

T R I N I T Y  
B I B L E C H U R C H  
D A L L A S

The Sermon

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Psalm 73

"The Anchor for our Hope"

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TRANSCRIPT

We're going to be in Psalm 73, if you would find that with me, and we'll ask the Lord for His help as we study His word together this morning.

[Prayer] Lord, we are grateful to be here in Your house today. Lord, I'm aware this morning that there are anxious hearts among us. This has been a hard week for our world, and because of that, it's been a hard week for those who are here. I'm also very aware that there is nothing of myself that would commend anyone to listen to what I say unless what I say is Your words. So I pray that You would give me clarity of thought and of mind, that I would rightly interpret, explain, and apply Your word to these dear people today. Help me to say things that are helpful. Above all else, I pray that Your Holy Spirit would do what only He can do through the proclamation of Your word to each of us today. And as has been said before, Lord, we just say to You today to command of us whatever You will, and grant us to do whatever You command. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

Well, God is good, and God is good to His people. At least to everybody else, I'm not sure about my life; I'm in the pits. I'm grateful that everybody else's marriage is doing so well; but as for my own, we're struggling. I'm glad that your job and career and your children are doing well, I am; I just wish that mine wasn't in such disarray. I don't understand why sinful, wicked, evil people all around us seem to get by with their sin and their

wickedness. I wonder if it's even worth it to try to do what's right; it seems to all be in vain. And such begins the honest and raw thoughts of a man named Asaph who writes Psalm 73.

Just so you know, that what I just said is not so much true of me today, but that is true of Asaph. By God's grace, my life's fine, my marriage is good, my children are good. But I want you to hear what it sounds like to take Psalm 73 and speak it out loud, because Asaph's honest struggles were so intense he felt like he couldn't even say them out loud.

You may not know the name Asaph, that may be a new name to you; but you, no doubt, are familiar with his struggles. You've had them, too. When you look at the world around you and you wonder, "Why is it that evil seems so prevalent?" When you look at other people's family and you say, "I really am glad that you found someone. I really am glad God brought someone to your life for you to marry. But as for me, I'm longing for that. God, what about me?" Or when you say, "I really am glad that your children are walking with the Lord, I'm really glad that your family is so blessed; but the truth is, as for me, I feel like my prayer's not being answered or even heard." Or maybe you've thought to yourself, "Is it worth it to try to honor the Lord; because I'm doing everything I can to live according to His word and His ways and His glory, and it seems like nothing is working out for me."

You may be unfamiliar with Asaph, but you know where he's coming from. The things he wrestles with, you wrestle with. The questions he asked in his mind are questions that people continue to ask. And maybe the frustrations and the pain and the disappointment that Asaph brings to light in Psalm 73 is something you may be even struggling with right now.

Asaph and his family had responsibility to help with music in the temple. They wrote 12 Psalms: Psalm 50, as well as Psalms 73 to 83. And when you come to Psalm 73, what we see is it is brutally honest, extremely raw; and what has happened is Asaph has taken his eye eyes off of the Lord, he's put them on the world, and as he's done that, he's become completely

disillusioned and frustrated. But from his very honest words, we learn. We learn several things that I hope to show you this morning that I think will be for your good. First, we learn that, "Hoping in the wrong things leads to despair. Hoping in the wrong things leads to despair."

Let's look at the text together, Psalm 73:1, "Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." It begins with this great statement of truth. This is true: God is real, God is good, God is on His throne. And as Asaph begins, he begins with this statement of faith and of truth and of hope, "Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."

Verse 2 is where it gets hard: "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped." Asaph feels like he's the exception. Asaph begins by saying, "I know that God exists, and I know that He's a good God, and I know that He's a sovereign God, and He is good, and He rewards those who are His people; but I feel like the exception - my life, my family, my career, God, I don't question that You're on Your throne. I don't question that You're ruling and reigning. I don't question that You're powerful. God, what I don't understand is, "Have You forgotten me?"

In one sense, verse 1 is the conclusion of all things. God exists, God is good, and God is in control. But in another sense, verse 1 is the basis of the very problem that Asaph has. It's the fact that he knows God does exist, and knows that He is a good God, and knows that He is sovereignly in control; that's the very reason why Asaph has the struggle that he has. If Asaph thought that God was not powerful, he may be left without hope, but he wouldn't have any questions; he would understand why his life was the way that it was. If he thought that God were powerful but not good, he may not be happy, but he wouldn't have the same struggle and frustration, he would just think in his mind, if that were the case, "Well, God just doesn't want to help me." But when Asaph says, "God, I know and I believe that You are a good God who rules and reigns in power. But as for me, but in my life, but in my family, in my marriage, with my children, in my career in this world today, I feel like, God, I can barely walk. I know You're good, I know You rule, I know You reign, I know You're powerful, I know You're the God of

all gods; but as for me, my feet can barely take a step without stumbling." That's where Asaph's coming from.

Maybe you've been there. Maybe you've come to church on a Sunday and you look around and you say, "I'm so glad that all these people seem so joyful; but as for me, the joy is gone." Or you look around and you say, "I'm so glad that this church has so many young families and so many children; but, God, as for me, we're longing for children. Why can't we have a child?" Or you say, "God, I'm so glad that all these people I see at church have good jobs and they're using their jobs to bring glory to Your name; but, God, I can't find one. What about my situation?" And what he begins to do is he just unloads his heart with what he's experiencing.

Verse 3, "For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." "Prosperity" is a very full word. It's meaning in the original text carries a - it's a word that would mean wealth and peace and completeness and happiness. He says, "I look at the wicked, and they've got everything. I look at the world that lies and cheats and steals and mocks the things of God, and they seem to have everything they want." And it's made him, verse 3, by his own admission, it's made him envious of them. He's saying, "I look at their life, and I want what they have." And self-pity grows in the soil of envy and jealousy, and it's a dreadful thing.

And he goes on and he says in verse 4, "They have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek." We read verse 4 in our culture and think that that sounds like a put-down. That's not a put-down. He's saying, "They've got all they need. They're eating, and then they've got more. They eat all they want, now they have leftovers. They're indulging everything they want."

Verse 5, "They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; and violence covers them as a garment." Asaph says, "Lord, when I look at the wicked people, not only do they seem to have all they want and then some, they're getting by with it, and they are boastful and arrogant and prideful. They're all the

things You say that we shouldn't be, and they seem to be just fine. And, God, I look at the wicked, and they're violent."

This is true in our world today. You can today get on your phone – don't do it – but you can get on your phone today and you can go to a number of social media apps and you can see people who now are filming themselves going into the street and doing nothing more than beating and pulverizing innocent bystanders, laughing at it, uploading it, and becoming well-known and famous for nothing more than parading their violence in the street. Social media is new, the wickedness of a sinful heart is not. Asaph's world is just like yours. He says, "God, I see these people, and they wear pride as a necklace. They're proud of it. They show it off. They take violence and they wrap it around themselves as if it were a garment. They wear their sin as though a wardrobe for everybody to see.

Verse 7, "Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threatened oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth." They not only do whatever they want, they will purposefully mock the things of God while they do it.

Verse 10, "Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. And they say, 'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?'" In other words, these people, who are living however they want to live and getting by with it, so it seems, stop and say, "You tell me there's a God in heaven? Well, your God must not be able to see me, because I'm breaking every law of His and I'm doing just fine. There's a God in heaven who can hear everything that somebody says? Well, He must be hard of hearing, because I'm mocking His name and cursing His name, and I've got everything I've ever wanted. There's a God in heaven who punishes the evildoer? Well, He must not be as powerful as you think He is, because watch me. I will completely rebel against everything He says, I will break all of His commandments; I will belittle His name while I do it. I will mock Him publicly in the streets, and I've got everything I want." And they say to Asaph, "Does your God see? Does He hear? Does He know? Does He have

any power at all? We get by with whatever we want." And Asaph takes this all in, and it wears him out.

Maybe you can relate to that: that coworker of yours that lies and cheats and is crooked, and is advancing through the company anyway; those people who do what is dishonest and dishonorable, and they got their recognition anyway. And here you are trying as best you can to honor the Lord and to speak of the Lord and to obey the Lord, and you're not saying this out loud, but in your heart of hearts you wonder, "God, is all of this even worth it; because it seems like the more I stand for You, the further behind I get."

Verse 12, "Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, and they increase in riches." Verse 13, "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. Lord, I've tried to do the right thing. I have tried to teach Your word to my children. I have been at the Lord's house to worship. I have tried to be honest at work. I have tried to serve other people, I have tried to put their needs above my own; and, Lord, all I see is that everybody else around me is blessed. Everyone else seems to have more than enough, and I can barely walk without stumbling."

Now, in Asaph's honesty, he says, in verse 14, this is non-stop: "For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning." Every time he turns around, he's confronted with this world that he lives in. And it's even worse than you think, because verse 15, he says, "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have betrayed the generation of Your children." In other words, he says, "Not only is this what I think, but I can't even say it out loud, because I know if I say this out loud, it sounds terrible. If I come to Trinity Bible on a Sunday morning and I tell a friend of mine at church that this is how I feel, I know it sounds wrong, I know that they're going to look at me and say, 'What's wrong with you?' And so what you do is you just keep it bottled inside."

That's what Asaph did. He didn't understand the world. He was frustrated with the world. He was frustrated with what God was and was not doing. He was frustrated with trying to live a certain way that seemed to get him

nowhere, and he was so tired of seeing the wicked people seem to win and the righteous people seem to get left behind, and it was consuming his soul. But he couldn't even say it out loud, because how do you tell the generation below you, how do you say to them, "Guys, I don't know if it's worth it to follow the Lord; it doesn't seem to be working for me"? And so you just stay quiet.

I mean, some of you got pretty nervous when I started, and you're saying to yourself, "I don't know if I want to listen to this guy." Well, here's the reality. My life is imperfect, my family's imperfect, but by God's grace, ministry is fine, and our marriage is good, and my kids are good. But here's the reality of it. What if it wasn't? If I stood in front of you and I meant truly what I said at the beginning instead of just paraphrasing Asaph, if that was truly my testimony, if you're honest, many of you would say, "I don't know if I want to listen to him. He's telling me that he's got struggles and doubts, and his faith is shaky, and his family is struggling." If you are honest, you would say, "I don't know if he should be here."

And so, Asaph, who's helping to lead music in the temple, understands, "If I even tell people how I'm really feeling and what I'm really thinking, they're not going to let me do what I do." So he just keeps it inside. I suspect, like some of you in this room are right now, where your faith is struggling and your family is hurting, but you're afraid that if you even say it out loud you would betray the people who look up to you.

It's not unlike Habakkuk, in chapter 1, where he says, "God, You're not listening, You're not watching, You're just sitting idly by and You're not doing anything." Now, that wasn't true, but that's how Habakkuk thought. It's what we call in theology a theodicy. Theodicy is the struggle with the reality that God is good and there's so much evil at the same time in the world around us. The term "theodicy" may be new to you, the problem with it is not. We've all wrestled with it: "How is it that God is good and powerful, and yet there's so much evil in the world?"

And Asaph says, "I'm thinking all this, I'm feeling all this, I'm observing all this," in verse 15, "I can't even say this out loud." Verse 16, "But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task." In other words, Asaph says, "When I lie in bed at night and it's just me and my thoughts and I'm trying to make sense of: God, why is it that the wicked prosper? Why is it that the righteous are persecuted? Why is it that the people who mock the things of God seem to be getting all they want? Why is it that as for me, I feel like the exception to all of the blessing that everybody else gets?"

Asaph says, "It wore me out. I got so tired, I got so weary trying to figure out: How do I deal with all of the reality of sin and evil and wickedness in the people who just flaunt their sin, the people who do not hide in shame at what they do, but they openly, purposefully mock the things of God for everybody to see?" Asaph says, "It left me so weary. It left me exhausted. I can't make sense of it. I don't understand it." And when Asaph was hoping in his own understanding and hoping in his own ability to make sense of these things, it led him to despair, because hoping in the wrong things leads us to despair.

But by God's grace, here's a second thing we learn from Psalm 73, and that is that, "Worship leads to hope and truth. Worship leads to hope and truth." Psalm 73:17 is one of my very favorite verses in the entire Old Testament. Having just said all that he's thought and all that's inside of his heart, verse 17, "until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end." He says, "I was hopeless, I was frustrated, I was desperate, I was confused, until I went into the sanctuary. And when I went into the sanctuary, I got clarity because I thought about the truth."

My friends, I want you to understand, there is something that is such a rich gift and blessing to you, and that is every single Lord's Day you get to come into the house of God and hear the truth of God's word proclaimed. And in a world where your week is filled with violence, we see it not only a world away, we saw it last night right here in this city: when there's violence, when there's wickedness, when there's evil, when there's all kinds of evidence of people mocking the things of God, Asaph says, "I was

undone, until I went into the sanctuary of God. And when I went to worship, I was reminded of the truth; and the truth of God's word brought clarity to my soul." You have a rich gift of being able to come into this sanctuary every Lord's Day. You need to be reminded each week the truth of God's word to bring clarity to your mind and to your soul.

By God's grace, I was raised in a home by believers. We were at church every Sunday. I'm 50 years old now, and I'm at church each Lord's Day. On my days off, I'm usually at a church preaching. I'm on vacation this week; I get to be here with you. And I don't say that because of some legalistic sense, like if I miss a Sunday, God's going to strike me dead. I don't mean it like that. I just mean this: I need to be in church on the Lord's Day. I need it. Like you, the things I see each week wear me out. Like you, the struggles that I see in other people's life, and even in my own heart and mind, it leaves me weary. I need to come into the sanctuary of God and sing about the holiness of God, and how He is our rock, and how He is our fortress, and how we can depend on Him. I need to hear God's word read. I need to interact with other brothers and sisters in Christ who love the Lord and are trying to honor Him. I need to be in church. I'm at church every Sunday, not because I have to be, as if someone's forcing me, I'm there because I need it. I long for it. My heart and my soul needs the clarity that comes from gathering to worship the God of the universe.

And Asaph says, "I was a mess, until I went to the sanctuary." And specifically in verse 17, he says, "It was then that I discerned their end." In other words, instead of thinking about today, he began to think about eternity, and it changed everything. He began to understand in that moment that all these people who think they're getting by with sin are, in truth, getting by with nothing; and that you can't measure what matters most by looking in a temporal sense. "But when I went to the sanctuary of God, I discerned their end."

Verse 18, "Truly You set them in slippery places; You make them fall to ruin." I read verse 18, and I pause, and I think to myself in verse 2, Asaph says, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly

slipped." He almost fell, but he didn't. And the wicked are made to fall to ruin.

Verse 19, "How they are destroyed in a moment and swept away utterly by terrors!" When the wicked die, one second after they die, they have no question about the sovereignty of God, they have no doubt about the authority of God.

Verse 20, "Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when You rouse Yourself, You despise them as phantoms." These wicked men that seem so powerful, so fearful, so in control, so domineering, when they stand before the Lord it's as if they are a phantom. They are as nothing before the Lord.

Verse 21, "When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You." In other words, Asaph says, "When I was thinking about them, I was so out of control in my mind, I was like an animal. I couldn't think, I couldn't reason, I couldn't make sense of things; I was so bothered and wearied by the world and the wickedness around me, that when I thought about that, I was like a beast."

But something changed when he went in the sanctuary of God. Clarity came, because worship leads us to hope and truth. Hoping in the wrong things leads us to despair, but worship leads us to hope and truth. And then a third thing we learn from Psalm 73, that is that as believers, "We hope in that which is best and for our good. We hope in that which is best and for our good." Look at verse 23: "Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You hold my right hand." And here, Asaph tells us the secret.

Why is it that Asaph almost slipped and the wicked will be ruined in their fall? Why is it that Asaph stumbled, but was upheld, and the wicked fall under judgment? Here's why: because God holds His people. Asaph says, "You're always with me, I'm always with You, and You hold my right hand. You're the reason why I can stand. Even if my knees are trembling, I can stand. Even if my feet almost slip, I can stand." Listen, as a believer, there

is one reason and one reason only why I am confident that I will go to heaven when I die, and it's not in my ability to remain saved, it's in Christ inability to lose that which is His. He is with me, and He uphold holds me.

Verse 24, "You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will receive me to glory." You see what Asaph has done is he's gone from keeping his attention on the wicked and their situation today, and instead is now focused on God and eternity. What happens to the wicked one second after they die? They're going to see, in no uncertain terms, who God is that they have mocked. And for the righteous, we're received into the house of the Lord.

Verse 25, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You." Now, if Asaph was here, we'd have to stop and say, "Asaph, now wait a minute, wait a minute. You say that there's nothing you desire. But wait a minute; it sure seems like there's a lot of things you desire. It seems like you were desiring for you to have more blessing, and for the wicked to stop mocking the Lord, and for the unrighteous to stop having everything they want, and for you to be able to have the freedom to speak what's on your mind. It seems like there's a lot of things that you desired. But in verse 25, you say there's nothing you desire of this earth." And I think he would say, "You're exactly right. Before I went to worship, I wanted a lot of things; but when I went to worship, I was reminded I just need one thing." And the one thing he must have is the one thing he can never lose, and it's his God.

Brothers and sisters, hear me clearly this morning. There's only one thing you need ultimately. The one thing you need is something that can stand forever, something that can be with you in life and death, something that can take care of your sin, something that can bring forgiveness to your soul, something that can welcome you into heaven, something that can provide for you for all eternity. The one thing you must have just so happens to be the one thing this world can never take away from you.

Now, I want you to notice that as Asaph says this, nothing in the world has changed. The wicked are still there. The violent evildoers are still there. People are still cheating their way to the top. None of that's gone away. None of that's changed. The only thing that's changed is Asaph has turned his attention from "them" to "You."

Just look at the pronouns throughout the chapter. The first half of the chapter is all about "they" and "them." Verse 4, "They have no pangs. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble. They are not stricken. Verse 7, "Their eyes, their hearts." Verse 8, "They scoff." Verse 9, "They set their mouths." He's so consumed with "they" and "them."

When he went to the sanctuary, he stopped thinking about "they" and "them" and he started thinking about "the Lord." Verse 18, "Truly You set them." Verse 20, "You, O Lord." Verse 23, "I am continually with You; You hold my right hand." Verse 24, "You guide me. You will receive me to glory." Verse 25, "Whom have I in heaven but You. There is nothing I desire on earth besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." That's what changed. It wasn't the world around him, it was his mind within him.

"Lord, before I came to the sanctuary, I was angry, I was frustrated, I was confused. I was like a beast before You trying to make sense of what's going on in the world. But when I came to the sanctuary of God, I stopped putting my focus on them, and I see You; and now I understand, You are the strength of my heart, You are my portion, You are the only thing I need. And the one thing I must have is the one thing I can never lose."

Verse 27, "For behold, those who are far from You shall perish; You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to You. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge." It's an interesting thing, isn't it? He says, "For me it's good to be near You." This is something the unbeliever cannot say. And let me just be very clear and very honest with all of you this morning: if you do not know Christ as your Savior, the most frightening thing imaginable for you would be in the uninterrupted

presence of God. For an unbeliever to die, take their last breath and meet the Lord is the most frightening thing your heart could ever fathom. And Asaph has come to understand, "Why would I be envious of the wicked? I know how this ends for them."

David wrote in Psalm 37:1, "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!" Verse 7 of Psalm 37, "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way over the man who carries out evil devices!" And you say, "Asaph, you ought to go back and read the Psalms. Why don't you understand it's already been there?" And I would say to me and to you, this is part of why you need to keep going to the sanctuary of God, because our minds are prone to wander, our hearts are prone to stray. We need the clarity that comes from singing and praying and reading and preaching the word of God, and to remind ourselves of what matters most.

"But for me it's good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge," - look at the last sentence in verse 28 - "that I may tell of all Your works." There's something here that always interests me when I read Psalm 73 and it's the juxtaposition between verse 28 and verse 15. In verse 15, he says, "I was so frustrated, I was such a mess, I couldn't even speak, I couldn't even talk out loud my life was so miserable. I couldn't even say what was on my heart, until I went to the sanctuary of God. And in the sanctuary, I began to take my mind off of the wicked and on to the Lord, and off of temporal things and onto eternal things. And now that I have, and now the Lord has reminded me of what I have in Him, now I have a message to share. Now I have something to say. Now I can tell people that I rejoice in the Lord, and He is my rock, and He is my refuge; and I will tell of His works."

Now just a moment of honesty here. If I were Asaph and I had written Psalm 73, and if the Lord had done this work in my heart, and if going into the house of God had produced such clarity and such worship that I wrote things like, "God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever; You are my refuge," I'll just be honest; if I had written Psalm 73, I would go back and I would erase verses 1 to 16, wouldn't you? I mean, it's got his

name on it. If I had written all this, and God had taken me to the place of where He landed, I'm going back to the first half and I'm, "delete, delete." I'm starting with verse 17: "I went to church, I thought about the Lord, and the Lord is my refuge, and I want to tell you about it."

Aren't you glad he didn't delete it? Aren't you glad he left it in? Aren't you glad through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the Bible writers don't go back and clean up, that the Bible doesn't hide the faults of its heroes? See, because Asaph is not the last person who's going to struggle with these things. And even if you wouldn't dare say it out loud, Asaph did. It's written down and preserved.

And if you ever say, "Is there anyplace in Scripture to go to when you look at the world and you feel weary?" go to Psalm 73. If you ever say, "Am I the only person that sometimes thinks living by godly, righteous standards may not be worth it, because it feels in vain compared to what the rest of the world's doing?" go to Psalm 73. If you ever think to yourself that you can't take any more wicked people mocking the things of God, and you just feel like you're at the end of it all, go to Psalm 73 and meet a man named Asaph, who felt what you feel, who thought what you are thinking, who has wrestled with what you're wrestling, and has come to the place where he did not hide or clean up his faults and flaws, but has left for you the path of his discovery, that he was like an animal before the Lord, until he came to the sanctuary of God. And in that moment of clarity, he discerned their end, and he remembered that the Lord holds him, the Lord counsels him, the Lord will receive him to glory; and because of those truths, he has a story to tell.

You may have come into this place this morning so wearied by the world. Maybe for you, you've seen so much news coverage the last few days of the Middle East and you just feel like you can't take anymore. Or maybe, if you're honest, you would say, "You know what; I know that should concern me, but here's the truth: I've got such a war raging in my own soul, I can't even get past that." That may be true for you today. And you came to the sanctuary of God. And in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day, you've been reminded to take your attention off the world and put it on the Lord, and to

not let your heart be consumed with temporal things, but instead, to think about what matters forever.

And if you are a believer, be reminded: He holds you, He counsels you, and He will one day bring you home to be with Him. And on that day, more than you've ever known before, you will be able to confess that your life has been about Christ, and to die has been gain. And when you remember that, you are free to truly live, not by fear, and not by being vindictive, but by setting your mind on the One who is good, who is in control, and never leaves His people.

[Prayer] Lord, we do thank You today for Your word. I pray that You would use it to bring encouragement to Your people. I pray, Lord, for those who are not believers that are here with us, that their own heart and conscience would be seared this morning to the place of understanding that they need to turn to You, to run to You, that this world has nothing for them. But through the work of Your Son, You forgive, You save, You restore, and You can make all things new. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.