

# Third Servant Song: Comfort & Joy

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Date: 15 December 2024

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at [TrinityGraceAthens.com](http://TrinityGraceAthens.com).

Isaiah chapter 50, I'm going to begin reading in verse 4 and read through verse 9. This is the Word of God.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.

Morning by morning he awakens, he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious.

I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

[ 1 : 0 7 ]     But the Lord God helps me. Therefore, I have not been disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a flint.

And I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me.

Who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment. The moth will eat them up.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. You know, there's no time of the year we're more religious than at Christmas.

[ 2 : 0 5 ]     I know we all go to church a little bit more over the holidays, but that's not what I mean. What I mean is that unlike many other parts of the year, we approach the days before Christmas and the traditions we have with a religious-like purposefulness.

It just doesn't feel like Christmas until we've checked certain things off the list. It doesn't feel like Christmas until we've put up a tree or decorated the house.

Or we've watched Elf or Die Hard or It's a Wonderful Life. It doesn't feel like Christmas until we've made a batch of sugar cookies or had Christmas dinner with all the fixings.

It doesn't feel like Christmas until we've gone to our great aunt's house for the family gathering or until we've just read the old, old stories again. As a boy, it didn't feel like Christmas until Christmas Eve about 9 p.m.

when Renee Herlong sang O Holy Night as a solo, which he did year after year after year. What are the things on your list that make it Christmas to you?

[ 3 : 1 6 ]     In the midst of our frenzied and chaotic lives, unlike any other time of the year, we approach Christmas and the traditions with this purposefulness.

It's all so predictable. It's all so planned. It's all so routine all the way down into the sides that we serve at the dinner.

And it's precisely because they're the same things that they're actually helpful. They remind us of Christmas has gone by. They remind us of how God has been with us and has kept us.

They remind us of what Christmas is all about. You know, if you think about it, we're always moving, always changing, always going, but Christmas stays the same.

Now, obviously, our celebration of Christmas will not stay the same. Friends move away. Hey, loved ones go on. Life happens.

[ 4 : 20 ] But the story of Christmas is always wonderfully the same, always wonderfully true. As we've seen throughout our study of Isaiah and these Psalms, the people of God are living in a time in which almost everything has changed.

They're no longer in the land. They no longer have the temple, the feast, the sacrifices, the things that set them apart as the people of God.

They're strangers in a strange land. And they're there because they've sinned against God. They assume the Lord has forsaken them. The Lord has forgotten them.

You see that in the beginning of Isaiah 50. But while so much has changed for them, the Lord is calling them in and through this section to remember that He is still the same.

He's still the everlasting God. He doesn't faint or grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. It has no limits. He is still mighty to save and will deliver them through the servant King.

[ 5 : 33 ] You may be entering this Christmas acutely aware that everything has changed for you. Aware of the people that are no longer with you.

The friends that you're no longer around. The relationships that have fallen apart. Perhaps even in a place or the country that's dislocated from so much that you count as precious.

You may feel forsaken and forgotten by God. So often it's not the things that take us out and burden our souls and discourage us.

It's the feeling that the things remind us that God has forgotten us. Doesn't seem to be at work anymore. More seriously, like the people of Israel, your life may be filled with the broken promises, vows, and commitments.

You would love to point the finger at someone else, and yet you find that the problem is way closer to home. Where do we go when we feel forsaken and forgotten?

[ 6 : 41 ] Where do we go when we know so much of the failure and the brokenness in our life is our own? The Lord is calling us in these verses to see that Jesus Christ is same yesterday, today, and forever.

Strikingly, in this third servant song, it's a song about the servant's obedience. Even as the backdrop is about the disobedience of the people of Israel, this servant will be unlike them in every way.

He will not fail. He will not stumble. He will not go astray. Indeed, this servant is about our servant and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And His obedience is precious because His obedience means He secures us forever. And the word where we're going is, Fear not that our Lord Jesus saves His people eternally through perfect obedience.

Fear not our Lord Jesus saves His people eternally through perfect obedience. Let's break this out. Three points. First is, Jesus obeys truly. Jesus obeys truly.

[ 7 : 50 ] These verses unpack this third servant song. We saw the first one in Isaiah 42, and then Isaiah 49 last week, and now Isaiah 50, these verses.

We don't learn that this is about the servant until verse 10. If you look down there in verse 10, He says, Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of His servant, alerting us that this is, in fact, a song about the servant and about his obedience.

Verse 4 describes how a servant, how the servant is a true disciple. A disciple is someone who hears and obeys the Lord. And this servant is a disciple par excellence.

A great disciple. Look down there in verse 4. It says, The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with the word him who is weary.

It's telling us about this servant, that the things he has been given are not a one-time gift, or an ingrained ability, or an inherited aptitude. All that the servant has learned, he has learned through training from the Lord.

[ 9 : 06 ] But how did he learn? Look back in verse 4. It continues, Morning by morning, he awakens. He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

But, again, repeating that phrase from the beginning of the verse, everyone is awakened by the ear. You know, sometimes we're awakened with a shout, with a banging of the door.

It's time to get up, kids. School is coming. I never liked being waked up in a loud way. I'll never forget discovering the proverb that says, the person that blesses his neighbor loudly in the morning will be understood as pronouncing a curse.

So I like to post that verse around. Didn't like being waked up, but other times we're awakened with a whisper, you know. Son, it's time to get up. We've got to get in the tree stand before dawn.

So many mornings running out to go hunting with my dad. But the Lord does not just awaken the servant. The Lord awakens his ear.

[ 10 : 14 ] It's what we're alerted to immediately to hear. The awakened ear is the first mark of being a disciple. Not everyone, scripturally, not everyone who has ears hears.

That's why in Revelation, the Lord says, Let him who has ears hear what the word of the Lord to the church is. In perhaps his most famous parable, the Lord tells about a farmer sowing seed like we might do in a field.

He talks about some of the seed that falls along the path and the birds jump in and devour it. Some seed falls along the rocks at the edge of a field where the ground is shallow.

It grows up and withers away because it doesn't have good soil. Others falls among thorns and briars that move in and choke out the seed.

Other seed falls on good soil. And the Lord's disciples said, What is going on? What is this story about? And he says, The seed is the word of God, the word of the gospel.

[ 11 : 16 ] The soil is the hearts of those who hear. At the end of the day, what the Lord is saying, the real question is not, Who are your parents? Did you grow up going to church?

Were you baptized? The real question is, Do you have ears to hear? And if the awakened ear is the mark of a disciple, someone who hears, the growth of the disciple is continually bending their ear to hear.

Morning by morning, he awakens my ear. I love that picture. The disciple does not receive everything in a one-time gift, as we've said, but nor does it come quickly.

It comes morning by morning. Listening. Receiving. Growth and godliness is the product of a prolonged attention to the word of God.

There's nothing automatic, nothing microwavable about growth and godliness. It is a dogged attentiveness to the most important things.

[ 12 : 27 ] One of my neighbors has a dog. I call the dog Buffy. I don't even know the dog's name. But my neighbor has this dog. He's told me a number of times that he didn't want the dog.

As is often happens with dog owners or dog families. You hear that. His wife wanted the dog. And so to serve his wife, to bless his wife, he began walking the dog once or twice a day or something like that.

And then now he just walks the dog all the time. The other day I was writing a sermon, sitting in our dining room, looking out. And he must have walked the dog.

In between, about a four-hour time frame. Walked the dog four or five times. So walking across in front of my yard, back to his house, walking across in front of my yard. Finally I just walked out and said, what is going on, man?

He said, I just can't have the dog look at me and not take him on another walk. There's a dogged attentiveness he has to this little dog.

[ 13 : 31 ] There's a similar dogged attentiveness that must come in the Christian life. There's a wonderful tying and anchoring to the word of God.

To growth. To following him. But what do these verses have to do with Jesus Christ? As the son of God who is perfect in knowledge, there's nothing he needs to learn.

He has never learned anything. As a son of God who's perfect in wisdom, there's nothing he needs to adjust or improve. There's no course corrections with him.

He's done everything. And all that he's done is good and acceptable and perfect. But in becoming the son of God incarnate, he had to learn.

The Bible presents us with all sorts of things that are difficult to believe. So many miracles. The flood and the big fish that ate Jonah. The feeding of the 5,000 and the resurrection.

[ 14 : 30 ] But the real difficulty, the supreme mystery is the incarnation. It's just a word to refer to God becoming a man. J.I. Packer says in his very important book, Knowing God, the really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man.

It is here in the thing that happened at the first Christmas that the profoundest, most unfathomable depths of Christian revelation lie.

God became man. The divine son became a Jew. The almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises.

Needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets.

Nothing in fiction is as fantastic as the truth of the incarnation. The son of God became man.

[ 15 : 41 ] The son of God had to learn how to crawl. How to toddle. He had to learn how to read and write. He had to learn how to tie a knot and how to slaughter a lamb.

Everything he learned, he was taught. He had to learn the scriptures. He had to learn through temptation, most importantly.

He learned obedience, Hebrews 5.8 says. He learned temptation of thirst and hunger and discouragement and doubt.

He had to learn temptation from the inside. There was a sense in which God knew temptation perfectly. He is the perfect God. And yet, Jesus Christ came to learn temptation from the inside.

It was not enough for him to be only God or mainly God. Some kind of superhuman. Some kind of superman.

[ 16 : 43 ] Because then he couldn't represent us to God. But also, he could not be only man or mainly man. Because then he couldn't represent God to us.

He was fully God and truly man. So he could reconcile sinful man back to God. And God so loved the world that he gave this one to learn. So that he could sustain with a word, him who is weary.

Sustain with a word, him who is weary. That's one of those words that just makes you want to exhale. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. But what is the word for the weary?

What is the word that has been placed in Jesus Christ's mouth? You know, there's a lie spreading throughout our culture, throughout our world.

That the word that's in his mouth is health and wealth. The so-called prosperity gospel. That in the two-thirds world, it's just raking in millions of dollars.

[ 17 : 48 ] It says, believe in Jesus and trouble will flee. Health and wealth and prosperity will come to your house. Even some scriptures seem to teach that.

But that's not the word that is placed in Jesus's mouth. Nor is the word that is placed in his mouth a word of happiness and purpose. You know, there's a lie that I think we're particularly vulnerable to in this time of year.

And it's the gospel of self-fulfillment. It centers on how we feel. It focuses on our needs, our desires, our want. It says, come to Jesus if you're empty and he'll fill you up.

Come to Jesus if you're aimless and you will find purpose. Come to Jesus if you're sad and you will be happy. But Jesus does not come so that you will feel full, gain purpose, and be happy.

Sometimes he gives those things. Many times he gives those things. But a lot of times he says, come to me and you may lose everything. After all, we follow a crucified Savior.

[ 19 : 04 ] So what is the word to the weary? The word to the weary focuses on our sin against God. The deepest problem in the world is not our sadness.

It's not our political instability. It's not our family strife or any of these things. The deepest problem in the world is our sin against God. And the word for the weary and the backdrop of Isaiah is for them who've tried with all their heart to do what is necessary to be right with God and have no hope.

The word is not good vibes of comfort and joy, but good news of peace with God. So Jesus obeys truly so that he might offer us this word.

Second point, Jesus obeys completely. Jesus obeys completely. Verses 5 through 7. And continue and unpack how the servant king, our Lord Jesus Christ, obeys completely.

All throughout Scripture, to truly hear is to follow and obey. And that's what we see in the servant. Look in verse 5. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious.

[ 20 : 23 ] I turned not backward. You know, in the most famous of the Arabian Nights story, Aladdin discovers a magic lamp and when he rubs the lamp, a genie pops out and says, your wish is my command.

Perhaps you wish your family would greet that same message to you in the morning. Or just one day to hold that magic lamp. Where the genie is expressing what every servant says to a master.

Your wish is my command. To hear is to obey. In the life of faith, that's the way it is. There's meant to be this similar joining of hearing and obeying. To truly hear is to obey.

Who are the ones who truly hear? Who are the ones that are the true children of God? But those who do the will of the Lord. But what is obvious from the context is that the people of God have heard and have not obeyed.

Isaiah says, you are a rebellious people. Children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord. Later he says, hear you deaf. Look you blind that you may see.

[ 21 : 33 ] Isaiah 48 using the same picture. He says, you have never heard. You've never known. From of old your ear has not been opened. But the servant says, the Lord God has opened my ear.

Do you see? I was not rebellious. I turned not backward. These words clearly refer to Jesus Christ.

He's the only one that could say, I was not rebellious in any way. So the scriptures teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ always did the will of the Lord.

And word, thought, and deed. He was made like us in every respect. Yet without sin and deed, as he said in John 8. I always do the things that are pleasing to the Lord.

But it's not as if he obeyed only in the good times. Look at the way it continues in verse 6. He says, I gave my back to those who strike me.

[ 22 : 42 ] My cheeks to those who pull out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. If you remember, throughout these psalms, we've caught a glimpse of opposition that is coming.

And Isaiah 42, it said, he will not be discouraged. So something is going to come at this servant that will tempt him to be discouraged. We see a similar thing, Isaiah 49.

So we've caught a glimpse. Well, now it is coming into focus. This servant will face costly and serious opposition. So he says, I gave my back.

I gave my cheeks. I gave my face. These verses could have been written describing the scene of Good Friday when Pilate's men gathered around our Lord and flogged him.

He said, I gave my face.

[ 24 : 04 ] Upon his back and on his legs. The Jews would have given him no more than 39 lashes. But the Romans showed no mercy.

But what's striking here is that the servant says the opposition is a part of his obedience. So often when opposition comes, biblically, something is wrong.

You know, when Joseph is rejected. So many of the prophets are rejected. And when Joseph is rejected, something is wrong. When Moses is rejected and flees to Midian, something is wrong.

When David is driven out of Jerusalem, something is wrong. But when Jesus tells his disciples, so when he does, tells his disciples that he must suffer and be killed. Peter takes him aside and begins to rebuke him.

Because every other time the opposition that has come upon God's man has been something awry. Something disturbing the plan. But Jesus rebuked him back.

[ 25 : 09 ] And says, as it were, I will be giving my back. I will be giving my cheeks. I will be giving my face.

It's all a part of the plan. Look at verse 7. He continues. So I give my back, my cheeks, my face. But the Lord God helps me.

If you notice four times in these passages, the reference to the sovereign Lord. The Lord God helps me. The ruler over all. Oh, how that verse must have sustained Jesus Christ on that good Friday.

The Lord God helps him. Not by rescuing him from the opposition. But sustaining him in and through the opposition. Indeed, sustaining him on the cross.

He continues and says, the Lord God helps me. Therefore, because he helps me, I have not been disgraced. He's not taken out by suffering.

[ 26 : 11 ] He's not taken out by this opposition. He's not confused. He's not ashamed. He's certain that this is all a part of it. This is a part of his obedience. This is a part of the affliction that he must fill up.

And offering himself. He continues and says, I have set my face like a flint. I know that I shall not be put to shame.

So not only is he not confused by suffering. He's not deterred by suffering. He's not conceding. He's not giving up. He's not letting whatever happens, happen. He is determined to suffer.

To be obedient. To endure all the opposition that was ordered according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Almost certainly, Luke had this in mind.

In Luke 9, when after Jesus told the disciples he must suffer, he set his face to Jerusalem. In each of the gospel accounts, after he announces that he will suffer, begins making the way to Jerusalem.

[ 27 : 17 ] Jesus is in the front. All of his disciples are straggling behind. Other verses come to mind.

When I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me. But I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down.

I have authority to take it up again. The point is the cross is not an aberration. It's not a deviation. It is not a departure from the plan. It was the plan all along.

The cross was not just something that happened to Jesus Christ. The cross was the assignment. The religious leaders did not crucify Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ took up the cross.

And laid down his life. All of this is what theologians call the active obedience of Christ. There's only a few times when I tell you there's a doctrine you need to know.

[ 28 : 24 ] You need to know this one. The active obedience of Christ. What began in his incarnation continued through his life. And culminated in the cross was an act of obedience.

The Father. They say, the theologians say, in the covenant of redemption before all time. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit determined to save a people through that cursed cross. The cross is simultaneously an act of ultimate sacrifice.

And an act of ultimate obedience. It is an act of sacrifice. For Jesus Christ was put forward as a sacrifice.

He is our Passover lamb to bear the wrath that all of our many sins deserve. And we celebrate that. Next week we will look at that and consider that.

[ 29 : 35 ] But the act was also an act of obedience. If it was only an act of sacrifice. If all Jesus did was remove the debt. Pay the debt for the penalty for our sins against God.

We would just return back to the garden. To try to earn our way back to God. To try to be accepted by God. To obey Him and be accepted into His presence.

That's why it's precious to know that it was an act of ultimate sacrifice. But also ultimate obedience. The cross was not just sacrifice.

It was not just something that happened to Jesus Christ. Jesus obeyed on the cross until the very end.

The cross did not take Him out. But He yielded up His life. That's why Philippians 2 says, Have this mind among you which is yours in Christ Jesus. Who though He's in the form of God.

[ 30 : 35 ] Did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. But emptied Himself. And taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of a servant. Being found in human form.

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. Even death on a cross. And so all that Christ endured was an act of obedience to the very end.

If it was only an act of obedience until the cross. And not in and through the cross. Jesus would not offer perfect obedience to God. And because of these two realities in the gospel.

There is what theologians call. So this is another doctrine. Sorry about that. But you need doctrine. Doctrine is precious. I'm not going to apologize for doctrine. It's what theologians call a double exchange.

On the cross. In and through the work of Jesus Christ. Your sins were placed upon Him. The Lord says that His eyes are too pure to look upon evil.

[ 31 : 37 ] And so on the cross. All of your sins were placed on Jesus Christ. His eyes too pure to look on Jesus Christ any longer. So He pours out His wrath upon Him.

But also in and through the work of Jesus Christ. In and through His work of obedience. His righteousness was credited to you. The double exchange.

Such that you have a perfect sacrifice. He is the perfect sacrifice. Such that you are treated as if you never sinned.

Never sinned. But wonderfully. It's also an act of perfect obedience. You're treated as if you always obeyed. Always did what was right.

Such that your state is so much better than Adam in the garden. J. Gresham Machen says, If we had just been forgiven of our sins, we would return to the state of Adam in the garden.

[ 32 : 42 ] But through the gospel, we're far more blessed. Look at what Machen says. Those who have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ are in a far more blessed condition than was Adam before he fell.

Adam before he fell was righteous in the sight of God. But he was still under the possibility of becoming unrighteous. Those who have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ not only are righteous in the sight of God, but they are beyond the possibility of becoming unrighteous.

That is our hope. That is our joy. In 1929, Westminster Seminary began with the help of J. Gresham Machen and John Murray, two of my heroes.

Machen and Murray were dear friends. During the Christmas break in 1936, Machen had a cold but nevertheless traveled to North Dakota.

He was single, traveled to North Dakota to minister some struggling churches there over the holiday and into the new year. Before the end of the new year, he was hospitalized with pneumonia.

[ 33 : 50 ] A friend visited him on New Year's Eve and said he was near death. The following day, New Year's Day, Machen was in and out of consciousness.

But for a moment, his mind cleared and he telegraphed his dear friend John Murray one final time. In his final telegraph between these two friends, in his final recorded words of this theologian, he said, I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ.

No hope without it. No hope without it. You could say that the righteousness, the active obedience of Christ, the righteousness of God through Christ that we receive is this precious gift that never runs out.

You know, on the one hand, you know, maybe, maybe if we thought in economic terms, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ cancels all the debt.

There's no debtors coming after you any longer. But the unspeakable truth of the righteousness of Christ is as if your debit card has no limit.



[ 35 : 17 ] All your sins are continually covered by this new debit card you have. You just swipe it such that nothing you ever do in your body, in this life, can take away the righteousness that you have through Christ.

Point three, Jesus obeys perfectly. Jesus obeys perfectly. Verses eight and nine kind of continue with this courtroom-type scene.

Kind of an odd scene. He says, The Lord helps me. Therefore, actually, sorry, down there in verse eight, He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend against me?

This scene, you have this idea that there's some sort of courtroom going on and he says, The Lord is near to him. The Lord never has to be called on to be near to his people in trouble.

He's a very present help. And so the servant asks this string of questions. He says, Who will contend with me? Who is my adversary?

[ 36 : 31 ] Verse nine, Who will declare me guilty? He says, Let us stand together. So he's looking the opposition in the eye, the enemies in the eye.

Let us stand together. Stand up to me. What we're meant to see is this servant is not the least bit afraid of a trial. He has no secrets. He is completely innocent, without sin in every way.

Unlike the people of Israel, he is not guilty. And so he's calling them to come to him, to come up to him, to stand up to him.

But that's not the way it happened with Jesus Christ. The scriptures tell us in a different way that when the Lord Jesus stood trial, the opposition stood against him.

They claim, or they said, He claims to be the Son of God. He's committed blasphemy. They condemn him to death. No one defends him. No one is around him.

[ 37 : 36 ] All of his disciples, for the end of the night, abandon him and leave him to suffer alone. Jesus Christ hung suspended between heaven and earth, completely alone.

But it says here, Let the Lord God helps me. So too, even though the Lord didn't defend our Lord on that night, on that afternoon, the Lord raised him from the dead just a few days later to show that he was completely innocent in every way.

That he was completely perfect. That he offered the perfect sacrifice and offered the perfect obedience. His righteousness, his unspotted, has no weakness in it.

No deficiency. No failure. And the scriptures say, God highly exalted him, bestowed on him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And this little servant song ends with the servant saying, Behold, all of them, all of the enemies will wear out like a garment. The moth will eat them up. The assumption is, the servant will not.

[ 39 : 00 ] The salvation of God will not. Because our Lord's obedience was true, was sincere, was right and complete and perfect, our salvation is completely secure.

striking that we have this passage about the servant's obedience before we have the passage about the cross.

In Isaiah 52 and 53. It's meant to show us this complete security we have in Jesus Christ. Pastor, the late pastor, Tim Keller, tells a story of one of his professors that he loved to share.

The professor spoke at a missionary conference and two young women heard the preaching about global missions and decided to devote their lives to becoming missionaries. Both sets of parents were extremely upset with the professor.

[40:10] The pay is low. The living situation may be dangerous. We tried talking to our daughters. They need a job. They need a career. They need a master's degree or something like that so they'll have some security before they go off and do this missionary thing.

Someday a trap door is going to open up underneath every single one of us and we'll all fall through it. And either there will be millions and millions of miles of nothing or else we'll fall into everlasting arms of God.

I have offered perfect obedience to make you mine forever. Jesus is saying to you this Christmas, I am your security. All other refuges!

Even those closest to you, those dearest to you will fail you. But there's a friend who'll never fail. Our Lord Jesus Christ, He's perfect, offers perfect obedience.

And yet He's offered the perfect obedience so that all that He has done might qualify you to share in the inheritance of the saints and light. Let us pray.

[ 42 : 18 ] We pray and we thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

through the