



Discernment-Part 3

Urgency & True Importance

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With all this kid's ministry going on at church this week, I started reflecting on how quickly my children are growing up. Like that happens to all of us parents from time to time, and I started thinking about just when they were little babies. It seemed like yesterday they were having their first birthday party, digging their chubby little fingers into the birthday cake—just before they take the face-plant into the icing. And just that whole experience, thinking back to them in their highchair, little babies crawling around in the living room.

And I thought to myself how much easier it was to plan their parties back then. Now, I didn't do it, but I could have just run out of my office, grabbed anything off my office shelf, and thrown it in a box for my kids. And they seemed to be more enthralled with the wrapping paper than the present. They were more excited about, you know, the box than what we put in it. They could be entertained by the bow and the ribbon, you know, for as long as the toy that we bought them. Those were the days—it was really easy. Today, though, it's a lot harder. Matter of fact, they don't even care if I wrap their presents now. As long as it's cool and expensive. That's all my kids care about. They just want that, see, because they have this sense now about what things are worth. And their excitement about my presents to them are proportional to the worth of the presents that I give them.

See, that's the thing about maturity—it helps someone with their valuations of their father's presents. That's just how it works. In our spiritual lives as Christians, unfortunately, in our immaturity, we can be enamored with the wrapping instead of the gift. We can kind of spend time moaning over the fact that we didn't get the right ribbon, you know, on the box, and we can cry in our earthbound childishness at the things that God doesn't do for us when he's presented to us something so valuable. Spiritual growth has a way of helping our valuations of the Father's gifts. And we've got to be very careful that we look in the Bible and think clearly about what's important, what's not, what's valuable, and what's really just wrapping—what's eternally significant and what just has temporal flash. There's a big need for Christians to grow up and be discerning in this matter.

As we've been looking at Luke chapter five here recently, we've been talking about the scenes in Christ's life in terms of discernment. Today, I want to talk to you about a scene there that begins in verse 17 of Luke chapter five, where we really see Christ making the distinction in a very dramatic way between what people wanted from him in this very dramatic scene and what he felt was—and clearly knows—what is most important, what is eternally important. And in this exchange that goes on between Christ and a paralytic, and those that bring the paralytic, there's a great lesson for us that if we could just catch this, it can spare us a lot of the immature whining that I think characterizes so much of our Christianity and needs to be expunged. And we need to replace it with a lot of mature discernment about what's really important, that rises above the circumstantial ebb and flow of how we feel today, or this month, or next week. And we need to focus on what's truly



most important—things that should, if we rightly understand them, cause our hearts to be filled with a profound joy that surpasses all understanding.

So if you haven't opened yet to Luke chapter five, I invite you to do that, looking at verses 17 through 26, as we see Christ, according to the parallel texts in Capernaum. Now, Luke doesn't tell us that, but he's back to the place he has set up as kind of his operation, his headquarters here near the Sea of Galilee, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, not far from the shore. And he has probably put himself back, as you'll see in this text, not in the synagogue in this case, but probably in Peter's house. And it's jam-packed full of people. Look at how it's put beginning in verse 17.

Let me read it for you. Luke 5:17: "On one of those days," Luke says, "as he was teaching, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee, and not only Galilee, but Judea, down south, and from Jerusalem." So we had some big heavy hitters here—the religious, you know, elite, the brass have showed up. And as we looked at many times in Luke already, that's about a three-day journey. It'd take you almost 30 hours to get from Jerusalem on foot up to Galilee, up to Capernaum. So this was a big investment. And there was some interest, obviously, that had spread all around about Jesus, because the bottom of verse 17: "the power of the Lord was with him to heal." And that's going to attract a crowd, because just a few times we found in the Old Testament, there were occasional situations where something dramatic, something miraculous took place—where people were being healed. And this was something obviously big that God was doing and people were going to show up—the Pharisees, the teachers of the law.

Well, in that situation, in a crowded house, verse 18: "Behold," Luke says, "there were some men bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed." And according to the parallel texts we have in the other gospels, we know there were four men carrying this paralytic. So you've got a paralyzed man and four of his friends here, bringing him to the house that Christ is teaching in. "And they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus." But "finding no way," verse 19 says, "to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, and they let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus." Imagine how dramatic that is, right? Can't get in the door, it is crowded, we're climbing on the roof, we're going to disassemble the roof, and we're going to lower him—just in the middle of, you know, mid-sentence—here comes this paralytic on a cot.

"When Jesus saw" that—and you can imagine the ruckus, right—and he's looking at this hole in the roof now—"when he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, you are healed. Get up out of your bed and walk.'" Highlight that widget. Is that what it says? Correct me if ever I read this wrong, Sunday school—thank you. It's not what it says. "When he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'"



Now that's an odd thing. I've come here with my buddy. He's paralyzed. He needs help. There's no disability insurance. He's got no way to make a living. This guy is dependent on his extended family. Please, Jesus, you've got power to heal—heal him. And Jesus sees the great lengths to which these guys go, and he says, "Hey, that's—man—that's amazing faith you have in me. You're forgiven." We didn't come here for forgiveness; we came here to fix the paralysis in this man's legs.

That brought up a big stir in the crowd. Teachers of the law—the scribes—were there. It says in verse 21: "The scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" When Jesus perceived their thoughts—well, there's an interesting thing that only God can do as well—he answered them and said, "Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier to say"—and here's a thought-provoking question—"Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?" "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." Verse 25: "And immediately he rose up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God," as you can imagine. "And amazement" (verse 26) "seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying," as you would do, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

Now, anytime you'd be in the presence of Christ healing a person, you'd say, "That's extraordinary. That's an amazing thing we've just seen." But what's more amazing, I hope for the discerning reader of this text—what's even more amazing—is that when they come asking for healing, Christ grants forgiveness, and only grants healing as proof that he has the authority to forgive. That's a big deal. Very interesting. Think about the great lengths to which these four guys and this paralyzed man went to get in this crowd, to get in the middle of it, and to get this paralyzed man before Christ.

I mean, I watch people, you know, come into a Starbucks, and if the line has too many people in it, they turn around and walk out—"don't have time, not interested." You'll see crowds that are much bigger than the coffee shop at the Orange County Airport, and I've never seen anybody walk up there to the big crowds and lines and go, "Oh, it's crowded, I can't get through here, I'm leaving." Because getting on that plane—that's much more important. You've got a lot more invested in it; it's urgent. "I've got to get through this line." And they may try to wiggle their way through the pilot's portal, but they're there. They're going to do it. They're not happy about it, but they're going to push their way through the crowd and do whatever they can because this is important. They must be persistent. "Gotta catch my flight."

See, for these men, it was not something that they came and said, "Well, it'd be great if Jesus could heal our friend, but you know, it's crowded, we can't get in, I guess we'll come back another day." Think about how determined and committed these men were to get their sick friend to Christ—urgency. And against the backdrop of that kind of urgency, just think for a second that when Christ finally sees this man and their friends, he says, "I'm not going to give you what you asked for. I'm



going to forgive you instead.” At least initially. That’s where the—now here’s an interesting—little bait and switch from our perspective: you seem to have the power to heal, but instead you offer forgiveness. That does show something about priority and what’s important to God.

And it is, for us, maybe a helpful place to stop and just say, “Hey, how about the things we’re so urgent about? The things we come to Christ and really pray about? The things that every day we’re often saying before God, ‘God, you just have to do this for me, or my family, or my children,’ or whatever. ‘I’ve got to have this.’ What are the persistent things that we pray about?” Number one on your outline—let’s jot that down and just spend a few minutes rethinking what’s really urgent. Because we have naturally a response to things that we want and desire, and sometimes they rise to the top of our prayer list. And when it comes to our spiritual life and our walk with Christ, we pray those things more than anything else.

I wonder if we could take the tapes and supernaturally throw up here on the screens a chart of your prayer life this week, and find out what you prayed about most. And I’m not talking about the rote things you may say before your enchilada; I’m talking about the thing you really are concentrating on, and you’re pouring out your heart to God. What are the things that captivate your prayer life, that you bring to God with a great sense of urgency?

In this story, these men were urgent and persistent and committed and resolved to see their friend walk. And you would understand that. Can you imagine what a big deal it would be to be paralyzed? And not only that, to be paralyzed in the first century, when so much of your well-being, your comfort, and your convenience hung on whether or not you could work and be an able-bodied man. This is a big deal. I can understand why it was at the top of their prayer list. But what’s interesting in this passage, of course, is that Christ grants them something that they didn’t ask for—something that apparently reveals his priority that’s different than their priority.

And I wonder if Christ looked at your prayer list and said, “These are the things that you’re concerned about. These are the things that captivate your attention. These are the things that you’re anxious and all wrapped up inside about.” I wonder what they would look like compared to what Christ sees as the most important things for you. And the way I often like to think about that is—if you’ve heard me preach for a while, you’ve heard me talk about the hundred-year test. We need to apply the hundred-year test to our prayer list. And that is: a hundred years from now, will the things that you’re all concerned about this month in your prayer life—will it really even matter if Christ answered that prayer or not? I mean, will it have any lasting eternal significance as to whether or not Christ granted you that thing that you’re pressing in on him to do? How important is it to God? That’s the question we need to ask.

We don't take time to turn there—we'll get to it eventually—but it might be worth jotting down if you're a note taker: Luke chapter 10. There's Luke chapter 10—you may remember, near the end of that chapter, the story of Christ coming to the house of Mary and Martha. Smile at me if you remember him coming to the house of Mary and Martha. And when they were there, Jesus encounters two sisters: one who's sitting at the feet of Christ, listening to Christ teach, and Martha, who's scurrying around trying to take care of the preparations for the meal and all the things that she was going to do to be a good hostess for Christ and his friends. She complained—now think about it this way—and she's bringing, from our perspective, a prayer request to Christ: "My sister's not helping me. I'm overworked. I'm doing the job of two hostesses here. Christ, have my sister help me." And you know Christ says, "Oh man, I'm a compassionate person. I am a loving deity. I feel for you; you know what—Mary, get off your butt and start helping Martha." That's what Jesus says, right? Now, correct me, Sunday school graduates, if I ever get these stories mixed up. That's not right.

Jesus—now think about this—does not respond to her prayer request with a positive response. The answer is not, "Yes, I'll do that for you and relieve some of your pain." The answer is, in essence, "You're praying for the wrong thing. You're asking for the wrong thing." Matter of fact, how does he respond to Martha? "Martha, Martha, you're worried and troubled about so many things. Only one thing is necessary. And Mary has chosen the better part, and I'm not going to take it away from her." Think about that. I mean, that's a bit of a slammed door in your face from heaven, is it not? You want Christ to relieve your struggle—"I'm hurting, I need help. Enlist that person to help me." "No." Why? Because your priorities are wrong. Because what you're asking for is not what's important to me, and it's not what's best for you. I need you to sit with your sister—I mean, that's what's inferred and implied—sit there with her and learn from me.

Priorities are so important and so critical for us. It's a bit like looking at our prayer lists and recognizing we're asking for some things that—they may be good things—but they're not the essential things. Obviously, in this text, it's the first use of the word "faith," and we'll get to it in a second when we'll reread that section there in the center. But clearly, we're talking about forgiveness, which is the most important thing of all.

And it'd be like being in a plane as you're flying back to Chicago or something this week, and all of a sudden the pilot comes on—and you're 35,000 feet—and says, "We're at 35,000 feet—no, make that 34—no, make that 33. Okay, I must admit, we're heading down. We're going to crash. But the good news is we've got our stewards here in the cabin; they're going to bring the flight attendants, parachutes for everyone. We will get to 10,000 feet, we're all going to bail out, and we'll all be fine. So strap on your parachutes." You go, "Oh, what a hassle. Why'd I fly with these guys?" Okay. So you sit there, and you see as they come up the aisle—which is now "pushing" up the aisle because the plane is tilting down—and they're coming and passing out the parachutes. They get to your row, row 28, you're in seat D, and you see them coming, and as they're passing out the parachutes, you say, "Oh, by the way, my stomach is grumbling—do you have any peanuts? And, you know what, I'm sitting here in this seat uncomfortable; a pillow would be great. Do you have a pillow?"



Now, here's the reality: your stomach is grumbling; you may need a pillow. Those are good things to have. And I'd suppose that'd be an important thing to have—if there wasn't a much more urgent thing that is pressing upon everybody in the cabin, and that is: you better get your parachute strapped on. Here's the problem: we're very often asking for peanuts and pillows, and what we really need is the parachute.

Think about it this way: Jesus compares, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter seven, the way we respond to our kids when they ask us for things. And he says this: if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your kids, don't you think the Father knows how to give you good gifts? Now here's the problem. We ask for bread, and he says, "Listen, God's not going to give you a stone." You ask for fish; he's not going to give you a snake. That's how we read it, and we move on to the next passage. But think about it. A lot of times we ask for bread—he doesn't give us bread; he gives us something else. And the problem is we say, "But I really wanted bread," which in our immaturity may be—we wanted the bow, but we didn't want the present. We valued the wrapping, but we didn't really want the essence of what God wants for us.

As a matter of fact, when Luke tells that story, he talks about the thing that God ultimately wants to give all of us is the Spirit of God. And we often read that about, "Hey, be great—I want a boat in Dana Point Harbor, that's what I really want." And I know just like I know how to give good gifts to my kids—when they want a bike, I give them a bike—"give me that, God!" That is not what he's interested in. Now, he may be—because he's overly generous, I get that—he may endow you with all kinds of peanuts and pillows. And in South Orange County, a very wealthy, you know, American 21st-century church, I understand he's given you more pillows and peanuts than you know what to do with. But what we really need is parachutes. And the reality of it is, often when we ask for bread and he gives us something so much different than that, we can't even see how valuable it is.

And I don't know how to illustrate this—choose your favorite, I don't know, the greatest food ever made. I don't know what that would be for you—maybe a Ruth's Chris, medium rare—make it medium well—one of the thick, sizzling plates of filet mignon with a nice salad with ranch—little ranch on the side—hot bread, steamy out of the oven, which is just the garnish, because of course I'm going to have the garlic mashed potatoes as well on the sizzling plate. Picture all that. "I just want a slice of Weber's bread." Do they make that anymore? I don't know. Whatever bread they make. What's the brand—give me a bread brand. Yeah, Wonder—do they still make Wonder Bread? Are you playing a joke on me? They make that? You know—Acme Bread? Oh, Acme Bread, okay. No—Wonder Bread. I get it. We're asking for something, and Christ is sliding something so much better in front of us. And if we're immature, we say, "Hmm, I really just wanted bread." You asked for a fish—he gives you something radically different.



Do you think people in that room, especially when they started to question within themselves and reason in their own minds and grumble with their eyebrows and their smirks on their faces—do you not think that they thought, “Wait a minute, this guy asked for healing; that would be a really good thing. You didn’t give him healing; you’re giving him forgiveness.” Now, the Pharisees had a theological problem with it, but a lot of people—goes without saying—would start with, “They asked for the important.” For us, we need to reevaluate often our unanswered prayers.

I don’t have time for this, but it’s the last service, so let’s go. For daily Bible reading—we’re encouraging all to read the Bible, hopefully you’re reading it, and if you didn’t read today’s, you can read it tonight—but we read today, we start in Psalm 13. Psalm 13 is a great psalm. We find so many psalms like this in the Psalms, where the psalmist, the godly person, comes and asks God for things and God does not grant them. And the frustration that’s revealed kind of transparently in many of these psalms is the way that God does not answer, and the frustration is built, and it peaks because other people across the street who are not godly and give no deference or thought to God—they’re the people getting all their nice things given to them.

If you want a big psalm that gives us that whole thing, think back to last summer when we were doing the Selected Psalm series—remember that? And we did Psalm 73, and we met Asaph. And Asaph was there, for many verses, being frustrated at the fact that the guy across the street got the promotion; the guy over there had the great marriage; the person down the street—they had good health. And he says, “I didn’t, and I’m godly. Every morning I wake up and I’m afflicted. Look at those people—they’re blessed every single day and they don’t care about you. I don’t understand this, God. You’re not answering my prayers.” I know it’s a big, you know, long time ago, and a big question to ask you here, but you remember how that psalm plays out? The whole point of that psalm was, at the end he says, “I was like a brute beast before you. I was just stupid and foolish, until I recognized the end.” And the end of those who do not recognize or fear you is not good; it’s doom, it’s demise. But for those of us who do—even if we don’t get the peanuts and the pillow—if you’ve got the parachute on, there’s no need to look across the aisle at the guy with the peanuts and pillow and say, “How great is that guy’s life,” as he sits there without a parachute. And you’re sitting there bemoaning the fact that God hasn’t given you all the goodies he gives other people.

What’s the point? Let’s reevaluate what we’re so urgently pressing God for, when in reality he has something far, far, far more important. And I’m not saying he may not—as he does in this passage—give us the things that our hearts desire. But let’s make sure the desires of our heart are prioritized the way they are in God’s mind. Rethink what’s really urgent.

In this text, it says in verse number 20, he responds to that great, urgent, heartfelt, sincere desire to have Christ fix the problem by saying, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” Just the transition from 17, 18, 19 to verse number 20—it’s jarring for my life. And I’ve got to say this: some of you know this about my life, but to read any story about a paralytic brings this thing so close to home in my life, because my daughter is technically a paralytic—she’s paralyzed. And this is the 11th-year

anniversary—this week was our prenatal check, the 20-week ultrasound where we find out whether we’re having a boy or a girl. This was our third child, and we find out that she’s a girl. And within five seconds, we go silent because the tech there made it very clear: there is a problem. The doctor rushes in and we find out our daughter has hydrocephalus—a severe case of it—and spina bifida. If you know anything about those things, the prognosis was not good. At first, it was, “Your daughter is going to die.” Then by the time she was almost ready to be born, they said, “Well, she looks like she’ll survive, but she’s going to be paralyzed. And there’s such irreparable damage to her spinal cord—she’ll never walk, she’ll never run, she’ll never skip, she’ll never jump. This is just the way it’s going to be.” And certainly that’s the reality of our lives—we have a paralytic. And though she walks around here, if it’s short distances from the classroom to the car, you might see my daughter in leg braces up to her thighs, but if we go anywhere where we have to walk any distance, she’s in a wheelchair; we have to wheel her around.

And I think to myself, if I were in the presence of Jesus Christ with my daughter paralyzed, with all kinds of issues that you guys never get to see because of the organs in her body that are paralyzed, and the grief that she has to go through, and the maintenance my wife has to do, and all the trouble and heartache of looking at things in her life and recognizing, “You’ll never do that, you’ll never have...”—seeing all of that—and knowing I stood in the presence of Christ and he could, with a touch, take that all away, and to have him say, “You’re forgiven,” that—that’d be big. That’d be hard. I mean, that would be—in my immaturity—that could be devastating. “You’re not healing my daughter of her paralysis?” “No, no, I’m forgiving her.” Unless I understood the values of heaven, this phrase right here would not mean what it should mean.

Now, as I mentioned, in verse number 20 this is the first reference to the word “faith” in Luke. We’ve seen it—if you’re a technical Greek guy and you’ve got your computer out there or your iPad—you may say, “Well, there are two references to this word ‘Pasteur, oh’—the word faith—in chapter one.” They’re used in non-technical senses as verbs. Here’s the first reference of the noun “pistis,” the first reference of the word “faith,” which becomes such a central word, not only in the gospels, but throughout the epistles—tied to forgiveness. And that’s why in this text we see faith being observed. Christ says, “I observe your faith,” and then he says, “I’m going to grant this man forgiveness.” The faith–forgiveness connection.

And while Christ does not give the thing they desperately, urgently want—and in their minds, they’re not getting their healing—the Healer is saying, “I’m giving you something different.” The reality of that should make us understand something about forgiveness. Because we know Christ is intimately involved with the needs and hurts of this man—of everyone. He’s got the hairs on our head numbered. He is our heavenly Father. And if a Father would not grant healing to the paralysis of one of his children, when he has the power to do it, you must be telling me there’s something so surpassingly important about forgiveness that would make the healing of paralysis just—not even an issue. Number two on your outline—let’s write it down that way: we need to see the surpassing value of forgiveness. The surpassing value of forgiveness.



He grants forgiveness—which is the pardon for everything this man lying on that mat had ever done that had either fallen short of the glory of God, had twisted the command and standard of God, or transgressed the parameters and prohibitions of God. This man’s account was instantly, with a word, clean, and he was acceptable before his Creator. And even stating it that way, I hope you recognize I do understand with enough spiritual maturity before you this morning to let you know that it’s far more important. And as a matter of fact, the more I think about that, if Christ were here and looked at my daughter and said, “You’re a Christian. You’re never going to be condemned for your sin. Your sins are eternally forgiven. Oh yeah, you’ll be in a wheelchair and leg braces for the rest of your life, but you are going to be in the New Jerusalem,” that’d be enough for me to say, “That’s a good day’s work, Christ—we’ll take it,” because I know the hundred-year test on my prayer list: it will not matter a bit what the physical state of my daughter or your life is for the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years. It won’t matter a bit. Because not only will you have no reference of concern for the ailments of your body on this earth, but you’re going to be given a body, the Bible says, that is just like Christ’s resurrected and glorified body, and we’re going to go, “I can hardly remember all the hangnails and problems or cancers I had down there.” It won’t matter a bit. But what will matter is whether you’re going to hear, “Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” or, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” That will be eternally important.

Let’s look at this text afresh. Verse 20: “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” The scribes and Pharisees stumbled over that theologically, saying, “Hey, this guy’s blaspheming. Who is this? Who does this guy think he is—speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Now, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the teachers of the law, the scribes—all these people that we hold up as religious leaders in the gospels—are often villainized as terrible people, and of course in many cases Christ is pointing out the worst of the Pharisees and all the rest. But oftentimes they speak the truth, and this is a true statement. I don’t even need to take you all over the Old Testament to prove to you that what they deduced from that statement was absolutely right. It would be blasphemy to say that this man could forgive sins as though he were God—that would be blasphemous—because no one can forgive sins but the One you’ve sinned against. And I don’t have to turn you to any passages in the Bible; all I could do is illustrate that, and that is: if I were to come in your situation, whatever it might be, where someone has wronged you—stepped in the middle—and said, “Hey man, you’re forgiven,” you’d go, “What? Get out of the way. This doesn’t involve you.”

See, when that man on that cot had sinned, either in thought, action, deed, or word before the holy God that created him, that sin—as David said when he was contrite in heart—our sins are against God alone. Oh, they affect a lot of people, but the violation is against God. And for someone to step in and say, “That’s okay,” would be like me and you walking out, you know, to the food truck rally, and as we’re standing there getting our crowd dog or whatever they’re going to serve us today, and say, “Look, that kid over there is keying your car.” And you and I are standing there together and we see some punk, derelict kid—it’s not from our youth program—but some kid walks in off the street and he’s keying your car maliciously. And we walk over there—“What are you doing?”—we catch him red-handed. “Hey, listen, man,” I step up and I say, “I just want to tell you, you’re forgiven. I forgive you.” You’re going to stand next to me—“What? What are you talking about, Pastor Mike? This is not your car. You cannot forgive this kid for doing something to my car. I’ll decide whether I forgive him or not.”

I don't know—that sounds too malicious—backs into your car. We have a little fender bender in the parking lot. You walk out—bam. I walk in, say, “Hey, don't worry, don't worry, don't worry.” I look at the guy who just rammed your car: “Forgive you, man. You're forgiven. Okay, go about your way, go home, no problem.” He drives off, you'd be steaming—“What are you doing? I didn't get his insurance, I've got to—you're not going to pay for this, this is terrible!” “No, I forgave him, it's okay.” It's not okay. Who can forgive sin except the one who's been sinned against? You can't do that.

Do you think that's why—I mean, clearly it is in verse 22—why Luke now adds something that reminds us that we're not dealing with a prophet here. This is not Isaiah; this is not Jeremiah; this is not Elijah; this is not Elisha. Look at this: “When Jesus perceived their thoughts”—okay, I'm going to think of something right now. Okay—whew—okay, now, what am I thinking about? Go ahead, tell me. You have no idea. I'd be embarrassed to tell you what I just thought about—it's so bizarre. You don't know what I thought. Not a person in this room knows what I just thought. And as Paul said, who knows the thoughts of a man but the spirit inside the man—and that's me. I'm the only one who knows what I just thought of. Only person. Well, of course there's an asterisk in that passage in 1 Corinthians, because there is someone else who knows my thoughts—God. God knows my thoughts. He's the Creator of all spirits. He's the God of all spirits. He looks through everything; he is—“I see everything,” every thought, every everything.

This text reminds us that Jesus perceived their thoughts, answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts?” What's going on in your hearts? This is God in human form, who has the authority to say when sins are forgiven against the Triune God because he is the second person of the Godhead. He then asked this question, because they're going, “I'm not buying it.” “Which is easier,” verse 23—now this is a head-scratcher for commentators; they're polarized on this—“which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?” You know, it's fun to read the commentations—there's a lot of things going on—and people sit back and pontificate and ponder what's happening in this text. And some commentaries are so—somebody—they say, “Well, which is easier to say? I don't know that—well, I guess the first one's got more syllables in English.” This is not about what's easier to say; what's easier to say and have it happen?

Clearly, this is a question about which would be easier—now you answer that question. Now think about that. Which is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” and have them actually be forgiven, or, “Arise and walk,” and really have that happen? Now think about that—you need a couple different answers. Matter of fact, your brain'll go back and forth like a ping-pong match, going, “Well...” Because here's the deal: if you're looking for authentication here and now, it would be harder for you to say, “Rise and walk,” because I want to know that it really works, that you have the power to do that, because I'd see this guy get up, and I'd see him walk away, and I'd see his atrophied legs. Have you ever watched my daughter? Or get a look at her—no—all of her atrophied muscles down here? You'd see muscles instantly inflate like someone put an air valve into the balloon and—boom—and then walked away: tendons working, muscles working, everything, all the nerves



firing—and off they walk. That would be an amazing thing, and you'd say, "That seems harder." But is it harder? Think about it—is that really harder? I've already clearly shown you what's more important—and what's more important is whether or not we have forgiveness. That's more important.

Now, in the Bible, you find things happening all the time where God is speaking a word and things are being created out of nothing, with an appearance in history of age they never had. For instance, in Genesis one, we have God speaking, and out of the ground, here comes Adam—recapitulation of the story in chapter two. He says these things, and here they come—boom—Adam and Eve. You find that happening often throughout the Scripture in, you know, very special cases—the creative acts of God. Doesn't take, you know, a whole long series of events. You know what's much harder? Forgiveness. Why? Because it took just a word to create man, to have something come out of nothing—like it would be to create muscles in the calves of a paralytic, and have all of his spinal cord be firing all the electrical pulses the way they're supposed to—only take a word to do that. But it takes an entire Bible to explain how God takes sinful transgressors like you and me and forgives their sin and remains the just and the justifier of the wicked. That's a big, big deal. It takes the incarnation of Christ; it takes the suffering of Christ; it takes the crucifixion of Christ; the resurrection of Christ. It had a whole Old Testament leading up to the picture of that kind of substitutionary sacrifice. It is a big deal to forgive people's sins.

I know a lot of moderns think that God just sits in heaven like a grandpa, saying, "Ah, you messed up. I forgive you," like it's nothing. The whole Bible explains how difficult and complex and costly it is to forgive sins. So read it again—verse 23: "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Rise and walk'?" Clearly it is more difficult to say—and actually have happen—the pardon of some sinner's sins. That's a big, big deal. But for them, it would be harder to say, "Rise and walk," because then I'd actually have to see something that verifies it. He says this: "But," verse 24, "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I want to show you that he has that authority." By the way—another sidebar here real quick for you, you overachievers—"Son of Man." I've talked about that often as we've studied Christ's life, even in the early stages, because in other gospels we've looked at that phrase. It comes from Daniel chapter seven, which is all about God the Father investing all authority over all the kingdoms and all the people in the world into the one who is like "the Son of Man," who appears to be a human being—God's resonant authority encapsulated and contained within a human form. That's the incarnation. And he now calls himself, for the first time in the Gospel of Luke, the "Son of Man." And he uses this great word "authority" that's there in the Hebrew text of Daniel seven. It's the idea of the authority over all things in creation—the Son of Man—so that you can know that the Son of Man, the all-powerful One, residing all authority over human beings—so that you can know that I have the authority, not only to create, but to forgive, I'm now going to make this man walk. So "he said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.' And immediately he rose up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and he went home, glorifying God."

Do you see what he just did? He only healed him to show that he had authority to forgive him, because what was the most important thing for him? To be forgiven. Nothing more important than

that, because a hundred years from now it wouldn't matter if the man were paralyzed, but it will matter a lot whether the man was forgiven—because everyone will stand before a holy God. You know, picture the courtroom that you've been picturing on the news and in your mind—the gavel will come down on your life as “guilty.” That's going to be true of our lives—no matter, Christian or non-Christian—we will be understood as guilty. Oh, that is unless, of course, someone has paid for our guilt. And that accounting trick, if you will—it's called justification—where you, a sinner, are made right before a holy God. You're either going to hear, “Depart from me,” into a place where you will now incur the penalty for your sins—not capriciously, not angry; this is not God kicking the dog on the way out because he's had a temper tantrum—this is the execution of justice, which I know most of us don't fear, we don't think about. But we ought to. We ought to clearly think this through. That is more important than anything—whether he says, “You know what? It's been paid for—on the cross—dealt with.”

One quick passage on this, if you would—Matthew chapter 10. You're not far from it. If you're in Luke 5, go to Matthew chapter 10. Now listen—I get that in this passage I'm trying to illustrate for you the importance, the surpassing value, of forgiveness. You're going to say, “We don't even see the word ‘forgiveness’ in this passage.” I get this. This paragraph doesn't mention the word “forgiveness,” but tell me if it's not the idea here. I mean, this is all about the surpassing value of being forgiven. Look at verse 28—all the way down to verse 28. Matthew 10:28: want to compare forgiveness with the sense of urgent needs that you bring to Christ every day? Look at this: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” Think that through—kill the body, can't kill the soul. You know, and heal the body—disease. As a matter of fact, in the first section of this sermon I talked about our urgent needs, and something—almost, you know, just condescendingly—you may think, “I'm offended by that; some of my needs are really important.” And I get this—and if you're a good pessimist, you can always draw the line between your unanswered prayer and death, right? If you're a really good pessimist, you can do that in, matter of ten moves or less. “If God doesn't answer this prayer, I could die.” Now, that's not how your concern starts, but, I mean, I don't know what it is—“I need this job, and if I don't get this job, I'm not going to have a job; and if I don't have a job, I'm going to run out of unemployment; then I'm going to lose my house; my house is going to foreclose; and then my wife's going to leave me; my kids are going to abandon me because I'm such a loser; and I'm going to have to live in an underpass; and eventually I'm going to get killed by a gang and I'll die by the roadside.” I don't know—I'm just optimist trying to think like a pessimist. But there it is. Whatever it is, you can say, “God not answering my temporal concerns could eventually cost me my life.” And you know what Jesus says here to those people thinking like that—like you and I? “Don't worry about that.” “What do you mean, don't worry about that? This is important.” “I know. But it's not important compared to this”—middle of verse 28—“Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

No, I don't like talking about that. I get that. As a matter of fact, Satan wants you to so avoid this topic, that he has permeated our society with this word so that you hear it every single day. You don't get through a day without hearing the word “hell”—radio, TV, even print ads now, commercials on the radio—hell, hell, hell. It's an adjective, it's an expletive, it's, you know, all kinds of ways that it's used. In reality, we don't fear it the way we ought to. And if you don't fear this the way that you ought to, unfortunately you can never value forgiveness the way that you should. And I understand when there's a long time between the threat of something and the reality

of something, you can sit in that relative tranquility between the threat and the reality, and you can say, “I don’t even fear it anymore, because it’s been a long time and nothing’s happened.” That’s what 2 Peter 3 is all about—people saying, “Well, you know, God’s made me mad, but he’s not showing it. I’m sure everything’s fine.”

It’s like us living, you know, here in earthquake country. I don’t know when you moved to California—if you’re like me, you’ve been here your whole life. But you can sit there and think after a while that all those things you learned about the San Andreas Fault and everything else—well, who knows, who cares? I don’t know—we’ll be fine. Let’s build another warehouse. And in reality, we don’t fear it because we think, “I know it’s real, I know it’s true, but I’ve kind of been lulled into passivity about the threat, because, I don’t know, we haven’t had a big earthquake lately, right? You know, my house has always rumbled a little bit and creaked, but, you know, no beams are falling on my head.” But you do understand—this is not here to talk about earthquake preparedness or anything—but you do understand we live in a state that could at any time be rocked by a huge earthquake and cause devastation. It’s big. It’s a threat. You didn’t think about it yesterday; you didn’t picture yourself—unless you’re really the ultimate pessimist who can think about, you know, an unanswered prayer to death in five moves or less. But here’s the deal: you didn’t think about the beams falling down on you yesterday and killing you, because it’s just—whatever—it’s not in your mind’s eye happening. And you may not have thought about the reality of what it would be like to stand before the tribunal of God and have him say, “Enter into this place prepared for the devil and his angels,” because it’s not here; it hasn’t happened.

We need to get ourselves—and our prayer requests and our concerns—in biblical perspective. All that really matters is whether or not you are forgiven. If you’ve got the parachute, the peanuts and the pillow really don’t matter. It doesn’t really matter.

The rest of this passage—if you still have Matthew 10 open—the good news is, you don’t have to live in constant fear of this, because verse 29 says—and he’s speaking here to those who put their trust in him—“Hey, listen, think about the sparrows. Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father”—under the purview and management and the sovereignty of God. There’s not a single bird that dies without God’s express permission, if you will. “And,” the Bible says, “Listen, you’re way more important than that—even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father; whoever denies me before men, though, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.” Here’s the deal: whether or not you’re going to make it on that day when you die—to be forgiven and pardoned or condemned and sentenced—that difference is all that really matters. Everything else in between, even though birds die under the sovereign care of God every single day, and you and I may have cancer and it’ll never go into remission, or you may get in a car accident, you may get a disease, you may never get the promotion, or your marriage may fail, or whatever it might be—if you are forgiven, that should overshadow any other fear you have.



And I guess that's really where this sermon ought to end up. Are you absolutely 100% positive that you're forgiven, and you're not trusting in some false image of who God is? Have you truly put your faith in Christ to have your sins cancelled and blotted out? If not—man—it's time to make that happen. It's time for you to respond to the instructions of God, which are very clear about repentance and faith.

I don't know if we can appreciate that as we should—don't have time for this either, but let's go there: Leviticus 16, real quick. It's all going to speed up from here. Well, it seems pretty fast already—little bit faster now. Leviticus 16. In Leviticus chapter 16, I just want to remind you that if you were to go to worship in the Old Testament, it wouldn't be like this place—air conditioned, comfy chairs for your rear end, you know, music, nice sound system. This is a gruesome thing that you'd have to prepare your children for. They didn't have flannelgraphs back in Old Testament worship—they had bloody sacrifices. You'd have to get your daughters ready for the priest—the seminary grad—to take his knife and cut and slit the throat of animals as the centerpiece of worship. I just want to remind you how costly your forgiveness is. This is what we should value and see as supremely important because of the great lengths to which God had to go to capture that forgiveness for you. It's not just a word of Christ; it's a work of Christ, and the payment of Christ on a cross.

Drop down to that section on Yom Kippur there. Do you see that in Leviticus chapter 16, third book of the Old Testament, verse 20? We pick up in the middle of the two animals that were brought as the centerpiece of this one day—Yom Kippur. Do you know that phrase? It's on our, you know, Google calendars if you import all the holidays—Yom Kippur is sometime in the fall, in September on the Jewish calendar. There's the day—"yom," that's what the Hebrew word for day is—"kippur"—atonement. The day we symbolically celebrate the forgiveness of our sins. Two animals were brought to the high priest—two goats. One—the neck was slit and all the blood would splatter on the sandals of the high priest. And the other one—pick it up in verse 20—here's what would happen: "When he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, then he shall present the live goat." Got two goats—one dies, one lives. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat"—and I picture that—"and confess over it all the iniquities"—let's just take these words real quick. I've already referenced them briefly, but here's this idea of "iniquity"—"avon" in Hebrew—the idea of taking something that God had planned, and us as humans twisting that into something else—that contortion—"all the iniquities," confess it. He says, "and all their transgressions"—there's another Hebrew word, "pasha," which is that idea of going beyond the limitations, the boundaries—God said, "Don't do it," and you did it anyway—"and all their sins"—all their iniquity (twisting), all their transgressions, and all their sins (the falling short, the failing to do what God has asked us to do)—"confess it all, admit it. And then he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness." And those of you who know this—this has even trickled down into everyday vocabulary in our society—we call that goat the—what?—scapegoat. Off it goes.

Now picture what's happening here. Your sins are such a big deal before the tribunal of God that God then has to have a blood sacrifice, which is only symbolic of the ultimate sacrifice—Christ's death. And the picture that sometimes we miss is what that cross settled for us. The sins that we had



were laid on Christ. But that picture of sin laid on that goat—that second goat on Yom Kippur—was then sent out in the wilderness—think about this—never to return—away from us. In Psalm 103, it's put poetically this way: that God, who could punish us for our sins, doesn't treat us as our iniquities deserve. As a matter of fact, he takes our sins and transgressions and separates them—as far as, you know, the phrase goes—away, as far as possible.

Therefore, I can say today, as a Christian, putting my faith in Christ, I know that the day that I die, unlike most of your religious friends in your life, I can say with confident surety—it's no virtue of my own; because of my trust in Christ, just like this paralytic—the declaration of forgiveness: I know my sins will have no reference that day when I stand before God, and he'll say, "Enter into this kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Why? Because I had more good than bad on my account? It has nothing to do with that. Because I put my trust in Christ. That's the transaction that you should value more than anything.

And when you're praying for your daughter, like I do, you know what's far more important than ever having legs that can skip and run and dance and jump? Whether sins are forgiven. When I pray for myself and all the things in my world, you know what really doesn't matter? My paycheck. It doesn't matter—my accomplishments, it doesn't matter what I do or what I produce. All that really matters is whether Mike Fabarez has all of his sins sent into the wilderness, never to be encountered again. That's all that matters. And the bloody cost of that was the death of Christ. You've got to see the surpassing value of forgiveness.

You know what—that is such a big deal. And unfortunately, the sad thing is, I would really draw bigger crowds if I could heal people than if I could preach the forgiveness of God. That's the foolish immaturity not only of our society, but of people that name the name of Christ. If I was really healing people, you'd have every parent from chalk bringing their kid in here, having me lay my hands on them and heal them. You'd have bigger—and you would not have an empty seat in this room, though there's hardly any now—but you'd have people lined up along the walls; there'd be people out on the patio; they'd be pressing to get in—who knows, maybe someone would peel the top off of this building to get their kid in here to have them healed. But today, we can proclaim the forgiveness in Christ. And isn't it sad the way we don't value that the way we should? Because what I'm preaching this morning can change your reality a thousand years from now. And if I could heal your kid of some disease, it would only matter for a few decades. We've got to see the surpassing value of forgiveness.

Bottom of verse 25—you can see this man went home glorifying God, as I assume you would too. And the crowd, in verse 26—it says in Luke chapter five, it's printed there on your worksheet—look at it, last verse: "Amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen extraordinary things today.'" Now, I guess if you're teaching this to the third graders in a Sunday school class, you might assume everybody here—if you weren't thinking very hard on the text and you didn't know the rest of the Bible and how realistic it is—you'd think, "All



these people are so grateful this man got his sins forgiven.” But let’s be real for a second: the people that went home amazed at the extraordinary things—do you think at the dinner table they were telling, “I was over at Peter’s house; I saw something—it was amazing.” Do you think it was that a guy got his sins forgiven? Probably not. They were probably amazed that some guy that was a paralytic was healed and went away walking with very healthy calf muscles. They were wowed by that.

Well, let’s take this—though I’m sure that it was mostly a mix of amazement at temporal healing—can we at least take it to the level it should be for mature Christians and recognize that we should be—number three on your outline—amazed and we should worship God for—what? For the peanuts and the pillow? That’s a good thing, but we should really be amazed for the parachute. You should be amazed—as the old hymn writer put it—for amazing grace that would save a wretch like me. “I once was lost, and now I’m found; was blind, but now I see.” And you know the song is not about physical sight.

See, what needs to be celebrated by Christians that gives them a kind of fortitude and resolute strength in life, a peace and a joy that transcends all circumstances, is a kind of understanding about our forgiveness that makes us worship God for things that are the most important. One passage on this—then we’ll be done. Turn to Psalm 32, please. Psalm 32. David is writing a song that—if you want to bring the urgency of forgiveness over and above all other temporal things that should result in real worship and real lasting joy—enduring, transcendent joy—it’s for you and I to focus on the worth of forgiveness, maybe like we haven’t in a long time—maybe never in your Christian life.

Psalm 32. Now, unfortunately, the translation of some of these words are so familiar to us in church settings—like you read the first word of verse one, Psalm 32:1—“Blessed,” and you can almost hear the organ playing, right? I mean, it’s such a church word—I don’t know, “blessed.” But you need to understand what that is. That word “’ashre”—maybe that even sounds familiar. One of the 12 tribes—one of the sons of Israel—Asher. “’Ashre” is the word for happy, joyful, right? You name a kid that because you want happiness in the kid—not some stained-glass, organ music, weird, you know, religious, pious thought. This is someone who’s happy, excited, joyful. “Happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven.” That is, if we understand what’s at stake—how important this is—and when that transgression—there’s that word again—that sense of going beyond the boundaries of God’s standard—is gone; it’s forgiven; it’s released; it’s gone into the wilderness; it’s as far as the east is from the west. That’s a happy thing. “Also whose sin”—there’s the other word, falling short—“is covered,” atoned for. “Happy”—’ashre, blessed, rejoicing—“is the man against whom the LORD counts no”—there’s the other word—“twisted iniquity.” It’s an accounting thing. I understand that. Christ justifies the wicked—you and I. God changes the Excel spreadsheet on your account and makes you righteous in the annals of heaven. And that should make you happy.

Now, who does that? Who’s that for? Bottom of verse 2: “in whose spirit there is no deceit.” What’s the problem with all the people that will never be saved? They deceive themselves. They look at



their sin, and they think, “Well, it’s not that bad. God’ll love me anyway. I’m sure my picture’s on his refrigerator. He likes me. I’m a cute kid.” Listen—that isn’t going to get you anywhere. You need the debt paid for. And the only way to get the debt paid for is to see your sin for what it is—“in whose heart there’s no deceit.”

What does deceit look like? I’m glad you asked—verse 3: someone who keeps silent about his sin, tries to cover it up. David knows what that’s like. He said, “And when I did, my bones wasted away through groaning all day long.” And that’s a good sign, verse 4, because God was convicting him. “Day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” But you want forgiveness? Here’s how you get it—verse 5: “I acknowledged my sin to you”—that’s a spirit in whom there’s no deceit—“and I did not cover my iniquity.” See the words again—falling short; twisting what’s right. “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions’”—there’s that other word—“to the LORD,” and here’s the good, good news: you confess it—just like in New Testament truth, it’s the same truth—God is “faithful and just to forgive” the iniquity—the twistedness of our account before God—and “my sin.”

Therefore—you want the urgency—here it is, verse 6, highlight it—“Therefore let everyone who is godly”—who’s godly? The person who has an honest view of themselves, a real concern and fear for God and what’s at stake—“offer prayer to you at”—now this is the one to underline and highlight—“at a time when you may be found.” You know, think about the Christian life—we’re living the Christian life with a scoreboard and a clock, and the clock is covered by God strategically by a piece of cardboard; you can’t see it. We don’t know when the time is going to be up—either for your earthly life here or when the trumpet’s going to sound and we’re going to be gone. But you’d better call on him while you can. And right now, you’ve got an opportunity—“at a time when he may be found.” Today salvation is available; tomorrow—I can’t promise that. “Surely in the rush of great waters”—here’s the picture of the Old Testament looking back to the flood—“they shall not reach him.” When the flood comes, the punishment for sin—it’s not going to reach you.

There’s the urgency of what’s truly important. “You are a hiding place for me,” David says; “you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.” “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.” “Be not like a horse”—don’t be stupid—“or a mule”—don’t be thick-headed—“without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.” Don’t be stupid. Verse 10: “Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.” “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Be amazed and glorify God—not that God passes out a really cool, fluffy pillow or great-tasting peanuts (and you may have the healing, you may get the thing; God may give you the promotion; he may make your marriage great—wonderful). What matters is whether your sins are forgiven.



I don't know what it must have been like on the ark at the beginning of the flood of great waters. I'm sure the accommodations were a bit noisy and smelly. I can only imagine. And had there been any takers of Noah's preaching—that's how the New Testament puts it—the preacher of righteousness—had someone said, "You know what, I'm going to join your sons and your daughters-in-law, and I want a place on the ark, because what you're saying is convicting to me. I want to confess my sins. I want salvation from the coming judgment of God"—they would have been shown a room, a porthole, a little—some kind of place to hang their hats and sleep at night on the ark. And I can only imagine there'd be a lot to complain about. I can only imagine—I mean, you've got a stall next to the rhino or something. I don't know; this is not where I want to be. But for all there was to complain about, and for all the lack of seeming attentiveness of Noah to give you a better lot on the ark, I imagine it would only take a little bit of perspective and a little bit of brainpower to have all that complaint evaporate, would it not? All you'd have to do is think about where you are and what you're missing. I suppose anyone looking back on the flood—in this imaginary story of someone taking the heed of Noah's preaching—would never look back and say, "What a lousy cabin I had on that boat. You know, I had a lot of things I asked for and I never got. I wanted a pillow and peanuts and they never showed up." No one's going to think that way—because they had a place on the ark.

You sure you've got that place on the ark? Some of you've had that place on the ark for a lot of years now, and you're confident. Don't be yawning your way through this. Spend this week rejoicing profoundly—with joy—even if your cancer never goes into remission, even if your daughter's legs are paralyzed for the rest of her life, even if you lose your job, your marriage breaks up, even if you get the worst possible news you could ever get as it relates to the temporal reality of life on planet Earth—don't let it freak you out. Rejoice that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Be glad that your sins have been pinned to the cross, and that Christ, the Lamb of God, has said about you and your sins, "Tetelestai"—"It is finished"—paid in full. Rejoice that you will never incur the penalty for your sin.

But I've got to guess—God, in his extreme generosity, is the kind of God passing out a lot of pillows and peanuts anyway. And if he does in your life this week, recognize the gravy that it is and be excited about it. But make sure you never lose sight of what's truly important. Don't ever get enamored with the wrapping. Always be overwhelmed with the gift.

Let's pray. God, help us. Because we live in a world that we can't help but be influenced by, and so often we're just concerned about the size of our paycheck or the square footage on our house or how much joy and pleasure we get out of our relationships in our marriage and our upbringing, our children. God, all of that—even if you never answered another prayer ever again in our temporal existence here on earth—how blessed we are. We couldn't be any more blessed than knowing for sure because of Christ our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Let that be the cause and fuel of rejoicing in our hearts this week—and maybe even today like it never has before. Fill our hearts with great joy and singing because of the truth of forgiveness. In Jesus' name, Amen.