

# Philippians 4:10-23

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[0:00] Okay, I'm one of Shoreline's pastors or elders, and I get to conclude the book of Philippians! So I invite you to turn with me to Philippians chapter 4. We'll begin in verse 10.

I'll give you a moment to turn there. And I am feeling particularly needy today. Though I am particularly needy every day.

I'm going to... Mike just prayed for me and the preaching of the Word, but I'm also going to pray for me and the preaching of the Word. Our great God and Father, there is none like you, and there is nothing like your Word.

Lord, by your Word, you formed all things. And by your Word, your Son, you have redeemed the world.

Lord, by your Word, you shape your people. Will you do that today? Will you make us more like your glorious Son?

[1:21] Amen. We stoke joy in our hearts for the great salvation we have in Him, the mission that He's called us to. And may we share in His love for His people, for our own joy and for your glory.

Amen. Paul concludes the book of Philippians this way.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I could do all things through Him who strengthens me.

[2:35] Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. A fragrant offering, a sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God.

And my God will supply every need of yours, according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

[3:42] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. This is God's Word. As we come to the conclusion of the book of Philippians, it's worth asking the question, who is responsible for the fact that it's here in our Bibles?

Certainly God, the divine author of all of Scripture, is responsible for it. And so too, the Apostle Paul, the human author of this letter.

But this passage also shows us that the Christians who lived in Philippi also had a hand in this. Because this letter is in large part a thank you letter.

It's not a superficial thank you. Paul has pastoral concerns here that he has been outlining for them. And he's been including them throughout. But the occasion for writing this letter was Paul's gratefulness to and for them.

As we saw in our series in the book of Acts, which we concluded... When did we conclude that? Early 2022, I think. Paul was in prison in Rome for the sake of the gospel, awaiting trial before Nero. [5:13] That's where he was when he wrote this letter. From his imprisonment, he was sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippian church after they had sent Epaphroditus to visit him.

He wanted to send a greeting and an encouragement to them. But why had Epaphroditus been in Rome? To support Paul with both friendship and encouragement and also with finances. Now, what does a prisoner need with money? Prison commissaries are a relatively recent invention. Luke actually showed us, or at least hinted to us, why Paul needed money in this season of imprisonment.

In Acts chapter 28, he mentions twice kind of what's going on. In Acts 28, 16, when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him. Verse 28, or verse 30, he explains further, he lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

[6:38] And those are the final words of the book of Acts. Paul was able to be under house arrest, not in a dungeon, which meant that he could keep ministering the gospel in a pretty public way.

He did that by writing letters like this one, by welcoming all who came to him, including Epaphroditus. We saw in Acts 28, if you read through, he was actually able, wherever he was hiring out this room for his house arrest, he was able to do, to address large crowds in those rented quarters with a soldier constantly watching him.

So the content of this letter is largely about the goodness and the majesty of Christ and the joy that we have in him and how that reshapes our whole lives. The occasion for this letter is Paul sending back the messenger and the bearer of that gift with thanks.

And like the rest of the letter, this is not just like a charitable giving receipt, like thanks for that and you can put this on your taxes, or even just saying a superficial thanks.

He is also blessing them by the content of what he says when he thanks them. Just he has been offering them truths about Christ to shape their lives and their hearts and fill them with joy throughout this letter.

[8:09] This last section offers to them a few final blessings as he explains to them first his own gratitude, but then does something more and he explains exactly what their generosity has done for them, not for him, as he returns Epaphroditus to them, bearing the letter which is more valuable than the gift ever was.

And so this final section of the book of Philippians breaks down into three parts, each with its own blessing to the people who are receiving it. First, in verses 10 through 13, Paul tells us about his own thankfulness and contentedness.

In verses 14 through 19, he's going to teach the Philippians three things about Christian generosity. He's going to show them, you don't even know how valuable this was.

Let me explain it to you. And then in verses 20 to 23, Paul concludes praising God and sending his love to the church. So we'll treat each section in turn.

First, beginning in verse 10, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

[9:29] You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance, and need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Verse 13 is quite possibly the verse of the Bible most frequently cited in a way that conflicts with its immediate context and its actual meaning.

Other contenders include Jeremiah 29, 11. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans for welfare, not for evil.

To give you a future and a hope. You see that in a lot of coffee mugs, right? In its context, he is telling this to a people who he had just said, you will probably die in exile.

[10:37] You need that critical context to understand that verse. Or perhaps another contender, Matthew 7, verse 1, judge not that you be not judged.

That you be not judged. Excuse me. That seems to be non-Christians' favorite verse to quote to Christians. Get off my back. Don't judge me. Right?

Of course, in that context, Christ goes on to explain that Christians aren't to live prideful, hypocritical judgmentalism and tells them how to be humble and discerning in their judgments about people. Going on to say, do not give to dogs what is holy. Do not throw your pearls before pigs lest they trample them underfoot and turn and attack you.

Which sounds an awful lot like exercising judgment about people. Likewise, people apply, verse 13, to all sorts of things that have nothing to do with what Paul is here talking about.

[11:45] It has nothing to do with sports or political campaigns or our personal dreams. In fact, it's mostly about how we can be content when our personal dreams are shattered.

it's chiefly about what we can achieve when all those things go wrong. When we don't get or accomplish what we had desired.

And if we're to understand it correctly, we need to read it in its context. And much like last week, we'll find that the most famous verse in this passage isn't even the main point of the passage. It's an application of that main point.

And so, let's look at it in its context. Paul begins by talking about their revived concern for him. The Philippian church had been the first place Paul visited in Europe, in the region of Macedonia.

And these were the first Christians in the European continent. From there, he kept going. And they supported him in that.

[12:54] He mentioned specifically his time in Thessalonica when they sent aid to him, financial support to continue the mission, to spread the gospel and the salvation and the glory of Christ, not just once, but more than once.

And for a time it appears that they were unable to continue that financial support. He says you had no opportunity. Now that could mean several different things. We're not sure.

Macedonia was impoverished at this time. Paul talks about how the Macedonian churches were giving out of their poverty. It could have been something along that line. It could also have been simply that we just finished a series in the book of Acts.

Do you remember, can you keep straight all of his missionary journeys? I can't, not without a chart, right? And this was in a day and an age when what we would call snail mail today would be revolutionary in the first century.

That would be spectacular, that kind of communication speed. It's quite possible they just lost touch with him because he was moving so much and so rapidly.

[14:03] But whatever the reason, now that he's parked in a prison in Rome, they can continue to support him financially.

and Paul was grateful that they're able to resume their support even as they had been concerned with him, verse 10, the whole time. And Paul is quick here to correct a possible misinterpretation.

He is not writing out of some sort of faux gratitude or to imply further financial need or any strategy to angle for more money from them. In fact, he's not asking for something from them.

He's offering something to them, a perspective that will make them rich. Because Paul is saying here, do you want to hear a secret?

I know one. And it's a money secret even. And it's this. You can be content with it or without it.

[15:11] Paul talks about both extremes. poverty and riches. I think most people would expect you go to church and you know, yeah, of course we'll talk about being content in the midst of difficulties and poverty and trials.

But riches, he like makes a point to say, I know how to be content when I abound. Aren't you already content when you abound?

When you're full? When you have plenty? What's the big deal? What's the secret of facing, he says, facing plenty?

As if it is a challenge to overcome. last fall, we did a four-week sermon series on Christian contentment.

We thought about actually these very things. peace. By its very nature, desire is not a thing that can be quenched.

[16:25] By its very nature, desire is not a thing that can be satisfied. Peace and contentment and happiness do not come from outside us in our circumstances.

Your circumstances simply cannot give you that. That is not a power that they have. Having an abundance does not inherently make people content.

How content are you with your financial circumstances today? You probably want a little bit more, don't you? However, your present financial circumstance is that little bit more, or perhaps a lot bit more, that someone else wants, that they are aspiring to.

And guess what? Those people in this world who have that little bit more that you want, what do they want? A little bit more. Now, I'm not going to re-preach that four week contentment series here today.

First, there's no time, and secondly, more importantly, we want to see what this passage says, specifically, about how Paul has found this secret. What is his secret that allows him to face not only poverty, but face fullness and riches?

[18:09] First, he has probably learned to be content through his experience. He has experienced both extremes, and here he is still standing, still okay. But there's more to his secret than simply having walked a hard path, because he actually leads, I think, with the secret.

he leads off with this very intriguing statement. If you were in Paul's shoes, you are presently imprisoned, luckily it's a house arrest, but you are imprisoned.

You had just spent two years in prison in Caesarea Philippi, or sorry, Caesarea Maritima, wrong Caesarea, my bad, and then you got shipped off, like false trials and all that we saw this all in the book of Acts, and then he's shipped off to Rome, shipwrecked on the way, lost everything, thought he was going to lose his life, finally makes it more prison.

How would you react to the gift that Epaphroditus carried? If it were me, I would say, thanks, thank you guys, this is great, now I can keep doing the house arrest thing, not the dungeon thing that otherwise if I ran out of cash would have to do, you're the best.

Now, I bet Paul did feel that way, but he felt something else even more, and that's what he talks about. The beginning of verse 10, he says, I rejoiced in your gift.

[19:55] So that's not what he says, he says, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly at your gift. He didn't rejoice primarily in the gift itself, like I would, but in the Lord.

If he were to rejoice chiefly in the gift, in the circumstance, he knows, those of you who are with us in Paul's biography in the end of book of Acts, he knows that the circumstance can change like that, completely and swiftly.

Setting your hopes in a situation is building your house on sand, but that isn't where his hope and his contentment and his peace resides, or his joy.

He knows first that this gift is from God through the hands of the Philippian church who are indeed the Lord's hands in this circumstance.

In James chapter 1, we read every good gift and every perfect gift, including this gift that Paul is receiving here, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

[21:28] And so Paul has seen through his circumstances that he's receiving the gift and maintaining his position outside of a dungeon and he has seen to something greater, the Lord hand in it.

And what's more, he's rejoicing in something other than the gift. I rejoice in the Lord, the giver, not the gift, is where his joy is set and unlike his circumstances, the giver will never be taken from Paul, no matter what.

So verse 13, I can do all things is not about, as I heard one preacher once say, leaping tall buildings in a single bound.

It means I can do all these things. I can do all these circumstances. I can do poverty or wealth, hunger, fullness, prominence, obscurity, because I am rejoicing in Christ and cannot be shaken. And he wants that for us. We won't linger here because Paul doesn't. If you'd like more, we spent a whole month last fall on Christian contentment.

[22:49] So I encourage you to go back and revisit that. But now Paul moves from himself to his hearers and he's thanking them for their generosity. He opens their eyes to three things about Christian generosity that they may not have already recognized.

And what he's saying here is that you have done more than you know in sending this gift. And it is good for you, not just for me.

Beginning in verse 14. It was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God.

[24:08] And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. First, let us head off a potential error here.

In verse 17, when Paul says that their giving increases their credit, we could mistake that for something like, you and I, we can purchase blessings through our giving.

What did we sing earlier today? nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling.

There is no way for us to earn anything from God. Our conceptions of his greatness and his holiness and his grandeur and his majesty will always be too small.

Every time a prophet gets a glimpse of the throne room of heaven, it's obscured to them. But they, even in its obscurity, they don't have words.

[25:43] They say things, it looked like, it was as if, and then they are lost for words, the glory and the majesty and the splendor of the king of heaven, who has made and upholds the world, the world, and everything in it by the word of his power.

There is none like him, and there is only folly in thinking that we can earn something from him as if he could owe us anything.

There is no earning blessing from God, there is receiving, which is the center of the Bible is him giving what we could not earn.

Because the central storyline of the Bible is that that God has made the world and image bearers, us, reflections of him, and we have turned from him each to our own way in all the various ways that we confessed this morning as Pastor Mike led us in a pastoral prayer of confession and repentance.

sins. And against so great a God have we sinned. And there is no earning that back.

[27:08] What can I do to earn before that great God? The message of the whole Bible is that he came and made a way back.

And it is the cross of Christ. nothing in my hand I bring only to the cross I cling. If you have not ever come to the point where you have understood that there is nothing that you could earn but that he has given all so that you might be welcomed in, friends, that is why the church exists is to proclaim this message of the gospel.

So I invite you to repent and believe on Christ this great king. and find in him treasure forever. Yet, Paul still says, verse 17, I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

What does he mean? Certainly we can't earn anything before the Lord, but what does he mean by this? There is a mystery.

to what is often called eternal rewards. Jesus tells us about them on the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapter 6, beginning in verse 19, he says, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but he says, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[29:00] Later in the book of Matthew, he tells the rich young ruler in Matthew chapter 19, If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

And Paul, the author of this, the letter to the Philippians, writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 6, instructing him in how to lead a church himself, he says, as for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Jesus and his apostles clearly preach that we can earn nothing before God, but also tie our generosity to God's blessing.

But notice where that blessing is. It's treasure in heaven. If you're looking for an earthly payout, a solid ROI on your 401k, gospel ministry is not your best bet.

[30:45] And further, Paul is clear in verse 19, my God will supply every need, not every desire. But Paul truly wants the Philippians to understand this.

He is happy for them that they generously supported his ministry because it is truly in their best interest. He teaches them three things here about Christian generosity that they probably had not reflected on very much.

they probably just saw a need and said, let's meet it. They loved Paul, appreciated his ministry, knew that he needed it, but Paul is here teaching them about just what they had really done in supporting gospel ministry.

He teaches them three things. Christian generosity, first, is an act of love. Christian generosity, second, is gospel ministry.

And third, Christian generosity is worship. Let's look at them each in turn. First, Christian generosity is an act of love.

[32:03] In verse 10, he says, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Do you see there how there is an affect for Paul in their giving? They may not have even really stated out loud.

Then again, he says in verse 14, it was kind of you to share my trouble. What they're doing by sending this is saying, we're with you, Paul, and we want to raise your circumstance and enable your ministry.

We'll get to that in a minute. When you give to gospel ministry, what are you doing? It's always tied to love in some way, is it not?

Shoreline supports a ministry, Randy Matthews, we prayed for him today. He's in Ghana right now equipping leaders who don't have access to pastoral education. If you've ever met Randy, it's hard not to like him.

[33:14] He's a really great guy and the fruits of the Spirit just pour out of him everywhere he walks in the joy of the Lord. I think many in this room probably support him because of that fact.

They love him. Or you love the people that the funds support, that the ministry supports, Nigerian orphans and widows.

You care about their suffering. So it's an act of love towards them. Or you love your church. When you give at Shoreline, what are you supporting?

What are you doing? You are supporting the gospel ministry of and the gospel ministry to this body of brothers and sisters in Christ.

It's an act of love towards your brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ. So Christian generosity can't be disconnected from love because it's always pointed at people.

[34:21] Even if it's people you don't yet know in a far off mission field. Remember at the beginning the reason I was asking who is responsible for this letter is the reason that you have this letter in

your Bible?

Has it stoked joy in your heart? Has it taught you something of your Lord in these last weeks as we've walked through it? The reason you have it in part was their love for Paul.

God had prompted them to minister to their friend and he had returned their messenger with this letter of encouragement and it has paid dividends for you. Their love has paid off for us.

Now, we haven't defined those heavenly rewards. What is treasure in heaven? That's because the Bible shies away from defining them.

But it does hint at them. As Pastor Mike hinted earlier today. And I think that the hints that it makes are tied to this idea that Christian generosity is an act of love.

[35:33] Because Jesus ties our generosity to relationship. Just as Paul is doing here. In Luke chapter 16, he says, I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails, they may receive you into eternal dwellings.

Now, there's a great mystery about that verse and we're not going to go exegete it today, but it seems as if our riches in heaven for all eternity is measured in people, not gold.

And Christian generosity is an act of that love towards those people, building up treasure in heaven. may we act accordingly for our own riches.

Second, gospel or Christian generosity is Christian mission. I'm going to tie two things together here.

What Paul says in verse 15 about your partnership with me in giving and receiving, and then something else that Jesus said about treasure. God gave Paul the ability to pay for house arrest rather than imprisonment in the imperial dungeon, which means that he could keep ministering the gospel by writing letters like this one, by welcoming all who came to him, including Epaphroditus, Jesus.

[37:28] Which is why Luke concludes the book of Acts with those words, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

And it's why Paul has already told the Philippians back in chapter 1 verse 12, I want you to know, brothers, what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel because he wasn't actually hindered from ministry himself and because it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ and most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord in my imprisonment are much more bold to speak the word without fear and we see a payoff of that at the very final words, right?

Verse 22, all the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. Because of this gift, they now have more treasure.

Saints from Caesar's household are now their brothers and sisters in Christ and part of their treasure forever. All this because Paul was under house arrest which was made possible by the generosity of the church in Philippi who had sent a gift to him in Epaphroditus' hands.

Without it, it seems that he would have instead wasted away in a dungeon unable to receive visitors, unable to minister, and neither Caesar's household nor the Praetorian guard would be talking about the strange man under house arrest receiving all kinds of visitors, proclaiming the name of a crucified Savior.

[39:16] Savior. But his ministry was, Luke said, the very final word of the book of Acts is unhindered.

And the gospel was advancing. And the church has this wonderful letter today in our hands because of the generosity of the church in Philippi. God. And so when Paul says in verse 15, your partnership in giving and receiving, this is the second time he said something like that.

He says it here in the conclusion, but also at the outset. In chapter 1 verse 5, he called it your partnership in the gospel. When Christians give to gospel work, when they enable missionaries to spread the gospel, when they support pastors in the public and private ministry of the word, when Christians fund the purchase of medical supplies and sporting goods for an outreach to a Fulani village in Nigeria, let the reader understand, Paul calls that partnership in the gospel.

It is now their ministry too. Supporting and enabling Christian mission makes you a partner, a fellow worker in Christian mission.

And here is what Jesus had to say about that and your treasure. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus was commissioning his apostles to go and do ministry.

[40:56] Two by two, they were to go throughout Judea and preach the good news of the kingdom. Abraham. And he concluded with this thought, whoever receives you, receives me.

Whoever receives me, receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet, because he is a prophet, will receive a prophet's reward.

And the one who receives a righteous person, because he is a righteous person, will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water, because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Again, we've not been given many details about heavenly rewards. But it's not something that Jesus shied away from either.

And here's why I wanted to tie Paul's participation language to Matthew chapter 10. Those who support a prophet of God, he says, will receive a prophet's reward.

[42:09] Now, of course, that isn't clearly explained to us in Scripture either. But we're tying these two passages together. On the day that they entered Christ's presence, the Philippians, having received and supported Paul the apostle, received an apostle's reward, whatever that means.

Christian, your support of gospel work, God sees it. And out of his abundant grace, he decrees that he will bless you in the heavenly places for it, along with the worker who you are supporting.

Amazing. Amazing. And all of grace. Which ties us to the third thing that Paul says about financing his ministry.

They weren't really giving to Paul at all. Because Christian generosity is worship. In verse 18, he says, the gifts you sent me are a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Those phrases, fragrant offering, sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God, those are language of the temple, language of the burnt offering.

[43:45] I like how one writer put it, by heaping up these important sacrificial terms. At the end of his sentence, Paul draws attention figuratively to the immense value of the Philippians' gifts in the sight of God.

They're doing good and sharing with others in need are said to be sacrifices that are pleasing to him. when you give to gospel causes, first to your church, then to Christian missionaries, and then to other Christian causes and organizations, you aren't giving to them as such.

You're giving to God, which is an act of worship. Sometimes we talk about worship primarily in terms of music, and worship songs are indeed worship.

But what makes them worship? Worship is ascribing honor and value to the Lord, which we do with our words and with our time.

Right? Participating in the gathered worship of the church is itself an act of worship. It's proclaiming God and his people are worth more than the other things I could be doing with my time right now.

[45:16] He is worthy of my time. And the same is true of giving. God and his people and his mission are more important than the other things I could be doing with my money.

God and how does the Lord receive that worship? He says as acceptable and pleasing to our God. And so Paul has taken what was given to him and his ministry and shown the Philippians how it has benefited them even more than it has benefited him.

Because Christian generosity is an act of love storing up what our true treasure is in heaven. And it is a participation in ministry.

And lastly, it is worship. Which is why he concludes verse 20 to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

[46:36] Amen. but he can't help himself. He says amen and then he keeps going. Because our God is a giving God, is he not?

He gives all life and breath and in him we have our being. But he has also given us his son, the greatest of all blessings, so that he might give us himself and so even after that there is then one final greeting, one final blessing.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. And then one last moment of blessing, one last giving to the children of the king, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

How good is our king? Let's pray. Oh Lord, there is none like you.

In all the earth, in all the stories that have ever been told, and in the heavens there is none like you. So to you we say be glory forever and ever, amen, and we receive the knowledge here that you are our great reward, our blessedness.

[48:25] Lord, will you shape our hearts to rejoice grace in you, in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As this letter to the Philippians, this gift to your church has taught us, may we prize you in our hearts for our own contentment, for our rejoicing,!

and as worship that is acceptable and pleasing in your sight. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

Amen.