

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

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

**August 6, 2017**

**The Privilege, the Preservation, and the Profession of the Faith**

**John 17:10-12**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just want to again thank you for your grace, thank you for your goodness, thank you for the incredible blessing that you bring to us and the reminder we have each month about the cross. Father, I just again on communion Sunday pray especially for the presence of your Holy Spirit, I pray that you would guide us, that would you give us the insight and wisdom that we need that only comes from the presence of your Holy Spirit. And so as we open up your word, may your Spirit accompany us and may you give us the ability to make this of lasting value, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I said, this is the first Sunday of the month, this is the day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with the disciples, and there for the last time he celebrated his final Passover supper and *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." So Jesus took the bread and he took the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his blood and of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked the 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 his sacrifice on a regular basis, and 2,000 years later that's exactly what we are doing. We call it "the Lord's table" and we celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, then we examine ourselves, we ask God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our own lives where he's convicting us of sin, confess our sins, and then we participate in the elements. John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, if you recall, we're in the 17th chapter of the gospel of John and we're talking about Jesus's high priestly prayer. This is John 17:5-10, it says this: *"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. I*

have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them."

"And glory has come to me through them." Glory has driven Jesus's ministry from the very beginning and glory is the focus of his ministry now that he's at the end. If you remember the very beginning of Jesus's high priestly prayer in *John 17:1*, it says: *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."* So Jesus is identifying the upcoming cross as the focus point of the entire universe in space and time when it comes to glory and then he goes on to identify his primary goal in everything he does as glory. He says in verse 4: *"I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."* The universe gives God glory. I mean *Psalms 19* says: *The heavens declare the glory of*

*God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. And all of creation gives God glory. Psalm 148 says: Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.*

So creation gives him glory and most important of all, humans give him glory. It was Abraham Kuyper who I believe said it best, he said: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" There's one exception to that statement. The universe belongs to Christ. The mountains, the hills, the beasts, the livestock, the creeping things, the flying birds, they all belong to Christ. But when it comes to *Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children*, well, the invitation for them to give glory to God is oftentimes rejected. God gave to our first parents the right to choose and they chose poorly. They chose to side with the serpent against the very one who had given

them life itself, and in so doing, they fell. And every subsequent offspring of Adam and Eve is born already predisposed like their first parents to reject their creator. I mean it's no secret that the vast majority of God's creation rejects him. Even though God says in *Acts 17*: *"In him we live and move and have our being."* King Jesus has every right to the complete and full ownership of every last person who has ever breathed, but he doesn't exercise his rights of ownership. I mean we are his creation and by his will and by his power, we exist down to the very breath that we breathe and the beating of our hearts, we exist at his pleasure. And should Christ, the author and sustainer of life itself remove himself from us for an instant, we would all collapse like the bags of proteins that we all are. God gave the ultimate choice to our forefathers Adam and Eve and they chose to rebel. And ever since then, God has suffered the pain of our collective decision to reject him. Consider Jesus's words as he was speaking about Jerusalem. This is from *Luke 13*. He says: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"* That unwillingness applies to every one of us. And against that backdrop, we return to our text this morning, Jesus is praying but he's not praying for the whole world that has rejected him. No, instead he is praying for a very small group of men, and

it's a group of men that the Father himself has given as a gift to his son. Jesus says in verse 9, Jesus says: *"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours."* And then he goes on to express to his Father in prayer the nature of the privilege that these disciples have received. This is what he says: *"All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."* Now, did you hear the privilege that Jesus is speaking about, the privilege that he's giving to the disciples? Jesus mentions it four times, but it's easy to miss. The privilege is God's name. Chapter 17 starts out in verse 6 with Jesus manifesting God's name to the disciples. He says: *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."* Then verse 17, Jesus asks his Father to keep the disciples in his name. He says: *"Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I have kept them in your name, which you have given me."* And then at the end of the chapter in verse 26

Jesus says again, *John 17:26*: "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Well I don't think it's hard to conclude that God's name was incredibly important to Jesus, and giving that name to the disciples and keeping it was of critical importance as well. And so we ask, all right, well, what's in a name? Well, first I'd like to clear up a misconception that folks have about Jesus's name. Jesus's first name was Jesus but his last name was not "Christ." "Christ" is not a name, it is a title. "Christ" means "anointed one." And Jesus was known as Jesus of Nazareth, because folks in that part of the world are named according to where they were from and Jesus was from Nazareth, hence Jesus of Nazareth who was known as Jesus, the Christ. Scripture actually has more than fifty different descriptive names for Jesus from the "Logos" to "Wonderful Counselor" to "Prince of Peace" and each of them describe a very small slice of who he actually is. And we know from our text this morning that God's name was incredibly important to Jesus because it includes the full revelation of God's plan to redeem mankind. And so Jesus is determined to have his disciples receive, keep and profess the name of God.

But you know God isn't the only one who has a very keen interest in

names, I mean, we care a great deal about names as well. I've had five different, very serious conversations with five different young men, each of whom wanted to give their name to one of my daughters: Alex Yost, Eric Harget, Jason Gorss, Sam Woodard, and Taylor Watkin, they all asked my permission to change my girls' names from Mortenson to their own. Now my sons in turn had to ask permission of their in-laws to give our name to them. I mean these conversations gave me ample opportunity to consider the importance of a name. You see, for better or for worse, your name has a way of defining you. You know, one of the blessings or curses of a large family is that your name will often precede you. All of my younger kids who went to school, I mean, they always had the experience of having teachers and administrators say, "Oh, you're a Mortenson. I had your brother. I had your sister," I had blah, blah, blah. They understood all of that and they'd be the very first one to tell you there was a certain expectation that came with that name. Sometimes there's even a physical component. This is really astounding to me but my daughter Lydia got asked in Denver, somebody came up to her in Denver and asked her, "Are you a Mortenson?" And strangely enough, the person who asked her that now has Mortenson as her last name. It was actually Seth's new wife Lauren who saw Lydia in Denver, saw an incredible familial resemblance because, believe it or not, Lauren actually once lived here and went to Minisink, saw a resemblance, went up to Lydia and



asked her if she was a Mortenson. And my son Seth is walking down the street in Wisconsin two summers ago and a young woman came up to him and said, "By the way, are you a Mortenson?" Turned out that she was a cousin. And you know, I asked Lydia, I texted her, I said, tell me exactly what happened, you know, with that situation. And she was telling me and she said by the way, I was in Newark Airport two weeks ago, a person came up to me and said, "Excuse me, are you a Mortenson?" And she said, "Yeah." And it turns out it was a young woman who once ran track with Bethany in high school and now lives in Denver herself. It's astounding. I mean, it's astounding to me that physically and spiritually your family and your family name sets you apart and it identifies you. I mean it's the first indication of who you are. And what is true in the physical realm is doubly true in the spiritual realm. You see, when you become a child of God, you literally take on his name, you take on his characteristics, you take on his character, sometimes physically you change the way you look, usually for the better, because God has taken up residence within you. And this morning we want to look at the name that we bear as believers in Jesus Christ. We want to look first at its privilege, its preservation and finally its profession.

So first let's look at the privilege of God's name. Just take a step back and look at the context in which Jesus is reciting his

high priestly prayer. Jesus has just spent three years in public ministry, he's been feeding the hungry, he's been healing the sick, he's been even raising the dead all by this miraculous power and at the end of this period, he has this tiny little band of true believers and he has this band only because God has gifted him with them. And Jesus made that clear in *John 15:16*, he said: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."* So Jesus tells the disciples that they are there by God's choice and not by their own. I mean, they're just -- they're a group of blue collar fishermen and social outcasts, so they don't fully grasp the privilege that they have been given. God himself in the form of Jesus has chosen to manifest God's name to them. I mean Jesus prays to his Father in verse 6, he said: *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world."* Verse 26 he says: *"I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known."* They have been given God's name and one part of the privilege is that they are told by Jesus that anything that they ask the Father in that name he will give them. He says in *John 14:13*: *"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."* Well, this is only the first part of the privilege of hearing God's name and of bearing God's name and

it belongs to every one of his children. But we misunderstand what "praying in the name of Jesus" really means. You know, folks have misunderstood this passage to say that any time you pray something, just tack on Jesus's name and you're going to get it, and that's not what Jesus was saying at all. What he was saying is first that the disciples had been privileged to be brought into the family, to so bear the family name and the family resemblance that when they ask the Father according to that name, they will be given it. Now understand what Jesus is actually saying here. What he's saying is that by God's choice you've been brought into the family and now you have the privilege of bearing his name and anything that you ask in line with the family name, the Father will grant it. In other words, anything that you ask of the Father in the name of the Son with his heart and his mind and his passion and his wisdom and his mission, you will be given it. Now a new Cadillac and a house on the lake, they usually don't qualify. A heart for the poor and a heart for the disenfranchised oftentimes does. But even the Son gave to the Father the ultimate authority for all of these decisions, I mean, it was Jesus who said, "Not my will but yours be done." Those who have been given God's name, those who have the privilege of being part of his family recognize that the Father has the ultimate authority in all of these things. And that same authority that Jesus gave to his disciples he gives to every single member of the family.

And so the very first thing that I would ask us this morning is do you realize the extent of the privilege that you have received? I mean, Jesus flat out told the disciples that he wasn't praying for the whole world, just for those whom God had given him. And then he expands on that privilege in verse 20 by saying: *"I do not pray for these alone"* -- that's just the disciples -- *"but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."* That's us. You know why do you believe in Jesus? Well first and foremost it's because of the word that's been passed down from those disciples to us. You know, for over 2,000 years, the truth that they embraced was passed from person to person, from generation to generation, until our ears heard those same words. But what made those words make sense to us? I mean, was it our cleverness? Was it our spiritual insight, our ability to discern the truth? Or was it God's grace overcoming the blindness that makes coming to the gospel impossible for every single son or daughter of Adam outside of God's grace? God says in *2 Corinthians 4:4*: *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.* I mean, if we could only grasp for a moment the immensity of the privilege of knowing Christ, it could and it should revolutionize our lives. If you ever want to be reminded of the impossibility of coming to Christ without God first moving in your life, regenerating your heart of stone, turning it into a

heart of flesh, then just start sharing the gospel, just start sharing with people who would even be willing to give you a hearing in the first place and even those folks are few and far between. The god of this world has truly blinded the inhabitants of this world. They don't see the glory of Christ. They can't see the glory of Christ unless that is they too have the privilege of God opening eyes. Right now I'm presently dialoguing via email with a person about the gospel and we've exchanged three different letters so far, and you know, I use Microsoft Word and I get a little word count over there, I just looked, I mean, we've had 12,000 words in three letters so far and we're no closer to the truth of the gospel being received than we were at the very beginning. I mean I'm thrilled this person is even willing to dialogue about the truth of the gospel and basically she states her objections and then I try to answer them. You know, my last email came back with so many objections and so many problems that she had that I decided the only way to approach it was to just list them and number them, and I did. She had 64 objections to my statements. So I just listed them, all 64 of them, and I sent them back to her. I said, look, I can't answer all 64 in one letter. I said, why don't you pick your favorite five or just pick five at random, it doesn't really matter, and I'll concentrate on those. See, I pray for this person and I recognize the complete and absolute impossibility of the gospel ever making sense without God first doing a work in her

hearts. I mean I ache over the mountains of objections to the truth that she raises, knowing that answering one mountain is just going to create another and another and another and another. But there's another side of this. There's another side in which I have absolute and complete confidence. My confidence is in God and the fact that God can connect the dots and make everything make sense. So that I, too, just like Jesus did, I, too, can manifest the name of Christ. That's why I plead with you never to be put off by your lack of knowledge or experience with sharing what Christ has done for you. *1 Peter 3 says: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* You see, God is quite capable of taking whatever you sincerely give to a non-believer and making it of eternal value. I mean our job is simply to speak the truth in love, to just tell folks what Christ has done for you. Now I understand that oftentimes it's like trying to explain the colors of the rainbow to someone who was born blind. They just have no frame of reference for the truth of the gospel. And if you understand the gospel, you know Christ is your Savior, you have to know you've been privileged in a way that very few people on this planet have been privileged. God says in *Ephesians 2: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* You have received the most incredible gift

anyone on planet earth could ever receive. To get the truth of the gospel is to get grace and understanding that is absolutely undeserved, and that's our privilege. That's the privilege part.

Next we have the preservation part. The preservation part is understood by a doctrine. The doctrine is called "the perseverance of the saints." It's a doctrinal position that says if God sovereignly chose you, you will also preserve that which he has chosen. And no one can say this doctrine better than Jesus himself. This is how he described it in *John 10*. He said: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* The question is can you lose your salvation? Can you be kicked out of the family once you've been brought in? Can you be unadopted once you have been adopted? Well, the answer is absolutely not. But here's the rub. It is extraordinarily easy to think you are part of the family, that you bear the family name when in fact you don't. I mean we throw around the phrase "once saved, always saved" as if some kind of magic formula that guarantees that once you've raised your hand or said a sinner's prayer or gotten baptized or made a membership roll, then you're a member of the family and you're free to live

like the prodigal son. But one thing that is seldom mentioned is that if you are living like a prodigal son, you have no guarantee that you are a family member who's just kind of wandering off the reservation or a poser, an imposter, somebody masquerading as a family member when in fact you never were. 1 John 2:19 is a very sobering scripture. It says this: *They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.* What that's acknowledging is the fact that God never loses one of his own. No one can snatch them out of his hand. But if they were never in his hand in the first place, they can appear to be snatched away when none of them belonged to us in the first place. Jesus tried over and over again to get people to understand that. He spoke in many, many different analogies and parables just to get that idea across. He spoke about the wheat and the tares. And in the wheat and the tares, what he was trying to say is the church is always going to contain real family members and real imposters. See, a tare was an imposter. A tare was a plant that looked exactly like wheat but was absolutely useless. The Jesus said wheat and tares will always grow together until harvest times, and folks, the field where they grow is right here. The church is where wheat and tares grow together. And what Jesus is saying, and I say this with a broken heart, is that some of us in this building are imposters. Some of us are posers and we don't



even know it. Jesus said in *Matthew 13:30*: "*Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'*"

So how do I know, I mean, how do I know if I'm a wondering prodigal or someone who's never been saved? Well, if you're wandering off the reservation, the fact is you can't know and that may be by design. You see, if you are living an openly sinful life-style, the very last thing that God wants you to feel is confident that you're part of the family when you might not be. Personally I tell folks that the singular that mark I have observed in people who I've seen walk away on the permanent basis from the faith is that they have little or no qualms at all about walking away. Doesn't bother them a bit, they sleep like a baby at night, it's no problem at all. Here's why I think that's the mark of somebody who was never saved. You see, when you become part of God's family, when you actually begin to bear his name, you have the Spirit of God himself who lives inside you. And when you embrace open sin, you set up an internal war between the spirit of this world and the Spirit of God who is inside you. And that means that every single genuine prodigal is somebody who's really at war with himself. I mean, he may deny it for a period. Look at somebody like David. David committed murder, he committed adultery and he denied it for

a significant period of time. But even David acknowledged at that point he was in a spiritual war. Listen to what he said in *Psalm 32*. He says: *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.* You see, those who are able to walk away from God and his kingdom with no pangs of conscience whatsoever -- and I've seen it, I've seen it many, many times -- are folks I believe who do not have the Spirit of God within them in the first place. As 1 John says: *But their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I'd just like us to take some time to just consider the privilege that we've been given. We are God's gift to his Son. And consider also the warning that God gives about communion itself. It's contained 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.*

Communion is extremely serious business, you know, when God says: "*For this reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep,*" God says I have killed some of you for this. You don't get more serious than that. To enter into communion in an unworthy manner, I say it over and over again, is to literally court disaster. And I beg you, if you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you have not by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior or if perhaps you first need to be reconciled to your brother before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just pass the elements on. I mean no one's going to look at you strangely, I say this each month. But on the other hand, I also need to point out that you can make the mistake of thinking that unless I'm spotlessly perfect I'm not worthy to receive communion. Well, the enemy loves that, too, because that's also a mistake. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin, it doesn't mean that you never fail. It means you recognize that salvation is a gift and it's a gift that no one is ever capable of earning by his good works. And I repeat this quote from Dane Ortlund each time because it's so apropos. 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." You see, we have to understand that when we fail, we are understanding we have sinned because God's Spirit is now living inside us. And so we grieve and we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us, who longs to cleanse us, a God who 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 means that when we sin we understand that we now have an advocate with the Father. There's someone in heaven right now speaking on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so because we have alien righteousness, that doesn't mean from outer space, it means it's not from us, it's not alien to Jesus Christ, it's his righteousness, we have his righteousness, it now belongs to us and because we have his righteousness, we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love the Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Christ purchased for you at the cost of his own blood. We say it all the time, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven.

So there's some very, very heavy questions that we want to ask ourselves this morning about the privilege that we've received, about the responsibility that that privilege includes, about the preservation of the saints. I just -- I would love for us to resolve completely in our own mind that awful question: Am I real or am I an imposter? Think on these things for a moment.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter 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.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, let me again recap what the scripture is teaching us this morning. First it's teaching us about the privilege of God's name being made manifest to us. Again Jesus's words: *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."* We have the incredible privilege of bearing the name of Christ. And secondly, because God is the author of our salvation, we have absolute and uttermost confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God. And again, verses 10 to 12 says: *"Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."*

*While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me." And so we're learning that we've received this privilege not by anything that we have done by what God has done. None of us deserved this privilege; but if God chooses to open our eyes and bring us into the family, we are in the family forever. No one can snatch us out of his hands. And the warning here is to make sure that we actually are part of the family.*

*So we have the privilege, we have the perseverance, and finally we have the profession. God said this about those who profess to bear his name and are somehow or other ashamed of that fact. He says in 2 Timothy: If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. Jesus said Matthew 10: "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." You know, we've already talked about this idea of an advocate, it's something that I speak of every communion service, we have someone before the Father speaking on our behalf and it's none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean in 1 John it 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 Hebrews 7 tells us: He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to*

*make intercession for them.* There's only one way you will not have Christ speaking on your behalf, that is if you're not one of his family. And one of the signs that you may not be one of his family is an unwillingness to state that you are. I mean if your life as a Christian has been marked by a fear of being found out as one and a willingness to deny Christ, then consider whether or not you are actually part of the family or an imposter. "Secret Christian" is an oxymoron. You can't be secret and a Christian and at the same time not be defying what Jesus said in *Matthew 5:16* where he said: *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* See, if you are ashamed to name the name of Christ, it could be because you're not a Christian. And I'm not talking about a one-time deal here. I'm talking about a lifestyle, I'm talking about a pattern. You know, we all know Peter denied Christ three times. We know he was completely and totally forgiven and restored in a powerful way. What Christ is talking about here is an ongoing practice of actively denying Christ before men. And I think the question that it practically raises for us is are we living to express Christ in our lives in a way that lets God's glory shine through us so that people will know and understand that this is to God's glory or are we somehow hoping to fly under the radar so that our Christianity will not be a source of stress or difficulty to ourselves and our non-Christian friends. And if that is the case, then this place

and this time particularly, confession is the perfect of perfect opportunity for us. This is the perfect opportunity for you to ask yourself where your heart really is because the stakes couldn't be higher. You see, Peter denied his Lord and he was forgiven. And so can we if we repent. Jesus says: *"Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven."* Have you been privileged to have God's name manifest to you? Do you recognize the privilege of perseverance, of being kept in his name? Do you acknowledge the lordship of Christ before men or do you deny it? Take a few moments to ask yourself these questions.

*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 of the service that I call heart, hands and feet. It's where we speak about the practical implications of acknowledging Christ as Savior. And I want to talk about a word that's become sort of a buzzword. It's a good word. It's the word "intentionality." What "intentionality" really means with regard to the gospel is asking God for opportunities to shine the light,



is asking God for opportunities to share the gospel and then taking them when God gives it to you. You know, one of the things that I've observed just in my Christian life and I spent a great deal of time in the secular world working before I became full time in this job, but one of the things that I observed is when I met somebody new, I was very anxious to get that person to know that I was a Christian right off the bat. Because the longer you wait to let somebody know where you're coming from, the longer the enemy's going to use circumstances to kind of twist it and make it harder and harder and this person and you are going to be engaged in conversations that are going to make you start to feel queasy and then eventually he's going to start suggesting things that are going to make you feel bad and already you haven't even told him that you're a Christian and now you kind of got to back up and say, "Guess what, I'm really not into that." The sooner you say it, the less you go through that. And so the first thing that I when I meet somebody new, I'm trying to figure out a way without shoving it down his throat that I can let them know that, hey, I bear the name of Christ. I mean, what I used to do all the time is I'd somehow casually mention church and then people would say church? You know, you can just go from there or just, you know, God will give you all kinds of opportunities as long as you're willing, as long as you're intentional. But the longer you wait I think the harder it becomes.

The second thing I think of is you need to look at what our brothers and sisters around the world are going through. You see, the idea -- I think we believe the idea that it's really okay to be secret about Christianity because, you know, you don't want to step in other people's faces and you don't want to step in their spaces and you don't want to get them upset and I'm not suggesting you shove tracts down people's throats, but we know that around the world when people are bearing the name of Christ, they let people know and they pay dearly for it. We just read of a bunch of families that were kicked out of their village because they acknowledged Christ as Lord. We hear of young men and young women being beaten and ostracized by their own family members and then by the government, and we hear of people getting arrested and tortured and executed simply because they refused to be silent about naming the name of Christ. They do that in the face of incredible punishment, incredibly bad things. The very worst that we're going to face is embarrassment, I mean, that's -- that's really it. Nobody's going to stone you, nobody's going to arrest you. Somebody might look at you oddly and think that there's something wrong with you. I think we can handle that. And so what I ask is that you pray for a God-given opportunity. And I -- every time, like I said, every single time I meet somebody, I'm thinking, "Does this person know Christ? How can I get them to know Christ?" And I've prayed this prayer over and over, and I'll be the first one to

confess, I've had opportunities. There was an opportunity I remember years ago I could have driven a truck through, and I didn't take it. I chickened out. And as soon as I had done that, I was aware of that, it was my Peter moment and I did just what Peter did, I said, "Lord, you gave me that opportunity, I was fearful I didn't take it." I confessed it, I repented of it. I said, "Give me another chance," and he did. And my point for all of us is you need to be intentional and say, "God, this is what I want. I want to shine my light. I want the opportunity to be able to do that." And I don't have the cleverness to manufacture all of these circumstances but He does. And believe me, if you are intentional before God of saying, "God, give me the opportunity to share the name of Christ," he will give you those opportunities.

And you say, okay, well, how -- just practically how does that work? And I've used this example many, many times, the example I used is CJ Mahaney who is a pastor, many of you have heard of him, and he's a person who practices intentionality. He loves Starbucks. He loves Starbucks coffee. He goes to Starbucks every day. So he said I went to the same Starbucks, I picked the same table and I prayed that the same waitress would come and serve me, and the waitress would come and the waitress walks up and says, "How we doing today?" And his answer was, "Better than I deserve," and that's all. And that went on for a considerable period of time

till eventually the waitress said, "Why do you say that?" Bingo. There's your opening. There's something you can drive a truck through. And that's God giving an opening to somebody who's sincerely seeking it, who's intentional about sharing the gospel. So as we go to prayer this morning, realize you don't have to be clever, you don't have to be thinking, oh, how am I going to be figuring this out? Ask God to figure it out for you. Ask him to give you the circumstances in which you can start to shine your light, and then let's see what God does. Let's pray.

*Father, I just again, we have this incredible privilege of bearing your name, God's name has been manifest to us. Jesus said, "I've kept them in your name." He's keeping us in his name as well and bearing that name means that we do not deny you. Father, I pray that you would give us the ability to be intentional about each and every person that we meet, knowing that every single person is a divine opportunity to share the good news, to spread the light, to bring glory to you. Give us the ability to seek that and give us those results, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*