

Great Confidence - Real Christianity is Certain Salvation

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[0 : 00] Turn now to our Bible readings for this morning, which you'll find once again in Psalm number 3 that we're going to be reading together. So if you'd like to turn up Psalm 3, page 448, if you have one of the visitor's Bibles, and put your finger in there.

And then if you'd like to turn back to 2 Samuel chapter 16, which you'll find on the church Bibles, page 268. And we're going to read some verses from there that explain a little of the background of this Psalm of David.

So 2 Samuel 16, verse 5, and then Psalm 3. And the story here in 2 Samuel 16 is of David, the king, being run out of Jerusalem, the capital, through being faced with a rebellion of the people. The soldiers, many of the people, led by his own son Absalom. And not only was he forced out of the city, but in a state of great ignominy.

And here we read of curses raining down upon him and his party. When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gerah.

[1 : 25] And as he came, he cursed continually. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

And Shimei said as he cursed, get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man. The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul in which you place you've reigned.

And the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood. Then Abishai, the son of Zeruah, said to the king, why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?

Let me go over and take off his head. But the king said, what have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, curse David, who then shall say, why have you done so?

And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, behold, my own son seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjaminite leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to.

[2 : 35] Maybe that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today. So David and his men went on the road while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust.

And the king and all the people who were with him arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself. I turn to Psalm number three, which we're told is a Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom.

Oh Lord, how many are my foes. Many are rising against me. Many are saying of my soul there is no salvation for him in God.

But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me from his holy hill.

I lay down and slept. I woke again for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

[3 : 50] Arise, O Lord. Save me, O my God. For you strike all my enemies on the cheek. You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Your blessing be on your people. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.

Turn with me, if you would, to Psalm three. Page four, four, eight, I think in the in the church Bibles. And we're looking particularly at the last two verses of the psalm this morning, which tell us of the

great confidence that the true believer can really have, because real Christianity promises to us a certain salvation.

It's the third week looking at this psalm and what it has to teach us about real Christianity, about real biblical faith, as opposed, that is, to the fantasy that some people, even some so-called Christians and churches, imagine our religion to be.

And I hope already we've seen just how realistic this psalm is about the life of faith. There's absolutely no fantasy at all here about the believer's life being a bed of roses, or that there's any sort of sense of the nonsense that some people think about and talk about our faith, when they say, well, you know, Christian faith is a crutch.

[5 : 32] It's just a delusion. It's there to help you forget or to ignore the harsh realities of life and pretend that life is somehow different. No, no, no, quite the reverse.

The very first thing that we saw in this psalm about real faith is that it puts the believer immediately into great conflict, that real Christianity means a constant struggle. Look at verse 1.

O Lord, how many are my foes? That's the cry of the psalmist, of King David, of the anointed king of God over his people Israel.

And as we saw, here is the Lord's anointed himself, being despised and opposed by all, even rejected by his own people.

And he's cursed, he's rejected, he's being driven out of his city, Jerusalem. And not just driven out with insults, but actually with rocks raining down on him from his enemies, as we read in 2 Samuel 16.

[6 : 33] And you remember what we read there, they were bombarding not just David, but all the servants of King David and all the people and mighty men on his right hand and on his left.

And friends, the Bible tells us that will always be so. For all of those who stand with the Lord and stand with the Lord's anointed, they will always be despised and rejected on this earth.

What did the Lord Jesus himself say so plainly to his followers on the very eve of his own suffering and his crucifixion? Well, we read in John chapter 15, Jesus says, Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, the world hates you.

A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. All these things they will do to you on account of my name.

Because they do not know him who sent me. That is the only true God in heaven. And friends, that is how it has always been from the people of true faith, right from the very beginning.

[7 : 46] Go back to the beginning of your Bibles, the book of Genesis, the first few chapters. What do you find? Abel, the man of faith, persecuted and then killed by his own brother, by Cain.

And you go on and read of Ishmael, who persecuted Isaac, the one who was born, says Paul, according to the Spirit. And all through, all through the history of God's people, right up to the present day church of Jesus Christ.

Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God. That was Paul's words, wasn't it? In Acts chapter 14, as he went around encouraging the newly planted churches all over the ancient world.

To continue in the faith, as Paul said. Notice the faith. This is the only true Christian faith that there is.

And that's what we're seeing right back here in the experience described in Psalm 3. And that is because what we saw in Psalm 2, verse 2, is always true.

[8 : 53] The nations, their people, their kings, their rulers, set themselves against the Lord and his anointed. And therefore, against all the people of the Lord and his anointed.

So I was reading just this very week in the newspaper, as perhaps you were too, about Chinese Communist Party officials going into churches. And this is in the official churches in China, not the underground churches, but even the state-allowed churches.

And demanding that the first commandment in the list of the Ten Commandments written on the walls of these churches be taken down. You shall have no other God before me. Because the Communist Party and President Xi will not tolerate a God who is preeminent above the party and the president.

And actually, we're not so very far behind, are we, in our Western world today, in our own society, as these consultations about hate crime and so on are making so plain to us.

So make no mistake, for the real Christian, there will always be enemies without. And of course, as we've also seen, there will always be enemies within, which is often worse still for us.

[10:04] the assault of our adversary, who Peter says, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And when he does that, using our circumstances, and often it's the very sad and sinful circumstances that we've admired ourselves in by our faithlessness, by our folly, and using them to placard before us our guilt and our shame and our sin.

And taunting us constantly, therefore, to erode and to shatter our assurance. That's exactly what's happening in here in verse 2. That's what they were saying.

There's no salvation for him in God. Look what he's done. Look at the mess. For a man who's made such a mess and caused so much damage to his family, to his friends, indeed to the whole nation, who's let himself down so very badly.

That's so very familiar, isn't it? the tactic of our enemy and our adversary. And how many allies our great enemy has when he accuses and leads that great chorus against us, when Satan tempts us to despair and tells us of the guilt within.

That's a reality of Christian faith that we recognize, isn't it? It's experience that very sadly all of us know only too well. But also is the experience of verse 3.

[11:35] Thank God. But the real Christian can also say, despite the reality of verses 1 and 2, can say, but you, Lord, are a shield about me. Despite the reality which the Bible never hides, but the life of faith involves great conflict and constant struggle, so also, the Bible tells us we do have great comfort.

We have a continuous shield in the presence of our Lord and Savior himself, who is all around us because we have continuous fellowship with him. And the beauty of his presence means that it's he himself who is our refuge.

It's he himself who is our righteousness and our restorer. Even in the face of the greatest foes, the fiercest foes without and within, he is our shield, our glory, and the lifter of our head.

What a beautiful picture that is. And as we saw last time, that untold beauty of his presence with us affords us the unceasing bounty of his provision.

We know the miracle of prayer, as verse 4 speaks of, of the God who hears and answers our prayers. And verse 5, we know the miracle of his providence which surrounds us always as he sustains us and keeps us.

[12:53] And so it's also true that we know the experience of verse 6, the miraculous peace that means we don't need to fear even though there are enemies, thousands for David on every side.

That's why the Apostle Paul tells the New Testament church that we as true believers in Christ, we can have that peace that passes all understanding to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. And so you see, that's why the real believer can always have, despite all what is displayed here also in verses 7 and 8 of Psalm 3, we can have great confidence that real Christianity promises us a certain salvation.

It's not uncertain. It's not tentative and filled with fear about whether we can ever make it, whether we will ever make it to glory in one piece. No, no, no.

Our faith is certain. Our faith is assured. Our faith is even triumphant. Even in the face of everything that the enemy can throw at us.

[14:01] And even in the face often of the very disastrous and damaging consequences of our own sin, of our own mistakes, of our own failures. which is exactly what is David's situation here in this psalm.

And alas, far too often is our own situation, isn't it, in our lives today. But praise God, the Bible deals in reality. And it meets our real calamities with real Christianity.

Not fantasy religion, but real faith. There's no pretending away in the Bible that the true believer must always live with real foes in this fallen world.

No pretending away that our struggle is constant. That there will be great conflict for every true believer. But there is, nevertheless, clear proclamation that the true believer does live always in real fellowship with the living God.

Therefore, our shield against evil is continuous. And so there is great comfort for every true Christian. And above all, you see, there is also this unswerving promise that the true believer will have always a real future in the kingdom of a victorious Savior.

[15 : 19] And that's why our salvation is certain. And so there is, and there can be, and in fact, there must be great confidence for every true Christian believer.

Even in the face of our massive shortcomings. Even in the face of my stumblings, which are many, and your stumblings. The truth is that our Christian lives are and must be lives of confident faith. And that's what verses 7 and 8 are expressing here in the climax of this wonderful little psalm. Look at them. Arise, O Lord. Save me, O my God. For you strike all my enemies on the cheek. You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessings be on your people. Now isn't that extraordinary confidence? Especially when the psalm began with that agonized cry, O Lord, how many are my foes?

How can that be? Because nothing seems to have changed, does it, in the reality of the situation? Verse 6 is plain. He hasn't woken up to find that God has miraculously removed all these tens of thousands against him.

[16 : 28] He hasn't woken up and found that God's turned back the clock and everything's back to the way it was before. No, they're still set around about him on every side. So what's going on?

Is this psalmist just pretending? Is this just the worst kind of name it and claim it self-delusion of the charlatan TV evangelist? Is this just the delusion of those who peddle a prosperity gospel and say, no, no, no, you're rich when actually you're poor?

Well, no, it's not. This is not the conceit of the religious fanatic. This is the confidence of genuine Christian faith.

We need to notice three things, three, well, I suppose you'd call them necessary negatives. Three things that David's words express about his faith and about all true biblical faith that help us understand this.

And here's the first. There's nothing presumptuous about David's confidence. Nothing presumptuous. His words in verse 7 simply exhibit genuine faith in the promise and in the provision of the God of the covenant, of the Lord whom he knows and trusts.

[17 : 42] Look at the ascription there. Arise, O Lord. When you see that word Lord in capital letters, that's the personal name, the covenant name of the Lord himself, Yahweh, Jehovah.

And when he says, Arise, O Lord, he's deliberately echoing the words of Moses. You go back and read of the time in the wilderness and you see that Moses would say, every time, every time Israel broke camp and moved on in their wilderness wanderings as they moved on towards the land of Canaan or indeed as they set out against their enemies, the ark of God would go before them, be carried by the Levites and that ark was a living sacrament among them of the presence of God. It was telling them that the presence of the Lord their God was in their midst. And what was in that ark of the covenant? Well, it was the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that God had given to Moses, wasn't it?

The covenant of promise that God had made with his people at Sinai that said, I will be your God and Savior and you will be my people. And in Numbers chapter 10, we're told that whenever the ark set out, Moses said, Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you flee before you.

It was a wonderfully symbolic action. It was the word of God's promised salvation. It was God's gospel leading his people out on their journey and indeed into battle against all enemies.

[19 : 19] And it was a supreme act of faith and trust in God's promise to express it that way. A normal army goes out against the enemy, doesn't it? With its heavy armor, not with a Bible.

But that's what Moses was doing with Israel. And that's what David's doing here. Arise, O Lord. He's saying, Lord, my confidence is not in me and my men, it's in you.

It's in you that I trust, not myself. And I'm throwing my trust on everything that you have promised to me on your covenant word of salvation. I believe you, Lord.

I believe what you have said that you are our Savior and I'm taking you at that word. Verse 8, look, salvation belongs to the Lord.

It belongs to you. So, do as you've promised. May that blessing indeed be on your people. You see, that is not presumption. That's faith.

[20 : 19] It's trust in the word of God. It's confidence that what God has said will be true is true. And that what God promises, God will accomplish.

And that is the confidence of a real believer. That's what comes from a relationship, a knowledge, a fellowship with the God who hears prayer and who answers prayer.

A God who promises real salvation. salvation. Even when the only thing that we can see around us at the moment is the very present reality of countless enemies.

Enemies all around. Indeed, enemies deep within. But real Christian faith can have confidence. It can have assurance. Total assurance about that salvation from God because we trust in a God who is sovereign.

In a God who has power to save. Verse 8, in a God to whom salvation belongs. And because we have a God who has promised to save.

[21 : 24] He is a sovereign God but he is a saving God. And so it's not presumptuous to say, Lord, save me. You must save me. You must because you can't be untrue to your word.

David is prizing God's word as faithful and true. He's giving due reverence to the glory of God as the sovereign savior. And that's why real Christian faith is confident faith.

There's no conceit in that. We can have assurance. We can have certainty in our salvation in God just because we know that God is truly sovereign.

That salvation belongs not to us, not to anyone else, but to God. And God has promised to give that salvation to all who call on him in truth.

He gives it. It's something he gives. It's not something we can earn but he has it and he promises it.

That was the marvelous discovery made by Martin Luther that set off the extraordinary events of the Reformation right across Europe 500 years ago when he discovered that salvation is not something that's locked up in the church.

[22 : 41] It's not something that's locked up in the hands of the priesthood. It's not something that's dispensed through endless ceremonies and penances and confessions that can be never completely assured until the last rites are administered at the end of life.

No, he discovered that salvation belongs to the Lord and that what the Lord promises he will deliver to everyone who trusts in those promises, everyone who has faith in him alone and who shows that faith by crying out to God alone, save me, oh my God, just as David does here in verse 7.

That's why there can be confidence. That's why we can sing as we will sing later, no guilt in life, no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in us.

No matter how great the present evidence against us seems to be, no matter how countless the foes stacked against us to terrorize may be, there's something greater in the power and the salvation of God who is for us.

I love that story in 2 Kings 6, isn't it? Where Elisha and Elisha's servants are shut up in their house in Dothan and the whole of the army of the king of Syria comes against Elijah's house and the servant goes out in the morning and looks and he sees this enormous army all around about them and he's absolutely petrified, runs in and he can't believe it that Elisha's just, you know, eating his cornflakes and reading the paper and doesn't seem to be concerned.

[24 : 17] Haven't you realized what's happening? And Elisha says, go and have another look and as he's going out he prays to the Lord and just says, Lord, open his eyes and he goes out and opens the curtains again and he sees, yes, the whole army is still there, tens of thousands of them and their horses and chariots but he looks up and he sees all around about them far greater and vastly more majestic and powerful the massed armies of the Lord of hosts, the armies of heaven totally surrounding and outnumbering every enemy against them and that is what changes everything and you see that is what trust in the gospel and God's covenant promises does for us.

It doesn't pretend away any reality. It doesn't close our eyes to the real world with all its foes. It doesn't close our eyes to the reality of the mess all around about us, the mess even in our own lives but it does open our eyes to something far, far greater.

Yes, we still see the enemies, of course we do but we see the truth, the word that we saw in Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 that God's word is the real key to life and to happiness in this world and that God's son above all is enthroned in power and is the one who truly rules this whole cosmos and will judge this cosmos and therefore we are enabled confidently to walk by faith to trust in God's promises and therefore we can have confidence even under fire whatever the world whatever the flesh whatever the devil himself can throw at us we can say you save me oh God because salvation belongs to you you are the savior the sovereign and you have promised it to me you see confident faith is not presumption it's simply treating God as God truly is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth but notice also secondly there's nothing passive about David's faith either real confidence leads him out into battle with the assurance that God will go before him as he trusts him and as he obeys his command to lead out with the ark of the covenant as he says

Lord let your enemies be scattered let those who hate you flee before you see God is the one who alone can sovereignly bring victory and salvation to his people but David knows that he has the responsibility to fight the enemy with everything he has and in fact that's exactly what he did if you read on in the story of 2 Samuel 18 you'll see a great victory was won for God's people although it was of course a great personal cost for David in the death of his own son Absalom that made him grieve of course we know it don't we because the Lord Jesus tells us that sometimes winning winning the battle that God calls us to does mean losing something that's very precious to us take up your cross and follow me there's a path of victory for Jesus and that means denying a great deal and losing a great deal perhaps in this world's terms but you see these two things always go together in the Bible on the one hand

God's absolute sovereignty and salvation and on the other hand our absolute responsibility to obey God's call to act in faith and trust to trust his word of promise to do what he has said he will do we can have absolute confidence absolute assurance only because God is sovereign but we must exercise confident faith also for that very reason because to do any less than that is to deny and to cast doubt on God's sovereignty to say that we can't have assurance in him and can't have confidence in him actually is to disbelieve his power and to dishonor him as the God of glory that's so important for us to understand sometimes you see people are mistaken and people say things like this so I can't be sure that God could save me because you don't realize just how bad how awful my life has been you don't believe and understand just how feeble my faith is even still so I couldn't possibly presume in that way but no the opposite is true you must trust God you must have confidence in his salvation because not to do so is to sin in a far far greater way because you're calling God's word his promise into question aren't you you're calling

[29 : 09] God a liar you're calling God's sovereign power into question you're denying his glory and above all you're calling the death of Christ into question and by thinking that or saying that you're really saying in some way well Christ's death on the cross wasn't adequate enough for me to save me from sin no no no there can be no passivity about real biblical faith no waiting till you till you feel something do you feel as if perhaps well perhaps God is really at work in me and perhaps really I will be certainly saved no no no Paul says the apostle doesn't he you are to work out your salvation with fear and trembling that is you're to trust and obey actively you're to play the part of a servant of God that God has called you to be for says Paul for it is God who is at work in you for his good pleasure what he's saying is yes salvation belongs to the Lord yes he is sovereign indeed but you are not to be passive you're to be up and active you are to be confidently exercising faith and trust in him you are to be saying arise save me oh my God as the hymn says forth in your name oh Lord

I go my daily labor to pursue I'm going out in faith and in trust never separate God's God's sovereignty and our responsibility for faith and trust in him the Bible never ever separates those things and we mustn't either nor does the Bible ever either separate two other things that this psalm shows it won't separate and that is the salvation of God's people and the defeat of God's enemies verse 7 arise oh Lord save me oh my God for you strike all my enemies on the cheek you break the teeth of the wicked so we must be absolutely clear there is nothing presumptuous about David's faith there's nothing passive about that faith but neither in emphasizing this last thing neither is there anything primitive about

David's view of God's salvation some people would want it that way they're embarrassed by this kind of talk of smashing enemies they want to say well surely that's the kind of barbarous thing that's the kind of primitive talk that the New Testament leaves far behind with Jesus so people sometimes want to soften this and say well this talk of breaking the teeth of the wicked that's just a way of saying God will save you out of the jaws of the wicked and save you from their teeth from a vicious enemy that just won't do will it I mean apart from anything else the image doesn't work does it do you think you're going to smash a lion's teeth by pulling your arm out of its mouth how many surfers have smashed sharks teeth by managing to haul themselves out of the mouths of sharks it's ridiculous and look at the imagery striking enemies on the cheek to strike on the cheek is to give a savage blow to a person's pride and dignity we even have that in our own expression don't we we say that was our right slap in the face no it's plain here what's going on there could be no salvation for

David in his current predicament without public defeat and total defeat of his very real and present enemies who were arrayed against him and all through the whole bible god's word is absolutely as

clear as they ultimate deliverance of god's people comes only through ultimate defeat of all god's enemies and his people's enemies there is no other way that's what god's covenant promise promised right from the very very beginning way back in genesis chapter 3 what's the promise that a human seed will arise from the woman to do what to crush the enemy underfoot that and that alone is how the curse of sin will be reversed in the world and every single victory all the way through the story of the bible points forward to the ultimate victory of every enemy of god's people the great enemies of sin and of guilt and the last great enemy of death itself jesus you see great david's greater son he came at last to destroy the works of the devil says the apostle john he came says paul to the colossians to deliver us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his dear son in whom we have forgiveness of sins but how only he says by disarming powers and authorities by making a public spectacle by shaming them triumphing over them in his cross breaking their teeth striking their cheeks with salvation from the lord and for his people you can't escape that all the way through the bible when you get to the end of the bible in revelation chapter six and seven there's the great chorus exactly from this psalm of all god's people in earth and heaven shouting salvation belongs to our god because they see the destruction and the judgment of all his enemies the great hallelujah chorus that you know from handel's messiah in revelation 19 is the same hallelujah salvation and glory and honor power belong to our god for he has judged the whole earth the city of man every last enemy of god's people and friends that is the grace that is the wonder of the gospel of our salvation and that's what links you and me and links every single christian believer today to

David and to his real experience in this psalm there's nothing primitive about this salvation or about David's faith and trust in god and indeed what the bible shows us always is that it's out of the ashes of all human sin that our god works salvation through the triumph of his grace it was from David's adulterous union that was the cause of all of this pain and anguish that union with Bathsheba that caused all the calamity out of that very a son was born named Solomon and it was through him that god's promise lived on until at last of his seed came the lord jesus christ whose name joshua means salvation he came to destroy forever all his people's enemies and to bring forgiveness of sins to all his own the salvation that belongs to him it's poured out on all who trust in christ so that blessing may be upon them forever so that none can ever destroy or take that away and that's why you can have confidence as a christian today that's why you can have confident faith not to be passive but to rise up to take arms to fight against every enemy not of course any longer with the weapons of earthly warfare we're not fighting for an earthly kingdom in that way that

[36 : 52] David was then but we have the same war cry arise oh lord let your enemies be scattered we have the same promise of god leading the way against enemies without paul tells us we fight not with the weapons of the world not with guns and spears but with weapons of real power with the gospel of god that Paul says destroys destroys every argument that demolishes the strongholds of unbelief and brings every thought captive to obey Jesus Christ we have confident faith in the power of the word of god to bring even hostile enemies captive to the lord jesus christ and so to find the life that belongs and the blessing that belongs to his people and we can fight just as confidently against the enemies within because we have the same weapon of the gospel that we can apply as we cherish it as we trust it in our own lives as a shield of faith as

Paul calls it against the arrows of the evil one that penetrate us and make us so often tempted to despair we can claim confidently with no conceit confidently the righteousness and the peace that no one on this earth can ever rob us of because the victory of the son of God has destroyed all our enemies has broken their teeth has drawn their sting we can live with lives of confident faith yes there will be great conflict make no mistake there will be constant foes right till the end of your Christian walk but we have this great comfort of continuous fellowship of a Lord who is for us and is for us everything that we can't be for ourselves he is our shield he is our glory he lifts up our head and so friends we can have great confidence we we can have faith to march out into enemy territory tomorrow morning sure in the knowledge that his great victory is every victory we need our salvation is certain in our

Lord and our Savior so if your prayer of late perhaps has been like David has been at the beginning of this psalm constantly thinking of the many enemies the many foes the many pressures all around us Lord how big are these battles I'm having to fight day after day Lord how oppressive these enemies are against my innermost soul well remember you can have great confidence not because deliverance is in your hands but precisely because it's in his hands because salvation belongs not

to us but to the Lord and that is what means and guarantees that his blessing will be upon his people all who are his people forever and ever and if you are one of Christ's people then that blessing will be upon you it will be upon you today and tomorrow and every day as you go on trusting him as your savior and you can pray with

David arise oh Lord save me oh my God he's the God who hears and he is the God who will answer you just as he answered him salvation belongs to the Lord and so his blessing will be upon his people let's pray our God and father how we thank you that you indeed are the sovereign Lord of earth and heaven and that everything that we place into your hands is safe and secure and can never be taken away and so Lord we pray that you would help us to have confidence in your gracious sovereign power towards us who believe and that we may therefore go out into the world this coming week whatever stands in front of us whatever you call us to do knowing that you are with us that you are our shield you are our glory and you are the lifter of our head help us we pray for

Jesus sake Amen Amen