

'Christ - our high priest, mediator and inheritance'

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[0:00] Turn your Bibles to Numbers chapter 17. Okay, we're not at the first reading yet, but I'll pray before we start.

! Father, we want to thank you for your word, and we want to continue to feed on it, and we ask that as we do, your spirit might guide us to help us in particular understand Old Testament Scripture in light of Christ, and of course, to then apply it.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus. Pray and ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, let me, before we get into the reading, just give a bit of an introduction as to how I'm going to do things a bit differently today.

Now, we've been looking at the last, over the last few years, at the first books of the Bible, what we call the Pentateuch. That's the first five books. And one of the things that, you know, we have to grapple with as we read these books is how to read and apply it the right way.

Because on the one hand, they seem ancient, irrelevant even. And yet, because they remain God's word, we need to discover then how actually is the right way to make it relevant for our lives today.

[1:22] So, for example, what do we make of the sacrificial system? What relevance does Israel's desert experience have for us? And so, with that in mind, I'm going to try and approach things slightly differently today.

We'll still be looking at both the chapters. But I'm going to spend a little more time showing how it's actually the New Testament that is the key to how we interpret, understand, and apply the Old Testament.

We've been doing that, by the way, over the last however many years that we've been looking at the Old Testament. But today, I'm going to, as it were, you've trusted us as pastors.

But today, I'm going to try and show you actually what the method ought to be. Of course, the key is to interpret Old Testament scripture in light of Christ, in light of the fact that Jesus has come, which is exactly how the New Testament writers do it.

And now, some of you will be familiar with this already. And so, if you are, just bear with me as I try and explain it to the rest of you. But first, let's just remind ourselves where we are.

[2:28] Because last week, Israel's rebellion resulted in God's wrath. And one of the things that actually they had a problem with was Aaron's role within Israel. And so, God now is re-establishing the order that was meant to be.

And in particular, explicitly reiterating, re-explaining Aaron's role among the people. And so, he summons the 12 leaders, one from each tribe, to come before him.

And that's where we are at Numbers chapter 17. And so, I believe Jackson is the one that's going to come and read this first part, the whole chapter, verse 1 to 13.

So, thank you, Jackson. The first part we're in comes from Numbers 17, verses 1 to 13. Starting from verse 1.

The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes.

[3:30] Write the name of each man on his staff. On the staff of Levi, write Aaron's name. For there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe.

Place them in the tent of meeting in front of the Ark of the Covenant Law, where I meet with you. The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.

So, Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him twelve staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron's staff was among them.

Moses placed the staffs before the Lord in a tent of the covenant law. The next day, Moses entered the tent and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the tribe of Levi, had not only sprouted, but had budded, blossomed, and produced almonds.

Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the Lord's presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them. And each of the leaders took his own staff.

[4:46] The Lord said to Moses, Put back Aaron's staff in the front of the Ark of the Covenant Law to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. Moses said, This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die.

Moses did just as the Lord commanded him. The Israelites said to Moses, We will die. We are lost. We are all lost. Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord will die.

Are we all going to die? All right. Thanks, Jackson. Okay.

I think it's quite clear that the man that God has chosen is Aaron. Correct? Because his staff not only sprouted, but budded, blossomed, and produced almonds all overnight.

Verse 8. That's a bit of a miracle. More than a miracle. It's nothing short of a miracle, really. Now, notice as well that God not only chooses Aaron as the high priest, he already, before the staff even blossomed, chose Aaron as the leader for the Levites, because he's the head of that tribe.

[6:09] Because the Levites, as a tribe, in turn, will be supporting him and the priests in their work. And we see from verse 10 that the reason for this exercise is to prevent Israel from rebelling again.

Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Ark of the Covenant law, the Lord says, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me so that they will not die.

So the message really is to the people, stop grumbling. Stop grumbling and submit to God's will, God's choice. Now, not every Old Testament passage that we read in the Bible has New Testament commentary associated with it.

This one actually does. And when that occurs, then it's important to see what the New Testament writers say in order to work out then how it applies to us.

And so, for this passage, the commentary actually comes from Hebrews. It's on the next slide, but I'll walk through it. In Hebrews 5, verse 1, the writer says that And so, just as God has already explained in Exodus, Leviticus, and even earlier in Numbers, the high priest's role is that of offering gifts and sacrifices to God for sins.

[7:35] But a few verses on, in verse 4, the writer then alludes to this very incident in Numbers 17. For he says, No one takes dishonor on himself, but he receives it from God, or when called by God, just as Aaron was.

And this is the incident when Aaron was called by God explicitly. Now, this connection is being made in Hebrews to explain how Aaron will foreshadow what will occur with Jesus.

So, a few chapters on, in chapter 8 of Hebrews, the writer says, Now, the point of what we are saying is this. That is, why I'm explaining all these things about Aaron and the high priest is that we do have such a high priest, who is Jesus, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by mere human beings.

You see, not every fulfillment by Jesus is actually an explicit Old Testament promise. Sometimes, the patterns, the structures, and the laws, which God establishes in the life of Israel, becomes pointers to what Jesus will fulfill in the future.

And this is one such example. Aaron, Israel's high priest, serves at the earthly tabernacle. But actually, it's a picture of a heavenly reality of what Jesus will do.

[9:09] Now, many of you will know that whilst you're at school, there are times when, you know, things are sort of set up as a model for educational purposes, right? So, you know, I don't know whether in your day, when you're doing classes about Australian democracy, there was a model parliament, yeah?

Some of you could become the prime minister. Some of you became the speaker. And, you know, really, what the teacher was trying to teach you was how parliament works. But it's all fake, isn't it? You're not making any laws. You don't get to change anything. It's pretend. Some of you at law school will understand that there is such a thing as the moot court, which is really a simulation of a real courtroom, where, again, students get to role-play what it means to be a judge, a lawyer, and all those kind of things.

Well, the physical tabernacle is rather like a mock-up of the heavenly sanctuary, which Jesus serves. And just like on earth, no one gets to demand to be made high priest in this heavenly sanctuary.

Now, certainly as humans, we can't get there anyway. But even if we could, no one is perfect to be able to serve in the role. And so what God has to do is send his son Jesus to become a human so that when he then is appointed, and he's the human being that is able to represent humans to God, he is able to bring us with him into God's presence.

[10 : 37] But having chosen Jesus as this high priest, we now move on to see in Numbers chapter 18, how the role that Aaron fulfills as the priest, and then as well the priest and the Levites, foreshadow Jesus' own role in the heavens.

So, again, I will ask Sharon to read the passage. Thank you. The second Bible reading comes from Numbers 18, 1 to 7, starting from verse 1.

The Lord said to Aaron, You, your son, and your family are to bear the responsibility for offenses connected with the sanctuary, and you and your son alone are to bear the responsibility for offenses connected with the priesthood.

Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your son minister before the tent of the covenant law. They are to be responsible to you and are to perform all the duties of the tent, but they must not go near the furnishing of the sanctuary or the altar.

Otherwise, both they and you will die. They are to join you and be responsible for the care of the tent of meeting. All the work of the tent and no one else may come near where you are.

[11 : 56] You are to be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the altar, so that my wrath will not fall on the Israelites again. I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the Lord to do the work of the tent of meeting.

But only you and your son may serve as a priest in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who come near the sanctuary is to be put to death.

Okay. Now, often, in the Old Testament, and in the Bible generally, it's often very helpful to see what is being repeated in a particular section, because it helps us actually then to work out what is the main idea of that passage.

And so there are two repeated phrases here in this passage that I think we need to take note of. The first one is the phrase, the care of. I think you find that in verse 4 and 5, and I think even in verse 3.

And the other phrase is to be responsible for, which I think is in verse 3, 4, and 5. Now, actually, these two phrases together, when you read a more literal translation, like the one that is in the ESV, which is on the next slide, together all these words actually come from the same root word.

[13 : 35] To be responsible for, to care for, actually there's a stronger sense of what the word means. It actually means that they shall keep God over. And that's not because God needs protection from enemies, but rather it's the other way around.

That the people themselves need to be protected from God. And, you know, that's like a shield or a bearer. Sometimes, you know, at the fireplace you have those little guards to prevent you from getting too close to the fire.

Well, that's what the priests and the Levites are. They are human shields that stop people from coming too close to the tabernacle. And that's repeated as well in this passage, that if they come too close, they will die.

And last week we saw how the leaders came to the Lord and offered unauthorized incense, and they did die because, actually, they came in a manner that was prohibited by the Lord.

And so, while one of the tasks of Aaron and the priests is to, as we saw, offer sacrifices to God, the other task, actually, is to turn around and to face the people and prevent them, actually, from coming too close and be killed by God's holiness.

[14 : 50] And the offenses that we read of in verse 1 and 2, these offenses which Aaron and the priests are responsible for, and the Levites, relate to this task.

That is, if they fail to stop the people, then Aaron, the priests, and the Levites, they will also be held responsible. So, it's not just those people who come and encroach into God's presence that will die. Aaron and his sons and the priests will also suffer for it. Now, there is also a further segregation, because Aaron and his sons and the priests are specifically responsible for the offenses connected

to the priesthood.

That's in verse 2. That means guarding the sanctuary or the inner part of the tent. Verse 7 includes the altar and inside the curtain, which is into the holy place.

Whereas the Levites, they were responsible for guarding, keeping God on the outside, the sanctuary or the perimeter. So, the buck stops with Aaron, but the Levites carry out this work.

[15:57] On behalf or under his supervision. You also read in verse 3 that the Levites themselves were not then allowed to go any nearer. So, they guard, but then they can't come nearer themselves to the furnishings of the sanctuary or altar.

Otherwise, they will die, but so will Aaron. And so, we see this dual role of the high priest as mediator. One that's facing God, offering sacrifices, but the other one actually facing the people to stop them from coming too close.

And Aaron is protecting not just all the people, but his own tribe as well, the Levites. But in both cases, as a mediator, Aaron stands between God and the people and was responsible for their sins.

That is, it's not just when he does wrong, but when the people do wrong, that he is responsible as well. Now, we see Jesus fulfilling that very same role in the New Testament.

And so, we look, for example, to 1 Timothy 2, verse 5, where Paul writes, Likewise, when we go back into Hebrews 7, verse 25, Jesus is described as the one who is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede.

[17:29] And that's a mediatory role, intercede for them. And so, just like Aaron, Jesus stands between us and God. And like Aaron, he does not come empty-handed.

Now, if Jesus was simply returning to the Father after he'd been on earth on his own accord, then, well, perhaps he could bring nothing because he was sinless, holy and pure.

But if he desires to bring us with him, then he has to offer something on account of our sins. Aaron brought the blood of animals to atone for the sins of Israel.

But Jesus is, because he's holy and blameless, his blood shed for us on the cross, which is what he brings into the heavenly sanctuary, is not for himself, but actually for all of us.

And so, when we read that in chapter 7, that Jesus is interceding continually for us, it is not just the act of prayers offered to God on our behalf.

[18:31] Rather, he's interceding with his blood, using it almost like a shield to guard us, to protect us from God's wrath. But here's the thing, because unlike the Israelites, because even after Aaron had offered the blood, and their sins were atoned for, God still said, no, you still can't come near.

Stay away, or you'll be killed. But you know, for Jesus, once he has offered his blood, and he acts as mediator for us, we, even though we're just as sinful, we get to come into God's very presence.

And you can read about this in Hebrews 10, verse 19 to 25. I don't have it on the screen, so you have to do it on your own time. But there, the writer says that, given that we have the blood of Jesus, we are able to boldly approach the heavenly throne, God's heavenly sanctum.

And friends, that is not something that we will do when we die and go to heaven. That is something, if you read Hebrews, that we can do even right now.

And I want us to just pause for a moment to just consider how amazing that is. Because even right now, by the Spirit, through the Lord Jesus Christ as mediator, we can come before God's very presence.

[19:58] Anytime, anywhere, whenever we pray, whenever we gather, like right now, we are actually in God's holy presence.

We are, as it were, spiritually, in God's inner sanctum. And friends, I think that's worth just pausing for a minute to reflect on, to pray, and to give thanks to God for, if you are in Christ Jesus.

So, let's just do that for a minute. Father, we thank you that by your Spirit, through your Son, we are in your presence.

Holy though you are, unworthy though we are, that Lord, you welcome us, you hear us, you embrace us, and we have communion with you.

Thank you. Only because of Jesus. Thank you, in His name. Amen. Okay, hopefully I'm beginning to show you how we can use the New Testament, and I've been quoting quite a few New Testament passages, to apply our Old Testament passages, including the one that we've looked at today.

[21 : 36] because what we're doing really, when we do that, is to stand on the shoulders of the New Testament writers. Right? I don't know whether you realize it or not, but when these writers were writing, they didn't have the New Testament with them.

Make sense? John did not have the Gospel of John, because he was the one that was about to write it. And so that was the same for Paul, for Peter, for Luke, all of them.

Instead, what happened was that, when they believed in Jesus, and Jesus spent 40 days with them, after He rose from the dead, remember? He taught them the Scriptures, which was really the Old Testament.

And so after He ascended, they continued to meditate and reflect on how Christ was fulfilling everything in the Old Testament. And so the writings of the New Testament, really, is a reflection of that process.

That as they were writing, what they're also revealing to us is the method and the principles to use to apply Old Testament passages to New Testament believers in light of Christ.

[22 : 53] And so, even if there is no Old Testament, sorry, no New Testament commentary on Old Testament passages, which is, there are quite a few Old Testament passages where you don't find a New Testament equivalent.

What we can do is use the principles that we find in the New Testament and apply them to those passages as well in order to understand then how they apply to us.

And that is the case that we will get to now with our third and final section, right? So, I'm going to ask King Lee to come up. We're just going to read six verses, but then afterwards, I'll go through the rest of the chapter as well.

Numbers 18, verses 8 to 13. Then the Lord said to Aaron, I myself have put you in charge of the offerings presented to me. All the holy offerings the Israelites give me, I give to you and your sons as your portion, your perpetual share.

You are to have the part of the most holy offerings that is kept from the fire. From all the gifts they bring me as most holy offerings, whether grain or sin or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your sons.

[24 : 05] Eat it as something most holy. Every male shall eat it. You must regard it as holy. This also is yours. Whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the wave offerings of the Israelites.

I give this to you and your sons and daughters as your perpetual share. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it. I give you all the finest olive oil and all the finest new wine and grain they give the Lord as the first fruits of their harvest.

All their land's first fruits that they bring to the Lord will be yours. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it. Okay, I think some of you may have come across this passage before and you're going, oh, tithing.

Okay, so tithing, how does it apply to us right now? And it's very tempting to just say, read it directly and assume that that's how it applies. But actually, I want to say that as I've been saying, what you need to do is to see how the New Testament fulfills or Christ fulfills and written in the New Testament, what is written in the Old Testament and then from that basis apply to yourself.

Does that make sense? So it's not Old Testament straight to you, but Old Testament, what does the New Testament say and therefore, how does it apply to us today as a church? All right, so I'm going to explain how to do that.

[25 : 38] And the first thing to notice then is the common thread that runs through this section.

Okay, and it will also run through to the end of the chapter, which we didn't read. And the common thread is this, that the Lord now says that everything that Israel has offered to the Lord at the tabernacle is being given by Him to Aaron, the priests, and the Levites.

All right, you see that in verse 8, verse 9, 11, and 12, and then you'll keep seeing it right to the end of the chapter. And that is the main idea that I think we should apply through the lens of the New Testament.

And so what we find is that for all these things that are brought, aside from those things that are burnt, if the Lord has said that it's kept aside, kept from the fire, not offered to Him as a burnt offering, all of these things belong to Aaron and his house.

Now, the first section says that some of these things are considered most holy, which means only Aaron and the priests are able to eat it. But for the rest, he then goes on to say, the others in your household, that is the children and the women, well, they can eat it as well, provided they are

ceremonially clean.

And so we see this continue through the chapter. So verse 14 and 15, it says, everything devoted to the Lord is yours, Aaron's.

[27:07] So to the offering of the firstborn, accept the firstborn son of an unclean, or an unclean animal, because for these, they are to be redeemed, they can't be sacrificed.

But otherwise, for clean firstborn animals that are sacrificed, any meat and other offerings that's not burned belongs to Aaron and his sons and daughters.

Over and over again, we read, whatever has been given to me is yours. You can eat it. I give to you. I give it all to you. And then verse 20, the reason is given.

God's, this is God's generous provision to Aaron. For he says, you will not have inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them. I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.

And the reason for this is that looking after the tabernacle, which God had assigned to them as their job, was a full-time one. They wouldn't have any time left over then to cultivate any land.

[28:11] And so if God gave them the land, it would actually go to waste or become derelict.

Instead, God says that I will nourish you, I will feed you, I will provide for you from the offerings that are received from the people.

And mind you, these are not leftovers that the people are to bring, right? Because God also says that they are to bring animals without any blemish. They are to bring the best from the land.

But more importantly, in verse 20, God tells them that actually, I am your share and your inheritance. Yes, I will provide for you, but actually, it is me you need to look to.

I'm the one that will continue to make sure that you have enough. Now, the same way, the Levites are also given the tithe of the land. That is the tenth from the land.

That's what the other tribes have to bring, a tenth of their produce to the temple. So, that's in verses 21 to 24. And again, the reason, verses 23 and 24, is the same as the priests.

[29:17] For the Lord says, they will receive no inheritance among the Israelites, that is no land.

Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present and offering to the Lord, to me.

Now, interestingly, if you keep reading, the Levites themselves then have to tithe, verse 25 onwards, so that their tithe then goes to the priests. And in verse 29 and 30, the Lord says that they are to bring the very best.

You must present as the Lord's portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you that is given as tithe. When you present the best part, it will be reckoned to you as the product of the threshing floor or the wine press.

In other words, if you bring your very best to me, I will consider like you've grown it yourself. and you'll bring it to me. So if you think about it, if all the tribes have to bring their best to the Levites and the Levites have to bring their best for the priests, the priests actually get the best of the best, isn't it?

Even though they have no land at all. Now, as a bit of an aside, I actually did some sums to work out actually how do you divvy it all up.

[30:33] So I've got the next slide. It might be a bit small, but you know, remember, year 10 maths. Yep. Let the output of each tribe be T. Yep. Then, if you divide it as the Lord has, it's a bit rough and ready because then I say, assume that every tribe, including the Levites, are equal in number, which is probably not accurate.

but if you follow the calculation, what it shows is that the 10% tithe results in actually a roughly equal distribution among the 12 tribes. All right?

So you can see the Levites in the end because they had to give the 10% to the priests, they end up with 0.99 T. The other tribes get 0.90. So not quite exact.

If you want it to be exact, and some of you would have worked it out already, actually God needed to say, give 1/11th of your tribe. Okay? But, hey, I'm not God, so I'm not going to question him about that.

But the point is, don't worry too much about the exact nets because what I'm saying is that God has actually generously provided for the priests and the Levites so that even though they have no land and they're serving the Lord, they're not actually worse off, are they?

[31:43] In fact, they're actually a bit better off even. But the other implication, and that's the point I make about not taking the tithe and applying it straight to us, is that this 10% actually works because of the number of tribes in Israel.

If there were five tribes in Israel or there were 20, that would not be a tithe, it would be a fifth or it would be a 20th or whatever, right? And so I don't think it actually applies for us as a church today unless we have the aim of literally appointing one pastor for every 11 income earning member of the church or supporting one gospel worker per 11 income earning member of the church. Maybe that's what we should aim for. I don't know. But otherwise, this percentage is somewhat arbitrary for us. It works for them because of the number of tribes they have.

But for us in the New Testament, in the church today, the Bible clearly states when you read in the New Testament that the principle for giving now is generosity and partnership with God's gospel mission, right?

It's not 10%. 10%, yep, maybe a good rule of thumb but some of us will be asked for more or we should give more, some less. But the 10% works because that was the situation for Israel.

[33:09] So I come back again that the better way to apply this section is really to go back to what we've already seen in the passage that Jesus is the high priest and mediator. And so what does that mean for us in reading this passage?

Well, if you've read my newsletter this week that was pre-reading by the way, I don't know how many of you did, what I said was that the Bible reveals that everything in creation has now been given by the Father to the Son, right?

and that's because, yes, he's God's chosen Messiah but also, as we read this passage, it follows the principle because he is also the high priest chosen by God in the heavenly sanctuary.

And this is foreshadowed then in what God asked Aaron and the Levites to do. Peter then goes on to say that's true for Jesus but actually, it is also true for us because in 1 Peter 2, verse 9, as Christians, we too are a royal priesthood.

So we read this and we go, we are priests as well. And so, in Christ Jesus, everything that belongs to God, everything that belongs to God belongs to us through Him.

[34:29] That is the bigger, bigger, more wonderful truth that we should take note of. I'll say it again, in Christ, everything that belongs to God belongs to us through Him.

And that's why Paul can say in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3, that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, that is the heavenly sanctuary, in Christ Jesus.

Christ is now our share and inheritance. And everything that belongs to Christ belongs to us who are in Him. Friends, if you think you're poor, you are not if you are in Christ Jesus.

God has given to His Son the nations and all the possessions of this world. Now, it's not to say that we have all the cattle and all the cars and whatever, but we have whatever God has blessed His Son with, we have it with Him as co-heirs in Christ.

And we should never forget that. We should never ever think that we are poor because of that, because we are in Christ Jesus. Now, analogous to that, God also says to the Levites that they were to give their very best back to Him, right?

[35:54] And so I think that is also applicable to us as priests and Levites, as it were. Because we are now to give our very best back to God.

Not in what we own or have, but actually more than that. We are to give our very selves. Romans 12, verse 1, Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice.

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Hebrews 13, verse 15 and 16, Therefore, let us, through Jesus, continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess His name, and do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices of ourselves, our conduct, and our lives, God is pleased.

So here's another reason why the 10% is not the right measure because what God is seeking from us is not 10%, it's 100%. Now, it doesn't mean that, you know, you drop everything and only stay at church and do everything that's related to church work.

Rather, what it means is that whatever we ask to do in life, to look after ourselves, to look after our families, to contribute to society, to serve in the church, yes, all of it needs to be treated as worship to the Lord.

[37 : 19] God, that's 100%, and it's not just what we do, but how we do it because the fruit of our lips is not just about singing praises to the Lord, which is often what we think it is, it is also honoring God with everything that we say.

As you're going about your work at your workplaces, are the fruit of your lips professing openly His name and honoring God's name, that's what the Lord is asking from us as giving back our very best because God has already so graciously given us His Son, right?

All of Him as high priest, as mediator, as our inheritance, and so really our right response is to give back to Him, isn't it?

Our very best as an expression of our thanksgiving, as an expression or as an act of worship with all our lives.

Everything that we do, not just what's here at church, but even out there in your homes, at university, at work, all of that is about bringing your very best and giving your very best to God as an act of worship.

[38 : 37] Let's pray and ask God to help us do that. Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus, that He's our High Priest, our mediator, our inheritance, that He has saved us and has given us access into your heavenly presence, and that every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms is ours because of Him.

Help us to respond by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice in worship to you all the days of our lives until the very end. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.