

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 July 2016

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 0 0] in your Bibles, if you have one, to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. If you're using one of the Pew Bibles, it's page 961. We are continuing in our series through this book on the home stretch as we've been going through this book throughout the year.

As you turn there, I want to thank you to the church for allowing and encouraging us as your pastors and staff members to take vacation time with our families this summer. Jane and I were certainly blessed by our time away over the last couple weeks.

So thank you for giving us that flexibility in our employment contracts and also bearing with us in the practicalities of when you call the office and you don't know who will answer. But we will always have somebody here, even if some of us are in and some of us are out.

You know, it's a good reminder that God's work continues and that God's work in this church is not dependent exclusively on one particular individual. And, you know, it's a good sign.

That we can go away for a couple weeks and come back and God's continuing and doing good work here. During our time away, I had a little time to reflect. And so before I read this passage this morning, I want to just share some reflections on the last five years.

[1 : 1 4] It's been five years since Pastor Matt and I came on staff and Pastor Nick, we became the three co-pastors. And so I was thinking a little bit of what God has taught us as a church.

Some of you have been here for those five years. Some of you have come more recently. You know, but if you think five years ago, we were just emerging from a two-and-a-half-year interim leadership period after our senior pastor had left.

We were venturing into this team leadership model with three co-pastors. None of us had had previous experience on a church staff outside of Trinity. And so we moved into our offices.

And then, as you may remember, a week later, Matt's wife, Brandy, was diagnosed with breast cancer. And so over the last five years, as a church, we've been brought to face realities that many of us and many of us in our culture try to avoid.

Sickness and pain and death. And we've prayed fervently and boldly for healing. We've come to trust the Lord's providence, even through grief and pain.

[2 : 1 8] We've been reminded that our true home, our true home is with the Lord, that our hope and our help come from Him. I think also the message that we preached about in 1 Corinthians 13, about the supremacy of love, the excellence of love, the importance of love, that above all else, we as Jesus' disciples must be characterized by love for one another.

I think that message has sunk in more deeply over the last five years. I think we live in a culture where many of us might be tempted to focus on our performance or our knowledge.

We're in a church where there's always people coming in, moving to town and leaving town, and our relationships might wear thin in a context like this. But I think God has brought us to a deeper level of community and love for one another as a church.

I think we've learned to rejoice together and to mourn together, to care for each other, not just for Pastor Matt and his family, but to really care for each other as we go through our own struggles and trials and to rejoice as we share joys and victories.

And so I think our community has grown deeper, more vulnerable, and also more hospitable as a result. So that's, I think, sort of the first way we've grown is in our love for one another and in our depth as a community.

[3 : 3 9] But we've also grown outwardly. Our building is, especially during the school year, it's more crowded on Sunday mornings. Sometimes you have trouble finding a seat. Some people are up in the balcony sometimes.

The youth group has grown on Wednesday nights. Some of the small groups are outgrowing people's living rooms. That's all a good thing. And God is bringing not just more people, but I think more different people.

You know, you look around and you talk to people and you're like, we're not all the same here. And, you know, sometimes it takes a little while to figure out what we have in common. But what draws us together above everything else is the message we're preaching about this morning of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

And as we look into the, and God has also brought opportunities for outreach our way, even ones that we wouldn't have looked for. Planting a church in New London was not on our strategic plan, but God brought that to pass over the last five years.

The idea of joining together with other churches in a partnership in New Haven for ministry like Bridges of Hope, that didn't exist two years ago. Might have thought, well, that's sort of a nice idea, but when does that ever really happen?

[4 : 48] But God has brought that together and is beginning to grow that. And Lord willing, may that continue to have a greater impact over the next five years. I think the Lord's also giving us a growing love for internationals, for people from all parts of the world.

God has brought many of you here from different parts of the world and to contribute to our church life and to help us more effectively reach out to our international neighbors.

So as we look to the next five years, what will the next five years hold for us as a church and for the kingdom of God in New Haven more broadly? You know, some days I have ideas.

I could give you lots of ideas that I think have a lot of potential. Sometimes I can be an optimist. And other days I can come up with all kinds of obstacles and difficulties and anxieties and things that could go wrong.

But the passage we're looking at today is I think what can serve it as an anchor point for us. It provides an anchor for us personally. It provides an anchor for us as a church.

[5 : 52] It reminds us the ground that we stand on, the foundation that this church and every true church is built on. And it gives us a reason that we can look into the future with both humility and confidence.

So that's what we're going to read together. And I want to sort of frame the passage by thinking about what might God have for us in the next few years.

So let me read this passage, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 to 11, and then we'll jump in. Paul writes this, Now I would remind you, brothers of the gospel I preach to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

If you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain. For 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 12th.

Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

[7 : 13] Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it wasn't I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. This morning, the apostle Paul wants to remind us of two things that matter more than anything else.

Number one, one, the historical reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection. Number two, the present reality of his transforming grace.

Those are the two points I want to look at this morning. Let's begin with the first one. Now, as I said, we're on the home stretch of our journey through 1 Corinthians.

[8 : 21] We've made it through chapter one to four about divisions in the church, chapters five about church discipline, chapter six and seven about sex and singleness and marriage, chapter eight and nine and ten about idol worship, chapter 11 about head coverings and the Lord's Supper, chapter 12, 13, and 14 about spiritual gifts, tongues, and prophecy.

We've made it through a lot of different topics. This is the last major topic of the book. But it's not just one more topic on sort of Paul's laundry list of problems and issues that he wants to address

with the Corinthian church.

This is really the capstone of the book. Paul began, if you remember, in chapter two by talking about the message of the cross.

He said, I've resolved to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified. So he begins by speaking about the cross and now he's going to end by speaking about the resurrection.

And those are sort of the two pillars that hold up the whole book. And everything in the middle only makes sense if you see these two things.

[9 : 34] That Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and that he was raised for us on the third day. And so he's, we see the implications of those things. Karl Barth wrote, this chapter forms not only the clothes and crown of the whole epistle but also provides the clue to its meaning.

Light is shed upon the whole from this place on the book as a unity. What we'll see as we look at this chapter for the next five weeks is that the resurrection of Jesus not only gives us hope for the future and eternity but it also transforms our life in the present.

It does both of those things and they're both essential and important. But Paul starts this morning by bringing us back to the basics.

Verse three. He says, I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received. Now there are some translations that it's possible to translate that slightly differently to say, I deliver to you at the first.

In other words, this was the first thing I told you. But the reason why Paul would have told them this first is because it was a first importance so it doesn't actually matter how you translate it. But Paul wants us to remember this matters more than anything else.

[10 : 55] as you read 1 Corinthians and talk about all these topics he says, don't lose the forest for the trees. This is what it's all about. This is what matters more than anything else.

This is the good news I preached. It's what you believed. It's the message through which you are being saved. And Paul says, this isn't just my distinctive message.

It's the message of every true Christian believer since the earliest days of the Christian church. Paul says, I delivered to you what I also received.

In other words, he's sort of like the UPS guy. Right? He got the package and he faithfully delivered it to you. He didn't open the package, take out half the stuff inside, throw in some other stuff that he wanted to throw in, and then deliver it to you.

He's saying, I got it and I've passed it on to you faithfully the message that you believe. Paul is quoting here from an early Christian creed or summary of the faith.

[12 : 10] That's why he says, I deliver to you what I received. And just as he did in chapter 11, he used the same language when talking about the Lord's Supper.

Right? Not just something that Paul's churches observed, but something that all Christians have always shared. The meal to remember Jesus' death on the cross for our sins.

Now, look for a minute at what Paul delivers to them. He says, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. He was buried. He was raised in accordance with the Scriptures and then he appeared.

So, there's four sections. There's a symmetry to it. It's easy to remember. Right? In accordance with the Scriptures. In accordance with the Scriptures, there's a rhythm to it. It's very simple.

Right? Paul says, this is the core. And this message that Paul's quoting goes back to the earliest days of the Christian movement. So, just let me give you a little bit of the background here.

[13 : 11] 1 Corinthians is written sometime between 52 and 55 A.D. That would be about 20 to 25 years after Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

Either 30 or 33 A.D. was when that happened. But Paul says, I delivered this to you. That means he taught it to them when he was there with them, which was back in A.D. 50 a few years earlier.

And then Paul said, before that, I received this. You might think, well, where did Paul receive this? Right? Where would he have received this sort of summary of the Christian faith from someone else or some other group of Christians?

Well, in Galatians 1, one of Paul's earliest letters, he says, three years after he came to faith in Jesus, he went up to Jerusalem to visit James and Peter or Cephas, both of whom are prominently mentioned in this list of people Jesus appeared to.

Take note. That would have been back in the mid to late 30s A.D. Most likely, that's when and where Paul received this summary of Christian beliefs. Now, other scholars suggest he might have

got it at Antioch or Damascus.

[14:21] That was basically around the same time. Now, here's the point. Paul is quoting something here that goes back to within five to ten years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

And by then, this was such an established belief in the Christian community, he could say, this is what we believe. This is the package. It wasn't somebody's new idea then.

It was already a settled consensus. Now, here's the point about all this chronology. If you read about, if you go on Wikipedia, right, the fount of all knowledge, right, and you read about early Christianity, or even if you read some books by scholars with PhDs from Yale and other places, some of them will say the early Jesus movement didn't believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and didn't believe that Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice, they only expected his imminent return as king.

And later on, when he didn't return as soon as they hoped for, then they came up with these other ideas to give meaning to what had happened. Well, there are many problems with this view.

One problem is it simply doesn't fit any of the evidence that we have for what the earliest Christians actually believed. Right? This is one of the earliest Christian creeds.

[15:46] Right? It's in one of Paul's relatively early letters, and it's something that he delivered, had received, and had previously become a consensus. That's going three steps back, pretty far back. And this affirms the atoning death of Jesus, right?

He died for our sins as a sacrifice, and he was buried and he was raised. In other words, he ain't still in the tomb. Because you don't say he was buried and then he was raised if his body's still there in the tomb.

So, and the other time in 1 Corinthians, Paul quotes an early Christian creed one other time in chapter 8, verse 6, and it refers to Jesus as God, the Lord, from whom are all things.

So, these are not beliefs that Paul or Mark or Luke developed a couple of decades after the facts.

This is what the earliest Christians consistently believed and proclaimed.

Right? All the way back to the apostles in Jerusalem where Jesus lived and died and was raised.

So, you can be confident that there's reasons to believe this.

[16:54] And this wasn't just something that some people sort of cooked up later on or developed somewhere long ago and far away from what had actually happened. This is what Christians have believed and proclaimed from the first.

And Paul makes the point that this wasn't an accident what had happened, that it happened according to the scriptures. That is, according to the story of the old, in fulfillment of the Old Testament story.

Paul says, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. You might say, well, where does it say in the Old Testament? That's the scriptures Paul would be referring to.

Where does it say in the Old Testament that Christ, the Messiah, would die for people's sins? Well, one place it says it is in Isaiah 53. You can read that chapter.

It talks about the suffering servant. One verse in it says, all we, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him, on this suffering servant, the iniquity, the sin of us all.

[18:04] But you know, it wasn't just a few isolated prophecies Paul's referring to. This is a theme that runs through the whole Old Testament. That humanity as a whole and God's people included have fallen into sin.

That is, we've turned, we don't want God to be in charge and everything is falling apart. And the result of that sin is ultimately death.

Physical, spiritual, all kinds of other ways. But, there's a promise that one day God would deal with sin and conquer death. Right?

It goes through the whole Old Testament. So, story of Adam and Eve right at the beginning. What happens? They disobey God's command. They're prohibited from eating of the tree of life. But, they're promised one day the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

Will defeat the enemy. Then you have the story of Abraham. Right? Abraham and Isaac. A haunting story that sort of hangs over the whole Old Testament when he is called to offer his one and only son as a burnt offering.

[19:11] But then he's rescued at the last moment by God's provision of a substitute sacrifice. And then you read the laws and they have all these laws about all the ways you become unclean.

Sort of reminds you all the stuff, all the junk that's in the world and in our hearts and all the ways that we can become unclean before a holy God and then all the remedies.

But then there's one chapter in the middle of Leviticus that says once a year on the day of atonement the people of Israel can be cleansed from all their sins.

And you think, well, what's going on here? Right? It's sort of, it's looking forward and the prophets, Zachariah said, one day the Lord will remove the iniquity of the whole land in a single day.

All right? So there's a, there's, you see the problem and you see a promised solution which hasn't come yet. The problem of sin and death and a promised solution which God says it's coming one day.

[20 : 14] You see that throughout the whole Old Testament Paul says that's why Jesus came into the world. To reconcile us to God. To pay for our sins. That's why Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

If you have younger kids there's a great children's book that puts the sacrifice, the sacrificial death of Jesus in the context of the story of the whole Bible.

It's called The Garden, The Curtain, and The Cross. It's a great book if, if I highly recommend it and, and it's one of those books that if you read it as an adult it's like wow that was a really good children's book because it's, it spoke to me too.

Right? And, anyway, so I recommend that. So Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

But second, Paul says, Christ was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

And again, you might say, and some people have asked, well where in the Bible does it say that the Messiah will be raised from the dead on the third day? Well, again, interesting, it's not just one verse, it's, there's a pattern in the Old Testament that very often God's saving intervention happens on the third day.

[21 : 30] So when Abraham takes Isaac up the mountain, it's on the third day when the, when, when, when he sees the animal and the thicket and his son is saved from death.

And Exodus 19, it's on the third day when God comes down on Mount Sinai in glory. The story of Jonah, it's on the third day when he's rescued from the belly of the fish.

Hosea chapter 6, again, one of the prophets says, after two days he will revive us on the third day. He will raise us up. So the third day represents completeness or finality.

God's saving intervention. God's gonna come and rescue you on the third day. You see that throughout the Old Testament and Paul says, don't you see?

That's exactly what just happened in the resurrection of Jesus. Nobody put it all together beforehand. Right? Nobody could see exactly where the story was leading. Nobody expected Jesus to be raised on the third day even though he said he would.

[22 : 37] But when you look back you say, oh, it makes sense. The pieces fit together. Now Paul reminds us verse 5 through 7, there were several witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

Again, he's reminding them. This isn't just something I said. There's other witnesses too. So he mentions Peter or Cephas. Cephas is just the Greek word that means rock or maybe it's the Hebrew.

I don't know. It's one language and Peter's the other language. I don't remember which language.

But they both mean rock and he went by both names. Right? But Peter and then James. This is not James the apostle but James the half-brother of Jesus.

The younger brother of Jesus who had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem and Paul.

Now if you notice all three of these Peter had denied Jesus publicly.

It says James and Jesus' other siblings didn't believe in him during his earthly ministry and Paul had persecuted the church. So Jesus didn't just appear to his most loyal supporters. Right?

[23 : 47] Like John the apostle and the women who stood around the cross and went to the tomb. Right? They were his most loyal supporters but Jesus didn't just appear to them. He also appeared to people who were who had failed him and who were against him and who were skeptical.

And that's another reason why we can be confident these are credible witnesses. They weren't exactly the most likely people to believe this stuff on their own. So Jesus appeared to individuals. He also appeared to groups. The twelve disciples. Paul mentions all the apostles. Perhaps that includes some others who had accompanied Jesus besides the twelve. More than five hundred brothers and sisters. Perhaps that's when what Matthew recorded in chapter 28 when Jesus gave the Great Commission.

Paul says most of them are still alive. In other words ask them if you want. So what do we take from this first point? Besides the fact that I need a drink of water just a second. What do we take from this first point?

Well during my sophomore and junior year in college I wrestled with a number of doubts about Christianity. And there were a few Christian doctrines that I just really struggled to figure out how do they all make sense?

[25 : 04] How can these all be true at the same time and all make sense together? Thinking about questions that I didn't have complete answers to. What about people who've never heard of Jesus?

How is God sovereign over everything? And we have meaningful human responsibility in a world of evil and suffering. And I spent hours thinking about these questions. I spent sleepless nights pondering and thinking I was probably the only one who spent sleepless nights pondering these questions.

But then I would come back to passages like these. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised. He appeared. And I was like I can't deny this.

You know whatever else doesn't quite make sense in your mind. Whatever else you're wrestling with or doubting. Whatever other teachings in the Bible you struggle with. Come back to this.

And look at the people Jesus appeared to. Look at this is the core message of Christianity. Everything else will only make sense if you start here.

[26 : 07] Right? This is the foundation. You can build the rest of the house after you have the foundation. And I looked into the alternate explanations that skeptical historians offered. None of them were ultimately convincing.

So let me encourage if you're having doubts this is the anchor that you can hold on to. The central reality of the scriptures. The heart of the Christian faith. The bodily resurrection of Jesus.

So that's the first thing Paul wants us to be anchored in. The historical reality of Jesus' resurrection. Second point. The present reality of his transforming grace.

Now there's a connection between these two points. Jesus' resurrection and Jesus' transforming grace. Paul doesn't make it explicit here but he does in some of his other letters.

So Romans 8 Paul says he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

[27 : 09] In Ephesians 1 Paul speaks about the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

In other words the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is at work within us. Transforming us by his mercy and grace.

I mean just consider the three people Paul mentions by name. Think about Peter. Peter. I mean Peter was a guy who talked smack and then he didn't do what he said.

Right? He didn't always live up to his talk. He said to Jesus I'll stand by you I'll die for you even if everybody else abandons you I'll be there with you. And then that night he denied Jesus three times.

But Jesus appeared to him in particular alone not just with all the other people in a group but him. and then Jesus talked to him in John chapter 21 he brought him face to face with his past failure and he said to Peter come you follow me I have a plan for your future I'm not done with you yet.

[28 : 20] And so Peter became a powerful preacher and evangelist and writer of two New Testament epistles. Then you have James Jesus' younger brother. I mean imagine being Jesus' younger brother seemed like he had a few from the reference in Mark chapter 6 but it says in the gospels John chapter 7 verse 5 says even Jesus' own brothers did not believe in him.

And at one point Mark chapter 3 it says his family went to take charge of him or to seize him because they were saying to each other he's out of his mind. Right?

In other words they wanted to commit him. Right? It wasn't such a thing as a psych hospital back then but they were like he's crazy. But then what happens to James after the resurrection?

He becomes a respected and courageous leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Right? One who had in his skepticism and cynicism had dismissed Jesus and thought no he can't be.

He becomes convinced and he again he wrote a New Testament book the epistle of James and at the council in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15 which was sort of a crucial turning point for the church he's the one who stands up just at the right time and says exactly what needed to be said and

people say yes that's right.

[29 : 50] So there's Peter James and then Paul. Right? Paul hadn't just denied Jesus by his words or been skeptical of him. Paul had actively persecuted Jesus' followers violently and Paul doesn't try to hide that aspect of his past.

He doesn't try to sweep it under the rug and hope nobody figures it out. He confesses and freely in verse 9 he says I'm the least of the apostles I don't deserve to be an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

Paul didn't put on a mask of self-reliance and flawlessness he knew that he was a sinner saved by God's grace. He said it's only by the grace of God that I am what I am.

You know this week I was this week I was talking with Pastor Nick and we were reminiscing about our brother Randall Perkins who recently passed away and Nick said I remember several years ago I was teaching Sunday school and Randall piped up and said wasn't there a guy in the Bible who was a murderer and killed Christians and then God forgave him and Nick said that's right it was the apostle Paul and Randall said well if God can forgive him then he can forgive me and that's exactly the point Randall wasn't a murderer by the way don't get a misconception here but God can forgive anyone whatever their past whatever your past includes now it seems that some people in Corinth were questioning Paul questioning his credentials as an apostle not just because of his past but also because he didn't seem that impressive in the present you know the New Testament doesn't describe what Paul looked like but there's a second century document that describes Paul this way small in size bald headed bow legged well built with eyebrows that met got a unibrow and rather long nosed if this is accurate we don't know if it is but it very well could be

Paul didn't exactly have the most impressive physique by ancient standards and in verse 8 Paul refers to himself as one untimely born that was actually a word that was sometimes used as a derogatory insult sometimes it referred to someone born prematurely or even born as a result of a failed abortion and someone who might have been disfigured or deformed as a result it was a term that's sort of like the word freak today used in a negative way often about people and some people might have even used that term to talk about Paul and said this guy's a freak he's crazy he's weird he's messed up and Paul Paul wasn't Paul wasn't fazed by that he said the foundation on which I stand is not my physical appearance it's not my past accomplishments it's by the grace of God he says it's by the grace of God I am what I am and so Paul could live with humility and with confidence you know maybe you maybe you're like Peter maybe you feel insecure because you can look back on ways you've screwed up during your time as a follower of Jesus like Peter could maybe you're like James and you're you have a skeptical cynical side of you that seems hard to shake maybe you're like Paul you have a pre-Christian past that you're deeply ashamed of and you think if people in the church knew about everything

[33 : 42] I used to do maybe they wouldn't love me or accept me maybe I wouldn't be welcome here and I wouldn't have a purpose here anymore you know what this passage says to you is trust in the reality of Jesus transforming grace wherever you're coming from you can be empowered by the Holy Spirit despite your past failures and whatever you've accomplished it's interesting Paul talks about his worst failures in the past and his greatest accomplishments in the present verse 10 he says I worked harder than all the rest of them and it's probably true right Paul planted more churches in more cities than anyone else we know of in the ancient world he traveled more miles around the Roman Empire than any of the other apostles it's true he worked harder than everybody else but then he could say it's not I but the grace of God and so if you're haunted by your failures and weaknesses and insecurities you need to be encouraged by this passage that God can use you and he can transform you by his grace and it's not too we are past and your present struggles are not too big for

God to handle and if you're really accomplished like Paul if you've succeeded if you've done a lot in the world or in the church or if you have a high status in one way or other you need to be reminded of what Paul said it's not I but the grace of God that's within me you know if you can look around and honestly like Paul say I worked harder than most of the people around me can you also say but not I yet the grace of God because if you don't say that you're vulnerable to fall into being condescending and arrogant and looking down on other people and God's not pleased by that but you see what this message does is it humbles is it humbles us and it makes us confident it humbles it humbles us because it's only by the grace of God that we are what we are and it gives us confidence because it's by the grace of God that God deals with our sin and our past and he gives

us hope and confidence for our work in the future that he calls us to so that's how we can look forward into the future with humility and with confidence

God's done good things among us in the last five years you know as you look through as you think of the past five years in your own life whatever your journey has been you can think about what's led you to this day what's led you here but if you take your stand on this foundation that Christ died for your sins and he was buried and he was raised on the third day and if you trust in his transforming grace you can face you can go into the future with hope and with confidence and with humility and graciousness let us pray oh God we thank you for this message we thank you for the central reality that brings us here this morning Lord we thank you for the grace to transform Paul and James and Peter's life we thank you for the grace that empowered them to do mighty works for your kingdom

Lord to bring many people to faith in you to write letters that are still used by your Holy Spirit to instruct and guide your church Lord we pray that your transforming grace will be at work among us give us confidence Lord where we see and are aware of our weaknesses and failures we pray that we would come and receive the forgiveness of our sins and Lord where we need your empowerment and your wisdom to guide us for the task that you lay before us we pray that we would come before you and be empowered only by your grace Lord we pray that you would continue your work in this church in the next years ahead we pray that you would continue your work in each one of us for your glory we pray these things in Jesus name amen