

# Gethsemane

by C.J. Mahaney

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*Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane reveals the horror of becoming sin and being abandoned by God, the Father, and prepares us for the significance of Calvary.*

**Duration:** 49:40

**Topics:** "Gethsemane"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the Garden of Gethsemane and the intense struggle Jesus faced before his crucifixion. He emphasizes that Jesus' horror and distress in the garden were a result of the weight of sin and the impending separation from God. The preacher highlights Jesus' invitation to his disciples to watch with him, showing his desire for their support and preparation for the coming persecution. The sermon concludes by urging listeners to recognize Jesus' love for them in his darkest hour and to reflect on what his sacrifice means for them.

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## Transcript

My task this morning is a daunting and difficult one. Josh has asked me to address you on the Savior's prayer in Gethsemane. So this morning, we will follow the Savior to a location He loved, the Garden of Gethsemane.

In John's Gospel, we are informed this garden was where, quote, Jesus often met with His disciples. So often that Judas, already in process at this time of betraying the Savior, knew exactly where to find Him. It was a location and a setting where the Savior loved to spend time with His disciples, teaching them, talking with them, singing together, praying together, laughing together.

But not this evening. This evening, in the garden, Jesus would endure suffering that is simply beyond our capacity to comprehend. This evening, He will unexpectedly be struck by horror as He contemplates His impending crucifixion.

One cannot approach this text and this particular task of preaching on this text without feeling very weak, very weak and inadequate for this particular task. My historical hero, Charles Spurgeon, felt this same weakness as he approached this text and task. In his sermon on Gethsemane, he prepared his congregation with these words.

Since it would not be possible for any believer, however experienced, to know for himself all that our Lord endured in mental suffering and hellish malice, it is clearly far beyond the preacher's capacity to set it forth to you. Jesus Himself must give you access to the wonders of Gethsemane. As for me, I can but invite you to enter the garden.

This morning, this passage, this event is far, far beyond my capacity to set it forth. I can but invite you to enter the garden of Gethsemane. And I pray, I pray that the Lord Himself will give you, will give us access to the wonders of Gethsemane as we observe the Savior suffer and as we overhear the Savior pray in the garden.

Matthew chapter 26, I will begin reading in verse 36. Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane and He said to His disciples, sit here while I go over there and pray. And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful.

And then He said to them, My soul is very even to death. Remain here and watch with me. And going a little farther, He fell on His face and prayed saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, So could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done. And again, He came and found them sleeping for their eyes were heavy.

So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at. Father, we appropriately pause and we appeal to you.

We appeal to you to reveal to us the wonders of Gethsemane. For this is far beyond my capacity. I feel so very weak and I'm grateful I do.

For I call upon you now to give great grace to all of us. As we contemplate this passage. Draw near to us, Lord.

May the Savior's suffering on our behalf. Be deeply and freshly impressed on our souls. So that everyone present leaves simply amazed.

I pray this and I thank you in Jesus name. Amen. I find a verse from a well-known hymn particularly helpful as we contemplate what took place in the garden of Gethsemane.

The hymn writer cries out, Oh, make me understand it. Help me to take it in. What it meant to thee.

The holy one to bear away my sin. I think this verse from this hymn forms a most appropriate attitude and approach to our visit to Gethsemane this morning. We draw near to this garden in order to understand and take in what it meant to him.

What it meant to him. The holy one to bear away my sin. By observing the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane by overhearing him pray.

We indeed discover what this all meant to him. What it meant to him. The passage uniquely reveals what it meant to him.

Passage uniquely reveals what it meant to him. Since since the source for this narrative could be none other than the savior himself. For the disciples were asleep much of the time he was praying.

And even when they were awake, they didn't get what was taking place here in the garden. So it appears that at some point, possibly after the resurrection and before the ascension, he described for them what it meant to him, the holy one, to bear away our sin. And this is what it meant to him.

This is what it meant to him. It meant resolving to endure the righteous wrath of God for our sin through the experience of human weakness. That's what it meant to him.

Resolving to endure the righteous wrath of God for our sin against our sin because of our sin through through the experience or through the crucible of human weakness. This this text, this scene gives us a unique glimpse into the humanity of Jesus and really a unique encounter with his suffering for our sin. The savior's humanity is uniquely on display in the garden to encounter the savior in the garden is to encounter the mystery of the incarnation through the mystery of the incarnation.

God, the son became a man. The divine one became truly and fully human while remaining God. He became fully man, the eternal son of God, fully divine, is also a man, fully human, having embraced human frailty and vulnerable to its limitations and temptations.

Yet, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, without sin. And in Gethsemane, his humanity, his sinless humanity is on full display. And as we observe him in Gethsemane and overhear him pray, we are we are confronted with how much he suffered for our salvation.

We need to proceed carefully, very carefully. Listen, do not ever discard him casually. Sinclair Ferguson has written that the garden of Gethsemane is one of the most sacred and solemn scenes in the entire Bible.

Such was the intensity of Jesus' experience there that Luke, the physician, recorded that Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood. At the end of the experience, an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. Alexander White, the famous Scottish minister in the 19th century, once said with insight that in heaven, after he had seen Christ himself, he would like his first conversation to be with this angel.

Who knows what depths of suffering this angel came to witness? Let us consider together this depth of suffering this angel came to witness. Two simple points this morning. What it meant to Jesus.

Secondly, what it means for us. First, what it meant for Jesus. This is what it meant.

This is what it meant for Jesus to suffer for our sin through the crucible of human weakness. Number one, it meant relational abandonment. It meant relational abandonment.

Beginning with Gethsemane and throughout his arrest and trial and crucifixion, he is abandoned and he is alone. As the hour of his crucifixion approaches, he would make his way to the cross alone. He would not

have human support.

He would not have the support of his disciples. He would not have the support of his friends and Matthew. Matthew wants us to be aware of this.

Matthew not only wants us to be aware of this. Matthew wants us to be affected by this, affected by the Savior's aloneness through it all. So he draws our specific attention to this.

Look in chapter 26, verse 31, where the Savior says to the disciples, then Jesus said to them, you will all fall away because of me this night. You will all fall away. And after inviting Peter, James, and John to accompany him to watch with me in verse 38, very touching phrase.

Obviously, the Savior, in his humanity, desiring their support, watch with me. I mean, he invited them to watch with him primarily to prepare them for impending temptation and persecution. But in a secondary way, he desired their support.

Watch with me. And then in verse 40, he comes to find them sleeping and says to them, could you not watch with me one hour? Sadly, apparently not. Because they didn't get it.

They didn't perceive the Savior's troubled soul. They didn't perceive his desire for their support. They didn't perceive their need for divine help as temptation and persecution approached.

And then after his arrest, look at chapter 26, verse 56, the final phrase, then all the disciples left him and fled. Oh, it's clear. Matthew wants us to be aware of this.

Matthew wants us to be affected by this. The road to Calvary would be one he would walk by himself, alone. He was truly, he was genuinely, relationally alone.

There are times as I look back in my life where I felt alone. A vivid moment where I felt alone was after my dad's death. After the family gathered at the funeral home to make the final arrangements for the funeral, I drove away by myself.

I did not get a half a mile from the funeral home. I was overcome with tears, freshly overcome with tears. I could not safely drive.

I pulled over. And I remember cars both sides of the road just streaming past while I sat there weeping. I felt so alone.

I wasn't alone. I mean, had I turned around and just driven a half mile? There gathered were people who loved me with all their heart. I mean, I felt alone, but I wasn't alone.

I've never actually been alone. Listen, the Savior didn't just feel alone. He didn't just imagine he was alone.

No, no, he was alone. He was alone. He had been abandoned.

And this is what it meant to him. This is what it meant to him, the holy one, to bear away our sin. It meant he would suffer alone.

Judas would betray him. You will all fall away. They all fell asleep.

And then all the disciples left him and fled. He would suffer and he would do so alone. He would suffer and do so alone for sinners like us.

That's what it meant. That's what it meant for Jesus to suffer for our sin through the experience of human weakness. Secondly, this is what it meant to him.

It meant distress of soul. It meant distress of soul. What did it mean for him, the holy one, to bear away our sin? It meant distress of soul.

Listen, what we observe of the Savior, what we hear from the Savior in the garden is unlike any previous description of the Savior. Upon entering this garden, an abrupt and dramatic change takes place. He began to be sorrowful and troubled.

And he said to the disciples, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death. In the words of the song by Buffalo Springfield, there's something happening here. But what it is ain't exactly clear.

Here's what is clear. What is clear is our unfamiliarity with the Savior described here. We are unfamiliar with the Savior described here in this passage.

Listen, from the beginning of his ministry, the Savior has been forgiving sin, healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, walking on water, calming storms, feeding thousands with a few loaves and fish. He was briefly transfigured. He was amazing all with his teaching.

He was boldly confronting the religious authorities. He has been compassionate. He has been authoritative.

He has been fearless. But all of this, all of this appears to change when he enters the garden of Gethsemane. Here we observe a Savior we are we are decidedly unfamiliar with here.

His humanity is clearly on display here. We discover what it meant to him in his humanity to bear away our sin. He began to be sorrowful and troubled.

One translation reads he began to be gripped by a shuddering terror and to be in anguish. His distress of soul is so great that he is actually in the garden drawing near to the experience of death prior to the crucifixion. So great was his sorrow of soul that he almost dies in the garden.

And this all appears so sudden, so abrupt. There's nothing something gradual about it that there is there is no indication of a deep distress of soul prior to the garden. None at all.

No, as he celebrated the last supper with the disciples, he, Matthew records, gave thanks. And then the meal concludes with the singing of a hymn. After that, they sung a hymn together.

There's no indication of this distress of soul. And then upon entering the garden, there is this sudden, extreme distress of soul. Why? Why? What is going on? Why now? Why? Listen, why? Why, after facing death so calmly for years, is he so suddenly overwhelmed with sorrow and troubled in soul? His demeanor to this point has been one of resolute calm in the face of death.

Why this? Why now? Here's why. Because in this moment, the Holy One gets a foretaste of what it will mean to be the sin bearer. That's why.

So we discover the cause of his turmoil and troubled soul as we overhear him pray in verse 39. My father, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. That's the cause.

That's the source of this turmoil and troubled soul. He's contemplating the cup. He's contemplating the cup.

He's contemplating the contents of this cup. It is this cup that dominates the heart and the mind of the Savior while he's praying in Gethsemane. Well, what's up with the cup? What is this cup? What's in this cup? Well, this would be a familiar image drawn from the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the cup commonly referred to the judgment of God. Isaiah describes it as the cup of his wrath. Jeremiah refers to it as the cup of the wine of wrath.

This cup and the contents of this cup were the bitter brew of the wrath of God for and against our sin. This this copies contemplating contains the full fury and fierceness of God's righteous wrath against our sin. Don't misunderstand what's happening here.

It was not it was not the immediate prospect of death. It was not the immediate prospect of physical death that uniquely troubled the Savior's soul. Not at all.

Not at all. His impending death was no surprise to him. He had spoken repeatedly and specifically to his disciples about his death.

Matthew 16, 21. He informs them of his death. Matthew 17, 22.

Matthew 20, verse 17. Look at Matthew 26, verse one. When Jesus had finished all these things, he said to his disciples, you know that after two days the Passover is coming and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.

Now, it was not the immediate prospect of his death that uniquely troubled the Savior's soul. It was instead the horrific reality of his impending death as sin bearer. As the object of the full, furious, righteous wrath of God, suffering a death that would propitiate the wrath of God.

How can we account for the deep agony which our Lord underwent in the garden? J.C. Ryle asks. What reason can we assign for the intense suffering, both mental and bodily, which he manifestly endured? There is only one satisfactory answer. It was caused by the world's imputed sin.

And that prospect of being the sin bearer is so horrific that in the weakness of his humanity, he prays for an alternative. Verse 39. My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

This prospect, not of impending death, but death as sin bearer is so horrific that the Savior, in the weakness of his humanity, prays for an alternative to the cross. Listen, in his humanity, he did not want to suffer in this way. He did not want to die this way.

And as he contemplated this unique form of death, it was his natural preference to avoid this form of death. And so he appealed to the father for an alternative. Insightfully, does William Lane write the dreadful sorrow and anxiety then out of which the prayer for the passing of the cup springs is not an expression of fear before a dark destiny, nor a shrinking from the prospect of physical suffering and death.

It's not what it's about. Here's what it's about. It is rather the horror of the one who lives wholly for the father at the prospect of the alienation from God, which is entailed in the judgment upon sin, which Jesus assumes.

This horror thus anticipates the cry of dereliction on the cross. My God, Jesus came to be with the father for an interlude before his betrayal, but found hell rather than heaven open before him. And then he finishes, listen.

And he staggered hell open and he staggered. As he contemplates becoming sin, he contemplates becoming the object of God's wrath against sin. He staggers.

Listen, he doesn't sin, but he does stagger. And he appeals for an alternative as he, as he anticipates, not simply being abandoned by the disciples, but being abandoned by the father. He staggers.

Doesn't sin, but he staggers and he appeals for an alternative to the cross as he, as he contemplates the true agonies of Calvary, he staggers and he appeals for an alternative. So you will never understand. You will never fully understand Calvary apart from Gethsemane.

Gethsemane is preparation for Calvary. Gethsemane prepares us for Calvary. Gethsemane interprets Calvary.

Gethsemane reveals Calvary. And in Gethsemane, he staggered and he appealed for an alternative. Three.

Appeals. As I stare into this cup and the contents of this cup, I don't want to die this way. Is there an alternative? This is what he heard.

Appeals again. This is what he heard. Appeals a third time.

Listens. This is what he hears. Divine silence.

And listen, you can be certain of this. You can be certain of this. If there was an alternative, the Father would have intervened and provided an alternative.

Oh, you can be certain of this. If there was a way to avoid this impending horror, God the Father would have provided an alternative. If there was any other way to save us from our sins and the penalty for our sins, the Father would have answered this prayer.

This prayer, actually, and the divine silence in response to this prayer should now inform your understanding, our understanding of John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that when His Son appealed for an alternative to the cross, He was silent. Lord, help me understand it.

Help me to take it in. What did it mean for you? What did it mean for you? The Holy One to bear away my sin. This is what it meant.

It meant distress of soul. And here is just one of many challenges I confront this morning. Listen, like all the pastors who have the privilege to teach, to serve you through teaching, I work hard, I work hard to craft illustrations that will aid in the comprehension and application of a text.

And when I first prepared this message on this passage for a number of hours, I searched to create and craft an appropriate illustration that would help us to in some way, to in some form understand and identify with the distress of soul that is present in the Savior's heart in the Garden of Gethsemane. But here is what happened to me. After a few hours of considering possible illustrations, I realized I realized this, this passage cannot be adequately and effectively illustrated from our experience.

Can't be done because there is nothing in our experience that resembles what is taking place here. I have not been there, done that to draw upon because only he has been there and done this. And if I provided you with an illustration from my experience or drawn from your experience, well, then I might leave you the impression that we can in some way relate to what he experienced here, when in fact we simply cannot relate.

So here's what I'm going to do this morning. I'm going to honor the Savior and I'm going to honor what took place in Gethsemane by intentionally not providing you with an illustration. Because no illustration exists.

This is uniquely what it meant to him. It meant distress of soul as he contemplated drinking the cup and the contents of the. Finally, this is what it meant to him.

It meant obedient resolve, obedient resolve. And this resolve appears in his prayer for an alternative to the cross. It's a qualification in each of his prayers.

Nevertheless, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Verse 39, this would echo his earlier instructions to the disciples to pray. Thy will be done.

And actually look at verse 42, because even a stronger statement appears in his prayer there. Your will be done, which is not only a direct echo from the Lord's prayer in chapter six of Matthew, but it's it reveals an increasing resolve on the part of the Savior, indicating a growing realization that there is no alternative to the cross. And this all culminates in verses 45 and 46.

The hour is at hand. The son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners rise and let us be going. Look at note how the Savior emerges from the garden.

He emerges quite differently than he entered the garden in and through prayer. He emerges with a holy determination to fulfill the purpose of his birth and life and substitute himself for us on the cross. And that's what it meant to him.

Relational abandonment, unimaginable, indescribable distress of soul. And obedient resolve, that's what it meant to him now in our final few minutes, it would be most appropriate after considering what it meant to him for us to think about and reflect upon what it means for us. Here's what it means for us.

Here's what it means for us. One, recognize his love for you in his darkest hour. Recognize his love for you in his darkest hour.

What we read here, what took place here was all done for sinners like us. It was all for us. It was because of us, for our sin created this scene and these circumstances.

Listen to to enter Gethsemane is to be reminded of my sin. Then a Gethsemane is to be reminded of my sin is to be reminded of the seriousness of my sin, the appalling nature of my sin in relation to God. This

what I read here, the sorrow and troubled heart, the distress, the shuddering terror and agony, even to the point of death that overwhelms the Savior's soul here.

This is because of my sin. It's my fault. He's innocent.

If in this moment you could have somehow interrupted him and tried to comfort him over hearing his words, wanting to bring some immediate comfort to his soul, if you had asked him, what are you doing here? What's going on here? The appropriate answer from him would be because of you. This is your God. I'm innocent.

I'm sinless. This is what is required of me because of your sin. See, my my sin, your sin necessitates the suffering of the son of God.

You just you just can't accompany the Savior into Gethsemane and emerge from Gethsemane unaffected by your sin. And listen, more importantly, you cannot accompany Jesus into Gethsemane and emerge unaffected by his love. Can't do it.

Listen fast, fasten your eyes on the following words that reveal the love of the Savior for sinners like us. Verse 39, not as I will, but as you will. Verse 42, your will be done.

Listen, these words are these are sweet words. These words, this this resolve to obey reveals the depth of his love for us. His soul was, in effect, crucified here in Gethsemane before his body was on Calvary here in this garden.

He resolved to drink the cup of wrath on our behalf so that we might drink from a different cup so that we might drink the cup of salvation. The cup that the cup that should have been thrust into your hand was instead taken from your hand by his hand so that he might he might place the cup of salvation in our hand. And so he he gave the cup of salvation to his disciples just prior to Gethsemane.

And then he entered the garden and he took their cup, our cup. And this is what it means for us. Recognize, recognize his love for you, for sinners like us in his darkest hour.

Phil Riken in his fine commentary writes the following about this scene. If I understand Gethsemane at all, it means that Jesus loves me even more than I can imagine. Yes, he does.

If I understand Gethsemane at all, it means that Jesus loves me even more than I can imagine. It's not just that he died for me, but he died this horrible, damnable, God forsaken death that no one would ever want to die. He died this death because there was no other way for sinners to be saved.

No easier road to redemption, no alternative to the cross. Jesus thus volunteered to do what the father willed, choosing to do the one thing that would bring the most suffering to his body and soul. Well, the wonder of the love of Christ for his people is not that for their sake, he faced death without fear, but that for their sake, he faced it terrified, terrified by what he knew.

And terrified by what he did not know, he took damnation lovingly. This must always be the main lesson we learn whenever we go to the garden of Gethsemane. Matthew does not show us the agony of Jesus to arouse our pity primarily or simply to remind us of our savior's humanity, but to help us see again the love that Jesus has for us in dying for our sins.

We will never have to suffer what our savior suffered in Gethsemane or at Calvary for the very reason that everything he suffered there was in our place and on our behalf. Yes, in my place, condemned in the garden, he stood. As my substitute.

So that I would never know this distress of soul. So if you're wondering this morning, how can I be sure God loves me? Come with me to the garden. Observe what's happening there.

Listen carefully to what he's saying there. And let me ask you a question. What more would he have to do to convince you that he loves you? Now you can enter this garden and you immediately become aware of your sin.

But as you linger, you're overwhelmed by his love. That's what it means for us. You recognize his love for you in his darkest hour.

Secondly, receive his care for you in your darkest hour. Receive his care for you in your darkest hour. For dark hours await you, or perhaps you're familiar presently with a dark hour of soul and circumstance.

Listen, dark hours of temptation and trial and testing and suffering are inevitable for each and every one of us. And no one present is exempt. Don Carson wisely has written.

All we have to do is live long enough and we will suffer. It's exactly right. Everyone will suffer.

It's a fallen world. Here's the comfort that is of inestimable value that we receive from this passage. In your darkest hour, he will uniquely care for you.

Having endured this dark hour. Now here's what's really important here. Oh, this is of critical importance.

We must distinguish his suffering from our suffering. We must. We must make a distinction between the suffering described here and our suffering.

Now I run the risk of being misunderstood. I don't want to be misunderstood in making this point. I am not in any way minimizing the severity of suffering.

Anyone presently is experiencing this room, and I'm aware of a number of different people. And I'm aware of a number of different people suffering in ways that I would say is clearly and obviously severe. And I'm aware of a number of people who are suffering in a way that is pleasing and glorifying to God.

And by making this point, by no means am I minimizing your suffering. Actually, you're going to find comfort in an unexpected place, an unexpected way. As you listen to this particular point, we must make a distinction.

Between his suffering and our suffering over the over the years, I've had a number of people come to me over the years. And as they are describing their suffering, they'll say something like this. I'm going through my Gethsemane.

Now, if I have a relationship with this individual, if I know they trust me, if I know it wouldn't tempt them, if I know it would serve them on occasion, I have said to them with numerous qualifying statements, I have said to them, you don't have a Gethsemane. Only he had Gethsemane, not you. See, we got to do all we can to protect this.

So I'm trying to do today, trying to protect it and say, I want to protect this because it was unique. It's not to minimize the severity of your suffering. But listen, only he drank this cup, whatever we're experiencing.

It's not this. It's not this cup. But here's the good news.

Here's the good news for us. Because of what he experienced here in Gethsemane. I will never, you will never go through your own Gethsemane.

And because of what he experienced here, he is well able to comfort you in the midst of the severest form of suffering you will know in this life. To understand his suffering in Gethsemane is to read Hebrews 4 with new eyes. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet without sin. Therefore, in the midst of our suffering, let us approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Oh, that that's the one who ever lives to make intercession for us.

This is the one who comforts us in our darkest hour. He was comforted by an angel in his darkest hour. He doesn't send an angel in your darkest hour because in the weakness of his humanity.

He suffered uniquely as sin bearer and substitute. There is no trial or suffering you will experience in this life. That he can't, from his experience, provide you unique and inestimable comfort.

Help me understand it. Help me to take it in. What it meant to be the holy one to bear away my sin.

It meant resolving to endure the wrath of God for our sin as our substitute through the experience of human weakness. It meant for him relational abandonment. It meant distress of soul.

It meant obedient resolve. And this is what it means for us. Recognize his love for you.

How can you not? In his darkest hour and receive his comfort and care. In your darkest hour. Let's pray.

Father, how kind of you to give us access. Access to the wonders of Gethsemane. Access through the inspiration and authority of your word.

Father, how can we thank you enough for inspiring this word and preserving this word so that we might return to this scene and be freshly affected by what took place here? Father, thank you for sending your son. Lord, thank you for your silence. When your son appealed for an alternative.

Lord Jesus, how can we thank you enough for enduring this shuddering horror? This anguish of soul for us. Because of our sin. So that we might never have to endure the shuddering reality of God's righteous wrath.

And Holy Spirit, we are grateful. That you have opened up the eyes of our heart to behold the Lamb of God. Takes away the sin of the world.

Who takes away our sin. Father, Son, and Spirit. Receive our gratefulness.

Receive our worship. Amen.

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