

Introduction

Good morning. There we all are. Hey... credit to you guys for being here on Spring Break, but not the extra credit for coming to the early service on Daylight Saving time Sunday. (Laughter) You got "Runner Up." I'm so thankful that you're here today. It's a sweet thing to gather with the family of God and worship Him and to encourage one another in the faith, and to hear from His Word and to sing praises to Him. That's why we gather; it's important and God has called us to do that. As Pastor Steve mentioned, we are going to have a three-week miniseries here called "Grace Upon Grace." The fourth week is Easter, so that will be a stand-alone. We know what we are going to talk about on Easter... every Easter. We are going to do that again on Easter. But we have three weeks in the first chapter of John. We are actually coming back after Easter to continue in the Book of John for several weeks. I'm excited to kick that off this morning... just establishing this idea of "Grace Upon Grace" and what John is writing about in his Gospel and where do we see grace upon grace in the life and ministry and work of Jesus. As believers in Christ, I hope that we are able to see our lives as "Grace Upon Grace." So that's what we want to talk about in the next three weeks and in the Christian life.

We will be in the Gospel of John; it's the fourth Book in the New Testament... Matthew, Mark, Luke, and then John. The Old Testament, all the stuff before those Gospels, is a history of God establishing Himself, who He is, letting His people know who He is and how holy He is, how set apart and "other" He is, and then setting apart a people for Himself. As He sets apart a people for Himself and really being separated for His purposes, He begins to promise them a Messiah, a Savior, who will come and save them and save mankind from their sin. Then in the New Testament we get to see the coming of that Savior in the person of Jesus Christ. We get to see about His ministry and His teachings and His works... His miracles... and the fact that He represents God the Father that we have come to know through the Old Testament. Then after we see the ministry of Jesus, as He is crucified and buried and rises again and ascends into heaven, we get to see how the rest of the New Testament is for the Church... how we relate to each other and how we relate to the world and how we live lives as followers of Christ. That's where the Old and New Testament come together... all proclaiming the same message in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that there is a God and there is a Savior, and salvation is found in Jesus. I hope that you have a copy of the Scripture. If not, we will have the verses on the screen. There are also Bibles in the seat trays, underneath the seat in front of you. So if you don't have a copy of the Bible you can take that as yours. We want you to be able have the Word of God with you wherever you go and be able to dive into that. Let me pray for us, and then we'll read our text this morning.

"God, thank you for today. We thank you for the freedom to gather in Your Name, to open up Your Word. God, the fact that we have such access to the Scripture, God, we take that for granted often. Not everybody in the world has access to the Scripture, God, so I thank you for that freedom. I thank you for the freedom to gather in Your Name and come together and just to glorify You, to hear from You, to see others in the family of God and encourage them and be encouraged by them. God, as we have already been lifting high Your Name through song, God, and just entered into the throne room, I pray that over these next moments, as we look in Your Word, that it would just be a time... now that we are in the throne room, we are just gazing at the throne. We are fixing our eyes upon who You are... and God that You would minister to us... that it wouldn't be us trying to work, or effort, or figure ourselves into fellowship with You and get everything in our lives in order, but God that we would just sit before You, gaze upon You... that we would receive Your truth, that we would by faith trust in who You are and believe in Your Son. And God I pray that we would just drink from the fountain of Living Water as we come to the Word in Your presence today. We thank you for that. In Jesus' name... Amen."

We will be in John chapter 1, verses 1 through 18... *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, 'This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.") And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known."

1. The Word Became Flesh.

So the big thing in this passage is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. But before we can understand and fully appreciate how amazing that is, we need to establish "Who is the Word?" Who is the Word that John is talking about? I think if you've been in church for a long time, you just think, "Oh, that's just another name for Jesus... so we are talking about Jesus there." We want to really look at what John is trying to establish for his audience, when there was such division and disagreement back then about... "Is Jesus God? He claimed to be God, but is He really God or is He just some crazy person? ...Or is He just a prophet? Is He trying to point people to God, and people have misunderstood Him?" John establishes in this first chapter who Jesus is, so that for the rest of the Book we understand what Jesus was about and who He is trying to point us to. So right here in verse 1, it begins to establish this Being called "The Word." We eventually read in verse 14 that this "Word became flesh." But let's take a look at who "The Word" is before we can really appreciate the Word becoming flesh.

The opening verses tell us that the Word was in the beginning. This is the same phrasing we see in Genesis chapter 1. So for a Jewish audience to hear John write, "In the beginning..." they would think, "Oh... I know that Scripture: 'In the beginning God created.'" So even in Genesis, we don't see a creation of God; God exists already. He has been in existence for eternity, and we join the story when He begins to create, in Genesis 1:1. It just presupposes the existence of a self-existing God. So for John to point to that same phrasing and say, "In the beginning was the Word..." he is using some very strong language to point people to the fact that the Word sounds God-like here... where is he going with this? He sounds like he is describing the God the Father that we know about... who created and was "in the beginning." He was already in existence before the creation of the world and with God. Before we get to speculate too much... "Oh... is this another God? Is this a second God?" He says that He was not just in existence with God, but that "The Word" was God. We read that "The Word" created and that nothing exists that wasn't created by "The Word." The attribute of "Creator," again, reserved for God, the Higher Power, the Supreme Being in the universe. Only that "Being" can create. So now he has not only said that this "Word" is eternal and was

there at creation, but this Word also created and that nothing was created that wasn't created by "The Word." "Oh... so he must be talking about God Himself, right? ...God the Father." But he says that He was "with God." So "The Word" was God... so was it God, the Father, because He created? But "The Word" was with God. "Wait a second... is this a second God?" No... he is talking about the second Person in the Trinity. John is affirming the doctrine of the Trinity that we hold to as an essential belief... that we worship one God, not several gods... but that that one God exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They have all three existed for all time, and they are all "All God"... all fully God. Everything that it means to be God, each Person of the Trinity, is that. And yet, there are three distinct Persons.

So obviously I have a very easy, simple topic to bring to you this morning... (Laughter) ...in trying to unpack the doctrine of the Trinity and then unpack the doctrine of the Incarnation. So pretty light stuff for our Spring Break to work on here. But we see that if He was God and was with God, okay... then they are One and yet they are separate. So, again, we see Persons... different Persons in the Trinity... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So "The Word" is God. This doctrine of the Trinity, again, is amazing and is kind of mind-blowing, but it's not something that we have a lot of time to dig into today. Hopefully I didn't present enough just to confuse you, but I do want to present enough to say, "Here is the truth about the Trinity." God is not one God who sometimes takes the form of the Son and sometimes takes the form of the Spirit and sometimes shifts back into the form of God the Father. All three exist all of the time. And they are always fully God all of the time... three Persons in one God. We try to come up with analogies to explain these things and they always fail. There is a mystery to the Trinity... and there should be. If I can fully understand and explain the mystery of the Trinity, then God didn't create me; I created Him. Right? I can't be higher than Him; I can't be wiser than Him. He reveals things to us and helps us to understand things, but if we can figure it all out and there's no mystery at all... it takes the power of the cross and the mystery of the cross away. We will get to that in a few moments. So again... a challenging subject; I'm not diving full-on into the Trinity, but we see John affirming the Trinity here and saying that "The Word, the Son of God, was with God and is God." He is a Person of one God... one of three Persons.

So the Word is Jesus, the Son of God. John connects the dots in these 18 verses that Jesus is "The Word." He is saying "Jesus is God." This was very controversial then... as it is today. Some say that because the Greek there does not say "He was with God and was 'The God'" ...that it could be interpreted and should be interpreted that He was with God and was a god. But we see other places in Scripture where there is no definitive article "the" in front of God and still refers to one God. So don't be led astray by that false teaching... that it says "Jesus was a god." It says and means "Jesus was God." They are One. Jesus claimed, Himself, that He was One with the Father and not another being. Again, the Word is Jesus, the Son of God. That's what makes the Incarnation so amazing. *"The Word..."* (God... the Son of God) *"...became flesh and dwelt among us."* God took on flesh. The almighty, all powerful, all-knowing Creator... God of the universe... became a man and lived as a man among other people.

Paul, in Philippians 2, verses 6 through 8, talks about this humbling of Himself... that Christ humbled Himself to take on flesh and live as one of us. He says, *"Christ, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* So Christ takes on flesh to live as man... still remaining fully God and yet becoming fully man... another mind-blowing mystery. We see the truth of that laid out in Scripture... that He remains fully God, becomes fully man... it's called the "Hypostatic Union," if you want some crazy, big term to put on it. It doesn't make it any easier to understand; but maybe it's a little more

encouraging to say, "Oh yeah, with a crazy name like that, it should be hard to understand." But fully God and fully man... this is not like... again, all analogies fail, so when I was trying to think, "How do you explain that?" It wasn't as if Jesus, God of the universe was like, "I wonder what it's like to be human, so let Me pretend to be human and camouflage Myself and walk amongst them so that I might try to understand them."

I grew up watching movies of all kinds... but the early Christopher Reeves "Superman" movies. I don't remember the actor who played young Clark Kent, but there is a scene in which Clark Kent or Superman... he's not from here. He is an alien and that's why he has superpowers and is not like the rest of us. But he has to try to fit in. He has to be like everyone else. He didn't strip himself of his powers to become like everyone else... that's in "Superman 2" actually. But in "Superman 1," (Laughter) ...or 3, I don't remember. But in "1" we see a young Clark Kent trying to fit in, trying to pretend that he is not the strongest person... fastest person... can burn things with his eyes and freeze things with his breath. So instead of being on the football team and dominating, he is the equipment manager... humbling himself to be not like everyone else. And yet he is still not like everyone else.

That's not what Jesus did. Jesus didn't pretend to be human. He became human to experience what it means to be thirsty, hungry, to hurt, to feel lost, to be tempted in every way... just as we are... and yet He was without sin. So it's not that He doesn't understand what it means to be human, and He is just trying to put on a human suit and figure out how we operate. He became flesh and walked among us. The term here in John 1...Steve even mentioned this last week... it says that "He dwelt among us." That literally means He "tabernacled"... or pitched His tent among us. Again, think of the Jewish audience who for years and years and years has heard the history of God and His people and in the wilderness where they set up the tabernacle, only to have the presence of a holy God come and manifest Himself at certain times and only to certain people. It was so off-limits and so "other" and so restricted... and now John is writing this concept to say, "The Word became flesh..." and is not just visiting us with a presence momentarily for a select few. But He has become a man to live amongst us... to dwell among us as one of us. He humbled Himself to do this. He didn't need to do this; He didn't owe it to us to do this. And yet He took on flesh to dwell among us.

2. To Reveal God.

Why would He do this? Well, the Word became flesh to reveal God. In verse 18 right here in chapter 1, John writes that no one has ever seen God, but that He... talking about "the Word"... has made the Father known. John says, "Jesus is the light sent to enlighten us to who God is." This Word is the Light or Enlightener, revealing to us God the Father and who God is. Something cool about the idea of "the Word" that we can only appreciate in its context is what the Greek word "logos" means... the word for "Word"... "logos" in Greek. We don't lose a whole lot in just looking in it and saying, "Oh, the Word of God... that makes some sense. He is the message of God." He is what God wants to say to us. He sends Jesus because He wants to say something to us. It's a message for us; it's a word to us. So we don't lose a whole lot without context, but I think we gain so much more through the beautiful context that is actually happening here. Obviously for the Jewish people to hear "the Word of God"... it carried a lot of authority for them. They were people devoted to the Law; as it said, "The Law came through Moses, and thus sayeth the Lord"...so the commandments of God... the Word of God. When John says, "The Word became flesh..." it wasn't too much of a leap for them to associate the authority the God, the power of God, the commandments of God... have come to us. But in the Greek, we see so much more for the Greek culture... not the Jews but the Gentiles... those who had many gods and had their own philosophy and

things outside of Christ that would deny Christianity. Instead, we have all of these different gods that we worship and pray to and live for and sacrifice things to and celebrate and have parties... those are all of our mini gods. They had a term "logos" for their living and thinking and worship. And for their "logos"... listen to how cool this is, in light of who Christ is: Greek philosophers had this idea of "logos" (the Word) that was essentially the intermediary between deity and humanity. In their thinking and teaching, it was "the Word" that made sense of the universe. It was "the Word" that bridged the gap between divine power and mere mortals. In their secular, natural thinking, they realized there would need to be a link between their gods and humanity. But their thinking fell short because they didn't recognize the one true God and could never conceive of the God-man Jesus... fully God and fully man. They invented this other... this "logos"... this "Word" that acted as a go-between between their gods and humanity. That's without the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's without knowing who Jesus is. They thought, "There are supreme beings, there are divine powers, there are higher beings... we are not them. We need a link to them. We need something to make sense of all of this... to make sense of the world and bring purpose and meaning to our existence." We call that the "logos"... "the Word." So when John says, "I've got your 'logos' right here..." He is pointing them to the person of Jesus Christ. That meaning and purpose and the link between the higher Supreme Being and man is the person of Jesus Christ.

But Jesus isn't some vague linking concept. He is a person. He is also fully God. He reveals the Almighty God the Father. He makes known to us the God of the universe, but not just as a messenger... as God Himself. Jesus is no stand-in. He is not assistant to the regional manager... (some of you will get that later). He is not simply the flag-bearer or mere representative of God. He is God. Colossians 1 tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God and that the fullness of God dwells in Him. Again, He is not just the ambassador to tell us about God; He contains the fullness of God in Himself. That's why John is able to write that no one has seen God, but if you've seen Jesus you have seen God. Not just the message of God, the purpose of God, the meaning of God... "No... you have seen the character of God. You have seen the Person and Being of God, if you have seen Jesus." He is divine. He is God. He is what we are supposed to be devoting our worship to. So John says, "He is the 'logos'... He is the meaning; He is the purpose."

Once you start thinking about what is your "the Word" or "logos" in your world or your life? You probably don't use that term or that phrase. But as we have talked about in here before, you start to look at "What is my schedule devoted to? What is my budget devoted to? What are my affections devoted to? What makes me lose my temper so easily? What scares me to think it might not be there tomorrow?" Those are the type of things that help us to indicate that I might have things that I'm worshipping other than God. We have developed for ourselves some kind of system or some kind of object to make meaning or purpose out of our lives... because the world sends a pretty strong message that you ought to be discouraged... you ought to be hopeless... you ought to be without direction... that there may not be meaning here. And yet there is something inside of us that says, "No... there has to be purpose and meaning. I have to make sense of all of this." So we dive headlong into all of the wrong things, and John is trying, through his Gospel, to say, "Stop pursuing the 'words' of the world... the false 'logos' of the world." Whatever you have created in your life and your system to say, "This is how I make sense of it all. Here is my established line that I'm trying to reach for everything to make sense... A secure home where I get the finances... my kids are safe..." Or it's a job or a promotion... or it's even something that the world would frown upon... an addiction or something your heart longs for because you're just trying to make sense of life... trying to find meaning in life. John writes here, and I would tell you today, that "the Word"... the "logos"... is not found in any of those things, but it's found in the Person of Jesus Christ. So I pray that you would walk away from your "logos" today and turn to "the Word"... the person of Jesus.

3. That We Might Believe And Be Saved.

Why does Jesus reveal the Father? Why do we need to know the Father? The Word became flesh to reveal God, that we might believe and be saved. We read in John 1:10-13, as we just read a few moments ago, that Jesus came into the world but many did not know Him or receive Him. *"But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."* In fact, John's entire Gospel builds a case for the divinity of Jesus... describing His life, His works, His ministry, His miracles, His teachings... so that his readers would see the truth and believe in Jesus and be saved.

Certainly the miracles and works of Jesus should be chronicled and written down just to know this cool thing happened. But John tells us, in chapter 20 verse 31, this Book was *"...written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."* He has said, "I didn't write all this down just because it was really cool and I wanted to remember it and wanted everybody else to say, 'Man, a bunch of cool stuff just happened.'" "I wrote these things down," John says, "So that you may believe in Christ and find life in Him... That is why I wrote down what Jesus did; that's why I wrote to you who Jesus is and what He has done." We see there is a God of the universe. In our natural state, we are separated from Him. We are separated from Him because He is holy; He is perfect. He is completely righteous and just. We are born naturally apart from Him because we have a bend toward ourself. We have a bend toward disobedience and selfishness. While God has embedded His existence on our hearts, He hasn't embedded the Gospel on our hearts. We are wired to know that there is a Higher Power. I truly believe that every human, in their heart of hearts, knows and recognizes there is a Higher Power. There is a Supreme Being. Many will deny that, but I believe that they are denying that in lies to themselves, basically. I think that Scripture teaches that God has written His existence on our hearts. That's why we search for meaning; that's why we search for purpose... because He has written His existence on our hearts. But He hasn't written the Gospel on our hearts. That's why we needed Jesus to make Him known. That's why we need God to speak to us the things that we can't figure out by ourselves.

Paul, again, in 1 Corinthians 1:17-25... he talks about the shortcomings of human wisdom: how we fall short, how we never reason ourself to an understanding of salvation, because then it would be of ourselves and not of God. He says, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written,*

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

"Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Paul writes here that if the wisdom of man could reveal the things of God or convince ourselves of the things of God, then there would be no power in the cross of Christ. You see, reason seeks to make sense of the world, and human reason can get us the point of recognizing God and even our separation from that God... this need for a 'logos' - this need for something to link us to this God... but human reason could never... would never... have developed a system where victory is found through sacrifice. Human

reasoning would never had used humility as the path to glory. That's why the cross of Christ is a stumbling block. The Jews sought a victorious earthly kingdom. "We have been persecuted. We have been kicked out of our land; our things have been destroyed. So when we hear about a coming King, we are thinking, 'A king who will sit on a physical throne and will set us back into the prominence as a nation on this earth, as we need to be. That is the end goal for us.'" So it didn't make sense when Jesus showed up and lived a humble, suffering life and then surrendered it. It's also why the cross is foolishness to the Greeks. It was all about philosophy, all about wisdom, all about "It's got to make sense; we can figure this out. We have brains. We can do this on our own." Paul says, "If you can do it on your own, then it's you who did it and not God."

So God, in all of His infinite wisdom, makes sense of the universe by doing something that makes no sense at all. He sends His only Son to live a perfect life... perfectly obedient as a man... so that His death could serve as a substitute for sinners like us. If Jesus had any sin of His own, then His death would have covered His sin... so He was without sin so that His death could cover the sins of others. In being fully man, His death satisfied the price owed by man. There is a curse on mankind. There is a debt owed by humanity in sinning against God. So when Jesus offers His life as a sacrifice, He pays the price that we owe. In being fully God, He conquered sin and death, rising from the grave three days later... but still fully man.

So in being fully man, in taking on flesh, He reveals to us who God is because He is God. He also offers up His life, paying the price that we owe. That's one amazing immense aspect of taking on flesh. The other upside to this is that in being resurrected and perfected and glorified in a physical body that Jesus still has... He is still fully God and fully man now and will be for the rest of eternity. He rose from the grave glorified but still with the scars of His crucifixion. He promises us that He is going to redeem not just everything that it means for us to be physical beings, but for a physical creation... so that in eternity, the new earth is a physical new earth that we will inhabit, without disease or loss or suffering or pain. We will enjoy the presence of God forever. We will work with meaning and purpose and be in fellowship with the God of the universe. That is part of the amazing truth of the Incarnation... that Jesus took on flesh, not just to pay the price for mankind but to redeem everything it means to be human, so that we might have new life and everlasting life in Him.

This is not the wisdom of man. This is the grace of God. Grace because we didn't deserve it, grace because we couldn't ever get it done, and grace because God didn't owe it to us to begin with. Out of love, God made a way. That's why it's called grace. John 1:13 says, *"The children of God are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* If you just want to make that an affirmative statement, take out the *"not of blood, nor of the will... nor of the will..."* and just connect... *"The children of God are born of God."* "Not of blood," meaning we are not physically born as children of God because our parents have faith or their parents had faith, or anybody before them had faith, so we just inherited faith as we were physically born. That's ruled out. It's not through our race or lineage, as he expands the Gospel... not just to the Jew but to the Greek. So Jews, Gentiles... there is no distinction. So it's of by race that we come into salvation and not by the will of man. I can't effort myself into salvation... I can't just decide myself into salvation. That would be a work; that would be my effort. What it is is just surrender. It's realizing that you can't, you can't, you can't... God can. And He did. And if I believe in His name, if I trust in Jesus, I can have life in Him. That's the grace of God. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God made a way to know Him and be with Him forever, if only you would believe in Jesus Christ. It's through surrender... not through reason, not through works, not through donations... not through anything that we can do to feel good about ourselves... He made a way through surrender and belief in Jesus Christ. Let me pray for us.

"God, thank you for who You are. Thank you God that as You sent Christ... as He took on flesh to dwell among us... that, God, it wasn't a change of heart... it wasn't, 'He represents all the good thing that you don't represent... that He has the tender, softer, gentler aspects of God.' But no... when we see Jesus, we see You. The Jesus of compassion and grace and mercy... that is the same character of You, God... Father God. Don't let us think, 'Oh, I'm all about Jesus of the New Testament, but that God of the Old Testament... I'm glad He changed His ways.' It's the same character: grace, love, and mercy... that flow from You... that Jesus manifests when He took on flesh and walked among us. Thank you God for sending a way to know You. Thank you, God, for revealing Yourself through Your Son. And we thank you, Lord, and not only did He give up His life, humbling Himself to death, even on a cross... but God that He was raised from death to life... that You glorified everything in Him that it means to be humans so that we could be redeemed as well. And God, now we have the Comforter, the Helper... the Holy Spirit. As Jesus ascended, He said, 'I'm sending Another'... same character, same God, same Being... just another Person of that Trinity. God, we pray today that Your Holy Spirit would change our hearts, change our minds, God. As we struggle, as we strive, as we try to do better and be better and think harder to get ourselves into a place of, 'This is where meaning and purpose is found...' God, that You would shatter all of those illusions, and that Your Holy Spirit would just reveal to us, 'There is life found nowhere else but in Jesus Christ.' I pray that Your Holy Spirit would give faith to believe, faith to trust in Christ, faith to walk away from 'the logos'... the idols that we have set up in our lives, God, to make meaning and make sense of a hopeless existence. But God, just as we read in Your Word today that meaning and existence in the universe are found in You, and You have extended an invitation to us through Your Son. God, may we live lives that reflect this truth; may we live lives embracing all of the ups and downs as grace upon grace... day after day; breath-in and breath-out. Whatever trials may come, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, God, may You be greater than all of these things. May we lift high the name of Jesus, walk confidently in the name of Jesus, as we trust and believe in Jesus. God, You tell us in Your Word that You are not just the author of our faith, but You are the perfecter of our faith. You tell us, God, that You who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete that work in us. So God, if somebody needed to hear that today, they have been discouraged... they've seen You, they've experienced You, they've believed in You and yet discouragement, circumstance, hopelessness, and darkness have begun to creep in, God... Remind them that You who began a work in them will be faithful to complete that work in them. Every day we are conformed more and more into the image of Christ... every day. God, we don't put our hope in an earthly kingdom, an earthly throne, or an earthly king. God, we put our hope in eternity. We put our hope in the fact that You will redeem us for eternity but not this side of death.

"God, I want to pray for those in the room today that are far from You, that have not believed in You, that have been trying to find meaning and purpose in the things of this world... God, I pray that You would just drop the scales from their eyes, that their hearts would see the beauty and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... that they might believe and surrender their lives to You. God, for those who came here today as children of God already, those who believe in Your name and received Jesus by faith, God, that we would continue to walk by faith in the grace that You have shown us... that our lives would be surrendered to your will and to Your purposes... not just so that we would be blessed by knowing You, but that others... that others who don't know You would see our good works and glorify You, our Father in heaven. God, work in us to bring glory to Yourself. Conform us more into the image of Christ. That is our good. That is Your desire for us. I pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."

If today God has shown you some truth that you didn't realize before, that you didn't understand before, or God is working in your heart or your mind... to learn more, to find out more, to press into Him... I want to

invite you after the service, as we dismiss in just a few minutes... to head over here. We have a team over to my left in this wing that will talk to you, point you to Scripture, pray for you, encourage you... help answer some questions for you. If God is drawing you, God is working in you... they want to point you to what that next step might be, by faith.

If you've been here for some time and maybe not a spiritual step but maybe just a connecting step to our church or to our ministries, we have a Connection Center right out here through these doors... a team there to connect you to a Life Group or to a place to serve... some other form of Bible study. We hope that you would continue to engage, if God is working in your life... that you would press into that... not away from it but press into that... that you might link arms with the family of God... with other brothers and sisters... and pursue the life that God has called you to.

If you would stand, I just want to speak a blessing over us before we sing the Doxology and are dismissed. I pray that God would bless you, keep you, and cause His face to shine upon you, because He has given us grace. He has sent His Son, an extension of who He is... an invitation to know Him... that Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray that we would believe that Gospel, walk in that Gospel, we grow in that Gospel, being conformed day by day into the image of Christ until He is through with us. We don't decide when that is. And as we grow in the Gospel, that we might go with that Gospel, again that we would show others what we have found in Jesus... that we have found the "logos," the meaning and the purpose of life, in the person of Jesus Christ, that other may know Him as well. Amen and amen.

[Doxology sung]