When Jesus meets the unworthy

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Date: 04 March 2018

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0:00] Father, we often do not know the state of our own heart. We flatter ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin.

We don't really know, Father, the devices and desires of our own hearts. So, Father, we are so thankful that you know everything there is to know about us and still you love us.
We thank you, Father, that your Holy Spirit moves to bring your word to our heart, the center of who we are, the command center of our lives. And we ask, Father, that you would do that wonderful work in our lives this morning of bringing your word to the center of who we are, that we might know Jesus, that we might love Jesus, that we might trust him, that we might know how great a thing he accomplished for us in his life and in his death upon the cross and resurrection.
We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Please be seated. So, when I was ordained back in those days, by the way, we're having problems with lighting because the way they set the light up.
Just start waving at me if I keep walking into the darkness and you can't see me. Unless you don't like seeing me, and then you can just stay like this. Just stay there, whatever.
[1:24] And I'll just sort of look and figure out who's picking the most move. Anyway, never mind.
So, I spent a couple years in a suburban church and then in the diocese that I was part of back then.

The way it worked is when you get ordained, you get paid a very tiny bit of money and you get a bit of a raise. As long as you keep breathing, you keep getting small raises. And so, basically, there were a lot of churches in the diocese that their entire model was having...
Well, it was sort of a... What it was, it was sort of a vampire model of organizing your church. Every couple of years, they'd say, What we need around here is some new blood. And so, they'd hire you because you were cheap.
And actually, it was very funny. When I went to my first church out in the country, they basically said to me right of the way, It's so good to have you here. You're cheap. We know you're only going to be here a couple of years because then you move into a higher pay bracket and you'll have to move along.
So, we like you right now because we need you to do the things that we do and we need you to be cheap. And that's just the way things worked. In fact, we did eventually move, but we didn't move.
[2:37] The church had grown. They could have continued to afford me, but God called us to this particular church. One of the things we struggle with in life, if we think about it, is coming to realize that at some point in time in our lives, people don't need us.

It can be very hard for moms and dads when the kids all leave and the kids don't need you anymore. And in a far more personal and far more threatening type of way, it can also be very hard.
In a room of this size, there are probably several of us who've been divorced. And maybe we're still living with divorce. Maybe some of us have remarried. But we've lived with this great problem, this great tearing in our lives because the person who loved us found somebody better.
Or at least that's what they thought. And we're no longer needed. We're no longer loved. I was talking a couple of years ago to a couple of people, and they were all sharing about a particular movie.
And this particular movie, which I had also seen, it was about a young guy who had a very deep relationship with this young woman, but he never wanted to marry her because he was always worried about how he could ever marry one particular person when he might meet somebody better later on.
[4:10] And one of the young women was saying it was too painful for her to watch that movie. About halfway into it, she had to leave. Because it was touching at a very, very deep fear in her life

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that at that time that she would never marry.

And the reason she would never be able to marry wasn't that she wasn't able to commit, but that all of the fellows that she'd had any dealings with were always basically looking for something better. And so it's a very deep-seated, this complex of issues of struggling with the fact at some points in our time, in our lives, people leave us because they don't need us anymore.
It doesn't seem like they love us anymore because they don't need us. And we're this pattern of people always looking for something, or just being open to something better, whatever that means, and leaving us alone.
And the love breaks, the love ends, and it's just hard sometimes to live our lives that way. Some of us here this morning might, in fact, still be living with very deep wounds connected to this. Believe it or not, the Bible text that I read a little bit earlier actually speaks in a very powerful way to our fear.
[5:24] And it's one of the curiosities of our heart that many of us, when we read the text, don't actually realize that it's actually addressing something very deeply, something deep in our heart that we worry about.

So it'd be a great help to me if you would open your Bibles and turn with me to John chapter 5. John chapter 5. And for those of you, I don't know what's up on the screen above me.
Oh, we already have one of the paintings. What we're doing is we're going through John's gospel, and we're up to John chapter 5, and here's how the text goes. After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
And just pause, if you're a guest here, one of the characteristics, if you read the Old Testament, one of the characteristics of the Old Testament is that there are several times of worship that are also called feasts.
I mean, literally, one of the ways that you worship God is by eating a lot and drinking a lot, all to the glory of God. That's just the way God set it up.
[6:30] And this is one, it could have been several ones. John decides not to tell us which one it is, but it's for one of those. And Jesus goes to Jerusalem to be right where the temple is so that he, as a good and observant Jew, can take part in the feast.

We'll read it again. Verse 1. After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five-roofed colonnades.
Colonades? I don't know how to pronounce it. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years.
Now, just pause for a second. And those of you who are following along, some of you, if you have a King James version of the Bible, you say, George just skipped part. And others of you who are very keen readers notice that it goes from verse number 3 to verse number 5.
Now, this is actually just an important little aside. The title of this sermon series is Knowing Jesus, John's Intimate Biography.
[7:48] And one of the things about this, which we now call the Gospel of John, which is really just one of the four ancient biographies of Jesus, written by an eyewitness and, in fact, a person who was with Jesus for all of these different things.

He was with Jesus his entire public ministry. One of the things that Christians have a concern for is to actually know what the original text actually is. And over time, archaeologists keep finding more and more ancient copies of manuscripts, copies of the Bible.
Because up until the printing press, every time somebody wanted a copy of the Bible, some person had to sit down and write it out by hand. And then they would give it to a person. And one of the common misconceptions of the Christian faith is either that we can't know what the original writing was, or that somehow or another some crazy monks or the crazy church went and moved things around and changed things around, take out the bits that they didn't like and add parts that they did like.
And those are complete and utter misconceptions. It's not what works at all. That, in fact, there's scholars throughout the world, Christian, non-Christian, who find these ancient manuscripts.
And there's actually a scientific method whereby you can look at all of the manuscripts, and you can date them. And as archaeologists find more and more and more ancient manuscripts, Christians who just want to know what the actual text says, adjust the text.

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[9:27] And one of the amazing things about it is if you go and take a King James version of the Bible, and you take ours, and a modern version will have some of the bits taken out, you'll see that not a single important doctrine of Christian belief has ever been affected by the newest archaeological findings.

Not one. That the copyists, because they desire to copy accurately, and because it was actually a craft, a trade, where you were trained, they actually did a remarkably good job.
But occasionally, you find a small difference. Now, what part was left off? A part about an angel coming in and stirring the water. It doesn't affect anything to do with the gospel or Christian doctrines.
But because Christians desire to know what the Bible actually says, these adjustments are made as time goes on.
By the way, so whenever, if you talk to a Muslim and they say you don't know what's in the Bible, last time I had that happen to me, I just smiled. I thought, oh, I am so glad to myself. I thought to myself, I am so glad you raised that particular question.
[10:37] And I started to explain it to him, and I started to talk to him about how, in fact, the Koran is not, in fact, questioned in the same type of way that the Koran, it's uncertain what exactly...

Anyway, at some point in time, he just decided he would change the topic. But the point is that we as Christians can have... And actually, not just Christians. Anybody can have a very, very great confidence.
You might still think it's nonsense, okay? But with every passing day, our confidence that this is actually what John wrote gets stronger and stronger and stronger.
Science and archaeology makes our confidence in this higher and higher and higher as time goes on. Anyway, that was a long... Where were we?
Verse 5. Okay, we're talking about our fears of being abandoned. We'll read verse 5 again. And one man was there by the pool who had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time...
[11:42] See, Jesus is showing divine knowledge. Jesus says to the man, do you want to be healed? And the sick man answered him... Now, in English, it's hard to communicate what just happens right now.

But in the original language, the man gives a sarcastic answer. The man doesn't say, Oh, Jesus, I'm so glad you came here.
I've heard stories about you. I know you can heal me. I've been praying to God that you would come here because I know you can heal me. I've heard all about you.
Please heal me. No, the guy's answer is he basically flips Jesus off. He says... You know, basically he's saying, Dude, I'm here all by myself.
I can't get in the water to be healed. Like, why are you asking me this stupid question? That's what's being... But in English, it's not as obvious. But that's actually the heart of...
[12:46] In fact, it's part of the shocking nature of this story. As the story goes on, this man becomes revealed as more and more of a miserable, ungrateful, sarcastic, backbiting, betraying guy.

That's how the story unfolds. And so it begins. So Jesus says to him, Do you want to be healed? The sick man says, Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going, another steps down before me.
Duh. No, the duh's not there, but it's implied. Duh. And how does Jesus respond to him? Does Jesus say to his disciples, Gosh, this... Like, why is this guy flipping me off?
Like, I'm trying to be nice to this guy, and he just gives me this sarcastic answer. Doesn't he know what I can do for him? Is that what Jesus says?
No. What is Jesus? Jesus heals him. The guy's not expecting Jesus to heal him, doesn't believe that Jesus can heal him, doesn't ask Jesus to heal him.
[13:54] In fact, his response is a sarcastic putting him away. What does Jesus do? Verse 8. Jesus said to him, Get up, take up your bed, and walk.

And at once, the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. And by the way, partly what John is doing, and if you've been here for the other sermons, John keeps putting in little bits of historical detail.

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In fact, if you go on the Dig and Delve website from a couple of years ago, Craig Evans shares how there's a variety of different Israeli Jewish archaeologists who use the New Testament to find more sites in Jerusalem because of its accuracy.
So these Jewish archaeologists read the New Testament so they can go looking where to find things that were destroyed over the years. And so in this particular story, what is being emphasized is the wow of the miracle.
This guy's been an invalid for 38 years, and Jesus, just by his mere willing it, heals the man to the extent that he can stand up, pick up his mat, and walk away.
[15:21] It increases the wow, the nature, how big the miracle is. So how is the man going to respond to this? Remember I've sort of said to you, as the story goes on, it shows how miserable this guy is.

He'd be one of these guys that if you were in a hospital or if you were a social worker, after you've dealt with him, you'd go, gosh, I don't like that guy.
Maybe you'd go home and tell your husband or your wife about how miserable and unthankful the person was, had to deal with this person. We came, we gave him free medicine, we fixed him all up, and all he did was give us lip. And that's what happened.
Look, continue reading the rest of verse now. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, it is the Sabbath and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.
Now just pause. Andrew, could you put up the first point, please? I'm not going to go into it very much, but just so you know, Jesus does not tell the man to do anything which goes against what the Bible says.
[16:24] He tells the man to break a religious tradition, not a command of God. I'm not going to go into it very much, but it's not, Jesus doesn't say, you know, go ahead, I know the Old Testament says this, but go ahead and do it anyway.

It's just a tradition that they have. There's nowhere in the Bible that it says, nowhere in the Old Testament that says, you can't carry your mat on the Sabbath. Okay? But they have a tradition around it.
Anyway, so these, the religious leaders, they say to this guy, they don't know anything about him being healed. Okay? All they see is a guy carrying, they're mat on the Sabbath.
They're like the religious police. They, they're busy bodies. And these religious busy bodies go up against the guy and says, you're not supposed to be doing this.
Verse 11. So how does the man answer him? Well, the man says in verse 11, the man who healed me, that man said to me, take up your bed and walk.
[17:25] Now, just notice there, there's two things here. The first thing is, he basically tries to pass the buck. He wants to get out of trouble. So he's going to put it on Jesus.

Like that's a really good, grateful way to express your gratitude. And he tries to put it on Jesus. It's not my fault. Whoa.
No harm, no fault. Oh, just was him over there, somewhere over there. He was going to tell me, you should go get him because you should be mad at him, not me.
And, and how do the, how do the religious leaders say, respond to that? Verse 12. Now, we're not going to go into it very much, but one of the things about the gospel is the gospels are the most profound critique of religion in all of literature.
You don't have to read Christopher Hitchens. You don't have to read Dawkins. You don't have to read those people to have a critique of religion. You just got to read the Bible. And, and here all the way through this text is a profound critique of religion.
[18:30] And religion is any type of, you know, organizing your, your life around worship or meaning in any type of way that excludes the gospel. Can be Christian churches.

Can end up becoming really just religious places, not actually places where the gospel is centered.
So how do they show this critique? So this guy says, uh, okay, I'm, I'm carrying this because a guy healed me and told me to walk.
And, uh, and they asked him verse 12, who is the man who said to you, take up your bed and walk?
Like, see, this is the subtle critique of religion. They don't say, really, you got healed.
Really? Like, what did you get healed of? They're not even interested in that. You know, it's really funny because if in fact a miracle had happened, only God could do this.

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You'd think that religious people would be interested in God. But religious people aren't really interested in God. They're interested in their traditions. Because you see, often religion is used to inoculate us against the true and living God.
[19:40] So they don't even ask any question at all about the miracle. They just said, who is the man who said to you, take up your bed and walk?

Verse 13. How does the man respond? Now, the man who had been healed did not know who it was. For Jesus had withdrawn as there was no crowd, as there was a crowd in the place.
Just pause. So who's this guy? Jesus comes up. You want to be healed? You know, sarcastic answer. Jesus heals him. He's not even grateful. He doesn't say, for 38 years I've been lame. You just healed me. Who are you? The guy's completely and utterly uninterested. He just leaves. When something comes against him by the religious police, he tries to say, don't blame me, it's this guy's fault.
Verse 14. It gets worse. Afterward, Jesus found the man in the temple and said to him, see, you are well, sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.
[20:51] The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. In other words, okay, you want to find the guy? His name's Jesus.

Like, he betrays Jesus. He betrays Jesus. Now, here's a very, very good question.
Why on earth did Jesus heal that guy? I mean, how many of you are wondering that? Like, why on earth did Jesus heal this guy? Sarcastic, absolutely no faith, completely and utterly ungrateful, passing the buck, getting Jesus in trouble, betraying him.
Why on earth would Jesus heal someone like that? Now, why do Christians ask that question? The reason we ask that question is that we want to sneak in the belief that the reason we are Christians is because we're worthy.
[22:13] You see, for those of you who are guests, this is an evangelical church. Evangelical Christians are supposed to know that we're saved. How are we made right with God?

By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That God doesn't weigh up how many good things I have in my life.
He pardons my offenses. In fact, if you could put up the next point, Andrew, and the next point, I thought, it's just a quote from the Bible. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, in other words, completely and utterly unworthy, far from God, turning our back on God, walking away from God, Christ died for us.
He dies for us when we're bad. He dies for us when we don't want him to die. He dies for us when we think we are like little gods. He dies for us when we are still sinners.
And we know that this is the case. But in fact, if you could put up the next point, Andrew, that would be great. I keep sneaking in the belief that I am worthy of God's love and power because of who I am and what I've done.
[23:34] See, that's why we find this text very, very, once you actually see what's going on in the text, Jesus heals a completely and utterly massively unworthy person that if we were doing, and in fact, it's even actually sort of emphasized by the fact that one of his complaints to the God, to Jesus, is, for 38 years I've been lying here and I don't have any friends or family that want to help me.

Like, his personality problems have been going on a long time. Some of you have heard me this story, this is quite a few years ago, I did a, I was asked by a funeral home to do a funeral for a man who dropped dead at work, one of those brain aneurysms that just, he's just, all of a sudden he just dies.
And I do the funeral and the guy was, I don't know, in his mid-40s. So you think that a guy who's in his mid-40s who dies in a large government office at work, how big do you think the funeral would be?
And he has a wife and three kids. You think it's going to be a big funeral? Okay, six people at the funeral. Six people at the funeral. His ex-wife and his three kids aged, I think, roughly, you know, 20, 18, and 13.
13-year-old was a girl. Not a single tear was shed at the funeral. And there's only that six or seven people at the funeral. And I said to myself, what type of man was this that could die in such a manner?

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[25:14] And only these six or seven people would come to the funeral. And his 13-year-old girl daughter would not shed a single tear. What type of a man was this?

And I never know because, in fact, it was a funeral home funeral. There was no reception afterwards. Everybody just went their separate ways. I came, I did the service, and I went home.
I never have the answer to that. Maybe this guy that Jesus healed is something like that. And in our heart of hearts, even for Christians, we wonder, why would God heal a man?
Why would Jesus do that? And the reason we ask that question is that we think it's connected to worthiness. Because you and I keep sneaking in to our walk with Jesus that I actually am sort of worthy.
nothing personal. I'm a little bit more worthy than the rest of you, you know? And I don't know, maybe there's 140 people in here, and probably every one of the 140 of us, we're Canadians, okay?
[26:27] So we're not going to say I'm more worthy than 139, but as Canadians, we might say I'm more worthy than 100 of you. Right?

Because we'd know it'd be too sinful to say 139 of you aren't as worthy as me, but I'm more worthy than 100 of you, and every one of us is saying that in our heart of hearts. And we think that when things go wrong in our life, that maybe we are having trouble in our marriage, or we're having problems with our kids, or we're having trouble at work, or we have health problems, and all of a sudden we feel as if God is very, very far from us, and the reason is is that there has snuck into how we understand and see ourselves is that somehow or another whatever blessings I have is because of some type of worthiness, and now I no longer have that external success that the saved should have, and so we don't want to be around other Christians because at the end of the day it is very, very hard for you and me to believe that I am saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone.
And part of it is because we don't know who God is. John's gospel is about, one of the things that John's gospel is all about is that Jesus introduces God. Those of you who have been here, what I've been saying almost every week, I need to start saying to Canadians that in terms of the God that most Canadians believe exists, I am an atheist.
I believe in the God that is introduced by Jesus. And I believe that Jesus introduces the God that really exists, that truly does exist, that is unknown, apart from Jesus.
If, Andrew, could you put up the next point? And one of the things which God, Jesus reveals about God is that God has no need love.
[28:38] He is only gift love. God has no needs. So part of my need love is, you know, human, we human, you know, we know what need love is.

We want to be needed and we love it, you know, when our kids are young and they need us and sometimes that just bothers the heck out of us but other times we just so love it and we really know we love it when they no longer need us and they don't want us around.
And we like to think that there's something about us that's worthy and that the other person really needs that will keep us together and that's fine.
You know why it's fine on one level? Because in fact the matter is that human beings are just one unending need. I am one unending need. I needed my parents to conceive me for me to exist and I think I'm a god.
I couldn't even bring about my own existence. No human being can. and everything every second every microsecond I am one unending need for oxygen for gravity for food for people around I needed to learn a language I didn't invent it myself if you do invent a language yourself it's sort of called not learning how to speak it's actually not a good thing but a problem you just keep making up your own language the only person in the world who speaks that language that's called failure to learn a language not a sign that you are God okay we all know that we're one unending need and part of the mystery part of the things which other religions whether it's Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism and especially atheism cannot account for it's easy to account for the fact that human beings are selfish in love and they want a type of self-centered need type of love the hard thing for all those religions to explain is the fact that there's sometimes that we do rise to gift love just with nothing expected in return there's many many years ago we had this in fact when I was the students connected to the church used to call it the slum mobile
[31:06] I had this really terrible big old 12-seater van and we took this 12-seater van all rusted and everything like that but it ran and we took it to Nova Scotia had a bit of a holiday and way back

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there was some problems and we pulled into a garage and the guy looked at me the Ontario plates nine kids looked at the van and Ontario plates Nova Scotia and he said to me you know what I'll look at this right away for you and he looked at it right away and he fixed it and he said you know what no charge hope you make it back safely I'll never see that guy again that was just pure gift love all of us have been recipients of just pure gift love but the fact of the matter is God has no needs he just he is only gift love he only gives he does not need anything from human beings and to try to understand that God doesn't need my worthiness he doesn't need my strength he doesn't need my abilities he doesn't need anything in me at all that his only relationship to me is pure pure pure gift love and on one hand as a human being who wants to feel needed who wants to feel worthy it almost feels like I'm naked in public to think that

God relates to me only and utterly and completely by gift love and there's no need love in him at all and it feels like I am naked and powerless and it doesn't feel good but that is the God is unfailing God is unfailing and God is the only being in the universe who has no needs and if he puts his love on me as a gift there is nothing more secure than to be connected to the God who is only gift love and has no needs his love will never tire his love will never come to an end his love will never find someone better because he's not looking for better he doesn't need anything he's just love there is no more secure relationship than we can have than with the
God who truly does exist who's revealed by Jesus Christ that is only love only gift love with no need could you put up the next point Andrew in this is love in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins this is such a powerful text if you think about this text one of the things which is so remarkable about this text in the previous miracle how did the miracle work in the previous miracle you can go back and read it the guy comes he says to Jesus Jesus I really need you to heal my son and his son is 35 kilometers away and he says I really need you to come and heal my son and Jesus just looks at the nobleman the high official and just says go your son will be healed and the guy believes Jesus and goes and finds out the next day that the moment that Jesus said that and that he left the son was healed but in this case there's nothing like that remember how does the miracle work the guy doesn't know who
Jesus is the guy doesn't care who Jesus is the guy has no hope doesn't believe that Jesus can heal him has no expectation makes no request whatsoever the guy isn't even asked to do something before he's healed Jesus just heals him and after he's healed the guy can get up and the guy is completely and utterly ungrateful completely and utterly unthankful all these bad things everything that is done for the man's healing is done by Jesus why because he is gift love and so it is with our relationship with Christ Jesus does everything to heal the man the man does nothing he must do everything to give us eternal life I can do nothing he must do everything to defeat death I can do nothing he must do everything to deal with death's cause which is sin I can do nothing he does everything when I am completely and utterly unworthy he does everything out of gift love and not need love this my friends is the gospel this is
Jesus this is what he does for you and for me all he says is you just put your hands out our arms aren't even long enough to reach Jesus his arms reach ours it's his holy spirit coming into us that gives us this life he does it all we do nothing that is the gospel that is the gospel and we are to be gripped by his unfailing love his great victory please stand if there is any here who has not yet given their life to Jesus hopefully you now have heard that if you are waiting to make yourself worthy that's not the way to go if you feel that your life has been so wrecked that Jesus would never even pay any attention to you now you know that that's not true there is no better time than right now to say
[37:28] Jesus could you be my savior and my lord I now know that I am unworthy that you do everything and that you do everything to make me right with God that I might receive eternal life and live with you forever you do it all and there's no better time than now to make that transaction with God in the name of Jesus and say Jesus I am not worthy you have done it all it's all your love please take me as your child come into my life and never let me go there's no better time than now to pray that prayer and for all of us who are Christians there is no better time than just to do a bit of business with Jesus and say Jesus I confess I've been slipping in to think that it's about my worthiness my abilities my power and Lord I just thank you that it's all you all your love all your grace all your power all your salvation it's all you your endless gift love grip me with who you are

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grip me with who

Jesus is let's bow our heads in prayer father if there are those here who are still searching or seeking or maybe they came as skeptics father I ask that your holy spirit would move gently but powerfully in their hearts if there are those here father who can feel Jesus knocking at the door of their hearts father I ask that your holy spirit would move in their lives that this would be the time that they respond to that knocking and open the door and look your son in the eye and say Jesus I am not worthy please come and be my savior and live within me forever and for father for those here like myself who are followers of Jesus we confess before you once again how we sneak in our worthiness and we thank you father for Jesus we thank you for his unending gift love we thank you father that our eternal life our salvation the putting away of our shame and our sin the clothing of Christ righteousness that it's all him father make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel learning to live for your glory and all these things we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen

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