

The house of God

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[0 : 00] The Bible is to the Old Testament Scriptures to read you a few verses there from the book of the Psalms in Psalm number 122. I want to make this our meditation this morning.

Psalm 122. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel.

There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May those who love you be secured.

May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, peace be within you.

[1 : 11] For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity. Perhaps we want to take a particular text.

We have the very first words there, perhaps the best known of this psalm. I rejoiced with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

This morning I want us to think of that theme of the house of the Lord. Or perhaps we have to put it another way.

I want us to think about the church. And there are three things. I want us to think about the concept of the church.

The call of the church. And the commitment of the church. Or what it is, what it offers, and what it asks.

[2 : 10] These three things. I rejoice with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. What is the house of the Lord?

Or more directly we could ask the question, what is the church? What is our concept of the church? Now that's a very big question to try and answer fully at all.

But perhaps if we can think of the simple game of associations. You know, if I say a word to you. Say for example, town. What do you think of immediately?

What do you think of? Field? Farm? Buyer? Bull? Whatever. Maybe I think of my brother-in-law. These sort of things.

You associate one word with another. What do we think of when we say church? Well, there are several things. Steeple. Bell. Pews.

[3 : 19] Stained glass. Organ. Exclamation mark. Cross. Long sermons. And we could go on.

Well, the only thing of these that we have here are the long sermons. All the rest you can't find in this particular building. But there are many such associations that we have. The things that we think of when we think of church.

What is our concept of the church? What is a church? Or what is the church? Most of the associations we have are with buildings as such. We think of the church as a building.

People ask, where is your church? I say, it's spread all over the east. They're in all different corners of Luke's and Cam's. The church, the building, is in Elliburn. The church is not a building as such.

The church is people. Now that is the basic definition, the concept that the Bible tells us about the church. The church is people. And the church, if we can say it this way, is or are a very special people.

[4 : 28] They are all those who believe in Jesus. All those who are born of the Holy Spirit. All those who therefore belong to God. They are the church.

Let's forget about labels. Forget about denominations. Forget about free church or Baptist or Church of Scotland or any other label we have in the world. These are perhaps necessary separations.

I don't say that we are absolutely wrong. But the church is more than any one of these particular groups. The church is all of God's people. Now the word that we have for the church in the Bible is a word that means gathering.

Collecting ourselves together. An assembly. And that is what we do when we come together to worship God. We come together to fellowship. We come together to meet in the name of Jesus.

That is the church. It is a word for gathering. It also means called out. So the church really is two things. They are people who are called out.

[5 : 31] That is called out from the rest of the world. Called out and gathered in. That is the church. A special people. And particularly they are a people among whom God lives.

Now that is an essential part of what the church is. Remember there is a promise in the Bible that we read the way back that God spoke to Abraham. As one has repeated at various stages and times throughout the history of the church.

Paul uses it again. It is one that says this. Where God says to his people. I will dwell among you. And you shall be my people. And I will be your God.

That promise. Now that is what the church is. It is a people who are called out so that God would live among them. Now you could find that same promise right at the end of your Bible again.

It is when John is describing there the end of all things. The fulfillment of God's plan through all the ages. And this world as such.

[6 : 39] As it is now. It is folded up. There will be a new heavens and a new earth. And it shall be fulfilled. That God shall be among his people. Heaven and earth will be a reality.

Now that is what the church is. It is not something necessary that we wait for. It is people. A special people called out for godness. Now Solomon.

If you remember the time of the very special momentous occasion. When Solomon after having had the privilege of being involved in the building of the temple.

Then that temple was dedicated to the service and to the worship of God. Solomon made this prayer. In it he said. That the heaven.

The heavens of heaven. Cannot contain you. Speaking to God. It wasn't that they had built a place for God to live. Some special building that is God's building.

[7 : 41] It wasn't that. The heaven of heavens can't hold God. God is unlimited. God is infinite. God is everywhere. God is everywhere. It doesn't matter how big we build our churches or cathedrals.

We don't necessarily by the size of the building get any more of God in. It's not with you. God is among his people. This is what Paul was explaining to the men.

The people of Athens. When he went there. They had this offer to an unknown God. He explained who this unknown God was. And he said to them. God doesn't live in a building. In a temple. That is made with hands. There are lots of temples for all their different idols. And their different gods. But he said this God. Is a God that cannot be restricted in that sense.

He doesn't live in a building. There was one little boy who said to another. God goes to my church.

[8 : 40] Now there are some of us who think that way. Sometimes. We think that perhaps God is in our church. And he's not going to be in anybody else's church. It's a wrong way to think. God is among his people.

Wherever his people are. Those who worship God in spirit and in truth. God is in the midst of them. Wherefore they shall not be moved. You see perhaps what is important to the definition.

Any definition of the church. Or the definition of any church. Is the presence of God. Remember the time when Jacob. Went on his journeys.

He was running away. From the wrath of his brother. And he landed up at the place. Where he set up a stone. A pillow. Someone had hard pillowed in the time.

But never used it. A big stone. And Jacob lay down to sleep. And he had this wonderful dream. With a ladder ascending to him. And he woke up realizing. But God was in this place.

[9 : 37] And he didn't know it. He hadn't realized it before. And he called that place Bethel. Which for those who are the Hebrew experts among you. Would tell you. That means the house of God.

Beth is house. El is the name for God. Bethel. The house of God. But Jacob journeyed on from there. He went off. And as you know. The story. And he got his fortunes in life.

And his wife and so on. He came back. He was making his way back. Came back to this same place. But he was a different man. Because God was dealing with him. God was renewing him.

As an individual. You know what he called that place. The next time he came back. You know the discovery he made. He called it El Bethel. That is the God.

Of the house of God. You see sometimes I think. We're too taken up. With the actual building. With the fabric. With the external. Things of the church. We forget the most important aspect.

[10 : 33] The most important aspect is God. In the midst. The presence of God. And the knowledge of God. In the midst of us. Jesus said a very wonderful thing to his disciples.

He said. Wherever two or three are gathered in my name. There am I in the midst of them. You know. What we're saying there is this. That two persons plus Christ.

Constitute a church. That's what a church is. Two persons plus Christ. Sometimes we complain about our small congregations. And we sort of perhaps even compare. We have ratings throughout the churches.

To see. Oh that's a good congregation. It's got a big crowded church. And so on and so forth. Well one of the problems. We praise God for it. We hope we have every success. And every blessing from above. But this.

Yes. Remember. Two plus Christ. Gathered in his name. That constitutes a church. The church. If we read of it.

[11 : 32] Through the Acts of the Apostles for example. Where we read so much of the developing of the Christian church. What is it? It is people. It is back to this. People with God in the midst of it.

They were never preoccupied with any end of business. The only building that we know of. Or buildings that were the temple. But they knew themselves was going to be destroyed. It had been protected. It wasn't long before it was going to happen.

And they were their own homes. Apart from that they knew no churches as such. And we can scour through the Bible. We can scour through the New Testament as we like. And there is no mention of buildings.

And there is no mention either of appeals to put up buildings. Now you may be asking. Why am I saying this? Apart from just covering myself. Why are we here in a special church at all?

Why have we gone to the border of putting up this building? And the cost of it? Well the building is here. As simply as a practical need. For the congregation.

[12 : 33] A place where we can gather sensibly and meaningfully. To worship God. It is not in itself a holy building. There is no holiness in the bricks that plenty of builders used.

There is no holiness in these timbers. None at all. It is a place for God's people to gather together to worship God. That's all. A place.

We read in Colossians. And one of the reasons we read that chapter was this. That there the church is described not as any building.

But as ourselves. We are the church. We are the body of Christ. And that is why the writer to the Hebrews stresses this fact.

Do not forsake the gathering of yourselves together. What's important? It is that God's people coming together for God is in the midst.

[13 : 30] That's the church. Wherever we happen to meet. And without fellowship together. We have no church. No matter how fancy. Or how new.

Or how specially designed our buildings may be. You know there are many attached to church buildings. We hope we have one here. But you know.

We are not any more in the church this week. Than we were last week. Not any more. This is as much the church. As where we met before.

Whether we meet in a school. Or in a house. Or if we were to meet in a barn. Or a cave. Or in the open air. If it's God's people meeting together for God is.

That is the church. It is not a building. The church is God's people gathered together. With God in the middle. Now let us grasp that. Let us explore this Bible concept of the church.

[14 : 28] And then we can consider its implications. To see where that leads us. We can experience also. Something of the glory. Of the reality. Of what it means. To be the church.

And as we said earlier. To the children. To belong to the church. Not because we happen to go to a specific building. And sit in perhaps a regular seat. Sunday after Sunday.

That doesn't mean we belong to the church. Or if our name is on the communion road. That doesn't necessarily mean we belong to God's church. If we only belong to God's church. If we belong to him.

When we are one of his people. And when we gather together. We're fellowship. With his people. That is the church. The concept of the church. And I want us to think too.

Of the call of the church. That is. What it offers. And we see that in our text. In verse 1. I rejoice with those who said to me. What did they say?

- [15 : 23] Let us go to the house of the Lord. That is the call. It is the call of God's people. To the rest of the people. Let us go to the house of the Lord. Now the psalmist.
- Is more than happy. To go along with them. Because he knew there were blessings attached. In going to the house of the Lord. This is one of the psalms. And it's called. A pilgrim psalm.
- This whole group of psalms around here. Are the pilgrim psalms. And they were. Designed specifically. They were sung. In the situation. Where the people were going up. To the house of God. They were going to the temple. In Jerusalem. As it was. Under the Old Testament. But their joy. Their rejoicing. Was not that they were going.
- Necessarily. Simply. And merely. To a physical building. What I'm sure. Was a very wonderful experience. In itself. But there was much more to it than that. They were going.
- [16 : 20] There. In a spiritual exercise. Perhaps. We could maybe paraphrase. This. Call the church. Let us go.
- To the house of the Lord. What is he saying? He says. Come. And meet. With God. Come. And meet. With God. That's what we're saying.
- You know. It's like. The. Invitation. That Moses. Gave to his father-in-law.
- Remember Hoban. In the book of Numbers. We have that. Verse. Where. Where Moses. Said to his father-in-law. He didn't belong to him. He wasn't a Jew. But Moses invited him.
- Come with us. And we will do you good. You know. The church is saying that. That is. Part and partial. Of our witness. That is what we are offering.
- [17 : 14] People. In the world. We are saying. Come with us. And we will do you good. Join us. In the sense of. Coming to Christ. And belonging to God's people. And there are blessings.
- That you. You just can't understand. Or appreciate. Until you come. We are calling other people. To share the blessings. Of God's people. And I wonder what.
- Particular blessings. Are mentioned here. Just in this psalm itself. Well we are offering this. The call of the church. Is to know God. Come to know God.
- I think that's implicit. At least. In the first verse. Jesus says. This. Is eternal life. That they may know you. And Jesus Christ.
- Whom you have sent. This is eternal life. To know God. To have a personal relationship. With God. That is what the church is saying. Have a personal relationship.
- [18 : 11] With God. Come to know God. Because you come into church. Is what? Well. For different people. It may be different things. You know what it is.
- For yourself. But coming to church. Ought to be this. At least. It is coming to meet. Someone. We know. It's not merely going to a place. It is coming to a person.
- To meet someone. Whom we know. Or. Perhaps. If we do not know him already. Coming to church. It may also be this. It is coming to know someone. Through meeting them.
- And that happens all the time. When we meet new friends. Every day of our life. Or every so often. At least. We meet new people. We didn't know them before. But we got the opportunity. To get to know them.
- Simply because we met. Now for those who know God. It is coming to meet with the God they know. For those who don't know God. Coming to church. It is coming to get to know God. Meeting with him.
- [19 : 08] So that they will know him. For themselves. That's what it is all about. That's the call of the church. To know God. It is more than that. The call of the church.

What it offers is this. Is to praise God. If you look at verse 4. This is where the tribes go up. The tribes of the Lord. To do what? What did they do when they got to the temple? To praise the name of the Lord.

According to the statute given to Israel. Why do we come together in a church building? And what are we doing here? What are we doing even now? When you are sitting there so quiet and peaceful. I hope you are not asleep.

What are we doing? We are praising God. We are joining together in worship. Even when we are. It is not just the singing. It is not just our prayers. It is when we are gathered together. Hearing God's word.

It is part of our praising to God. Part of it. I am going to ask this question. Do we worship when we worship?

[20 : 04] Do we? You see to be able to praise God. Is a privilege. That I believe very few people possess. Or exercise.

To really worship God. In spirit and in truth. And that is a call to the church. They are asking not merely to come along to the church. Take a seat. Anywhere you like.

It is not just that. Come and praise God. May your heart be so in tune to God. That you will praise him. You will worship him. From your heart. The call of the church is this too.

It is that we would experience salvation. If you look there at verse 5. It may be a bit obscure. First reading. There the thrones were judgment standard. Thrones of the house of David.

What is he speaking about? I think we are doing this. It is. God. He is speaking about God's justice. And that through God's justice.

[21 : 01] We are guaranteed forgiveness. And we are granted forgiveness. Now that is what comes out of the New Testament. How is it that God can be just.

And deal fairly. And still forgive the person who has wronged him. How can he be fair and do that? It is because Christ has borne the punishment of the sinner himself.

So that God is just. And also the forgiver of those who trust him. Now what we can do when we come into God's presence. Is to plead.

What we call here the covenant promises of God. The things that God has sworn to do for us. Will he forgive my sins? Will he change my life? Will he renew my heart?

Will he do it? Yes he will do it. Not for my sake. But for his own means. And this is the assurance that we have. We can plead the covenant promises of God. God promises.

[22 : 00] And he will forgive everyone who confesses their sins to him. Who come in honest repentance before him. Even in the secrecy of their own hearts. A promise.

We don't have to go along with burden hearts and consciences forever. God promises to cleanse us. We can plead these promises. We can plead the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why did he die? He died to take away these very sins that are crushed in upon me. That is why he died. And we can plead the blood of Jesus. To cleanse us completely.

To forgive us absolutely. And that is what salvation is. We come and we trust God. What he has done for us. So that we can experience his forgiveness.

His salvation. There is one other thing I just want to mention here in verse 6. Of what the church offers. It offers eternal security.

[22 : 54] Now I think in the day and age in which we live. This is a very vital message which the church ought to proclaim. And an offer that they should make as public as it possibly can.

That the church offers through Christ. Eternal security to all who believe in Christ. Now what am I speaking about? It is this guarantee.

That those who belong to God. Are safe in God. Without any qualification. May those who love you be secure.

And they will be. You see. We may come and call this. On the plans of this building. On the building we are making. This square area in which we are sitting. It is called the sanctuary.

That is a place of refuge. We may still call it that. But this building. Will never be. And can never be. An eternal place of refuge.

[23 : 50] It will not keep us safe. Only God. Can keep us safe. You know these timbers. And I'll even say this to the builders. These timbers. Eventually.

I don't know when. Or how. But these timbers will rot. And they will rock. And they will come crashing down someday. There is nothing eternal about this building.

But God is eternal. God is. And he will take us through death. He will guide us even unto death. We may say even beyond the death.

Some of you may have watched that very. In some respects horrific. In other respects very telling. Film. A week past last night.

The day after. About the results. The consequences of a nuclear holocaust. Or even a partial holocaust. That. With a very moving experience.

[24 : 47] For many who watched. It is something that is on many people's minds. And I think rightly so. Because it's not any. Just a fiction. It's a real possibility.

Now what is going to save us? Where are we going to turn in the hopelessness. Of facing such a desperate situation as that. An unbelievable situation. God is our refuge.

And our strength. In straits of present day. Even though the earth be removed. We will not be afraid. Now that is the assurance of the Christian has.

And only the Christian has it. God will lead us through. He will guide us through death. Even through a nuclear holocaust. God is still. Our security.

And not as what the church is offering. To all who believe in Jesus Christ. To all who belong to him. They have nothing really. To fear. At all. Now this is a season.

[25 : 48] Of the year in which we wish each other prosperity. And so may it be. But do you really want to prosper? Because this verse is speaking about that. May those who love you be secure.

The word is also translated. May those who love you prosper. Do you really want to prosper? Will you only do that when you take up the offer of the church. Or the offer of God through the church.

To come to know God for yourself. To come to worship God for yourself. To know his forgiveness. And to know his eternal security. Through Christ. Do you want it?

Do you want it badly now? To really have it. And ask the question is this. Are you really glad?

Do you really rejoice? When you come together today. In God's presence. You see I hope you will enjoy coming to church. Not just today. But whenever.

[26 : 47] But you know. You can never really be at home in church. Until you're at home with Christ first. That's a basic principle. Of what the church is and how it operates. You can never really be at home with the church.

In fact it surprises me. That many of our churches have a lot of people. Who feel very much at home. And very untroubled in their conscience. But yet are not friends of God in their hearts.

It's a strange thing. And no matter what kind of furnishings we would supply here. We can't make you comfortable in the church.

And we don't intend to make you comfortable in the church. If you're outside of Christ. We welcome you yes. We welcome you to hear the gospel that will save your soul. Because only if you come to know Christ.

Are you really safe. And are you really happy. When we think of going to church. The call for the church is this.

[27 : 46] What it offers is this. Let us go and meet with God. Through Jesus Christ. Now just one last thing. I want us to mention to you. And that is the commitment.

Of the church. What it asks. And I think the first thing it asks. Of those who belong to the church. The people who are God's people. What does it say of them? It says this. That they need to be people of prayer.

That is the first great priority. This is the increasing need. Of the church in our own age. We need to be people of prayer. It's the first requirement. As well as the first sign of what the Christian is.

They are people of prayer. Because Christ's kingdom. The development of Christ's kingdom. Depends on his people. The people of prayer. Now what we are calling here.

Is to pray. Verse 6. Pray. Not for the peace of the world. There are many prayers made. For the peace of the world. I don't believe that God is going to answer these prayers.

[28 : 45] Not in the absolute sense that they are demanded. Because he can't. He has otherwise promised that there are going to be wars. And there are going to be rumours of wars. And there are going to be earthquakes. And there are going to be famines. And there are going to be all sorts of disasters.

And things are going to get worse. Rather than better. Oh yes. We may pray that people may be preserved. Either in the short term or the long term. We pray that they may be saved.

We are not asking that God would deluge these people out of existence. What we are saying is this. That our priority is not to pray for the peace of the world.

But to pray for the peace of the church. Pray for the peace of the youth. You look at the world. You see how troubled it is. And it's a terrible mess. And there's not a lot that we can do about it.

Even if we're all politicians overnight. This. The church is in this bad state. But not worse. And what we must do is to pray for the church.

[29 : 43] As a priority. To pray for the peace of the church. The prosperity of the church. The progress of the church. You know. I believe.

That we should. And I've come more and more to this conviction. Just in the last few weeks. That we should get involved. More in the great political and social causes.

Of our own generation. We have to. There has to be a Christian voice. At every level of society. Even if you're merely chatting about it. To your workmate. Or wherever. Or your friend. Down to the shopping centre.

Or over that cup of coffee. Or whether we're writing to the papers. Or whatever we're doing. I think we should get involved. I think we should be interested. In what is happening in God's world. World round about us.

But no matter how involved. We are able to get. In these areas. These are very restricted. And they're a very short term solution. To man's real plight. What we ought to be first of all concerned about.

[30 : 39] Most concerned about. Is to pray. To pray for labourers. That God would send them out. Thrust them out into the harvest field. And more people would hear the good news. The message that can save.

We need to pray for labourers. We need to pray for converts. That people would actually be turned from darkness to light. And we need to pray above all things. That God would work in our day.

You know many people would say. Oh where is your God? The psalmist could answer. But our God is in the heavens. Can we? Sometimes we wonder if God is really there at all ourselves. We need to pray that God would work.

That we would see his holy arm. Beared to the salvation of people. For the recovery. Of our society. Pray for the peace of the church.

The prosperity. Because when the church prospers. So society will reap the benefit. As a consequence. And it always has. In any age of revival. Now I pray that this building.

[31 : 37] May indeed in itself. Become. A house. Of prayer. Above all things. We need people of prayer. And we need.

In terms of our commitment to the church. Brotherly love and Christian unity. That's what this psalm is talking about. Brotherly love. I think this is a great sign.

Of the Christians. And of the church. The one outstanding sign. They love. One another. And it's not just sentiment. And it's not just words. It is a living.

Practical reality. That can be seen. And felt. And known. And unmistakened. Brotherly love. The other is Christian unity.

Now Christian unity to us. Is a thing not to be despised. But to be desired. We can speak wrongly. I think. Of the ecumenical movements. Throughout our world. And their different forms.

[32 : 37] We can speak rightly. That they may be wrong. In certain places. But we should not write out. Unity as a thing. That is. Should be pushed aside. And is undesired. And is something that we need.

More and more. Both within the local fellowship. And I believe in the wider field. The field as well. We should be ecumenicals. In the best sense of that word. And I believe that the day is coming.

When the church of God in the world. All the different denominations. The church of God will be forced. To acknowledge each other. In their different groups. And branches. And gatherings. They will be forced to meet each other.

They will be forced. To appreciate. And to love each other. Because things will get so tough. For the church. That they will appreciate. Just who their Christian brothers and sisters will be are.

That they will not be a bad thing. If these hard times come upon us. If they make us fulfill what is our great need. Brotherly love. And Christian unity. Within the church of God.

[33 : 39] And there is one last thing. That we need this part of the church's commitment. Sacrificial effort. In order to obtain this.

We must not only pray. But if you look at the end of the psalm. We must seek for the good of the church. We must seek for its prosperity. And that is not merely using our eyes. It means using all our efforts.

Doing everything we can. To obtain the welfare. And the well being of the church. Now how are we going to do it? This is something that demands.

Correct priorities to start. It demands an unselfish form of commitment. It demands fulfilling what Jesus says. Seek first. The kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Not just as a left over. If we have any spare time. We will give it to the church. There is a certain priority. Which God demands. Because we belong to the church. We have the privilege. I believe the church fails.

[34 : 39] When God's people put themselves first. And if you think about that. It is in itself a contradiction. God has brought you into his kingdom. Why? So that you can live for yourself.

Just as you used to do. Not at all. God has brought you into his kingdom. So that you can live for God. First. And if you do that. All these other things. That so preoccupy us.

They will make it to us. Just as well. You see. The apostle Paul had to complain. Even when he wrote to the Philippians. That church that he has to praise. And be so thankful for. He complains.

That all men seek their own things. And not the things that are Christ's. Now there is a terrible condemnation. In any church. Or in any Christian. When they are putting their own things.

Before the things of Christ. There is a certain priority. That is demanded. That of sheer Christian commitment. Seek first. The kingdom of God.

[35 : 36] And I believe that we only truly belong to the church. When we have. When Christ. Has that prior place. And his kingdom. Has that first calling. In our own lives.

Now what do we think of the church? I am not talking about this building. You can make your own assessment of that. What do we think of the church? Because what we think of it.

Determines just how we respond to its call. Let us go to the house of the. Let us come and meet with God. Do we want to do that? Do we really want to do it very much? Do we rejoice in our hearts.

When they say to us. It's the Lord's name morning. Let us go to the house of the Lord. Let us go and meet God's people. Let us go and meet God himself. Do we rejoice? It all depends on what we think of the church.

Let us start with. Do we belong to the church? Belong in the sense that we belong to Jesus Christ. And we can share in all its joys.

[36 : 38] And all its privileges. And all its hope. That it has in the midst of a hopeless world. You see what we think of the church. Will determine also.

Our own commitment to the church. If it's at the very secondary level. It means that our thinking of the church. Is at the very low end as well. What we think of the church.

Determines. Our commitment. Is it Christ first. And his kingdom first. Or us. And may God bless.

His word to us. Shall we bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray. Our gracious and eternal God. We do bless and praise you indeed for your truth.

Lord we do ask that your own word would lead us into truth. To experience it. To practice it. Lord we thank you this day. For what you have told us and taught us.

[37 : 36] About your church. Lord give us a desire to meet with yourself. Give us a desire to belong to you. To belong to the people of God. And all that that means.

For now and for the day. And forevermore. We ask our God that you would bless us even this day. Bless us in our further fellowship together. And grant that you would indeed be in the midst of us.

To seal your word to our hearts. And take away our sin. Even for Jesus' sake. Amen.