

The New and Living Way

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn this morning to our reading, which you'll find in the book of Hebrews. Bob is taking up where he left off some weeks ago with his studies in this long letter, and we've come to Hebrews chapter 10.

It's a long chapter. We're going to read the first half now and the second half after we've sung again. I think the Church of Visitors Bible is page 1006.

And if you don't have one of those, if you have your own Bible, you'll find it after Timothy and Titus. There's the letter of Hebrews.

So let's read now Hebrews 10 verses 1 to 18. And the first part of this chapter rather summarizes much of the argument that, well, whoever it is, the writer has been making up until this point.

And he says, For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, it can never make perfect those who draw near.

[1 : 19] Otherwise, they would not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year, for it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.

In burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.

When he said above, You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings, and burnt offerings and sin offerings, these are offered according to the law, then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will.

He abolishes the first, sacrifices and offerings, in order to establish the second, the will of God. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.

[2 : 34] And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when Christ came, he offered for all time, a single sacrifice for sins.

And he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to this. For after saying, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declare the Lord. I will put my law on their hearts and write them in their minds.

Then he adds, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Well, let's take up our reading again in Hebrews 10 at verse 19. Into your presence you draw us and we come by your grace.

[3 : 52] We come because there is no longer any need for sacrifice, for sin, before we draw into the presence of God. So verse 19 says, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved? By the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace.

For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[5 : 49] But recall the former days, when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle and sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

For yet a little while, and the coming one will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Amen.

[6 : 55] May God bless to us this, his word. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at that passage, and let's have a moment of prayer before we turn to it.

Lord God, as we draw near to you, we pray that you will most graciously draw near to us, that you will open your word to our hearts and minds, and that you will open our hearts and minds to your word.

And this we ask in the name of the living word, the Lord Christ himself. Amen. Amen. It's said that one of the rulers of Egypt ordered the burning of the great library in Alexandria.

Of course, there's Alexandria in Egypt, not the one along the road, which contained a tremendous amount of writing from ancient times, irreplaceable stuff.

And the reason he gave for this act of vandalism was this. The books in the library either contain what's in the Quran, in which case they're irrelevant, or else they contradict the Quran, in which case they're blasphemous and not needed.

[8 : 22] Now, without wishing to burn the Old Testament, it would have to be said that many Christians effectively have that kind of idea about the Old Testament, that either it contains what's already in the New Testament, in which case we don't need it because we've superseded it, or else it actually contradicts the New Testament, in which case we're better without it.

And indeed, sometimes passages like this one in Hebrews are pressed into service for that view. After all, the law is but a shadow of the good things to come, says verse 1, instead of the form of these realities.

It can never make perfect those who draw near. Those of you who know me would not expect me to hold that view at all. It's not whether I hold that view or not that's at all important, it's whether the author of Hebrews holds that view.

And I want to show to you, as we've tried over the rest of the series, he most certainly doesn't. He talks about Jesus as the new and living way in verse 19.

And that's our title for this morning, the new and living way. And the new way is rather like the new covenant. Now, when we talk about the new covenant, I suggested the new covenant stands in relation to the old covenant, the way that a child stands in relation to the grown adult.

[9 : 48] If you look at pictures of children, including yourselves, you can usually see resemblances between the child and the adult. In any case, they're organically related.

Or else, the relationship between sunrise and the full blaze of the sun at Noon, it's an organic relationship. And so the new is not so much a substitute for the old as the full development of the old.

Now, I'm going to be speaking particularly about the second part of the chapter, 19 to 39. But I want to say something about verses 1 to 18 and a word or two about the letter up to this point because it's quite some weeks.

Now, don't worry, I'm not going to expound chapters 1 to 9. Again, I'm simply going to remind you of one or two things. Very briefly, and that's appropriate because our author tells us in chapter 13 he had written only a short letter, which is somewhat amusing when he gives us the length of the letter.

But he's written only a short letter because of the subject. And the subject is this. God has fully, finally spoken in Christ the living word. There is no other revelation to be given.

[11 : 03] We are in the last days when the last word has been spoken, the word Christ Jesus. He is the living word. He's also the living way.

And thus we don't need to approach him through rituals and sacrifices. That is essential that our author has been arguing in chapters 1 to 9.

And now in 10, 1 to 18, he's summing that up. And in particular, of course, this is Christ is the great high priest who in himself embodies all that the ancient priesthood had spoken about.

But just a couple of points about verses 1 to 18. Verse 1, the law is but a shadow. Now the substance replaces the shadow, but the shadow was a genuine shadow.

It was not a misleading shadow. It was a true picture of reality. And here as elsewhere, the author is showing us how if you read the Old Testament, you will see a series of genuine pictures which will lead you to the full light of day.

[12 : 09] Gradually, increasingly, clearly, and with power, you will see these shadows pointed to the substance. And indeed in chapter 11, which we'll look at in a few weeks' time, he's going to be telling us that the faith of the Old Testament was identical to the faith of the New Testament.

By faith, Abel. By faith, Noah. By faith, Moses. They weren't saved by a different Savior. They didn't have a different salvation.

It was Christ, Jesus, who was to come in the last days, who saved them. After all, if Christ can save us, we'll live thousands of years after him. Surely he can save those who lived thousands of years before him.

They didn't see clearly. They saw in the distance, as the chapter 11 says. So the substance replaces the shadow, but the shadows are real shadows.

They're not misleading. They're not the full light, but they are the same kind of light. And John says that in a different way in his Gospel.

[13 : 18] The light that lightens everyone was coming into the world. The second point is, the repeated sacrifices could not take away sin, but they were a true pointer to the sacrifice which did, the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus.

After all, in chapter 11, Abel, we are told, offered a better sacrifice. What does that mean? A sacrifice that pointed to Christ, the once-for-all sacrifice, the one sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world, takes away the sin of all who believe in him.

So, the substance has come, but the shadows were a genuine pointer. The once-for-all sacrifice is the culmination of these repeated sacrifices.

Then he says, therefore, in verse 9, therefore, we can approach God. What does that mean? Notice, first of all, he says, we, he's identifying with the readers.

Now, this letter has been a wonderful blend of encouragement and warning. And we need both, don't we? We need encouragement, otherwise we become discouraged and defeated.

[14 : 36] We also need warning, otherwise we become complacent. And this is what he's continuing to do. So, as the argument develops, he develops in three movements.

It seems to be looking at verses 19 to 39. First of all, he says, come with confidence, verses 19 to 25.

Now, that's a development, really, of an earlier passage, let us come with confidence to the throne of grace because we have a great high priest. That doesn't mean come swaggering to God's presence.

Only by grace can we enter. Only by grace can we stand. We've no intrinsic right to be here.

When I say here, I'm not particularly talking about this gathering, all gatherings of God's people. This is our Father's house. Not the building, not the fellowship we belong to, but all of God's people throughout the ages.

[15 : 36] We come with confidence, but we come with confidence, knowing that it is our Father's house. And the first thing is that no entry signs are removed.

Verse 20, open for us through the curtain. This has been a frequent image throughout the books. Remember, our author is thinking in terms of the old tabernacle and the old temple, the great, heavy, thick curtain which hung between the most holy place and the rest of the sanctuary.

The place that only the high priest was allowed to enter, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement. It must have been a very tense moment when the high priest entered on the Day of Atonement.

Because after all, if you read the book of Leviticus, you find that the high priest's sons, Nathan and Abihu, had been blasted into eternity for entering that place presumptuously.

And if you read the book of Leviticus, it's like a manual of radioactive material. Do not touch. This is dangerous. Do not go beyond this point. You may not think of the book of Leviticus as a manual of radioactive material.

[16 : 49] For many people, it's the deathbed of pious hopes to read the Bible from start to finish. But if you read it with this realization, this is about sinful people approaching the holiness of God.

Everywhere is dangerous. Do not enter. Do not cross this line. Do not touch. When Jesus died, that great thick curtain is torn from top to bottom.

Notice from top to bottom, it's God who tore the curtain. The no entry signs are removed. The do not cross is taken away because the great high priest goes into heaven and opens the way for all his brothers and sisters who will believe in him.

That's why Wesley could sing, Bold I approach the eternal throne. Now that's all you sing. That can be a swaggering thing. But then, and claim the crown. Not claim the crown which is my own, but claim the crown through Christ, my own.

He is the living way. Once again, developing a thought in John's gospel, Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He is the high priest who appears for us in heaven.

[18 : 03] The no entry signs are removed. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. That's how we approach him. But there is also need for sincerity. Verse 22, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Probably think about Psalm 24, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, the one who has clean hands and a pure heart. And probably also thinking of Ezekiel 36, where the blessings of the new covenant are outlined, and he sprinkles his people with pure water.

There's need for sincerity. In other words, we do not come into God's presence to pretend. We do not come into God's presence to show off. We do not come into God's presence to see how wonderful we are.

That's how you discover it. Some people actually don't want God's presence either here or in the new creation. When they discover they have to sing, worthy is the lamb, and what they actually want to sing is worthy am I.

Now, if that's what we want to sing, then we really are in serious trouble, because only by grace can we enter. So, he is, but notice, in case we think this is all up to us, notice what he says at the end of verse 23, or verse 23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, persevere, keep on going, because he who promised is faithful.

[19 : 42] Not you're going to make it by your own faith, but he who promised is faithful. And then in verses 24 and 25, now these words, these you's and we's are plural.

We need to help each other to do so. This is part of what being Christian brothers and sisters means. Now, the do not, meeting together, this word is only ever used elsewhere in the New Testament, in 2 Thessalonians, where it talks about the final gathering of God's people.

Paul says, I wrote to you about the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him as we anticipate the final gathering of God's people.

And we are told to stir up one another to love and good works. This word stir up is a very interesting word. What it actually means is provoke. That's what God's people are to do when they meet.

They are to provoke one another. Now, I know it's all too easy to do that, so it's perfectly easy to be provocative, but there's a particular type of provocation to love and to good works and to encourage one another.

[21 : 01] There is a famous part of the Baye tapestry, which underneath has the caption, the bishop encourages his troops. What the bishop is doing is prodding them back into battle with a spear.

The bishop encourages... Oh, he's not saying, come on, lads, have a cup of tea. He's saying, get back into the fight. We're in a fight. We haven't made it yet. So, provoking one another to love and good works, encouraging one another, which means, in effect, helping one another to run the race.

And Hebrews has a lot to say about this, and in chapter 12, it looks at it from a different angle. Some people want to collapse.

I've heard this said often, that some people want to collapse the whole purpose of meeting into this verse. Not neglecting to meet one another, but encouraging one another.

The only purpose of coming together was to meet people. Now, that is an important dimension of the worship of God's people, the horizontal dimension, if you like, but it's only one.

[22 : 09] And in chapter 12, he's going to add dimensions. You've come to the city of the living God, to the saints, not just where gathered in a particular building, but to those gathered throughout the world, to those now in heaven.

It's a sense of, it's a sense of helping one another to run the race, to keep the faith, to stand firm. So, because, he says, as you see the day drawing near, that fits in once again with the second Thessalonians passage.

This is, we're on a journey, we're on a pilgrimage, and, of course, chapter 11 is going to develop that idea of pilgrimage. So, first of all, approaching, coming by the new and living way, means we come with confidence.

We come with confidence because we come to our Father's house. We come with confidence because he is faithful. But the second movement now, and characteristic of our author, he switches to warning, verses 26 to 31.

Be alert to danger. Now, we've seen this already in Hebrews, in the warning passages, those passages that talks about the danger of apostasy, the danger of falling away.

[23 : 28] A lot of prayers I find very helpful in the prayer book is where we confess our sins and ask forgiveness for negligence and weakness and our own deliberate fault.

Now, in one sense, of course, all sins are our own deliberate fault. But many sins, as you know, are negligence. We are careless. We become complacent. We, or else, weakness.

We really want to do what's right. But we can't do it. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The kind of thing that Paul wrestles with so powerfully at such length in Romans chapter 7 with, you know, that the evil that I don't want to do is what I do and the good I want to do is what I don't do.

This, however, here is not negligence and weakness. This is our own deliberate fault. This is turning away from the living God.

As in, he's talked about this already. And he talks about in chapter 3 an unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

[24 : 39] And he's thinking once again of the Old Testament. Numbers chapter 15 talks about sinning with a high hand, sinning deliberately. Now, the whole point of the sacrifices and offerings were to show there is a way back to God.

there is forgiveness. But, this is the kind of sin which is deliberate and persistent sinning. Proverbs talks about this in chapter 2.

Forsake, forsaking the paths of righteousness, rejoicing in doing evil and delighting in the perversion of the soul. This is walking away from God.

Remember he says, come near, enter. This is doing the opposite. This is walking away. It's not even frequent lapses because frequent lapses can be forgiven if they are repented of.

This is a deliberate turning our back on the living God. And there are two things to notice. First of all, we cannot be forgiven if we reject forgiveness.

[25 : 45] We go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. We have heard that Jesus forgives all sin, that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven.

No one, however, far away, no one who sins however horribly or however respectably is out of the reach of the grace of God.

But what if we reject that grace? What if we basically say, I don't need to be forgiven? Now, if you are worried that you have committed this sin, if you are torturing yourself, that after you are a Christian, you have gone so far away from God, you have committed so many sins, whether they're sins of action or sins of thought or sins of attitude, this passage is not about you.

This passage is because someone who feels like that, obviously, is not walking away from grace. Now, there's a problem there, of course, because obviously such a person hasn't got a true grasp of grace.

But you see what I'm saying? There's a vast difference between someone who feels they have sinned so badly that they cannot be forgiven, and someone who basically says, I don't need to be forgiven. Remember the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

[27 : 14] Please don't take that as meaning a tit-for-tat. God is not saying, unless you forgive, I'm jolly well not going to forgive you. That's not what it's saying.

It's saying something rather different. It's saying, if you don't forgive, you will soon get into the state here so arrogant and self-centered that you won't see the need to receive forgiveness.

Like the man who once said to John Wesley, Wesley, I never forgive. And Wesley replied, well I hope you never sin. You see, forgiveness is at the very heart of the gospel.

Only by grace can we enter. Only by grace can we stand. So this is the kind of sinfulness. This is apostasy. Walking away from God, rejecting the gospel of grace and believing that we'll make it on our own.

The second thing to notice is it is more serious than in the Old Testament. Verses 28 and 29. Anyone who set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

[28 : 23] How much worse punishment do you think? Reserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace.

any idea that the New Testament is less strong on judgment, the Old Testament, surely set aside by this verse.

But what is the point? The point is that since the Son of God has come and full revelation has been given, then that makes us more guilty.

You see, it could be said, well, in the Old Testament times, people might have misunderstood. They might not realize what the sacrifices were about. And there were times during Israel's history when that happened, simply because the priests were neglecting the task of teaching people.

At the very end of the Old Testament, Malachi condemns the priests for two things. First of all, offering corrupt sacrifices, and secondly, for failing to tell people what the sacrifices meant.

[29 : 24] That's one reason why God raised up the prophets to do the job the priests ought to have been doing. That's why people like Isaiah and Amos talk so much about the danger, of offering insincere sacrifices.

It's more severe because the full mercy has been given and rejected. Like the poet who says, I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

We are not the masters of our fate. We are not the captain of our soul. And if we turn away from grace, it's deadly serious. And I use the word deadly advisedly.

It is the denial of the Son of God. Back to chapter one, who has God fully revealed himself in the Son, who made all things and offered himself.

It's a denial of the spirit of grace. grace. And there are echoes. And in verse 30, he quotes from Moses' farewell speech in Deuteronomy 31 and 32, where Moses is talking both about the grace of God and the danger of falling away.

[30 : 32] And that's been a great theme in the letter, the danger of falling away, as the generation did in the desert. We can only be forgiven if we accept the need to be forgiven.

It is a fearful thing, verse 31, to fall into the hands of the living God. I wonder if this is the dimension that we've ignored so often.

And we become almost flippant about God and about his grace. Because remember, grace is at the very heart of the gospel.

To deny grace is to deny gospel. So there's a warning here. First of all, we're told, come with confidence. Secondly, we are warned, it's really opposite, don't walk away.

If you walk away from grace, there is nothing but judgment. That's why it says, verse 28, without mercy. That sounds harsh.

[31 : 32] But then if mercy is rejected, if mercy is spurned, if the blood of the Son of God is trampled underfoot, what other gospel is going to save us?

And now in the final movement, he says, verse 32 to 39, persevere with assurance. Characteristically, our author switches from warning to encouragement.

Here, once again, he is talking about confidence. In verse 35, you have, do not throw away your confidence.

warning, it's still warning, but it is warning with a note of encouragement. Now, there's one or two things to notice here. First of all, the readers have been under severe pressure.

Verse 32, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. The word suffering here, hard struggle, is a word often used in an athletic contest, someone training for a marathon, or something like that.

[32 : 38] And that, of course, points forward to chapter 12, running with perseverance, the race that is set before us. It's a general word for suffering, general word for hardship, reproach, and affliction.

Both their own and others they had shared it with. Now, we know from chapter 12, verse 4, that this was not, this had not amounted to martyrdom or physical persecution.

Verse 4, in your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. But it had been a time of great discouragement, time perhaps of deprivation of material possessions and some loss of property.

Now, it's always a temptation, isn't it, to cling to material possessions, to cling to money. And later on in chapter 8, he's going to say that like Abraham, we look for the city which has foundations.

Now, these passages about persecution in the scripture are difficult ones, aren't they? And particularly when we read horrific stories of what's happening in the Middle East and elsewhere to our brothers and sisters.

[33 : 54] Some of you will read the literature from the Barnabas Trust, and we feel horrified. There's also another feeling creeps in, doesn't it, so often.

Are we proper Christians at all, since we're not suffering in this way? I want to say this. When we stand before the Lord on the last day, the Lord is not going to say to us, how did you handle the persecution I didn't send you?

What he is going to say is, how faithful were you in the circumstances in which I placed you? The Lord knows exactly in his providence and in his grace and his love, how much joy, how much sorrow is needed in each of our lives.

And of course, he dispenses it differently. We've got to remember, of course, there is a suffering that comes not because we are Christian, but because we are human, because we live in a fallen world.

Christians, as well as non-Christians, suffer from this, and this is just that there is common grace, there is common judgment, living in the fallen world. I think we need to remember that for all Christians, life is going to be a hard struggle.

[35 : 10] If you're faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, you won't need to go around looking for persecution. You won't need to go around looking for trouble. Trouble will come, because that is the nature of living for Christ and anticipating the new world to come in a fallen world.

And that is the point of verses 37 and 38, where he quotes once again from the Old Testament, quotation from Isaiah 26, yet a little while, the coming one will come and will not delay.

And from Habakkuk 2, the righteous one shall live by faith. Now, both these prophets are looking to the exile. Isaiah, quite considerably before the exile, is warning the people of the dangers of exile.

Habakkuk, on the very brink of the exile, is making a similar point. Now, for those in the Old Testament times who looked for the Messiah, the time must have seemed endless.

As the long centuries passed, generation after generation passed away without the Messiah coming, it might have seemed sometimes he had come. could it possibly be Abraham?

[36 : 26] Abraham was fallible. Moses, David, all of them were fallible. All of them, as I say, were genuine glimpses of the Messiah. The point he's making here is this.

This has been a common experience of God's people since the world began. It's been a common experience to wait. It's been a common experience to wait for the one who is to come.

Yet a little while, and the coming one will come. There is no possibility that he won't. It's interesting actually, the New Testament tends not to talk about the second coming, but simply the coming.

Because in a very real sense, the first and second comings are part of one great event by which God invaded human history. And when the apostles are encouraging people to keep going, they say, keep going.

Remember what's already happened. That passage in 1 Thessalonians 4, where Paul encourages the believers to wait for the coming of the Lord. He says, we know he is coming because of two things about him that have already happened.

[37 : 35] If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then he will come. It's similar to what the author is saying here. And notice once again, we, in verse 39, we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed.

Although he's warned the readers, he's convinced a real work of grace begun in their lives. That is so much true of us today, isn't it?

A real work of grace done in people's lives. Hardships come in, our own weaknesses come in, the sheer business of living in the world as well as the pressure of being a Christian.

And we need this blend of warning and of encouragement. We're going to sing in a few moments, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

Now that's an experience that comes regularly. What does our author have to say? Our author does not say, you've got to try a bit harder. That's simply discouraging.

[38 : 38] You're trying every bit as hard as you can and nothing seems to be happening. Our author says, and he's going to say this, particularly in chapter 11 and 12, keep looking to the great high priest.

He is already at the throne of God. He's already made it. He completed the race. But he's also alongside to help. And through him, we will finish the race and reach the goal.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we are so fickle, so prone to wander. We are so often sins of negligence and weakness, and yes, our own deliberate fault ambush us.

Sins long forgotten suddenly jump on us unexpectedly, and Satan's fiery darts continually harass us. Help us to look to the great high priest, someone who has run the same race, who is touched by the feeling of our infirmities, looking to him and encouraged by him and strengthened by his spirit.

We ask that indeed we may finish the race for his glory. We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.