

O God, Our Hope for Days to Come

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[0 : 00] Let's read the Word of God now, first of all, from the book of Psalms in Psalm 126. Psalm 126.

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the naked. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

And then from the book of Revelation and chapter 7. Revelation 7 from verse 9 to the end. After this I looked, and behold a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

[1 : 44] And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these clothed in white robes? And from where have they come?

I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[3 : 24] May the Lord bless to us these readings from his own holy inspired word. Let's turn back now to Psalm 126.

Psalm 126. This morning we were looking at the first part of this psalm. It's clearly in two parts, isn't it? When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.

So these are a people looking back to what the Lord did by way of intervention and restoration. And they knew it was only the Lord who could possibly have done that.

And we looked at the historical facts. We looked at various events in church history which were a clear sign that the Lord was doing something. Only the Lord could have done it.

We looked at how this could apply to individuals as well. How the Lord rescued them, intervened in such a way that only the Lord could have done what he did and brought them back, restored them.

[4 : 31] And then we looked at the personal result for these people. They were like those who dream way beyond their imagination. Their mouth was filled with laughter and their tongue with shouts of joy.

This is the kind of joy which you experience once the Lord has done a wonderful work in you that is divine in its origin in its nature and impact.

And then we look thirdly at the public impact of this. Such was the change, such was the restoration that even the nations took notice.

Those around them noticed what had happened. What did they say? The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord hadn't done it for us, he says, but he's done it for them.

This distinction between them and us was noticed. And God was noticed. And what he had done in these people was noticed. And they acknowledged the Lord has done, not just done things for them, he's done great things for them.

[5 : 42] Beyond what they could have expected. The public impact, especially when the Lord works in the hearts and minds of people or communities in days of revival, the community notices that God is at hand and at work.

And that leads, of course, to the believing confession. When we hear the Lord saying, that the people saying, the Lord has done great things for them, we're saying, yeah, the Lord has done great things for us.

And we are glad. This believing confession, and we were saying at the final part that we must remember to name the name of the Lord.

We must speak of the Lord more. It's not right that we speak about every other subject, but not about the Lord himself.

The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad. But of course, that opening section of 126, it really is the foundation and the prelude to the second part of this wonderful, short psalm.

[6 : 59] When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, that's what we were like. Now, restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.

Here's a prayer, a forthright prayer. We can't forget what you did, Lord, but now we so need you to intervene again.

So here's the first thing, this forthright prayer. Secondly, it's a time to cry. Those who sow in tears, he who goes out weeping.

The metaphor that's used here is tears and weeping and crying. And there is a time when the Lord's people are in such need that they weep and they cry.

And yet they're weeping and they're crying and they're crying doesn't paralyze them. In fact, it leads to them sowing sacrificially.

[8 : 05] Those who sow in tears. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing. It's so important that there should be that sacrificial sowing.

But we sow, says the psalmist here, looking and expecting a harvest. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.

He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. Confidence.

The Lord will answer. The Lord will intervene. Following the sacrificial sowing, there will be a harvest on the horizon in Jukosh.

And then finally, incomparable joy. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

[9 : 12] Same kind of joy as they had in the past. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, our tongue with shouts of joy. We know, Lord, that this can happen again, that there will be this incomparable joy.

So, five very simple things, as you can see, the rise out of these three verses. First of all, forthright prayer.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. The Negev, of course, that region down in the south that hardly gets any rainfall.

It's hard for us to imagine just how dry certain parts of the world can be. When I was coming home from the Saturday course yesterday in Edinburgh on the bus, I was listening to a podcast about hydrogen.

I like science, and I was listening to this podcast about hydrogen, and they were talking, of course, about Israel, and the way Israel is one of the world leaders in making sure that there is water available to irrigate their plants.

[10 : 23] And they've found marvelous technologies both to use seawater as well as to drip, irrigate into the soil. And in that way, I suppose, they can deal with some of the problems in the Negev.

But in this time when the psalmist was writing, these dry seasons could be so serious, and they would want a wonderful flood of water to come in to irrigate everything they would sow.

That's the picture presented here. Well, here there is a forthright prayer then. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.

The problem isn't here, really, that they're looking for a harvest. And that's not to say that that can't be a serious problem in many parts of the world.

They don't have enough. So especially in these days when there is at least a warming up of the climate, there can be issues that there's a shortage of food in certain regions, and they're longing for rain.

[11 : 37] That same podcast was talking about the serious problems in India because they just don't at the moment get anywhere near enough rain. But that's not what this is really about.

It's not about giving us harvests. This is talking about a metaphor so that we can think about even greater needs that we have.

As we remember the past, we ask God now to do something. Restore our fortunes, Lord. Come back again and restore us.

Intervene again, Lord. change things for the better. Renew us, Lord. Do something within us again. This morning I was reminding you of this lady Annie MacDonald who is now at congregation.

You'll know her granddaughter Sandra Murray who sometimes comes here. Well, her grandmother was converted in the 1935 revival in the Isle of Lewis in that region called Carloway.

[12 : 43] And when I interviewed her one night in Dingwall as minister, she was radiant telling us all about what the Lord had done in that revival.

A whole community awoken in the most wonderful, wonderful way. And then I said to her, Annie, I says, do you think the Lord can do that again? Her instinctive answer was no.

And then she put down her head yes. See, there was something so wonderful about what the Lord did and she hadn't seen the like of it for decades.

So when you're asked on the spot do you think the Lord can do it again? You know what happens? We get used to the ordinary. We get used to a day of small things. So instinctively she said, no.

And then shook her head, of course she can. And I loved her for that, you see. Of course the Lord can do it. It's as if you're speaking to this psalmist.

[13 : 50] Did the Lord restore your fortunes long ago? Did he change things so wonderfully? Yes, he did. Do you think he can do it again? Absolutely he can.

And that's why he cries out, restore our fortunes. But you know what the psalmist did here? He took time to think about the past before he would pray about the present and the future.

Sometimes it can be incredibly painful to think about the past. Incredibly painful. Maybe the times of sweetness were so amazing when God intervened and you experienced such wonderful help and strength and you experienced God so near that it was so, so real.

But you're saying today where is all that gone? You look back to the past and you're saying the Lord was so near he wrapped himself around me like a cushion.

It was so, so precious. And you think back on that situation and you say, you know, that situation was so painful before the Lord intervened.

[15 : 06] It was so hard, so hurtful. What depths, what darkness, what difficulties. Remembering the past can be difficult and it can cause pain for all of us.

There's a pain in remembering the past. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't do it. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. Have you noticed how many of the Psalms remember the past of their own sin?

Where the Lord remembers and they know he remembers the things that they did that brought his judgment upon them. And they don't say, well, when we're writing these Psalms we're not going to mention all the terrible things we did before we experienced the Lord's intervention.

No, they actually speak about the sins. I'm amazed if David wrote so many of the Psalms that we have, the honesty in these Psalms.

Think of David writing Psalm 51, writing about that terrible situation of immorality that he sunk down the pain of remembering the past.

[16 : 29] Don't be afraid to remember the past because there is a pleasure in recalling God's works. See, when you think of the past, it's a good time to do it in prayer.

See, that's a safe place to remember the past. In prayer before God. Restore our fortunes. I'm thinking back when the Lord restored the fortunes before.

Lord, restore our fortunes now. Do it in prayer. Take time to think in them, to hope, to have courage, to have confidence. It takes time to do it.

But that's the key to actually spend time recalling the works of God. And I think that's one of the reasons the Lord gives us a book like the book of Psalms.

Because it's so varied, it's so colourful, it's such a range of situations in life that we can use these words as we sing them, pray them, to actually consider our own past.

[17 : 43] We can use other parts of Scripture as well as we do that. But it must lead to prayer. Restore our fortunes, O Lord.

Last week, David ranted in the morning, Lord, from the depths to thee I cried. My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Hear somebody with a forthright prayer.

He's in the depths. It's his own sin, his own iniquities. The sin is too strong for him. He's way too deep to get out of the pit.

But what does he do? He comes to the Lord. Lord, from the depths to you I cry. This forthright prayer, restore our fortunes, O Lord.

We are asking you, Lord, to come and bring these rivers, rivers, to irrigate, bring this torrent of water, because it all looks so dry, everything looks as if it's going to die.

[18 : 48] We have no hope unless you come and bring the streams in the south. But Lord, we believe you can do it.

And there's this forthright prayer. You know, when we gather for prayer in the midweek, when we gather for prayer in our family worship, when we take time to pray ourselves, whatever your state of time is, make sure you pray honest prayers, and be asking the Lord to do beyond what you ask or think, to restore, to intervene, to turn things back.

I mean, how terrible things are in the nation at the moment. We all bewail that. So we pray about it. Intervene in the nation.

The Reformation in Scotland, that's so many hundreds of years ago. So we want another Reformation. Did the Lord bring the first?

Yes. Can he bring the second? He most certainly can. We were talking this morning about revivals in Wales. Can he bring another revival?

[20 : 04] Of course he can. God has worked wonderfully in other parts of the world. So we must ask him to restore our fortunes.

We ask him to intervene, to turn things around, a complete reversal. Where there is dryness and aridity, where everything seems to be without life, Lord, come and bring the streams in the south.

We actually believe that you can do it. So forthright prayer. The Lord's people, do you think that the Lord sometimes is wondering, why don't you pray?

Why don't you ask? Why don't you beg and wrestle with me? Forthright prayer. Secondly, it's a time to cry.

Those who sow in tears, he who goes out weeping. You know, there are sometimes when there's weeping for joy.

[21 : 15] Do you remember when Jacob and Esau met with one another after these years of estrangement? Jacob didn't know what to expect when Esau came out with the 400 men against him.

And yet when the two brothers met, their necks were intertwined as they wept on each other's necks.

Tears, weeping of joy. It's the same with Joseph. Remember, when Joseph met with his brothers again, they didn't know what to expect. Here's this man of great might and power ruling over Egypt.

He had the power to order, vengeance, upon them. And yet, when he met the brothers, he wept with them over them with joy.

And then when he met his father, can you imagine the tears of joy at that time? Of course, there is a weeping for joy.

[22 : 17] There is also a weeping. I don't know if it's a weeping of resignation, but it's a weeping where you know nothing will ever get better.

That, that I have never experienced. The weeping where you know nothing will ever get better.

When there is hopelessness and there will never be hope. When there is despair and light will never dawn.

when there will be gnashing of teeth and it will never ever get better. I am, of course, describing the lostness of those who are lost.

They will weep. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. listen, if any of you aren't yet Christians, I don't want you to be in that place of torment when you've heard so much of the gospel yourselves.

[23 : 31] I would love you and all your loved ones to experience something far better. But there is that weeping.

there is also something maybe in our psyche where we want to cover up weeping. In other words, we don't want to show our emotions, so we cover it up with empty words and even constructive joy.

And when we're constructing church services, we say, well, we've got to make them as exciting as possible. We've got to ensure that everyone who comes through these doors know that they're coming to a place where they will experience absolute joy and tears are not a part of it.

And I heard a radio program about somebody who was going through terrible depression, terrible difficulties in his life, and he received a leaflet and he came to the church and the church was one of those full on, happy, happy, happy churches and when he came into the church, he was asked to rejoice and he couldn't rejoice.

That's not the situation in which he was in. So what does he do? He says, they're asking me to be something that I'm not rather than responding to what I am.

[25 : 07] And there are times when we need to lament. We need to have tears and we can't cover it up with empty words.

Why is there weeping? Sowing in tears, weeping, bearing the seed for sowing. why is there weeping? Well, I think, very briefly, the need is so great.

That will often be a measure of the need. That is so great, you weep. In other words, ordinary life doesn't go on.

You just can't go on from day to day as if everything's fine. You break down the tears flow because the need is so great and you cannot sort it yourself.

You've got this ache in your heart. You've got this terrible, terrible ache on the inside and you know this can't go on and you can't deal with it.

[26 : 21] And you come to God in forthright prayer and of course there is weeping. There is weeping. There are times when this is not to do with other people very often it is.

Sometimes to do with family members but it's often the case that it's our own lives. Maybe there are sins that you've been cherishing for decades since you became a Christian and there's still there.

Are they there to the point that you weep over them and you say this is awful. The need is so great. It may be a health issue.

It may be a bad diagnosis. It could be church things. Have you wept over the situation in the local congregation?

we've been here since 1985 and how much are we touching the community around us?

[27 : 25] Do we weep? All these people that we pass by on the way to church, do we just pass them by as a matter of routine?

Surely there's a place for weeping. Place for weeping. You know there have been ministers in the past, godly people in the past, and they've thought, they've taken the time to think, no matter how painful it was, about how things used to be.

not so that they could live in the past, but so that they could cry out to the Lord, Lord, will you work in people like that again today?

Are you content with tens, hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, even in West Lothian, to be there on the day of judgment and experience weeping and gnashing of teeth?

Are you content for your siblings? Are you content for your family members just to be lost? Surely not. So there is weeping because the need is so great.

[28 : 46] Sometimes there's weeping because the failure is so real. The failure is so real. This is very often the case when it's to do with ourselves.

Have you come to a point where you are filled with self-loathing because you realize you're not what you were born again to be. And you come before the Lord with a sense of failure, not just a sense of need, but a sense of failure.

You have let the Lord down. Can you imagine what David felt like when Nathan said to me, you're the man. can you imagine how that's true of all of us in ever so many ways.

And we weep because the failure is so real. So we weep because the need is so great, the failure is so real. We weep because we depend on divine sovereignty.

I don't know if I'm explaining it right, but sometimes you weep because you can't do it. You can't change it.

[30 : 03] You can't bring the streams of beautiful water into the nest. You can't restore the fortunes. Only the Lord can do it.

And because you can't do it, you weep before him. because you're depending on his sovereignty. I don't think this psalmist could stand with his hands in his pockets and pray this prayer.

When you are weeping, you see the need for divine action and you weep because you need such divine intervention.

Of course you do. So it's a time to cry. A church without tears. Don't long for such a thing.

It's not authentic. Not authentic to real life. Not authentic to real religion. It's not authentic to God. Down through the centuries and millennia people have wept before God and the 21st century should not be a church in which there are no tears and of course it's not.

[31 : 29] You and I know what it's like to weep. It's a time to cry. It's a time to cry. that leads then to sacrificial sowing.

See weeping could paralyze. Tears could paralyze. The need so great our failure is so real only God can do it we can't.

But the picture here is no. Yes we're in tears and yes we're weeping but what are we going to do? We're going to sow in tears. What are we going to do weeping?

We're going to go out with seed for sowing. Sowing. Now that's something we do. That's something we do and there are two things here if you wanted to think of them.

One is very much based in the text and one I think rises from the text by implications. I think first of all there's a sowing of our own tears.

[32 : 39] There is a sowing of our own tears and there is a sowing with our own tears. Sometimes our tears are like the seed that we sow.

See when you weep and sorrow over your own sin when you're brought on a Sabbath afternoon as you ponder what you've done and how low you've sunk when you read a book about somebody's life like David Brainerd and you think what a man how he lived how he cherished holiness and you think oh and you weep see these tears you are actually sowing these tears when you weep over the sins of others you're actually sowing the tears when you're weeping in sympathy over those who are afflicted again you're sowing these tears when you're weeping when you're under the word of God or you're reading the word of God and God is this amazing thing it's a word we tend not to use so much but we should it's when he works with tenderness and we become tender under his word we're softened it's as if God permeates through and we weep because we are so thrilled with what

God has revealed himself to be have you read the Bible have you read the scriptures have you explored God more and you say this is so amazing and the sowing with the tears of tenderness or maybe you're in a time of prayer and there can be a wonderful sweetness when you meet to pray honest prayer when you meet to pray honest prayer and there's the tears of the sweetness and fellowship in prayer do you know this the Lord looks on these physical tears not put on tears you can't manufacture this kind of sorrow this kind of sympathy this kind of tenderness this kind of sweetness and there are people that are more able to weep I'm not talking about that

I'm talking about this real response to sin to affliction to the word and to fellowship and prayer that it will bring us to be so emotional emotional and that emotion will frequently be seen in tears even if it doesn't come to tears see the emotion itself the emotion itself is something that is sown and we trust will bear a harvest sowing our tears but sowing with tears those who sow in tears why would they be in tears where they're sowing see if you follow the metaphor through here if you have only a few grains of seed left what do you do with it you can feed your family or you can sow it in the hope that there will be a harvest to come that will feed more in the future and you look at this seed and you say what do

I do what do I do with this what do I do with my time my speech my strength I've only got limited time I can only speak for so long I've only got limited strength and it gets less by the year I have only limited gifts I can only share the word of God for so long I can only have these church services I can only have ETS I can only have books that the banner produce what will I do with them there's always a sacrifice in sowing there's always a sacrifice in sowing where you sow with tears you're giving something you know that you could possibly use it for yourself in that immediate moment but no you're going to sow in tears you're bringing seed for sowing and you go out with it weeping and once you've sown it it's gone and you think what have

[37 : 58] I done with it what have I done with my life with my time with my words my lips my gifts what have I done with the witness that the Lord gave me the light that he told me to share what have I done with it and you've gone out and you've sown it and you've told people and you've prayed with people and you've shared with them you've helped them and wept with them you've done all of these things and you've done it with tears with genuine heartfelt emotion before the Lord it's not any of emotional listen but genuine affection and you're doing that and you say what have I to show for it sacrificial sowing I don't think anybody goes into the ministry of the word of God and that's the role that I'm in you can't do that without sacrifice you can't do missionary work like Jim and Megan did without sacrifice you can't do the kind of work that

Heather and others do for the Lord in the seminary without sacrifice you can't do the work that Jonathan does at the banner without sacrifice you can't be elders and deacons and mature Christians sharing the gospel giving your time you can't do that without sacrifice next Saturday two o'clock to four o'clock Elfer demands sacrifice you can think of a hundred things that you could do if you didn't go but there's a sacrifice what do you do with it sow in tears that's minor but you're sowing the sowing now not tomorrow it's now you're sowing and one of the things about sowing the harvest doesn't come at the moment of sowing it may be a few minutes after sowing a few hours after sowing a few months after sowing a few years after sowing

I know parents who have sown the seed of the gospel in their loved ones lives and they went to heaven without seeing the harvest that came from that but that brings you to the next point harvest on the horizon those who sow in tears they will reap with shouts of joy those who go out weeping bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy bearing his sheaves with him you sow not in despair you sow expecting a harvest you sow in anticipation you may see it this week you may see the harvest next month you may not see it in this life but you go out sowing expecting a harvest why because of the nature of God and because of the promises of God the nature of God

God's plan you are seeking to do his will you're sowing the seed his word will not come back void when Jim was praying in the vestry this morning he was quoting Isaiah 55 that God's word as it goes out will not come back to him void that is absolutely true it will not what the harvest will be I don't know but God has a plan God is the one who makes provision God is the one who has power and God is the one who can bring change I have no idea what will result from what is sown in your time with your gifts with your abilities with your tears with your prayers

I have no idea all I know is that you are called to sow you can be working in a school you can be working from home you can be sitting in front of a screen for x number of hours but if you're sowing the seed and doing the work of God you can expect a harvest God's promises they're complex they're profound see on the morning of the resurrection I think I think the Lord in a way that I can't understand just now I think the Lord will assure us on that morning not only that his will has been done not only that his people have been saved

[43 : 40] I think he'll assure us that every seed we sowed with tears in some way in some way led to this morning this resurrection morning we walk by faith we sow by faith we look for the horizon and the thing with the horizon is I've used that word carefully the harvest is in the future it can be close it can move further away as you travel towards it but it's there nothing you do will be wasted why because you're doing it for the Lord first of all he is honored by it he is acknowledged by it he is thrilled with your sowing well done good and faithful servant when I got my mother's bible after her funeral

I took it back to basket opened it and there was an envelope on the back of the envelope written well done good and faithful servant I looked at that and I thought I am far from that but she was a good and a faithful servant recalling of the times when I would sit on my mother's knee and she would take what was called the mother's catechism when we were wee and just teach us biblical truth over and over again a lovely Christian woman modest to the core and yet she sowed the seed and yes she did see my own conversion my sister's conversion still awaiting my brother's conversion but the beauty is that she's doing it as a faithful servant and the

Lord is honoured well done good and faithful servant well done well yes because you're doing it for me of course you are and whatever else the Lord brings from that in his own wise providence it won't return to him void harvest on the horizon and of course that's what brings us to the incomparable joy those who sow in tears shall reap but with shouts of joy those who go out weeping bearing the seed for sowing shall come home bringing the sheaves with them but with shouts of joy joy why because our needs are met our needs are met these things that we ask the Lord for he meets these needs that his own incomparable grace is shown see that's why we read from

Revelation and chapter 7 7 there Revelation and chapter 7 isn't it beautiful here's the day when so many prayers will have been answered they are before the throne of God seven day and night in his temple he sits on his throne which shelter them with his presence isn't that beautiful God on the throne sheltering others with his presence hunger no more no more thirst the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat why because the lamb in the midst of the throne will not just be king he'll be their shepherd guiding them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes see as John

Calvin would put it God will wipe away all tears he will fill their hearts with inconceivable joy inconceivable joy see the joy that we have now it's a foretaste of the joy unspeakable and full of glory that will come in fullness at the end resurrection joy I remember hearing my colleague Professor Donald McDonald who struggled with MS multiple sclerosis from when he was a missionary out in India to this very day and every time I'm in touch with him he's getting weaker he says and weaker and weaker and weaker and he was at the Saturday course once and he was speaking in pastoral care and he was speaking on healing and he was asked about miracles and he says

[49 : 31] God has done a miracle in my life and at that moment he was actually sitting in a wheelchair and he said I'll never forget he says I am healed and he's sitting in a wheelchair he can't walk I used to cut up his meat in the dining room because he didn't have the strength to cut it and he says I am healed and then he explained I am so at peace with God's will for me there's a sense of wholeness and joy see that rose out of sowing for him sowing in faith and he reaped that joy even now yes it will be wonderful in the morning of the resurrection that's when the full harvest will come but the joy strangely can begin now incomparable joy let us pray heavenly father we we realize that we realize lord that we know lord that you are the one who calls your people you set the path before them and you give them the privilege to meet with people to bring people into this world and you call them to be your servants and to share with them and to labor in your name for every single one of them thank you lord for every opportunity you've given to us thank you for the opportunity to speak to use our gifts to share the gospel to use our time to use our skills thank you lord for everything you've enabled us to do because we know lord that only ultimately only you can really change things and we look to you lord you are the one who alone can restore our fortunes do it lord for us as a people do it for us as a congregation in elliburn and west loathia do it for us lord as families do it for our families do more than we can ask or think and certainly more than we ever deserved for we ask it in Jesus amen to ray sorry so amen