

God is personal and speaking

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[0 : 00] So 2 Timothy 3, verse 1 to 4, verse 5. But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty, for people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

Avoid such people, for among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sin and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

But just as Janus and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

[2 : 22] But as for you, continue in what you have learnt and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learnt it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearance and his kingdom, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

[3 : 36] As for you, always be sober-minded. Endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry.

Well, good morning, everyone. For those who are visiting, I'm one of the pastors here. My name's David. David the Older.

David the Ordinary. Yeah. So, you and I live in a huge world. It's a fragile world.

And I think, oftentimes, it's just a scary world. We live in this huge, fragile, scary world alongside almost 8 billion other people.

And our world is dwarfed. Our planet Earth that we live on here is dwarfed in our solar system, which in turn is dwarfed in our galaxy, the Milky Way, which in turn is immeasurably dwarfed by the universe.

[4 : 47] We are so small in our universe. And that begs the question that is in everybody's mind at some point in their life is, yes, we're small, but are we insignificant?

That huge question of meaning and purpose explains in part why every one of us has what I'm calling this morning a voice in our head, a life voice.

Words that are speaking into us all the time. A life script, perhaps you might call it. It's something that comes from outside ourselves and which we need to give ourselves some perspective in our

smallness, to give ourselves a sense of meaning and purpose in this giant, humongous universe. We need that voice because it needs to be bigger than ourselves. Now, every person has it and every person listens to it.

Not every person is aware they're listening to it, but every person listens to it. That voice actually defines and shapes how they think about themselves, how they think about our world and how they live in the world on a daily basis.

[6 : 12] It gives perspective to daily life. Now, for young children, I think that voice might well be just the voice of parents.

That seems to be the size of their universe as young children. For teenagers, the universe gets a bit bigger, but not necessarily wiser. So that voice might just be the voice of peers.

Dare I say the blind leading the blind. Social media. I don't know how you describe that. For adult Australians, the predominant voice is science.

Science says, well, yes, I'm a very, very insignificant little cog in a very, very big mechanistic world, a big machine.

It's impersonal. And it exists only by chance, by randomness. That doesn't really help with significance, does it?

[7 : 20] The problem is with that, is that people can't live as an insignificant part of a huge machine. People, by nature, crave relationship.

We actually crave a beating heart at the center of our universe. We crave something and long for something and almost need something that's bigger than ourselves, bigger than what we can see. A being, whatever we call it, some form of God. People call it all sorts of different things. But there's a common longing for something bigger than ourselves, something or someone who will understand our universe and, in a sense, understand our part in that universe.

And thereby, find significance for ourselves in that universe. And so, given that people can't live, really, with the voice of science, it's constantly in competition with the voice of religion, the voice of spirituality.

And there's literally hundreds of thousands of different forms of that in our world. But it's so common. People want and need some form of God.

[8 : 36] Some one or some being who's there in the background. Someone who knows our world. Someone, in a sense, who sees us. Well, friends, what people long for, I want to tell you this morning, is at the heart of biblical Christianity.

The key of Christianity is, at the heart of our universe, is a beating heart. Is a personal God.

If we're to know that God and be known by him, he must be personal and speak. Now, at this point, I just want to stop and make a disclaimer here.

I really wish that Adam's introduction this morning was my sermon introduction. I said to Alison as he was going through that. That's what I should have had as an introduction to my sermon. So, if you can reflect back to Adam's words, it's a much better introduction than mine.

So, it's a really good thing because if we are to know God and be known by him, he must be personal and speak. Words are how we get to know people.

[9 : 48] Unless God took the initiative to tell us what he's like, to tell us what's in his mind, we would never be able to find out. We might have a vague sense that there's a God out there.

But we wouldn't actually know. We couldn't live securely with knowledge of that God out there. What does he want of us?

Does he want anything of us? Those sorts of things are beyond human discovery. In a world where science tells us that we can discover everything.

Not so. Those things are beyond human discovery because God is outside of all human methods of investigation. And so, in speaking, God reveals things about himself.

He reveals things about us. He reveals things about our world that otherwise would be hidden and unknowable. And as Adam said in his introduction, words are relational.

[10 : 52] So, as I speak to you over a period of time, you get to understand what I'm like. You get to see something of my character. You'll hear something of my aspirations. I'll express my thoughts.

As Catherine said this morning, without words, very, very little can be known about someone. We can guess.

We can hope. But unless we have words, very little may be known with certainty about another person. In this case, God. And there's a verse in Isaiah 55.

I'm just going to turn to it now. You can listen or find it if you're quick at finding these things. In Isaiah 55, verse 8. God tells us this through the words of Isaiah.

God's word through Isaiah's words. We'll say more about that in a minute. God says this. For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways. My ways, declared the Lord.

[11:57] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways. And my thoughts than your thoughts. In other words, God's saying there's a great gulf between me and you.

You couldn't span that gulf in your own resources. For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bear fruit and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread theater, 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. God's word bridges the gulf and makes God knowable to us.

And more importantly for us, at an experiential level, makes it possible that we will be known by God. Now, first point of application.

It's a small point and yet a big point. At a very, very practical level, that means that our knowledge of God is something that we need to see as a gift from God and value it as such.

[13:18] We're so familiar with God's word as Christians, aren't we? That we forget it is a really, really precious gift that God should speak to us and tell us about himself and tell us about ourselves.

And as we saw in 2 Timothy 3, tell us about salvation. God's speaking to us, God's word, is a precious gift of grace and mercy from the Lord.

Okay, next question. How does God speak? All right, we're saying God needs to speak and as he speaks, then we see his personality. God is personal as he speaks. But how does God speak?

Well, you don't need to be rugged science to work this one out. We know that effective communication or relationship requires words.

The best communication requires precise words, clearly spoken. In just the same way, God speaks into his world, into the lives of his people, using ordinary words.

[14:27] He uses ordinary words to reveal himself. And so God speaks meaningful statements about himself.

He reveals in those meaningful statements, sentences, ordinary functions of language and grammar, he reveals his character. He reveals his physical relationship, his relationship to the physical universe.

He reveals how he wants to relate to ourselves as his image bearers in the universe, as we've seen in Genesis 1-3. In speaking personally and precisely, God prescribes how we are to think about him.

He says, this is what I'm like and this is how you should think about me and how you should engage with me. This is what you should believe about me, says the Lord. This is how you ought to respond to me when you hear me speak.

And in turn, as we hear and get our picture filled out of what God is like, then that tells us something really, really important about ourselves in relation to God.

[15:39] How we're to think about ourselves individually and collectively as humans. Now we see this in Genesis 3, Genesis 1-3. Right through Genesis 1, God spoke and God said words, front and center, powerful words.

God's word spoke our universe into existence in all its diversity, in all its differentiated parts and its single whole.

God's word spoken. And as he speaks, and we see that in Genesis 1-2-3, his words and the actions that come hot on the heels of his words, his words always achieve what he says, his words and the resultant actions reveal perfectly his character and his purpose.

and God said, and it happened, and God's conclusion, it was good. It was exactly as God said it would be and deemed it would be.

And in Genesis 1-2-3, we see what God's words speak of God. So it speaks, first of all, of his existence.

[17:02] God exists. He has to exist to be personal and speaking. And he existed before in the beginning. In the beginning, Genesis 1, but before the beginning, God existed in Trinity.

Father, Son, and Spirit. It tells us, God's word tells us about God's creative power. Tells us about his goodness. Tells us about his personal glory reflected in his image bearers. It tells us about his desire to relate to his image bearers, loving and providing for them in abundance. It tells us about his holiness and majesty in Genesis 2, commanding his image bearers to live under his rule.

And then in Genesis 3, calling his image bearers to account when they refuse to live under his rule. And then in the end of Genesis 3, it speaks of his steadfast love and commitment to his people and his world, even in the midst of and in the light of their rejection and rebellion.

Huge amount we learn about God's character and God's purpose in those first three chapters of our Bible. So God speaks using ordinary words. And those words are recorded and preserved in what we call the Bible.

[18:19] So it's very appropriate to say that the Bible is God's words in men's words. So ask the question, well, how do we know what God's words were in the very beginning of our world?

Adam and Eve were the only ones there. Maybe they didn't even hear those words and God said. So how do we know what God said? Answer, because we have the Bible.

The Bible, by its own definition, is the written record of what God has said in relation to his world.

God's words. God's words and that brings us to 2 Timothy 3, 16.

Scripture is God-breathed. The word for breathed there is the same word that's used in other places and in Genesis 1, 1, for that matter, for the Holy Spirit.

The point here, I think, is that just as the Holy Spirit was involved in the physical creation at the very beginning, so the Holy Spirit is fully involved in creating the Scriptures or what we call the Bible.

[19:39] And we're told, I don't have time to track through it all. You can research this for yourself.

We're told that the Holy Spirit oversees supernaturally a range of ordinary people writing in the different centuries at different times and different circumstances and he oversees them supernaturally to record precisely what God wants them to write.

And here's the point. It is so precise and so accurate under the Holy Spirit's superintending that we can say with confidence that when we read these words, here in 2023, here in 2023, that they are just as real and living and direct and just as much God speaking as if God himself was standing here in front of us this morning.

that's what the scripture itself says of scripture. Now that doesn't mean the writers, the Bible writers were mindless robots.

No. The Holy Spirit superintended the normal function and faculties of each of those individual writers so that not only do we have God's word recorded over generations but we see a lot of different personality types.

We see a range of styles but all combining to be God's recorded word. God's words in man's words.

[21:10] And the next thing is then we need to understand that that revelation of God in words is progressive. As we move through the Bible from Genesis right through to the end we see the progressiveness as God excuse me as God speaks he unfurls his plan of salvation.

Now again as in any relationship the longer it lasts the more deeply we get to know the person we're relating to. And so it's the same.

God's revelation of himself gets richer and fuller and clearer as we track through what we call the Bible. As we trace his relationship and see his salvation plan unfurl through history.

And again we see that principle in Genesis 1-3. I'll demonstrate it there and then I'll be jumping back to the New Testament again. So when you look at Genesis 1-2 then we see a lot about God's character.

but in Genesis 3 we see aspects of God's character that I believe couldn't possibly have been known in the time frame of Genesis 1-2.

[22:29] So in Genesis 1-2 God's a creative God he's a good God he's a personal God but it's not until we get to Genesis 3 that we see an aspect of God's character that would have been new to Adam and Eve that is we see that God is a God of wrath a God who takes himself very very seriously and who will act decisively with those who reject him and refuse to live under his rule.

And we'll see in Genesis 3 he's a God of judgment. There are consequences for stepping out from under the authority of this good creative God that we meet in Genesis 1-2.

and in the end of Genesis 3 we also see that this is a God of grace and mercy and compassion.

You see it's progressive revelation three chapters in and we're already starting to build a much

richer picture of God's character and God's purposes.

And progressive revelation continues throughout the Old Testament as God speaks to his people in covenant relationship with them.

Each book of the Bible each generation each circumstance each event we get another little bit of the picture until the process is completed with Jesus.

[24 : 04] Why is it completed with Jesus? Well you need to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 1 to start putting that point down in concrete terms.

So the writer of Hebrews says this in Hebrews chapter 1 Long ago at many times and in many places God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature and he upholds the universe by his word and by his word of his power and after making purifications for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Progressive revelation we get an increasingly clear picture of God and his purposes and salvation until we get to Jesus and when we get to Jesus we've got the final piece of the puzzle.

The one piece of the puzzle in a sense makes sense of all the other pieces that come before it. If you want to know what God says look at Jesus he's the exact imprint.

[25 : 44] If you want to see the creative power of God look at Jesus he's the radiance of God's glory. Do you want to know what God is like?

Look at Jesus he's been with Jesus since before the creation of the world. He's been with God since before the creation of the world. He is God before the creation of the world.

God has spoken most plainly God has spoken lots throughout the Old Testament but he's spoken most plainly and finally in Jesus. In other words God has nothing more to say in terms of his salvation plan.

is fully embodied and fulfilled in Jesus. We see the same thing in John chapter 1 verse 1 to 18 where that famous passage of the word the word becomes flesh and again I don't have time to read it all but the highlight of that introduction is that the word you can't get any more personal than that than saying the word actually becomes flesh.

God's creative saving word actually becomes flesh in the person of Jesus and dwells among us.

[27 : 06] Why? That we might have new life. Now again just to pause on the way through here and just score a point by way of something to think about application wise.

What that means I believe and I think we've lost that in so many places in the Christian church what it means is that all religious experience all religious authority must be evaluated against the words of Jesus.

If he is the complete the fulfillment of God's word the final God's word then whatever Jesus says has to be the measure of what God's will and purpose in our world is and in the church.

How do we fit the New Testament into that? Well the New Testament was written by divinely appointed apostles who took the words of Jesus and applied them under the supernatural superintending of the Holy Spirit applied them in the building of the church and so the record of the New Testament is the record of the word God's words through Jesus as the Old Testament is the record of God's spoken word into his world.

Well that's how God speaks. Why does God speak? Well the first thing I want to say here is that God doesn't need to speak really. Sometimes we speak or you know sometimes you have the person who speaks would never be me but they speak because they're lonely or because there's a space and they have to fill it with words.

[28 : 55] God's not like that. He's not lonely. He's not filling up some longing or deficiency in himself. His purpose in speaking is very very purposeful and that is to deliver us into unending pleasure with him.

In other words God speaks in order that we might be friends with him that we might be in relationship with him. Again we've seen in the past few weeks Genesis 1 to 3 that we learn that people there people were created people are made to know God.

Our purpose in life is to know God and enjoy him. The good life, the best life that we were created for is the life lived under God and with God.

Those are all themes from Genesis 1 to 3. Jesus reinforces that truth and makes it more precise in John 17 that famous prayer on the eve of his crucifixion.

He says this is life. They might know him who sent me and know me. In other words God speaks. The reason I'm here as the word living and dwelling among you is that you might have true life, eternal life.

[30 : 25] that you might be in relationship with God forever. Friends, why does God speak? Well, ultimately he speaks that we might receive salvation and fellowship with him forever.

Now, again, see the potential disconnect there. That means, again, if God hadn't spoken, there wouldn't be salvation, there wouldn't be fellowship.

Flip the coin again. That means we're made as rational beings, and we are rational beings, well, at least some of the time. We're supposed to be rational beings. We're able to think, we're able to act on our environment, we're able to love, listen, speak.

Why do we do all those things? Ultimately, for us as people, we do all those things because they're elements of creating relationship and building relationship.

They're elements of affection and commitment. And God has made us as we are, his image bearers, that we might be able to engage in meaningful, reciprocal relationship with him.

[31 : 59] So, God doesn't want to relate to us like a farmer relates to a sheep dog. Get behind. No, he wants to relate to us more like the picture of a husband and wife, a father and son, or two besties, whatever picture it is.

It's that picture of intimacy, a picture of affection, reciprocal nature. So, God speaks.

And because God is committed to this friendship, being living and active, then it's not a surprise that his word is described as living and dynamic and active, as a guide throughout life.

Again, the only way to make friends is to speak and keep on speaking. If a friendship is going to survive, it needs to be fed with words and affections.

God speaks to his image bearers. He finds joy in giving us gifts. And we find our joy in giving him thanks.

[33 : 22] Again, back in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 again. God's greatest gift is new life in Christ. And his word, we're told there, and notice the tense, his word, though written in the past, present tense, is able.

It's living, it's dynamic, it's active, is able to bring us to salvation. But much more, it's able, and again, notice the present tense written in the past, but is able to guide us and nurture us into the life of righteousness, the life of Christ-likeness, or in the words there, to make us true men and true women as we were created to be.

And since God hasn't changed, his voice to the world hasn't changed. So the Bible you have in your hands this morning or on your device, the Bible you have this morning is God's current living, active, dynamic word to you today in 2023 as it was when it was first spoken.

The Bible is God's complete message to his world. Now, it never claims to say everything there is to know about God.

That's an important thing. Sometimes we want the Bible to say more than it's ever promised to say. It never claims to say everything there is to know about God, but it does claim that it says everything we need to know to live well in God's world as God's people.

[35 : 01] So, final question. What should be our response to God's personal words and promises? Well, I think it's a very simple equation.

The shape of God's revelation determines the shape of our response. God's revelation comes to us in words and statements and commands and promises our response.

ought to be in terms of listening, hating, and obeying, believing, trusting. It's that simple. In other words, we ought to be, our first response ought to be active listening to God's word.

Now, the danger of not listening is so real for us and so dangerous. Genesis 3, the very first instance of God's people when they stopped listening to God, choosing not to hear God's word, choosing not to heed God's word.

And Genesis 3 describes that as an act of arrogant rebellion. how significant was it? Well, it was whole of life changing.

[36 : 32] It was generationally changing. It was a catastrophe. One simple act of stopping listening to God's word, and here's the consequences.

But it wasn't just that simple act of stopping listening to God's word, because as they stopped listening to God's voice, God's word, then they actually started listening to their own voice, their own words. Well, I'm not going to be limited by God's command.

I'm very capable of deciding what's good and bad. I don't need God to do that for me. They listened to Satan's lies. Well, come on, it's not that big a deal.

So, it's not just that we stop listening to God and then there's a vacuum. As we stop listening to God's word, then we start listening to other words, the voices that come to us from our society, from our culture.

After they sinned, we see the same thing happening again. They were hiding from God's word. They didn't want to engage with God's word. Genesis chapter 4.

[37 : 54] Cain kills Abel. How can we pitch that? Well, I'm going to pitch it in these terms. Why did Cain kill Abel? Well, I think Cain killed Abel to silence the voice of righteousness that Abel had expressed to Cain, which exposed Cain's shabby attitude to the Lord.

Cain's mind. And so we have the voice of self-protection in Cain's mind, the voice of self-defense showing itself to be so ruthless that it would try and silence the voice of righteousness rather than repent and say sorry to God.

God. It's dangerous to stop listening to God's voice. Hebrews chapter 3. I'll just reference it.

I don't have time to even go to it. Hebrews chapter 3 notes how God's people spent 40 years in the wilderness. Now, there's many reasons why they spent 40 years in the wilderness. What was the summary in Hebrews chapter 3?

They stopped listening to God's voice and paid the consequences for it. What were they listening to instead of God's voice? Well, they were listening to a romanticized version of their life in Egypt.

[39 : 20] At least we had onions to eat back there. It was a crazy voice, but they were listening to that rather than listening to God's voice. And friends, we're not any different.

I think it's incredibly sad. Even stronger. It's just so wrong to observe believers.

Remember, believers are those who claim to value relationship with God, who claim to value God's word. It's just so sad and so wrong to see believers form conclusions about issues and make life decisions.

without reference to God's word. How does that happen? We're actually under increasing pressure to shut down God's voice, God's words in our mind and go with the voice of popular belief. belief. Haven't been able to turn on the TV to watch the news for the last two weeks. All against gay pride, gay Mardi Gras. The voice of popular pressure, popular belief.

[40 : 42] belief. It's even more sad, I think, and I observe this all too often to see believers, those who've been Christians for many, many years, find themselves in a position where they're almost illiterate in terms of what God's voice would be on this particular issue or that particular issue.

How does that be? We're tooled up with information at so many other points of reference.

Why aren't we so tooled up when it comes to God's word? Friends, it's as simple as this. Our view of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is inseparably tied to our view of God's word.

It just goes together. Careless in respect to God's word, careless in respect to God. The proper hearing of God's word will overflow in determined action, a life of belief, faith, or trust.

God's word God's word is God's word speaks primarily because he wants to be in relationship with his image bearers, since he promises salvation, since he promises the good life, since he promises the life of abundance, and says, this is how you get it, then our determined action ought to be a life of faith, a life of belief.

[42 : 33] God has said it, will accept it. God has promised it. I'll live my life trusting in it. God has declared it.

I dare not look for an alternative source of truth on it. So I'm just going to finish by asking a question. Whose voice has captured your head, your mind, your heart? Whose voice, therefore, I'm asking you, is shaping your life daily, informing your decisions, determining the point at which you will pivot and resist our society?

I'm just going to I'm seeing increasingly in evangelical circles even, that churches are trying to use something other than God's word to build churches, to build communities of Christ's people, to build maturity.

humanity. That's got to be hopeless, hasn't it? At the very least in Congress, that we who say we delight in the Lord would be listening to some other voice to grow ourselves into maturity.

[44 : 12] It doesn't make sense. And yet I think all too often is true. So we need to be asking ourselves individually, and we need to ask it analytically of our whole church family here.

Are we listening to God's voice? Are we hating God's voice? Are we determined to act in the light of God's voice? At every point in how we relate to one another, in how we deal with difficulties with one another, in what we teach people as the hope and certainties of life looking forward into the future?

We've got to ask ourselves, well, if we say we're listening to God's word, then what difference is it making in your life? Is it something you delight in? Is it something you crave to understand and apply more?

That is God's word as a written record. Do you see and appreciate and savour the perfection of God's word for every aspect of your life?

To grow you, to lead you, to keep you in every circumstance of life, to deliver you safely into the next life? Do you pray that God's living act of word will crash through your defensiveness and expose your sin?

[45 : 37] or you still want to hide from God's word in those key areas of sin that you find yourself loving all too much?

That's what I know. I do that myself, so I'm not asking you something I haven't asked myself. It's shameful. We need to ask the Lord to crash through our defense and to expose our sin so that we might repent and become all the more appreciative of the grace we have in Christ.

The only option I can think is that God's voice is just annoying white noise in the background while you're busy trying to listen to another voice.

It's sometimes infuriating in a shopping center or a party or something where there's too many competing voices and you know you should be listening to this particular voice but it's just a bit of white noise in the background because you're actually trying to listen to somebody else's conversation over there.

Well, are you listening to another voice that's promising you a better life down a different pathway?

[46 : 51] Even as you're sitting here this morning, I would mean you to say, and I might get myself in trouble for this, but sadly I think there's way too many like this in our church for whom God's voice is just white noise in the background while they're busy trying to listen to another voice.

I just want you to consider this morning if that's actually you. Well, pray with me. Lord, we thank you that you've chosen to speak to us, that you revealed yourself to be a personal God who loves to be in relationship with us, who wants to be in relationship with us, who's actually defined relationship and provided everything needed for that relationship to be loving and secure and affectionate and forever.

Lord, forgive us for not listening to you, for not hating you, for not being determined in our actions of faith and trust and belief in response.

Forgiveness and more specifically, Lord, forgive us when we silence your voice and listen to other voices, whether it's the voice of society or the voice of temptation or the voice of self-indulgence.

Forgiveness and more forgiveness and more forgive us, we pray, Lord, and make us delight in your word once again. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen.