

AM Isaiah 55 & John 4:1-18 Jesus in Samaria 1

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Preacher: Rev Ronnie Christie

[0 : 0 0] Isaiah chapter 55. This is entitled, The Compassion of the Lord. Isaiah chapter 55. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear and come to me, here that your soul may live, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let them return to the Lord, that he may have compassion in them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

[1 : 3 3] For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorns, shall come up the cypress. Instead of the briar, shall come up the myrtle, and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off.

[2 : 4 6] May God bless to us this reading. For reading from verse 1. Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize but only his disciples, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee, and he had to pass through Samaria.

So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, weary to see was from his journey, was sitting beside the well.

It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink, for his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him, How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, Give me a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

[4 : 06] The woman said to him, Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob?

He gave us the well and drank from it himself. As did his sons and his livestock. Jesus said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will come in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come back here to draw water. Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband and come here.

The woman answered him, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You are right in saying, I have no husband. For you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.

[5 : 16] What you have said is true. Then, just to remind us of how the story goes, in verse 29, this is what the woman said to the people in the town.

Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? And they go out and they meet with Jesus. And then, in verse 42, we've got the climax of the story.

They said to the woman, It is no longer because of what you said that we believe. We have heard it for ourselves. And we know that this is indeed the saviour of the world.

May God bless to us this reading too. I'm going to look at Jesus and the Samaritans. And we're going to deal with half the story this morning and the rest this evening.

And basically, we're going to look at the passage that we read. So, I have no text in particular. We're just going to look at this story in general. There are two points that I want to deal with before we look at the details of the story.

[6 : 31] And the first question really is this. What is this all about? What is the focus of our attention to be when we are dealing with this story of Jesus and the Samaritans?

Now, some people, and I've done it myself, I used to do it this way in fact, some people treat this as an example of how to do personal evangelism. They focus on how Jesus went about getting in touch with this woman, the way he introduced himself to her, the way the conversation developed, the themes that he touched on, and they say, now that's the way you have to do it too.

So, in that case, the focus of attention is Jesus and the style of ministry, and the lesson is you have to follow that example. Now, I'm not denying that you can get a lot of meaning out of a passage, this passage, in that way, but that's not why John wrote it.

He didn't sit down and say, now, I think we need to teach people how to evangelize personally. So, at this point, I'm going to put in the story of Jesus as the married and woman as an example to them.

That wasn't in his mind, I don't think, at all. So, that's not our focus this morning. Then, generally, this is taken as a picture of a woman that came to know Jesus as the water of life.

[7 : 57] And, therefore, the focus of attention is all in this metaphor of the water and Jesus' explanation of what it means and the woman's response to that.

And, that has got its importance. We're not going to deny that at all. But, it's not really what the whole passage is all about.

If you just focus on that, you've left out an awful lot of what is contained in the scriptures here. You've left out the account of Jesus' teaching about worship.

You've not mentioned the fact that she acknowledges him as the Messiah. It just doesn't work that way. When the Samaritan woman went to tell her people what had happened, she doesn't say, come see a man who gave me the water of life.

Isn't this the Savior? She said, come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Isn't this the Messiah? Messiah. The story is not focusing on Jesus as the water of life.

[8 : 57] That's an element, but it's not focusing on that. It's much bigger than that. It's much wider and deeper than that too. So, we're not going to treat it as a story about Jesus and the water of life.

What we are going to do is to try and acknowledge that here Jesus is really revealing himself to this woman. He shows different aspects of who he is.

Not just that he's the water of life, but other things as well as we'll see. And there's a whole range of ideas that are brought to bear upon this woman. And we are made to understand what she makes of them and what she comes to think about Jesus.

And that's the way we're going to try and look at it. The focus is who is Jesus? What roles does he perform? What does he offer to me, to people?

And therefore the focus of attention is who is Jesus to us today? And what does he mean to me today? And that's the focus of our attention.

[10 : 04] So that's the first big idea that we've discussed before we get down to the text. The focus of attention is not Jesus as an example of personal evangelism or Jesus as the water of life.

We've got to see him in his all-round capacities as revealed in this passage. The second thing that I want to do before we get down to the text itself is to say a wee bit about the setting of the story.

And here we've got to speak about the geography of this, the timing of this, and the cultural background of this. And I'm going to do so as briefly as I possibly can so that we don't have to deal with these things when we begin going through the story itself.

Jesus, or rather, we're told here that Jesus left Judea and departed again for Galilee and he had to pass through Samaria.

Now I'm taking this as a statement about the geography of the area. Judea is in the south of the country and Galilee is in the north of the country. And to go from one to the other, the natural way is to go that you have to go through Samaria.

[11 : 22] And I think that's what is being spoken about here. It is true that some people went eastwards over the Jordan, up the other side of the Jordan and then crossed back into Galilee so that they didn't have to go through Samaria.

Samaria. And that's what led some people to say, this isn't speaking about geography, it's speaking about divine compulsion. He had to go through Samaria.

Well, I'm not denying that there was divine planning behind this, that there was divine planning behind everything that Jesus did. His purpose was to fulfil the will of God and he was always under compulsion in that sense and I take this as a statement of geography only.

If you're going from Perth to Inverness you have to go over Dromochter. Okay, you could go through Dundee and Aberdeen and Elgin but if you said I went from Perth to Inverness and I had to go over Dromochter, that's just a statement of geography and that's what we've got here.

The next thing is the timing of this event. Now, I was disappointed to notice that it says here in the footnotes that six the sixth hour when this happened is 12 noon and I don't want to make too much of this but actually I think it's kind of important not for this story but for other parts of John's Gospel.

[12 : 51] Now, six o'clock to us means either 6am or 6pm and there was a way of counting in that style in the old days as well but the normal way of counting in the Jewish style was to start with the evening and the day started in the evening and so the sixth hour was six hours after evening that was midday midnight or else six hours after dawn which would be midday and that's the Jewish way of doing things.

Now, quite a bit has been quite a bit of emphasis has been placed upon the fact that she went out at 12 noon to get water. Who would do that out in the midday sun to go for water at the well?

Because you could have waited three or four hours and the sun would have strength would have declined somewhat and the answer given is of course she was isolated she was ostracised by the people of the village nobody wanted to associate with her nobody wanted to deal with her and an awful lot of expositions of the story that comes up.

Six o'clock is 12 noon she's going out there because she's a poor isolated woman that nobody wants to speak with because of her sinful lifestyle.

Well, that's one way of looking at it. But I do ask this why can't we take this at 6pm? There was that way of counting things in the world at that time.

[14 : 27] This is our 6pm and it was at a time of day when I suspect that most women had actually got water already but it's not unreasonable to think that in the cool of the day she went out to get water from the well.

And what makes me say that you see is this that elsewhere in John's Gospel you've got to count time like that because it says here for example in regard to Jesus arrest and trial and crucifixion it was about the 6th hour Pilate said to the Jews behold your king so at the 6th hour on John's reckoning Pilate is examining Jesus but 6th hour at the reckoning of the other Gospels there was darkness over the land from the 6th hour until the 9th hour so some Gospels have darkness at 6 o'clock till 9th hour and John's Gospel has them still before Pilate at 6 o'clock so who's right?

well they're both right because John is not speaking in the terms that were common to the Jewish people he's speaking in terms that we understand 6 o'clock in the morning that's what happened 6 o'clock he was before Pilate 6 o'clock by Jewish reckoning he was on the cross and the sun had grown the sun grew dark till the 9th hour well that's what makes me say this happened at 6 in the evening and there's no basis in this story for saying this woman was ostracised she was isolated from everybody else and nobody wanted to speak with her I don't think we have any basis for saying that that's something about timing now the third thing we want to say by way of setting the background is the cultural background this problem of the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans what's all that about after King Solomon in the Old Testament the Jewish nation was split into two the people of Judah were in the south and the people of Israel were in the north and in the course of time after hundreds of years the Assyrians came and they took the people of Israel away into exile and they spared the people of Judah and to replace these people that had been taken from Israel other nations were brought in to settle there and they intermarried with the remaining

Jewish people in Israel and in due course these people became the Samaritans and there was hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans because of this that the people of Judah were taken away into exile by the Babylonians and when they came back they were rebuilding the walls and the Samaritans opposed them so there was bitter hostility between the Samaritans and the Jews dating from that time and the Jews saw the Samaritans as not real Jews at all they had Israel they had Jewish blood in them but they were a mixed race and they had their own temple at Mount Gerizim and didn't come to the temple in Jerusalem and they had their own scriptures just a form of the first five books of Moses so they hated them with sort of hatred that comes from people that are quite closely related but are bad terms with each other and that's the traditional hatred the Jews just had no dealings with the Samaritans and the Samaritans have no dealings with the Jews we must remember that side of things as well so there was deep rooted hatred going back for generations and well worked into the thought patterns of both peoples and that's the situation that we've got here so here then is the setting for the story

Jesus after a day's journey is tired out as you might expect after a full day's journey and he sits down about six in the evening at the well while his disciples go into the town to buy food and perhaps to find somewhere to stay I don't know about that and meanwhile this Samaritan woman from this people that are alienated from the Jews and hostile to them she comes to draw water at the well and that's the story that we've got to deal with now how does Jesus deal with her revealing himself to her what does she think about him what sort of impression is created by him and the first thing that comes out here it seems to me is Jesus concern Jesus compassion even we might say because he's different from other Jewish people he's not like them at all so

[19 : 34] Jesus says to the woman of Samaria give me a drink and what does she say to that the Samaritan woman said to him how is it that you a Jew ask for a drink from me a woman of Samaria Jesus interest in her knows no bounds he's not put off because he's a woman when the disciples do come back they're surprised that he's speaking with a woman but Jesus didn't observe these conventions his concern for people didn't know boundaries and he's prepared to speak to this woman as an individual and as a Samaritan he's prepared to have dealings with her and that's startling to this woman and that's what she asks about how is it that you have an interest in me because there's meant to be hostility between us was meant to be a gender barrier that isn't capable of being crossed and so her interest in Jesus is awakened in his interest in her and willingness to speak with her now this is just a faint picture of what becomes much clearer in the Gospels in general but it is an indication of what sort of person we're dealing with here

Jesus is a person whose compassion knows no bounds when people said don't speak with that woman don't associate with these men because they're tax collectors they're traitors to our nation they're extortion they extort money from the poor and to line their own pockets they're outcasts don't speak to people like that Jesus spoke to them he called Zacchaeus he was a friend of tax collectors and sinners this man receives sinners and eats with them just as he receives this Samaritan woman and drinks with her we may suppose that's his attitude of mind here and it's not plainly revealed here but it is revealed here his compassion knows no bounds he crosses the boundaries that other people aren't prepared to cross there is no one excluded from his interest because of their ethnicity because of their social background because of their standing in the community because of their moral standing similarly

Jesus' compassion knows no bounds it reaches to people wherever they are whatever their condition and that's the Jesus we've got here whoever we are whatever our situation whatever our particular characteristics nobody should feel that they're outside the bounds of Christ's love and compassion because here's the beginning of the revelation of Jesus whose compassion knows no bounds then we move on from there and the second thing has got to do with Jesus' power now there is something strange here you know and we'll notice it as we go on there's abrupt changes in the conversation the woman is asked can you explain please why you're talking to me why you a Jew have dealings with me a Samaritan because it's not the done thing at all she asks that question does he answer it well he says if you knew the gift of

God in verse 10 and who it is that is saying to you give me a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you a living water now why does Jesus say that well I must say I don't entirely know but it's possible that he's really going behind the question that the Samaritan woman has been asking which he does frequently in the gospels he doesn't answer the question that has been posed but he does answer the thoughts of a person's mind and this woman is saying in effect who is this person he's not like others he's different who is he and Jesus is telling who he is I'm the water of life now we'll look at that in a moment but before we get there you see notice that the woman doesn't immediately respond to that in spiritual terms the woman in verse 11 says sir you have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep where do you get that living water are you greater than our father Abraham and our father Jacob he gave us the well and drank from it himself as did his sons and his livestock so she's not interested at the moment in the message that

Jesus is proclaiming here about the water of life she's taken up with how we can do a thing like this now it's quite obvious that she's misunderstood what Jesus is saying we'll come back to that she's thinking that he's saying I can give you water that doesn't come from this you know I can give you water and she says how come you can give us water you have nothing to draw with the wells deep are you greater than our father Abraham so you see awakened in our mind is this person is different than our father Jacob sorry greater than our father Jacob now that's a pretty sweeping thing to say Jacob one of the patriarchs of the Samaritan people is one of the Jewish people's patriarchs as well and this Samaritan woman is saying who are you you've crossed this boundary that others have set to talk with me and now you're saying that you can give me water are you greater than

[25 : 28] Jacob and there's that scene in our mind that there's a power about this this is no ordinary person this is something special different greater even than Jacob himself and of course if we look at that in the same way as we looked at the other point that's what was happening in Jesus life and ministry usually they saw it in his miracles this is no ordinary person ordinary person can't do that sort of thing this is special power this one there's the power of God even behind them now the Samaritan woman doesn't go as far as that but you can see her moving in that direction she's impressed with the claims of this man that seems to make him a great great figure greater than Jacob himself and that you see suggests not only was she beginning to think about this compassion she was beginning to think about this power as well and that's what we've got of course this is the thing we don't doubt because we know all the miracles and we're thoroughly impressed with this but the compassion and power of Jesus go together he's not just able to help us which is probably to us no great problem but he's willing to help us which is what the problem is in many cases we don't doubt his ability to do something for us but we do doubt whether he's going to be willing to do it for us in particular circumstances but in this case you see you've got both these aspects that are welded together that are presented together she's made to think of this man crossing boundaries to meet her she's made to think of this man doing greater things than Abraham and Jacob so you see this revelation of Jesus is building up a bit and it develops now into what seems to be the main point of this first part of the story

Jesus is the water of life now here as we've said the woman doesn't immediately respond to what Jesus has said in that connection she's more taken up with the idea that he's greater than Jacob so Jesus responds in verse 13 everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life now here's the big spiritual picture of who Jesus is the water of life now we understand this because we were brought up to understand it the water the actual physical water is a picture of the grace of Christ as we need water to live if we don't have water we'll die water gives us strength and vitality and it's absolutely essential and so the grace of Christ does that for us in a spiritual sense we understand that quite easily

I suspect that the perceptive Jewish person would have understood this as well after all they've had the Psalms and the prophets that we've been dealing with so we have like as the heart pants for streams of water so my soul pants for you Lord thee my God I early seek my soul doth thirst for you and in the prophets as we've read come to the waters and that he that is no money come buy and eat by wine and milk without money and without price so these are Old Testament pictures of this idea just as you need water to live and a thirsty person longs for it and sees it as what will give him life and vitality so we have to look to God and see him as acting in the same way and then in the New Testament Jesus takes these common pictures and he says in effect

I'm the water that these Old Testament passages were speaking about a Jewish person should have been able to understand this but this is a Samaritan and she hasn't got the Psalms and she hasn't got the prophets and she doesn't understand it and we'll come back to that in a minute but that's the situation here now see what Jesus is setting before her the revelation isn't grasped I believe but it is made so that if she thinks back on this afterwards she'll be able to grasp what Jesus actually has been saying here he's been making big claims here he's capable of giving real life it's going to be life that will be really satisfying everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again so he's saying this water you've got to have time and time and time again you relieve your thirst and then you go and do your work day by day and you get thirsty again and so it's a constant repetition but the water that I give you don't get thirsty again in the same way there's a constant source that will satisfy you the water that I give you is satisfying water and not only that but he goes a bit further and he says the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life so it's not just a drink from a well that he's giving us as it were it's a well that he's giving us it's a well within us that he's giving us a constant source of supply that's resident within us that's bubbling up all the time that's there fresh for us to utilize at any moment a constant supply of grace that is rooted in our beings within our hearts within us so that it will never fail so it's not just something that satisfies it's also something that never fails and then another element is this look at the result of this it's a spring of water welling up to eternal life the issue is not that we are going to live forever the life that we're going to get is a new quality of life it's eternal life it's the life of God and the soul of man if you like it's that sort of thing that brings a new dimension into the present experience and a new future for us that looks beyond our natural death that's what's promised here so it's a remarkable revelation that is given to the woman here and I don't think she grasps it but anyway it's given and that's who

Jesus is somebody who is an unending supply that satisfies somebody that plants something within us that remains there as a constant source of supply something that will remain forever and be something that produces eternal life a fantastic revelation this is and of course we know what this means and we can fill it out in more detail we can say for example the Holy Spirit comes to us and implants his life in us the spirit is implanted into our lives at the new birth and there it remains it remains as a source of grace to us it remains to us there as a spring of living water that's what it is the Holy Spirit within us and this means that whatever be our situation if we have come to know that experience the grace is available to us it's varied grace that will meet our varied needs and we understand this quite clearly and that's the message for us here's Jesus revealed to us have you drunk from this fountain of grace have you come to know him in such a way that you can say I've tasted the water of life and I've been satisfied with it have you known the influence of the spirit in your heart to such a degree that you can say the Holy

[34 : 17] Spirit is within me a well of water springing up constantly bubbling up there so that I'm never lacking in what I need and have you something that enables you to look to the future and say I may goodness and mercy follows me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever if not that's what Christ offers us come to him and know him rest upon him constantly and lay claim to the promises that are ours and make sure that when you're guilty you come to him and find forgiveness make sure that when you're distressed you come to him and you find comfort make sure that when you're perplexed you come to him and you find guidance that when you're lonely you come to him and find companionship because he's the water of life giving unending satisfaction on a constant basis to those that trust in him and that's what this point of the story teaches us now there's a further thing that we're just going to touch on and this is where we stop and we'll take up the matter again this evening all be well now what's going on here because again we've got a very big transition

Jesus said to her go call your husband and come here now what's he doing changing the subject and why change it in that direction well I think the thing is you see the woman hasn't understood so Jesus doesn't and you can see this in what she herself says the woman said to him sir give me this water wonderful wonderful she's asking for the water of life but is she give me this water so that I'll not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water she's still thinking of water natural water physical water nothing more than that she hasn't had the insight to understand what Jesus is offering and I think that that's what determines what Jesus says next he doesn't say to her daughter your faith has saved you remain well from all your problems with this well of water that is now within you he doesn't acclaim her in that way or comfort her assurer in that direction he changes the subject because you see there's an element in her experience that she hasn't been taking into account and he wants her to bear in mind her moral status before God and that's why Jesus changes the subject he's not really changing the subject what he's really saying is this okay you've missed the point and you'll not get the point until you come to terms with this fact that you've got a moral mess in your life and so he says call your husband and she says I don't have one and he says you've had five husbands and the one that you have is not your husband implying I think it's somebody else's husband that she's got now I used to think of this as meaning that she was just a loose woman but I heard a sermon on this in fact it was from your old minister I heard a sermon on this recently and it made me think that it doesn't necessarily mean to say that she was living in serial adultery if you might say that with one woman one man after another it doesn't necessarily mean that she had five husbands what had happened to them maybe they had died and she's been a poor widow suffering the trauma of widowhood time and time again maybe she's been divorced because it was quite easy for a man to divorce a woman in those days at any whim perhaps even that doesn't reflect on her moral character but it was still a traumatic experience or maybe indeed she was living loosely at least to some degree so I don't think we should say this was a woman that was no better than a prostitute maybe but maybe no maybe this is a poor woman that has been widowed two times and divorced three times we don't know but I think we should bear in mind that possibility that she's not an out and out prostitute the way people wouldn't perhaps think about it but she has a moral problem and that's what

Jesus is wanting her to face up to now she doesn't face up to it she's taken up with something else which will develop this evening so we're going to stop here what does this say about Jesus and the way that reveals himself to people he's one who makes moral demands yes he's really saying you won't want the water of life you won't get the water of life until you face up to your sinfulness first of all you can't have one without the other and if you're not ready yet to see me as the water of life it's because you haven't seen how sinful you are and how much need you have for forgiveness and for your life to be sorted out at a moral level I think that is what Jesus is revealing to us here you have no grace apart from guilt no grace apart from a realisation of yourself as a needy sinner and that's an important thing for us to bear in mind as well we were on holiday recently in Berkshire and beforehand and I looked on the web to see what church we might possibly go to and I found a church that had a statement of belief and point five in the statement of belief or maybe it was point four said we believe that the most important relationship in everyone's life is the relationship with God and that

Jesus has made it possible for us to become sons and daughters of the living God now that's pretty good you might think it is pretty good you know there's a lot of good stuff there a relationship with God through Jesus sons and daughters of God big thing that and you might wonder here's a gospel church we can go to but then I read the rest of it and it didn't say anything wrong it just didn't say the things that were important no real mention of sin no mention of the cross no mention of the Bible and I thought they've got something there but they haven't got what counts because Paul said I put before you what was of most importance that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures the most important to Paul Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures a church that can't put in this statement of belief something about the Bible about the cross and about sin isn't a gospel church because the things of most importance are not there and that was what this woman was like in one respect at least she had been presented with the blessings and she hadn't seen the need of them because sin hadn't yet been brought into the picture and that's what Jesus is trying to do here so this fills out the picture by all means come to see Jesus as the water of life but you'll do that increasingly the more you recognize your moral problems and the more you recognize well the first thing you need to do is to deal with the question of guilt and deal with the question of sin and when that's put right then we can drink of the water of life freely and find it as a constant refreshing source for us so there's where the message ends for this morning

Jesus his compassion crosses all bounds knows no bounds so don't think that you're excluded from his grace Jesus power knows no limits so don't think there's anything impossible to him Jesus promises eternal life the water of life to sustain us constantly unfailingly and he does so to those that recognize their sin and come to unforgiveness and rest upon his grace first of all in that way and that's the message that this brings to us today that's the saviour that is presented to us today and it's us our duty to respond to it come to him in guilt and in sin receive his forgiveness and experience day by day the water of life in every aspect of our beings may God bless to us his word we're going to see we're going to see you