

Having Stood The Test - James 1:9-18

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Preacher: Ralph Depping

[0 : 0 0] before Ralph comes up. And James chapter 1 verses 9 to 18. Perfect. Last Saturday week I sprained my ankle stepping out of the car so I was delighted when I heard Jonathan say that the theme for today is standing firm. I hope that we can all learn from Ralph and learn how we can stand firm and you'll hear that phrase as I read out today's passage.

So James chapter 1, if you haven't found it, it's on page 1213 in the Red Church Bibles. 1213. Starting at verse 9 through to verse 18.

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position, but the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wildflower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant, its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly light, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. Let me just pray for Ralph as he comes up.

Father God, thank you for Ralph, for his gifts and abilities that you've given him, those of us who have heard him teach before. Thank you how he helps Johnny and Alex and Jonathan lead this church faithfully. We pray for him as he comes up to speak your word. It's a privilege, but also Lord, it can be a daunting task. So we pray for him that you would give him the confidence that comes only from you and your word, that he would present it calmly and truthfully, honestly, and yeah, that he would remain confident in you and in your Holy Spirit, because we know it's only through your Holy Spirit that our lives can be changed. Otherwise, they're just mere words. So we pray for your spirit here today as Ralph preaches that we would take in what he's being said. We recognize it as truth and that we put it into practice in our lives. We wouldn't just leave it here when we leave.

[3 : 1 6] In Jesus name. Amen. Thanks Ralph. Thank you very much, Connor. I'm just going to adjust things slightly.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I've learned from past experience to do this now rather than midway. Thank you very much, Connor. And we'll be staying mainly in James and referring a little bit back to the passage we read earlier about the parable of the sower.

Pastor Drew Sokol had a crisis of faith. Now, unfortunately for Drew, it came under lights and 10 minutes into preaching a sermon into a large hall, much bigger than this, filled with 800 people. And he was standing on a big stage. And a feeling suddenly came over him that I can't do this anymore. About a week earlier, he'd received an email from a friend, someone in his congregation, a single mom who had two young daughters. And in that email, he discovered that she'd been diagnosed with terminal cancer. This young mother of two young daughters was going to die. Well, he immediately called over and as soon as he got out of his car, he could hear her moaning in pain from the third floor apartment. When he got there, there were the daughters at the kitchen table doing their homework, hardly flinching at each moan because this had become the new normal. Drew prayed with them all that God's love is real, that he is a good God that cares for them and showed that he cared for them by sending his son Jesus to the earth to die on the cross. But by this time, Drew was thinking to himself, is there really this good God, good and loving God when this

mom and her daughters are suffering like this? So a week later on stage, he was preaching on the topic of truth. And he wanted to say to his congregation that morning that that God is the God of history, a God that we can trust, the God who came down and who saves us.

But Drew realized he just seemed too much suffering. And none of this can be real. None of what he's saying made sense to him anymore. This feels fake. I'm a liar and I'm lying to these people and to others. He held it together for the sermon, but immediately afterwards, he threw up and he began to cry. Over the next six months, he began applying for new jobs because, well, as a pastor, you're meant to have all the answers, aren't you? And he didn't. He realized he just didn't believe in the same way anymore. Drew saw the pain and the suffering of a dear friend. And in the midst of her trial, he experienced a severe trial of his own. And his trial caused him to doubt the goodness of God, really doubt. And he almost abandoned the faith.

[7 : 09] What would you say to someone like Drew that is struggling in the midst of a trial like that? What would you say? What words of comfort or what encouragement or challenge could you bring to someone who is tempted to simply give up on God and to walk away?

Well, James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the early church in Jerusalem, knows that his flock, his people, and fellow believers everywhere are going to suffer doubts about their faith. They're going to have these kinds of questions. They will doubt that God is good, especially when trials come. Trials, along with the temptation to give up, and we know this, they're part and parcel in many ways of following Jesus in this world. A world that is at odds with itself internally, and a world that is at odds with its creator. There's going to be struggles and trials and temptations. Where then is our comfort through trials and suffering? Well, I believe that verse 12 is the key for us this morning, and I want to spend some time, in fact, most of this morning focused on verse 12. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love them.

And I believe that James wants us to know this this morning, and this is the radical claim when we consider someone like Drew and that mom. Trials prove the goodness of God. Trials prove the goodness of God.

And in front of the hardest trials that you can imagine, that's a bold statement to make, isn't it? That trials prove the goodness of God. Where Pastor Drew found a trial cast doubt on the goodness of God, I want to humbly say from the word in front of us this morning, that trials ultimately demonstrate the goodness of God.

[9 : 39] That God is for us, and that God is saving us. There are no easy answers here. Trials and suffering are like rakes and spades and shovels that are digging all around us. And when they dig, they expose our roots. And in the midst of trials, we're left vulnerable.

We're at our lowest ebb. And at that point, we feel like there's almost another axe that's coming in and being taken to our very core to chop us down. And at times, we're not even sure we can hang on in some of the trials that we face. But my hope this morning is that we can leave with a renewed confidence in our faith. To root your life in Jesus. And to remember that to be pruned by Jesus through trials is how we know that we are going to arrive at our eternal reward.

For Drew's friend, the mother with terminal cancer, her trials were many and varied. She battled physical pain and inevitable death. And all of that with the worry for her two young daughters. Drew himself underwent spiritual anguish, an existential crisis. Who am I? What do I believe? It threatened his livelihood, his identity, his relationships, his marriage to walk away from his faith? And James is writing to Jewish Christians in the first century of Palestine.

We know they experienced famine, the early church there. Hardship, persecution from family members because they're following of Jesus. From their fellow countrymen and women. And in some cases, believers, people like Stephen, we know from the scriptures and other sources, they were put to death. Such was the persecution and the trials. So trials are many and varied. And the examples I've given are just some. We all experience trials in many ways. They come to us at different times, different circumstances. And as I was thinking about this sermon and thinking about what is a trial, and I think the best definition I could think of is trial is anything, anything that can upset our most basic assumptions about life, the commitments that we have. So if we say that our heart, our heart is set on following Jesus, then trials, when they come, will test and prove that commitment.

So a trial is anything that has that ability to unsettle us at our core. If, on the other hand, if we're not a believer in Jesus, and we ignore God or believe he doesn't exist, and we say that we live in a

purely material universe, and that we go and find our own meaning, well, when trials come for the unbeliever, they're going to upset them in that worldview, aren't they? So whether we're a believer, or whether we're an unbeliever, whether we believe that God exists, or we don't believe there's any God, and anything in between, trials will come and challenge us in our very core and our very center of our beliefs. And trials, I believe, will do one of two things. They'll either drive us closer or further away from that truth that we hold at the very root of our hearts, because that's what trials do, don't they? They unsettle us. They cause us to kind of hop around and maybe step more firmly where we are, or to step away. That's why we read the parable of the sower, because I think it really helps us to understand how trials function in the Christian life. Jesus explains how trials work there, how trials on earth are most important commitments, and show us exactly what it is that we're being faithful to at the root or at the core. We're familiar with the story. A farmer, he comes and he scatters seed, and he's kind of doing it indiscriminately, it sounds like. He's scattering some here and there. Some hits the path, and the birds come and eat that. Great for the birds.

[14:14] Some seed lands in shallow soil, and it starts to grow, but the sun comes out and scorches, and it's all gone. It stops growing. Other seed falls in a place where there's thorns, and as it starts to grow, but ultimately it's choked out by those thorns. Some seed hits good ground, and it puts down deep roots, flourishes, and produces a large crop. And Jesus explains that that seed in that parable, or that story, it's representing the kingdom of God in seed form, the very smallest thing, and it's been sown by Jesus, and by the disciples, and by the church. And that message, it's scattered wide to all kinds of people, all of creation. But then, in time, trials come, and they come along, and they show up whether that message, that seed of the gospel has truly taken root or not in the person's life.

Satan comes, and he tests people's commitment. And because the message landed on that stony path, and it never really penetrated, the person never took hold of it, well, those people aren't going to stay and follow Jesus. They're going to go their own way, aren't they? And a shallow ground, it's like those that initially received the message with joy, and we think, wow, this is amazing.

That person loves Jesus. But persecution, it says, Jesus says, or trouble comes. And because there's no deep root, that trial, it causes those people to leave the faith, to abandon the faith. It never, the message never really took deep root in them. The shallow ground, sorry, the seed among the thorns, well, that grows for a while. But then the worries of life come along, don't they? I mean, we've experienced this ourselves. Just the worries that come from living in this world, the struggles.

Jesus says the love of wealth can be one of those things. And those things, it begins to choke the life out of the gospel message in our hearts. And it shows that ultimately, again, our desire for Jesus is quite shallow. And ultimately, we often see those people struggle and fall away.

Faithfulness is tested at the very root and can be found lacking because there's no real root.

[16:55] Only the seed, Jesus says, that falls on the good soil, the prepared soil, the ready soil, that seed takes root and will outlast the trials that come and go because there's stability. It's rooted in Christ. You see, in the end, our perseverance or our faithfulness prove the depths of a person's love for Jesus. I don't know if you've ever asked this question. I certainly have many times. Why?

Why are there trials? God's God. He could do this in many ways, couldn't he? He could have created a world or a Christian experience or a way of living that possibly may not have necessitated trials like this. He could have sent Jesus once, you know, to come and to take his people. And, you know, in this period that we live in between Jesus' two comings, why is it like this? Why is the Christian life full of trials and of testing? Well, it's ultimately because when testing come, when trials come, the roots are exposed. And it's not enough, James is telling us, to simply say that we have faith in Jesus. It's not just about a set of words, is it? Saving faith. James constantly says in his book, and he tells us in his letter, it's going to be evidenced by what? It's going to be evidenced by love. It's going to be evidenced by works. It's going to be evidenced by obedience. And it's going to be evidenced by faithfulness to Christ. And the easiest, simplest way I can put this is that to be saved by Jesus is to become like Jesus. To be saved by Jesus is to become like Jesus.

There's a connection there. It's not that we're saved by Jesus in the sense of we say a form of words and we're into heaven and that's it. But truly to be saved by Jesus is ultimately to become like Jesus. The root produces fruit. It's another way of saying it, isn't it? The root produces fruit.

Our root within Jesus will produce the fruit of Jesus in our lives. So as Jesus persevered under trials himself, so too will his true believers, those who are united to him by faith.

They will persevere to the end in obedience to God the Father. Rooted belief in Jesus has practical outworkings in our life. And because of that, it exposes some of our inconsistent living.

[19 : 57] So we can say, can't we, that Jesus rose from the dead. And we can acknowledge that. We know it's true from the Bible. Yet thoughts of our own death cause us to doubt that we are going to live forever with God on a new earth. And we're going to live 10,000 lifetimes more. So as a result, because we don't connect those things, that my belief that Jesus rose from the dead and that my eternity is secure, we don't connect that. So as a result, we end up spending our lives trying to secure an early retirement so that we can potter around our gardens or go golfing. But how does our plan for retirement fit with this temporary world that will end versus life unending with Jesus on a new earth?

You see, trials begin to expose our faulty thinking. We say that we follow Jesus' example of trust and humility, how Jesus always trusted the Father. Yet the prospect of being without work for a month or two causes extreme anguish and almost anger towards God when that trial comes, as we fret about having money for all that we think we need. In the midst of trials, the seed of the gospel, that seed that's within, that's going to be plucked, it's going to be starved, it's going to be choked by the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the very fear itself of being tested is going to bring all of its weight to bear on our roots, on our trust in Jesus. Trials expose the roots of our supposed commitment and our inconsistent living. We say that we love Jesus. And trials will either strengthen and prove that or reveal to us and to others, like the other seed, that our faith was actually placed somewhere else.

verse 12 says, blessed. Blessed is the one who perseveres, or happy, or whole, or at peace, and all of those kind of ideas are there. Because those that are faithful to Christ, in that verse, under testing, receive the promised crown of life from Jesus himself. For Jesus says elsewhere, on the same theme in the book of Revelation, Jesus speaking these words, Do not be afraid about what you are going to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Be faithful, even to the point of death.

And I will give you life as your victor's crown. God, who comes down from heaven to rescue us from our sins, also promises us that through trials, we will make it. We will make it to the end. We will persevere and receive a victor's crown. See what it says in verse 12 again, blessed is the one who perseveres under trial. Because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to all those who believe. Our reward is tied to faithfulness, yes. But he is faithful. He is faithful to his own.

The Lord is faithful to his promises. You know, each person starts out in life in rebellion, in their heart towards God. That's our natural state. Whether we religiously try to always do the right thing in order to earn our favor with God and put God in our pocket. Or we're someone who wants to indulge our selfishness. It doesn't matter. Our lives by default are lived to our own standards. We like to set the rules. And we like to say, well, God, if I do this, this, and this, then that'll please you, and you'll have to do things for me. Or we can try and turn our back from God. And we can try and live our own path and our own lives and just live for self. And either one is really the same thing, setting our own standards to live by. But God, the Creator, sets a perfect standard of love and obedience to him. And we fail to love God. We fail to love him and we fail to love others. And as a result, we're separated in our sin and in our disobedience from God. And we deserve his wrath. We deserve his condemnation.

[25 : 00] Yes, through God, the Son, the second person of the Trinity, God, the Son, Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Our slate is wiped clean. We now live under God's perfect standard and we're empowered by the Spirit to follow him if we accept Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. At the cross, Jesus gives his perfect record of faithfulness, of perseverance, of obedience, of good works. He gives us that perfect record. And in exchange, he takes the sin from us and places it on himself.

We are made right with God through faith, by grace, in Christ alone. That's the seed that Jesus spoke about. The seed that's scattered, the seed that's planted, the message of the gospel. Has that message been planted in you?

Do you love Jesus? Have you exchanged your own efforts for all that Christ has done? Do you know in your deepest commitment in your deepest commitment in your heart? Your deepest joy is knowing that Jesus has done it all for me? That Jesus has forgiven my sin? That I have peace with God, the creator of the whole universe?

Jesus has forgiven my sin. If that's not you. If that's not you this morning, if you don't have that peace with God, today is the day. Today is the day. Today is the day. Do not pass up this opportunity, but turn to God in faith. Let that message take root in your life. And I pray that the Holy Spirit is at work and has been preparing your heart as good soil so that message would take root in your very life this morning. This then is how trials save. For in God's goodness, in God's goodness, trials are a means for proving the genuineness of our faith. They're there to prove that our faith and our root is in the right place. It's no kindness to go through life thinking you have it all right when you don't.

The message has been planted. The message is growing and it will persevere because he is faithful. And in the end, we will receive the promised crown of eternal life. Those that are saved will persevere.

[27 : 52] That is true. No trial will ultimately affect the root of our deepest commitment, whatever that might be. And if it's in Jesus, that's where it will stay. And the flip side is also true, isn't it? Those that persevere will be saved. There are two sides of the one coin. We try and separate those things and we argue about them sometimes, but they're both true. Those that are saved by God's faithfulness will persevere.

But in a sense, those that persevere are those that are saved. And those two things beautifully go together in God's providence. Pastor Drew Sokol was rocked by his doubts. But actually, through his crisis of faith, he found at the end that his heart was closer to God than ever before. He loved God the Father. He loves Jesus.

Praise the Lord. He is a faithful minister of the gospel serving in New York City. And his faith was proven genuine. But for the one who falls away under trials, what about them? Their experience is very different. I came across the story of Drew Sokol from a podcast called Hinge. If you're interested in such things, I highly recommend it. It's a 10-part podcast. And it's examining issues of faith and suffering and trials. But the primary question is looking at the evidence for Jesus. So the podcast is Drew on one hand and a committed atheist called Corey Markham on the other. And a very high quality podcast where they look at the evidence for the gospels, the evidence for the resurrection.

What causes people to believe? Is it just all psychological? Or looks at all those issues. But very fair, very balanced, both men co-hosting.

So Drew teamed up with his former Christian and firm atheist, Corey Markham, to produce this podcast about belief and evidence for Jesus. And it's interesting. Within, I think, one or two episodes, Corey makes this ultimate charge. And it's the one that I think he sticks to most.

[30 : 06] And it's probably the hardest one as a Christian to answer. Well, certainly I found. And his ultimate charge in the podcast is this, that there are times when we desperately need God. We desperately need God to make himself known. We need God to show up. And God doesn't show up. He doesn't reveal himself. Where's the evidence? You know, if I call out to God in my trouble or my doubt or my lack of faith, why doesn't God show up like he did in the New Testament and walked around and healed people?

It's just not good enough for me. He doesn't show up today, does he? Not like that. And James knows that verse 12 is a hard sell to people that have undergone trials because through trials, some are tempted and some leave the faith. It's like God has set all the rules for the game, the game of life for the Christian life. And then when we most need God in the midst of our trials, in the midst of our struggles, in the midst of our doubt, and we need God to intervene and to show up and to show that he's there, he refuses. He doesn't. It's like he changes the rules and he blames us for losing the game.

Is the God of trials then also the God of temptation? Is it actually God through his inaction of not showing up that is going to lead people towards unbelief and sin? Is it God's fault then?

At that point? When he doesn't show up? When I need him? And we know that under trial we're tempted, aren't we, to doubt God's goodness. We're tempted to sin. We're tempted towards unbelief.

Look at the start of verse 13. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. But that becomes our reaction, isn't it? That God is tempting me in the midst of this.

[32 : 09] We want the trial to end. We don't like trials. They unsettle us. They shift us around. They move us from foot to foot. And we want it to end. So we turn the tables. And God is testing us. And God is bringing this trial. So we want to flip it around. So we want to test God instead. We want to

turn the tables. God, if you're there, show yourself to me by... And you fill in the blank because you will have your favorite fill in the blank for that situation. God, God, show yourself to me and that you're there and prove yourself by healing me. Father, take away this doubt. Lord, next Sunday, that sermon, I really need it to speak to me, Lord. So if it speaks to me, I'll know that you're there.

Lord, if the third car that passes by is red, I'll know you're there. Father, we will have... Each one of us will have our favorite way to ask God to say that you're there, God. And how we expect him to be there during trials and to prove himself.

And James describes that slippery slope of reasoning that we get into and the consequences of it that are worked out, sadly, time and again in people's lives. And read through this with me and see if you can follow what James is saying. Verse 13. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desires and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Now, I don't think it's talking about the sins, the individual sins that we do here. Don't worry. This is not to say that if you sin, it will lead to death. But there is a sin that leads to death. The sin of unbelief. The sin of turning from God. This is sometimes how our reasoning goes. God has put me in this situation, because we affirm that God is sovereign. He is God. And he's put me under stress. But we go on to argue that we, first to ourselves and later possibly even to others out loud, that God, take an example,

God, you could have given me a more helpful partner in life. You could have given me a happier marriage. Therefore, it's God's fault that when the other person came along and they spent time listening to me, that I ended up sleeping with them in order to feel value and love. God could have stopped me.

He could have stopped me from marrying the wrong person. But God didn't. And then God tempted me. God tempted me in that vulnerable situation. And I gave in. And he knew. He knew I didn't have enough willpower. And he knew I was unhappy at that time. And why did God allow this to happen? Is God even there?

[35 : 30] Because in my greatest need, he didn't show up. And God didn't stop me. God tempted me. It's God's fault. Well, James is a doctor of the heart. And he's not falling for it. He knows that trials, on one hand, and temptations, on the other hand, have different sources. They don't come from the same source. Temptation. Temptation doesn't originate from God. God's immune to temptation. And God doesn't tempt anyone. We can try, can't we, in that turning the tables with God in the midst of trials. We can try and pin the blame on God, can't we? Because we reason about God's power and we say that God is in control and it's his fault that he causes trials. And therefore, he caused me to be tempted and to doubt him. But James says that if we go down that road, then we've only deceived ourselves.

Verse 16. We've only deceived ourselves. We look outward and it's like we want to shine the biggest, brightest spotlight we can purchase. We want to shine it on God. We want to shine it on God.

And, you know, have everyone looking there in our situation. And in the middle of that, while everyone's looking there, we're getting the black bin liners out and we're trying to cover up our own mess. And we're switching off the lights in our own house. And we're even closing our eyes and hoping nobody notices and saying, look, God, it's God's fault. Point the finger of accusation at God. Such self-delusion won't work with the creator of the universe, the one who knows all things. James tells us in verses 13 to 15 that we are ultimately responsible for that relentless path of our own desires through enticement towards the sin of unbelief and ultimately to death.

Don't be deceived by your own heart, James says in verse 16. My dear brothers and my dear sisters, don't be deceived. Don't be deceived by a heart that would accuse God of evil in order to cover up my own sin.

[37 : 59] Let's read those verses. Don't be deceived by a heart that would accuse God of evil in order to cover up my own sin. Let's read those verses. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like the shifting shadows.

He chose to give us, he chose to give you and me birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all that he created.

James ends with truth, true truth, truth that you can build your life upon. And the truth is this in verse 17, that every good and perfect gift is from above.

All that is good, all that is right, all that is praiseworthy in this world finds its starting place in that which has always been perfectly good, God himself.

Everything, everything, everything that is good comes from our Father, God himself. You see, God doesn't change. He's not like the shadow that shifts as the sun rises and moves through its course during the day, and like on a sundial or even your own shadow as that moves and skips around.

[39 : 28] That's not God. That's not what he's like. The shadows that come and go with the moving sun. And why is that important? Well, it's because of this, because God, God, our heavenly Father, set his love upon you.

And when did he do that? He set his love upon you before a single atom in the universe started to vibrate. Before a single atom was created and started to vibrate and to fill this whole expanse. God set his love on you. God willed, before the very first star was called out into its place in the night sky.

God willed that God, the Son, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, would come down to this earth. He would be sent by the Father of the heavenly lights, who sends every good and perfect gift.

And what is the best gift? What is the most perfect gift that comes from our heavenly Father? Is it not the Son? Is it not Jesus, who is himself God?

[40 : 44] The Son comes to the earth for you to take the wrath for your sin. In eternity past, that was agreed for you.

Verse 18. God chose to give you not just physical birth, but God chose to give you a second birth. God chose to give you spiritual birth through his word, the word of truth, the seed of the gospel that we spoke about, that Jesus spoke about, that tiniest of seeds, yet the most powerful of seeds. God chose to rebirth you through that seed in your life. Through his Holy Spirit beforehand, he prepared your heart as good soil so that you, dear brother and sister, might be a kind of first fruit. That when it would grow, that you would be the first fruit. And by that, he means the very best. The very best of all that God is doing in this universe is you.

[41 : 51] Isn't that incredible? That you are the first fruit. You are the best, the very best and most important part of all of his creation because of that new birth.

How then, my brothers and sisters, if this is God's character, and if this is God's heart towards you, can you ever accuse your heavenly Father of tempting you to sin?

If this is the truth, of tempting you to leave the faith and to die under judgment, that's not God. No, God is good.

God is good. Trials prove his goodness. He calls you in eternity past to be his child and a good God will bring trials to grow you in faithfulness so that your faith is proved genuine and you will receive the crown of life that he always planned for you.

Let's pray. Our Father, we depend upon your mercy and we depend upon your goodness. And Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word, the word of truth that is planted.

[43 : 01] And Lord Jesus, I pray that in your goodness that you will bring everyone here through the trials of life. Give them the help and strength that they need from all that you provide to be faithful to you as you are to them.

Be gracious, Lord Jesus. Amen.