God Sees

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[0:00] We also thank you, God, on the eve of an election that we are a nation that has still been granted freedom to read, understand, and apply your word. And we, God, are more aware than ever that those freedoms are fleeting when they are not practiced and when they are not stood up for.

So, God, we pray that you would continue to give us these freedoms. But, Lord, make us worthy of them and make us use them and lean on them. God, it is absolutely insane that we should have all of these freedoms to have your word, God, and to read your word and apply your word.
And then for so many in our country to be offended by your word, the very thing that is given to us for life. Please, God, we ask that you would bless our time as we start this book.
And, Lord, we thank you for your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You can be seated. We'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry. And if you'll turn in your Bibles to the book of Isaiah, chapter 1, we'll be reading from Isaiah 1, 1 today through verse 20.
Isaiah chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 20. Let's jump right in and see in chapter 1 we have a bit of an introductory or summary verse here in Isaiah 1, verse 1.
[1:20] It reads, For God himself.

All of these figures show up a little bit, but relatively speaking, we hear very little about them and very little from them. For the most part, we hear from God.
And I think the most important word in that first verse is the word vision. And it says again, it's something we want to check ourselves on. It says the vision of Isaiah. Well, don't come into this book thinking that what we're reading here is how Isaiah sees things.
That's not the way that the word vision is meant here. It means that Isaiah has received a vision from God and that he is seeing things the way that God sees them.
And that's why I'm so excited to enter into this time. It is a tremendous gift to be given the eyes of the Lord over something.
[2:42] To see things the way that God sees them is to see them as they actually are. I was going through one of the old systematic theologies that I have.

Stephen Charnick, in his discourses upon the existence and attributes of God, says, An infinite mind does not judge by veils and shadows. It judges by what is true.
An infinite mind does not judge by veils and shadows. It judges by what is true. We are not infinite minds and we have veils and shadows. That's really what we have.
We are constantly struggling to see things rightly. Not so with God. And so when God writes a large book like Isaiah, where he gives us his vision of things, we want to feel grateful and we want to lean into that.
Now, as I mentioned in the call to worship, there are basically four things that we can see God seeing. God sees sin in a way that we do not. God sees his servant in a way that we do not.
[3:41] God sees salvation in a way that we do not. And God sees the supper. I decided to go full Adrian Rogers, full Southern Baptist alliteration. So the supper is a bit of a stretch.

Not terrible. It's actually in the text. But the vibe there is, is that that's just referring to all of the glorious eschatological glories that God has planned as he seeks and saves the loss and builds up a world where the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth like the waters cover the sea.
So that's verse one. Verse two, hero heavens starts hero heavens and give hero earth for the Lord has spoken. Well, I think what you need to know about this verse is that this is courtroom language. God is opening a case against his people. This is the kind of language that would precede a covenant or treaty lawsuit in the ancient world.

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God is filing papers against his people and not only his people, but against all of the surrounding nations. And he summons the heavens and the earth as witnesses to his court that he's convening. [4:55] And this will tell you something about the power of God right away. Don't ask me how I know. But the Johnson County district attorney regularly has trouble getting normal people to show up to serve for jury duty.

That's the Johnson County district attorney. And God says, actually, heavens and earth here. And they attend immediately to his summons.

Now, what is the case that God is charging? What is the case that God is filing? He is saying that his people are inexorably, totally, completely lost in sin.

I said at the beginning that we're going to see four things that God sees. We're going to see four things the way that God sees them. And the first one is sin. The first idea I think God communicates here.

We'll get to this verse here in a minute. Is that sin violates a person's purpose. So point one is God sees sin. And the sub point, the first sub point is sin violates a person's purpose.

[5:56] I found out sometime this year a dreadful, terrible thing. If it ever happened to me, I would be in a bad mood maybe for a month or more.

Let me set this up. You're going to think this is stupid. Let me just set it up the way that I see it and why it offends me so much. All right. You guys know what Roombas are, right? Roombas, they're robot vacuums, right? Some of you have them.

Roombas exist because there are certain people who really want their floors clean, but also don't want to do extra work to clean the floors. And so you spend a considerable amount of money and a considerable amount of technology has gone into the production of this Roomba.

And I have always been a fan of Roombas. I love the idea of tech, of course, and robots are awesome. And so this has always been wonderful to me. I've loved the idea of a Roomba. And then I found out about this terrible thing that sometimes happens.

You know this. I just found this out. It's scandalizing. Occasionally, throughout the day when the Roomba is doing its work, if you have a dog, that dog lays a mess on the floor.

[7:11] The Roomba runs over the mess on the floor and then starts painting your floor with dog excrement. Okay.

Isn't that just, isn't that just, it's just like unjust. You bought the Roomba for a very particular reason. And not only is it, it's not like the Roomba just died. Right? That would mean it's just not doing what I got it to do. But it's inverting its purpose. It's inverting its purpose.

It's doing not just, it's not just failing to do what it's supposed to do. It's doing the thing it's not supposed to do. That's what God says the sin situation is for his people.

That's called a teleological way of thinking about sin. Sin breaks your purpose. Sin violates your purpose. Sin turns your purpose upside down.

[8:12] Now, we have all sorts of different kinds of spiritual maturity in the room. And some people have been Christians for a very short time and some for much longer. And I want to give you a paragraph that I think you can use to really unpack a giant part of all that the Bible is saying.

And that would be this. God made you to act as his image by representing him back to himself and to the universe.

God made you to be his image. You are created, the Bible says, in the image of God. The way that you image God, the way that you reflect God, is you're supposed to do this by doing the two things that God does.

What are the two things that God does? God loves God. Well, that's vain. Not at all. God is most worthy of love. And if God didn't love God, he would be deficient in his judgment.

God loves God. God loves the Son. God loves the Spirit. So one of the things God does is God loves God. And for you to be a faithful image of God, you should love God too.

[9:17] The second thing that God does is God loves people. And for you to be a faithful image of God, you should love people. Now, what I've just done there is I've given you a code you can go all the way through the Bible in because now you understand why Jesus says the great commandment is the great commandment.

Jesus says that the whole law is summed up by the call to love God with all of your being as God loves God and to love your neighbor as yourself. God loves people.

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God loves himself. God loves people. God loves people. You were created to image God. Your purpose, why you exist, why there are beats in your heart right now are to do these two things, to love God and to love people.
And in doing those things, you are reflecting the goodness of God back to God, to others, to the universe, and so on and so forth. That's why you exist. Now, if you were to stop doing these two things, that would be one thing.
But you don't stop doing them. You're the Roomba that ran over the dog poo. It's not as if you simply stop doing them. That would be one kind of charge God would have.
[10:22] But God's charges, the way he sees your sin, goes even deeper than that. So that your sin is, here again, this may be helpful for some of you. What is sin? Sin is the failure to love God and love others.

Like, sin is the failure to obey the sum of God's total law, to fail to be like God. Sin is to miss the mark of God's standards. He wants you to love him. He wants you to love others.
And when you fail, you're sinning. And you're violating the basic purpose that God made you to have. Look at verse 2. Children I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib. But Isaiah does not know. My people do not understand.
But Israel does not know. My people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation. A people laden with iniquity. Offspring of evildoers.
[11:21] Children who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They are utterly estranged.

God is saying that he brought these people into being. He brought you into being for a very particular purpose. And they have fundamentally violated that purpose.
Not only are they failing to love God, they're actively rebelling against them. You have children you can think about. There are all sorts of times when your children are not helpful. There are all sorts of times when your children are checked out.
There are all sorts of times when your children sort of fail to kind of do things you'd like them to do. That's one category. And then there's a category that comes after that where they are openly hateful toward you.
Those are both terrible, but one is much worse. And God is saying that these folks have descended into that second category. Well, the next thing that we see God sees in sin is that sin inflicts great harm.
[12:21] Sin inflicts great harm. Look at verse 5. We really have to take a moment and slow down and appreciate the imagery here because it is grotesque.

This person is sick in every possible way. They are wounded in every possible way. Sickness in the head. The brain isn't working like it should.
Faintness in the heart. The heart has lost a sense of vitality and verve, and it's just a shell of its former self. And the whole body is bruised and sore and full of raw wounds.
You really ought to think a moment about what that is describing. It's hard to envision someone. The only way I could kind of get there was to think about some of the reports I've read of individuals being thoroughly, systematically tortured by an enemy that really knew what they were doing.
God is describing people who have literally no soundness in them whatsoever. And here's the second thing that God tells us about sin that we don't see ourselves. And that is your sin not only is violating your purpose, the purpose that God made you to live, but your sin is also absolutely doing violence to your soul.
[13:54] You may not see the damage. In fact, you may be so deceived as to believe that all the real damage you would incur is if you stopped this particular sin, if you repented of this particular sin.

But God sees sin better than we do, and he sees that not only does it violate our purpose, but it causes us much, much pain.
Well, the third thing we see from God about sin, point three, is that sin brings judgment upon a land. We don't have time to get into this very far, but you need to understand that in addition to violating your own purpose and doing great harm to yourself, sin in the individual contributes to the guilt of a nation.

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Isaiah 1, chapter 1, verse 7. One of the things I think that you will be surprised by as we spend time in Isaiah, is how much God talks about the nations, and how his standards for all of the nations are relatively similar.
He has a more exacting version of his standards for Israel, but God holds every nation to a certain standard. That standard is roughly sketched out in a kind of natural law way that reflects the Ten Commandments.
[15:36] And we'll see as we work our way through the book of Isaiah that God has a vision for the nations. He has a desire to heal the nations because the nations are sick with sin, and their sins are the same as what I described earlier.

All nations are sick with sin, and they fundamentally are violating God's perfect law, which is to love him and to take care of others, to love others. So what is kind of being implied here, and we'll unpack this more as we proceed and get more into the national discussion involved in the book of Isaiah.
What's being implied here is that a group of people are sinning, and they're actually corrupting their nation and bringing their nation into a spot where they deserve desolation. Now, number four, we want to spend some time on.
Number four is this. Your sin is affecting your heart and your mind in a way that it is perpetuating false repentance.
Your sin will perpetuate false repentance because it will make it more and more difficult for you to discern between true and false repentance.
[16:50] Now, we're going to read verses 11 through 15 and try to notice the noise in your head and how you're interpreting this.

Do your best to not add color or details or motives into what you read in verses 11 through 15. Okay, do your best to stay neutral. I'll help you afterward, but let's read this.
Verse 11. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of ram and of the fat of well-fed beasts.
I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who is required of you this trampling of my courts?
Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations. I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
[17:52] Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will not hide my eyes from you.

I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.
Now, what I want to ensure as we're reading this is that we're not imagining these folks as being engaged in a kind of knowingly, cynical, get-out-of-jail-free-pass kind of religion.
I don't want you to imagine that these folks are knowingly engaged in hypocritical worship because that's not what the text says. In reality, these people are engaged in all of the forms of repentance they believe they ought to engage in.
That's why you offer sacrifices. This brings to mind this idea of false repentance versus true repentance.
[19:06] These folks are engaged in spiritual acts, offering sacrifices, attempting to fulfill their religious duty. I don't think the text suggests that somehow they know that they're holding out on God.

I think the text suggests they think they're doing what they're supposed to do, and their sin has so deluded them as to make it impossible for them to see that God is deeply offended with them, and that their religious practices, their engagement of this kind of repentance, is actually not real.
It's a false repentance. I think that's what's happening here. These are people who are engaged in activities they believe to be consistent with their understanding of repentance.
But sin has deluded them so much that they don't even see the sins in their lives anymore in a way that is meaningful, in a way that they can interact with and respond to God correctly.
I believe that one of the kindest things, one of my favorite writers is a man named Thomas Watson. And I believe that one of the kindest things Thomas Watson ever did was he wrote, he took the time to write a very simple, careful, and memorable sentence.

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[20:31] And here it is. You've heard it before. Repentance is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients. The sight of sin, sorrow for sin, confession of sin, shame for sin, hatred for sin, and turning from sin.

I think that was one of the kindest things a writer has ever done because he took the total of biblical teaching on the subject of repentance and put it forward in a way that we can understand.
And trust me, this is the way the Bible talks about it. He just wrote a great sentence to serve us well.
True repentance is a special medicine, a spiritual medicine made up of these six special ingredients.
And I think that what we see is that these people, in verses 11 through 15, are engaged in a kind of repentance. That's why you offer sacrifices, amongst other reasons.
But they are lacking some of these ingredients. And we don't necessarily know which ones. We simply know that God is identifying their religious actions as false repentance.
[21:47] He sees the sin where they don't. Now, I will tell you, I believe that there are certain sins that have become so embodied that our consciences don't even recognize them anymore.

There are certain sins that have become so practiced in our families that we don't see them anymore. And there are certain sins in our culture that are so common that we don't see them anymore.
In other words, God alone can see sin that we cannot see. They were offering sacrifices. They were gathering in solemn assemblies.
They were offering incense. But something necessary was missing. Something on Thomas Watson's list is not happening.
And I'm not going to chase that down this morning. I don't know that the text tells us exactly. But what I can say is what Matthew Henry said. Many that will readily part with their sacrifices will not be persuaded to part with their sins.
[22:56] Many that will readily part with their sacrifices will not be persuaded to part with their sin.
There is a kind of religious action that appears to be sorrowful, that appears to be repentant, that appears to be sorry, and is not actually handing over the sin to God in the way that Watson describes.

So what we can see is that sin is breaking our purpose. It's doing great damage to our soul. It's possibly even putting our nation in jeopardy.
But it is also really deceiving us. Sin hides. Sin hides a part of itself. Sin plays possum and appears dead when it is not.
Imagine having... I think this is not actually that far off. I'm both happy and also a little nerve that we have so many medical people in the room now consistently because I like to make medical illustrations and now I get called on them when they're...
Anyway. But I just want you to imagine some kind of antibiotic resistant bacterial infection.
[24:15] It has this really clever play it runs. When it gets a signal that the antibiotic exists in the system, it signals back to the body you're getting better.

Just imagine that. It sort of stops making you feel sick. So then you stop taking the antibiotic and you've given enough genetic information to the bacteria for it to adapt that much more to the antibiotic becoming stronger and stronger and stronger.
I don't think bacteria has a brain, but open to that? No. But I can tell you that your flesh, your sin, the devil, like these things are clever enough to do exactly that so that as you begin to apply the spiritual medicine to this or that sin, you begin to see the symptoms alleviated and you begin to think, I am better and you are not better.
These folks were engaging in the spiritual antibiotics of the sacrificial system. They had the blood of bulls on their hands to prove it. They lost money and time and effort and they went out of their way to offer these sacrifices and God is saying, you are not healed.
You just think you are. Spurgeon once said that the arrow of conviction has wounded some people's feelings without killing their sin.
[25:56] The arrow of conviction has wounded their feelings without killing their sin. Well, how would you know? How would you know?

How would you know if you're engaged in true repentance or false repentance? You need God's word. You need God's spirit to work through God's word. Something like that appears to be happening to the people of Judah.

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One of these six ingredients, the sight of sin, the sorrow for sin, confession of sin, shame for sin, hatred for sin, turning from sin, one or more of these ingredients is missing from their heart.
And so God says, I will not accept your worship any longer. Now, take a breath. I'm going to do a hard pivot because up next, something entirely unexpected happens in the courtroom.
God offers a full pardon. Verse 18. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.
[27:13] Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Are you tracking? How can, how is it possible that a people so thoroughly rebellious and so deceived who are trampling God's courts, defying the purpose for which they were made, damaging themselves, damaging their nation, damaging others, how can it be that a God who hates sin and is offended by all of that could now, in this verse, verse 18 of the same chapter, offer a pardon?

And the answer is, is that there is another person in the courtroom that we cannot see in Isaiah chapter 1, and his name is the servant.
There's another person in the courtroom whom we cannot see yet. And so, yes, if God only saw sin, we would all be toast, but thankfully in this courtroom and in every courtroom, when God adjourns, when God draws us in to the trial, he sees not only sin, but he sees a servant, his servant, whom he has chosen.
And we're a long way from Isaiah 53, but this is what God sees in Isaiah 1. What God sees in Isaiah 1 is what we see in Isaiah 53, verse 5.
He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
[29:06] What makes this great pardon possible? And it's not just a pardon, by the way. That's putting it lightly. It's because God sees the servant.

The Father sees the servant. As much as he sees your sin, the Father sees the servant. And I want this to be really important. I set this up in a very particular way.
I skipped a couple of verses, if you noticed. I did that because I want you to see that when God, when the servant gives his grace to you, it is not just pardon that he gives.
The servant's grace is more than a pardon. The servant's grace is more than washing you clean of your record. So we are very familiar, I think, with verse 18.
Come now, let his reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow. We know that part. Let's look at the context. Go back to verse 16. Wash yourselves.
[30:15] Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice.

Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Please plead the widow's cause. And then you have, in verse 18, come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.
Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Unfortunately, verse 18 has routinely been taken out of context and made it easier for us to get the nature of the salvation that God sees. We get it wrong. God sees sin. God sees a servant. Now we're in God's sea salvation. And we're thinking, what is the salvation that God sees? Is it simply a get out of hell free pass?
Is it cheap grace? Is it sort of a drop your quarter of repentance in and get washed clean like a car wash? What is the salvation that God is offering to his people and to us through his servant?
[31:27] Our understanding of that depends on us reading verses 16 through 20 in kind of a connected way. Right? Do you see the tension that is already appearing?

One tension that appears right here is that you would read this as the pardon and justification I receive in verse 18 is due to my self-washing in verses 16 through 17.
You see the text? It says, wash yourselves. There's a tension here. Let's talk about this. There's probably two ways to get verse 18 wrong.
The first way to get verse 18 wrong would be the cheap grace way. And it would read verses 16 through 20 like this. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.
Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And you will eat the good of the land. That's the cheap grace way of understanding

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salvation.
[32:34] Cut out most of that text. Grab 18. Little bit of 19. There we go. That's the gospel. And if you preach any other way, you're not gospel centered.

Okay? There's another wrong way to get this passage, and that would be to see the washing that takes place in verses 16 and 17 that contains the six ingredients of biblical repentance, that that washing, that repentance, is what cleans us and saves us so that we see salvation coming from a sincere effort to change, putting in a lot of work, making sincere effort.
Those are the two ways to get it wrong. This passage is provided to us to show us what I think is the basic truth of the salvation that God sees and to show us the gaps between the salvation that God sees and the salvations that we see.
I think that most people see one of those two errant salvations. They see a cheap grace salvation that has no expectation of change at all, or they see a no grace salvation that has expectation of you earning your way into God's good pleasure.
Here's the deal. Everything that is happening in verses 16 through 19 is happening because the servant is extending his grace to a soul in different ways.
[34:09] To put it differently, God does not provide the grace to pardon you without also providing the grace to let you repent truly.

true repentance is a gift from God. True pardon is a gift from God. It's all of grace. It's all part of salvation. And it's all from the servant. The actions called for in verses 16 and 17 are not requirements to be saved.
I'm just basically giving you the crisp version of Westminster Confession right now. It's not requirements for you to be saved, but your repentance will always be present when God exercises an act of changing, transformative, saving grace on you.
You will repent. Really, it can be no other way because we see here people who are fundamentally corrupted and broken, people who cannot even see their sin, people who think they are repenting when they're not.
How is a person like that ever to crawl out of that kind of pit of self-deception and delusion and futility of mind? How can they ever possibly repent on their own? Listen, guys, when God calls these people to repent, in verse 16 and 17, it is the exact same vibe, the exact same theological vibes, as when Jesus tells a lame man to rise and walk.
[35:37] He is, as Augustine would say, empowering what he commands. Repentance is part of God's gracious saving work.

It does not cause God's gracious saving work, but it is never absent from God's gracious saving work. There's a reason why the apostles, as they were evaluating this really crazy development, Gentiles started getting saved in Acts 11.
There's a reason they frame it the way they do in Acts 11, 18. They're watching all this happen. And listen to what they say. Repentance that leads to life is a gift from God.
It is not an earning of salvation or forgiveness, but it is never absent from those things. And so we can conclude that true salvation that comes from God's servant always involves true repentance, not false repentance.
And at the offer of come now, let us reason together, I will make you new. And the call to learn obedience, learn to change your ways, stop sinning, those are both calls made and empowered by the grace of the Lord Jesus.
[36:59] Because God sees his servant, a true salvation is possible for you and me. Not a cheap grace one, but a transformative one where we actually do change.

Not a false signal, not a false repentance, but an actual transformation. And in verses 19 through 20, we see that final S, the one that I crammed in there.
God sees sin, God sees his servant, God sees salvation, and God sees the supper. Look at verse 19. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.
But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. God promises that those he transforms and saves, he will also bring into his presence, his fellowship, those whom he justifies, he also glorifies.
If you are transformed, you will eat of the good of the land. Now, what do we do with all this? Really quickly, we can't do too much. That was just a lot that we had to get taken in to start acting on it.

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[38:15] But I want you to consider this as we move into the next section next week. These folks were most likely blind to their sins because their sins were so normal either to them or to their culture.

And so we can do that work together next week and continue to do that work. But we need to do that work also with the Lord this week. Let's pray.
Create in me a clean heart, O Lord. Renew in me a steadfast spirit. Search me and know me, O Lord, and see if there is any offensive way in me.
Let's pray. Lord God, we come before you and we would say, if you don't show us what you see, we'll never see. We're too limited and we're too broken.
So we pray that through your holy word you would help us to see these things well, Lord. But God, we so praise your name that today in this moment, it's always the right time to look at Jesus.
[39:21] And so we do look to the servant, the one in whom your soul delights. We look to the servant and say, Lord Jesus, you have healed blind men before. If anyone here is misunderstanding their heart posture before you, would you as an act of kindness and grace reveal that to them?

Not so that they could be less bad or something like that, but so that they could enjoy you and they could enjoy what you promised, the Laodiceans in Revelation 3, that behold, you stand at the door and knock and if anyone hears your voice and opens the door, you'll go in and you will eat with them and they with you.
And Lord, we just pray that you would use this sermon to create souls that are hungry to eat with you, to be with you, to enjoy you, to know you, to fellowship with you.
And that we would ask God that you would, through your servant, make all that possible. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen. Well, communion is our opportunity to look forward to this supper that Jesus has promised for us while also acknowledging we have fellowship with God right now because he has offered himself for our sins.
And so if you're here today and you're a follower of Jesus, I would just encourage you to come and grab the elements, turn to your seat, and we'll partake of them together. Come.

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