



JOHN 16

Part 29 of The Gospel of John

Pastor Mark Driscoll | John 16 | July 29, 2001

John 16, the situation we find ourselves in is just previous to Jesus' death, few hours before he's going to be killed. He knows this is impending. He is God; knows the future. He's telling his disciples exactly what is to come, how they should prepare, how they should anticipate his death, and what is to follow that, and so he begins in John 16, 17. We'll launch right in. Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while, you will see me no more and after a little while, you will see me again, and, because I am going to the Father.'" They kept asking, "What does he mean in a little while? We don't understand what he's saying."

Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, and so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while, you will see me,?' I tell you the truth. You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices." And he concludes, "And you will grieve." Jesus here is speaking about his death. Jesus knows that he is going to die. One of the things that shows us that he God is the fact that he knew the future and he, upon many occasions in John's Gospel, predicts his own death. He tells them here that, "As the world rejoices and celebrates my death, you will mourn." We see in the early chapters of the book of Acts that the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews all conspire to kill the Lord Jesus.

One of the only things you'll see in all of human history that the Greeks, Romans, and Jews, all with competing interests, could agree upon is they wanted Jesus dead, and they celebrated his death. They were glad to be rid of him, and, so, as they all celebrated his death, the disciples, Jesus said, would be filled with a deep and a profound grief. They would go into a mourning season, shedding of tears, and a deep sense of loss from losing the Lord. And that is the model that is laid down for us, whereby, as God's children, every time we think of Jesus' death, it should lead us to this place of profound grief. It should be for us this deep well of sorrow and of angst and of concern and of pain. It should be a difficult place for us to go.

The reason being is as we see Christ's death, as we see him crucified and murdered, we start to ask certain questions that lead us into the place of grief. The first of which is the most obvious, and that is: why did Jesus die? Why did God come down and then experience murder at the hands of his own creation? Why in the world would God subject himself to that, and the issue is pertaining to our sin. It is because of our sin. The Scripture says that we have, in a sense, very much killed and participated in the murder of the Lord Jesus. That Jesus died because of our sin, not because of any sin that he has committed, and our sins were placed upon him, and he was punished in our place. And the wage for sin is death, and so he was murdered because of the sins of his people, and that should lead us to this place of profound grief.

Where every time we sin and the Spirit does his Work of convicting, as John has just written for us, we come to greater awareness of how dark our soul is; of how wicked we are; of how evil we are, and some of you resist that. You don't like to hear that. You say, "Well, that's negative. That gives you low self-esteem. That gives you bad self-image." As soon as you become really depressed and discouraged by analyzing yourself, you're just starting to brooch an area of honesty. You are much worse than you anticipate. You are so bad that you think that you're good, and that's evidence that you're bad beyond belief.

I always say at Mars Hill, "We believe in more than total depravity. We believe that total depravity is for optimists. We believe that we are so sinful that we don't even know how sinful we are," and you have to begin there, and that honesty leads you to a place of grief where you realize, "My goodness. The world is the way that it is and I am the way that I am not because I am running — or we are running counter to what we are, but we are just living out the fruit of what we are, and that is enemies of God." People who have rebelled and run and hid from God, and this is what we look like, and that leads us to this place of grief; some of us never go there. We continue to maintain this optimism. "Well, things are good. They'll turn around. I'm a good person. I'll work hard. It'll all come together."

Some of us go into that place of deep grief and mourning and we never come out. We get stuck there with this obsession in our sin, this naval-gazing, not realizing that that grief and that conviction point is not our abiding and our resting place, but it's a place of beginning that is then intended to kick-start us on with some other things that Jesus then continues to refer to. He says, "You will grieve," — Verse 20 — "But your grief will turn to joy." That that grief of repentance, recognition of sin, the death of Christ should then lead us out of that into a place of joy, where God's people are happy.

He tells us, "A woman giving birth to a child has pain, because her time has come, but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into this world. So it is with you. Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again, and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy." You'll begin in grief, convicted of your sin, a murderer of Christ, and that will subsequently end up in joy. A joy that no one can take from you, and he uses this analogy: it's like a woman who gives birth. If you wanna see an unhappy woman, see a woman in labor. How long were — is that your baby? How long were you in labor?

Response: Nine hours in the hospital.

Nine hours in the hospital. Did they give you an epidural?

Response: Yes.

God bless them. Didn't mean to embarrass that woman, but I felt it was sovereign timing. Nine hours of — men think they're tough. No, no. Men are not tough. Men are not tough. Men think they're tough because they can eat a whole steak. That does not — no, that's not tough. You know, a woman — my wife is a little woman and she carries a baby. I can't even imagine that. She can't sleep on her stomach. She can't — she's pregnant now. She's in her fourth month. It's early. Well, there's nothing — I mean, child — I can't think of anything more painful than childbirth.

I mean, can you guys think of that? I mean, that's like pulling a bowling ball out of your ear. It's just like — my gosh. How did that happen? I can't believe what a woman has to go through. That's why we give her drugs. It's our only attempt to comfort her in the midst of her curse, and he says, you know, "In the middle of a birth, a woman has no joy." You don't see happy women in labor. I mean, you see women — you see godly women saying things that they would never otherwise say. I guess I remember my wife giving birth. I'm the guy — I can barely watch ER without passing out. My wife went into labor and she — we kept — take her to the hospital — oh, she's not ready yet. She's not ready yet. Driving her back and forth, back and forth, and finally they admit her and she goes through hours of labor and doesn't give birth.

So they go to give a c-section, and I remember sitting there just thinking, "I cannot believe we are doing this. My," — they take all my wife's organs out, and I'm just sitting there, like, "What in the world?" Like, you know, I'm — the guy comes in. The anesthesiologist, he's like, "How's she doing?" I'm like, "She's fine. If you could give me a little stick in the spine, I'd like it. I need drugs. I can't handle this. I can't handle watching this, let alone participating." And, so, when men say things like, "We're having a baby." No, you're not. She's having a baby and you're just driving her home, but Jesus says, "You know what? You see a woman who's in labor and she is going through intense, excruciating pain." You don't see any semblance of joy, unless she has a very good anesthesiologist, and then she appears to have joy.

He says, "But after she gives birth, then she has joy, because then this new life has come into the world," and you'll see a woman shortly after giving birth happy, glad, joyous, holding her baby. Everything's fine. She's totally satisfied and has this deep and abiding joy that no one could take away. Jesus says, "That's the way that it is." That, you know, when you think about his death, and you think about your sin, it is just pain, anguish, struggle, toil, strife, grief, but then when you realize, as he's saying here, "In a little while I'll see you again." What Jesus' referring to here is his resurrection. He is going to die and he's going to rise from the dead.

When you're starting to think about his resurrection, now you transition from the person who's feeling like they're in labor and in pain and torment to this person who has deep and abiding joy that no one can ever take from you, and so Jesus' death produces grief, but his resurrection should produce joy. God's people should be happy that sin is not the final word; that death is not the final word; that grave does not contain the grace of God, but that he has risen from the dead to conquer all of our enemies, and, so, he transitions then that what is to happen after this is his ascension. Jesus says, "I'm going to die, but you'll see me again very shortly," and then he talks about his return to the Father. He does that down in beginning of Verse 25.

He says, "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I no longer will use this sort of language, but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day, you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world, and now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." He's talking here about his ascension. That Jesus says, "I'm gonna die. That'll cause you grief. I'm going to resurrect. That'll give you joy, and then I'm going to return to the Father from where I came. Going to leave this world after my Work is completed, and I'll return to the Father." And then we'll transition from grief to joy to love.

That we will know that God the Father loves us, because of Jesus' Work on our behalf, and we will love Jesus and believe in him and have faith in him and trust him and put our hope in him, and abide in him as he abides in us. And out of this love, Jesus says that, "Two things will develop," and the first of which is prayer. He tells us that beginning in Verse 23. I wanna camp here for a little bit. "In that day," — I believe he's referring to after his resurrection, after his ascension. "In that day," — after his Work is completely done — "You will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth. My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Up until now, you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you'll receive and your joy will be complete."

Here's the process. Jesus will die. Our sin grieves us. Jesus resurrects. That gives us joy. Jesus returns to the Father. Now we know that we are fully and completely loved by God. Subsequently, we are invited to pray so that that joy that has been given to us can be made complete, and Jesus tells us to pray for what? Anything. Jesus tells us to pray for anything, and then he puts a caveat on that. What is the contingency for those prayers? Ask anything you want —

Response: In my name.

— in my name, which is another way of saying: according to my will. Jesus then says, "After you've grieved over your sin and I've died for them and you've repented of them and I've resurrected to forgive your sin, and I've ascended to the Father, and you're now reconciled to the Father. You could speak directly to him. I give you this invitation to complete your joy. Pray to the Father. He'll answer your prayers. He'll answer anything that you request of him, providing it is according to my will," and Jesus told us a little earlier that kind of prayers that this entails are prayers that glorify him, give us joy, and bear much abiding fruit that will last in this world. Those are the kind of prayers we should be praying for.

Things that give God glory and make us happy, and if both of those things are accomplished, I believe those are fully the things that are in Jesus' name or in Jesus' will, and there is some very sick teaching that goes on regarding prayer in our day. I think one of the most abused doctrines in our day is this doctrine of prayer. My least favorite book of all time is the most popular Christian book on the market today, and it's a sick little book that basically says that when you get to heaven, you are going to get a box filled with things that God wanted to give you, but he couldn't because you didn't ask for them, which is a sick book, because it tells you that God is prohibited from being nice to his kids, unless his kids beg him. That is not true. Anyone here ever gotten anything from God that they didn't pray for? I have.

God sometimes just does things when we don't even ask, because he's a wonderful God. Romans 8 says, "Sometimes we don't even know what to ask for." We're not even sure what to ask for, but the Holy Spirit lives in us and he brings our needs before the Father, and God answers prayers that we don't even know how to articulate. There are other times that you and I have asked prayers and God has not answered them, and that was good. Praise God. Aren't you glad you didn't marry your high school sweetheart? Aren't you glad? Your first love in junior high? "God, please, I'll die." Now you're looking going, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you," — yeah. Yeah. This issue of prayer, though, Jesus says, "Ask anything." And I'll tell you this. I struggled as your pastor. I struggled telling you this because I see prayer so abused and manipulated.

In our age, I always say that prayer has become the stick that whacks the cosmic piñata. Prayer for us is seen as this. God's got all these goodies up in heaven. If we whack it with the stick of prayer, then all the goodies fall down out of the sky and we get to pick up all our toys, like little kids at a birthday party. I don't think that is exactly what prayer is all about, but Jesus does say here that we need him, and that we need to come to him in prayer. We need to request things of the Father, and he invites us to ask anything, and so we should. And I was thinking about it. I promise you this. I have never seen God not answer one of my prayers. I started thinking about it. I thought, "God, can I really tell everybody that they can ask anything and that you'll answer their prayers?" That's a big claim. That's — and that's an overwhelming claim, really.

To tell you, as God's people, that there is a promise that God answers prayers given in accordance with his will. That God answers every prayer, given in accordance with his will. It's almost frightening for me to tell you that, because what if God doesn't do his Word? What if God is a liar? What if God doesn't come through like he promises? But God is a truth teller and God is not a liar and God is not a man like us. Every single time I've prayed, God has answered that prayer. Every time. Sometimes it's no. Sometimes it's later. Oftentimes it's yes, and I started thinking about it and inventorying it. One of the things I always struggle with is bringing what I consider trivial things to God, which, I'm sure, to God, the things that I consider very big are yet still trivial. I don't know if anything is big for God.

My daughter — four years old — says it well. She says, "Jesus is the most powerful, and we pray to him, because he could do anything." Yeah, that's true. She told me that in bed last night when we were cuddling and praying. She says, "I pray because Jesus can do anything, dad." Yeah, okay, daddy needs to learn that lesson. That's a good lesson. Jesus says, "Ask me anything." I'll give you guys some simple examples. My son is almost two. He has a very stubborn will. We're not sure where it came from. He's a beautiful, wonderful boy. I adore him, but he got in the habit, on vacation, of sleeping with us. Crawling into our bed or sleeping with his sister. He's a very affectionate boy. He's a great little guy, and so he refused, now to sleep by himself. We bought him a nice racecar bed. Figured that would entice him. He will not sleep in the bed.

He would just cry all night, because he wanted to sleep with my wife and I, but we gave in and word of warning to the new parents. My wife lays this way. I lay this way. My son lays this way, and he loves his mother, apparently more than me. So he lays his head on his mother's shoulder. I get his feet, and I get his feet in the back of my head, which means if, at any point, I have any sense of ownership of more than six inches of the edge of the bed, my son proceeds to give me a foot to the back of the head and move me over back into my territory because he has staked claim to my bed. Well this led to a great division between my son and I, and I started to become very upset with my boy, and so my wife and I tried everything. We tried disciplining him. That didn't work. I put a little lock outside of his door so he couldn't get out; locked him in his room.

That didn't do a great job, because he would just yell all night and wake his sister up, wake up the whole neighborhood. He was very loud, and, so, finally my wife and I were talking. She says, "Well, what do we do?" I said, "Well, I don't know." She says, "Maybe you should pray." My genius wife telling the pastor that, "Perhaps you should pray," and I said, "Well, yeah, okay," and I felt bad praying. I thought, "Well, this is something I should be able to take care of, but obviously this is a work that only God could do. This requires a miracle." And so we began praying and we tucked my son in. Well — see, we hit one night where I said, "We're just gonna let him cry, because he'll get tired and go to bed. He didn't do that. He's — at 5:30 in the morning, he went to bed.

He's very stubborn, and it was a war of the wills, and we walk in the morning — don't tell him I told you this — but we walk in the morning and he — just in protest — he stripped himself naked. And I walk in there in the morning and he'd only slept a couple hours. He looks at me with one eye open. He's buck naked. Just is a little defiance like, "I couldn't get out, but I'll be naked while I'm in here just to show you I'm not — I'm still in charge of something around here." So we thought, "Well, we need to pray about this. We need to really pray about this." So we asked a lot of people to pray. "Pray for our son. Pray that my boy goes to sleep." And happy to report, God immediately answered prayer. My son goes to bed at 11, wakes up at 10. Sleeps all night; sleeps sound. It's beautiful.

The other morning, my wife and I rolled over at 9 a.m. We looked at each other. She's like, "Did you get up?" I'm like — she said — I said, "Did you get up?" She said, "Is he still alive?" Says, "Let's go check." He's alive. Prayers were answered. The boy's still breathing. We slept a full night. God answers even little prayers. God's a good God. "Ask me anything," Jesus says, "And I'll answer. Anything you want, ask me, and I'll answer, providing it's according to my will — it's in my name." And I started thinking about it. I mean, this whole week for me has been — it's always interesting as you're teaching something, God, in your life, just sort of shows how all of that's true. If you've ever taught a Bible study, you'll know, as soon as you're teaching something, that week it's going to mimic your instruction.

So if you teach on suffering, you know, buckle up when you go to work. Just play it safe, because it's gonna happen. This week I saw God answer all these prayers. It was amazing. Last week, at the 5:00, there was a young woman that a friend and I had been praying for, for 12 years, to come to Christ, and she got up and took communion. I asked her why. She said she'd become a Christian that week. I had the privilege this week of seeing my assistant, Jennifer, a woman who I adore. She's a big help. She had been praying for a godly man. She would not settle, and there was this guy, Brian. He had lived in Colorado and he sent an email to the church saying he was moving up, so I started praying for him before he got here. When he came, I met him. If any of you guys know Brian, he's a great guy. He loves the Lord. He's just — he's awesome.

And Brian and Jen, after he'd been here for a while, connected and I officiated their wedding on Friday. Been praying for Jen's husband for about a year, and been praying for Brian before he even moved up. They meet and God's grace puts them together as a family. Officiate their wedding on Friday night. That wedding, I'm looking out, and there are — in the crowd — there is in the crowd — I count 12, 15 people that have come to Christ in the last year that we were praying for: a number of couples that had gotten married; a bunch of couples that had had children; a few couples that were infertile that we prayed for, and God had actually given them children.

And the building we're in today, I don't — you guys probably all heard the story. This building was given to us. We heard that it came available. We started praying, and God gave us this building as a gift. We didn't have the money to renovate it, and then we prayed and God gave us the money to renovate it from a generous donation that was given. You know, I have seen God answer everything we've ever asked for. I have never seen God fail me, my family, or my church. I have never seen God fail. Every time that we have asked for something, God has answered, and usually he has been more gracious than our request. He has poured out kindness beyond what we were even anticipating, and I would encourage you, you know? If you do understand your sin and you grieve that. You realize you can't do anything about that, but that Jesus died for that, but that he rose. You should be happy.

You should have joy, and then, as you realize that he's returned to the Father, now he's sent his Spirit. That should invite you to pray through him to the Father as your mediator, and you should feel free to ask God for anything, and trust that he answers prayer. That he loves his children. He's a good Father who gives them what they need. Jesus tells us that, "That love is manifest through prayer. That love is also manifest," he tells us, "Through understanding." In Verse 29 he says — it says, "Then Jesus' disciples said, 'Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.'" See, up to this point, Jesus used a lot of parables and metaphors and similes and analogies and now, just before he dies, he wants to make sure that they understand exactly what he's talking about. So he starts to speak very clearly.

He says, "Now we can see that you know all things. You not need all — you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." Jesus declares, "You believe it last." As we understand Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, what begins to happen is that we trust him; love him; believe in him; throw ourselves upon his mercy, and that we come to a greater understanding of what he was accomplishing. Why did he come? What was he doing? Well, now it all makes sense. That our sin was placed on him and he was punished in our place, and he dies for us, and then he resurrects to give us new life. And then he forgives us and he gives us joy, and he answers our prayers, and he completely continues his work of revealing to us himself and the Father.

And the Father's plan and how he accomplished it on the Father's behalf, and so we begin in grief, and that leads to joy, which ends in love that causes us to continue to study Scripture and learn and understand: who is God and what has he done? And how has he loved me through his Son? And then invites us to pray and to ask him and trust him, as a loving Father, for all of our needs, and then Jesus gives his disciples one more reminder. That though as long as they are present in this world, there is going to be some trouble. He says in Verse 32, "But a time is coming and has come when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone, yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace, but, in this world, you will have trouble." See how he contrasts those things?

"In this world — trouble." Some people come to Christ and they say, "My gosh, I thought becoming a Christian would make everything better." A little secret: it makes everything worse. Seriously, it does. All of a sudden, people don't like you. All of a sudden, you can't lie, steal, and cheat your way through this world. You have to be honest. That comes with a real high price; causes you all kinds of trouble. World is filled with trouble, and, all of a sudden, you used to be an enemy of God and you were a friend of the world, and so the world didn't give you any trouble, but now that you're a friend of God and an enemy of the world, now you have a lot of trouble, because that whole world is against you. By that, he means all the systems of corporate flesh: the thinking, the acting, the doing, the being that is opposed to God and exalts self over God.

This issue of manifest cultural pride; he says, "You're gonna have trouble as long as you're in this world." He says, "But, in me, you're going to have peace." And so Jesus becomes this eye of this hurricane that we live in. In Christ there's peace and rest and Sabbath, but in this world there is nothing but turmoil, chaos, strife, grief, and difficulty, and Jesus says, "Don't lose heart." Instead, take heart, and he gives us this great declaration. "I have overcome the world. My victory is sufficient. My resurrection and ascension, when they are completed, will finish everything that was needed." And it's interesting because, as you start to think about it, that is the pursuit under the sun of all of the people in our whole world. They're looking for joy, love, and peace. That's what they want. They wanna be happy.

They wanna be in a meaningful relationship whereby they are loved and can love, and they wanna have peace. Peace with themselves, peace with God: that's what they want, and Jesus says, "As long as you seek those things," outside of him and in this world, "You will do nothing but collect various types of trouble." Failed relationships; attempts to build a career; build a name; build a reputation; have self-esteem, self-actualization, self love: all narcissistic pride. In this world, as you seek anything outside of Christ, you have trouble. Some of you have been there, done that, and know that. That's why you're here. You've had handfuls of trouble and peace has not yet come, and in Christ, he says, "There is peace in me. In me, you'll have peace." It's a great promise. Jesus looks at his men, shortly before his death, and makes them this promise.

"I'll die. I'll rise. I'll leave you. I'll give you joy. I'll answer your prayers. I'll give you peace. Don't worry. Take heart. Everything's okay."

Tremendous declarations of promise that he has made good of; my question to you today is simply that: has Jesus accomplished his promises? Has he done this? I am not talking in some theological abstract. Has he done that with you as his children? Has he brought you to a point of deep grief over your sin? Has he brought you to a place of inexpressible and glorious joy over the forgiveness that he was wrought through his resurrection? Has his ascension caused you to understand fully what the Father was doing and how much he loved you? Has that caused you to pray? Has that caused you to have peace? Has that brought you some trouble? When Christ died, what did he conquer? He says has overcome the world.

What did he defeat?

Response: Sin and death.

Sin and death: our sin was placed upon Christ and he was punished in our place. He has conquered our sin. What that means is not just a theological abstract, but the funky stuff that you have gotten yourself into and the messes and errors that you have grievously made in your life. Christ has died for those. Christ has risen for those, and if you believe in him, all of that is in the past and his grace is in your future, and like Paul says in Philipians 3, "You can forget what lies behind and get on with the stuff of life." You're free. Also, death; death is the subsequent result of sin. "The wage for sin," the Apostle Paul says, "Is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." What that means is you have earned death and that salvation and life is a gift that has been given to you by grace, not by anything that you've merited. Jesus died.

That's punishment for sin, but in that he has conquered our enemy of death. That's why Paul can proclaim, "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?" Death does not hold the child of God. The child of God has life — "Eternal life," John says. Life that continues after the grave; physically and spiritually we are not just alive but we're in the presence of God, reconciled to him as friends through Christ. Jesus has conquered sin. He has conquered death. What else has he conquered? What is he victorious over? Satan. You had an enemy. Scripture says that he hated you and he was a liar and he was seeking your demise and your death. Some will say, "Well, I don't believe in Satan." Do you believe in death? What do you think that came from? Do you believe in lies? What do you think they come from?

He has conquered Satan — Colossians 2. "He has made an opened, public spectacle of him, triumphing over him by way of the cross." Jesus has conquered Satan. Jesus has conquered sin. Jesus has conquered death. Jesus has conquered all of our enemies. He says, "Take heart. I've overcome. Have peace. Have joy. Don't forget to pray. Keep studying so that the plan that the Father implemented through me can become further revealed to you." Let me ask you this practically. Let's take this out of the stratosphere and let's just land it. For you, what has Christ done? What has he done? What are the troubles that he's guiding you through? Where is the peace that he has given you? Where is the sin that you have left because of his resurrection, and you've been able to walk away from? Where's the joy that he's brought?

Where's the prayers that he's answered? Somebody tell me anything.

Response: Found a wife?

You found a great wife. How many men, by God's grace, have found a woman that they adore? I tell you what. It's God's kindness. It is God's kindness. Joy? Yes. Love? Yes. Grief over my sin? Yes. Peace? Yes. Given to me in Christ and sometimes given to me in Christ through my bride, absolutely. I have had the privilege of doing premarital counseling for over 100 couples in the last 5 years. God's — is Jesus alive? Does he answer prayer? Does he take care of his kids? Does he want them to have joy? Yes, absolutely. What else has Christ done to get you through trouble, to answer prayer? To give you joy and peace? Yeah. When we wander, when we get lost, when we have questions, when we get stuck, I love what Paul says, "Even when we are faithless, God's faithful." I love what Jesus says in John.

That "We sit in the hand of the Father and no one will snatch us from his hand." What that means is that even if we jump, he catches us with the other one. We're fine. That some of us have had tremendous prodigal seasons of rebellion, doubt, worry, confusion, and that the Father has been faithful to us. He has been abundantly faithful to continue loving and pursuing his children, absolutely. He has overcome a lot to hang onto us. What else? Provision? It's amazing. Jesus tells us to pray prayers like, "Give us this day our," what? Daily bread — you're going, "Well, the God of the universe who created everything and holds and sustains it all, and he cares about lunch? Apparently he does. He encourages us to pray for daily bread.

Apparently God is concerned about the miniscule, trivial details of his children, just as a loving mother or father does care that their children eat lunch. God is our Father. He does, as well, absolutely. Every time you eat, that is God's grace. We do not make the sun come up. We do not make the rain fall on the land. We do not cause harvest to come into being. Scripture is very clear about that. We did not create our body. We do not give ourselves health. We do not have the capacity to give ourselves life, nourishment, and sustenance. Everything, even the work of our hands, is through the grace and the kindness and the love of our God, everything. What else has God done? See the babies, spiritually and physically?

I love to just see children born into loving Christian homes. Love that. My children have got a world that is a parallel universe. They don't even understand this world. My kids, they have got friends beyond number. All — both of my kids started praying on their own at 18 months; my daughter laid hands on me when I was laying in bed sick. Asked for God to heal me when I was 18 — she was 18 months old; I started bawling. My son couldn't even talk. He prayed before he talked. Didn't have any words, but at dinner or at bedtime, or sometimes when he would sin against his sister by whacking her over the head, which is his favorite pastime, he would bow his head and close his eyes and he would mumble, and he was talking to God. He was talking to God. He sings and worships now. He only knows a few words, but he sings and he worships God.

To see children born and to see parents who know Christ giving the truth of Scripture. "Okay, you need to grieve your sin, but Jesus died for that and he rose for that, and he forgives you if you repent, and he'll cleanse you and heal you and renew you so that you could have joy and live your life. So

you should love him, and, as you live, have peace. He's with you. He's overcome. You can come to him for anything and you could pray to him." Kids, I think, are naturally receptive toward the Gospel. It all makes sense to them. Think that's why Jesus says, "Come to me as a little child." How many of you have had the privilege of seeing someone in the last year or two come to know Christ? Somebody you love.

You're praying for them, and they come to Christ, and, all of a sudden, they're saying, "Hey, can we pray together? Or I got questions about the Bible, or," — joy? Absolutely. Answered prayer? Certainly. I'll tell you what. For me there was nothing like baptizing my sister, nothing like baptizing my sister. Marrying her to a man who loved the Lord. My other little sister comes to faith in Christ. Talk all the time. She loves the Lord. Nothing like seeing people you love come to know Christ. God answering those prayers: nothing like that. Having theological conversations with my dad; see, growing up, I wasn't sure my dad knew the Lord. I knew I didn't, and now I'm certain we both do and we get along better than we ever have by God's grace. I adore my father. We get together and we talk about Christ. Joy? Answered prayer? God's alive?

Cares about his kids? I see it all the time. See, I sit in this privileged seat of seeing God work in, literally, thousands of people's lives, and I know all their stories. I get to see people come to faith and children be born, and I get to see God provide for his kids. It's unbelievable. At the wedding on Friday, it was amazing — all day I worked on my house. See, we didn't have a house. By God's grace, through a friend, we got a great house. So I'm out working on my house and I'm out there with my son, and he couldn't be happier. He's covered in paint and he's with his dad, and he's got my cordless drill, which he still wants to sleep with. It's his favorite item on the whole planet, and we get dressed to go to a wedding so I can marry administrative assistant to a man that she loves, and we get there and we see all these people from the church.

And the first thing that happens is Andrea, who's the wedding coordinator — pray for her. She's really busy doing a lot of weddings, but she comes up and she says, "Mark, I know you and everybody's been praying. We've been praying." She has a few children and she wants to stay home with her kids, but financially they've been unable to do so. So her husband got a degree. Picked a different career, and she said that they were praying that he would get an eight-percent raise. If he got an eight-percent raise, they could squeeze by. She could stay home with her kids. She comes up totally excited. She says, "He got 14 and a half." She says, "I quit my job today." She says, "I'm staying home with my kids," and she just starts bawling. Then Beth — Tim's wife comes over and she's — looks really happy.

She says, "I quit my job today." It's like wife-quitting-work day. They just bought a house. They needed a car. They were praying and God gave them a car for nothing. You know, and they were praying that God would give them a child. His wife is pregnant with a child on the way. They were praying for a home. God gave them a home. God gave them enough money so that his wife could have the desire of her heart; quit her job; be a mom; entertain, have a bunch of you guys over at different points for dinner, you know? I remember praying, as a new Christian. "Lord God, please let me marry Grace, my wife." That's my high school sweetheart. Man, I wanted to marry her. I just loved her. I loved her since I was 17 years old when I met her in high school.

I've loved her for 13-and-a-half years. God answered my prayer. I got to marry my sweetheart, my privilege, my joy. I prayed that God would enable us to be parents, and I have this beautiful daughter who stole my heart, and I have my son that is incredible. I love being a dad, and it teaches me so much about God as Father and how God does care about his kids, and I learn so much about the Gospel through being a dad. I think I've learned more about the Gospel through being a dad than anything, and, with the last pregnancy, the third child, my wife had a miscarriage. So, I think I took it harder than she did. I cried a long time. I had a really hard time. I wasn't angry or bitter at God.

I was just deeply grieved, because I was so looking forward to meeting that child, and I can remember coming home and having to tell the kids that she'd miscarried, and my daughter had been so excited. She wanted to have a sister. She wanted to have bunk beds with a slide. She had it all figured out, and I told her — I said, "Honey, the baby went to see Jesus." — I said, "We're not gonna have the baby." She says, "Well, we'll see the baby when we get to heaven." She says, "The baby will be fine." She says, "Jesus will take care of it and when we get there, we'll just see the baby." I said, "Yeah, you're right, sweetheart."

And so she drew a big picture of our family — this killed me. Had me like this with my arm out over the whole family. That's how she sees me. Just sort of keeping an eye on everything, and there was mommy and her and Zach and then the baby, and I said, "Honey, do you understand that we're not gonna have the baby?" She says, "Daddy, that's when we get to heaven. Then the baby will be with our family." I started crying, and she says, "We need to pray for another baby," and I said, "Yes, we do." So we broke into prayer as a family, and my wife's four-and-a-half months along. We're due around Christmas, and God answers prayer. God's a good God, and all of this to simply say I think this is true. I don't think Jesus is a liar. I don't think that Jesus is telling us things that are completely untenable and undoable and out of reach.

I believe that God is alive. That he did get out of his grave and he did conquer enemies of Satan, sin and death, and that he is present and active and that he does hear and answer prayer, and he intends for us to have joy, and the Father really does love us as his children, in spite of our sin, because Jesus has already taken care of that. And his desire for us is to have peace, though, in this world, there will be trouble, so don't be surprised. There will be trouble, but, in Christ, there's peace for you there. There's a resting place in him, and I believe that what we are to do as God's people is to testify to this. We had been told previously in John's Gospel that "The Spirit will indwell in God's children and that they will testify." They will tell the story of what God has done.

The big story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, absolutely, but, in addition, our story of how that has impacted and flooded into our life. It's not just that God loves people in some ethereal way. That God loves me with daily bread and friends and family and joy and teaching and rebuke and encouragement, and everything that I need for joy and peace and life in Christ, and as we tell the story and brag about God, what happens is I believe it builds our faith. It shows us: yeah, God has been faithful. You start to take inventory of God's faithfulness, and God's kindness, and how God answers his prayer. And how God loves you and gives you joy and has overcome sin, Satan, death to get to you. It encourages you. "My gosh, I am

secure in the hand of God, and God does love me, and he always will.”

In addition, it encourages the rest of us, as we brag about God and talk about what he is doing, and we intercede and pray for each other, and it also spills out as we testify to the world, so the people who don't know God learn something about God. That they may not understand all of our theological concept; what they may understand is: “That person prayed to Jesus and their life changed and God seems to really love them and they're happy. Even in the midst of trouble; as trouble comes they don't respond as I respond. They don't think as I think. They don't act as I act. They don't speak as I speak. There is something that God has done that is undeniable in the lives of his children.” And I would tell you this. I think, if anything, we, as a church, have failed in two areas. We have gotten stuck in our grief. Some of us obsess over our sin.

There is a season for that, but it is for the purpose of propelling us out of that into joy and life and love and hope and Christ and peace and prayer. Some of us only think about ourselves, and the narcissist naval-gazing does not permit us to fix our eyes on Christ, that author and perfecter, the great finished of our faith, who's alive and active and doing his Work and enjoys our participation with him, and, for some of us, we have walked through that process and God has been great. And we're quiet. We don't say anything. No one knows what God is doing. God is wonderful to us and we remain silent. We don't tell anybody. Part of the reason is that we, I believe, are people who are prone to pride, and we don't want anyone to think that we're weird. We don't want anybody to think that we're religious.

We don't want anybody to think that we're crazy, because Paul says, “You know what? We are fools for Christ.” We're stupid. We actually believe that 2,000 years ago Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection has anything to do with today. We actually believe that God is alive and that God cares, and that God hears and answers prayer. That God loves us. That joy and peace and life are possible. See, we're fools for Christ. We're nuts, and the world may not understand that, because they are addicted to their trouble, but, for us, we're not. We're in Christ and there's peace there. We shouldn't lose heart. His victory is complete. If you are not a Christian, I would just encourage, implore, and beg you to just bring it all back down to Jesus. Promised his death; promised his burial; promised his resurrection; promised it would overcome our enemies of Satan, sin, and death.

Promised it would give us eternal life. Promised it would give us joy. Promised it would reconcile us to the Father. Promised that subsequently we would live lives of prayerful happiness; he is not a liar. I had one guy after the 9:00 services say, “I'm not a Christian, but if that's true, that's the best thing I ever heard.” He told me that standing right there. I said, “We call it good news.” It is good news. I said, “It is true, so you need to think about that today. You're gonna be stuck in traffic. You think about that.” For the rest of you, I want you to get in the habit of talking about God. Prayers: that you need your brothers and sisters to be praying for you; answers: that you need to be celebrating so that the rest of us can be encouraged. How great is it for you when you hear that God has answered prayer?

How encouraging is that? That's what we all need. At this point, we respond. Some of you need to respond with grief. You need to understand your sin and start there. You've killed Christ. Can't soft-sell it, make it any better than it is. For some of you, you need to move out of that and realize that Jesus is alive. He's not dead. He's fine, and he's forgiven your sins. He's conquered your enemies of Satan, sin, and death, and you should come to him by faith, love and trust him and thank him. For some of you, you need to focus on the fact that he has ascended and he has poured out his Spirit, and he's still doing his Work, but he's doing it through you, and so he sent you out into this world. That's why you have trouble, because wherever you go, God goes with you. This world is no friend of God's. It will be no friend of yours.

Some of you have trouble. You need to pray and ask God for help and peace. Some of you, God has answered a lot of prayers. You need to just thank him and be grateful. We all need to respond to the Gospel of Christ. We respond through giving. If you're not a Christian, or you're a visitor, don't give. Good to have you. We'll respond through singing and celebrating and recollecting what God has accomplished in his Son. In addition, we'll hang out afterwards and visit. Part of that is so that we can tell stories, one to another, about God's kindness to us. We'll take communion, which is remembering Jesus' body and blood. His death that is sort of the springboard that launches us off into this whole parallel universe of peace and love and joy in the midst of trouble, and then we'll leave, and we'll go about our lives.

And the two things I will give you as assignments: look for the hand of God. Always be looking for the hand of God. Where is God in his love and in his mercy and in his kindness and in his justice and in his discipline? In the fullness of who he is, where is he in my life? Take inventory of that. Thank him, and communicate with him through prayer, and then, as he answers prayer, brag. Tell somebody. Tell anybody. Tell everybody about your God. John does that, and today we read his words. We do that. Hopefully someday people will remember our own. Father God, thank you for giving us a chance to get together. Thank you for Jesus' Words to us. Thank you for John faithfully recording them. Thank you for your Spirit, ensuring that they've been handed down for 2,000 years so that we could get together today and read.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are victorious, that you have conquered Satan, sin, death. That you have overcome all of our enemies, and that you give us this gift of life. Lord Jesus, may we all throw ourselves into our grief about our sin, but, Lord Jesus, would we resurrect from that place of darkness and stench and walk out of our own tomb new people, new creations, new life, old things passed away; joy and love and hope and peace before us. Lord Jesus, please keep us in your Word. Keep teaching us about this plan that the Father conceived and that you implemented and that the Spirit continues working through. Lord Jesus, please, as your disciples asked, we come asking you. Teach us to pray. Teach us to pray in your name, according to your will, and teach us to keep our eyes open, to see the answers and to thank you and to celebrate and to testify.

Lord Jesus, some of us come today with great trouble. We thank you that you have overcome the world. We cling to your promise that we should not lose heart, but, instead, Lord Jesus, we covenant with you to take heart and to remember that you have overcome. We love you and we thank you. Amen.