I mean think about your own family, think about your own family affections. If you have to gin up some kind of emotional response to love your mom and your dad or to love your kids, then clearly you know something is wrong there. I mean for Christians, love is what is supposed to be there. I mean love is what naturally is inside because you've gotten this brand new heart, and this is no minor issue. Understand that God defines this as the most important response for any believer to have towards him. Jesus himself stated it in the form of a command in *Matthew 22*. He said is this: *But when the Pharisees had heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher,*

which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Here we have Jesus saying the greatest, the very first commandment is you must love God with all of your heart, all of your mind and all of your soul. You can't do that. You can't do that in the flesh, you can't do that on your own, you cannot do that by human effort alone. And the reason why Jesus can command it is because that is what flows out of the new heart that God gives us. It should not require effort to love God with your heart, your soul, and your mind if you've got this new heart within you. And whether or not this new heart is alive and well is a function of how you perceive your faith to be. You see, if your faith is just something to be tucked in with the rest of your life like your job or your home or your recreation or whatever, then I'm here to tell you that something is definitely amiss. You see, your new heart is supposed to define your life. Your passion for God and Christ and his gospel should be the number one driving force in your life. Every other force should take a second place by a considerable distance. And understand this is -- this is not a command. God is not commanding. This is not an imperative. This is more a statement of fact. This is an indicative. It indicates

whether or not you are one of his. It's what all new believers in Christ have in common, they have new hearts and their new hearts now drive them to see their faith as the most important things in their lives.

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, I would like us to take some time this morning to ask ourselves about the state of our hearts, about the state of our affections. Do you sense within you a heart that is full of glad dependence? Are you pleased to submit to his will? How about contented resting? Are you willing to be content with your lot right now, trusting that God is in control? I mean this is a normal response of a new heart that God has placed within you at the moment of your salvation, and if these affections seem foreign, well they shouldn't be. See, the new heart that God places within his sheep is filled with these type of affections. And it's a fair question to ask yourself if those affections are there at all, and if they are there, are they growing at all? You know each time we gather together, we share this warning from scripture. And the warning begins, it says: *But let a man or a woman, but let a man examine himself -- that's what we're doing this morning. We are looking to see if we literally have a heart for God and his kingdom. 1 Corinthians 11 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. What God is trying to tell us here is that communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster. So I plead with you, if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you have not by faith trusted in Christ, do not participate in this communion service. Simply pass the elements by. No one's going to look at you or think there's something wrong with you, they may in fact think you're wise. But I also want the opposite not to be the case as well. We don't want to make the mistake of thinking that unless we are flawlessly perfect we are unworthy to receive communion. I mean that, too, is a mistake that the devil loves. See, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we don't sin and that we never fail. What it does mean is that we recognize that salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by being good. I mean we repeat this quote each month from Dane Ortlund. It 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 do fail, we are aware that we've sinned. Why? Because we have that new heart. That new heart is where the Holy

Spirit resides and the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive 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.* You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are sinless. What it does mean is that if we do sin we understand we have an advocate with the Father, someone who is speaking out in heaven on our behalf. *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 so because we have Jesus's righteousness, that now by faith belongs to us, we have his righteousness and not our own, so now because of that, we are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. You know he lived the life we were all supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy to participate in this table, so that we could be made worthy of heaven. And so what I'd like us to do this morning for our meditation, I want us to ask ourselves, ask yourself a very simple question: Do I love God? Just think on that for a moment.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, verse 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 want to take a moment this morning in our second part to reflect a little bit on what my job is and how that should affect your affections. You know, I was asked and I've said this many, many times before that my job, my primary job as I define it, is to help you fall more deeply in love with Jesus Christ. I think it's a relatively simple task, I mean, all I need to do is open up for you who Jesus was and what he has done for us and so for the second part of our communion morning, the service, I want to focus in on one little statement, the very first statement of John chapter 19. It is a remarkable statement in its brevity and in its brutality. *John 19:1* opens up with this statement, it says: *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.* I want to look at this scripture in particular as a means of growing our affection for Christ. And I want to do it by helping us understand just a little bit more of the battle that Jesus went through on our behalf. But first I want to look at a far more earthbound example. I mean we all know this latest brouhaha in the press, the one that's been over the White House correspondents dinner and some pretty vile remarks made by a comedian who spoke there. I mean, the comedian used vile language and sexual situations to denigrate the president, and critics of

her performance were fit to be tied. Now defenders of the comedian pointed out that the president himself has used the very same kind of language in the past and has not shied away from denigrating women as well, so he was just getting some of his own medicine. What stands out in this particular mudfest is the amount of mud that was flowing. There's plenty of mud to go around for everyone. It just makes me realize there was no mud whatsoever associated with Jesus. There never was. I mean it was Jesus himself who called out his enemies with this challenge in *John 8:46*, he says: "*Which one of you convicts me of sin?*" And he wasn't just talking about any sin, he was talking about all sin and it was a blanket invitation. Is there any sin anywhere, any way, any how you can convict me of? We can't imagine any of us doing any such thing because we all know that we're sinners. Jesus knew the exact opposite. He knew that from birth he had led a flawless life, and he knew that he would have to go flawlessly to the cross to bear not his sin, because he didn't have any, but ours. This battle between the President and the press is evenly drawn with both sides flinging accusations against the other. You know the press and its allies suggest the President has brought all of this on himself by his conduct in and out of office. On the other hand there are folks who argue persuasively, I think, that it doesn't matter who the president himself is, the office itself demands a certain level of respect, respect that has so disappeared over the years that the

President no longer attends this dinner not wanting to be a punching bag for people who have nothing but hatred and disrespect for him. Let me tell you, hatred and disrespect was something that Jesus knew all about. He once told the disciples that the hatred that they were experiencing was part and parcel of simply being identified with him. He said in *John 15:18*: "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.*" I mean Jesus knew that not only was he going to be hated but all those associated with him would be hated as well simply because of him. And the stunning question that this raises for us is the question: Hated for what? I mean this was the only person ever born who never harmed a living soul, who never did anything but absolute good always, who everywhere he went brought nothing with him but truth, beauty and healing. I mean it doesn't matter which side you're on in this White house versus press corps battle, the bottom line is there's no shortage of hatred on both sides. When it came to Jesus, what was absolutely remarkable is that there was never a basis in reason for the hatred that he received. Jesus himself went on to say in verse 25: "*They hated me without a cause.*" And again this brings me back to the Lord Jesus Christ and my task of growing your love, your affections for who Jesus is and for what he has done for us.

And so we turn our attention to this hideous text this morning:

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. Jesus is, was and will always be the creator and sustainer and ruler of the universe. He was so at the beginning of creation and he will be at the end of it. And he was still creation's creator, sustainer and ruler at the precise moment that Pilate decided to have him flogged. Pilate knew he was dealing with an innocent man. I mean he also knew that anyone taken into custody as Jesus was was entitled to the protection he was supposed to offer as his case was being decided. Pilate made the decision to forego the protection he was supposed to offer and instead handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be flogged. You see, Pilate was a venal, cowardly bureaucrat and he feared losing his job, and so his commitment to what is true and what is proper just sailed out the window along with his honor and respect when he decided that flogging Jesus, well, that will be a pretty good idea. It's been argued that Pilate was simply trying to save Jesus's life, I mean, subjecting him to such obvious and physical torture that would have left him so bloody, so obviously tortured that the crowd would have no choice but see Jesus as pathetic and worthy of being released. That's the best possible motive that we can ascribe to Pilate. Chances are he was more than disgusted at the position that he was placed in and that he saw Jesus as a person of no consequence whatsoever and simply because his wife had a troubling dream about him and wanted nothing to do with him he felt he could kill two birds with one stone. He could

effect Jesus's release and still express his disdain and disgust for all things Jewish including this Jewish person who's claiming to be king. So Pilate had Jesus flogged. Or did he? See we know from scripture that the entire passion of Christ was foretold from the fall of Adam and Eve. We know that the prophets of old testified in astounding detail all that would take place during the crucifixion from the rooster crowing at Peter's denial which we've already spoken of all the way to the dividing of Jesus's garments as he hung on the cross. Every aspect of the crucifixion was played out freely by people who never even remotely understood that they were accomplishing exactly what the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit had set out to do centuries before. Jesus made it crystal clear to his disciples precisely how he was going to die, and when he spoke to them as they were approaching Jerusalem, I mean this flogging that Jesus was about to undergo at the hands of Pilate, it was something that Jesus knew all about beforehand. It was something he shared specifically with his disciples when he said in *Matthew 20:18*, he said: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."* See Pilate may have made the decision to have Jesus flogged but it was Jesus who was orchestrating everything. It was Jesus who knew ahead of time

exactly what Pilate was going to do.

I want to go back to the dialogue that took place between Jesus and Pilate in chapter 18. And we see Jesus having this discussion with Pilate and all the while Jesus knows it's going to end with him being flogged. It changes nothing about the way Jesus addresses him. This is *John 18:33*. It says: *So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world -- to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" And after he said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him." The chapter ends with Pilate's futile attempt to release Jesus that ends up with the crowd shouting instead for the release of Barabbas. I mean Jesus was no threat whatsoever to Pilate but Barabbas was absolutely a*

threat. And it may well have been Pilate's frustration at having to release a dangerous criminal because of the crowd that led him to do the unthinkable. *Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.*

And the question that I want to raise this morning concerns Pilate. In about -- in a roundabout way, really the question is this: Who was it that actually flogged Jesus? I mean we know that it was Pilate who made the order but we also know that the entire crucifixion was orchestrated, that was planned by the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and we know that the reason for the cross was so that God himself could take our place and actually pay the penalty of our sin, that God would justify us not by nobly shouldering the burden of paying our sin as if there was a difference between the debt and the debtor. No, no, he did that by becoming the debt itself, by becoming sin itself. 2

Corinthians 5:21 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.* God poured out his righteous fury on all the collective sin of his sheep from Adam until the final sheep was entering into the fold and he poured that fury out not on us who deserved it but on his Son who went willingly to the cross to take it.

And so we go back to our question, who was it who had Jesus flogged? See, it wasn't really Pilate or the Roman government or

the Jewish leaders or the howling mob who was responsible because all of them, guilty as they were, were playing a part in a drama that God was orchestrating and he was orchestrating because it was the only way that he could be perfectly just in condemning sin and perfectly merciful in taking that condemnation on himself. So if we're going to be completely honest, the answer to the question of the cross in general as well as to the specifics including the flogging of Jesus, we'd have to say the ones who are responsible are you and me.

As the elders distribute the cup, I'd like us to consider this fact: I can just as readily say instead of the phrase: "*Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him,*" I can say then Tom took Jesus and flogged him or Mary or Sue or Bill or Jim or any other person who by faith has become one of his sheep. See, we are the ones who participated in the whole passion of Christ because it wasn't the Jews or Rome or Pilate or the mob that put Christ on the cross, it was our sin that he went to the cross to pay for. We are the ones who put Christ on the cross. Make no mistake about it, God could have stopped these proceedings at any moment. He could have stepped in and declared the price was too high, the insult was too great, the cost of seeing his perfect Son mocked, brutalized and crucified was not worth the benefit of you and me being liberated from the sin that we loved, but he didn't. Father, Son and Holy

Spirit had purposed before time itself had began, before any of us and all of creation even existed that for his glory and our good, God himself would die for us.

Now there's two ways to look at this. You know, one is to focus on how miserable we are and what our sin has cost our Savior and the other is to focus on how wonderful a Savior we have, that Jesus Christ, the spotless one, the sinless one would be willing to endure every part of the cross including the monstrosity of Pilate's order to be flogged points only in my mind to one amazing thought and that is *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

Well, how does that translate to us living our lives? Well, God uses specifics of the cross to speak to how we live our lives and God frequently argues from the greater to the lesser. That is to say once you accept the greater premise, the lesser premise becomes obvious. Let me give you an example. If I told you -- if I told you I was going to give you a car and you asked me, "Will you give me tires with that car?" I would say, "Yes, the tires come with the car." If you asked me, "Will you give me a steering wheel with that car?" I would say, "Yes, a steering wheel is included in the car." And if you said to me, "Can I have a windshield along with

the car?" I might start getting annoyed at your lack of faith in my gift and I would tell you, "Look, if I'm giving you a car, you can expect I'm giving you a windshield as well." The major premise includes the minor premise. Well, God uses the same type of argument to tell us that his answer to all the struggles we have, struggles with life that we may not have expected, struggles with God seeming like he's absent, struggles with living in this fallen world where pain and struggle is everywhere, God says my answer to your struggles is the cross, the cross, and the cross. He says in *Romans 8:32*: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* See what God is saying here? God is telling us that the cross was the maximum that even God could go to. Major premise. And having gone there, having gone to the maximum, how would he not then give those he loves all the things they truly need? Minor premise. The question is do we love God enough to trust him?

Charles Spurgeon points out how this trust is deployed. He says this: "Unerring wisdom ordained your lot, and selected for you the safest and best condition. Remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there. You are placed by God in the most suitable circumstances. Be content with such things as you have, since the Lord has ordered all things for your good." See,

sometimes the notion that God has put you where you are right now because in his love he has declared is his best, sometimes that notion requires one thing that we can offer to God that is truly precious to him. That's our faith. That's our trust. That's our willingness to accept that life with all of its good and all of its bad is still sovereignly guided by his hand, and that no matter what life hands me, I'm going to trust in God's grace to get me through it. So the question we ask this morning is are you willing? Do you have within you a heart that loves and a heart that trusts no matter what? Do you have the affections that accompany a spiritual heart transplant that God alone can give? Feelings of glad dependence, thankful trust, fervent admiration. This is the time and the place to ask yourself those questions. And if your answer is open and honest and it's "no," this is also the time to ask God for that heart, to ask him to come into your heart, to occupy your heart, to have his Holy Spirit change your heart's affections. So before we participate in the cup, just take a moment to meditate on that.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 25th verse 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 head, heart, hands and feet where we are speaking of some practical ways, some practical understanding of what it means to remember Christ as Lord and Savior. And as you all know, this has been quite a month, I mean, we've had Hod and Betty, we've had Bill and his mom. How's she doing? Same. Okay. Kathy's dealing with her dad, with her sister, Gary's dealing with his sister who's near the very end of her life. We have Scott and Nancy, Beth and Eric. And in all of this I had two specific thoughts in all of the physical things that are going on this -- this week, this month. The first one was from *1 Peter 4:12* which says: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* I would say we were not surprised. And we were not surprised for one reason, because God's word has prepared us. There's another scripture that bears on this as well and it's *Psalms 23* which says: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* I've mentioned this many, many times, God says I'm not going to walk you around struggle. I will walk you through it, but your comfort will be me, my rod and my staff will comfort you, and God has comforted us through his body. You called, you texted, you volunteered, you gave and you prayed. This

is how the body of Christ functions. And you know the amazing thing is that God wastes nothing.

You know, Piper has a series of articles and books, says don't waste your cancer, don't waste your life, he says all of these things are going to happen to you anyway. Use them. Use God's grace to make them have extra value. And I looked at all of the situations that took place this month particularly mine with Bethany and Eric, and I just saw all of the people, people who were outside of the communion of believers, non-believers seeing what was going on, seeing how God was ministering, seeing what was taking place, the wonderful blessing that that was, and I don't want to waste that.

And then it also made me think about the body of Christ in general, the big body of Christ. I want to share with you one email that I got. This is -- I got this from my sister, and it's an email about Bethany coming home. This is the email. It says: My dearest Patty, I'm just reading your wonderful email. I am in tears of gratitude, just bent my head down and worshiped God for this blessed news that Bethany is home and doing well. I will continue to pray for full healing and no after effects and no more incidents in Jesus' name. Please keep my posted. And then it's signed: Christi Napier. Now who here remembers Christi Napier? Just raise

your hands. It was eight years ago that we more or less adopted Christi. Christi was a person who just, regular person, housewife, went in for surgery because she had pneumonia. In the course of the pneumonia she couldn't breathe so they did a trach on her, the trach caused scar tissue to build up so terribly fast in her throat that it literally choked her overnight. She was lucky to survive that, but every time they operated to clear her throat, more scar tissue came back. And so we followed her for two years, two years of just unrelenting agony and pain. If you remember the discussions that we had of praying for her and just the terror that she was involved in and the pain that she was involved in, having to open up her throat over and over and over again over these 30 surgeries, she had to fly to Philadelphia to do that. And I was just thinking here is somebody in the body of Christ in Scottsdale, Arizona just connecting with us, connecting with how we are with our woundedness, and I just think the body of Christ is such that when one of us is wounded, the whole body feels it. Even the body out in Arizona which is extraordinary. We kind of took on some of her pain, and she's taken on some of ours. And I just thought about -- I was looking at some of the old messages because I was -- I went back and the messages that we spoke about in talking about this were eight years ago, and I saw some of the emails that we had, some of the emails that she sent and that we got and I just want to conclude with this email that she sent. This was eight

years ago. And by the way, she's doing fine. She has a rasp in her voice and that's it, but she's been fully healed and she's been doing great. Her life has worked out extraordinarily well, God has blessed her. But this is what she said eight years ago.

She said: I belong to God, and I desire his will in my life.

Therefore I am never desperate, never need panic over something that cannot be overcome. If God has permitted this, he has a laser accurate plan and blessing in store. Thank you God for this exact trial. Thank you for how long it's lasted. Thank you for what it's cost. I trust you and I believe that you permit nothing to touch me, my life, my loved ones, that you will not work for good if we wait and surrender. This is an ugly package, but it is a good gift and I intend to receive it.

I just want to say that I think we've learned a lot of our lesson and we've seen ugly gifts are good packages that God gives to us. I just want to just praise God for what we have learned through this and what we continue to learn through this. And on that note, let's pray.

Father, I just again, I look at all of the physical things that have descended on us this month and I am so well aware of your presence and so well aware of your Holy Spirit coming alongside us

and, yes, you do not walk us around anything. You are walking us through this but I am so blessed to see how the body has responded, I am so blessed to see how the body has literally represented your hands, your feet, your lips, your heart, all of the different parts of what you represent here on earth. And so I pray for each and every one, I pray for Hod and Betty, for Bill and his mom, for Kathy dealing with her dad and her sister, for Gary with his sister, for Scott and Nancy going forward and for Beth and for Eric, for all that you've done. Yeah, the stories are lousy, these are not good things, this is all part of the curse, Lord, and every one of these stories relates to the curse that we're under and how you promised to walk us through this, and we've seen that, we've experienced it. And so we praise you and we thank you and we pray for even more grace and that none of this would be wasted and that those who are outside the kingdom of God would look in and see and say, "I want some of that." And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.