

Praise from Inside a Fish

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn briefly tonight to the passage in Jonah we read in the book of the prophet Jonah and looking especially at chapter 2, this prayer that we find recorded there of Jonah's.

It's very likely that this was if not the strangest then certainly one of the strangest places ever from which the Lord was praised, from inside a fish.

Yet that's what you find in this chapter, Jonah is praising God for his deliverance, for the way that he actually came to his rescue by the fish to prevent him from drowning.

Praise from inside a fish. The fish in fact is God's answer to the prayer that Jonah uttered previously before the fish took him into its inside.

In other words you really find in the chapter a prayer inside this praise or this prayer of Jonah from inside the fish. If you look at verses 5 and 6 for example he talks about his experience in the depth prior to the fish actually coming to swallow him and therefore preserve his life through that means.

[1 : 23] The waters closed in over me ready to overtake my life. The deep surrounded me. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever.

Then you brought me up from the pit. My life from the pit. Oh Lord my God. That was his reflection on how God came and prepared, appointed is the word, this great fish to swallow up Jonah.

In other words as Jonah was inside the fish he was reflecting on how God had sent that fish as an answer to his prayer when he thought he was about to expire.

When his life was about to leave him in the depths of the sea. And God answered his prayer for help by sending that fish by appointing the fish that swallowed up Jonah and preserved him for three days and three nights.

Until it vomited Jonah out again by God's appointment. When the Lord spoke to the fish it vomited Jonah out upon dry land.

[2 : 27] Now we have to take this as a historical incident. A lot depending on this being a historical incident. You mustn't think of it as a myth. Or just a story that's been made up with some important points to teach us.

Because the Lord for one thing the Lord Jesus Christ himself believed the story of Jonah. And not only did he believe it as a real incident. He referred to him as a real person.

He referred to the incident of being three days and three nights within the fish. As a picture or an illustration or a type of his own experience in being three days in the grave.

The three days that covered from his death through to his resurrection. And that's how it was with Jesus. He accepted this as true, as a valid history.

And he applied it to his own situation. Where he saw this as an illustration of his death followed by burial and then resurrection. And there are so many things in the Bible like that.

[3 : 33] That are so important that we hold on to them as real historical events. Where the Bible presents them as such. Because without that you don't really have the kind of foundation that the Bible gives us.

In real historical events such as Christ's own resurrection. You can go as you know very well to 1 Corinthians 15. Where Paul sets about establishing the truth of that.

The actual fact that Jesus rose from the dead. And therefore there is such a thing as resurrection. And he argues out from that. Well you could say the same applies to the story of Jonah.

To the account you have in scripture. But as we say within the fish Jonah reflected upon where he had been in the depths of the ocean. And where God rescued him by sending the fish to take him inside the fish.

So we'll look at Jonah's repentant prayer. And that's taking us to the prayer that he prayed before the fish came. The prayer he prayed when he was in the depths. With the weeds wrapped around

his head as he puts it.

[4 : 39] And being at the very roots of the mountain. Right down in the depths of the sea. Right down near the very ground at the bottom of the sea. And then it was in that situation.

That Jonah came to a realization. Of where he was spiritually. Of what his relationship with God had become. And of the seriousness of having himself run away from God.

And from the mission that God had given him. To go to Nineveh with the announcement of mercy.

He is first of all a drowning man.

As you see there in verses 3 and then verses 5 to 6. You cast me into the deep. Into the heart of the seas. The flood surrounded me. Your waves and your billows passed over me.

The waters closed in over me. To take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were trapped around my head. He's talking there about being a drowning man.

[5 : 40] He was thrown into the sea as you know by those on the ship. And as he went down into the depths of the sea. That is where the truth really hit him. That is where God made him confront.

Where he was at spiritually. What his relationship with God had become. And you see he saw his situation as a judgment from God.

He saw it as the consequences of his rebellion. Or of his turning away from the message. The mission that God had given him. To go to Nineveh. Because he talks here about your waves.

He says to the Lord. When he prayed this way to the Lord. This is the prayer. That he prayed in the depths of the sea. You cast me into the deep. All your waves and your billows passed over me.

Jonah is personalizing this in regard to God. And these are the waves and the billows of God. They are sent by God. They have been ordained by God.

[6 : 39] They are under the control of God. They are the messengers of God. To actually bring Jonah up to a realization of his situation.

It made him think. It made him reflect. It made him realize the direction that his life was going in. And it was there that he confronted it. In the depths of the sea.

That's the means that God used. To actually bring him back to himself. If you like to realize where in fact he was at. Now as we apply that.

We could say first of all it's perfectly easy to misuse it. In that we would say well see God actually got him here. At the depths of the sea and rescued him.

People could misuse that and live kind of loosely. And say it doesn't really matter if I keep true to God or not. God will always come in to rescue me. Well as we say quite often.

[7 : 37] That kind of thinking is a very dangerous experimenting with God. We don't. We haven't been given the knowledge of God that we have.

So that we could live a loose life. So that we just presume upon God's intervention. If we don't stay true to him. We mustn't have that sort of presumption. We have no warrant to think that way.

As the apostle wrote to the Romans in chapter 6 there. How shall we sin? What shall we do? Is this why we have been justified?

How shall we who have died to sin live any longer therein? The logic of salvation is not towards a loose life.

It's towards holiness. It's towards dealing with sin. It's towards being true to God. But nevertheless that is one thing. But the other side of it is.

[8 : 34] Here is a cause to thank God for what you see here. That he pursued his rebellious servant right into the depths of the sea. And right to the point at which Jonah was about to drown and lose his life.

That is really the conviction that Jonah had. He was convinced at this point. While he was praying to God out of this predicament. And really as he saw it coming to the end of his life.

That is when he realized God came into the picture to rescue him. And now that he is reflecting on it from inside the fish. He is doing so with a thankful heart.

He is doing so realizing what a great privilege was his. And what an almighty blessing it was. That in that situation God came to his rescue.

God did not abandon him. Even there at the depths of the sea. A self-inflicted situation. It was Jonah who caused this.

[9 : 35] It was Jonah's fault. It was a consequence of his disobedience. And God let him reach that very depth. Before he came to show him where he really was.

And sometimes God will do that. If we are determined to be rebellious against God. It is a very very dangerous thing. Because God in his sovereignty.

Can actually bring us to such extreme depths. That we think that this is it. My life is gone.

Before God comes to rescue. And the drowning man comes out of his desperation. And out of the sense of God's judgment. In these ways.

To cry out to God. I cried he said. In this way. Now the second thing about him you see is. That he is a fearful man.

[10:38] In verse 4 there. Then I said I am driven away from your sight. Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. And the translation there. Could easily be translated.

And I think it is probably a better translation. To say. Then I said I am driven away from your sight. How shall I again look upon your holy temple. Because you see. Jonah is at this point in the depths of the sea.

Crying out to his God. Still not having been rescued by the fish. And what is really disturbing for him. Is not so much the fact that he is about to drown.

As he sees it. But that he is at such a distance from God. That's what's now really hit him. That itself is a remarkable thing to notice.

Then I said. I am driven away from your sight. How shall I again look upon your holy temple. There is Jonah having caused this episode.

[11:36] Having brought it upon himself. And before God comes to intervene. As he cries to the Lord out of this distress. This is what is really affecting his mind most deeply.

That he will never again. See the house of God. Because he has been rebellious against God. God has put a distance. Between him and Jonah. His servant.

That's his fear. That's his very real fear. And it's a fear that was real. To the psalmist as well. Even though we can say absolutely. And assuredly.

That God will never forsake his people. When you are in a backslidden state. And when you know that your life is not right with God. When you have in your mind.

The knowledge that it's come to this. And there's a very great distance. As you see it between yourself and God. And God has become a dim and distant figure to you.

[12:36] Then the fear factor kicks in. And it multiplies the more you keep on. In that condition. In that situation. Think of the psalmist. Think of David in Psalm 51.

As we sang these words not so long ago. Just a few minutes ago. There is David with his prayer of repentance. He knows where he's at. God has brought him to see. How wrong his life has been.

How it has deteriorated. How he has gone away from God. And as he prays that God will forgive his sin. That God will be merciful to him. As he appeals.

Out of these depths. That God will in fact come. And show again his graciousness. And his mercy in forgiving his sins. This is what he says in verse 11.

Cast me not from your sight. And don't take your Holy Spirit away from me.

[13:31] That is David's very real fear. In the situation that he's in. In relation to the distance that's come. Between himself and God. By David's own actions.

By David's sin. By David's backsliding. In that condition. Even as he thinks upon God. And as he's come back to pray to God. He has this very real fear.

Even for a man. Who may know that. God will not forsake him. Yet the fear is real enough. That he'll be cast from his sight.

Because that's what he deserves. That's what he knows he deserves. And so he appeals to God. Please. Take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Don't take the source of life. Out of my life. And that's why here you've got. The description out of the belly.

[14:27] Of Sheol. As it's translated in ESV here. In verse 2. I cried. And you heard my voice. The word Sheol. The word Sheol is really. Just the way it is.

In the Hebrew text. And it means. It's translated sometimes death. Sometimes the grave.

Sometimes even hell. It's a word that has all these.

Connotations of meaning to it. Depending on the context. But it always has to do with the idea of death. Death. And it always has to do with the idea of death as a separation.

Separation. Not only from the things of this present life. But especially a separation from God. That is really what death is. Isn't it? That's the wages of sin. Death. Not just the separation of your soul

and body.

When you die. In the sense of which you die physically. Because. Separation from God is the essence of death. That's what came upon mankind. When Adam fell.

[15:26] And the sense of being. Bound by. The bands of hell. The bands of Sheol. The bands of death. Is something that you find again in Psalm 116.

Where we sang. Also. Earlier this evening. That the pains. The pangs. The bands of death. Held on to me. Clung on to me.

So like. So like. David. David and also. Jonah here. So. That's really what you see. As he's in the depth of the sea. As he's crying out to God.

As he comes to realize. That this is really for him. An indication of his distance from God. Of separation from God. The very real fear. That God. Will not take him back again.

To see. His temple. Into communion with him. And worship of him. With his people. He is. A fearful man. As he is a drowning man.

[16:24] But that brings him. To be a praying man. As he finds himself. Drowning in the depth of the sea. As he knows.

As he knows that fear. Of distance from God. So he comes. To pray. As he says here. In verses. Two. And then. Verse seven.

As well. When my life. Was fainting away. I remembered. The Lord. And my prayer. Came to you. Into your holy temple. That's what he's saying.

When I. Was fainting away. When my life. Was reaching its lowest ebb. Then I remembered. The Lord. That is where. As we said. The truth really hit him. Of where it was.

And that's where he appealed. To God. And you. Heard. My voice. You answered me. Out of the belly. Of Sheol. I cried. And you. Heard. My voice.

[17:20] Isn't it. An amazing thing. A precious thing. That even.

When we have to. Confess. Our failure. Our self-induced. Our self-created. Failure. Whatever it is. We all have them. That we can cry.

To God. Out of them. And that God. Hears us. Where would we be. Tonight. Without this.

This. Kind of passage. In the Bible. Where would we be. Without knowing. That God. Pursues. People. Into the depths.

And will not let them. Be overtaken. By the depths. Where would we be. Unless we knew. That the waves. And the depths. With which God. Pursues us. In our times. Of turning away.

[18:14] From him. Are his own means. To bring us. To ourselves. A little. Like the prodigal. In the far distant country. He. Was. Just at the.

Very depths. With hunger. And with filth. Yet. These are the very things. That God used. To bring him to himself. And.

That's where prayer. Began for him. Well here is where. God. Brought. Jonah. Back. To. To prayer. Out of this. Self-created failure. Now very often. That's. Where we find it difficult.

To pray. Isn't it? We're all conscious of. Times of failure. We're all conscious of. Times of spiritual neglect. Times when we haven't been.

Reading out Bible. As frequently. As we should have been. Times when. Our prayers have been. Far too. Formalized. Or too short. Or just too. Too. Unthought through.

[19:11] If you like. It's just a kind of. Formality. And we. Then realize. That we've drifted away. From God. And we need to get back to him.

And then the devil comes. With. His. Suggestive. Schemes. And says. You. You can't go back to God. He's not going to be very pleased with you. How can you go back to God.

Seeing you've created this distance from him. Seeing you've brought this upon yourself. Seeing you have affected the relationship between you. And you have caused that. You know very well. That God's not going to be very pleased with you.

How can you possibly go back to him. And then he may be suggested. Even if you do go back to him. You've got no guarantee. That he's going to forgive you. That he's going to listen to you.

You don't have a right to go back to him. You have no right to expect. That he will receive you.

These are all the kind of things. That actually come to invade our mind.

[20:12] When we drift away from God. When we need to get back to him. And these arrows of the evil one. Try to stop us.

The only thing to do is just to. Just brush them aside. And just rush into the presence of God. Pour out your heart to him. And tell him. How it is.

And how you feel. And what you know he is like. That's the great thing about God. He's not going to then. Say.

Just a minute. You have to. Deal with me in a way. That's much more perfectly acceptable. To me than that. That's not what David.

Did when he came before God. That's not how he found God. When he came before God. As Psalm 51 begins. According to your loving kindness.

[21 : 09] And your abundant mercy. Forgive my transgression. It's not according to. How perfect David expresses it. It's not according to how.

Completely David is able to describe. His failure. And his sin. It's according to the mercy of God. According to the loving kindness of God.

And God is emphasizing. And re-emphasizing. And re-emphasizing again. Throughout the Bible. His own word. When we've gone away from him. When we need to get back to him.

We are on safe. Sure ground. When we appeal. To his steadfast love. To his loving kindness. To his abundant mercies.

To his constant. Constant. Constant. Care for his people. And he is. A praying man. In these circumstances.

[22 : 07] But. He then becomes. A very thankful man. Because. As he comes to reflect on this. Having been rescued by the fish. As God appointed that fish.

It's obvious. That he's a very thankful. And very. Praising the Lord. From inside the fish. I called. To the Lord. And he answered me.

Verse 6. You find. Yet you brought up. My life from the pit. O Lord. And verse 7 as well. At the end of it. My prayer came to you. Into your holy temple.

Why does he put it that way? Because. He knows. That is. In those days. Where God. Was at the center. Of the life of his people. As a people. Where the sacrifices. Were rendered. That God himself.

Had appointed. As a means. By which he was. Accessible to his people. Without. Burning against them. In his wrath. The means. By which. Sin.

[23 : 03] Came to be dealt with. By which. The distance. The barrier. Between themselves. And God. Was provided for. And come across. In the mercy of God.

It is to. His holy temple. That. That Jonah's prayer. Was directed. And it came into your temple. And when you come to pray. Every time you come to pray.

Not just out of your. Times of failure. And distress. And out of depths. And out of. Distance from God. And drifting away from God. Every time you come.

You're thankful. For the death of Jesus. For the sacrifice. That is always going to be fully sufficient. To bear the weight. Of your confession. And always going to be the ground. On which God forgives. Your sin. God is never going to say.

[24 : 00] On the one hand. He's never going to say. Your sin is just too much for me. Why is he not going to say that? Because. He's never going to be saying. The death of my son. Is not enough.

To cover your sin. That's how it is with him. It's the glory of his grace. And. As Jonah comes to express.

His thankfulness. He uses this language. From the pit. In verse 6 there. Yet you brought up my life. From the pit. It reminds you of Psalm 103. The beginning of Psalm 103 there.

Which. Talks about rescue. And the psalmist. Praising God. For rescuing him. Even from death. From the pit. From the grave. And. That's the language really.

Of resurrection. Isn't it? And you see. It brings us to. The New Testament. Expansion of these. Points in the Old Testament. Which weren't then.

[24 : 57] Understood as fully. As they now are. In New Testament age. When you have all of the. Evidence there. Through the resurrection of Christ. And the teaching of the New Testament. That there's such a thing as.

A spiritual resurrection. To which your physical resurrection. Is then connected. Because when God brings us to life. From the deadness of our sins.

From our sinful condition. As illustrated. For example. In the raising of Lazarus. From the dead. Well that's. A spiritual resurrection.

It's bringing to life. That which was dead. You. Says Paul to the Ephesians. You. Has he quickened. You. Has he brought to life.

Who were dead. In trespasses. And sins. And there's such a thing as. Physical resurrection. Awaiting God's people. When their bodies.

[25 : 52] Will be raised. From the grave. To meet the Lord. In the air. When they were reunited. With their. With their spirits. With their souls. There's such a thing as that.

Physical resurrection. Because. This spiritual resurrection. Has gone before it. You might say that. The spiritual resurrection. You're being brought to life. Spiritually.

Demands. That after you die. Your physical resurrection. Will take place. Because your body. Has come into. The redemption. The salvation.

That you've been brought into. By that. Spiritual resurrection. From the dead. And God is saying. For my people. Who I have brought.

From the grave. Spiritually. From the deadness. Of their sin. Their body. Can't be left. In the ground. It has to. Have its own part. In this.

[26 : 48] Wonderful. Salvation. This wonderful life. And therefore. There is a physical. Resurrection. Awaiting. Here's Jonah's.

Repentant prayer then. We read. That he became. A drowning man. And in that. He became. A fearful man. And from that. He became. A praying man. And out of that.

He became. A thankful man. How wonderful. God's. Dealings with him. How amazing. That from being. Thrown into the sea. Right through.

To being found. In the belly. Of a fish. All of these. Rich. Spiritual. Experiences. Could have arisen. In the life.

Of this man. So that as you. And I read them. Tonight. We benefit. From it too. Who would have thought. That all these.

[27 : 42] Years ago. God. Prepared. A fish. For the benefit. Of generations. Of his people. In reading. About Jonah. So he was.

In his. Repentant prayer. But let's briefly. Conclude. By looking at. Jonah's. Renewed. Passion. In verses. Eight and nine. Those who pay regard. Remember he's still.

Inside the fish. When he's giving. Thanks here. When he's reflecting. Upon. God answering his. Prayer in the depths. Those who pay regard. Or have. A regard for. Vain idols.

The word. Words are literally. Lying vanities. By which he means. Vain idols. They forsake their hope. Of steadfast love. In other words. He's saying here that. Nineveh of course.

Was an idolatrous place. It was a pagan place. It was the capital. Of the Assyrians. And. Jonah very well knew. That they were a pagan. Idolatrous people.

[28 : 39] And. The reason that he actually. Ran away. And couldn't face up. To going to Nineveh. He just could not. Get into his mind. As these were the enemies. Of the Lord. How could the Lord.

Have such a thing. As forgiveness. For them. How could they be brought. Into. The same sort of relationship. With God. As his people Israel. And it really took.

Until the New Testament. To really bring that. Fully. To life. Didn't it. But Jonah. Kind of wrestled with that. That's the. Thing that really. Caused him to turn. In the opposite direction.

And run away. From his mission. But now you see. He is back on track. God has used. This incident. To renew. His passion. For his mission.

To Nineveh. And. As he talks here. About. Idolatry. And. False. It being false. And futile. That's what. Lying vanities. Or vain idols. Really means.

[29 : 36] It may very well be. That. Jonah was. Regarding. His own mind. As it was rebellious. Against God. His own mind. As.

He himself. Thought best. As itself. A vain. Idol. That had come. Between himself. And God.

You see. We can make. Idols. Of our own. Understanding. Idols. Of what we. Regard. As our own. Superior. Way. Of looking. At things. We can make.

An idol. Out of our own. Minds. Just as any other. Part of our life. Or lifestyle. And. It's certainly true. When you look at. Jonah. And when you look at.

His. His resolve. And his determination. Not to go through. With. The way that God. Was. Bringing him. To face. Mission. To Nineveh. Jonah.

[30 : 30] Had it in his own. Mind. This is not right. Now he's saying. Well. That was just an idol. I was making. Of my own mind. Mine. What's my understanding.

Compared. To this great God. That's what he's now. Come. Come to really see. And it's possible. Indeed. That that's. That's the case. But. I think the main thing. There is that.

He is really thinking. Of Nineveh. And of the Ninevites. And what he's saying is. Those who pay regard. Those who. Have. This. Devotion. To. Vain.

Idols. They forsake. Their hope. Of steadfast love. And. What Jonah is seeing. Of course. Is that steadfast love. Resides in God. And when you go away. From God.

You are actually forsaking. Steadfast love. And as he saw it. To an extent. In himself. And in his own life. Even if he was. If it is true. That he was seeing. His own understanding.

[31 : 26] As idolatrous. Well the effect of that really. Was. Bringing him away. From steadfast love. From the steadfast love of God. And the care within that. That God has for his people.

But if you think about it. In terms of. The mission to. To Nineveh. It seems to have really hit Jonah. Very strongly. That. The Ninevites were really.

A people to be pitied. Not a people to. To say. They don't deserve mercy. How can I possibly go and. Declare.

Repentance. And the need to repent. And the forgiveness of God. What he is saying now is. All these poor Ninevites. Because they are so bound up.

With their lying idols. With their vanities. That they forsake steadfast love. They are at such a distance. From the God I know. As the God of steadfast love.

[32 : 26] That is how we must see the lost. That is what must. Move.

Our passion. For evangelizing. For reaching out to the lost. For being the kind of people. That see the lost. That see.

Like the Ninevites around us here. That see just like in the days of Jonah. People who are so absorbed. Orbed in their lying vanities. That they are at a huge distance.

From steadfast love. From the wonderful care. And compassion of God. That they are turning their backs upon. In refusing the gospel. And the call of the gospel.

And the claim of Christ. And the more we actually see. That that is how it is. A deliberate forsaking. Of steadfast love.

[33 : 22] And the provisions of that love. And the wonders of experiencing that love. The more your heart will go out to them. The more you will pray that they will be saved. The more you will actually be involved.

And engaged. In every means that you can. In order to bring those poor people. From their estrangement from God. To the means by which God may bless them.

Through the gospel. Those who forsake. Those who follow lying vanities. Vain idols. Forsake their hope.

Of steadfast love. And then Jonah has a renewed passion. Not only for the state of Nineveh. And its mission. But also for his own relationship with God.

But I with the voice of thanksgiving. Will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed. I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

[34 : 25] He had vowed. As a man of God. To be a servant of God. But he had run away from that. There had been an interruption. Now God has corrected him.

And God has brought him back. To see things as they really are. God has brought him back. To a renewed passion. Not only for the mission. That he has to the Nineveh. But his own relish.

And his own praise. And his own acceptance. Of God's way. And of God's will. What I have vowed. I will pay. And then he has this great declaration.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Which is really. You might say. More or less saying. Lord I am ready now to go. I am ready to go to these Ninevites.

I am ready to do your mission. And it is then. And not till then. That God spoke to the fish.

[35 : 26] Not until the fish. Had done its work. Not until Jonah had come to all of this confession. And this readjustment.

And this redirection in his mind. And in his life. Only then. Does God see. Now. This man is ready again. To be my missionary.

So God. Spoke to the fish. And it vomited Jonah. Out on the dry land. And you don't hear anymore. About the fish.

There is no more need for it. Jonah. Is now facing Nineveh. With a renewed passion. To speak for God. In his streets.

And that's. How the chapter ends. Then. Then. You. See in chapter 3.

[36 : 21] As we read. How Jonah went to Nineveh. And declared that message. And how the Ninevites. Repented. And came to turn to God.

And yet. Yet again. Jonah. Wasn't pleased. That's another story. But it does show us that. Having returned once. From going away from God. From following our own minds. That does not mean. We will never go back there again.

May God. Preserve us from it. But may we also realize. That we are prone to it. And as we see God willing. On the Lord's Day morning. Even a giant like Abraham.

Went back to the same. Schemes again. That had failed him before. And got him into trouble. And yet. Yet again.

[37 : 24] You find him. Back on that track. All that proves. Friends. All the more. How great. And merciful.

And patient. And committed. Our God is. To all of us. As his frail. Fragile.

Weak. People. Let's pray. We give thanks. O Lord. For your mighty strength. For your resolve. Ever to be. In hold of your people. For your way. In which. The way in which you. Show in the life. Of your people. That you are so committed.

To their well-being. We bless you. For that love. That will never let us go. Even when we have come. To stray from you. We pray. O Lord. That you would help us.

[38 : 20] To check. Every movement. Of straying from you. At its beginnings. Leave us not. We pray. To follow that path. Out any further. But grant.

That we may. In returning to you. Take delight. Again in your presence. We pray. For your blessing. On your word. That brings. All of these. Important.

Issues. Of Christian experience. To us. We thank you. O Lord. For every way. And means. That you use. To further lead us. And guide us. And teach us.

In your own ways. So hear us now. We pray. And bless us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.