

## **Meeting Jesus on the Road to Damascus**

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**Rich Nathan**

**September 1 and 2, 2001**

**Renewing Your Spiritual Passion**

**Acts 9:1-6**

While on my break I took some vacation time, but I also stayed mostly around town here. And I had the opportunity for the first time in twenty-something years to visit a number of other churches around town. I actually spent the summer visiting black churches around the city here and also around the state. Part of my visitation was a product of my deep desire and my continual prayer to God that he would increase our diversity. Right now, about 11% non-white are here at Vineyard Columbus. And I would sure like to see that percentage reflect the general community here in Central Ohio, which is about 20% non-white.

But I had an opportunity this summer to visit a variety of black churches around the city. I got down to First Church of God pastored by Dr. Timothy Clarke, who is a wonderful preacher. It's a great church on the Southside. And I went over to Rhema, which is another great church pastored by Lafayette Scales. And I went to several other churches here in town.

But I discovered several things in my journey. First of all, I imagined, before I went to some of the churches, that I would feel a little self-conscious being a white man in churches that were largely black. Some of the churches I went to had only one other white person. What I discovered was that I didn't feel awkward or self-conscious at all. See, we are part of the family of God. And I discovered that wherever Jesus is worshipped, wherever you get a group of people who hold up Jesus, if you are a Christian, you feel absolutely comfortable. It doesn't matter what color they are,

what they look like, what they are wearing. I did discover that as a general rule, people dress better in black churches than they do here at Vineyard. But that's not saying a whole lot. Folks at the Salvation Army dress better than we do here at Vineyard.

I was particularly interested in worship, because we are really trying to press the borders here with our worship and increase our musical diversity – I discovered that musical styles really vary. They ranged from traditional gospel choir to more of a contemporary jazz sound. The music is generally not guitar driven like our music. All of the churches I visited were keyboard driven. And several of the pastors were very musical.

My family and I visited a church just a couple of weekends ago where after the pastor was done, he said to one of the musicians, "Can you give me an E-flat?" because he was going to sing. I thought to myself, "You know, of all the things that you here at Vineyard Columbus will ever hear me say after I get done preaching, I can guarantee that you will never hear me say to the worship band, 'Will you give me an E-flat?'" I mean, I don't even really know what an E-flat is, much less have the pitch to be able to sing in E-flat. In fact, it would be more likely that you would see me do an interpretative dance up here in a tutu than that I would ask the band for an E-flat.

Just one other thing before I dig into today's message. I found as a general rule that black churches are far more expressive than we are. People are really engaged with the preaching. People say "amen" when they agree with something the preacher is saying. And I like that. And I just want to give you conservative, laid-back, disengaged people permission at appropriate times to give me some "amens." Amen?

Well, about a month and a half ago as I was praying – and I’ve had just a wonderful time with the Lord this summer and have had some opportunities for extended prayer – I felt the Lord drop a word into my heart. It was the word “passion.” What I’ve been asking the Lord for over the course of the summer was that he would renew my passion for him.

Now, I believe that this word “passion” is a word for our church in this season. What do I mean by “passion”? I mean the internal renewing of your love and your zeal, that your heart would get hot again. That it would burn brightly and that it would grow with love for Jesus Christ. See, the person who is in love doesn’t need to be sold or manipulated or sloganeered to death. They don’t need banners everywhere or guilt or marketing. The person who is in love, the person who is passionate for Jesus is internally motivated.

I get several brochures a month advertising various church conferences where I as a pastor can learn how to “motivate my volunteer workforce.” There are literally dozens and dozens of books out on leadership and management describing ways that we can get a desirable response out of people. And all of these books and all of these conferences and seminars are based on this totally muddle-headed assumption that motivation to do what God wants you to do is something that one human being places into the life of another. That to get you motivated to serve Jesus Christ that is something that I need to do to you.

And that is an assumption that I’m not willing to live with. I think it is great if a leader of a ministry or a pastor writes you a thank you note or throws a party and invites you and presents you with a gift certificate or pats you on the back or gives you an at-a-boy. But the truth is that all the stuff that we do for each other, all that stuff is just icing on the cake. Passion for Jesus is not something that

one human being does to another. Passion for Jesus is something that the Holy Spirit puts in your soul so that from your inner Being so you are motivated.

I think of all the people I have admired in the Christian life over the years. All these different Christians, who vary in gifts and temperaments – men and women, young and old – they have different educations, different races, different places in the world where they live – but the constant in all the Christians that I admire is that in all of them, they are internally motivated by God to sell out completely for Jesus Christ. They are white-hot for him. They are single-minded and are passionate. They are lit up in their desire step by step to serve Jesus Christ in this world.

The man who I consider my spiritual father, whose company and fellowship I deeply miss, was the founder of the Vineyard movement – John Wimber. And underneath all the gifts, all of his winsomeness and warmth, great sense of humor – underneath all of that, I always found a heart that was passionately in love with Jesus. And John was a person who would do anything that he felt Jesus was calling him to do. From the time he was converted, he adopted a model for his life that characterized the apostle Paul. John would talk about himself as being a “fool for Christ.” “I’m willing,” John said, “to look foolish in the eyes of the world because I love Him.”

One of my very precious memories of John was on the last night of the last conference that I ever did with him – I did some smaller seminars later on, but the last major conference I ever did with him was in England in Manchester. On the last night we had finished teaching and John had finished with ministry. He felt that God wanted him to sit down at the piano and sing a song that he had written 30 years before, right after his conversion. He had never actually performed it publicly. John’s voice was shot from having throat cancer. By this point in his life, his voice was really

gravelly. He found it very difficult to sing. He was embarrassed by what he sounded like. But I watched this now frail, and what I didn't know at the time, dying man sit at the piano and sing into a microphone a song of love to Jesus.

I just wept. I said, "That's what I want to be like."

See, it's passion for Christ that causes people to sacrifice their vacation so that they could go on a short-term mission trip. To not just do it because it is the right thing to do or it is their duty. But to desire it, to want to go on a missions trip. To delight in it. To spend money on it. To pray about going into long-term mission service for the Lord.

The Christian life, friend, is not always a giant battle between what you really want to do, but God won't let you, and what God wants that I really don't want to do. The Christian life is about a conversion of your heart so that more and more, in the deepest part of your being, you want what God wants. You don't have to be pushed into sharing your faith, or sloganeered into it. You want to share your faith. You take delight in opportunities to share. You don't have to have your arm twisted to tithe. Oh, God is asking so much of me. You want to give. You feel that what you give is totally inadequate. You are in love with Jesus. It is not because you are so noble or heroic that you choose to give up a job opportunity. It is because the thing that really turns you on, that really floats your boat, is serving Christ.

The apostle Paul was a person who was able to find his starter button in the morning. He wasn't sloganeered or manipulated or thanked by some volunteer coordinator into living for Christ. He was internally motivated by his spiritual passion. He was crazy in love with Jesus. We read in 2

Corinthians 5 one of my favorite verses, “If we are out of our minds, it is for the sake of God. If we are in our right minds, it is for you. For Christ’s love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, therefore all have died.”

I am out of my mind for the sake of God. I am crazy in love with Jesus. I would do anything for him. I would be a fool for Christ. If I sometimes sound insane, it is for your sake, he says.

Well, what I want to talk about today is what captivated the apostle Paul? What was so ravishing, so compelling? Very simply, what we are going to find is that what captured the apostle Paul, what he found so ravishing and compelling was simply his vision of Jesus. In future weeks, we are going to look at people’s encounters with Jesus because when you really encounter Jesus, you can’t be the same. He’s got you. When people meet Jesus their hearts are set on fire.

I’ve called today’s talk, “Meeting Jesus on the Road to Damascus.” Acts 9:1-6. Let’s pray.

*Acts 9:1-6—Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

Acts 9 tells the story of Saul's conversion. We know Saul better by the name Paul. It is not the case that Saul changed his name after his conversion. Rather, as a Roman citizen, Saul would have had three names. He would have had a first name, which was Saul. He was named for the 1<sup>st</sup> King of Israel, the most famous member of Paul's tribe of Benjamin. He would have had a family name, which we don't know. And he would have had an additional name, which in his case was Paulus, or Paul.

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Damascus is about 150 miles from Jerusalem by road in those days. And Saul, we read, was going there to arrest some Jews who had given their allegiance to a strange new teaching that was

spreading through the Jewish synagogues. This teaching that claimed that Judaism's long-awaited deliverer had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Saul saw this teaching about Jesus as a threat to his beloved Judaism. They were teaching in the synagogues that the Jewish Messiah was someone that had been crucified. That the Jewish Messiah was a person hung naked from a cross, in what N.T. Wright calls, "The Mangled Messiah." And further they were teaching that the resurrection from the dead had begun in and through this person, Jesus of Nazareth.

And so he knew, Paul knew down to his toes, that this teaching about Jesus of Nazareth was spreading like wildfire in the synagogues. This teaching about the Mangled Messiah, who supposedly had begun the resurrection of the dead and introduced a new age, the Kingdom of God, into this world. He knew that this teaching was false and that it was his job to stamp it out.

There are a lot of Sauls running around the church in America. People who believe that it is their religious duty to God to arrest other Christians, or at least in this country, to write books about them and to go on the radio, to stamp out what they just know down to their toes is false teaching. "You know, that church over there believes in praying for the sick or in prophesying. They believe that the Holy Spirit is visiting them in some unusual way. We know that that is false and we have to stamp it out."

There are Sauls running around all over the country. Have any of you ever played the role of Saul? Have you argued strenuously, you've fought like crazy against a certain teaching knowing, absolutely convinced in your mind, that this teaching was false or dangerous or unscriptural? And you turned out to be totally wrong?



I mentioned John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement. I once heard the testimony of his wife, Carole, in which, with great sorrow, she reflected back on John's early pastorate in the early 1970's and how she took it upon herself to run out of the church anyone who claimed to speak in tongues. She searched them out and ran them off, she said, because she knew it was false. It just couldn't be.

Fifteen years ago I was absolutely convinced that ordaining women as pastors was an unscriptural compromise with the feminist spirit of our age. I argued with people and I was sure I was right. Now after about a decade of studying the issue, reading the arguments, really digging into the text, I'm convinced that I was wrong. I now believe that women can and will serve in any role in the church and this church is giving permission to women to hear the call of God to any office.

Have any of you ever played the role of Saul? That you tried to drum out of the church some viewpoint, some teaching that you knew was dangerous. That you thought that you were serving God in your zeal for the truth, only to later discover that you were totally wrong? Maybe for some of you, you were convinced that charismatic gifts had ceased and you later discovered to your horror that they haven't. You were wrong.

Have any of you ever imagined that a position that you argued with other about, might be a wrong position? That maybe, just maybe you don't have the whole picture. Maybe you were certain that a certain denomination, a certain church, had all the truth that was to be found. Maybe you were raised Roman Catholic or Lutheran or Baptist or Brethren and you were certain that denomination had all the truth that there was to be had. You looked at some other churches, maybe even this

one, and thought, “Oh, that’s a cult. There couldn’t be any truth over there that we don’t already know.”

You know, lest we be too hard on the Sauls among us, or Saul in the Bible, those of us who have played the role of Saul in the past, as I have, and many of you have, I have to say that I have a lot of respect for Sauls. At least there are some people still around who take truth and God seriously enough to fight for it. At least there are some folks who will draw a line and stand up for what they believe and argue for it. The fact is, right now there are in the church thousands and thousands of very easy going tolerant people who just can’t imagine getting worked up about anything as abstract as the truth.

Well, maybe you could get worked up if the waitress is really slow in a restaurant in taking your order and even slower in getting your food out to you. Man, you are hot! You can’t believe how slow the service is. You don’t know how little I’ve had to eat today. What am I supposed to do, just sit here and eat the bread?

There are a lot of things that will upset Christians in America, but the departing from the truth is not generally one of them.

Well, as for me, I in large measure, respect Sauls – people who at least care enough to shut the TV off occasionally and to say something and stand up for what they believe. I respect people who are boldly wrong. Saul here in Acts 9 is a person who is boldly, he is fabulously, he is extravagantly, he is wildly wrong.

And here's what's wonderful about Jesus. Jesus met him anyway. I want you to see this. Because what is it that ignites me and ignited Paul about Jesus? Saul is a picture of a person who is going exactly in the wrong direction. He is going exactly away from God.

N.T. Wright in his book, "The Way of the Lord" points this out really graphically. He said that Saul is on a journey away from the Temple. He is going away from Jerusalem, away from Judea. He is going to Damascus, the land of Israel's enemies for 3000 years up until today. In Saul's day, if you wanted to meet with God, you would head toward Jerusalem, toward the Temple. That was where you went to meet with God. Saul is going exactly the wrong way. He is going to the land of Israel's enemies.

And this wonderful thing about Jesus is that Jesus meets us when we are on the totally wrong road, heading the opposite direction – he meets us. Some of you have run away from your marriages, you have run away from the church, you have run away from what you know to be right, even there, Jesus meets you.

Here's Saul. On a mission to persecute the people of God; heading to Damascus, the enemy city, totally filled with lies and falsehoods about what God wants and who he is in the plan of God. He is on the wrong road, going in the wrong direction for the wrong reasons. And Jesus reaches out and grabs him. Maybe some of you on the wrong road this evening in your marriage, in your love life, in your job, you're on the wrong road, going in the wrong direction for the wrong reason. But even there, Jesus can meet you.

Do you know that about Jesus? He is totally amazing. Totally wonderful. We meet Jesus in the most unexpected places. In fact, we often meet him when things turn out to be exactly the opposite of what our expectations are. We have this ambition, this desire – we are madly pursuing a career direction and it blows up on us. Here's what happens. The miracle is that instead of destroying our lives, in the wreckage, we find Jesus.

I remember 20 years ago I got fired from my first job in a law firm. I graduated from law school. Marlene and I had just purchased our first home. We had a little savings and Marlene was pregnant with our first child, Daniel. Everything seemed to be working according to plan, until I voiced some concern at the law firm regarding working on a case for one of the firm's clients – a man by the name of Larry Flynt, who was the publisher, some of you may know, of Hustler Magazine. Within days, a partners meeting was held and the managing partner called me into his office and fired me because of my concerns.

I remember going home. It was 2:00 in the afternoon. Marlene was in the backyard chatting with a neighbor over the back fence. He is my very pregnant wife and she said, "Oh, hi Richie, you're home early." I just looked at her and said, "Well, they let me go." She said, "Oh, they let you go early?" I said, "No, Marlene, they let me go. I was fired."

I thought my life was over. I was totally humiliated. I was this abysmal failure. One month on a job at a law firm – nobody gets fired after a month. Have any of you ever been laid off? Maybe some of you are right now. You're laid off or you are facing a lay-off. You've been fired. Isn't it fun? It is for lots of us horrible. It is humiliating. It is scary, especially if you don't have a lot of money in the bank.

But the thing about Jesus that I want you to get is that he is the master of reversals. I love Jesus because he meets people in the most unexpected places, when we are not looking for him, when our world is turned upside down, when our lives blow up. There is this gigantic boom – and in the explosion, there is Jesus standing.

Maybe you have had a desire for a certain relationship to evolve into marriage. You pray and pray and the relationship blows up. But there in the midst of the wreckage, there you found Jesus. In the broken pieces of our lives, there we find Jesus. I've heard person after person say that the best thing that ever happened to me was that unexpected pregnancy, that financial setback.

One of the leaders in this church met Jesus shortly after this guy discovered that he had AIDS. A lot of us are like Saul, we're headed on a road that should take us away from God, racing after a career, a woman, a guy, a party scene, a career, after some business deal. Any of you ever meet Jesus in some totally unexpected place? You just begin to worship or to receive prayer. You're angry? You're restless? You feel dead inside and yet Christ is so merciful. He comes to you and meets you. Some of you this evening need to meet Jesus for the first time, or you need to meet him again. You are nowhere with God and you know it. At the end of this message, I am going to ask you to come to Christ.

Anthony Blum, a Russian communist, a young guy, he was at a communist meeting where he heard another young man expound his faith in Jesus. He was so ticked off – Anthony Blum was – that anyone could believe in the nonsense in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He decided that he was going to go home and write a reputation of Christianity. He found an old Bible. He didn't want to waste any

more time than was necessary, so he read the shortest of the gospels, the Gospel of Mark. Mark is one of those books perfect for a person who is angry and restless and wanting to reject God because Mark doesn't pull any punches. He goes right for the jugular. There is Jesus with all his authority, dying on a cross, and rising from the dead. And as Anthony Blum read the gospel of Mark, like Saul, he was encountered by Jesus. His heart was lit up. He spent the whole night reading the other gospels. By morning, he was a Christian and he became one of the most famous and influential Russian Orthodox Bishops of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As the psalmist says, "If I go down to Sheol, in other words, if I am living in hell, you are there. If I fly away to the other side of the sea, you are there." If you are running from Christ, guess who you might meet like a freight train on the road to Damascus...Jesus.

Well, what did Paul see and hear? It says he suddenly saw a light from heaven flash around, the bright light. In v. 17 we discover that the bright light was none other than Jesus.

*Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here..."*

We see the same thing in v. 27: *But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told him how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him.*

Paul says that over and over again. It wasn't just a bright shining light that he saw, he heard Jesus. Why do all of the accounts of Paul's encounter with Jesus describe this encounter as a bright, blinding, shining light? The accounts are all describing the unparalleled glory of Jesus. He

looks up at the sky and sees this incredibly, awesomely, bright light. It is the light of the glory of Jesus. By the glory of Jesus, the Bible is speaking about the beauty of Jesus. His attractiveness, his excellence, his extraordinary worth, his loveliness. By the glory of Jesus, what Paul saw was Jesus as the most wonderful, the most beautiful, the most attractive, magnificent, compelling, ravishing being in the entire universe.

The scripture writers constantly refer to the experience of seeing and being ravished by the beauty and glory of Jesus. It's this vision of Jesus, so captivating, so attractive, that their hearts are lit on fire with passion for him.

In John's gospel, in the first chapter, he writes in John 1:14, "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. We have seen his glory."

Peter in 2 Peter 1 says, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

The apostle Paul declares in 2 Cor. 4, "The God of this age has blinded the eyes of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we don't preach ourselves, but Jesus is Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake, for God who said let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us light of the knowledge of the glory of God and the face of Christ." The gospel is a message about the glory and beauty of Jesus.

Here's what happens when a person gets saved. When a person gets saved, God takes away our blindness to the attractiveness and beauty of Jesus. He pulls away the veil so that we can see Jesus. You can know if you are saved by asking yourself whether there is a veil over the face of Jesus. Do you recognize Jesus as beautiful? Is Jesus glorious, attractive and lovely to your heart? Or is Jesus just a name? Is What Paul saw in his encounter with this bright shining light was the glory of God in the face of Jesus. What changed Paul, what made Paul so radical, so passionate, was his encounter with the glory of Jesus.

See, all of us are made with a longing for beauty, a yearning for glory, a desire for something compelling, something fabulous, something that ravishes our heart. We have this longing for something, for someone who is absolutely captivating. What the Bible teaches is that we exchange the glory of God for lesser things, for other people, for little trivial pursuits, for improving our golf game, for some kind of distorted sexual relationship, or for collecting Hummels. What we end up doing, according to the Bible, is that we close the drapes on our hearts so that we are blind to the bright shining Son of God. We close the drapes on our hearts and we try to create our own little light by burning some newspaper or lighting our little candle. We miss the glory.

This summer, my family and I had the opportunity to go to Hawaii, to the Island of Maui. An acquaintance of mine lent us his house on Maui for two weeks. Because Marlene and I had enough frequent flier miles from all of my travels, we got to go Maui for free for two weeks. Don't you wish you had acquaintances like that? One morning I was walking on the beach, just worshipping the Lord because of the beauty that I was seeing. I was worshipping the Creator of all that I was looking at, this incredibly gorgeous ocean and the islands in the distance that I could see and the volcano that was on the northern part of the island. I am just overwhelmed by the beauty I



was observing. And then I looked around at the other people on the beach. There were several people with these Sony Walkmans on. Their eyes were glued to the sand and they were walking along living inside of their heads, listening to some music pounding. This one couple was walking along in a heated discussion. I thought, "Lord, how rebellious we are as a race. Here we are in the midst of all this beauty and almost no one, almost no one here, looks up and acknowledges you as the Author of all of this."

I mean, if you go into a museum and see a painting, the first thing people do is look down at the little label to find out who painted it. They say, "Oh yes, that's a Monet. That's a Rembrandt. That's a Renoir." Here we are looking at something a trillion times more beautiful and no one ever says, "Who did all of this?"

Some of you might say, "Well, if I saw what Paul saw, if I saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, I would be lit on fire." The Bible says that the Holy Spirit can illumine your heart and mind so that you can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Certainly, the creation displays the glory of God. Psalm 19 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. We certainly see the glory of God whenever we contemplate the cross.

But most of all, we find the glory of God in the face of Jesus. Keep your eyes open and read the scriptural accounts of Jesus. As you find Jesus in the scriptures, you look at these encounters that people have with Jesus. You listen to what Jesus said. As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate you so that you can meet the person that you are reading about. That you can pull the shades open in your heart to see His beauty.

I'm telling you, you won't find the glory by staring at yourself in the mirror, by contemplating you. By trying to find some place of self-worth or some place of self-esteem. You aren't going to see the glory by digging into yourself. But you will see it in the face of Jesus.

Let me make this really practical for you. Every day you and I are presented with hundreds of hard choices regarding what we are going to let our hearts dwell on. As a matter of habit, you may find yourself regularly dwelling on the faults of your spouse – something that your spouse is doing or has done, or failed to do. Or on the faults of your child or a coworker or your boss. But you can choose, instead, to focus your attention on Jesus, on the beauty of Jesus, right now. To open the drapes of your heart up to the Son of God. Instead of thinking these discouraging, unhappy, critical thoughts you could turn your heart to contemplate Jesus, to look at his face, to think on him, to worship him.

You can spend all of your time dwelling on your victimization, about how someone hurt you or a group of people hurt you. You can spend all of your time thinking about your victimization. How someone stabbed you in the back, or spoke about you, or slandered you, or took something from you, physically injured you. Or you could focus your heart on Jesus.

You can spend your time fantasizing about having a better body, a nicer house, more money, a different job, a more attractive lover – or you can focus your heart on the beauty of Jesus. You can be eaten alive by anxious thoughts, about all the what-ifs concerning the future, your finances, your career, your love-life, your kids, your loved ones and your health. You can be beaten up with lust. You can focus your heart's attention on sexual images. You can continue to stimulate your appetite

and never be satisfied, or you can find peace inside for your restless heart by turning your heart toward Jesus dozens of times throughout the day.

The Spirit of God leads me to refocus my heart on Jesus. And I am going to be as honest with you as I possibly can. This is my internal secret for living the Christian life in a passionate way – refocusing all day long on Jesus. Jesus inside, inside. I’m saying, “Jesus, you are glorious. I bless you that you are what I need, no matter what I need, you are what I need.” Do you realize that about Jesus? That whatever you need for him to be, he is that – friend, confidante, counselor, teacher, lover, healer, Savior, deliverer – he is those things. My heart longs for your beauty. I long, I delight in the beauty of Jesus. I choose to open my heart to you again.

99% of the time, I don’t even need to pray for deliverance from some oppressive thought pattern or from whatever is threatening to dominate my spirit. I just turn my heart to Jesus. In the middle of the night, when it is 4:00 a.m. and you’re up, it is Jesus I choose to meditate on your loveliness. Lord, you are more precious than silver. Lord, you are more costly than gold. Lord, you are more beautiful than diamonds. Nothing I desire compares with you.

If this church were filled with people who would just choose to turn your hearts to Jesus, we would turn this city upside down, because we would be lit up. We would have our passion renewed. Friend, do not allow the enemy, or your own unbelief to say it can’t be done. It can be done. You can turn your heart towards Jesus. No matter how far you feel from God, you can choose to turn your heart towards Jesus.

Be honest, right now what do you spend your time dwelling on? What's the focus? There's an old saying that we become like what we worship. Whatever you spend your time dwelling on, beholding, focused on – you become like that thing. What do you spend your time dwelling on? What is the focal point of your heart and life? What dream? What is the little idol that you bow before? How about kicking that idol over and opening the shades of your heart so that you let the beauty of Jesus come in – his unparalleled beauty. Let Jesus captivate you. Let him ravish your heart. Let him move you so that you fall in love with him again.

Some years ago a pastor was asked to pray at a large Christian gathering. Some of you have heard this pastor's prayer before, but I'm going to ask the sound guys to play the tape of one of the most wonderful expressions that I've ever heard of the unparalleled glory of Jesus.

Dr. S. L. Lockridge

The Bible says my King is a seven-way King...

He is the King of the Jews...that's a racial King.

He is the King of Israel...that's a national King.

He is the King of righteousness

He is the King the Ages

He is the King of Heaven

He is the King of glory

He is the King of King

And he is the Lord of Lords.

That's my King.

Well...I wonder do you know him?

David said the heavens declare the glory of God.

And the firmament showeth his handiwork.

My King is a Sovereign King.

No means of measure can define his limitlessness.

No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline that his shoulders supplied.

No barrier can hinder him from pouring out his blessings.

He's enduringly strong.

He is entirely sincere.

He is eternally steadfast.

He is immortally graceful.

He is imperially powerful.

He is impartially merciful.

Do you know him?

He is the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizons of this world.

He is God's Son.

He's a sinner's savior.

He's the centerpiece of civilization.

He stands in the solitude of himself.

He's august and he's unique.

He's unparalleled.

He's unprecedented.

He is the loftiest idea in literature.

He is the highest personality in philosophy.

He is the supreme problem in high criticism.

He is the fundamental doctrine of true theology.

He is the corner, the necessity for spiritual religion.

He is the miracle of the age.

He is... Yes, he is.

He is the superlative of everything good that you choose to call him.

He is the only one qualified to be at all sufficient Savior.

I wonder...if you know him today.

He supplies strength for the weak.

He's available for the tempted and the tried.

He sympathizes and he saves.

He strengthens and sustains.

He guards and he guides.

He heals the sick

He cleanses the lepers.

He forgives sinners.

He discharges debtors.

He delivers the captives.

He defends the feeble.

He blesses the young.

He serves the unfortunate.

He regards the aged.

And He rewards the diligent.

And he beautifies the meek.

I wonder if you know him.

Well... this is my King. He is a king.

He is the key to knowledge.

He's the wellspring of wisdom.

He's the doorway of deliverance.

He's the pathway of peace.

He's the roadway of righteousness.

He's the highway of holiness.

He's the gateway of glory.

Do you know him?

Well...

His office is manifold.

His promise is sure.

His life is matchless.

His goodness is limitless.

His mercy is everlasting.

His love never changes.

His word is enough.

His grace is sufficient.

His reign is righteous

And his yoke is easy

And his burden is light.

I wish I could describe him to you,

But he is...well....yeah....yeah

He is indescribable.

Yes he is...good Lord.

He's indescribable.

Yes, he's indescribable.

He's incomprehensible.

He's invincible.

He's irresistible.

You can't get him out of your mind.

You can't get him off of your hand.

You can't outlive him

And you can't live without him.

The Pharisees couldn't stand him

But they found out they couldn't stop him.

Pilate couldn't find any fault in him.

The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.

Herod couldn't kill him.

Death couldn't handle him.

And the grave couldn't hold him.

Yeah....that's my King. That's my King.

And Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory

Forever and ever and ever and ever

How long is that?



And ever and ever

And when you get through all of the forever's

Then Amen

Good God Almighty. Amen

***Acts 9:1-6***

I. Passion for Jesus

II. Running from Jesus

III. Meeting with Jesus

A. Unexpected Messages

B. Unparalleled Beauty