



Commercial Christianity (Part 1)

Jesus + Stuff

Pastor Jerry Gillis – August 7, 2016

Well, with that sermon bumper, you know you're in for it. Now that we're clear about that.

So Boston College social scientist Dr. Alan Wolfe, who wrote a book called "The Transformation of American Religion", argued in it that America is a culture of narcissism. And because it's a culture of narcissism, it has taken on as a battle the life of Christ. And his contention is that the culture of America, which is a culture of narcissism, has come out victorious.

Now whether you take his perspective or not, one thing is sure that we have to consider, and that is that we're conditioned from birth toward commercialization and toward consumerism. I mean, from the time we're born this is just kind of what we come into. If you pay attention to any of the advertising that's aimed at you and by the way, that's aimed at your children and your grandchildren, what you'll hear are things like this: You deserve blank, right? Because you're the center of the universe, and they're appealing and marketing to you as the center of the universe in terms of what you deserve. Just listen for it in all of the advertising that you hear.

You not only hear things like that, but you'll hear about things that fit your needs. You'll hear about things that are in your best interest, that ultimately this is how the appeal is made to us in our commercialized culture is that everything is about us.

It's the way that we approach just about everything in our lives. It's the way that we approach looking for a place to live, whether that's a house or an apartment. It's the way that we end up approaching how we buy a car or where we choose to dine or what entertainment options that we like for ourselves or the clothes that we pull out. Or by the way, it even carries over into how we perceive and go about relationships in our lives.

You see, in all of these things we start asking our self the question in this commercialized consumer culture that we live in, we start asking ourselves the question how can I get the most for the least and still get exactly what I want. This is ultimately what we ask for and end up kind of embracing in the culture that we live in, because we bought in to the idea that we are the center of everything and everything orbits around us.

A few years back, 2012, the National Science Foundation did an interesting study. And they did a survey of American people, and in that survey they found out that 26%, that's over a fourth of Americans actually believe that the sun orbits around the earth. Some of you are going "what"? You are the fourth of the people that answered that, right? You're confused. What's interesting about that is that that's not a particularly big shock to me, because I don't think this is a failure in the education system, because regardless of where you went to school, at any place, whatever even if the

school wasn't the best school in the whole world, I'm telling you they got this part right. They got that part right. It's in every science textbook, everybody could have gotten that right. The issue is more cultural, because culturally we think everything orbits around us, we've been conditioned that way. It's not a surprise to me that everyone thinks that well, everything orbits around the place where I live, the earth. So the sun just orbits around me. In fact, it is so conditioned in our own minds that it's what we have grown up with and that has kind of linked itself to us almost to the place that we can't distinguish the truth from the culture.

Now, Jesus taught us a radically different way, and that radically different way will land with us if we'll pay attention. In Luke's gospel chapter number 8, I'm going to point something out to you in one of the stories that Jesus told, and it was a parable. Parables are stories that Jesus tells that are a little bit secretive, sort of. It's like there's a meaning but there's a "meaning" to these things. It's just kind of the way that He taught because there were people that were always listening to what Jesus taught, and some of them wanted to pounce on everything He said, and so sometimes He would speak a little bit in code. He would speak in terms of a parable or a story that had kind of a surface application and then a richer idea and a richer meaning.

One of those stories was the story of the sower and the seed. It's one of the most famous parables that Jesus teaches and in fact, it shows up in Matthew and Mark and Luke. It shows up in all of those kind of what we call the synoptic gospels. And in that story, Jesus is giving us something that's really interesting as the metanarrative, as a big picture, He's actually

kind of describing the life of Israel a little bit and how the kingdom was going to come, and He says it in kind of a different way but that's not going to be my point today, I'm not going to unpack the big picture, the metanarrative of this story, and how it implicates and talks about Israel and the kingdom. But instead I want to talk about the personal kind of application that comes from this. Because there is an individual application to this parable that I think we need to hear in our culture, in this kind of commercialized consumeristic kind of culture. This is something we need to hear and pay attention to. And in fact, I'm actually not going to unpack the entire parable, I'm going to pick a piece of it out.

But so that you can see the parable in its context, look with me in Luke chapter 8 beginning in verse number 4. It says this: "While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, He told this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When He said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Now, you hear at the end of this parable this incredible thing that Jesus says. Right when He's done telling this story that's a little bit of a, kind of a mystical story, so to speak, or at least they're kind of thinking okay, what's going on? Jesus calls out after saying this story, He says whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. See, that's almost like a secret decoder saying to say,

I'm saying some things but I'm saying some other things while I'm saying these things. That's what He's saying. Did everybody pick that up? At the end, right, when He gives you this idea, whoever has ears to hear, let them hear, He's saying that this is not something that you can just kind of give a quick glance to, but you're going to have to listen with your mind and you're going to have to listen with your heart. Because if you really want to hear what I'm saying, you're going to have to pay attention with everything about you. Not just kind of picking around the surface. And you're going to have to want to hear what I'm saying to you or else you're going to miss it. You'd better want to hear my words.

So Jesus gives them that kind of idea at the very end. And the piece that I want to pick out of this parable is the third piece. He talks about the sower who's sowing seed in different places, and in fact all over the place. But He talks about this third piece, and I want you to see it in verse number 7. It says: "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants."

This is the piece that I want to hang on to and you're going okay Jerry, I get it, you want to pull out one piece of this and you want to talk to us about this piece. But I need you to hold on for just a second if you might, because I don't really know what's going on in the parable quite yet. I'm not an agrarian farmer, you know, I don't really know what's going on with all this seed and scattering and blah, blah, blah. I don't really know what's happening and so if you could explain that to me that would be really helpful and then maybe I'd know what we're talking about when we're talking about this third piece that you want to pull out, because I don't

even know where we're at yet. Have you ever felt like that? Okay, just me? Great. Thank you for leaving me all alone, up here, in my spiritual isolation.

Well, you're not alone if you felt like that even if you just did not admit it because the disciples felt that way too. They listened sometimes to Jesus teach and then they would be like, whew, man, that was awesome. Jesus, what was that all about? I don't really know what that meant. They did that all the time.

So Jesus gives them an explanation for this parable so that they understand what's being referenced. Look with me in verse number 9. It says: "His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see: and though hearing, they may not understand.'" And He's referencing how God was speaking to Israel back in the book of Isaiah chapter 6. Then He says, "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." And then here it is in verse 14. "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. And then the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

See ladies and gentlemen, here's what I don't want you to miss today. I think that we live in a culture of thorns. We live in a culture of thorns. And interesting enough, what Jesus does is He describes for us what those thorns actually look like. He gives us three descriptions of what these thorns look like. And I want us to pay close attention to them for just a moment, because in the idea that Jesus is offering to us in this story, if we really have ears to hear it, what we'll see in this story is that in this culture of thorns sometimes those thorns come from platforms and pulpits. Sometimes those thorns have wrapped up the souls of people for too long. And instead of knowing what the way of Jesus looks like they've bought in to a false gospel, a gospel of thorns that puts us at the center and makes everything around us orbit us instead of Jesus being at the center and everything revolving around Him.

You see, there's a big difference between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of thorns. And I think that we live in a culture of thorns. And the gospel as a result, the word of Jesus to us as a result, here's what happens, it gets choked out. This is like choked out.

Well, what do those thorns look like? Well, Jesus tells us in verse number 14. The first thing He tells us is that worry is what these thorns look like. What do you worry about in your life? There are people that I talk to all the time that are filled with worry, and some of that worry is around what their image is, and some of that worry is around, you know, their health or their abs or their biceps, and some of that worry is around their appearance, and some of that worry is around their performance.

But do you know what most people's worry centers around? Money and stuff. That's where the worry comes from for most people. If you were to poll most people in the United States of America about the things that kind of they worry about the most, it would be money and possessions and stuff. That's where their worry comes from. And we have forgotten the words of Jesus, because we're worried about everything around our money and our paycheck and what we're going to do and blah, blah, blah, and we've just forgotten the words of Jesus. Why? Because we believe the thorns instead of believing the gospel. We believe the thorns instead of believing and hearing the word of Jesus and the word of Jesus has just gotten choked out. Because if we remembered what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount we would be able to figure this out pretty quickly.

Here's what He said in Matthew chapter 6. Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, don't worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They don't labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and then tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith: So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all of these things, and your heavenly

Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

You see, these are the words of Jesus to us, right? When it comes to the idea of worry, Jesus speaks very, very clearly to us and tries to help us understand that God's got us when we trust Him. That God takes care of us, that God provides for us, that God has it all, and if you look around and you see how He clothes the flowers and the field, and you see how He feeds the birds of the air, and He basically says you're immeasurably worth more than those. So why do you worry when you see it in front of you, you see how God provides, you see how God takes care. Why are you worrying?

You see, we want to worry instead, and usually what we're worrying about is our money. That's why He says the second thorn is riches. You see, what we end up doing is we end up chasing after riches, money, possessions, we end up chasing after those things and as a result we look like what Jesus called "isn't that what the pagans do?" People that don't actually know Jesus, isn't that what they do, they chase after all these things because they think in chasing them that it will somehow satisfy them. But it's never going to satisfy them. It's never going to be what meets the need of their souls. But that's what people buy into, they buy into a gospel of thorns.

And so what we do is we move our families all over the nation to chase a few bucks. That's what we do. We just run after a few more dollars. And we move everybody all over creation just to run after a few more bucks. I've

had people say to me, you know before, well, I'm moving to such and such a place. Why? Well, there's a job opportunity there, I've already got a job and it pays me a little bit more, you know, and so I'm going to move there, but there's no really good churches there so I hate leaving here, and we probably won't have a place to worship, and in my mind I'm going for a few bucks? You're doing that for a few bucks? You're going to check out on a church where you're being able to be fed and live life on mission and you're in community and all those things, and for a few bucks you're cashing all that in. And it's not even much. Like just barely anything at all, and for a few bucks you're going to go chase it. I don't know, man. I think in our culture we have been duped by what we are believing, that we are duped into thinking that somehow riches are going to provide everything that we need.

Do you know that Jesus actually when He described this parable, I mean when Matthew described this parable of Jesus in the book of Matthew, he actually recorded Jesus as saying that these things that we're running after, these riches that we're running after, they're actually deceitful, they're lying to us. Listen to His words in Matthew 13. He said "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful."

He's saying, man, look, listen, chasing after riches, I'm not talking about having a job and providing, and even getting promotions and doing well at your job. I'm not talking about all that, right? We all should do that. We should honor the Lord with what we do and work hard and do all those

kinds of things, we ought to do that. The people of Jesus ought to be some of the best employees of anybody, anywhere. They ought to be. So I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about what your heart latches onto and what you're chasing. That's what Jesus is talking about. And when we do that, we have duped ourselves into a gospel of thorns that has us at the center and everything orbiting around us. And we think that in chasing those things, that it's going to be good for us, and Jesus says it's lying to you, it's deceitful.

And do you know, Paul echoed these thoughts as well. When Paul was trying to talk to his young protege Timothy and help him understand what life is all about, right? He's giving him great mentor advice, and in doing it he actually talks to him about the deceitfulness of wealth. And he uses a phrase that tells me that Paul is borrowing from the teaching of Jesus. Paul's not just talking off the top of his head, he's talking informed by what Jesus was saying about these things.

Listen to his words when he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6. He says: "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money," listen to this, "have wandered from the faith and" what's that word, try it again, "have wandered from the faith and..."pierced themselves with many griefs."

Do you know why Paul, I think used the word pierced? Because he knew they were thorns. Paul knew these were thorns. And what thorns do is they pierce us. And Paul is helping us to understand exactly what Jesus was teaching us and that is, that if we will seek first the kingdom, then God will add everything that we need to that, but when we pursue riches and worry, that we're worrying about our riches and pleasure and we put ourselves at the center and think we can just add Jesus on to orbit around us, you are buying a bad gospel. It is a gospel of thorns. And it will pierce you.

The third thing he talked about here was pleasures. He talked about worry, and riches and pleasures. That word for pleasure in the Greek language is where we get our word "hedonism". Have you ever heard that word before? If you're a hedonist, that means you're somebody who pursues pleasure or pursues self-indulgence. And those of you who were here last week, you heard me talk a little bit about pleasure. Those who weren't here, I know you've already gone back and listened to that message to catch up so that you didn't miss anything. What I said out of the book of Ecclesiastes is that wisdom is better than pleasure. Because wisdom gives us an eternal perspective. And you see, he's trying to remind us here that at the end of the day, that the thing that we worry about is our riches and our pleasure and our self-indulgence and all of that kind of stuff, and that is ultimately a gospel of thorns.

And do you know what he says that the outcome of that is? The outcome in verse number 14 is that they do not mature. So the seed is being sown it says, among thorns, and it stands for those who hear but as they go on

their way they are choked by life's worries, life's riches and life's pleasures and they do not mature. They don't go on, these seeds don't go on to bear any fruit, there's no maturity.

Do you know in our culture, this culture of narcissism, this culture of self, I think that maybe the biggest hindrance, if it's not the biggest it's one of the biggest, maybe the biggest hindrance to spiritual maturity in our culture has to do with the thorn of money. There's a huge reason why in North America that we are an incredibly lethargic, apathetic, nominal version of Christian in North America. And I think a lot of it has to do with how we view the thorn of money. That it has taken such deep root into our souls, has pierced into us so deeply, that here's what happens. We can't even hear the word of Jesus to us anymore because it gets choked out. We've bought into the lie. And it has completely gotten choked out.

Do you know what I think would happen? I think would happen if we started getting this right and there was kind of a revolution of generosity, of understanding Jesus as the great center of everything, as the owner and provider of it all and that our worlds began to orbit around Him as opposed to vice versa. Do you know what I think would happen? I think there would be a revival of spiritual maturity in North America. Because I think one of the greatest hindrances to our maturity - and it says it very clearly in this text - one of the great hindrances is the way that we view our money and our stuff and our possessions.

You see, here's the reason that these things choke us. It's because commercial Christianity says to us that you can have Jesus and still chase

after money and possessions. It's like Jesus plus all of these things, right? Why? Because I am creating for myself the American dream. All the things that my culture has told me, all the things that my culture has advertised to me - that I stand in the center and everything revolves around me - that I can have Jesus plus I can chase after riches and possessions. Now, remember, we're talking about a heart posture here - we're not talking about working hard and doing well, and all that stuff - I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about a heart posture.

But here's the problem. You see, we buy into the lie that the culture feeds us and here's the lie: it says that relationship with Jesus is just like every other relationship in our culture - transactional. It's just like every other relationship we have - transactional. You see, that's the culture that we live in. Everything is a transaction because we are a consumer, a commercialized version of Christianity even - but we live in a commercial, consumerized version of life. And so everything becomes transactional, which means I still stand at the center of everything, and here's what happens: Jesus just becomes a part of my portfolio. He's just the religious part. I've got this part of my life, I've got this part of my life, and oh yeah, I've added Jesus to this, but Jesus is still going to be responsible to orbiting around me because I'm at the center. Jesus is just basically another wall painting to hang up in the home that you own. That's what he becomes when we buy into the lie. You see, the problem with that lie is that what we forget is that the call of Jesus is not transactional, it is transformational - that it changes everything and it turns everything on end and turns it

upside down. But instead we've bought into the gospel of thorns instead of the gospel of Jesus.

So, for instance, this happens from platforms and pulpits in the United States and Canada - in western Christianity and it's part of why we've become so nominal - that you will have people who do what I do, who will stand up and instead of preaching what Jesus said, which is to come and die to yourself so that you might find His life, but instead will become an ear tickler and basically say come to Jesus and you'll be happy all the time. Or, come to Jesus and you'll never be sick. Or, come to Jesus and you'll get better looking. Or, come to Jesus and you'll be wealthy. This is what's going on in western Christianity. It has become a commercialized, consumer version of what it actually means to follow hard after Jesus. The true Gospel is not just transactional, it is transformational and it changes everything.

Unfortunately many people buy into the gospel of thorns, and they center themselves and with themselves their pursuit of money and pleasure and all the worry that comes with it, right in the center and make everything else orbit around them. But you see, here's the problem with that. If you want to buy in to the pseudo gospel of thorns, it means that you're really buying into something that is a curse, not a blessing. You see in the scripture itself, thorns are most often pictured as curse.

In the book of Genesis you see it, right? When the opening story of the book of Genesis and the fall of humanity into sin, listen to what Genesis three says: To Adam the Lord said, "Because you listened to your wife and

ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns' - it's going to produce thorns. You know, the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament actually reflected on the big sweep of the Bible, the big narrative of the Bible said this in Hebrews chapter six: "But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned."

You see, it's really, really bad news - it's no good news - gospel means Good News - and if you buy into what the gospel of thorns is, it's actually a pseudo gospel and it's actually terrible news for you. Because what you're buying into, is you're buying into a curse that says that there are other things that can satisfy your soul other than Jesus. That you can find life in other things besides Jesus. And you're actually buying in to the curse of the Gospel - the pseudo gospel of thorns.

But you see, that's why the Gospel of Jesus is so much better. Because the Gospel of Jesus, when God sent His Son for a sinful humanity who are buying into this gospel of thorns that were under a curse - God sent His Son, born of a virgin, lives a sinless life, preaches the Kingdom of God that is among us, and before He ends up on a cross, He is standing in front of Roman soldiers who make for Him a crown of - a crown of thorns, mocking His rightful Kingship and mocking the fact that He deserves to stand at the center of everything. That in Him, and through Him, and for Him were all things created and they exist for Him. That is why when that appeared on His head to mock His Kingship and His rightful place standing at the center

of everything. And He went to a cross and He died, becoming sin on our behalf, taking our curse upon Himself, and overpowering it by His resurrection from the dead, that we know now that the Gospel of Jesus is incredibly great news, and the pseudo gospel of thorns is nothing but curse and death for us. But, so many of us can't hear that, because we're just like what the parable said: the seed gets thrown out and it falls among thorns and you hear, but then you walk away and the Word gets choked out.

You see, when we get to a place where we begin to act on the true reality of Jesus as the center, and we understand Jesus as the owner, and we understand Jesus as the provider, life changes for us. In all the right ways, life changes for us. But when we don't get to that place and we look at the gospel of thorns that teaches us that we can, with our hearts, pursue all of these other things that are going to somehow try and satisfy us, we're buying into a pseudo gospel - a gospel that's no gospel at all. It's in fact, it's bad news, not good news. And it's a curse, not a blessing.

But see in our passage today, we've actually got some living illustrations of people who believed Jesus was the center of everything, and that He was the provider, and that He meant more than everything, and that He was worthy. We see it right in our text because in the first few verses, right before he tells the story - look at what it says in Luke chapter eight. It says: After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some woman who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: (and then he names them) Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of

Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. Listen to this. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Do you know what they determined? They determined that Jesus is worth everything. That He is the center of everything. That He is the owner of everything. That He is the provider of everything. So you know what they were doing? They were supporting Jesus out of their own pockets. Do you know why? Because they realized He's worth everything that we have. He's worth it all. And, as the owner He's also the provider. I'm not worried about all this stuff, because I'm just going to give it because they understood who Jesus was.

Do you know what they understood? They understood the antithesis of what our culture tells us. Because here's what our culture will tell us, even in commercialized Christianity - here's what we embrace - we embrace this idea: We hold tightly to money and we hold loosely to Jesus. But instead, here's what these ladies understood: what Jesus has called us to is to hold tightly to Jesus and loosely to money. Because we understand that Jesus is at the center of everything. That He's the owner, that He's the provider, and that He is worth everything that we have.

You see, this is what happens when we find ourselves, ladies and gentlemen, trying to pull ourselves away and to peel ourselves back from the gospel of thorns. Thorns are really hard to get out, because they wrap deeply around our soul and they stick into everything that we have and they're really hard to get out.

What I want us to do for just a moment, is I want you to think about a few questions that you have to ask yourself if you really want to hear what Jesus has said. Ask yourself this question: How much of what God provides for me do I consume? Ask yourself this question: How much of what God provides for me do I give? And by the way the answer to that question will be the answer to the first question. How much do I believe that God owns everything and even that which I keep, how well do I steward it? Has my spiritual maturity been affected because of the way that I view the thorn of money?

Here's the thing: you probably can't answer that last question if you are so sticky with thorns - you can't even answer that question because you don't have the spiritual maturity to do it. That's why Jesus says whoever has an ear, let them hear. I don't want you to be like the people in the story who heard, walked away, didn't do anything about it, and then it got choked out. You'll be immature forever. You will not bear fruit, and that's not what I want to see.

Here's what I want to do. I'm finishing a little early because I want to do something with us. I'm going to ask our ushers, if you would, to find your places and they're going to, in a moment, distribute the elements for the Lord's Supper. Some of you are going, you're going to take a second offering after that message? What are you doing right now? I'm scared. Like, you got nervous, right? Those who don't really care, they're like, yeah, man, whatever - whatever you want to do. Those of us who have too many thorns, we sweat like a church member at offering time. That's just what we do.

So as they find their places, here's what I want you to know - here's what I want you to know. Everybody - everybody - is a consumer. The question is what are you going to choose to consume? The reason that we're doing the Lord's Supper today after this message is because I want you to have a physical, tangible reminder that when we consume the bread and the cup, we are saying Jesus, we want you at the center of everything. So as our ushers get in place, I'm going to let them begin distributing the elements and as they do, I want you to pause right where you are and I want you to reflect in your own heart. Maybe there's some things that God spoke to you - that Jesus spoke to you. Because I can tell you this: I just poured the words of Jesus on you today and you need words to hear what the Spirit wants to say. You need ears to hear what the Spirit wants to say to you. So reflect in this time for a few moments. Don't take the elements yet. We're going to do that altogether in just a minute and I'll lead us in that. I'm going to ask you as you receive them to contemplate what Jesus is asking you to do and how He's asking you to respond.

Now, if you would take out the bread. Scripture says - Paul is writing to the church at Corinth - he said for I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. That the Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

So, Father, I pray that with grateful hearts we would acknowledge that your broken body is what has made our body whole. That we now have the body of Christ. People from every tribe and tongue and nation who would put their faith in you and who represent You on the earth. And may we,

Lord Jesus, represent You well by putting You in the rightful place at the center of everything and allowing all that we are and all that we have to orbit around You. Thank You for Your sacrifice on our behalf so that we might be whole and reconciled to the Father. We pray in Jesus' name, amen. You can eat.

If you would open the cup as well. Scripture says in the same way after supper, Jesus took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Lord Jesus, we do pause to remember the sacrifice that you made and we also want to, in our hearts, repent when we think that there are other things that can satisfy us. Through Your death and resurrection, You have made a way for us to be reconciled to the Father and know what true life is - that You can eliminate the thorns and You exchange it so that we might know what it means to live in the vine - to abide in You. And so, Lord, as we drink this cup it's a physical reminder for us today that our desire is for You to be in the center, for You, Lord Jesus, to be everything to us - to own and provide everything for us. Lord, unlike the world that we live in which chooses to drink to forget, we choose to drink to remember. We remember Your sacrifice. We remember Your promise - that You are coming again. While we wait and while we represent You before Your return, may we not look like people who don't know Jesus - chasing after every other thing - but instead we pursue the Kingdom of God and Your righteousness and

allow you to add to us whatever it is You choose to add. We trust You to do this in Jesus' name, amen. You can drink.

Before we leave, I want to mention a couple of things. One - if you have yet to come to a place where you have embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior - really surrendered your life to Him - when you're exiting today, out in the Atrium there's a room called the Fireside Room. We'd love for you to come by and speak to one of our pastors - one of our prayer partners. It's not weird or kooky. We'd just love to say hello to you and tell you and show you what it means to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

For those of you that are in the room, under the sound of my voice, this room, the East Worship Center, maybe you already know Jesus, but what you've allowed to happen is you've allowed the culture to so influence your thinking - that you've bought into a gospel of thorns instead of the true Gospel of Jesus. May I ask you to please do whatever God's Spirit has put on your heart to do? That maybe you need to confess and forsake certain things in your own life. It may mean that you need to start doing something - maybe that's whatever. I pray that you'd do it. If you say, man, my life is so tangled up in thorns, I don't know what to do. Why don't you call the office, email us, so that you can talk to somebody in our stewardship ministry - maybe we can help. Maybe we can coach you, walk you through some of these things if you really want to get this straight. Because what we can't have in western civilization is we cannot have the wealthiest nation on the face of the earth consuming all their resources on themselves but instead put ourselves in a position, living within our means

to be able to have enough to share for the sake of the Kingdom of God because this is what matters. This is what matters.

So, Father, I pray that You would do that in our hearts, whatever it is You've called us to do and that we would obey You willingly - that God we wouldn't be hearers who would walk out and then these things choke our Your Word. We want to be people who have ears to hear what Your Spirit is saying. Help us to do that. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.