

Top Priority

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[0 : 00] And we're looking this morning at the first five verses of 1 Corinthians 15. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

But I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve.

Well, it's obvious reading the letters of the Apostle Paul, that the gospel was of first importance to him.

The gospel being the good news about Christ, about Jesus as a person, about his work particularly, his death, and his resurrection.

That gospel for Paul was of first importance. Nothing came ahead of the gospel apart from God himself. And so the things that comprise the gospel, the base, the core elements of the gospel, the teachings of the gospel, such as the resurrection and death of Christ, they obviously fit into that first importance category for the Apostle.

[1 : 32] And you can see that from these verses, how jealously Paul set out to guard that teaching, to continue to promote that teaching, and to actually make sure that those he was writing to understood how important the gospel and the core elements of the gospel were at all times.

It wasn't just for Paul's time, as we'll see today, what Paul is saying here to the Corinthians is an abiding truth for ourselves as well.

Because that gospel and the core elements of that gospel are still of such importance to us today as they were for the Apostle in his day.

And a denial of the resurrection of Christ, that means an actual resurrection, a bodily resurrection, a physical resurrection from the grave, is itself an attack on the gospel and the integrity of the gospel. You take that out of it, it's like one of those Jenga blocks, you take away one of the bottom rungs, and eventually the whole thing collapses. This is one of the primary planks or the primary points or truths of the gospel, that Christ is actually risen from the dead.

[2 : 55] It follows from his death. It's of the same importance as the death that Jesus died on the cross. And to deny the resurrection as an actual resurrection, as a physical resurrection, really destroys the gospel in its meaning, and it removes one of the core elements from the gospel.

That's why the resurrection is of such importance to Christians today, to actually defend that doctrine, even if it means in places in the world with their very lives.

So looking at these first five verses, let's look firstly at the gospel of salvation as he describes it there, the gospel I preach to you, the gospel by which you're being saved, the gospel of salvation. And then we'll look at the core of the gospel in terms of what he says here in the first five verses, the way in which the core of it is Christ's death, and his burial, and then his resurrection from the dead.

But notice in verses one and two, how he describes this gospel in relation to what he himself was, as a preacher of the gospel, and what these Corinthians were, as receivers of the gospel.

[4 : 10] That too is for the apostle such an important issue. Here he is, he's saying, now I would remind you brothers, it's not something they didn't know about, he's not teaching them anything new. But that's one of the beauties of the Bible, one of the beauties of the New Testament itself as well, is that it takes you back by way of reminders, by way of just recalling to memory, what things we already know, but are of primary importance to us.

And the gospel writers, the apostles, are not ashamed to do that repeatedly, because they know, and we should know how important it is to have the core elements held to, as foundationally important to ourselves.

So he's saying here, now I would remind you brothers, of the gospel I preach to you, which you receive. That's the first thing he's saying, it's the gospel I preach to you.

Now for the apostle, the preaching of the gospel is also of such importance, that he wants to emphasize it at this point. And that's something that we have to maintain as an emphasis, as a thing of importance in our own understanding of what it is to be under the gospel, and to preach the gospel, and to know what the gospel is about.

He's saying here, it's the gospel that I preach to you. And the word preach there is a word that means in Greek to herald something, to make an announcement of it. Like what you would find, for example, when royalty is about to enter a building, such as Westminster Abbey, one of those special occasions, when the queen is about to enter.

[5 : 39] There's a fanfare, there's an announcement, there's something that happens, that really says royalty is entering the queen. Her majesty is on the way. She's just going to make her way into the building. Well he's saying, this is what I'm doing with the gospel.

I'm heralding the gospel. I'm pronouncing the gospel. He's saying, this is the gospel that I heralded to you. Why is the preaching of the gospel important?

Why is it important to be under the preaching of the gospel? Because that's being minimized in certain places today, and the preaching of the gospel is being reduced in certain places, in certain denominations.

It's being reduced to a bare minimum, and in these situations very often, it's singings and other things that are then being increased.

Now there's nothing wrong, of course, with singing praises to God, and with other elements of our worship, such as we are engaged in today. But when you take away the preaching of the gospel, or reduce it to a bare minimum, then you're doing something that's contrary to what the word itself tells us.

[6 : 43] Because for Paul, the preaching of the gospel was of such importance. People came to faith through the preaching of the gospel. Romans 10 talks about the gospel being preached, and people being called to preach the gospel, and people coming to hear the word of God preached.

And what he says there is, faith comes by hearing. Hearing the word of Christ. In other words, the word that we have, this written word, is a word that's designed by God to be preached, to be preached out, to be expounded, to be heralded, so that we try and bring out the meaning of it. And that takes a bit of time, and it takes a bit of effort. We trust that we who preach the gospel, are doing that faithfully. That's what Paul is keen to protect.

We were to reduce the gospel, we were to announce as a Kirk session next week, we're only going to have a five minute sermon. Well, for a start, I would find it difficult to, to confine myself to a five minute sermon.

But that, of course, would be reducing such an important element of worship. An important element of presenting the truth of God. It's fine to have the Bible.

[7 : 54] Great to have the Bible. Great to read the Bible. We could come and just imagine yourselves here today, after prayer and a few singings, then spending 20 minutes just reading the word for yourself.

Nothing wrong with that in itself. But then, that's not how the gospel announcement is made. The preaching of the gospel is of such critical importance. You know, there'll be people today who will actually tap into this service online at some point.

We're glad that that facility is there. There are people that get in touch with me constantly, and seeing how good it is that they're able to actually see a video of this service, a video of the gospel being preached.

Because they may be in places where they don't have access to it, or aren't able physically to get access to it. And we welcome them today, as they actually listen in online, or watch online.

Because it gives them, more than just listening to it in an audio, that's also very good. But what they tell me is, it makes them feel more part of the occasion, by the fact they're able to see the preaching of the gospel.

[8 : 58] They're able to see the gospel being declared, and they're feeling part of that, as they listen to it. So that's such a great thing. The preaching of the gospel, for Paul, is so important.

Secondly, he says, which you received.

Which you received. The gospel was preached by him, but he's saying to the Corinthians, as I preached it to you, you received it. The truth that I heralded to you, you then correspondingly, or respondingly, received that.

And the gospel is there, to be received. This is not just a bare word, it's a truth of God. It's something in which salvation, is actually placed by God, as that salvation is announced, as that salvation in Christ is heralded, as it is preached.

It is being received, by people who themselves, are desirous of being saved. We'll see that in a minute. The gospel by which you are being saved.

It all comes together. You have to keep these elements together. But when Paul wrote to, the Thessalonian church, you have in the first chapter, of 1 Thessalonians, a similar kind of reference, to the gospel, and how the Thessalonians received it.

[10:14] In chapter 1, verse 4, of 1 Thessalonians, for we know, brothers beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction.

And then, he talks about them becoming examples, to others that were around them. But in verse 6 there, he says, you became imitator of us, and of the Lord, for you received the word, in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples.

The language that Paul is using there, is the language of welcome. It's like just, meeting a long, absent friend, or companion, or somebody, that you've been longing, to meet, or somebody to, that's been away, for a while, and you're, you're really looking forward, to welcoming them back. That's the kind of, language that Paul is using there, for the Thessalonian reception, of the gospel. You welcomed it. You threw your arms around it.

You took it into your heart. You loved it. You gave it, a loving welcome. How is it, with yourself today? How is it with yourself, as the word is being preached, even now?

[11:36] Isn't it a word, and isn't the gospel message itself, isn't the Jesus of the gospel, as he's presented to you, in the preaching of the word, is indeed there, to be welcomed?

And are you today, welcoming this gospel? This is the best news, for you, that you've ever heard. It's there, to be welcomed. It's there, to be received, like the Thessalonians, just to, give it a rousing reception.

It's just like, in those days, in the Greek games, when, somebody carrying the torch, for the Olympic flame, came into, the stadium, the whole stadium, just erupted, with a great noise, with a great, welcome to that flame.

You still find it, when the Olympic games, are on every four years, as soon as the, the flame comes, into the stadium, there's a great roar, of welcome to it. Well, that's the kind of thing, that he's saying here, happened in regard, to the gospel, in Thessalonica.

They gave it, such a welcome. You know, that's, really, the great privilege, we have, isn't it? of having a position, in God's providence, of being able, to welcome, the gospel.

[12:46] Don't take it, for granted. Don't just treat it, as a matter of, Sunday ritual. It is a ritual, it's good, and it's good, to see everybody, under the gospel, and coming to worship God.

Don't neglect, the welcome. Give a welcome, to the Christ, of the gospel, to the gospel, of Christ, where he is situated, in the heralding, in the preaching, of the gospel.

And then he says, in which you stand. I preach to you, that which, which you received, in which you stand. It reminds the Corinthians, that the gospel itself, is a foundational thing, in human life.

You see, that's why, it's such a serious thing, for us, to face the call, in our day, to put the gospel aside, to put the Bible aside, to treat the Bible, with much less respect, than has been the case, with us up to now.

And there are other teachings, that you can equally, put alongside it, or even overtake it. The Bible shouldn't really, be seen as just, the great truth, or the great book. Well it is.

[13:49] And the great institutions, of this country itself, whether you look at health, or education, other institutions, other matters of that, are actually based, on gospel principles.

It's through the gospel, and through the truth, of the gospel, that they were initiated. It wasn't atheism, who set them up. It wasn't humanism, who set them up. It was the gospel, it was the church, it was Christians.

It was the power of God, it was the truth of God. And he's saying here, in which you stand. Because the gospel, gives you a foundation. The gospel gives you, somewhere safe.

It gives you security. It's all about Christ, it's all about his death, and his resurrection. You're standing there, he says to the Corinthians, that's where your feet are. And that's so important, for yourself, isn't it today?

That you know, this gospel gives you, the security, your soul craves. Your soul needs security. You know that you need security. I know that we need security. We teach our children, the need to have security.

[14 : 53] A well based life. This is what gives that, well based life. This foundation, in which you stand.

And then, by which you are being saved. That's the fourth thing. He doesn't say, by which you have been saved, or by which you will be saved. But he's saying, by which you are being saved.

There's a wonderful thing, about a Christian life. Because it's true, that a Christian can say, I have been saved, or I was saved. And that's true, at the moment of your conversion.

At the moment, when you come to know Christ, as your savior. Whether you can, pinpoint it, and say, I know exactly where I was. I know the time. I know the day. Many Christians, can't say that.

But they know, that God has changed them. That Jesus, has come into their life. That by his grace, as Paul says here, by the grace of God, I am what I am. And Paul is saying, it's quite, it's quite okay, to say, I am saved.

[16 : 02] I've been saved. I was saved. But then you are being saved. As a Christian, you're being sanctified. God is working in your life. God is preparing you, for the eternity, for the inheritance, that he has for his people.

So that's part of, being saved. An ongoing way, of God working in your life. You can say for sure, I have been saved. I was saved. And for all, who were saved, and who have come to be converted, and to know Christ as Savior, they'll never again be unsaved.

But there's a work going on, in their lives, that needs to be completed, by God, in order to make them, ready for heaven. That's, I am being saved.

And you can also, speak, the Bible also tells us, there's a sense, in which you can say, I shall be saved. Because, the coming of Christ, is associated, with the final phase, the final aspect, of salvation.

So all of that, comes, into, view, as he says, as he says there, by which you're being saved, if you hold fast, to the word, I preach to you. See how important it is, to hold to the word, preached as foundational, to our lives.

[17 : 14] I can move on from that, I spent a bit longer on that, than I intended. But they're important issues. The gospel, of our salvation. The gospel, which was preached. The gospel, which you received. The gospel, in which you stand.

The gospel, by which you're being saved. If you hold fast, to what I preach to you. Secondly, core, of the gospel. Notice he's saying here, it's of first importance, in verse 3, I deliver to you, as of first importance, what I also received.

In other words, Paul is saying, this is top priority for me. This gospel, this gospel of salvation, it's of first importance. And it's first importance, in regard to, these core elements, especially, that Christ, died for our sins, that he was raised, in accordance, with the scriptures.

In other words, when Paul is saying, it's of first importance, that I, I deliver to you, what I also received. He's just reminding, the Corinthians, this is not my invention.

This is not something, the church has actually decided, to put together. He says, I received it from God. God, he gave me the gospel. He gave me, this mandate, to preach the gospel.

[18 : 33] But he gave me the gospel. He gave me the truth, as it is, in Jesus, to convey, through the preaching, of the gospel. I received, this from God.

And I also then, delivered it, to you. In other words, Paul is saying, the gospel, has its origin, with God itself. And as God, gave it to him, and he passed it on, to the Corinthians.

So he's showing, that this gospel, is actually not, a human invention. And you'll find that, today of course, mentioned, wow, this Bible, is just a human product.

And the gospel itself, this idea, that Jesus came into the world, that he died on the cross, that he rose from the dead. It's the disciples, really, who made that up. Because when Jesus, left them, and didn't come back, they had to do something, in order to, try and keep his memory alive.

That's the kind of nonsense, that you actually find, peddled as theology, sometimes today. It's not a new thing, but it's actually there, as something that destroys, the gospel.

[19 : 38] Because as Paul is saying, as we've seen, this gospel, at its core, contains, the death of Christ, and the actual resurrection, of Christ. And he says, it's of first, importance to me, that I passed, what I passed, unto you.

What did he pass on? He's saying, that Christ died, for our sins, in accordance, with the scriptures. See again, it's not of human origin, and it's an amazing, thing in itself, and it's always helpful, to just look at, how, the likes of what we said, to the children, this morning, the prophecy of Isaiah, as it speaks, about the coming of Jesus, because the New Testament, quotes from Isaiah, in regard to, the birth of Christ, and the life, the ministry of Christ, hundreds of years apart, and yet fulfilled, sometimes in a very minute way.

Isaiah 53, for example, was regard to, the death of Jesus, the sufferings of Jesus. I mean, who could have predicted that, hundreds of years before, in such detail, so minutely, if it were not, God himself, who was behind it.

So it helps you to, really just, be assured, of the truth of the Bible, and of the God origin, of the Bible, when you see the likes, of that sort of feature, a prophecy, that came indeed, to be fulfilled, in Christ, and in his death, on the cross.

What he's saying here, Christ died for our sins, in accordance, with the scriptures, just as it had been, prophesied of him. But you see what he's saying, he died, for our sins.

[21 : 25] And this is the only place, where Paul uses, this word for, because it means literally, on behalf of. One of the things, it brings in, to our minds, is the, the, incredibly close, connection, between sin, and me, and you.

Because sin, has no meaning, at all, unless it is my sin. Unless it is an act, that I have performed, in my mind, with my body, however I have sinned, against thought, and thought, against God, and thought, or word, or action.

You cannot detach that, from your person. And it only becomes, sin meaningfully, when you've done something, when it's something, that's true of you. And what Paul is doing here, is saying, Christ died, for our sins, on behalf of our sins.

He's really saying, he died for his people, but they were sinners. He died for them, as sinners. He died for them, knowing that they were sinners. He died for them, knowing what their sin deserved. He died for them, knowing, that he was taking their place. that the death, he died on the cross, was the death, that they deserved. You see, some people, don't really simply, simply don't catch the idea, that the death of Christ, is in fact, the death, that we deserve, for our sins.

[22 : 51] That he took to himself. Please don't think, that the worst, of Christ's sufferings, were his physical sufferings. Not in any way, at all, minimizing, the physical sufferings, of Jesus.

They were immense. Even what you know, from the Bible's description, you can see, how immense, and how intense, they were. But they weren't, the worst of his sufferings.

As one of the, theologians of, past times put it, the sufferings, of his soul, were the soul, of his sufferings.

That was Hugh Martin, speaking about the cross, the death of Jesus. The sufferings of his soul, were the soul, of his sufferings. In other words, he died in his soul, the death we deserve, separation from God.

Why did he say on the cross, my God, my God, I have you forsaken me. Because at that very moment, that's what he was experiencing. He was experiencing, hell in his very soul.

[24 : 00] This distance from God, this everlasting distance from God, which he was enduring, and bearing, and experiencing, in that moment, in that terrible moment, when darkness covered, the face of the earth, when darkness filled, the soul of the Savior, he died, for our sins, in accordance with the scripture.

that's why, he is who he is. That's why he is, to his people, what he is. Their Savior.

Their Deliverer. The one who rescued them, from the dilemma, of being sinners. When God has his wrath, against them, he delivered us, as Paul says to the Thessalonians, from the wrath that is to come, from the wrath of God.

That's such, a critical element, for ourselves, isn't it today, to know Jesus, and the death of Jesus, as the basis, of your forgiveness.

Your forgiveness, by God, has to be based on something, acceptable to God. And that's the death of Christ. He died, for our sins, in accordance, with the scriptures.

[25 : 19] We always emphasize, the importance of faith, of faith in Christ. Faith has to rest, on something. And faith, actually rests, on Jesus himself.

On what he has accomplished, and who he is. He died, for our sins. And that means, for the likes of you and I, can you say today, Jesus died, for my sins.

Yes, you can say, he died for the sins, of those, that know him, as their saviour. But is that yourself? Can you say of him, that he died, for your sins?

Well, you can, if you've come to him, and confessed that sin, and sought his forgiveness, and know his reception, placed your trust, upon his word, in the gospel.

And all who do so, will be saved, will be delivered, from their sins. And then he says, he died for them, according to the scriptures. And then that he was, buried, that he was raised, on the third day, in accordance, with the scriptures.

[26 : 33] Now we're skipping over, far too quickly. But you notice, he's saying, he was buried. And that too, for Paul, is important. The body of Jesus, was actually, laid to rest, in a sepulcher, in what you would call, a tomb.

And when you go to, John's version, of Christ's burial, it's interesting, that Paul, that John says, there, there in that sepulcher, they laid, Jesus, therefore.

Because the Sabbath day, was near at hand. There is where, they laid Jesus. He didn't just say, there is where, they laid the body of Jesus. Why did John say, this man who knew, Jesus so well, and so closely, why did he say, there is where, they laid Jesus?

Why didn't he just say, that's where, they laid the body of Jesus? It was a dead body, it was the dead body, of Jesus. Why did he say, there is where, they laid Jesus? Because the body, is attached to the person. And the person, of the Son of God, whose body, this was, is never, other than, attached to that body.

Even though, that body is now dead, it's his body. And so, he, went into death, and you could say, he, through that dead body, went into the grave.

[27 : 53] You know, sometimes I find it, it's always a very solemn thing, to stand at a grave site, when you're, committing remains, to return to the earth. Stand there with families, and others that are, are, sorrowing, and find it, such a difficult moment, to say that last farewell.

As you look down, into that grave, and imagine yourself, your body, in that coffin, what a consolation, it is, to be able, to say in your own soul, my Savior, was there before me.

My Savior, took up that place, that space in a tomb, his body was there, and therefore, he prepared that, for me. And I could go, through faith in him, and in his death, and in his resurrection, towards that grave, believing, that he has given me, victory over death, that I need not fear, death itself, because, he has gained, the victory over it, for me.

And I am victorious, in him. He was buried, and he was raised, on the third day, in accordance, with the scriptures.

His resurrection, from the dead, how important, as we said, all the way through, our study this morning. But you see, again, it is according, to the scriptures. We sang, Psalm 68, which, the New Testament, quotes, as, words, that actually, prophesied, of the resurrection, of Jesus.

[29 : 29] When God raised him, from the dead, when God the Father, raised him, from the dead, this is what was fulfilled. Thou hast ascended, up on high, and led, captivity captive, the powers, that held us captive, the powers of death, the powers of Satan, the powers of darkness, they were led, by Jesus, led captive, in his wake, in his train, just like a victorious, Roman general, returning from, war, with the spoils of war, the prisoners of war, dragged behind him.

That is where Satan is. That is where the powers of darkness are. They are behind the triumphant chariot, of Jesus, as he ascended, up on high. That is the gospel.

That is the good news. Death does not have the last word. The grave does not have the last word. Sin does not have the last word. The devil does not have the last word.

That is with Jesus. That is with his resurrection. That is with his triumph over death. That is the portion of his people. If you trust in him today, that is your destiny.

That is your future. That is your glorious triumph, that awaits you, as the day of the resurrection, will dawn, as this chapter itself says. All shall be made alive, each in his own order.

[30 : 44] Christ the first fruit. then it is coming, those who belong to Christ. It does not mean that those who are not saved will not be raised.

They will be raised, but not to eternal life. They will be raised to damnation. Not a nice word, is it? Not a nice word. But it is a very important word to understand, because that is our destiny if we are not in Christ. If this death and this resurrection has not been welcomed by us, and is foundational to our lives today, then our resurrection is going to be the worst day we have ever lived.

There will be a resurrection that will lead straight to hell. But you see this emphasis, this emphasis actually on the resurrection of God's people.

And that is where the Bible has the overwhelming emphasis anyway. Yes, it speaks about hell, and it is important to know about hell, and to know about damnation. But the overwhelming emphasis on the Bible is on life, on resurrection life, on eternal life, on life through Jesus Christ.

[32 : 06] That is what Paul is doing here. He is emphasizing for us, yes, of course, there is a hell to be avoided, but in a sense, more importantly, there is a heaven to be gained, and there is a heaven to be welcomed, and there is a salvation to be received.

That is the gospel. That does not leave out the emphasis on hell. And so, neither must we who preach the gospel. But then God is saying, He has no pleasure in the death of the unsaved, but that they should turn from their way and live.

Live, live, live. That is God's emphasis. Why should you die? Why did Jesus come into the world? Was it so that people would hear the gospel and choose not to live?

Of course not. Though some sadly will. Hope it is not yourself. And that was in accordance with the scriptures. And then he says, And he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred brothers at once.

Well, you see, the day in which the apostle wrote to the Corinthians, and certainly the days before that, it would have been perfectly possible to meet with people who had met Jesus after he was risen from the dead.

[33 : 23] It's not like people will tell you today, there's no proof of this. You can't prove that Jesus rose from the dead. Well, would reliable people such as the apostles, would they have written that they had met him, that five hundred of them had met him?

And then people coming to read that in their own day could go and check with these people. Have you really seen Jesus? Is this not a lot of nonsense? And they would say to them, Of course I met him. I spoke with him.

Perfectly easy to verify in the days of the apostles. You have to hold on to that. When people accuse us of being believers in fairy stories, and things which are just too incredible to believe.

Well, here's Paul saying, if you don't believe in the resurrection, if you don't believe in the resurrection, then life is futile. Preaching is futile. Our faith is in vain.

No point in going on. What's the point of turning up here? If there's no such thing as the resurrection, then he says, Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Now, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we have nothing in our lives foundationally to hang on to, to place our lives on to.

[34 : 31] But now he says, he is risen from the dead. It's not a matter of disciples inventing a resurrection in a way to keep the memory of Jesus alive.

It's the other way about. The Jesus who is alive, the resurrection of Jesus, transformed these people.

Why do you think they have the courage and the boldness then to go out into the world, the pagan world, and preach this message of Christ's death and Christ's resurrection if they had doubts about its truthfulness?

Would that have encouraged them? Would that have made them bold to go out with this message which they knew the pagan world was actually going to ridicule? Of course not.

And this message would not have changed a single human life. Christ had not actually been raised from the dead. top priority for the apostle.

[35 : 36] Christ's death, Christ's resurrection. Top priority for you and for me too, surely. May God bless these thoughts on his word to us.

Let's now conclude our service. We'll sing in Psalm 119. Psalm 119, that's on page 158. And we're singing to a tune rocking hymn.

That's verses 17 to 24. Do good to me and I will live. Your servant will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see great wonders in your law, O Lord.

Psalm 119 on page 158 from verses 17 through to verse 24. Do good to me and I will live. Be good to me and I will live.

Your servant will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see great wonders your Lord.

[36 : 54] I am a sinner on the earth.

Do not die dear call us from me. consumed with longing it is my soul because your loss I earn to see.

You have revealed you. Be insolent and hurt to roam your peace and stay.

Remove from me condemned and scorned for all your sanctuaries I obey.

The river spawns to harm my name. I'll meditate on you earthy free.

[38 : 25] free. You are started to top my great delight for they are counsellors to me.

If you allow me to get to the main door after the benediction please. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen.