

2 Samuel 16, Solid hope for scary times

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[0 : 0 0] So I'm going to read for us from 2 Samuel chapter 16, 2 Samuel chapter 16. When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him.

He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with 200 loaves of bread, 100 cakes of raisins, 100 cakes of figs and a skin of wine. The king asked Ziba, why have you brought these?

Ziba answered, the donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who have become exhausted in the wilderness. The king then asked, where is your master's grandson?

Ziba said to him, he is staying in Jerusalem because he thinks today the Israelites will restore to me my grandfather's kingdom. Then the king said to Ziba, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.

I humbly bow, Ziba said. May I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king. As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there.

[1 : 1 1] His name was Shimei, the son of Gerah, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left.

As he cursed, Shimei said, get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel. The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned.

The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer. Then Abishai, the son of Zariah, said to the king, why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?

Let me go over and cut off his head. But the king said, what does this have to do with you, sons of Zariah? If he's cursing because the Lord said to him, curse David, who can ask, why do you do this?

David then said to Abishai and all his officials, my son, my own flesh and blood is trying to kill me. How much more than this Benjamite? Leave him alone. Let him curse, for the Lord has told him to.

[2 : 1 1] It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of this curse today. So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.

The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination, exhausted. And there he refreshed himself. Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem and Ahithophel was with them.

Then Hushai, the archite, David's confidant, went to Absalom and said to him, long live the king, long live the king. Absalom said to Hushai, say, this is the love you show to your friend.

If he is your friend, why didn't you go with him? Hushai said to Absalom, no, the one chosen by the Lord, by these people and by all the men of Israel, his I will be and I will remain with him.

Furthermore, whom shall I serve? Should I not serve the son just as I served your father? So I will serve you. Absalom said to Ahithophel, give us your advice.

[3 : 16] What should we do? Ahithophel answered, sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute.

So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof and he slept with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. Now, in those days, the advice of Ahithophel was like that of one who inquires of God.

That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel's advice. Well, let's pray as we come to look at God's word together. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come this morning as people who are hungry, not just for our daily bread, but hungry for the bread and food of your word.

Our souls are hungry to hear of the living God. Please, we pray, speak to us by your spirit. Be at work in me, in all of us as we listen, that you might do your work for your glory amongst us as we listen to your word.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, like I said, as I started the reading, we've been looking at 2 Samuel together as a church since about Easter.

[4 : 35] And for the last couple of weeks, we have been looking at this betrayal by David's son, Absalom. It is, if you like, the worst kind of betrayal.

You know, if you think about all the different kinds of ways that someone can be betrayed, this is on the very heavy end of it, isn't it? A massive scale. It involves lots of people. David loses his kingdom.

He loses his palace. He loses his wives. He loses his home. He loses his trusted advisors. And he leaves Jerusalem, as we saw last time, weeping and defeated as Absalom rides into the city crowned in glory.

I wonder, though, and this is where we're going to come to this morning, if one of the most complex parts of this betrayal story, and really, I think of every betrayal story, is that even while this comes out of the blue, even while it's disproportionate and wicked, even while it hurts David intensely, still the backdrop to 2 Samuel 16 is not so much David's innocence as David's guilt, particularly his adultery with Bathsheba, then the murder of Uriah the Hittite, followed then by a failure to administer justice against his son Amnon, who raped his sister Tamar, and then the weakness in dealing with Absalom, who then killed Amnon.

You can listen to this. Listen to what Nathan the prophet said way back in chapter 12 after David had committed adultery, and Nathan comes to confront him. He says this.

[6 : 06] He says, This is what the Lord says. Out of your own household, I will bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes, I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight.

You did it in secret, but he will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel. So here's the complexity of 2 Samuel chapter 16, if you like, is that while David is on the receiving end of Absalom's betrayal and wickedness, while it's undeserved, still there are things that David has done that he should not have done, which have contributed to the situation he finds himself in.

Now, in a way, I want to suggest to you that, in a sense, all of our experiences of betrayal are like that. They are more complex than perhaps we first imagine. Perhaps you find yourself this morning in similar shoes to David.

I mean, I doubt that you've lost a kingdom and a palace. You might have done. If you have, I'll speak to you afterwards, please. But you might find yourself in a similar situation to David, that you feel like you have been betrayed, abandoned by a friend, perhaps, been the subject of false accusations at work or by a family member.

Perhaps you've been betrayed by a husband or a wife who turned out to have a secret life you knew nothing about. And the complexity of all that is not just the immediate pain and confusion that comes with it.

[7 : 33] It comes also with it, doesn't it, if you're honest. It comes with a whole load of if-onlys, doesn't it? If only I'd not done that. If only I'd said that. If only I'd not been on the roof that day and seen Bathsheba.

If only I hadn't sent Uriah the Hittite back with that note. And perhaps that's how we expect to hear David speaking and thinking as we look at this chapter and going through those if-onlys.

You know, if only I'd not been such a fool or such a jerk. Why did I do it? But actually the surprise is that he doesn't speak like that in 2 Samuel chapter 16.

In fact, it seems as though David has a different answer to his experience of betrayal and to his own contribution to that betrayal other than a whole list of if-onlys. And why did I do it?

Instead, he seems to have an answer that doesn't come from the inside of his own if-onlys, but an answer that comes from the outside, from something that God has done and that God alone is able to do, which actually God has done and provides the answer for David's experience of betrayal.

[8 : 42] And I want us to see that together in 2 Samuel chapter 16. But what I want us to do first is get the story straight in our minds. So I know that some of you are well familiar with 2 Samuel and you're like, Oh, Steve, why are you doing this?

But others of us don't know 2 Samuel so well and maybe you're just dropping into the series today. So let me try and explain what's going on. And really, this chapter is kind of grouped around the encounters with three different traitors, three different people who are like twisting the knife in David's back.

The first is Ziba in verses 1 to 4. Now, it might, as you listen to it, seem kind of cruel to call Ziba a traitor. After all, he's turning up with food and donkeys and supplies for the runaway David and for his men to eat.

But if you read the account carefully in the context of the rest of 2 Samuel, you'll realize that Ziba isn't really who he claims to be. So what's going on here? Well, in verse 2, David says, Why have you brought all this stuff to me?

This is a bit weird. Ziba, why are you doing this? And then in verse 3, David asks him, Why is Mephibosheth not with you? In case you don't know this, Ziba was a servant of Saul.

[9 : 52] And for the sake of David's promise to Saul's son Jonathan, David had taken Jonathan's son Mephibosheth into his care and appointed Ziba to look after him.

Mephibosheth was crippled in the feet and Ziba was to look after him and farm his land and provide for him, while Mephibosheth was to eat at David's table in the palace. And Ziba had obviously done a great job of farming Mephibosheth's land and had brought the produce for David and his people to eat on his way.

But he had come without the person who he had been entrusted to their care, without Mephibosheth. And Ziba says that Mephibosheth has stayed back in Jerusalem because Mephibosheth is hoping he's going to get his kingdom back.

That's what Ziba says at least. But really, all of that is a show. Ziba is actually playing David. So notice he doesn't go with David at all. He stays where he is.

And in chapter 19, Mephibosheth tells David that Ziba actually abandoned him, which seems like a more likely story than the one that Ziba is telling. But if you want to know what Ziba is really interested in, just look at the end of verse 4.

[10 : 57] He says, I humbly bow, Ziba said. May I found favor, charm or popularity in your eyes, my lord the king. Here's the point. Ziba is really interested in himself.

He's giving David a gift. What he really wants is David to be nice to him. That's what he really wants. He wants David's favor. Just in case David ends up returning as king.

But he's not throwing his lot in with David because he's not quite sure whether Absalom might win. So he's just hedging his bets a little bit. The second traitor is more obvious. It's the guy Shimei in verses 5 to 14.

He's introduced as a member of the household of Saul, a Benjamite. And he is sure that David's going into exile is God paying him back for taking the kingdom from Saul. Ha ha, says Shimei.

You're getting what you deserve. You stole the kingdom from Saul. Now it's been stolen from you. Look at how he puts it in verse 7. As he cursed, Shimei said, Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel.

[11 : 54] The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you were a murderer.

David is a murderer, but he actually didn't murder people in the household of Saul, did he? It's not just words that Shimei throws, though, does it? He's lobbing stones and throwing dirt as well.

So much so that Abishai wants to take off his head. Such a kind of Iron Age response, isn't it? Can I just go and chop his head off? Am I allowed to do that? David says, no, don't do that.

Don't do that. I mean, it's a fair point, isn't it? I mean, who is Shimei to insult the king like that? But David says, listen, I've got bigger problems than Shimei.

Absalom is against me. He's trying to kill me and take over my kingdom. I'm not worried about a few names and a few pebbles. If you're on the run for your life, you're not worried about getting dirty from a raving madman on the side of a hill.

[12 : 51] The final traitor is Ahithophel in verses 15 to 23. Here, if you like, the camera's swung from where David is with his people back into Jerusalem and to Absalom and to Absalom's arrival in the city.

First, we meet Hushai, who you might remember from last week, is David's friend who David has sent back to Jerusalem to try and kind of confuse Absalom about what to do.

And we'll find out next week about how he does that. It's funny, though, isn't it? If you know that Hushai is a spy, which we know, don't we, as we read it, it sounds funny, his comments to Absalom.

Look at verse 16. Hushai, the archite, David's confidant, went to Absalom and said, long live the king, long live the king. I wonder who Hushai was actually thinking about when he said that.

Was he really thinking about Absalom or was he thinking about David? Absalom said to Hushai, so this is the love you show to your friend. If he is your friend, why don't you go with him? Hushai said to Absalom, no, the one chosen by the Lord, David, and by these people and by all the men of Israel.

[13 : 51] His I will be and I will remain with him. Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son just as I served your father? So I will serve you. Actually, though, I am still really serving David.

Anyway, that's loyal Hushai, but really the focus here is on what Ahithophel advises Absalom. So you might remember that David has left behind 10 of his concubines, his wives in the palace.

And Ahithophel suggests that Absalom makes it very clear to all of Israel, listen, this is no joke. This rebellion is a real rebellion. My betrayal of David is a deep betrayal. So he takes his wives on Ahithophel's advice, on a tent on the roof of the palace, and has sex with them in a very public way.

He does to David what David did to Uriah the Hittite, but he does it in public just like Nathan promised in chapter 12, breaking not only the commandment on adultery, but specifically breaking the law regarding his father's wives, and deliberately making himself obnoxious.

I think it's probably an understatement, isn't it, to David. So Ahithophel, David's one-time trusted advisor, as you find out in the last verse of the chapter, turns out to become a treacherous backstabber, just like Absalom.

[15 : 02] There's no going back now for Absalom, no peaceful way out of this. Now, those are the three traitors on whom this whole story hangs, but I want to show you this great truth that David is holding onto in the midst of it.

So notice first the repetition of the word curse. Shimei curses David in verse 5. We're told in verse 7 again that Shimei cursed.

Abishai is asking why this dead dog should be allowed to curse in verse 9. And in verses 10 to 12, David himself replies using the word curse four times, before in verse 13, the writer tells us again that Shimei cursed David as he went.

Now, you might just think this is bad English or bad Hebrew or whatever by just repeating the same word over and over again, but I think the writer is wanting us to pick up on something. Curse, curse, curse, curse.

So Shimei claims directly in verse 7 that God is cursing David. David acknowledges that that might indeed be the case in verses 10 to 11. And in a way, having read to this point, we know that that's at least in part what is happening here.

[16 : 06] In these events, David is experiencing being cursed by God. Not so much because he's a man of blood in the way that Shimei thinks, but because he's a man of adultery and murder. And like we said at the beginning, the complexity of all of what's going on here is that really this is an outworking of the events of David's life.

This is because of what David did, that this is happening. And God is following through on what he said would happen, right up to the graphic horrors of Absalom on the roof with David's wives. Now, none of that sounds very promising, does it?

But look again at verse 12, and let me try and show you exactly what's going on. Look at verse 12, let me read it to you again. It may be, says David, that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today.

What does David mean? Well, surprisingly, the focus here doesn't seem to be on the wrong being done to David by Shimei or even by Absalom. Instead, the problem is what the writer calls his misery, David's misery.

Literally, his affliction or even his guilt. And what is that affliction? Like we said, it's the fulfillment of the words of Nathan the prophet in chapter 12. What's happening here is what Nathan said would happen as a result of David's sin.

[17 : 16] David here is being afflicted by his sinfulness. His circumstances are the affliction of his sinfulness. He's experiencing that. And that, like we said at the beginning, is the complexity of betrayal.

But verse 12 doesn't leave it there, it carries on, does he? Because he says that he hopes, he hopes that in the midst of his affliction, in the midst of his guilt, he has a hope.

What is it? Look again at the verse. Here's the hope. That God can still choose to show him kindness or goodness or what the NIV calls covenant blessing. A blessing, given what has happened, which would be undeserved by David.

David, which would wipe out Shimei's curses. In other words, verse 12 is saying something like this. It's astounding when you think of it. It is saying that the Lord will look on my guilt and give me blessing instead.

That's the astounding claim of David in verse 12. Just ponder what David is saying here. Notice that even as everything in his life is falling apart, even as these three treacherous men are twisting Absalom's knife in his back, even as that comes in part, at least as a result of his own sin, David is holding on, not to any kind of wishful, like, oh, I wish I had not done that.

[18 : 29] I wish I had not sinned. He's not holding on to that idea. Instead, he is holding on to this idea that his God, the God of the Bible, is able to take curses that he deserves even, and the ones he doesn't deserve, all of that affliction, and turn it into blessing, kindness, covenant blessings.

In other words, this is David's bedrock go-to truth in the midst of betrayal. It's an action of God that wipes out guilt. He's saying, in effect, let Shimei throw his stones.

Let him throw his dirt. Let him throw his insults at me, because I know that my God loves me, and even though I deserve everything that I'm getting right now, still I know my God will be kind to me in the end, because my God does not treat me as my sins deserve.

Friends, this is the doctrine of justification. By faith, here in the Old Testament. It's the great truth, right at the center of the scriptures, that God can take wicked, hell-deserving sinners, like David, like you and me, in the midst of our sin, even with our sin, and through an action of his own that we don't deserve, that we could not perform ourselves, he is able to declare us not guilty, free, justified.

Now, notice that David says in verse 12, it may be that the Lord will do this. In other words, David knows enough of his God to know that this is how he works, even though he can't articulate it clearly.

[20 : 12] But of course, you and I know more than David, don't you? We've read the whole book, right? We know the end from the beginning. We know where the Bible goes, don't we? We know that God's eternal king is not David, but Jesus Christ.

We know that Jesus is history's very only innocent sufferer. No one else has suffered innocently except for Jesus Christ. He, Jesus on the cross, is literally taking a betrayal that he does not deserve in any way, in order to give us a righteousness that we don't deserve in any way.

Cursed Christ, righteous sinner. So that in the language of our passage here, God might turn our guilt, our affliction into blessing, not with a magic wand, not by ignoring reality, not by compromising justice, but by taking the punishment on himself, dying in our place on the cross, bearing the weight of guilt and shame, so that you and I can be forgiven.

Justified, though afflicted and cursed, now declared not guilty. I want just to pause here and stay down for a moment, because I want you to notice just how unique this is.

I don't know whether you could imagine, this is a slight stretch of our imaginations, but if you imagine David walking into a counsellor's room somewhere in London today, and he walks in and he tells him the story of what's been happening in 2 Samuel chapter 15 and 16, he said, oh, you'll never believe what's happening to me.

[21 : 42] My son, my eldest son, he's turned on me. He's got everybody to hate me. He's taken my most trusted advisors. He wrestled 200 people from the palace and took them against their will, but has now turned them on me.

I've had to walk out of my palace. I've had to leave my wives behind. I've walked up the hill weeping, barefoot, head covered. What do you think the counsellor would say?

David carries on. Do you know what? I kind of think I deserved it, though, in a way. See, this is what I did. I saw this beautiful woman, Bathsheba, really wanted her, so I took her, and she got pregnant, and so I killed her husband.

Now she's my wife. What do you think the counsellor's going to say? Oh, David, just forget these if-lys, David. You know, you were just being authentic.

You were just being yourself. You were just following your desires. That's what you've got to do in life. You've got to follow your desires. You've got to be true to yourself. Everyone makes mistakes. It can't be helped.

[22 : 50] Get rid of this feeling that anything in here is anything you deserve, right? Just be true to yourself. Love who you're meant to love. Try, if you can, David, just to live in this moment now, to smell the smells of now and feel the things of now and just forget about everything else that's going on.

That will help you. Now, of course, the problem with that advice is that it really doesn't work, does it? I don't know whether you've ever tried something like that. I know I've tried to do that, and it doesn't work, does it?

It doesn't help. Because in the back of David's mind would be, and in the back of our minds, if that's the advice we're listening to this morning, is, but I did sin. And they are sinning against me as well.

And all this kind of brushing it under the carpet doesn't actually work. It doesn't satisfy. It doesn't deal with it. It's still there. When I was a theology student, one of our lecturers, he was a bit weird, but one of our lecturers used to say, remember, students, remember kings had jesters.

Right? Kings had jesters. You're a bit weird. But most theology lecturers are weird. But he was saying that because he had a really important point.

[24 : 05] He said, think about it. Why? If you've got everything that the world has to offer, yeah? If you've got power, you've got money, you've got status, you've got all the modern conveniences that your culture is able to provide for anybody.

You have the world's greatest minds at your kind of beck and call because you're the most powerful person, right? You're the king. Anything you want and anyone you want can be ushered into your presence at any point.

Why then? If you've got all of that, then why do you call a man, it's normally a man, in a silly hat with bells on the end to crack jokes in front of you?

Why would you do that? Why would you do that? Because what you know is that for all the great minds in all the world, for all the great power in all the world, for all the great accumulation of stuff in the world, you still have found no answers to the great problems in life.

And so all you can do is laugh at the silly man in a hat in front of you. It's hiding it. It's covering it over. And let me say to you this morning, if you're in the midst of betrayal, if you're messed up by your sin or by the sin of others being done to you, you need to know that all the world has to offer you is silly men in hats with bells on the end.

[25 : 24] Jestors, or whatever the contemporary equivalent is. Sometimes they're religious jestors, aren't they? Sometimes they're material ones. Sometimes they're expensive holiday jestors.

But David knows differently, doesn't he? David knows that there is something to say. There is a truth to hold on to. He knows a God who doesn't sweep sin under the carpet, but he knows a God who justifies.

He knows a God who is bigger and stronger than the story of our sin and our rebellion. He knows the story of redemption in the person of the Son, the only ever innocent sufferer who suffers for our salvation and for the salvation of all who would come and put their faith in him.

Let me ask you, if I can this morning, as gently but as directly as I can, can I ask you this morning, have you discovered David's saviour? Do you know him?

I don't mean do you know about him, because I presume that being in this room means that you might know something about the name of Jesus. You've probably heard some of this stuff before. I don't mean that.

[26 : 30] What I mean is, have you put your faith in him? Have you put your faith in him? Are you trusting in him? What I mean by that is, have you abandoned all your confidence in the power of everything else to solve the deep problems of your life and our world and put your trust in him alone as the only solution provided by God, the one who can take the curses that we deserve, the guilt of our sin and give us instead blessing.

See, this is the nub of the passage for us this morning. It's why it's in your Bible. It's so that you can appreciate the power of justification by faith in a real life story. Of a man in the midst of the mess of his own sin and the sin of others, he has found a God who can take his guilt and bless him anyway.

And you need that. I need that. You want that. I want that. It's important just to be clear, isn't it, that, I suppose to just try and iron out any potential misunderstandings this morning, what David has found by justification by faith has not lifted him into an easy life, right?

That would be a mistake to think that. He's not saying, you know, oh, I've discovered this justification by faith and all of a sudden my life is going to be really easy. Nothing's going to go wrong anymore. The message is not put your faith in Jesus and you will kind of float above the sin of your own life and the sin of the rest of the people in the world.

No. People do preach like that in London, but they're liars, right? It's important that you know that. They find no support in the Bible. Rather, the point is that for David, justification by faith, this power of God to take guilt and give blessing, is a power that Jesus brings through the cross, eclipses the trouble in this life.

[28 : 12] It doesn't remove it. We still experience it, but it eclipses it. It's bigger than it. Amazingly, David here seems to understand that Absalom might have taken Jerusalem from him, but still somehow the covenant blessings of God are still his.

Why is that? It's because Jerusalem was never the covenant blessing, right? God is able to bless us through justification by faith, even though we lose everything that this world has to offer, because the covenant blessings of God are not the things of this world, but they are the resurrection kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Being with him in a world remade by his power and his glory for all eternity, that's the blessings of the covenant. That's what justification by faith is giving us. In the 1990s, a friend of mine went to what was a closed country to do student ministry.

It was a dangerous place, and people who'd been to that country before to do student ministry in recent past had been killed for the ministry that they were doing. There was a massive need for people to go there and tell people about Jesus, but there was also a massive potential cost.

And at a conference just shortly after she left, one of the leaders of the mission agency that she was associated with recounted a conversation that he had had with her just before she left.

[29 : 36] The leader had said to her and looked her in the eye and said, you know, what do you think is the worst that could happen? What's the worst that could happen? And she thought for a while and she said to him, listen, I know, and I'm going into this knowing this, I know that I could lose my life.

I know I could lose my life. The leader said to her, yeah, that would be really awful, wouldn't it? It'd be a terrible loss for us. It'd be a terrible loss for your family. But is that really the worst thing that could happen?

She thought for a bit longer. She said, no, well, I guess not. I suppose I could be attacked. I could be tortured. I could be raped.

I could be locked in prison. And he said, well, yeah, no, that would be awful too, wouldn't it? That would probably be worse. But is it the worst thing that could happen?

And again, she paused and the leader pointed out that the worst thing in all the world, the worst thing that can happen to anybody, is to be abandoned by God, lost by him, and facing the judgment of hell.

[30 : 48] And then he said to her, and that cannot happen. Why cannot, that cannot happen to you? Why not? Because you are justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

So it can't happen. Listen, brothers and sisters, this morning, this is 2 Samuel 16, verse 12. Terrible things may happen in our lives, but if you're trusting in Christ, the worst can never happen, because it happened to him.

So that you and I can receive the blessings of the covenant, the blessing of membership in a resurrection kingdom for all eternity. So that you and I, if we're Christians this morning, we can say that whatever happens, and whatever is happening this morning, you and I can say, do you know what?

The best is still to come. Because it is. Let me pray as it goes. Let's. Just take a moment of quiet.

Maybe we can just pray in our own hearts, reflecting on what the Lord has said to us. Heavenly Father, we thank you that through your Son, the Lord Jesus, you can take all of the curses that we deserve, even the judgment and the punishment that we deserve from you, satisfy it through his death on the cross, and give us the great blessing of belonging to you in a kingdom from which we can never be taken and which we can never lose.

[32 : 53] Lord, I want to pray, especially for people this morning who maybe are really struggling with the suffering of their own sin or the sins of others. please restore them to this great joy that through Christ, through faith in him, through the justification that he provides, there is a great blessing and the best is still to come.

Lord, we praise you and thank you and glory in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.