

Saul and Goliath at Elah

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to our services this evening and as we come together in an act of worship, let us seek the Lord's blessing upon his own word.

Let us draw near to God in prayer. Eternal and ever-blessed Lord, that we may know and understand the great privilege that thou hast given to us when we can come together around thine own word.

And we pray, O Lord, that it would please thee to bless thy word to us, to apply it to our hearts by thine own Holy Spirit.

We give thanks unto thee that thy word is quick and powerful, that it is sharper than any two-edged sword, that it is a word that pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrows, and that thy word is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

And so we pray, O Lord, that as we come to meditate upon thy word, that thy word indeed would such our hearts, enabling us to come to know ourselves, and to know our great need of thine own grace in Jesus Christ.

[1 : 5 3] We come before thee, O Lord, conscious of the fact that every creature is made manifest in thy sight, and that all things are naked and opened unto thee.

O unto the eyes of the one with whom we have to do. And so we pray that we would humble ourselves and come and acknowledge our sinnership, and come and acknowledge our great need of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed his blood upon the cross of Golgotha, in order that we could be cleansed from our sin, all there that he was a fountain, that was opened for sin and for uncleanness.

O Lord, we give thanks for the efficacy of his finished work, which is able to reconcile us to our God, that is able to restore for us that fellowship with our God that was broken by sin.

O Lord, we give thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he is there as our great high priest, who is ministering in the courts of heaven on our behalf.

We give thanks for the Lord Jesus Christ, to seek thy mercy, and to seek thy grace to help us in our time of need.

[3 : 3 9] We give thanks, O Lord, that there is one who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, that there is one who can have compassion upon us, who knows, O Lord, our great needs.

And so as we come before thee, O Lord, at this hour, we seek that it may please thee to meet with our need out of the riches of thy grace, through Jesus Christ.

We seek, O Lord, thy blessing upon our homes and our families. Remember those who are ill, seeking, O Lord, that thy known healing hand may be upon them, those who mourn over the passing of loved ones, that thy known comfort may fill the vacuum, the emptiness that they find in their hearts.

O Lord, that thy known spirit may fill that emptiness. We pray, O Lord, that thou would bless our young people and our children.

O that there would be a generation who would fear the Lord and who would be thine own witnesses in this world. Grant to us, O Lord, as a people, that we would mourn over our sin, that we would know that blessedness that belongs to those whose sins are brought before them, who are convicted of their sin, whose hearts are broken, which is a pleasing sacrifice unto thee.

[5 : 31] And that we may know, O Lord, the healing balm of the cross of Golgotha applied to our wounded hearts, and that we would know, O Lord, the forgiveness of our sins.

O we pray, O Lord, that we may indeed have that strong consolation that belongs to those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us in the gospel, in Jesus Christ, that we may have that hope as an anchor of the soul that would be both sure and steadfast.

that hope that we have in Jesus Christ, in the one who has entered within the veil. O we pray, O Lord, that we would indeed value the privileges of the gospel.

we ask thy blessing upon all who come together to worship thee at this evening hour, and pray for all thy servants who proclaim thy word.

May they know the unction of thine own spirit upon them, granting to them, O Lord, that bornness, to speak and to proclaim the riches of thy grace.

[6 : 53] Through Jesus Christ. Remember us as a nation, we pray thee. O have compassion upon us. O may we return again to thine own word.

May we seek the blessing of the Lord upon our nation. O Lord, we have sinned. We have gone far away from thee.

But in thy mercy, in thy compassion, in thy grace, turn us again to thyself. We pray, O Lord, that thou would bless us now as we come to wait upon thee.

And all that we ask with the forgiveness of our many sins is in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Let us now read the word of God from the Old Testament.

And we begin our reading from 1 Samuel and chapter 16 and at verse 14. And we shall continue our reading into chapter 17 to verse 11.

[8 : 08] 1 Samuel 16 and verse 14. But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our Lord now command thy servants which are before thee to seek out a man who is a cunning player on an harp.

And it shall come to pass when the evil spirit from God is upon thee that he shall play with his hand and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well and bring him to me.

Then answered one of the servants and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite that is cunning and playing and a mighty valiant man and a man of war and prudent in matters and a comely person and the Lord is with him.

Wherefore Saul sent messages unto Jesse and said, Send me David thy son which is with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass laden with bread and a bottle of wine and a kid and sent them by David his son and to Saul.

[9 : 28] And David came to Saul and stood before him and he loved him greatly and he became his armour bearer. And Saul said to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray, thee stand before me for he hath found favour in my sight.

And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul that David took an harp and played with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well and the evil spirit departed from him.

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle and were gathered together at Socoh which belonged to Judah and pitched between Socoh and Asath in the land of Ephraim.

And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together and pitched by the valley of Elah and set the battle in array against the Philistines.

And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the other side and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side and there was a valley between them. And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines named Goliath of Gath whose height was six cubits and a span.

[10 : 49] And he had an helmet of brass upon his head and he was armed with a coat of mail and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass.

And he had greaves of brass upon his legs and a target of brass between his soldiers. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron and one bearing a shield went before him.

And he stood and cried into the armies of Israel and said unto them why are you come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine and ye servants to Saul?

Choose you a man from you and let him come down to me. and if he be able to fight with me and so kill me then will ye will be your servants but if I prevail against him and kill him then shall ye be our servants and serve us.

And the Philistine said I defy the armies of Israel this day give me a man that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

[12 : 07] And so on may the Lord bless unto us the reading of that portion of his own word. Now seeking the Lord's blessing let us look at 1 Samuel chapter 17 and those words that we have in verse 11.

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Last week we focused our attention on Saul and how an evil or a harmful spirit filled the vacuum that was left when the Lord withdrew his spirit from him.

and we noted the bad advice that he was given by his servants. Instead of encouraging Saul to repent they came up with the idea of seeking out a man who was a cunning player on a harp who would play soothing music and when the evil spirit came upon Saul the music would stimulate a good feeling.

For music was widely held in the ancient world to combat evil spirits. And one of Saul's servants had obviously been observing David and he suggested that David would be the ideal person to carry out this task.

[13 : 41] Saul sent for him and David came from looking after his father's sheep into the royal court and carried out the duties that was given to him. so that when the evil spirit was upon Saul David took the harp and played and Saul was refreshed and was well and the evil or harmful spirit departed from him for a time.

Now last week we noted that seeking consolation in things that make you feel good can be dangerous because while they can make you feel good the problem is much deeper than mere feelings.

good feelings will lead you to deal only with the symptoms and never with the cause of your problem and as we saw the problem is a problem of the heart.

What is required is repentance and a change of heart. Now tonight as we look at chapter 17 of 1 Samuel we know that the focus very often in this chapter is upon the battle between David and Goliath.

But I would like to continue our focus upon Saul and sketch out his life from the beginning up to this moment in which he is full of fear before the Philistine joined.

[15 : 06] For we read and the Philistine said I defy the armies of Israel this day give me a man that we may fight together. And when Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

He was greatly afraid and we know that the answer to his fear is to be found in the fact that he had disobeyed God and as a result God rejected him as king over Israel and the spirit of the Lord departed from him.

the Lord had given his spirit to equip him because the Lord gave his spirit to his servants in order to grant him the ability to carry out the work that he assigns to them.

For instance we read regarding the building of the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 31 I have called by name Bethel the son of Uri the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah and I have filled him with the spirit of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship to devise cunning works to work in gold and in silver and in brass and in cutting of stones to set them and the carving of timber to work in all manner of workmanship.

The Lord grants his spirit to his servants in order to equip them and to grant to them the ability to carry out whatever work that he has assigned for them.

[16 : 54] And in this man Saul we find a man who was anointed and equipped for the office of a king in that usual manner by which God equipped those whom he called to do a particular task.

So we are told that the spirit comes upon Saul. Oh the Lord equips him the Lord anoints him the Lord gives him the ability to be king over his covenant people.

The beginning for Saul was good however as time goes on the real Saul begins to emerge. let us look at his beginning and to do so we shall pick up points from chapter 9 to 16.

Saul was the first king of Israel he was the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin he rose up from the least of the tribes of Israel to the highest office in the land he had humble beginnings for in chapter 9 verse 21 Saul says am not I a Benjamin of the smallest of the tribes of Israel and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin but nevertheless he was the one who became the first king of God's covenant people Saul was anointed by Samuel who was the last judge of Israel and it was at a time when Israel was hard pressed by their enemies when we take a closer look at the beginning of this man Saul in chapter 10 we read that Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it upon his head and kissed him and said is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance and in verse 21 of chapter 10 we read and the spirit of the Lord will come upon thee and thou shalt prophesy with them and shalt be turned into another man and let it be when these signs are come upon thee that thou do as occasion saith thee for God is with thee what promising words we have recorded for us here about this man

Saul there in chapter 10 of 1 Samuel we are told and it was so that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel God gave him another heart and all those signs came to pass that day and when they came hither to the hill behold a company of prophets met him and the spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied among them and it came to pass when all that knew him before time saw that behold he prophesied among the prophets that the people said one to another what is this that is come unto the son of Kish is Saul among the prophets what we find in Saul is a man who had humble beginnings been raised by God and anointed and equipped by God to the highest office of being ruler over his covenant people when we read here of course of Saul being turned into another man or God giving him another heart we are not to think of it as meaning the inner changes that God works through his spirit in the case of conversions but rather the giving of gifts to carry out the work assigned to him it is a way of expressing the transformation of Saul from an assuming youth to be king that meant a drastic change for him personally and yet what we find in this man

[21 : 02] Saul is that he becomes a very controversial figure in the scriptures so much so that a large debate often takes place among people on whether Saul was actually a saved person or an unsaved person well what we find is that at the beginning everything seemed to be going well we note in 2 Samuel chapter 1 that in his lament over the death of Saul and his son Jonathan David says from the blood of the slain from the fat of the mighty the bow of Jonathan turned not back and the sword of Saul returned not empty indicating their success in battle and he goes on to describe them they were swifter than eagles they were stronger than lions during the period of the churches Israel had been easily defeated and was frequently subjected to foreign occupation but along comes the bow of

Jonathan and the sword of Saul neither of which turned back from battle without securing victory this can be seen for instance in chapter 11 against the Ammonites who had besieged Jabez Gilead and they would read that Saul inquired what aileth the people that they weep and when he was told of the plight of Jabez Gilead how they wanted to make a treaty with the Ammonite king who insisted that the right eye be gouged out by removing of course the right eye that would leave the people unfit for battle and the people of Jabez Gilead pleaded to be given seven days respite that they may send messages through all the territory of Israel if there is no one to save them they would give themselves up to the Ammonite king and on hearing this news we are told and the spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings and his anger was kindled greatly the coming of the spirit upon him makes a remarkable point for it shows that the

Lord's favour towards the king and that the spirit was equipping him with courage and vigour to do battle and defence of his covenant people so that Saul quickly organised his army and he defeated the Ammonite king Dale Davis in his commentary writes salvation came not because Israel has a king but because the king had Yahweh's spirit it is not the institution of kingship but the power of the spirit that brings deliverance the role among God's people is ever that which was stated to Zerubbabel which is recorded for us in Zechariah chapter 4 verse 6 not by might not by power but by my spirit saith the Lord of hosts always in our service to the

Lord we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit Jesus said I am come to cast fire on the earth some think that Jesus is here speaking of judgment no doubt scripture does use fire literally and symbolically as terms of judgment others like John Calvin thinks that it's a reference to the gospel Matthew Henry thinks of it as the fire of persecution although Jesus is not the author of it he permits it however here I would prefer to think of fire as symbolic of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit we know part of the comfort that Jesus gave to his disciples in the upper room before he died was regarding the sending of the Holy Spirit because it is the Holy Spirit that makes the world effective for salvation we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to apply the word of God to our hearts to change our hearts therefore we are to pray for the ministry of

God's Spirit in Luke Gospel chapter 11 Jesus concludes his teaching and prayer and he says how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him in John chapter 6 we have the words of Jesus it is the spirit that quickeneth the flesh profiteth nothing the words that I speak into their spirit and their life how we ought to pray for the Holy Spirit to come and to take the word of God and to make it effective in our own lives and the lives of those around us and the lives of those in our communities in every challenge that comes to us the challenges of sin and unbelief will require the presence and power of the spirit to be within us if we are going to overpower those challenges us the spirit of the

[26 : 36] Lord enabled Saul to have victory over the Ammonites and after the victory the people said to Samuel who is he that said shall Saul reign over us bring the men that we may put them to death but it was Saul that replied and he said there shall not a man be put to death this day for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel he reminds the people that was not he Saul but the Lord who had saved them and you know this was probably the high point of Saul's reign as king to this point in the life of Saul things are looking so promising but as we continue to sketch his life a different Saul emerges to the point where the Lord says to Samuel it repenteth me that

I have set up Saul to be king for he is turned back from following me and hath not performed my commandments when we come to chapter 13 we read that the Philistines had gathered a mighty army of chariots and men to do battle with Israel the army of the Philistines were so mighty that the small army of Israel were distressed and some went to hide themselves in caves and so on others they just ran away Saul was in Gilgal waiting for Samuel who had appointed to meet with him there and this indeed was a testing time for Saul for as he waited for Samuel the people were scattering and the enemy was thrown near what was Saul to do under the stress his reliance on

God would be tested and revealed if Saul would hold fast to God's word even when his followers were scattering and the Philistines advancing in great strength this perseverance would show that his heart was wholly given to the Lord he had waited seven days and Samuel had not appeared and Saul could not wait any longer so what did he do he took matters into his own hands and told them bring hither a burnt offering to me and peace offering and he offered the burnt offering now Saul knew that the priestly office did not belong to him that it belonged to Samuel but he allowed the circumstances of his current situation to overtake him and we are all faced with that same challenge so often to allow the circumstances of our current situation to overtake us and to do things that is not lawful for us to do he offered the sacrifice just as

Samuel was approaching and Saul went out to meet him and Samuel asked him what hast thou done and Saul sought to cover his disobedience and said because I saw that the people were scattered from me and that thou came not within the days appointed and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash therefore said I the Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal and I have not made supplication unto the Lord I forced myself therefore and offered a burnt offering and Samuel replied thou hast done foolishly thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which he commanded thee for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever but now thy kingdom shall not continue the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart and the

Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee this was the beginning of God's rejection of Saul and what was Saul's sin he made the sacrifice without authority to do so it was his failure to keep the commandment of God now you may think that what happened here was a very trivial thing just a small failing on the part of Saul surely he was worthy of some appreciation after all he had waited seven days and he found himself in a dire situation and offered the sacrifice someone may say surely that was better than not offering a sacrifice at all someone may say although he was not fully obedient he was almost obedient and surely that counts for something the thing that we must remember is that it is never right to violate the command of

[32:10] God obedience to God is to obey his word yes he waited seven days and that Saul was obedient but because a prophet did not appear at the expected time he takes things into his own hand he had sufficient for a burnt offering and peace offering so he thought I can handle it on my own if only he had waited another hour for as he offered the sacrifice we are told that Samuel was approaching you see what the Bible tells us is to wait upon the Lord we are told that if we wait upon the Lord that we have this promise but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings as seagulls they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint this teaches us that the way that we worship

God and obey God is by obeying the teachings of the Bible what we do in worship reveals our beliefs about who God is and what God wants see Saul here treated God's word with no reverence only a properly ordained priest could offer the burnt offering that would secure the favour of God the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 says let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear for our God is a consuming fire our worship and our work for the Lord must be in accordance to God's word it is God's agenda that we must adhere to and not our own agenda what Saul did may seem small and minor to us but for

God it was an indicator of a heart that was not right with him Saul is more content to depend on his own resources yes yet sufficient for a burnt offering and a peace offering he is more content to depend on his own resources rather than to wait and trust on God's word there are probably two very important lessons for us here to learn first trust God even when you see your own resources slipping away and secondly trust God even when you think your resources are sufficient when you think you can handle it alone this is all about trusting God this is all about leaning upon God's word upon God's promises but sadly when Samuel confronts

Saul he fails to accept responsibility and begins to place partial blame on his soldiers and on Samuel himself he says because I saw that the people were scattered from me and thou camest not within the days appointed I forced myself therefore and offered a burnt offering you know from this point onwards this attitude is a recurring one with Saul blaming others or excusing himself he never brings himself to admit his guilt he never brings himself to seek repentance he never brings himself to seek mercy how often we see among people what begins to be promising ends up with disappointment I think we can understand the grief that this brought upon God's prophet Samuel when we see people to turn away from following the

Lord after being so promising at the beginning and they turn away from following the Lord it brings us great disappointment and brings us great grief from this point onwards what we have in Saul is a decaying spiritual character the absence of Samuel from the life of Saul is incredibly significant as it indicates to us that Saul has stopped listening to Samuel and Saul is looking to other sources for divine direction you see God's word from Samuel has become threatening so he looks in another direction as we look around us such action does not seem strange to us does it we find in chapter 14 that

[37 : 25] Saul Saul turns to Ahiah now who was Ahiah well we are told that Ahiah belonged to the sons of Eli you remember that Eli was the Lord's priest in Shiloh and here we find that Ahiah belonged to the priesthood of Eli he belonged to those who were rejected by God he was a member of the rejected house of Eli but what we find is that here Saul replaces Samuel with Ahiah how easy for us to turn away from the harder words which correct and admonish us to that which we find more soothing and pleasing to our desires and that is what is happening here you see the words of

Samuel the servant of God were hard words hard words that corrected and admonished Saul and he was not happy with that and he turns to Ahiah who had more soothing and pleasing words to say to him oh you see that Saul is moving away from following the Lord a promising beginning but here we find his appointment and the thing is that Saul from this point became deeply religious as we sketch his life we see that among his religious observance that he ordered the Israelite soldiers to fast during a battle perhaps in an attempt to regain the favour of the Lord who was now silent to him but he was requiring more of

God's people than God himself had asked by demanding a fast in the midst of the battle we read that he even built an altar to the Lord he said disperse yourselves among the people and he said to them bring me hither every man his ox and every man his sheep and slay them here and eat and sin not against the Lord in eating with the blood and all the people brought every man his ox with him that night and slew them there and Saul built an altar unto the Lord the same as the first altar that he built unto the Lord he became deeply religious even going further than that which was required by God yet in all these actions Saul showed no sign of repentance towards God he showed no grieving over sin no real seal in honouring the

Lord his selfish motive in making himself more religious was that he felt that he was losing respect among his people Saul failed either to see or acknowledge himself as the source of God's disfavour he seems to be blind to his real spiritual standing before God God was silent to him and yet Saul did not understand that his own guilt and that his own sin was the problem in his battle with the Amalekites the Lord gave him victory and yet he proved unwilling to accept God's word the Amalekites would be known today as terrorists who played on weaker opponents they were the enemies of Israel and showed no regard whatsoever to God and the Lord had warned that he would blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven and God told Saul to totally destroy everything that belongs to the

Amalekites and after the battle Samuel comes on the scene and Saul greets him blessed be thou of the Lord he says I have performed the commandment of the Lord and Samuel confronted him what meaneth then the splitting of the sheep in my ears and the loin of the oxen which I hear Saul in what has become as well known method blames the others covering it with a religious overtone to defend his action by saying yeah I have obeyed the voice of the Lord and have gone the way which the Lord sent me and have brought Agag the king of Amalek and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites but the people took off the spoil sheep and oxen the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God and Gilgal and then for the first time we hear from the mouth of Saul something like a confession he said

[42 : 55] I have sinned for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words because I feared the people and obeyed their voice now therefore I pray thee pardon my sin and turn again with me that I may worship the Lord but you know everything in his confession is all born from self interest as Samuel leaves he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle and it rent and again he makes a confession I have sinned yet honoured me now I pray thee before the elders of my people and before Israel he is attempting to appease Samuel and he wants to save face among his people you notice how he replaces pardon my sin with honour me now before the elders of my people and Israel this was just a confession from the lips there was no heartfelt confession there was no rending of the heart over his sin no acknowledgement of guilt and of his disobedience to

God's word Saul teaches us my friends that partial obedience is really only disobedience made to look acceptable Saul obeys God's word to a degree but then he convinces himself that he has satisfied the divine commands he gives us it with partial obedience but it is only disobedience made to look acceptable he focuses on the externals but fail to grasp the internal realities how dangerous that can be let us search ourselves to make sure that our standing before God is not based on externals but on internal realities but it is not that which is out but that which is in no amount of externals like church attendance forum of praise or whether we stand or sit for prayer and singing and so on for it is easy for us all to simply go through the motions of rituals while neglecting the internal realities of a true confession of guilt and sin bringing us to repentance which comes from a broken and a contrite heart that sacrifice that is pleasing to

God oh when we come to the valley of Elah Saul is completely lost when Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine they were dismayed and greatly afraid what a contrast we have from the beginning in his battle with the Ammonites to the battle in the valley of Eli what leaves them now afraid whether he knew it or not it was abandonment how fearful it is to be facing such a great enemy in abandonment what is happening here in the valley of Elah is a confirmation of the truth that was brought before us in the previous chapter of 16 of 1st Samuel the Lord has withdrawn his blessing from Saul he withdrew his spirit and Saul is left powerless and unable to deliver the

Israelites from the hands of the enemy how different is this scene brought before us now to that scene earlier in this book of Samuel when Saul had victory over the Philistines when he had victory over the Ammonites Saul was unable to give Israel the victory now what was so promising in the beginning has become such a great disappointment here at this point how we should touch our hearts how we should examine ourselves but on the scene comes David and we see that all changes and next week God willing we shall look at how David fulfilled what was not possible for Saul the Lord would bless these thoughts to us let us pray eternal and ever blessed

Lord in our meditation today we have come to realise our great dependency upon thee oh grant to us that we would set our hearts and that we would be assured that thou art with us oh Lord we pray that we would come before thee at all times with reverence and with godly fear knowing that our God is a consuming fire knowing that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God we give thanks to thee oh Lord that we can come through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that thou hast opened a way for us that thou doth seek us to confess our sins with a broken heart a contrite spirit to come with our brokenness to thee for healing and we give thee thanks oh

[48 : 52] Lord that thou art the one who can give us true healing we ask oh Lord that thou would go before us during this week and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen