

The Gospel of John: Jesus' Dying Desire

Aaron Brockett | John 17:1-26

What's up Traders Point? How are we? If you missed all that [Easter celebration] last weekend, if you missed the whole weekend, you really missed out and I don't even feel bad for you. We put together that video recap so we could continue to celebrate that.

I just want to take a quick minute and thank the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers that stepped up to the plate last week. You guys were amazing. From guest services, people out in the parking lot all the way through kids ministry, and worship volunteers, and bulletin passer-outers. I don't know the technical name for you guys but that's what I like to call you. I just appreciate everyone stepping up and just manifesting the Spirit of Christ to all of our guests. I just really, really appreciate that more than you can ever know. You guys are the rock stars around here and we appreciate that so much.

A number of you over the last week have asked me so, in response, between Good Friday and all five of the Easter services last week we had between 9,000 and 10,000 people here last week. We had about 800 people tune in on their computers all over the world. That was awesome to see. It's really kind of a cool tool. We can tell exactly where people are tuning in from and the number one city is Indianapolis. Number two is Atlanta, which is kind of interesting. I don't really know anybody in Atlanta but, "Hey Atlanta!" Then the number three city is Whitestown. That's awesome. "Hey Whitestown, we're two minutes away." We're glad you are here, glad you could be here.

The most important number from last week, though, was 138. That was the number of baptisms we had last week. I just wish I could take all of you out of this room and put you, as a fly on the wall, out in that back hallway, in the tent, just to listen in on the conversations and see the tears, to see what God is doing in the lives of people. It is just humbling.

Always, whenever I do that kind of invitation where I say, "Hey would you come forward and be baptized this morning?" I get nervous because I'm like, "What if nobody does?" That would be kind of weird. But I'm always just like, "You know what Lord? It is up to you. It's your business. I can't manipulate that." So even if just one person goes, it's awesome. When Matt told me, "It is like 138," I was like, "You've got to be kidding me." We are just relishing in that, so thankful for the work God is doing in that.

Now you might be here this morning, especially if you are new and if you don't know me that well, and you hear me kind of rattle off all those numbers, which I really don't do all that often, and you might be tempted to go, "Are you one of these pastors who is just all about that numbers?" And, if that's the case, I am one of these pastors who is just all about the numbers [pause] but not in the way you think.

Before you grab your bags and are like, "Let's get out of here," can we just all admit that that phrase "it's all about the numbers" has kind of a negative connotation to it? By all means, if you hear that phrase, it can mean something twisted, dysfunctional, and unhealthy. Maybe you even have this mental image of me sitting in my office stroking my black cat going, "Bring me another." It's like this weird kind of, "We have to fill the seats. Let's just grow for the fame of our name." If that's ever what we mean by

rattling off numbers, then by all means pack up your bags, get your kids, leave, and go find a different church. That is twisted. That is not of God.

But there is a healthy way to be about the numbers. Here is what I mean. My wife Lindsay and I have four kids and we love them, most of the time, with the exception of when they've had too much sugar, or not enough sleep, or they cross each other's invisible lines in the car on the road trip. Other than that they are little blessings from heaven and we love every one of them. Never, ever—when we have been out in public and my wife turns to me and says, “Do we have all the kids?” I've never once turned back to her and said, “Honey I wish you weren't all about the numbers. It's quality of kids, not quantity. Look around, see who we're missing.” We never, ever do that.

You would never walk up to me and say, “Hey, tell me about yourself.”

“Well I've got four kids.”

“Oh I didn't know you were a dad who was all about the numbers.”

We would never do that. Why? Because those numbers represent our kids, those numbers represent a person we love.

So on the rare occasion when we do lift up a number or talk about those kinds of things we only want to be about it the way Jesus is about it. Jesus talked about numbers from time to time. Jesus would say, “Hey there are two brothers, one was a prodigal and one stayed at home. You know what? Both of them were lost and they needed the Lord.” He would say, “There is a shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to go find the one.”

In the book of Acts it says, “3,000 people,” it doesn't say, “a bunch of people.” It says, “3,000 people responded to the Lord,” and a couple of chapters later it says, “Another 5,000 responded to the Lord.” The reason they hold up those numbers is not to say, “Look at us. Look at what we are accomplishing.” It's because that's somebody's kid, that's somebody's mom, somebody's uncle, somebody's co-worker. That somebody means something to him and they mean something to God. So that person should mean something to us as well.

I want to be completely honest with you. I want to lay all my cards on the table and say, “I wish that I always could have said that,” but that wouldn't be true. About 20 years ago when I was a dumb Bible college student, which really there is not much change, I'm still pretty dumb. But 20 years ago as a dumb Bible college student, ministry became my idol.

I'm sure there is somebody in this room who can resonate with what I am talking about. I know we have pastors in here, former pastors in here, former Sunday school teachers in here, former worship leaders in here, or somebody who was really, really involved in a church even as a volunteer. Ministry, in general, became an idol. Here is what I mean by that. You served God to justify yourself and your value to others and even to Him. It just kind of became this thing where you were like, “I have to do this, so that way I can be important, that way I can be lovable, and that way people will think that I'm really important and successful.”

So even as a Bible college student I was like, “You know what? I'm going to get out and I'm going to lead a really fast-growing ministry. That's where it's at.” And then I graduated. All through my twenties I

served in these relatively small ministries. As I look back on it, it was awesome. I wish I would have enjoyed it more during that time, but I was so focused upon, "This isn't meeting my expectations. I really want the thing to grow a lot faster than it should." And ministry became an idol.

Listen to me. When serving God becomes an idol, like when you find your sense of worth in serving God and what you could do for Him and not because of whom you are it will kill you. It will burn you out. You'll walk away from it eventually. When I was 29 years old I almost had that experience.

Those of you who have been around here and who know my story you may have heard me talk about this before. We had planted a church and we had labored at it for like five years. It was a setup, teardown thing in a high school. We weren't really growing numerically and I was just burned out. I felt like God was stiff-arming me and I was pummeling fists and that He was like, "You're so cute. Just keep going with all your effort."

I was trying to do all these big things for God and He was like, "Yeah your motivation is wrong so I'm not going to bless it," and I just couldn't get that through my encrusted heart. So I was just like struggling and finally I was like, "You know what? I have to get out of this because I just feel like I am going to do something really stupid if I don't." So I was like, "I'm going to get out of full-time ministry for a while." Nobody was asking me to. I hadn't done anything to disqualify myself. I was just like, "I've just got to take a break from this."

So, when I was 29 years old, I almost went and sold RVs with my wife's uncle Dave. Dave's and Aaron's RV Sales, it would have been awesome. I seriously contemplated that for a while and, by God's grace, that didn't happen. Not because I have anything against RV sales but if that would have happened, my family would have starved. So God and His grace kind of kept us from that.

A little over seven years ago God moved us to Indianapolis and we came to this great, great church. I have to tell you that seven-and-a-half years ago (I was 31 years old) there was very little left of my pride and ambition. Maybe like some of you, I just came limping in here a bit. My prayer for the first 18 to 36 months as I served here alongside of you was, "Dear God, help me not to kill this church. In Jesus' name. Amen."

I had a number of you come up to me, like in most churches during the time when a new pastor comes in, and say, "Aaron what is your vision for Traders Point?" And I was like, "My vision is that we would still be here next Sunday. That's my vision." The response was like, "What a great vision from the Lord."

As we look at what God has done—in the last three years we've baptized over 1,000 people with 138 people last week. The average church size in America is 80 people and we baptized almost double that last weekend. Do you see what the Lord is doing? Here is the thing. That can lead to pride. I think that is why God took a full decade to kind of kick the pride out of me and He is still doing it. He is still saying, "Be careful. Keep your eyes focused upon Me," so that we can continue to deflect that and give the glory to Him.

We say this all the time as leadership and as staff when we've had a weekend like last weekend and we are all kind of coming down off of it in a buzz. We look at that and say, "God is at work here, not because of us, but oftentimes in spite of us. In spite of the things we do to mess it all up."

So if God ever does anything significant in the life of this body, it is just through ordinary, broken people who are making themselves available to Him. As the church reformers put it, "*Soli Deo Gloria*: For the glory of God alone." It's a Latin phrase. In other words, everything we do as a church is to be at the exclusion of our self-glorification and pride, and done for the glory of God. Jesus is to be the only Hero around here. He is the One we are to be focused upon.

In fact, I've said this before in the past. There are all kinds of motivations and reasons for people to come to church. God doesn't care. God is like, "Whatever it will take to get you in here," but there is only one motivation that should keep you coming back. You have to examine your motivations and say, "What are my motivations for attending this church regularly?" It could be for all kinds of good reasons. It's conveniently located. I really like the Park. The Kids' Ministry is great. I really love the worship and on and on you can go. All those things are very, very fine reasons but if they are the only reasons, eventually those reasons collapse down on you. Eventually you'll grow disappointed because those things and those people will eventually disappoint and Jesus never will.

So here's one thing I would say. Your motivation for coming back here over and over again should be simply this: "I want to get to know Jesus better." And I don't care if you've been walking with Jesus for four, or five, or six decades and you think you've heard all the sermons out of every passage of Scripture or not. You should simply say, "Yeah, but there is still more I need to know about Him. I've drifted from Him. I've gotten confused about whom He is and so I need to know Jesus better than I do or I think I do." Even if you would come here and you would say, "I don't know if I really buy this yet, but I am at least intrigued enough to get to know Jesus." Let that be your motivation.

Everything that we do, we desire to deflect that and be for the glory of God alone. In fact Jesus would say it this way. He would say, "If I be lifted up, then I'll draw all men and women unto Myself." That is church growth right there. It's not to be ingenuitive, it's not to be creative, and it's not to have all this flashy programming and buildings. It is simply, as a church, to say, "What are the barriers that keep people from Jesus? And let's remove them." We want to identify all the barriers against people coming to have a real, authentic experience with the real Jesus and, as a church, remove those barriers.

Here is how it works. You and I, at one time in our past, got invited to a church by a family member or friend and we experienced either an environment of love or an environment that said, "Please don't come back." You walked in here and, hopefully, you experienced an environment of love, and grace, and acceptance. And then you were, hopefully, given the uncompromising, yet sobering news from God's Word that you and I are selfish, rebellious, prideful, wretched, and lost. How's that for a dichotomy?

Listen, my two favorite words in the Bible are "but God." But God—He intervened. But God, in His infinite mercy and grace, made a way for us to be found, forgiven, and made whole through His Son, Jesus Christ. So when you get an opportunity to bump up against the real Jesus, He'll change your perspective, He'll change your heart, He'll change your philosophy of life, He'll change your worldview, and you'll experience something you never experienced before: Truth wrapped in grace.

Then you go and you invite the people that you love and you say, "You know what? Would you come and check this out?"

"I don't know man. It's kind of weird."

"Will you please come and check this out? Would you just try it? Would you just experience it?" Then they get an opportunity to come and, as a body of Christ, we manifest the Spirit of Christ and they experience that same truth wrapped in grace. Then it repeats itself over, and over, and over again.

You see, if this can't be a place where you can come and be honest with yourself and with others, if this can't be a place where you can feel that you can invite your un-churched family members and friends, and if this can't be a place for you to come and walk through your questions and your doubts, your fears, and your hesitations in order to discover that Jesus really can be trusted, then where else are you going to go to discover that?

I love it when I'm walking through the hallways of our church and I'll meet people who maybe just relocated from another state and they say, "We were a part of this really, really great church in this other state." Maybe sometimes I'll even know the church and I'm like, "That is a great church," and they just feel filled up and you can just see it on their faces. The Spirit of Christ is within them. They are spiritually healthy and they say, "Man, we can't wait to dive into the trenches of ministry with you and serve." I just think of it like reinforcements.

But you know what? The conversation I love even more than that is bumping into people in the lobby and they look uncomfortable to be here. Maybe it is the first time they have ever darkened the doors of a church. They are not quite sure. And I meet them and they don't exactly know what they should say, and what they shouldn't say. And they come up to me like, "Man that was one blankety-blank kind of a sermon there pastor." And I'm like, "That is awesome. Thank you. I'm so glad you are here. I hope you come back. I hope you feel loved. I hope you get a chance to bump up against the real Jesus and let Him change your life."

Last week Matt Hessel was in the tank most of the morning and afterward he and I got together as we usually do. He was exhausted and I was exhausted and he was like, "Dude, that was so awesome." I didn't have a chance to talk to him really the whole weekend. He was like, "Man, there were people coming down in the tank and I could smell alcohol on them and I could smell smoke on them." What a place where you can come with your baggage and your junk and you can experience the grace of Jesus Christ.

You see, so many churches, and I've been a part of them, and I've even contributed to this, we just kind of give off this air that says, "You know what? Until you get your act cleaned up, you can't come here." No, you come here with all your stuff, and all your hang-ups, and all your brokenness, and all your guilt and all your shame. You come here and you say, "You know what? I can experience the love and the grace of Jesus Christ." Not to have Him put His stamp of approval on you, but for Him to change you. And Jesus will, all the time.

You know in Jude 1:20-23, I love these great words and they are really directed toward the church. It says, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life." Now stop right there. What is that? That is discipleship, that is growth, and that is sanctification. That is, "Come and immerse yourself in God's Word and be built up in the very person of Jesus Christ."

The end of that passage tells us why. You see, for many of us, we are like, "I want to gain knowledge, and I want to grow in Christ, and I want to become a disciple," and it leads to spiritual pride. It leads to this idea of, "I've finally arrived. Look at what I've done in the eyes of God." Then we have a tendency to

look down on others and say, "Look how far I've come and look how far you have to go." But it says at the very end of that passage, the reason why we are built up is to, "...have mercy on those who doubt."

Do any of you work with somebody, live next door to somebody, or are friends with somebody who doubts? That would be like everyone in this room. Yeah, I could put a name to that. I could put a face to that. I get it. And he says in this passage, "Be built up in Christ, not so that would terminate upon itself, and you say, 'Look what I have accomplished,' but be built up in Christ so that you might have mercy on those people who you know and love who experience real doubt."

Now I love this last part. It says, "Save others by snatching them out of the fire ..." It is this idea that every church should be so close to the fires of hell that we can reach out and grab those who are in its danger, to be "in the world but not of the world." I like this phrase: Every church should smell a little like smoke.

We are not so far back, not so distant from the world that might contaminate us, but following the very words of Scripture we are compassionate enough to say, "We have not figured this out. We have not come up with this on our own. I am just as much in need of mercy and grace as anyone else on this planet, yet because of the grace that was given to me, I'm going to get close to you so you can meet the real Jesus as well."

So here's where we are going here in the course of the next several weeks together. Between now and the end of May, we have two more weeks left in John's gospel, counting today. So next weekend we are going to wrap it up in John 21. That is kind of hard to believe.

And then in the next four weeks, between then and the end of May, we are going to be in a new series of messages called: Humble and Hungry. I'll explain what we mean by that. I really want to ask you to be praying about this series and I want to ask you to stay engaged with me over the course of the next six weeks before we kind of split for summer vacations.

I don't know if you know this or not. In most churches, what happens after Easter is we slip into neutral. It is kind of natural because Easter is over and, "Wow we did it." And then we kind of come back and it is spring time and everyone gets itchy for Spring Break and little league starts and it's time to mulch your lawn. So everybody is outside and we are excited about all of that, so we kind of get distracted.

I want to ask you to stay engaged with what I'm saying and what I have to teach over the next several weeks because God has been doing some stuff in my heart and the heart of our leadership, our staff, and many of our people. He's been leading us in a direction and we're really, really excited about this next season of ministry that God has us in. I really believe this is a pivotal, and it's a crucial, and it's a really exciting time in the life of our church. I have some really cool stuff to share with you and we'll be laying all of that out here in the next coming weeks.

So, what I want you to do is I want you to grab a Bible and get to John 17. That's where we are going to be today. As I was thinking about this, over the course of the last several weeks, we've been in John's gospel—if you are new around here, we've been studying John's gospel since last August or September. We've been in it for a while. We've taken a couple of breaks and we've just taken our time working through this.

About 16-24 months ago, when we were laying out the sermon series, we knew we wanted to do the Gospel of John, but we didn't exactly know why. Honestly, I don't even know if I knew why until maybe like two months ago. We were like, "We just want to work through John's gospel. John's gospel is a great one to work through for those who have questions and are trying to come to believe."

But now as we are kind of seeing the vision and the mission that God is leading us to as a church in the course of the next several months, and even in the course of the coming years, I am going, "You know what? That is why God led us to John." Before we venture out, before we say, "God we want to take ground for Your kingdom," God was like, "You know what? You need to take an extended period of time as a church and get to know Jesus better. I don't want you misrepresenting Him. I don't want your heart growing far from Him. I don't want you turning ministry or progress into an idol." So, getting to know Jesus better, I think that's why we've been in John.

This is a great passage of Scripture. You might be familiar with it. This is known as Jesus' high priestly prayer, which sounds very, very formal. But basically what that means is Jesus is our High Priest and He prays for us. In Matthew's gospel, the disciples came up to Jesus once and they said, "Jesus, would you teach us how to pray?" Do you remember that? And Jesus teaches them how to pray and He says, "Well here is how you pray. You say, 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'" It's a great, great prayer. It is like four or five verses long.

But in John 17, Jesus actually prays. He doesn't just teach us how to pray, He prays. And as He prays, Jesus reveals to us what our values and what our convictions should be as a church. This is Jesus' dying desire and He's not necessarily praying for the world, He is praying for the church in this prayer. He is saying, "This is what is important to me, and here is why I went to a cross, and here is what you should be committed to as well."

Let's pick this up, John 17:1, here we go. It says, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; ...'" And so if you remember a couple of weeks ago when we ended chapter 16, Jesus basically said that, "Hey in this world you are going to have a lot of trouble but take heart, be encouraged, because I've overcome the world." As soon as He says that, He turns and He begins to pray to God. And He lifts up His eyes and He says, "The hour has come," and that reference to the hour is Jesus saying, "It is time for Me to go to a cross. It's time for Me to do what You sent Me into the world to do. I've been walking this planet now for 33 years and it's time for Me to go and to give up My life."

This is really interesting to me, as I was studying this, because when I feel convicted to pray, oftentimes I find that my life gets so busy, or I get so tired, or I get so distracted that it is difficult to pray. Does anybody share that struggle? You know whenever life gets turned upside down and I'm not certain about what is around the corner, and when my circumstances are up in the air, it's pretty easy to pray. I am like, "Dear God," and I am like on my knees and I am like, "God, You have to come through because I don't know what is going to happen here." When I pray it is because my circumstances are unclear. I am not sure what God is doing in my life.

Right here though, when Jesus prays, He knows exactly what is going to happen. He knows exactly the circumstances. And it teaches us this—when I pray I often want God to change things. In fact, I even move beyond asking God. I tell God, "God, change this." When Jesus prays, He wants to find God in the midst of those things. It is a fundamentally different way to pray.

It says, "God the hour has come," and going on in verse 2, it says, "... glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed."

What is Jesus saying there? Jesus is saying, "God, I am ready." That is what He is saying. "God, I'm here to do what You've asked me to do. God, I am ready to be the Savior of the world." That's what He means by, "Glorify Me and I'll glorify You." This is not a prideful thing. That's said within the shadow of the cross. He said, "God, would you please send Me to be the Savior of the world?"

Verse 6, "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your Word. Now they know that everything that You have given Me is from You. For I have given them the words that You gave Me," that's the Bible. That's the Gospel of John here, "and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You;" what we talked about last week. Jesus is who He says He is and He'll keep every promise that He's made to us, "and they have believed that You sent Me."

Verse 9, "I am praying for them." Who is He praying for? He is praying for all believers everywhere. He is praying for this church today. He is saying, "God, this is my dying desire, for those who maybe have a jillion reasons not to put their trust in You, but they are going to put their trust in You. They are going to believe You. So God, I'm praying for them. I'm lifting them up." What is Jesus praying for? He is like, "I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me." Now He is not saying that He doesn't love the world. He is just saying, "This prayer is for Believers. I'll get to the world later, but right now, I'm praying for the church." Right now the church is God's plan A. The church is where the Spirit of Christ is manifested and we are in kind of a spiritual battle, so He's lifting us up in prayer.

Verse 10, "For they are Yours. All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one."

I want you to look at the middle of verse 11 there when He says, "Holy Father, keep them in..." As I was studying this last week I stopped for a minute and I was like, "If I were Jesus and I was praying for you or for somebody else, how would I finish that sentence?" "God, please keep them..." and I noticed that oftentimes whenever I pray for others, I'm usually praying something like this. "God, please keep them safe." "God, please keep them healthy." "God, please keep them fully resourced." Those are not bad things to pray at all. It's just not what Jesus prays here.

What does Jesus say, especially in connection with what He said at the end of 16? "In this world you will have trouble." He says, "I'm out of the world. You are in the world. God, keep them in Me." That's what He said. He said, "I'm not saying I'm going to pull you up out of the trouble. I'm not saying that I'm going to give you only peaceful circumstances in your life. What I'm saying is that your foundation under your feet will be strong, but you have to stand in Jesus Christ."

This is why idolatry is the number one sin that pulls us away from the heart of God. Idolatry can be anything. Idolatry can be your spouse, it can be your kids, or it can be ministry, good, good things that make crummy gods. Jesus says, "Keep them in Me, God, because otherwise they're not going to make it. I want them to be unified so that the world may know."

Look with me down in verse 18, "As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." And this is kind of a central idea for this entire prayer. It's all built around this one word: sent. And the Latin word for mission is *missio*. That is where we get our word for mission. It means to be sent.

So Jesus, as you notice, for the remainder of this passage as we read down through it, Jesus says this over, and over, and over again. He says, "God, you sent Me, now I'm sending them. God, you sent Me." In fact, the fullness of Jesus' joy was tied to the fact that He was a Man on a mission. Jesus did not come to this earth to say, "You know what? I'm going to serve God and all of this is kind of for my self-glorification." Jesus' entire life, from zero to age 33, was, "I have come for others," and He says, "I get joy from that." And happiness is, "What can I do to serve others?" Jesus says, "Now I'm sending all of you to be on mission."

I don't know what thoughts, or images, or feelings come to your mind when you hear the word mission, but I grew up in a small little Baptist church with Sunday morning and Sunday night services and Wednesday night services. It seems like once a quarter we had the missionaries we were supporting come back on furlough. It was usually like a Sunday or Wednesday night and we would give the whole service to them. They would stand up and they would kind of do the slide show of the mud hut they lived in, and the tribe they were around, and the weird food they ate. They were like, "Maybe you would want to go," and I was like, "No way. Is there a secondary kind of Christian that you can be? 'Cause I don't want to do the mission thing."

Yes, it may mean you go in that kind of context, but don't relegate it to just that. To be a Christian means to be sent. To be a Christian where you live, work, and play means that right now, when we let this service out in a few minutes, you are on mission. You are going. You are being sent to manifest the very Spirit of Christ to a world that needs to go... Listen, the church either goes or it dies. It has to be moving.

So He says in verse 20, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word," He is speaking future tense here. "That they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us," why? "So that the world may believe that You have sent Me."

Christians, the worst testimony for Jesus is oftentimes Christians who forget their need for mercy and grace. And the best testimony for Christ is Christians who lean on their need for mercy and grace and it oozes out of their very life. Not a badge of pride like, "Look at what I've accomplished. Look at the knowledge I've acquired. Look at the salvation that I've earned." But, "I'm one beggar trying to show another beggar where to find food."

Listen there is something, even if you don't buy the verbiage of the gospel message just yet, there is something undeniable about a group of people who come together, who come from different eras, age groups, philosophies, clothing styles, music preference, and whatever. You look at these two people and you are like, "They don't look like they go together," and yet they are hugging each other. What do they have in common? Jesus.

And the world looks at that and says, "I can't even argue with that. I don't even know what to do with that. I don't have a category for it. That's what Jesus is praying for. He is praying for unity, not uniformity. In other words, He is saying when people look at His church and say, "I don't understand why those people are clapping all the time? Why are they so excited all the time?" Well, it's not this pseudo excitement or pseudo joy. It is the very Spirit, the manifested presence of Christ within them.

Verse 22, "The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are One, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me."

Verse 24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am," that's heaven, that's the new heaven, that's the new earth, "to see My glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world." That's what makes heaven so awesome. It's not like the streets of gold and babies playing harps on clouds and stuff. I'm sure all that's awesome. They are not really there, that was a joke. What makes heaven awesome is that you get a glimpse of the Glory of Jesus Christ from the very foundations of the world.

He says, "O righteous Father," and righteous does not mean good or perfect. Righteous means God will do what is right, and He's always right, and He can be trusted. I love that word righteous. "O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent Me. I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Have any of you ever opened up a newspaper, turned on the TV, or looked through the web to see what is going on in the world, in our city, our country, and our entire world? Have any of you gotten really anxious? Do you get really nervous like, "How long can this thing keep spinning? When are the wheels going to come off? This is really scary?" Especially if you have kids or grandkids you are like, "Man, if this is our reality now, what's it going to be like in 10, 20, 30, 50 years from now?"

It just feels like the world is kind of moving further and further away from Christ. Come back to this prayer. Jesus isn't surprised. Jesus is like, "You know what? The world may not know, but there will be some who will. There will always be some who will." He says, "I will be in them to make it known."

It is this idea that Jesus has never worked from the top down. He's always worked from the bottom up. He's working through the people who have faith like a mustard seed. He's working through those who say, "Lord, I'm not much. I'm the least of the lost, of everyone." And we come to Him and we are like, "Here, God, I'm not much but here I am." And He says, "All I want is your availability and I'm going to put My Spirit in you and there will be those who will be changed because I'm moving through you as you have faith to follow Me."

As I was studying this last week, I have to be really honest with you. I had a hard time with this. I think part of it was because I was like so tired after Easter. It was like preacher hangover or something until like Wednesday. It was like, "I have to preach again and I have to figure this out." And I was studying this passage and I was really, really having a hard time coming up with an outline and trying to figure it out. Then all of the sudden it hit me like Wednesday afternoon. I was like, "There are ten different sermons in this great, great passage that I could preach. And I only have time to preach one." And I know you guys are like really disappointed. Try to hide it, alright?

Whenever I tried to make it too complicated I was like, "God, what do you want us to hear from this?" Here is just the big, big thing. It is all established around this word sent. As Jesus was sent into the world to ransom us back from darkness, He says to us, the church—He's left us behind for a reason, "Be sent into the world and manifest the very nature of Christ and the gospel message to others." I could basically boil down what Jesus says into three simple things as He is speaking to the church.

He says, "Listen, stay in Me. Stay in Me." Stay grounded in the person of Christ. Stay close to Jesus.

The second thing He says to the church, He says, "Be unified. You don't have to agree on everything. In fact, if you did, that would probably be kind of weird. But, together, actually keep your eyes focused upon Me. Keep the main thing the main thing."

Then He would say, thirdly, "Move, get out, go. It's in the Great Commission. Go and make disciples."

Jesus says this to the church. There is like this simple thing that we do to remove barriers that keep people from Jesus. Stay in Christ, stay unified, and go. Continue to take ground for the Kingdom of God. Jesus was sent into the world to seek and to save the lost.

So here's the simple fact. About 80 percent of our city, Indianapolis, is not connected to a Bible believing, Christ centered church. That is roughly 1.7 million people. As we began to look at this and study this over the course of the last year, it was a little surprising to me because Indy sort of feels like there is a church on every corner. I have friends in other parts of the country that are like, "Isn't Indianapolis, the 465 loop, isn't that like the belt buckle of the Bible belt." It kind of looks that way. We have churches everywhere, but that doesn't mean that we have a majority of people who are connected to a relationship with Jesus Christ. There is still 80 percent of our city that is disconnected from Jesus.

One of the prayers on my heart, one of the prayers that we've been praying as a leadership is, "God, what would it take to reach just one percent of those people? What would it take just to make a little bit of a dent? We're not the only church in town, we just want to be one of the churches in town that is pointing to Jesus and teaching out of Your Word so they have an opportunity to bump up against Christ."

So we've been seeking the Lord in that and we've been asking Him about it. One of the things that has been keeping me up at night is to one day get to heaven and to have God look at me and say, "Congratulations, the church that you served grew but most of your city went to hell." There's just something about that that makes me want to throw up. It's not about church growth. It's not about how many people we can get here over a weekend. It's simply us saying, "You know what? We are not just going to wait around and hope people get the courage to come one day." We have to go to them and say, "I don't know what your impression has been of Jesus. I don't know what you've heard, but here is the real Jesus. Here is the gospel message: Truth mixed with grace."

So over the course of the next five or six weeks I want us as a church to be on our knees, to be laser focused, before we all kind of split for summer vacations, asking the Lord how He wants to move in and through our church. So that's why this next sermon series is called *Humble and Hungry*. We have to wed those two words together.

Oftentimes I'll talk to pastors in churches who, in the name of humility, really have stopped advancing. They've stopped loving people. They've said, "Well, we are just kind of trying to be faithful and in the name of humility we're not taking any more risks." Or, we send this message to certain people, "You're not welcome here until you take care of that mess." Or you go on the other side and you have churches that are so hungry it turns into pride. You have churches that are so hungry it is like, "Wow, look at what we've accomplished."

We want to be humble and hungry, *Soli Deo Gloria*, "God, this isn't the work that we are announcing to You that we are going to do. No, God, we are available. Now will You please do something in and through us?"

So let me give you three things I just want you to chew on, talk about, pray about in your Life Groups, or with whomever you get together with this next week, or even just do an evaluation of your own heart. Here they are: Before God does anything in and through our church He must first do something in and through my heart. Before God ever will do a transformational thing that only God can do in the life of a church and in the work of our city, He has to work on individual hearts to realize that the church is people who have been ransomed from darkness and delivered into light.

So if we forget our experience of grace, then we cannot possibly share that with others in any sort of authentic way. If we do, it sounds condescending. If we do, it sounds like we've achieved something that others cannot possibly achieve. Salvation is not something that you can achieve. It is something that has been given to you by grace through Jesus Christ. And you just go as one beggar to another beggar telling them where to find food. You say, "Just come the meet the Jesus that I know."

I love God's providence as we've been studying through John's gospel together because I skipped ahead last week to the resurrection, because it was Easter. I don't know if you noticed that. I went back to 17 and I basically didn't know how to work that. Now that I look at it and read Jesus' dying desire and what season of ministry we are getting ready to go into in the life of our church I am like, "Man, I am so glad we are studying this passage."

Next week is John 21, one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture because Jesus restores Peter on a beach over breakfast. Three of my favorite things: the beach, breakfast, and forgiveness. They are awesome. If I could just have breakfast on a beach and be forgiven every day, that would be a good day.

So Jesus is with Peter on the beach and, I don't know, He is making him scrambled eggs and fish or whatever. He is like, "Hey Peter, do you love Me?" Peter is just like—he feels like an utter failure because he announced, "Lord, I'll never leave you," and then three times he denied Him. Jesus was like, "Do you love Me?"

"Yes." I'm sure he didn't even make eye contact that first time, that first question.

"Do you really love Me? Look at Me, Peter, do you love Me?"

"Yes."

"Peter, do you love Me?"

"Yes, Lord. Are you trying to humiliate me?" And all of the sudden I think it registered with him. He denied Him three times, Jesus asked him three times. Then what does He say to him? "Go and feel better about yourself." No, He says, "Go and feed My sheep."

That is what He says to every single one of us. The grace that we've been given and the knowledge that we've been given of God's Word isn't so we can look down on others and say, "Wow, look at how far I've come. Look at the great Christian that I am," but it's actually to go and to feed the very sheep of God, to give mercy to those who doubt. Do an evaluation in your own heart.

Last week I was doing this evaluation and, as I was talking about earlier, when I was in my 20s I was full of pride. I thought, "I have accomplished all of this and I have no pride anymore." Then God was like, "You've not graduated from a lack of pride. Aaron, you still have issues and you still need to continue to lean into me."

"God, consecrate me, purify me. I don't want to take ground and try to advance my kingdom, but Yours. And if I mess that up then people get a bad taste in their mouth for who Jesus is and they may never come back."

Here is the second thing: God cares more about your availability than your ability. Please hear me in that. Some of us are like, "I'm not a pastor. I don't have any special gifts. I don't like being up in front of people. I don't exactly know what I can do. And the last church I served in, they about burned me out and I about walked away from God, so I don't really know what I can do." Listen, God is saying, "Hey look, I just want you to be available."

You see any time you read through the Scriptures and somebody experiences the reality of God, almost always, the very next thing God says to them is, "Go. Get out, move, follow Me in obedience." God simply wants a posture that says this, figuratively and spiritually speaking, open-handed, "Here I am! Send me! Work through me! Do whatever You might want to do through me." And God wants us to be available so He can say, "Hey, go there," and then we move.

You see we don't want to get ahead of God. We want to be as close to God and we want to be as attentive to God as possible so that when He does say, "Hey church, go there," we are flexible, and willing, and in a position to move.

Here is the third thing, and this is going to be a gut check: When it comes to our church, when it comes to this experience here, Life Groups, anytime we gather in whatever setting, weekend worship services, whatever it is, what level of "lostness" are we comfortable with?

Here is what I mean by that. If you turned around and you saw "blank" sitting there, would you be surprised? Would you say, "I can't believe he's here. I don't even know if I want him here. I don't even know if I want him around my kids. I thought he believed something else. I can't believe he came in here dressed like that."? What level of "lostness" are we comfortable with?

Here is the thing. We may never say something out loud but our body language will betray us. They'll feel it. They'll know it. I've had single moms come up to me sometimes and they'll say, "You know I tried to go to this last church. They never really said anything but I could tell they didn't really want me there. They didn't really want to deal with me." You know what? We communicate through our body language.

It's not just what you say. It's how you look at people. You see grace has to get so far into you that even when you look at people you look at them with tenderness and compassion, like the shepherd goes after that lost sheep. Not in the sense of condescension like, "You need to know what I know," but in the sense of, "You need what I know I need."

A few years ago before Lindsay and I had kids we lived in an apartment complex that had a swimming pool and a hot tub. So we would go out to this hot tub almost every night before bed. It was awesome. Did I mention we didn't have kids? So we would go out, we would sit in this hot tub.

I remember one night that there was this other young couple about our age that walked in. They sat down and we started to talk to them. We had a lot in common and we started talking about sports and snow skiing and whatever, a lot in common. It was a really, really good conversation until he said, "So what do you do for a living?" That is always kind of a dangerous question for me to answer. I said, "Well I'm a pastor," and immediately his body language changed. His face flushed. He got rigid.

His wife looked at him and gave him this look that said, "Don't." It was like, "Don't." So she, within like a minute or two, got up, got her towel, dried off and just left. I looked back at him and said, "What do you do?" He said, "I own a bookstore and we sell books, magazines, and CDs that you Christians despise and hate." And that was Lindsay's cue to get her towel, and to dry off, and say, "See you later, honey."

You know, I was sitting there in the hot tub with this guy and he was giving me just this look of anger. That really took me back because just a few minutes ago we were talking about sports and it was just great. He was just giving me this dirty look. So at first I kind of got armed up a little bit and inside my pride started to get the best of me like, "I'm going to go toe to toe with this guy, whatever objections he has," and all that. So we started going and he was firing at me and I was kind of firing back at him and we were going back and forth.

And I don't know what it was but, the Spirit of God, or something—about 15 or 20 minutes into this thing it was as if the Spirit of God kind of stirred up something in my heart. It was basically like this, "At some point in this dude's past, he had an experience that led him to believe that Christians don't like him." And it was like the Spirit of God said, "Aaron, lay down your weapons," and so I just laid them down. And I just listened more than I talked. And when he tried to attack, I just tried to slightly diffuse it. I don't know if I got anywhere with him.

The whole time in the back of my mind I thought, "It would be so awesome to lead him to the Lord. This would be such a cool story." Like for him to stand up and say, "I'm already in water. Why shouldn't I be baptized now?"

"Well okay."

Amazing—it would be such a better sermon illustration. But that didn't happen. He didn't profess his trust in Christ and he wasn't even actually all that much friendlier to me when we left. But I will say this. He calmed down significantly. And when we got out and just kind of awkwardly said goodbye. I threw the towel over my shoulder and, as I was walking back to my apartment, I took a lap or two. I said, "God, I feel like I just got my can kicked and I don't know what You are doing in his life but I pray that I've at least removed one more obstacle so he can take a step closer to You."

You see, here is the thing. For us as Christians, we feel like a failure if we don't seal the deal. Like if I don't lead my co-worker to Christ, like if I don't lead my spouse to Christ, if I don't lead my friend to Christ, then somehow I'm a really bad Christian.

I don't know how to articulate this very well. Jesus is not asking you to take scalps for Christ. He is simply asking you to lean on your own experience, on the mercy and grace that you've been given and just remove one more obstacle that the person that you love has between them and Jesus and let them take a step.

When I was talking to the 138 people who were baptized last week, you know what one of the common things they said? They said, "You know what? I had a friend, about five years ago, who said this to me."

"You know what? I had a grandma who gave me a Bible when I was a kid."

"You know what? I had a boss one time who was a Christian and he prayed over me." Those individuals didn't seal the deal and somebody else got a chance to baptize them in the tank.

Listen, your task as a follower of Christ is to allow the Spirit of God to manifest in you and say, "You know what? I'm going to remove this obstacle so that person can have the experience of the real Jesus. They are mean, and they are obnoxious, and they are firing at me. Yeah, they hung Jesus on a cross. But the only way to change hearts is to point people to Jesus." That's His business, not ours. Stay humble and hungry because there is a world that needs to know.

Father, we come to You right now and thank You for this great passage of Scripture. Thank You for the faithfulness of Your Son. Thank You for having faith in us way before we ever had faith in You. Father, today as we get ready to go into just this next season of ministry, as we go into our summer breaks, and all that is good to renew our souls and to get away with our families, but God help us not to slide into neutral as a church. Help us to be on our knees, to be praying, to be asking for Your direction as we ask You to lead us.

We don't want to announce to You, God, what we are going to do as a church. We want to see where You lead us and then go with all faith and with all courage, knowing that the most important number is one, one life, somebody's kid, somebody's mom, somebody's dad, somebody's co-worker, somebody's neighbor or friend, somebody who is far from You, somebody who had the impression that Christians don't like them. Father, may we remove obstacles so that people can have a real, authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. May we stay in You, may we stay unified, and may we be willing to go for the glory of Your Name. And we ask this in Jesus' name.