

The Meaning of Resurrection

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[0 : 0 0] I'm reading from the Gospel of Mark chapter 15 verse 42 onto chapter 16 verse 8. And when evening had come, since it was the day of preparation that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, brought spices so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on, the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. It was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen.

He is not here. See the place where they laid him, but go. Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. And they went out and fled from the tomb. For trembling and astonishment had seized them.

And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. This is the word of the Lord. Amen.

Let's pray as we start to look at this passage together. Lord, we ask now that you would come and make the resurrection of Jesus Christ real and alive to us, that we would see its truth, that we would see its power. We know now that we need the Spirit to help us read the word rightly. And so we ask for that. I ask Holy Spirit, you would be present with us and give us the eyes of faith. And we pray this now in Jesus' name. Amen.

[2 : 5 6] We are finishing a long series now on Mark's Gospel today with this resurrection story we've just read. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important, it's so critical to think about, it's so paramount. And one of the reasons for that is because we're all going to die.

That's the reason that the resurrection is so powerful, so important. And for most of us, especially our church being on the younger side of things quite often, we think of death more in theory. Death is theoretical. And then one day that the doctor says, close the door, sit down, I've got to talk to you about something serious. And it's then that it hits us that we're going to die. And we have tragedy striking our family or near us or around us and it becomes more and more real. The Bible teaches that the resurrection is a light.

It's the light. It's a light. It's a hope in the midst of darkness. When you're facing something so dark as death itself, the Bible, Christianity comes and says there is a light and it's resurrection. And J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the very first book of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Galadriel, she's this great elf, this queen of the elves really, the lady of the wood. And she gives good gifts to all the members of the party that are traveling to Mordor. And she gives to Frodo a crystal vial. It's a crystal rock and in it is captured starlight. And so it forever will emit starlight. And she says to Frodo, may this be a light to you in dark places when all the other lights go out. Now that's the resurrection. The resurrection is the light when all the other lights have gone out. It's the light in the midst of the darkness. It's the light when you face not only the darkness of physical death, but the darkness of very painful circumstances, the darkness that comes emotionally and spiritually at all different times in your life. The resurrection is the light. It's a light that will never go out. That's a metaphor, light. Another way to say it is it is our hope. It gives you hope in the midst of really hard things.

And so let me just ask you today as we think about this. Is that true for you? Is the resurrection, the light of your life? Is it the vial that will never go out? You know, the light that God has given you in the midst of the darkness. Is that true for you? Is it the heartbeat of your life? Is it your North Star? Mark teaches us here that you can have hope in the resurrection. And the way he focuses us all on that today is he teaches us about hope in the historicity of the resurrection, hope in the meaning and power of the resurrection, and then lastly hope in the grace of the resurrection. So let's think about those three things together for just a few minutes. Okay. First, hope in the historicity. That's one of the big things Mark tries to focus on. So if you read the commentators on this passage, they will all say the same thing, that Mark writes the story of the resurrection in a very objective way. There's a real note of objectivity here. There's a very important book written by a scholar named Richard Balkum some decade ago or so. And he says that when you read the

Gospels, you really have to recover the sense that the Gospels are eyewitness testimony. And when you read an eyewitness testimony, the nature of an eyewitness testimony is that it's asking you to trust it. So when somebody gives a testimony, the quality of your response is completely based on whether or not you trust them. Is that testimony accurate or not? And that's really the only way you can approach a testimony. So if you observe, let's say a car crash and the police come to speak to you about it, you know, there's five different observers and they want to hear your story, your testimony of what happened at the car crash. You give your testimony, you give your account, you say, what do you say? You know, the guy was speeding or he went through the amber light, not the red light or whatever it may be. And the police do not turn around and say, we appreciate that you're in your testimony, you've given us a great mythological legend in order to construct a national and cultural identity. You know, that's not what they say because testimony doesn't work like that. Testimony is not there to give a mythological legend in order to construct a national and cultural identity. Now, lots of people have said that's what the gospels do. They are mythological legends that are there to construct a religious identity. But that's not the category of testimony. And the historians and scholars say, you know, it just doesn't work. It doesn't fit. You can't approach it that way. And that's exactly,

[7 : 44] I think what we see when we look at the text pretty carefully, Mark is very objective. And if you notice just some of the objectivity about it, let me, let me point it out to you.

If you haven't noticed it yet, the time markers, the time markers and the details, he says, verse 42, it's evening. It's the day of preparation. That's the day before the Passover, before the Sabbath. It's the Passover day itself, this day that Jesus died. Verse two, this chapter 16, the Sabbath has now passed. They bring spices. Why? There's a detail there.

Because it was so late in the evening and the Sabbath day starts at sundown on Friday that you're not allowed to anoint a dead body on the Sabbath day. There wasn't enough time. And so the women come back on the Sunday morning to anoint the body because that's the first time it's not the Sabbath. They're allowed to do that in the Jewish law. Important details that Mark gives us. It's evening Friday and then it's the third day, it's sunrise on Sunday morning in verse two. Now, this is important just to say that Mark time stamps everything in this passage. Sometimes people, especially in the last two centuries have come and said, you know, the resurrection is something that's just existential. It's a feeling. It's a spirituality.

You know, it's a way of being. It's something not that happens outside of you, but something that happens in your heart. And when you read the gospels and you see the objectivity, you can't do that. Mark won't let you say that. Mark is saying, no, this was what happened on the Friday and then it was Sunday morning and he's time stamp. He's saying his claim, his testimony is that this is a space time reality, not a mere spiritual experience.

There's something more going on here. He keeps going. One of the most notable features of the objectivity that everybody has pointed out that's read this gospel is that the eye witnesses, the primary eye witnesses are women. And so it features that verse 47 down and when the three women come to the empty tomb. And that's very important because typically, according to the law at the time, in most nations, in fact, women were not allowed to testify in the court of law. And it's been pointed out so many times how important it is to note that it's women that are the eye witnesses of the resurrection. And one scholar says it like this, had the early Christians sought to fabricate the resurrection story, the testimony of women in all four gospels was no way to go about it. 200 years later, two centuries later, there is a debate between a philosopher, a polytheist philosopher named Celsus, and an early Christian named Origen. And Celsus tells Origen, he won't believe in the resurrection because he calls it quote, the gossip of the women about the empty tomb.

[10 : 40] So he won't listen to it because he says the gospel say it was women that saw it. And you see in the midst of this culture of patriarchy, how surprising it is if you're trying to fabricate a legend in the midst of a culture that won't allow women to give testimony in court to put women as the primary eye witnesses. You know, what's the reason? It's because that's exactly what happened. That's exactly what happened. And so this scholar, James Edwards, says, the testimony of the women gives the highest degree of probability of the truth of this story. Now notice, it's not all positive either. He doesn't say complete positive things about the women who saw. He says that at the cross, they were standing at a distance. They were afraid. He says when the angel told them, when the angel told them, go and tell all the disciples what you've seen, it says they didn't go and do it. They were too afraid to do it. It's not all positive. It's not just giving you a positive account of the women.

It's just telling you what happened. It's just complete objectivity. Verse five, when the women walk into the tomb looking for Jesus to put spices on his body, there's this little detail. The young man, the angel was seated on the right side. If you're writing a legend, you don't say things like that. You say, you know, behold, they went into the tomb and there was the angel glowing in light. And he was also seated on the right side, not the left side. You don't add that. You know, that's a report. That's a testimony. This is an objective account. The last thing I'll mention is just the ending here. Verse eight, Mark has been giving this account of the Son of God, King of creation, come to save the world, and how does he end his gospel? Verse eight, they went out and fled from the tomb, trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they didn't say anything to anybody because they were afraid. That's the end of the story. I'll just say a little bit. In your Bible, you might have in brackets verses nine to 20, a longer ending. So we've got over 5,000 manuscripts of the Bible from the first entry till now, and we're overly certain that the text that we have is the text that was written. This is one of the only places where there's a question as to whether these verses are also part of the gospel or not, verses nine to 20, if you have that in your Bible. Almost certainly they were not. They were very probably written in the second century, and so they put them in brackets there. They're not part of the earliest manuscripts that we have. I think that the reason somebody went and added verses nine to 20 is because they thought there's no way verse eight could be the ending. There has to be some more wrapping things up, drawing things to a conclusion, but it makes sense that it's the ending if you realize this is reporter testimony. He's ending with the last thing he was given by these women that were there. It's objective. Now, let me just say one more thing, and that's that it could be the case that you say, okay, okay, objective eyewitness testimony, but that's not my problem. The thing I struggle with, the thing we might struggle with as modern people is science. It doesn't really matter to me to what degree it's eyewitness testimony because I know, because of the enlightenment, because of the scientific method, because of the objectivity of science. David Hume right out here on the

Royal Mile, and Charles Darwin who studied here for a time, and all the way to Richard Dawkins. All these people have come and they've helped us see what? They've helped us see that dead bodies do not come back to life. Let me just say that the people in the first century understood pretty well before the enlightenment that dead bodies do not come back to life. We did, you know, the scientific method has not taken us very much further in knowing that dead people don't come back to life. Right? Exactly. Eureka, the point.

Right? That's the point. That's why this was written about, because everybody already knew dead bodies don't come back to life. So let me just ask you today, will you find hope today? Will you find light? Not just in a feeling, not just in a spirituality, but in the fact that this man rose from the dead in space and time. You know, one day, someday in our lives, all the lights are going to go out. Yeah? And we will face the circumstances of emotional darkness, spiritual darkness, maybe at times, physical darkness for sure.

We need a historical savior, not just a feeling. And that's exactly what we have here. Secondly, but what does it mean? Okay, it happened in history, yes. What does it mean for you today?

[15 : 32] What is the power? There's real hope when you just look at what the resurrection means. Now let me say that if we were to try to say what does the resurrection mean, it would be a very long list. We'd be here all day together. And there are depths, you know, there are depths about the meaning of the resurrection that I do not know. I don't think we know.

Depths that we will only find out in the next life. But let me just give you two that do show up right in Mark's language here, this report that we're given. The first one is in verse six. It's from the mouth of the angel. The angel says, you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. Now that's the first thing. The first thing to say is that the angel says he has risen. He is not here. Actually, the Greek text is a little more precise. It's a passive tense. So it very literally says he was raised.

He is not here. Now this is a very important moment because this moment is the first announcement in human history of the gospel after it has been fully accomplished. This is the first moment where somebody pronounces the gospel, the gospel finish, the gospel complete redemption accomplished as we often say. He says, you know, you, the three women that came, the three Mary's, you came to find him and you came to find him dead. You came to find him to put spices on his dead body. But I'm here to say he was raised by God from the dead.

And the reason that's so important is because that is the gospel. What is the gospel? The Christian gospel, unlike any other message in world history, is good news, not good advice.

The gospel is a pronouncement. The gospel is an exclamation of what's happened already. The gospel is saying this is what God did for you, not this is what you can do for him.

[17 : 35] The gospel never calls you to say perform and maybe I'll let you into the kingdom. The gospel, the Christian gospel says God came ever before you thought about it and did something.

Here we have it. The first pronouncement of the gospel. He was raised. God did it all. He did it. And it's more like, we might say it's the gospel is more like reading the newspaper than reading atomic habits or 12 rules for life or deep work or something like that.

The great productivity books of our time. You know, it's not a self-help book. It's not a way to become better. The gospel is more like opening the newspaper and just saying, look what God did. He's already done it. He did it for you. It means that the Christian gospel is not based on your performance. Now, what that says to you today is first, when you encounter the resurrection, there's really an invitation just to start by being silent and listening and just hear the pronouncement. He was raised. God did it. It's done. It's for you. And the other thing that that means is the gospel, the resurrection, all that it means doesn't actually first depend on the way we feel about it. So the gospel's power is not found in the way we feel about it. The gospel's power is found in what God has already done in history. And so we come to the light of the resurrection and we say it is the gospel, the good news salvation is not dependent on me. That's the first word of the gospel and I can rest in that. Now secondly, how so? What exactly does it mean that God has acted in history for you? What exactly? And we get this from the second word that the angel says. He says, verse seven, Jesus is going before you and you will see him. Now, what is that kind of language? It's the language of the meaning of the gospel, the meaning of the good news. What does he say? He is going before you. He's traveling before you. This is the language of forging a path, of making a road away. He has gone before you and he's made a road for you. That's the meaning of the gospel. I don't know. I grew up in the southern U.S. in Mississippi and there I spent a lot of time in the woods, a lot of time in the forest. And when I was small, I remember maybe you've had this experience that we would be deep, deep in the back country, if you might say. And we would come upon a thicket, thorns, thistles, brambles. We'd come upon a big patch of bamboo and my dad would be there and my dad would, I mean, he would trailblaze the bamboo. He would just push it over and it was so that my little self could pass behind him. And this is exactly what the angel is saying. He's saying, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a path, a road that's been paved for you and you follow right behind him. It's a road of redemption. What's the road? The road is movement from slavery to emancipation. It's a movement from debt to freedom. That's the road that he's paved for us. And here's the big idea.

Notice how to explain it. When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are united to him all the way. Meaning that when he died, it's as if you died. And when he was raised from the dead, it's as if you already have been raised from the dead. He's made a road for you. You're walking down the road. He's already walked down. He died, you died.

He was raised, you're raised. He got what you deserve, so you get what he deserves. He got your sin and death, you get his life and light. That's the road that you're walking down.

[21 : 29] That's the road that he's pushed over for you in the middle of the forest. He took your debt, you get his life. It's called the Great Exchange. It doesn't just work in the cross.

It's also fundamental to the resurrection. In other words, without the resurrection, there is no gospel. Because in the resurrection, it's not just that he's taken away your sin, it's that he gives you his life. That's what takes place in his resurrection life. Now, let me try to explain that a little more. The best illustration I've ever heard for this, and no illustration, by the way, is perfect. And this one's sure not, but it's helpful, I think. If you're married, if you get married, sometimes what happens is you get a joint credit card together. You have a credit card. You shared the account. And maybe you have all your financial stuff now in this 2024 that we live in on your phone.

And every time your spouse purchases something, it dings on your phone, right? And so you're there. This could be a man. This could be a woman. It works in every direction. You see, ding, Amazon, Amazon, Amazon. And maybe this happens for a long time and you don't have the money to pay the credit card off. And eventually the debt collector comes to your house and says, you owe a lot of money. And what do you say? You say, I never spent a penny of that. I haven't purchased a single thing. And what is the debt collector going to say? It doesn't matter. You are so legally connected. You are so legally bonded together like you're in covenant. You are. That everything that the one does applies to you. And everything that you do applies to the other. And that's exactly what's taking place in the gospel.

When Jesus Christ goes to the cross, God the Father says, you are so legally connected to Christ, covenantally connected to Christ. We call that forensic connection. You're so connected that everything that's true of you becomes true of him on the cross. That's the darkness of Good Friday. And everything that's true of him becomes the light of resurrection Sunday for you. You see, why was Jesus raised from the dead? Why? And the answer is because he deserved to be. You see, when he took on our sin at the cross and he went down into the depths of darkness, because he is God, because he is righteous, he actually did pay for human sin. Justice was satisfied. You know, if you go to prison and you've done your whole sentence, they release you, don't they? Because you have paid the debt. The justice has been fulfilled. Jesus Christ went to the cross on our behalf and really did fulfill the justice that we deserve. And so on the third day when he's raised from the dead, it is because he deserves it. He deserves it. He's righteous. He's good. He's God himself.

He doesn't deserve to be dead. He deserves to be alive. You see, when he goes to the cross, he takes what you deserve, death and justice. And because he satisfies that, on the third day, he's raised from the dead. The punishment's over. He deserves to be alive.

[24 : 49] He's righteous. He's good. And in that moment, you get what he deserves. He gets what you deserve at the cross. You get what he deserves in the resurrection. Let me say it like this.

You know, the angel says here, you will see him. He's trying to help you to see the positive, the great blessing of the resurrection. The gospel is not just you're a sinner and Jesus Christ has died for your sins. No. That's the starting point. But it keeps going. It doesn't stop there. That is good news. Jesus Christ has paid for all of our injustices.

And let me say it like this. Imagine you are the one that goes to prison. And you had a big charge against you. You're going to be there a long time. But then all of a sudden, they come in and the judge releases you and they tell you, somebody else has taken your punishment. Somebody else wanted to satisfy the just requirement of the court for you.

And so you've been released. Okay, that's good news. That's good news. Your big problem is dealt with except the gospel says a lot more than that. The gospel says, and we want to give you, you know, in the States, we want to lay on your neck the congressional medal of honor. We want to give you the George Cross medallion. We want to give you the Nobel Peace Prize. It'd be more like that. That's the gospel. It's yet you've been released from your debt from your sin. And now God wants to put over your neck the Nobel Peace Prize.

He wants to lavish you with a gift that you don't deserve. And the gift you don't deserve is the very life of Jesus Christ that he deserves. It's more than just being forgiven.

[26 : 47] It's that God wants to throw around your neck a garnish. He wants to crown you. He wants to give you a home, a feast and a family. That's resurrection life. It's exactly what Jesus deserves. You don't deserve it, but you get it as a gift. That's the message of the gospel. That's the good news. It's the hope, ultimately, if we could say it one word of joy. Now lastly, that leads us then to say, okay, what can I do with this today?

There's hope in the resurrection and the grace of discipleship that's being offered. There's a call here, an invitation in Mark's gospel at the very end just to follow Jesus and to receive this blessing, forgiveness and life. And the real focus of how Mark tries to get us to see that and do that is by looking at these women. Very important.

Mark's focus is that we would learn from the discipleship the way these women follow Jesus here at the very end of the passage. There are three Marys, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Salome, very likely the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. And we're told here that they were at the cross to the bitter end, but they also stood a distance away. They followed Jesus all the way and yet they were very afraid of the moment.

Very fearful, they didn't understand it. And then it says that they're the first people to come to the tomb on Sunday morning. Now Mark, if you've been with us the past year and a half really through Mark's gospel, you'll remember that one of Mark's most important focuses is on unnamed women all throughout the gospel. Almost always when Mark mentions women, he does not name them. And the big emphasis he gives on these unnamed women throughout the gospel is that they are the model of discipleship in Mark's gospel. And so you might remember the unnamed woman that pours wildly expensive oil on Jesus' body to anoint him in Bethany.

You might remember the poor widow unnamed that gives her very last penny to serve the Lord. And Jesus says, look at her, that's faith, that's discipleship. You might remember the woman with the hemorrhage of blood who teaches the local head of the synagogue, gyrus, what it means to have faith. You might remember the Syrophenician woman who grabs the robe of Jesus and falls at his feet. She was a polytheist before, but she sees him and she says, you can heal my little girl that's dying. And every single time Mark goes out of his way to say, that's faith, that's discipleship. At the bitter end, it's the women that are there.

[29 : 29] They're afraid. They don't exactly know what to think. They're bewildered, but they're there. And Mark points us to that. Now, it's very clear that Mark is trying to point to us.

The men who would become apostles ran away, except for John, we learn in the other gospel, and the women stayed. They stuck by his side. The men were hiding, and the women were right here.

But look, let me just draw out a few things he's teaching us about discipleship and we'll finish. The call of the resurrection, the fact of the resurrection is the call to follow Jesus, to receive justification, forgiveness of sin, to receive the blessing of his light, his life in every way. And how does it come to us in Mark? It comes to us through these women, and we're told first, they had lots of fear here. That's really highlighted. They were very afraid.

They stood at a distance from the cross. When the angel says, go and tell the gospel, it says that they were too afraid to speak. They were silent at the very end. And I think the first thing that Mark's trying to get us to see again is this.

If you want to come and follow Jesus Christ today, the King of heaven and earth, the Lord of the resurrection, you've got to see that the resurrection is really very objective. It says, you are saved, you are saved today, not by the quality of your faith. You might have a very fearful faith.

[30 : 57] You are not saved by the quality of your faith. No, no, you are saved by the object of your faith, the man himself, Jesus Christ, the God of the resurrection. And when you see that, that it's not your performance, the very next step that happens is you start to move in your Christian life from fearfulness to fearlessness.

You start to take steps of growth. Ephesians 4 says, because of the resurrection, you can actually grow in spiritual maturity. And you know that we know by tradition and by the rest of the New Testament that these women that were afraid became fearless.

In so many ways, we know that the apostles that were hiding away would later give their lives for the one that gave his life for them. In other words, the resurrection actually has the power to change your life right now. You know, you might come today and say, I'm afraid of physical death. Yeah? Are you afraid to die? And the resurrection says that you can face that fear and grow in confidence that God really will raise your body from the dead and you will live. And you might come today and say, you know, I'm afraid, I'm not afraid of the things of the body, I'm afraid of the failures of my past. I'm afraid to follow Jesus because I'm afraid of being exposed deep down to really look and say, I know I've got guilt, I've got shame, I've got things in my past I don't know I can be forgiven for. And do you know what? When Jesus walked out of the tomb, the light of life pronounces over you that you get everything he is.

Meaning you're clean, you're washed, you're not in the darkness, you're in the light. It doesn't matter what people around you say, you're forgiven, fully and forever. Are you afraid today? You might be afraid today of circumstances of loss, circumstances of disappointment, circumstances of not ever achieving the things you want from this life. And do you know that the resurrection power is to come to you and say, you know, you're going to get the Nobel Peace Prize.

You know, God's going to come and lavish you with every fulfillment you've ever longed for. That's the promise of the resurrection. And so I just want to close with this. This is striking, the very last thing. This little word rocks me at the end of this passage. I hope you'll find help in it. At the very end, the angel says to the women, but go, tell the disciples, and then there's that one word, and Peter. Now, Peter was the primary eye witness for Mark's gospel.

[33 : 44] And at the very end, the angel says very specifically, go, tell the disciples who are all hiding away, scared. He has risen and he's made the way for you in the midst of your fear.

And tell Peter too. Why? Why does he point out Peter? You know, what he's saying is, you know, Peter, this chairman in a way of the disciples, he betrayed, he was the traitor. He committed treason. You know, these women are a model of faithful discipleship. Peter isn't. And the angel goes out of his way to say, the gospel is for him too. It's for the traitor. It's for the one who left Jesus to die by himself. He goes out of his way to say, the final word, Peter, that you will hear in this life is not, you are a man of shame. The final word you're going to hear, because of the resurrection, is come and eat with me. And so at the very end of the gospel, Jesus invites Peter to eat with him. You could be a very faithful disciple. You could be a very poor disciple.

It's not the quality of your faith that saves you. It's the object. It's the gospel. It's the grace of discipleship. It's the good news. And so let me say that the word of the resurrection today, the last sentence, is not shame upon you. No, Peter, no friend. Instead, the word of the gospel, the word of the resurrection is, God says today, come and eat with me. Come and eat with me, no matter what. Let's do that. Let's pray together. Lord, we come to dine with you now at the Lord's table. And we thank you. We thank you for the power of the gospel. We thank you that the gospel of grace is for big sinners like us. And we ask now that you would help us to see it, that we would really know the depths of our heart, the condition of our soul, that we have committed so many injustices in this world, small and big, and we're in need of redemption. So we thank you for Redemption Road, for the road of Christ, for the one who stood in our place. I just pray now that somebody today here would be moved to see the power of the resurrection for the first time and believe it and take up the call to discipleship. I pray that many would have their path in following you down that red strength and strength and this morning,

Lord, by the light of the resurrection. So we pray that now and we pray it in Christ's name. Amen.