

THE SELF-DISCLOSURE OF JESUS

Luke 5:30–6:11

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Our Scripture today is in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Luke: 5:30–6:11. Jesus is eating at a banquet thrown by Levi, His new disciple, which was given for all of Levi's friends; and the criticism comes to Jesus because He's eating with tax collectors and sinners. Then there's a question raised to Jesus about His disciples, who are not fasting as did the Pharisees and John the Baptist, and Jesus' response to them. I've called this message today "The Self Disclosure of Jesus." If you look back to the Old Testament and find the first question that God ever asks, it is this, "Where are you?" God asked that to man.

If you open the New Testament, you'll find the first question that is asked, and this time it is a question asked by men. The question is asked by a king, and it is this, "Where is He that is born king of the Jews?" Note the questions. God asking, "Where are you?" and men are asking, "Where is He?" And all of life is summed up in answering those two questions. God saying to us, "Where are you?" And us saying to God, "Where are You?" Where is He?

You'll never get the answer to "Where are you?" until you answer "Where is He?" Because once we find where Jesus is, then we begin to locate ourselves.

Luke is showing us, in his Gospel, where Jesus is. He shows us, in Luke 4 and 5, as the great Galilean campaign begins, that Jesus' popularity is beginning to have an extensive display. Look at chapter 4:14–15, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him" (NIV). Verses 36–37, "All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out.' And the

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news about him spread throughout the surrounding area” (NIV). In 5:15, “Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that the crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses” (NIV). Verse 17, “Pharisees and teachers of the law...[came] from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem...And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick” (NIV). This is His great Galilean campaign and word about Him is getting out.

As Jesus is progressing in His Galilean ministry, His approach has been along three different lines of advance. He has been teaching, telling the people about God and who He is and what kind of people they can be. He has been doing mighty deeds, demonstrating that He has authority, more than simply authority of words, but He has authority of action. The third thing He’s been doing in these chapters is calling disciples to Himself.

Now, as we come to this latter part of chapter 5, we find Jesus beginning to be embroiled in controversy. The controversy begins when He says to a man lowered through the roof who is a paralytic, “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20, NIV). That is the first moment in which opposition to Jesus began, and it is still the reason for opposition to Jesus in the world today. The fact that He takes to Himself the unique and sole ability to forgive sins, and claims that He has a right possessed only by God—because He is God—to forgive sins.

Our Scripture today begins to set the controversy flowing out of that forgiveness of sins. There are two things about Jesus that are picked on. One is His eating habits. He eats with tax collectors and sinners; and furthermore, His disciples are not fasting. Then there are some controversies regarding the Sabbath. His disciples plucked grain on the Sabbath and Jesus heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. Such controversy fleshes out some terms that Jesus used to describe Himself and the reason why I’ve called this message “The Self-Disclosure

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of Jesus” is because, once He is in a controversy, His true identity emerges. We find four phrases that Jesus uses that tell us who He is.

I. The first phrase He uses is “Doctor,” or the older translations use the term “Physician.”

Verse 31-32, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor [or “physician”], but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (NIV). This claim of Jesus being a doctor is made against the backdrop of the great banquet at Levi’s house. In the course of that banquet, the regulations that the Pharisees and the scribes had set up had been broken—regulations that prohibited table fellowship with “unclean” persons.

That simply reflects the division of life of Judaism in that day, which is identical to the division of Judaism today, if you travel to Israel. There are religious Jews and there are nonreligious Jews or secular Jews. The religious Jews keep not only the Law, but the teaching of the rabbis. The non-religious Jews are Jews in ethnicity and in culture, but not in religious faith. Many nonreligious Jews, in fact, are atheists or agnostics. Perhaps 85 percent of the current population of Israel are secular Jews, non-religious practicing Jews, except for certain high holy days such as Yom Kippur.

There was a minority of nonreligious or secular Jews in Jesus’ day. Among them were tax collectors and sinners who basically said, “Hold your nose at the synagogue and phooey on all this religious apparatus and all this minutiae in rule keeping. We’re not going to do that. This world is the only world there is, and the Romans are the only power there is, so we’re going to get along and we’re going to have a good time while we do it. Forget the kosher and dietary rules and all the habits that go with it. We don’t care if we go to the temple or not. We don’t care if the Pharisees call us unclean. We’re going to live life, because this is all there is, and you only go around once.” It’s that group of people that Jesus is eating with; therefore, putting Himself in a

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condition of ceremonial impurity or uncleanness. The Pharisees criticized Him that He, a religious teacher, would degrade his position by circulating with people such as tax collectors and sinners, and even prostitutes. But Jesus said that the righteous don't need a doctor. The Pharisees aren't really righteous, but He uses that as an ironic comment. "You don't need a doctor. It's people who realize they have a need for God in their life that I've come for."

I can look back to the day, about thirteen years ago, when Wayne was being interviewed for the position of assistant pastor of this church. At that time, I was the only other person on staff. I'd recommended him because of the growth of the church, and we had a position. I brought my friends, Wayne and Diane. Wayne was finishing up his master's degree in physical education and health. We'd flown them out to be interviewed by the board. Not everybody, at that particular moment, thought it was a good idea that we go all the way to New York to get somebody, but I knew Wayne, and I believe that time has vindicated my selection. Wayne got into hot water in the interview. One of the deacons asked him, "Would you go to a bar to witness to somebody?" With the wisdom that Wayne has today, I know how he would have answered that question. He would have answered it with a question. "What would you do?" Then he would have known which way to go. But he was young and inexperienced, and he immediately volunteered that if somebody needed witnessing to in a bar and the Lord told him to go, he'd go into a bar. That set off a big debate among the deacons, of whether you should go into bars to witness. The interviewing process got left off. I wondered if I'd ever get this guy out here after an answer like that.

I thought about that a few years ago when I was looking for a member that had gotten away from the Lord. I understood that he was somewhere in a bar in Costa Mesa. I got one of my friends from the congregation who is a policeman, undercover at the time, and said, "I need your help."

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So he, in plain clothes, took me, and I visited every bar in Costa Mesa looking for this person. I kept saying, “Lord, I don’t want to find anybody from the church in here other than the person I’m looking for! I have a good excuse but they don’t.”

It’s an interesting question. Should you go to a bar to witness to someone? Jesus has perspective in going to where the sinners and tax collectors were. It wasn’t like a doctor going to a patient and saying, “I’m so sorry you’re sick. I think I’m going to get sick myself and keep you company in the next bed.” The idea of the doctor going to the patient was to make him well.

Wherever God calls us to go, it is not simply to pass the time of day. But if God calls you on a mission to a bar, make sure it’s not to sit down and have a drink, but that it really is a salvation rescue operation. Jesus says, “I’ve not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

He’s come to make things different for the people who have been captured in bondage by the evil one, the enemy. Jesus is not just in it for the social kicks. His purpose is to make people well. He says that the doctor—the Physician—does this.

The more serious your malady, perhaps the more you are in need of a specialist in a medical sense. If I’m shaving in the morning and cut myself, I don’t immediately go looking for a brain surgeon. Unless I’ve cut myself real badly! But I just get an antiseptic pencil, and it’s ok. If you break your arm, you don’t go out looking for a cardio-pulmonary specialist. But if you have a tumor in your brain and you need it operated on, you certainly want the finest neurosurgeon you can locate. And if there’s something in your life that is irreparable, that only God can fix, you certainly don’t want anybody but God to fix it.

Jesus, in calling Himself the Physician, is talking about the cure of the soul, the care of the inner life. In identifying Himself as the only one with the ability to meet the need in our life for repairing and restoration and spiritual healing, He calls Himself the Physician.

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We are priceless works of God's art and only the Master Creator, the artist Physician, can touch us. If somebody destroys a Rembrandt, please don't call me to fix it. Call a master artist to see if it can be repaired and restored. And when our life is broken, there is only One who can fix it, and all of our lives have been broken. If we understand that sin separates us from God, only Jesus can repair and make things new. He is the Physician and He identifies Himself unapologetically as that—the Doctor.

II. The second way that Jesus discloses Himself is to name Himself as Bridegroom.

Verses 34-35, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast" (NIV). The Pharisees have come to Jesus, critical of His disciples. It's sort of a tactful criticism because I'm sure they were criticizing Him behind His back, but when they come to Him face-to-face, they criticize His disciples. They say, "Your disciples don't fast as did John's and as do ours." Notice they don't criticize the disciples for lack of prayer. Evidently, the disciples had been learning to pray. They're criticized for not fasting. Jesus responds to them, "They can't fast while the bridegroom is with them. The day will come (that is, the crucifixion) when they will fast, but now the bridegroom is with them and they have no need for fasting. They are rejoicing and are glad."

In the biblical days of the Old Testament, there was only one day a year when all Jews were required to fast: Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement—Leviticus 16:29. As the history of Israel progressed, however, by the time of the prophet Zechariah, there were at least four fasts each year, in addition to Yom Kippur. Zechariah speaks of those in Zechariah 8:19 and says that, when these fasts are kept, they ought to be done joyfully and gladly and they should be happy times. The complaint against the disciples, though, was that they were too cheerful, because the

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Pharisees not only kept the fasts of Yom Kippur and the four fasts of Zechariah, but they kept three fasts a week, so that three days a week they were fasting the complete day. That will make anyone look a little bit haggard if they wanted to advertise their spirituality. The Pharisees were interested in doing that—letting everybody know, “Today I’m on a fast.”

Jesus said, “No, I’ve come to bring joy in life and My disciples aren’t fasting because I’m with them and they’re happy.” Jesus releases us from the view of the Christian life is one lived with a great deal of glumness or duty; He, rather, sees it as a celebration of life.

I read a story about a Presbyterian pastor who was taking the boy scouts of his parish through the beautiful sanctuary, which was adorned with stained-glass windows. He was explaining to the troop of scouts the significance of each of the panels of stained-glass panels: what they represented, and other symbols of the church. He came to the narthex, and there was a beautiful scroll containing a long list of names. The pastor told the boys that these were the people in the church who had died in service. One of the boy scouts asked the next logical question, “Which service did they die in? The eight-thirty or the eleven o’clock one?”

A service may not be fatal, but it can be deadly. Jesus says “Away from this kind of deadly view of spirituality or of life. I am the bridegroom. I bring joy into life. Please don’t put John’s methods or, Pharisees, don’t put your methods upon Me, because those methods are like taking a patch out of a garment and locating it on another. It will destroy both the garment it was taken from and the garment it was put on to. Don’t put new wine in old wineskins because the stretch is already taken out of the old wineskins. It needs new wine.” Just like every new generation of Christians needs to find the ways in which it will express itself to Christ in music and worship and in other ways because the old wines simply don’t make it with the new generation. New

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generations need to find their own way of having the vitality of the gospel applied to them. Jesus says, “Don’t put those old methods on Me.”

The Pharisees didn’t like this idea... that you could be happy *and* be spiritual—that you could smile *and* be in touch with God. The bridegroom in biblical days was not like a contemporary bridegroom. Today’s bridegrooms, right after the wedding reception, want to go away on the honeymoon and disappear from view. But in biblical days, when you didn’t have automobiles and airplanes, the bride and the bridegroom stayed right in the village and everybody had a wedding feast and party for a solid week. So the bridegroom was with everybody and it was a wonderful time of rejoicing. Jesus said, “That’s how I’ve come into life. I’ve come to be with you, to share life with you and it’s a time of joy.”

Even when Jesus ascended back into heaven and left the disciples, although there were fasts—and we know that the Early Church fasted—they were not done in the glum Pharisaical sense. Life was a joy lived out. Why is life a celebration because of Jesus? The death sentence has been lifted from us and we rejoice. The gates of heaven have been opened wide. Our sins have been forgiven. Our names have been written down eternally as God’s sons and daughters. There are all kinds of reasons to rejoice. What a contrast with the false, imprisoning attitude of the Pharisees who are always saying to people, “You will never make it. You’re not good enough.” Jesus was saying, “With My entrance into your life, you will make it. I will make you good enough.” Jesus is the bridegroom—the Giver of life and joy.

III. The third way that Jesus reveals Himself is as the Lord or the Master of the Sabbath.

There are three Sabbath conflicts that are presented in the Gospels that show how this controversy between Jesus and the opposition was building. In John 5, the first controversy occurs when He heals—on the Sabbath day—a man who had laid at the Pool of Bethesda and

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who had been infirm for thirty-eight years. Then, in Luke 6, there are two additional incidents—the plucking of grain on the Sabbath and the healing of the man with the withered hand.

When the disciples were walking through the grain fields, they were probably violating the law of the Sabbath by even walking that far on the Sabbath; but in addition to walking, they are criticized for eating. In being criticized, it should be noted that they were breaking a number of points of the Pharisaic law. They were picking the grain, which broke the law of reaping. They were rubbing the grain, which broke the law of threshing. They were throwing away the husks, which broke the law of winnowing. And they were eating, which broke the law of eating prepared food. So they broke the law four times for every mouthful. The law of reaping, the law of threshing, the law of winnowing, and the law of eating prepared food.

Jesus says to the Pharisees, referring back to 1 Samuel 21, “Have you never read what David did...” (Luke 6:3, NIV). The New International Version clouds the force of that a little bit.

“You’ve certainly read the Scripture, haven’t you, but have you even read this one?” In other words, maybe you haven’t read any, if you haven’t read this one. Have you read even this one? How David, when he was fleeing before Saul and was hungry, took his men and Abiathar, the high priest, gave him the bread of Presence—the showbread which was twelve loaves, symbolically representing Israel’s constant presentation of life to God, the showbread located in the holy place that was reserved only for the priests to eat when its week in the holy place was over—how Abiathar broke the ceremonial regulation and gave it to David because David hungered? Jesus was saying, “Don’t you understand that God validates the principle that it’s always right to break ceremony to meet human need?”

I recall a time when I had to break ceremony to meet a human need. Several years ago, someone from our congregation asked me if I would baptize a person who was dying of cancer. She was

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in her fifties. Her illness had brought her to the Lord, but she did not have enough strength to come to church. Before she died, this lady wanted to be baptized in water. Medically, she had not been allowed to be submerged in water. All of my training and my theology indicate that valid baptism is baptism in which immersion is practiced, which adequately sets forth the idea of being placed into Christ's death and being raised to newness of life. But I was asked to come and to baptize, and was told it would be impossible to immerse. Here I was in conflict with ceremony, but I was faced with human need—the need of the assurance of God's acceptance. I went to the home and asked for the best pitcher in the house. I filled it with water. I stood by this dying lady's bedside, and her face was radiant and transfixed as this wonderful moment she wanted to happen was now occurring. As I prayed with her and talked with her and heard her confession of faith in Jesus Christ, there came that moment when I took the water and poured it gently on her forehead and baptized her in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That baptism, I'm convinced, is as valid as any baptism I've ever administered, and a baptism in which I uniquely felt the presence of God ministering.

We must never let our form and ceremony get ahead of people's needs. Whatever God has called us to in life, we need to keep evaluating the rules that we construct—within family, within relationship, and within the church—to make sure that those rules are not a hindrance for people getting to God, but are instead actually being a help, and that we're putting real human need ahead of regulations that really don't matter.

Jesus came and met that human need. He shows Himself as Lord of the Sabbath. The Scriptures speak of different Sabbaths. There is a creation Sabbath, where God created man and man's first day was the beginning of God's weekend, symbolizing that when God created us, He always wanted us to enjoy the rest which He provided, and to live life free of stress and anxiety and the

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sweat of our brow and pain. But when we sinned, the Mosaic Sabbath was given to us, the Sabbath of Moses which required that one day out of every seven we set aside for rest and worship. Then Christ came, and gave us, according to Hebrews 4, the Christian Sabbath. The observance of the Sabbath never brought true spiritual rest; but in Christ we have true spiritual rest. There is yet a Sabbath coming when we shall rule and reign and rest with God—the eternal Sabbath. Jesus says, “I’m Lord of the Sabbath.” He is Lord of the creation Sabbath, Lord of the Mosaic Sabbath, Lord of the Christian Sabbath, and Lord of the eternal Sabbath.

In the synagogue, He meets the man with the withered hand. He is going to be tested—whether He’s going to minister to him on the Sabbath. The man was not in any extreme condition. His withered hand had been withered for years. It could stay withered for one more day. Jesus didn’t have to exacerbate the situation, He didn’t have to rub the cat’s fur backwards. He could have healed him on Sunday instead of Saturday. In fact, the Pharisees had an interesting rule—a lot of rules of the Sabbath—to show you the fine medical line that was drawn. The Pharisees made a determination, according to Rabbinical law, that if a person had a wound in the eye, you could provide enough ointment or salve on the eye to keep it from getting worse, but you could not apply a sufficient quantity to make the eye get better. The theory being, you could stop the deterioration on the Sabbath, but you could not help to cure, because if you helped to cure, then you were working on the Sabbath. You were promoting healing. And Jesus could have waited to heal the man.

Kind of an aside: It’s interesting to watch Doctor Luke at work. Because he is a medical doctor, he’s concerned about things that some of the other gospel writers aren’t. It’s a touch of authenticity, that he gives us details. For example, Peter’s mother-in-law, earlier in the gospel, was “ill with a fever,” say the other Gospels. But Luke notes she was “ill with a high fever.” He

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diagnoses the exactness of her condition. Regarding the leper—the other gospels simply say he had leprosy. But Luke shows us that he’s in the terminal stages: He is full of leprosy. The paralytic comes through the roof and Luke is concerned to note the differentiation of the bed he was on, noting the kind of bed it was by exact language. The man with the withered hand is simply “the man with the withered hand” in the other gospels, but for Luke, it was his right hand that was withered. Luke, as curious as he was as a doctor, had not been there at that healing, but later, when he was interviewing the people to whom this has happened to, would have said, “Which hand was it?” And he remembers the man stuck out his right hand and showed him the well hand that Jesus had made. Here’s just a little touch of authenticity to the gospel account. But Jesus could have waited for another day to heal the man, his point in healing is: You don’t procrastinate in meeting another person’s legitimate need. If you have power to meet the need today, you do it today. Don’t frustrate another person by withdrawing your effort of help when they have a need at this moment. What a lesson for each of us in family relationships, in the body of Christ, to not delay doing acts of good that meet another person’s need. Do not postpone something we’ve been intending to do for a family member—a wife, a husband, a child—do it when we have the strength and power to do it, at that moment.

IV. The fourth term that Jesus uses to disclose Himself is that He is the Son of Man.

The first time this term is used is in Luke 5:24; when the paralytic was dropped through the roof, Jesus had said, “That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (NIV). Again, he uses it in 6:5, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (NIV).

In all, the term “Son of Man” will be used in the Gospel of Luke twenty-six times. In all the Gospels together, the term “Son of Man” will be used eighty times. In those eighty times, no one ever uses the term except Jesus. It is Jesus’ favorite word to describe Himself. The only person in

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the whole New Testament, other than Jesus, who had ever called Him “Son of Man” is Stephen, in Acts 7. Once. Otherwise, it is Jesus’ term.

When we hear the term “Son of Man,” our immediate impression upon hearing it is that it’s referring to the idea of Jesus’ humanity. That He’s referring to Himself as another human being alongside other humans. But, in fact, the reverse is true. It’s a parable kind of a term. It’s a term that both conceals and reveals truth. It reveals truth to those who are looking deeper and conceals it from those who don’t really want to know. Jesus is drawing upon the teaching of Ezekiel and, especially Daniel 7, when He uses that term. In Daniel 7, we are given this vision of history in which wars and empires rise and fall. And at the end, one of the empires will arise as a challenge to almighty God. As God is dealing with that final empire, there emerges, before the Ancient of Days (namely, God the Father), one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power over all peoples, nations. Men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is everlasting. His dominion will not pass away and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed. The term “Son of Man” is not a reference at all to Jesus’ humanity. It is a reference to His divinity.

The introduction of that term, “Son of Man,” occurs when the eternal Son of God is in the heavens and not on the earth. That’s the introduction in the Old Testament. When Jesus stands and begins to minister in Galilee, He is saying, “I, the man from Nazareth, am the Son of Man from heaven, the one you’ve been looking forward to in the age to come, when all the kingdoms and powers and municipalities and principalities are subject to God’s eternal one. I’m there. I’m that one whom you’re going to meet. I am the Son of Man.” And the Son of Man, therefore, is really the Man from heaven more than He is the Man from earth.

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Jesus is revealing Himself, therefore, as God, when He uses this term; and saying, “No one can forgive sin except God. But I, the Son of Man, say to you, ‘your sins be forgiven’.”

When we think of Jesus as the Son of Man and we realize that He’s speaking about His eternal majesty and power and glory, we ask ourselves whether we have made Him the Son of Man in our own life, by giving Him authority over our life in every area. Whether we are giving Him glory in our life, sovereign power over our life, and whether we are giving Him worship and praise. His dominion is eternal and indestructible.

We live in an era of self-disclosure. There’s a lot of good to that. People in small groups, among friendship groups, in counseling, are basically saying, “Let me tell you who I am,” and so we share with another person who we are. I think that’s great, from days when people didn’t use to talk about what was going on in their life. But Jesus is saying, “Let Me tell you who I am. I am the Doctor. I am the Bridegroom. I am the Lord of the Sabbath and the Lord over tradition. I am the Son of Man.” This revelation will cause us either to discuss what we might do to Jesus, as happens in verse 11 (they discuss how they might destroy Him), or it will cause us to ask what He wants to do in us and through us.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, we come to You today and take this time of prayer to especially appropriate this message to our life. There are friends here today who need You as the Doctor in their life—the Great Physician; the Great Physician in their bodies and the Great Physician in their spirit. There are aspects of us that are so broken that only You can fix. We ask You to come, in Your gentleness and in Your skills, as the Great Physician of our soul; bring Your healing and apply Your forgiveness to our life. Come, Doctor Jesus, to our lives.

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I pray, Lord, for You to be the Bridegroom. I sense, Lord, that there are people in this audience today whose spiritual life and emotional feelings are as frozen cold as the tundra of the Antarctic. There's a heavy weight of ice hanging over the landscape of their life. There is no joy, because there is no happiness. There's been bad news; there's been loneliness and a lot of despair. You're taking this moment, Lord Jesus, to reveal Yourself to us and invite us into Your presence to enjoy and celebrate the things for us that are true, even when we don't feel them: the truth that You're preparing a home for us, the truth that You love us, the truth that You intercede for us in the heavens, the truth that our sins are forgiven, the truth that we are the eternal sons and daughters of God, the truth that our life has meaning and purpose, the truth that You will never leave us alone or forsake us, the truth that You are with us always. We celebrate that. We take a moment to unlock our hearts to You. No matter how deep the sadness or anxiety or concern. We want to reach out and begin to thank You for what we can and rejoice in You and begin a little fire in our hearts, that sort of lightens up the dark room we're in; to have You bring Your measure of joy and fullness into us. Thank You for being our Bridegroom.

Thank You for being the Lord of the Sabbath. For being Lord over religious tradition and being personal with us and so concerned about us that You break ceremonial rules, if necessary, to get to our need. Maybe for those who are in this service that are visitors or who've come in and feel very much like tax collectors and sinners, church isn't a frequent thing with them—maybe on the outside looking in—Jesus delights in being with you. He loves you.

Then, Lord, You're the Son of Man; the One whom we're going to meet in eternity and whose presence we'll enjoy forever. Lord, help us to live in that quiet confidence of Your sovereignty over life. That You, who will take care of us in the ages, will take care of us now. We lay all our

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care upon You. We put all our burdens to rest at Your feet. You're the glorious Son of Man and we worship You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.