



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

2 Peter 3: 1-9

Lesson 8

Spring 2020

"Our Great God"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Geoff. And good morning. We are continuing our studies in 2 Peter, and we're coming to the end of our study. We're on 2 Peter 3, verses 1-9. And then next week we should, Lord willing, finish our study in this brief epistle. Peter writes, beginning in verse 1,

"This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word, the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow

about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

2 Peter 3: 1-9

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, what a blessing it is to be in Your house with Your people, and to begin opening again and coming together. And we pray that as we do that, You would bless us and that You would protect us and that things would go smoothly, and things would go rapidly, and soon everything would return to what we consider normal. But we look to You for that because we know You are in absolute control of all of the events that unfold around us, that You are in control of the circumstances that we're in, and yes, we do live in strange times.

But You're in control, You're on Your throne, as I repeatedly say and we can rejoice in that. And we are reminded of that by the apostle Peter in this third chapter of his second epistle. And we pray, Lord, that You would instill that in our minds, that You would enable us to reestablish, reflect upon, the things that we perhaps know but sometimes we neglect. And that is the fundamental fact that You are absolutely sovereign over the things of this world, and we can trust You, even when things don't seem to go as we would anticipate or hope, as evidently was the case with these congregations to whom Peter wrote. So Lord, may the Spirit of God illuminate our minds this morning and teach us the things that the apostle wrote so long ago, but which apply to us as much today as they did 2000 years ago.

We look to You to bless us and teach us and build us up in the faith, and not only bless us spiritually, but we pray You'd bless us materially. We pray that, again, as we open things up, and as things open up throughout our land and across the globe for that matter, that You would bless, and that You would protect.

Lord, You know the needs of every one of us, those that are here, and those that are watching, and how some have dealt with chronic issues for weeks, months, years, and don't see a resolution to problems. We pray that You might bring that and give them health. And certainly in the midst of these difficult issues, a kind of "thorn in the flesh" like the apostle dealt with, that You'd give them comfort and You'd give them a sense of Your presence, and that through that difficulty, You'd draw them close to Yourself. And if it please You, again we pray that You'd give healing, and certainly give encouragement.

Lord, bless our nation. Bless our leaders with wisdom in these difficult, unusual times. We pray that You'd give them wisdom on the local level, the state level, and the national level. We are going through a great difficulty in our nation's history, and we pray, Lord, that in Your sovereign mercy and grace You might heal our nation. And yet, Lord, we know the ultimate healing is not going to come politically or in any kind of solution of that nature—it's spiritual. It's a spiritual problem that has existed from the beginning of human history, from the time that our first parents sinned. And the need and the solution is spiritual. —It is regeneration. —It's the new birth. And we pray, Lord, that You would bring that, that You would pour Your Spirit out upon our nation, and that there may be revival.

Well, You use Your people to do that, and I pray that You'd use us in that regard, and that You would give us boldness, clarity, and wisdom as we visit with people, and that we might be lights in the midst of a dark world. Peter addresses that dark world in our passage this morning so, Lord, I pray that as we look at our text in the moments before us, that You would bless us and teach us and build us up in the faith, and equip us for the things that lay ahead, this week, and in the weeks to come.

So Lord, bless us now, we pray. We thank you for this time together. We pray that You would build us up in the faith to Your glory, and we thank You for the ability and the opportunity we have that is made possible through the person and work of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

We have a problem in the world, but more importantly in the church. It was stated well by J. B. Phillips in a little book that he wrote over half a century ago, and the title says so much about that. And the title is, *Your God is Too Small*, and that's the problem. Now we expect that from the world of unbelievers, where if they even give a thought to God, would dismiss Him as irrelevant in this modern age of scientific discovery. But in the church, we would expect better. Yet as Mr. Phillips states at the beginning of his book, there are professing Christians with what he called, "childish conceptions of God."

The problem is not only modern. It's ancient. The psalmist wrote about it in Psalm 50, verse 21, the Lord speaks, and He said, "You thought that I was just like you." The accounts of their bad thoughts and behavior recorded in the psalm are the result of that. And it is a childish concept of God that explains the lure, the attraction of the false teaching that Peter prophesied would occur when he wrote, 2 Peter 3, verse 1 through 9. People will be "enticed" because their God is too small. Men will come along who will deny the Lord's return. In fact, they will mock the idea that Christ is coming again. "It's preposterous", they will say, even though it is promised in the Bible. We have it all throughout the Word of God. For example, in Titus 2, verse 13, Paul calls it, "the blessed hope", and describes it as, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

Peter said men will come, scoffers, who will deny that. Deny it as something risible—laughable. And people will be duped into believing them because they don't understand that the Lord is who Paul said He is, "Our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." He is great. He is not small. And He is able.

In Genesis 18, when God told Abraham that Sarah would have a son, Sarah laughed. And the Lord answered and said, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" Now that is a rhetorical question, and the answer to that, of course, is "no". "Nothing is too difficult for the Lord", not even causing an old, barren woman to give birth by means of a man who was beyond the age of producing children. And breaking into history again,

coming to this world in power and glory, as Christ promised to do is not too difficult for Him.

Jesus Christ is our great God and Savior. So those who deny that commit heresy, serious heresy, what Peter called, in chapter 2, verse 1, "destructive heresies." The King James version is close to the meaning with the translation, "damnable heresies." This heresy is damnable because it denies our hope, it undercuts the Word of Christ and the apostles, and it's destructive of the Christian faith.

So Peter now corrects it. He begins by stating the purpose of his letter. He was writing in order to "stir up their minds", to alert them to the danger of the false teaching, and to get them thinking correctly. He would do that by reminding them of things that had been previously taught by the Old Testament prophets, by the Lord, and by the apostles. The prophets spoke of "the day of the Lord." Prophet Joel spoke of it in Joel, chapter 2. It is a time of terror and judgment on the earth before the Lord returns.

Christ spoke of His return and the kingdom to come in Matthew 19, verse 28. He called it "the regeneration." Now that tells you something right there, that when He comes there'll be a great change upon this earth. Amazing changes will take place. There'll be a regeneration of the earth. That's how He describes the kingdom to come, "when the Son of man," He said, "will sit on His glorious throne." So the Lord spoke of this, spoke of it more often than just that. And Paul spoke of it in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 16, "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God."

The Old and New Testaments are filled with promises of the Lord's return. But in verse 3, Peter tells his readers that skeptics will come who deny all of that, "Know this, first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is promise of His coming?'"

Now this is a prophecy. Peter wrote it in the future tense, "mockers will come." He wanted them to know this because we can learn a lot about the present by knowing the future. Time is moving toward an age of unbelief, of a rejection of biblical doctrine. Paul wrote similar warnings in 1 Timothy 4, verses 1 through 5 and in 2 Timothy 3, verses

1 through 9. He described a time of widespread unbelief, selfishness and false teaching. "In later times," he said, "some will fall away from the faith." So it will be a time of great apostasy, of denying the truth.

Now that's the trajectory of this age, or the arc of this age. It's headed toward difficult times. And because it is the nature of this age, they weren't to be shaken when it happened in their own time. In 1 John 2, verse 18, just the next book over, John reminded people that antichrist is coming, "the beast", as he refers to him in the Book of Revelation. "The man of sin and lawlessness", as Paul speaks of him. This political-religious figure that's coming some day is what John reminds them of. He's coming. But then he adds, "Even now many antichrists have appeared." Well they've appeared because that's the nature of the age in which we live.

And it was happening in the churches to which Peter wrote this letter. So he says, "Know this." There's nothing surprising about it. It is typical of this age. But be on guard and resist it, resist these men.

Now, for us, 2000 years after he wrote this warning, we see the same thing. We see the reality of everything that he's speaking of here. We're surrounded by these kinds of people. We're surrounded by skeptics. The idea that God will someday intervene in this world, break into history, is dismissed as naïve, as mythological, by the world and by the theological professors of many places. Their denials take the form of mockery. They ridicule a belief in the Lord's return. And this is often the form that an attack on one's faith takes—mockery.

You see that in Acts 17, when Paul is speaking to the Athenian philosophers and intellectuals. When he comes to the resurrection they began to mock. They dismissed it. Well, that's what those, who reject the faith and reject this particular doctrine, do. But their rejection of it and their mockery of it is not grounded in fact. Rather, it's cloaked in scorn and jeering. And that's what these men will do, and what these men in Peter's day did. They mocked the truth of the second coming. But what drove their attack was not intellectual honesty or a quest for knowledge and truth, but their lust. That's what Peter says. "They follow after their own lusts."

Now a man cannot follow after his lusts comfortably, knowing that he will pay a terrible price for the things that he does. And so men deal with that uncomfortable fact by denying it, denying that there is a day of reckoning. They will do that in the future, Peter is saying. They do it today. They did it in Peter's time. It's what men do. Rather than abandon their sin, rather than repent and submit to God, they hold on to their sin and rationalize. They quiet their conscience by mocking God and dismissing the Lord's return and end up believing their own lie.

Now they have a rational explanation for this, they have a rational way of explaining it, at least a kind of intellectual argument, and one, that on the face of it, is sort of persuasive. It's realistic. That's the idea, at least. They're saying, let's look at reality. And Peter gives it in verse 4, their explanation in the question that they ask, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." You can feel the force of that question: "Look around, this is reality, not some great intervention of the Lord."

Even in apostolic times, I think this question that they're really addressing was a concern, because by the time Peter has written this letter, many Christians had died. People that were hoping for the Lord's return might have begun to wonder, (and I think they certainly did), where is His coming?

In 1942, General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia. He had narrowly escaped from the Philippines, which had been captured by the Japanese army. MacArthur made a brief speech to reporters that ended famously with the line, "I came through, and I shall return." It was a promise that he gave, and it gave hope to those that were there on the Philippines. And he did that victoriously in 1944. But you can imagine that over the months and the years of Japanese occupation, that some of the people there on the Philippines may have begun to doubt the General's promise and lose hope.

Well then, it's not unlikely that those kinds of doubts were something that was going on in these churches that Peter was writing to, those churches in Asia Minor where these teachers had arisen and were questioning the Lord's return. And so that's

why Peter is writing this in this second letter. They were living in occupied territory, as we are. The world is God's world. It's the place of His future kingdom, and He is ruling. And yet at the same time, it's a fallen world, and it presently lies in the evil one. John says that at the end of his first epistle, 1 John 5, verse 19. "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." He's the ruler of this world. Paul called him, "the god of this age." (2 Cor 4:4). That's great power.

And as the first generation of Christians began to die off, some in the church may have begun to wonder if the Lord's return was real, if this liberation was going to ever happen. And the false teachers were aggravating their doubts by scoffing at the promise, "If it were going to happen, it would have happened. It hasn't happened because it's not going to happen."

And they supported their skepticism by describing the world and history as unchanging. "Since the fathers...all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." (vs4). "Look, great convulsive events that change the world, or God coming, that just doesn't happen! When have you ever seen something like that happen? Never. Events like the second coming don't occur. That's not reality." That's what they're saying. And you look at life and, yeah, it just doesn't happen. It's one day after another. Now that's what they were saying.

And it's what we hear today from those who believe in naturalism or materialism; "The world is a closed system. God doesn't intervene. There's no room for the supernatural. God is not governing history. The Universe is an impersonal place of matter and physical laws. It's just a big machine. It came into existence by chance."

In modern times this is known as *uniformitarianism*. —Only natural processes worked in the past, and those same processes are working today. Nothing has changed, nothing's going to change. And, of course, there's some truth in that. There are not great disruptions in the natural world, not normally. Things do continue as they have in the past. And we rely on that. That's the goodness of God to us. It's His care for His creation, through His providence. Things do function according to natural law. There is consistency. That's why we can do science. But natural law is God's law. It is the means

through which He consistently works to sustain the world that He has created. And He can interrupt things to bring about His will as He wills to do it. He rules.

The heretics didn't believe that, and the evidence they gave is the continual routine of life. Rather than see the faithfulness and the goodness of God in that, they saw the absence of God in it.

So Peter answers these men in verse 5 through 7 and exposes the weakness of their argument. —They forgot about flood: "For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that, by the word of God, *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water."

Now Peter said, as it's put in the New American Standard Bible, "...it escapes their notice..." But this wasn't a mere mistake or just an oversight on their part. The Greek text has the word *willing*. So they were not only neglecting this, they were willingly, deliberately ignoring it. False teachers do that. They use Bible verses that they think support their position and ignore those that don't.

Peter called them out on this, "What about Genesis 6?", he's saying. "What about the flood? It covers three chapters in the Bible, Genesis 6 through 8!" Well what's so important about the flood? What's important about it is these teachers said, "Everything from the creation, from the beginning is the same." —Uniformitarianism. Nothing changes. It seems they viewed the world as self-sustaining and self-directed, just following the laws of nature that govern it, "God is like an absentee landowner. He doesn't intervene. We're on our own." The flood shows that is not true. The creation of the universe, of this world, shows that that is not true.

God is sovereign over it. He created it by His Word. He created it by divine fiat. He spoke it all into existence when there was nothing. And He cares about it. He brought dry land out of the water that covered the earth. He made the world inhabitable. And He sustains it by water. He is involved in this world. He is involved in its origin and continuance. But then, He used the water that was part of the world's origin and preservation, to destroy it. "So, read the Bible!", Paul's saying to these people. "You

claim to be teachers and theologians of the Lord God, read His Word. The lessons of the creation and the flood are there.”

And those lessons are moral. We do not live autonomous lives. That is, we do not live independent, self-directed lives, for we are dependent creatures. And God is sovereign. He is the creator. He is the sustainer of everything, and He is also the judge. He's patient. He tolerates sin, but not forever. And when His patience runs out, he intervenes in human affairs. The flood proves that.

He did that, and He can do it again, and He will. That's what Peter states in verse 7. However, it will be in a different way from the first time. In the future it will be by fire. “But by His word, the present heavens and earth are being preserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

Throughout Scripture, both water and fire are symbols for judgment and for purification. The world of Noah was cleansed of sin when God drowned it. Our world will end when God burns it. He will sweep it all away, and with-it, ungodly men. Peter says, "The world is reserved for that." Literally, “it has been treasured up for it.” That's a figurative way of saying it has been “set apart” or “destined” for judgment. The end of the world as we know it is certain. Now that should give us perspective on life. Things won't last forever. It's foolish to build for this world. Time will run out on it, and it will all go up in flames.

But they also needed God's perspective on things, on time itself. And we do as well; we need His perspective: God's perspective on time is not like ours. Verse 8, "But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." That is a quote from Psalm 90, verse 4. "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or *as* a watch in the night." One day with the Lord is like a thousand years, meaning, He can accomplish in one day what it takes man a thousand years to do.

“...and a thousand years is like a day to Him.” That second line is for the false teachers. A thousand years to Him is like a day, just a moment. So, the fact that the promise wasn't fulfilled in the less than 50 years since the Lord ascended into heaven,

(having just promised to return), there was no reason to doubt the validity of His promise—because from God's perspective only part of a day had passed.

And even for us, some 2000 years later, after the Lord left with that promise of returning, it's only two days on God's calendar. What seems like a long time to us is only a brief moment to God. God's not bound by time as we are. Time is His creation. Before He made time, God always was. He has no beginning, has no end. He's not like us and doesn't calculate things the way we do.

Again, one of the failures of the false teachers, and also those Christians who were beginning to be influenced by their ideas and their ridicule, is their idea of God was too small. It's a childish conception. He's not bound by time or space. He doesn't live under the constraints of someone's schedule. In fact, the Lord is the One who makes the schedule.

That's the picture given to us in Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 2, where the writer says that “through Christ, God made the world.” That is, literally, “He made the ages.” He makes time. He makes each age and epoch of history. Then he writes, in verse 3, that “Christ upholds all things by the word of His power”, which literally is “He is carrying, (or bearing along), all things by the word of His power.” He's unfolding history. He's moving time and events and the world on their course. The schedule He is on is one that He has planned. That's the triune God. He is infinite. That's no small god.

The fifth evangelist, Isaiah, spoke often of God's greatness. In chapter 40 he describes the Lord as “enthroned above the vault of the earth.” And below, he says, we “are like grasshoppers”, (vs22). Well that was from Isaiah's perspective. If he had a more modern science, had the microscope, he might have said, and we are like amoebas. The earth, the universe, he goes on to say, is like “a speck of dust” on His scales. That is a great God—infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

Then, in Isaiah 57, verse 15, is this very personal description; "Thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell *on* a high and holy place, and *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit, in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.” “He dwells in a high place. He dwells

outside this world, outside the universe. And yet He comes down to the obscure places and dwells with us to comfort us, to comfort the beaten down and the discouraged.

God's not limited. People make a gross miscalculation when they think that He is like them; that He is like us. That is an error that wrecks faith. It wrecks faith. God is sovereign and merciful. And because He is sovereign and merciful, He can and does keep His promises. He's faithful. But in order to believe that we must understand how great God really is. He is infinite and eternal and unchangeable and mighty. We need that perspective. He cannot be frustrated in His purposes, and we need to understand that as well. He is an unfrustrateable God. He has a purpose. He is acting according to it. It is His plan of salvation.

That's the reason the Lord has not yet come. And Peter explains that in verse 9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness. But is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." In other words, the Lord is not running late. He's not like us. Everything is moving smoothly and timely according to His plan. He's being patient right now because He does not want any to perish.

Now what does that mean? This is often cited as "proof" that Christ died for everyone, all, without exception. Or it's cited as proof of universal salvation—that everyone who has ever lived or will live will be saved; none will perish. William Barclay, the popular liberal commentator saw in verse 9 what he called, "The glint of a larger hope of the universal salvation of the whole world", so "it's proof" of universalism.

Neither of those ideas are supported by the passage. In fact, both ideas make nonsense of the verse. Universalism is denied by verse 7, which prophesies doom for unbelievers, "The earth is kept for the day of judgment, and the destruction of ungodly men." So if Christ's return awaits the repentance of every individual without exception, the Christ will never return.

But God is patient with the wicked. We see that very clearly in numerous texts. We see it, for example, in Ezekiel 18, verse 32, where He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies." He says it again in Ezekiel 33:11, "I have no pleasure in the

death of the wicked." He wants them to repent and live. But not all do, so not all are saved. Universalism is not taught anywhere in the Bible—not here or anywhere else. It doesn't fit the broader context of this passage or the immediate one. God's patience is not with the wicked, at least not here in this text. It is with His people.

That's what Peter says. He "is patient toward you", toward believers. That's the "you" of verse 1, the "beloved". And it's the same in verse 8, that the context is about "you". And that explains the identity of the "all" here; "...not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." God is not wishing for any of "you" or not wishing for any of the church, to perish. So God's not willing for any of His people to perish. That's what He's saying. He's referring to His elect, all of those He has chosen through the ages. He is presently gathering His people out of each generation—God is following His plan.

The scoffers didn't understand that. If He had sent His Son after His ascension into heaven, immediately after it, say midway through the first century, what would have happened to the elect of the second century, or the second millennium? He would have preempted His plan of salvation for generations of Christians. It's God's plan to save all of His elect who are placed in a long series of generations. He knows how many. We don't. We do know this. It is a vast "multitude" of people. (Rev 7:9). And with the salvation of each soul, we draw closer to that day. But Christ won't return until the last of His chosen ones are gathered in.

This is a testimony to the love of God, and His patience, because each generation is corrupted with sin and deserving of God's immediate wrath. He knows it. He sees it, just as He did in the days of Noah. Genesis 6, verse 5 says that, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And that led to the flood. It's not any different today.

But God is patient toward you, toward His church, and toward His nation, Israel. He hasn't sent His Son to judge the world because of you. He endures the wickedness that He sees for our sake. So to the church Peter is saying, "Don't be discouraged by the wait. It's not a delay. Christ will come. God isn't slow about His promise. He's following a

plan." His plan is for us in the present time to preach the truth, to give the Gospel. —And to live it, to live a life consistent with it.

He has given us an opportunity in this time to do that, to be lights in the midst of a dark world, and His agents in gathering His people through the teaching of the Gospel. We give it generally. We don't know who the elect are. But we know they're there, and we know He's gathering them. And He uses us to do that. And He's giving us opportunities in this day and age to do that, and at the same time, in doing that, He is giving us opportunities to prepare ourselves for heaven, and the glory of the kingdom to come.

In spite of the sophisticated denials of the skeptics, Christ will come again, in power and might, as He promised. He will judge the wicked, and He will establish His millennial kingdom on earth. And all of these great events of the future will be inaugurated by the rapture of the church, which Paul talks of in 1 Thessalonians 4. That may happen at any time. And that should motivate us to obedience in the present time.

But all of this should alarm the unbeliever and cause him or her to wake up to the peril of his or her soul. God is the Almighty; He rules and will "judge ungodly men", Peter says. The judgment is certain, and the judgment is eternal. —It is the "lake of fire" that burns forever and ever. But God, who is just is, also merciful. And He has given time for people to come to repentance.

So come. Christ died on the cross in the place of sinners and His sacrifice is sufficient for all. And this includes you present here today and those who are listening in, if you're one who has not yet put your faith in Christ, "Look to Him!" Don't delay! Believe, whoever you are; receive forgiveness and eternal life. Become an heir of the kingdom and live with that blessed hope of the Lord Jesus Christ's glorious return. God help you to do that.

I'm going to close in prayer, and then following the hymn, we will again observe the Lord's Supper. So let's bow together in prayer and ask the Lord to bless the time we've had together and then our remembrance of Him. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you for the hope that we have that's set forth here by the apostle Peter. He reminds us of the great hope that we have that is questioned by the skeptics of our day, or is questioned by the false teachers of his day, and will be questioned in the end, at the end of the age by the false teachers that will come. And we can become somewhat affected by what is said, keep us from that; protect us from that. Help us to remember Your promises are sure. You're not coming on our schedule; You have a perfect schedule. And it's being worked out presently, in this present time, at this very moment. And we have this great hope of Your Son coming, and righteousness and justice being established on the earth, and a glorious kingdom to come. We have the hope of the new heavens and the new earth, of a world without end, of eternity, of glory and joy and blessing. And we have all of that because of what Your Son did for us on the cross.

So Lord, we thank you for His sacrifice. We thank you for sending Him to die for us, for gaining forgiveness and eternal life for us. And now, Lord, as we will reflect upon that with the Lord's Supper, we pray that You would bless us and prepare our hearts for that. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)