

“Jesus, the Almost and the Real”

Jon Benzinger

John 3:1-36

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So these words that I just read in John, chapter 3 are probably the best-known verses in the Bible. We saw God's motivation for sending Jesus, which is what? It's love for sinners. We saw God's goal in sending Jesus, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. So eternal life isn't just God's goal in sending Jesus. It's also John's purpose in writing this book about Jesus. John 20:31 says it clearly. John wrote this book so that everyone, everywhere, at any time may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing, you may have life, eternal life in his name. Everything John writes, including chapter 3, has this great goal in mind, that people won't perish, that people won't remain under God's condemnation, but that they will be saved from that.

Now, John 3 is well known because of verse 16, and it's truly unique compared to what we've seen so far in John. In chapters 1 and 2, John introduces us to Jesus, who he truly is. He is none other than God with skin. That's the core message of Christianity, that God came to earth, and that, that when he became a human being, he became a human being without diminishing his deity at all and without deifying his humanity at all. In other words, he is truly God, just as God, as God is. And at the same time, he is truly human, just as human as you and me, but without any of the sin that we have. See, it may be human to be sinful now, but that's not how it's always been and that's not always how it's going to be, either.

Now, when this unique, one-of-a-kind person came to our planet, he was identified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, as the, as the son of God and the Messiah or the Christ, which is the same thing. And he's identified as the king of Israel, as well as the link between Heaven and Earth. As you think about that, what would happen if, if the God man, that kind of person, if he came here and lived among us? Well, chapter 2, we see what he does. His compassion and his kindness for a groom that, that didn't plan his wedding well enough, so he didn't have enough wine at his wedding, what does Jesus do? His first recorded miracle, he turns water into wine so that the party could keep going. Activity like that just simply proves that he is everything chapter 1 says that he is.

He then travels to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But when he got there, he was not happy at all. Yeah. If you hate religion because it's all about controlling people and taking advantage of them, then Jesus is right there with you. He was so disgusted by what he saw in Jerusalem, the, the false religion and the exploiting of people for God for, for money, that he cleans out the temple completely, a demonstration of God's judgment on the religion of that day.

Then chapter 3, we get this long speech. If you have red letters in your Bible, you know chapter 3 is all Jesus talking, right? It's mostly just him. But that's, that's the pattern that John has in his book. He tells us who Jesus is. Jesus proves who he is by doing a miracle. And then there's a speech about who Jesus is and what he did. So you can see this in chapter four, as you play it in your mind or even look at it. Jesus has this conversation with a woman at the well. She's, there in that conversation, we learn more about who Jesus is and, and what he came to do.

And then we move from that to two miracles in a row at the end of chapter 4, the beginning of chapter 5, and then the rest of chapter 5. If you have red letters, you know. You can see it. What

is it? It's a long message about all of these proofs, all these things that prove that Jesus is the son of God. So this is the pattern that we're going to see from chapter 2 all the way through chapter 12, message then a miracle, miracle then a message, all telling us here's who Jesus is and here's what he came to do.

Now, if you look at chapter 1, verses 11 and 12, some have said that the entire book of John is simply the outworking of these verses, where it says Jesus came to his own and his own people did not receive him. That's on the one hand. But, to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. So, so far in John, if you think about it, we've seen John the Baptist. He's the true believer, the one who really believes in him, who, who truly believed in his name, who received him. And then on the other hand, we've seen the religious leaders at the end of John, chapter 2, who didn't receive him, who mocked him because they had rejected him. And then we see the eternal cost of doing that in John, chapter 3.

Then last week, we were introduced to a third kind of person, the almost believer, the almost Christian who, who believe in Jesus, but don't really believe in Jesus, who, who have a lot of true knowledge about Jesus, but don't know him. They admire him. They're fascinated by him. They think he's great, but they don't give their lives to him. They they, they're not trusting in him. They're, they're not committed to him. And what we do as we enter chapter 3 is we put a face and a name to this third category of person when we're introduced to a man named Nicodemus. So if you're taking notes, point **1) Jesus and Nicodemus**. I know, super creative point. I get it. **Jesus and Nicodemus**.

Point number two is just as creative, **2) Jesus and John the Baptist**. There you go. You've organized chapter 3 around the three main characters, Jesus, Nicodemus, and John the Baptist. One is a real believer. The other is an almost believer, and that's our friend Nicodemus. One was a Pharisee. The other was a prophet. One was part of the religious establishment. The other was part of the religious counterculture. One came to Jesus privately at night, probably so that no one would see him, while the other spent his entire ministry publicly pointing everyone to Jesus who would listen to him.

Now, even though Nicodemus calls Jesus rabbi or teacher in verse 2, what we see in Jesus' interaction with this almost believer is Jesus the evangelist. As an evangelist, Jesus makes it clear that, that Nicodemus, though he almost believes, and though he's incredibly zealous for his religion, there is one thing that he lacks, the fill in, the first one under point number one. Nicodemus needs a Heavenly birth. That's what he needs. The popular way of describing this is being what? Born again, right? The theological word for this is regeneration. It's one of the very most important truths that, that we all need to know very well.

So I want you to notice three truths about this Heavenly birth. First, it's a second birth. Look at verse 3. Jesus answers him. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Nicodemus is clearly confused, but it's clear that he knew what Jesus was saying is that one birth wasn't enough. He needed two.

Second, this Heavenly birth is a spiritual birth. Look at verse 5. God's spirit is involved with this. Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh". That's just one birth. "That which is born of the spirit is spirit" or spiritual. The spirit is involved in this. Clearly he is involved. And here, here's the thing that happens in regeneration. This is an invisible, instantaneous, supernatural act of God's grace, where God, the Holy Spirit does two things. First,

he purifies the sinner from sin's infection of their lives. Notice verse 5. It's that idea of water right there, purifying the sinner of their sins. And then second, the spirit gives the sinner spiritual life. They're born of the spirit. You can see that at the end of verse 8. They're born by the spirit. They now have spiritual life, where before they were spiritually dead. Elsewhere in the New Testament, this is called being a new creation or being resurrected or being washed and reborn.

So when this happens, what does this look like? When this happens in a person's soul, what happens is that the direction of their life changes. The direction of their life goes from sin and self to being directed to God as our Supreme love, that our loves change. And we we change from love for self and love for sin to love for Christ. This person experiences a newness. It's almost like they're not the same person they're use to be, that they used to be. Anyone experience that, know what I'm talking about? All of this is done by God's spirit.

Now, third, this Heavenly birth is a sovereign birth. Sovereign birth. Look at verse 8. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is compared to the wind. "And Jesus says the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit". In other words, you and I, we have just as much control over this Heavenly birth as you and I did over our physical births. In other words, what happened, where it happened, when it happened, how it happened, had nothing to do with you. You and I, we were just along for the ride. We were completely passive when we were born.

And the idea here is that regeneration is something God 100% does to us. So that what happens, where it happens, when it happens, and how it happens is all determined by him. It's not something we control. It's not something we cooperate with. Like you and I, we didn't cooperate with our moms, right? K she did her part and you did your part, and together you were born. Like that's not how it happened, right? Now that's the same idea here. This is a sovereign birth.

And as as I read those texts, did you notice the urgency in these texts? Notice verse 3 again. Listen for the urgency. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". That word, unless, means this is a prerequisite. Without this Heavenly birth, a person, notice verse 3, "cannot". We are not capable. We do not have the ability to see, to experience the kingdom of God apart from this birth.

Now, notice the urgency in verse 7. Jesus says, "Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again." Did you catch the urgency there? Where's the urgency in verse 7? It's in the word "must", right? There's no wiggle room. There's no exception. This has to happen. It must happen. It's an absolute necessity. There's no spiritual life, no Heaven, no kingdom, no eternal life unless a person is Heavenly born. Now, you might hear that or someone else might hear that and be like, "I don't believe that. That's not true." Like, whatever with that idea. How did Jesus begin what he said in verse 3 and verse 5? With what word did he repeat in both of those verses? "Truly, truly". In other words, this is true. This is truly true. This is true truth. You must be born again, or you will never see Heaven. Anyone who says anything else doesn't know what they're talking about, which gets us ready for the second fill in under point number one, which is Heavenly witness.

Heavenly witness. How is it that Jesus can say this kind of thing? Because he is Heaven's witness to the earth. He came from Heaven. And when he speaks about Heavenly things, he speaks as an expert, as the authority, because that's where he came from. Look at verse 11. "Truly, truly I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if

I tell you Heavenly things?" And here's the point. No one has ascended into Heaven. So much for all of those books about people going to Heaven and coming back. No one has ascended into Heaven, except he who descended from Heaven, the son of man. Translation, Him. So to Nicodemus, the almost believer, evangelist Jesus makes sure he knows that Jesus first is the word. And he speaks with Heaven's mind. Why? Because he know, he knows what he's talking about because he came from Heaven. So when he speaks on Heavenly spiritual things, he speaks as the only authority that has ever been on this planet because that's where he's from.

Second, Jesus is not only God's word, but he is also God's love. Jesus expresses Heaven's heart for sinners. Verse 16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." So to a world of sinners who, who are already condemned by their sins and rejection of Jesus, God, out of great love for sinners sent Jesus to rescue all who would believe in him from condemnation. There is now no condemnation for anybody who believes in Jesus.

And third, in addition to being God's word and God's love, Jesus is God's light. He sees all people with Heaven's eyes. Verse 19, "This is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." He sees people clearly, more clearly than we do. And as light, Jesus exposes the darkness of our sins. See people, most most people run away from the light to avoid being exposed, or they do a lot of good works to try to cover up what the light would expose. They stay away from Jesus because he exposes their sin. But exposing our sin is the very best thing that could ever happen to us. Verse 21, "Whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God". God is at worth in their lives. And as a result of that, they come to the light and are saved.

As you think through what is said in these verses, what should our response be to Jesus being God's word with Heaven's mind and God's love with Heaven's heart and God's light with Heaven's eyes? How should we respond to that? The response is obvious, isn't it? Verse 15, 16 and 18. We should all believe. We should all trust in Jesus. We should believe in the name of the only son of God. When you do that, verse 16, "you will not perish eternally, but you will have eternal life." When you believe in Him, when you give your life in verse 17, you "will be saved." Or verse 18, "whoever believes in Him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already". Why? Because he's not believed in the name of the only son of God. Condemnation, it's rescued from legal condemnation for your many crimes against God. It's saved from punishment in Hell forever, perishing there. All of that and a whole lot more is given to all, everyone, every single person who so ever would believe in Him.

Now in verse 21, the scene shifts. It goes from Jerusalem to the farmlands of Judea, and it shifts from the almost believer, Nicodemus, to the real believer. So point 2) again, it's **Jesus and John the Baptist. Jesus and John the Baptist**. He is the real believer. He is the most obvious real believer so far in the book of John. And the scene here is that John is baptizing, and Jesus' disciples are baptizing. And um, John's disciples are seeing this and going, hey, this isn't, this isn't okay. You know the people are leaving us and going to him, and this isn't good.

Verse 26. Hey, John, "Rabbi, he who is with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness", that Jesus guy-"look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him". We're we're losing all of our influence. All the people that are following you are now following him, and this isn't right, and we've got to do something about this. How John the Baptist responds is critical. The answer he

gives to his followers, we're going to summarize with the fill in after point number two. He's a, He's a real believer, a maturing believer, and that's seen in how he understands his Earthly Ministry. Earthly Ministry.

You see, when Heaven has impacted your life, when you believe in Jesus, you trust in Him, when you're living for Him, what does that look like? Well, first, it's seen in an understanding, a realization that everything we have, everything, our lives, our families, our jobs, our good ideas, our influences, our ministry, all of it, everything we have is given, every good thing. Verse 27, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from Heaven". Let that paradigm, let those lenses, the lens of verse 27, see all of your life through that lens. God himself gave John the Baptist, notice the text, every single part of his life in ministry, all of it. There isn't, he says, one thing that he had that God didn't give to him.

That's why John the Baptist is never the focus of his ministry. He's just the groomsman. Look at verse 29. He's not the groom. "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom". He's like, that's not me. "A friend of the bridegroom, that's me who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice". So if the best man was the focus of your wedding, it probably wasn't for a good thing. Right? And it probably wasn't a good thing that he did in order ... Everyone's leaving, going, man, that that, that best man, he's something else. Like probably not, not good. And that's the idea. The best man is there to make sure people focus on what matters, which is the bride and groom.

And in the same way, real earthly ministry is about getting out of the way so that people focus their lives on Jesus. Why? because he's the hero. He's the focus. He's the focal point, the emphasis, the priority. And as long as that's the case, John the Baptist is like, great. I'm so glad this ministry is growing so much. Why? Because everybody, all these people get to see Jesus. And that's all that matters. And notice the end of verse 29. It's not just all that matters. End of verse 29, "Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete". In other words, I'm joyful. I'm happy. I'm grateful that all these people are leaving my ministry. Why? Because they're all leaving for Jesus. And that was his joy, people seeing Christ.

Now, as his ministry was growing and growing, and thousands and thousands were there, what we realize as we hear these things is that John's estimation of himself, third, was growing downward. Verse 30, "He must increase" his influences, the amount of people following him. "He must increase. I must decrease". That's, that's humility. And that kind of humility, the kind of humility that's joyful, when people see Jesus and not him, that's the heart of a real Christian, which is why it's the heart of real ministry as well.

I mean have you noticed that in the Christian life, growth in the Christian life is actually growth downward? Have you noticed that, that as you grow as a Christian, you grow down in your estimation of yourself? And that as your estimation of yourself goes down, doesn't your estimation of Jesus go up? Isn't that how it works? It's like I said last week, it's this spiritual teeter totter. As you go down, He goes up. But as you go up, He goes down. It is really good. It is very good for you to go down and for Him to go up in your heart. It's a really good thing. And by way of contrast, beware of the Christian, beware of the ministry that cares about going up and staying up, because then Jesus is going down. And then Jesus is being used to benefit the Christian or to benefit the preacher, and Jesus is not a means to an end. He is not, he is not the way that we get what we really want. He is the goal. He is the, he is the priority, not us.

Now why is that? Why, why is that true about Jesus? We see that beginning in verse 31, and we, we'll summarize it with the words Earthly Witness. Earthly Witness. Notice the earthly witness

of Christians, especially believers, has a, has an attention that is selfless. And what do I mean by that? Well, notice the repetition in verse 31, "He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from Heaven is above all". The idea here is that Jesus, the one from Heaven, is above all things.

And, in other words, he's the one that should get attention, not the earthly one. The earthly, verse 30, 32, "he, he bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony". In other words, while using earthly vessels and speaking earthly words, Jesus is to get the attention. Why? Because verse 31 says, and it repeats it for emphasis, he is above all. There's, there's nobody higher than him. In other words, he is not used to prop us up and to, he's not used to get attention for ourselves. He is the one who gets attention. He uses us so that people see how wonderful he is.

Second, our earthly witness to Jesus as Christians is made with selfless words. Verse 33, "whoever receives his testimony sets a seal on this, that God is true". Translation, I'm just giving a testimony. I'm not studying to come up with a message. I'm simply saying, "Hey, here's what he did." And then, verse 34, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God". Translation, I'm just simply saying what God says. That's really our goal as Christians. The goal is not to be creative and to come up with our own ideas. It's simply to say, "Here's what God says." Why? I'm simply uttering the words of God, "for he gives the spirit without measure". What the Christian proclaims is not his own message, but we simply give our testimony. We simply say, "Here's what he did." We give the message of another. It's his message. We're just, we're just passing it along to those who listen.

You've got this earthly witness. The attention is selfless. It goes to Jesus and not us. The words are selfless. They're God's words and not ours. And the third aspect of this earthly witness is that it is a, it has a selfless goal. Think about verse 35, "The father loves the son and has given all things into his hand". He owns it all. "Whoever believes in the son has". Notice it doesn't say will have, but it says what? "Has", right now, has now and forever "eternal life". "Whoever does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him". In other words, the goal is that people attach themselves to Jesus and not us. Why? Because the father loves the son, and so does the Christian and so does the preacher. And all of us realize, right, that all honor goes to Him. So our goal is selfless. In other words, we want people to believe in Jesus, not us.

Just like here are these followers of John saying, "Hey, all these people are leaving you." And he's like, "That's good." Why? Because they are not supposed to be attached to me. They're supposed to be attached to Him. They're not supposed to obey me. They're supposed to obey Him. Why? Because the goal is that they avoid God's wrath, which is all about their good. It's not about what's in it for us. We've got to all be aware that we're all servants. We're not lords, right? We're subjects. We're not kings and queens. We're slaves. We're not masters. We're stewards. We're not owners here.

From beginning to end, everything we are, everything we have is by the grace of God, because every good and perfect thing comes from Him. Verse 27. Again, there isn't a single thing that we have, not one, that wasn't given to us. The the theology Bible word for that is grace. And because it's all given, there's no reason to boast. There's no reason to say, "Look at me and follow me, and the goal is me." There's no reason for that ever. Why? Because God's the one who gives all of this. We stay humble. And like we've already seen with John the Baptist, all we do as Christians, we just point all people away from ourselves to their, to their eternal good and everlasting joy, which is not found in us or anything in this world. But it's found where? In Christ alone.

Now, as I thought through various ways to organize chapter 3 in this message, I was thinking maybe I'll do the six titles for Jesus in chapter 3, which are Rabbi, the son of God, the son of man, the light, the groom, and the witness. But I thought, no, let's organize it this way, around Jesus the evangelist and his interaction with Nicodemus the almost Christian, and around Jesus, the Lord and his impact on John the Baptist, the real believer, the real example of what it looks like to be a real preacher of the gospel.

As you think about these two men. What what did the future hold for John the Baptist and for Nicodemus? Well, John the Baptist, as many of you know, he was arrested for speaking against the sin and corruption of his government. And the reward that he got for doing that was the removal of his head from his body, right? But what happened to Nicodemus? It doesn't tell us in the Bible, but in John, you see Nicodemus three times. Chapter 3, he has this evangelistic encounter with Jesus. And we see him again in chapter 7, where he's chastising his fellow religious leaders. See, Nicodemus was, was a justice on the Jewish Supreme Court. And while he's there, the Supreme Court is talking about how Jesus needs to be punished. He is guilty for crimes. And he's going, wait a minute. "Like there hasn't even been a trial yet, and you've already, you've already proclaimed him guilty? Like we don't do that kind of thing here. That's not how this goes. That's a sham trial." At that point, he's no longer secret by night, so nobody sees him. Now, there seems to be this public admiration for Jesus.

And then it gets even more public the last time we see him in the Bible, in chapter 19. Chapter 19 is two years after chapter 3. And at this point, Jesus is dead, and there's a secret disciple named Joseph of Arimathea. He, he got permission from Pilate to take Jesus' body down and to bury him, and Nicodemus shows up to help. And Nicodemus brought with him 75 pounds of spices to wrap Jesus' body in to get it ready for burial. 75 pounds of spices cost a lot of money in those days. So Nicodemus again, justice on the Jewish Supreme Court, part of the religious elite, part of society's elite at the time, this was one important man. That's a ton of money. And you only did that kind of, you didn't do that for everybody. You only did that kind of thing if you really wanted to honor somebody who died.

When you think about it, it's not just, it doesn't just honor Jesus, but it's it's incredibly courageous, isn't it? By publicly associating with a man that his colleagues on the Jewish Supreme Court had just convicted of blasphemy and had executed for claiming to be the son of God, Nicodemus has now identified with him. So by chapter 19, I think what we see in Nicodemus is an almost believer becoming a real believer. And the question is, how did that happen? What happened in Nicodemus' life? And I think we can answer that question by following one word in John, chapter 3. This one word shows up at the beginning, at the middle, and at the end of John 3. And I think this word helps us understand how this almost believer became a real believer.

Look first at verse 30. Remember, he's part of the religious elite, society's, you know one of the top guys. Jesus even calls him the teacher in Israel. So he is like the guy that all of Israel would hear on a regular basis teaching the Bible. But in verse 30, in his heart, Jesus must have increased in glory and honor, while at the same time, he decreased in selflessness and humility. And that happens when the "must" of verse 7 happens to a person. You must be born again. See, he must have experienced regeneration in order to follow Jesus the way that he did, in a way that honored Jesus when the Jews, his colleagues had that same Jesus executed. To do that would mean that he would get canceled, right? He would be shunned by those same colleagues. And that's what church history says happened to Nicodemus.

Now we leave the Bible and we go into church history. And from being part of society's elite and very wealthy, he becomes a Christian. He gets baptized and for doing so, he loses everything. And when I say everything, I mean everything. They took everything from him, not just his status and his position in Israel, but they took all of his property and all of his belongings. He was actually kicked out of Jerusalem. He was not allowed to ever enter the city of Jerusalem again. His family was able to stay in there, but now they had to fend for themselves in utter poverty.

Then there's a story about his family, family members outside of Jerusalem, picking up grain on the ground just to try to get something to eat. There's another story told of a rabbi who saw one of his daughters digging in the dung fields, looking for food, and he's moved with sympathy. And as he's interacting with her, he asks her, "Who are you?" She replied that she was the daughter of Nicodemus, who was banished for becoming a follower of Jesus. And upon hearing that, the rabbi walked away and refused to help her.

No one that formerly knew him helped. And then, history says that one day he was surrounded by a mob and beaten to death. Why? For being a real Christian. That really doesn't happen to an almost Christian. Nicodemus had been born again, and one author summarizes it this way. He says, "He had lost everything in this world, but gained everything in the world to come." Why would he endure all of this? Why would he go? Think about it. Why would he go from excommunication to persecution to destitution to execution? Why would he do that?

I think the answer is found in the third "must" in John chapter 3, John 3:14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life". Where was Nicodemus when Jesus was lifted up on the cross? He was in Jerusalem. He was actually in the trials. He participated again as a justice of the Jewish Supreme Court. Could it be that he saw all of these things happening to Jesus? Could it be that seeing Jesus led as a lamb to the slaughter actually drew him to Jesus? John 12:32. Jesus says that when he is lifted up from the earth, that he would "draw all people to himself". Could it be that's what happened to Nicodemus? Jesus being tried, beaten, mocked and crucified actually drew him to Jesus.

With the gravity of all of his sin and the glory of the savior becoming more and more obvious to him, Nicodemus was born again. And then at some point, we don't know, at some point he gives his life to Jesus. And then years later, he gives his life for Jesus. In other words, he truly believed. He stopped being an almost believer. He was born again and became a real believer.

And the question I leave with you is, when did that happen to you? Has it happened to you? Jesus said you must be born again, or you cannot enter the kingdom of God. So are you born again? More about this next week, when we start a new series in John 3 called How to Go to Heaven When You Die. Probably important ideas in that series. Let's pray.

Jesus, a passage like this is um like, like so many passages in the Bible. A passage like this is powerful to help us understand the truth. And I love what you said in John 12, that, that when you are lifted up from the earth, that you would draw all people to yourself. So as we, we get ready to sing one more song to you in worship for who you are and for what you've done for us, I pray that would be the result of our time here together. And as we've heard this message that you would draw us closer to yourself, that we would see you in all of your glory and all of your goodness, that you would be raised up, that we would decrease, that we would recognize that as good and throw ourselves at your mercy, and that this drawing to you, drawing towards you would draw us closer and closer in love for you and worship for you and a desire to live for you

because of all that you are and all that you've done. In other words, may you be our vision. May you be our passion. May you be the controlling influence in all of our lives. I ask you this for our good, and I ask you this for the glory of your name. Amen.