

Where It All Goes From Here

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Bible Text: Revelation 18:21-19:10
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I invite you to turn tonight to the last book of the Bible. If you're visiting, we're working through Revelation, and we're almost through this book. Tonight we are in chapter 18, verses 21, and we will read through 19, verse 10, 19, verse 10 of the book of Revelation. Last book of the Bible. Chapter 18, beginning at verse 21. Context of this chapter is judgment on Babylon. On Babylon. This is the word of the Lord. Let's begin at verse 21 of chapter 18.

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; 22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, 23 and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." 3 Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" 5 And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." 6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to

me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

And there ends the reading of God's word tonight.

Well, I've said repeatedly through our study in the book of Revelation, one of the blessings of living in a world full of so much escalation of turmoil is that we are really beginning to see things more clearly and things that the Scriptures have said a long time seem to be taking on a lot more meaning for us. I had more response when I least expected it and this is how it always goes to keep me humble, but the sermons that I think are terrible are the ones you like. I never can figure that out. That's just how it always goes. But last Sunday night, I probably had, in my years here, probably the most response. It was really encouraging but I was kind of puzzled. Maybe it was because I quoted "Hotel California." I don't know. But I asked one of the elders, "Why the response? Why do you think there was such a response to that sermon?" He said, "Pastor, because everything you're preaching from Revelation, we are seeing so clearly unfold before our eyes in society. We're deeply troubled by everything we're seeing, the divisions, the wars, Vegas, all this stuff. This stuff is poisoning our minds and it's constantly before us and it's always being thrown at us and we never know what's coming next. What is coming next? It's just another thing. What is the new thing this week that's going to happen?" But we come to Revelation and we see that everything this book is telling us is true. What a way to confirm our faith, isn't it, as we're hearing this and seeing these things happen in front of us. It's a living word. This word is sharper than any two-edged sword. It's rightly diagnosing exactly what we're seeing happening. That's what Revelation's been doing for us and this was written way back in A.D. 90, wasn't it?

Well, I hope you've been encouraged, because as you feel the pressure of living in Babylon, and as Babylon is crumbling all around you, and all of this is distressing, and we worry about the future, and we think about these things, Revelation has a wonderful message for you and that message has been steadily the whole way through, this has never been your home to begin with. It hasn't. Truth be told, like this morning, we've enjoyed such a good reign of peace and prosperity that we were blessed to live in that time and we're thankful to enjoy that in this life. It's been that kind of life for us here. But because of that, we've forgotten the real struggle, haven't we? And now that things turn so quickly and we see how societies change and where things can go, and how now the system works, a beast and antichrist and the false prophet, and how Babylon is functioning, upheaval marks our society, we're understanding this thing's under judgment, Revelations telling us. And now you're much more ready to listen to what the Bible's telling you as you actually see this unfold. That's what's happening. That's what's happening. You're hearing the message a little clearer now. You don't have an enduring city here. Our home is not of this world. We look for another city whose builder and maker is God. And that's where we're being taken tonight. That's the beauty of this. We

have a feast held out for us. We have something we're aiming towards, somewhere we're going. Paul called it an upward calling from God in Christ.

And so that's what's being captured tonight here is the finality of Babylon's fall. Babylon is done here in Revelation now. We are dealing with Babylon. We're going to look in chapter 19 that the beast is going to be dealt with and the false prophet. We'll see what God does to them. But here's Babylon's end and as we come to Babylon's end, what is then described immediately after this is a glorious celebration in heaven. Everything you've been waiting for, everything you've been looking for is now described. The feast that we're all waiting for in glory is where this ends up tonight. So the effect of this and the purpose of this is to say, hold on just a little bit longer. Everything that has been promised, everything that has been preached to you, everything you've been told, here it is. It's coming. It's coming soon. And I'll give you a little detail, an explanation into it tonight so that you keep your eyes on it. It's coming. That's the purpose of this. So we're looking at the finality of Babylon's fall and the beginning of the eternal feast, such a beautiful section tonight that is described for us.

Chapter 18 of Revelation must have meant a lot to the Holy Spirit. That's a long one, isn't it? John was really affected by chapter 18. There was a lot of detail about Babylon's fall there. It's telling us how committed God is to Babylon's fall. If you're a visitor tonight, we looked at what Babylon means and we looked at its symbol using the graphic imagery of a prostitute and everything that she does to lure us in to take us away from the worship of Jesus. It's everything of this world, this world system, everything that's pulling us away, everything that seduces us in all forms in a cup, is pictured there, a golden cup of abominations. You have a million things that are in that cup that we are offered to take us away and try to lead us away from Jesus. All of these bad things Babylon has done, it's pictured as a prostitute who is persecuting us, who hates us. And that's the point.

Dennis Johnson, in his commentary on Revelation, I thought asked a really important question that I want to quote tonight. I think it's really helpful to look at this and it answers why 18 and 19 are so important in addressing Babylon's fall. Which is the dragon's, he asks, more dangerous weapon as he assaults the church in our time and place? Is it the beast symbolic of the state's power, "to intimidate through violent persecution and martyrdom. Is it that? Is it the beast symbolic of the state's power to intimidate through violent persecution and even martyrdom or is it the beauty of the harlot, the portrait of the culture's power to seduce through intoxicating idolatry of prosperity and the alluring invitation to adulterous compromise? What's more dangerous? Get that last part? The culture's power to seduce through intoxicating idolatry of prosperity and the alluring invitation to adulterous compromise.

Well, I think you know the answer. I think you know the answer to that. Has the political powers of our time and the days you've lived intimidated you through violent persecution? Have you known that? I haven't. I know many Christians around the world have but I haven't known that. But I'll tell you what I have been pressed with is Babylon's seduction and that's been really hard to live in. That's been really hard to live in and maintain the cause of Christ, to maintain a loyalty, to maintain a heart that worships him.

It gets pulled this way and that way all the time. If I were living in Iran or North Korea, I could say Satan's greatest tool is the oppressive government but I'm not saying that. That may change. For us, Babylon has seduced us. It's used every kind of sinful temptation in a free society that it can, adultery, pornography, prosperity, idolatry, on and on and on and on to seduce us. And what chapter 18 is saying is the Lord's saying, "I've had it with what Babylon's done to you. I've had it. Even though everything's draped in purple, even though everything looks beautiful, even though everything looks strong, even though the city of Babylon looks promising, even though all of this looks like it'll go on forever, even though it's so promising and offers us so much, I see what it's doing to you and your children." This is what the Lord's telling us. "You have got to look with me through the appearances and see Babylon as a whore." That's what Revelation's graphic language is of chapter 17.

It promises you all this stuff. It seduces you away. It lures your children. And it martyrs you that way. You don't think you've martyred them that way, do you? It's trying to martyr you that way. This is why I quoted the "Hotel California" where he could say, "We're in the receiving business, but you never leave." He understood it. Babylon, said Revelation 18, has fallen. Babylon has fallen. It's a prison. It's a pit for everything unclean. It's full of all kinds of demonic activity. I know you feel trapped in it at times. It's coming down, this whole system. The earthly city is coming down. The world as a center of seduction, a pleasure-mad, hedonistic society, a world in which you live that desires to pull you in and to hold you and to keep you and for you to find happiness in it and then it tries to destroy you. Remember the beautiful call that came out last time, "Come out of her, my people. Come out of her lest you share in those sins and the plague she's receiving. You're mine. I purchased you with the blood of Jesus. You're my people. Don't join your bodies," that's what 1 Corinthians said in 1 Corinthians 6. We are the members of Christ. Shall we take as our bodies the members of Christ and join it with a prostitute? See, you understand that now, don't you?

Well, now we have what Revelation is doing is describing the climax of Babylon's fall and everything that goes with it that has lured us is here captured in a kind of staged process. So notice what's mentioned here in verse 22. Notice here that everything goes with Babylon in the fall that has lured us away and lo and behold, what do you have mentioned? Verse 22, the sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, trumpeters, tears shall not be heard in you anymore. Her music's done. How much power does music have in this society? Really, do you need me to unpack that? You know how much power music has and look at the voices and look what they're saying to you in the words at times. I'm not saying all secular music we can't listen to. That's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is you know it's power. You know how it has been a mouthpiece of the devil. You know what it says. It's done, I'm taking it all away.

And then he says, her craftsmen are gone. Can you imagine a city with no craftsmen? Nobody working. All the stuff. It's over.

And then he moves on and he says, all the happiness is taken out of her. The voice of a bridegroom and the bride shall not be found in you anymore. We think of the beauty of a

wedding. Everything in Babylon that he's talking about here is everything that is luxury and seduction that it has offered us in life to take us away into ease and carelessness, he's put an end to. Why? Because she's been martyring us. She's been martyring us. She's martyring your children. She's trying. She's been killing people with this seduction for a long time. This is what I was trying to read to you from Glenn Frey last week. He got it. He saw it. He knew it. He loved it. But he couldn't get out of it. And so, v. 24 plainly says it, doesn't it? It says, the blood of the prophets and the saints and all who were slain on the earth by her. Martyrdom is taken in two ways at times. Martyrdom is taken as actually the beast rising up in persecution like we talked about this morning and putting a stop, putting an end to people's lives or martyrdom is the woman martyring us and our children this way. You have to think about it that way.

Now, as I came here last week, I was studying this, I thought to myself, I think we need a lot more righteous anger, righteous anger against Babylon than we have. When you see it clearly, when you see that this city stands in contrast to the city that is held out for you where righteousness dwells and true happiness with the Lord, it is something that when the Lord calls us out, we should be so thankful to be called out of it. Revelation is unmasking it. It's showing us that it's ugly. This has no hope. So here was the most important verse for me this last week as I was reading this and reflecting on it. It was this verse. The first verse, verse 21, that we considered tonight. Listen to this language, "Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more.'" This was a great millstone from a mill that was turned by an animal weighing a weight that no man could lift, okay? What John understood was by this symbol was that once Babylon is fallen, it's never coming back. It's done forever.

I was thinking to myself, we know this, some of the details, not all the details have been revealed, but when President Obama and the Seals, when they had captured Osama bin Laden, they took his body way out to the middle of the ocean because they didn't want the thing enshrined in worship and they put a stone around that body and dropped it to the bottom of the sea. I thought to myself, what an image, huh? What an image. Did you hear what was just said? He took the stone, put it around the woman's neck, and dropped her to the bottom of the sea. Feeling that? That language is taken from Isaiah. But a few commentators, I thought, the commentators seemed to miss the biggest teaching on this subject from Jesus himself. Remember what Jesus said? "Whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble, whoever causes one of those who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." If you have tonight little children sitting next to you, look at them. Has Babylon caused your children to sin? Does Babylon cause you to sin? Oh, I know you're sinful by nature. That's been dealt with. The Lord has forgiven you and dealt with the sinful nature problem in the cross. I'm talking about Babylon. Here are these children growing up in this world, this violent world. They've got all kinds of things going through their minds. They're developing. They've got hormones. All the pressures of identity. They're trying to find meaning to life, right? And we as parents, we're working so hard and if you're a grandparent, you're in the same place right now thinking about your grandkids, aren't you? We're educating them. We're loving them. We're trying to shepherd them. And we

know what these kids are all exposed to. How hard is this? We want them to find their identity in Jesus. And boys and girls, I know if you're listening to me right now, this is what we want for you. We want you to find real happiness in Jesus. Salvation. We want you to know this peace but you're being hit all the time. I think what will my children struggle with as this keeps going? What will we have to address? I know what I've already had to address because the cup of that prostitute is constantly being held out to them.

I mean, think about it, if you love your children, shouldn't that bring some amount of righteous anger against this city? You see? This is what's going to lead to the ultimate praise in a minute. It's hard enough with their sinful appetites to train them to see their need for Jesus, and then I have a prostitute knocking at their door? That's the language. Maybe it's just helpful to read Proverbs 7 for a minute, talking about a youth, a young boy. A young man. Listen to this. "Keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' and call insight your intimate friend, to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words. For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice." I was looking out one day, "and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness. And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait. She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him, 'I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you. I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home.' With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life. And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways." Are you discerning Babylon in all this? "Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng." She threw down mighty men. "Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death."

That's something to reflect on, isn't it, because it's just what he's describing in Revelation. How much has Babylon preyed on us? How much has she caused and leveled us this way, offering you happiness and then pulling it all away? Leaving you in misery. Trying to ruin your life. You hear what's being said to you tonight? This is what's being said to you tonight, an angel took a great millstone and put it around her neck and dropped her in the ocean. She's done forever. You see the praise now that's about to happen? It's over. This world is done. Do you want that freedom? I use the word freedom. Maybe this helps

to illustrate. It's hard to let go, isn't it? But once you do, you're really free. I was thinking, how could I illustrate this tonight about the desire to be free from this because I still hold on to it. And I was thinking, you know, it was very similar to an experience I had with the sport of basketball and my love for basketball. It was the first 20 years of my life. I lived the gym, in the gym. My father was a coach. I carried around that ball. I loved that ball. I grew up in a gym. Everyone knew me, all my dad's players growing up. It was basketball, basketball, basketball, basketball. I loved basketball. By the time I got to college, all these years of playing basketball, I'm already having problems. And I get to college, and I begin to loathe the practices. I hated the practices, and then I had a coach who would yell at me all the time, yell at everyone, not just me. And I would look out, as I was driving to practice, three hours of grueling practice, and I'd look out at all these free people who didn't have to do that and I remember my last year when I finally completed it, college basketball, I had an overwhelming sense of joy. It was done. I was free. I had the best last year of college I ever had. I mean, seriously. You ever felt that? The burden of everything, all of a sudden, it's come down. You're free. See, you kind of can get it, can't you? But you don't really get it yet. You will.

I know. I think I've captured it. But I wouldn't let go of basketball. I wanted to hold on to it. I ran with it as long as I could and I didn't have to. For years, you've loved Babylon. You've built a nice home here. You've made lots of money. You begin to realize over time, looking at how life goes, how affected you are and how affected your children are living here. You begin to say, you know, this isn't that great, especially as you get older. But you still hold on, man. You still hold on to it. You still hold on to it. The dream, you still want it. You've got it all mapped out. But it becomes more and more oppressive, doesn't it? More and more oppressive. Pain begins to grow. Confusion. Disorder. Sorrow gets stronger as life goes on. There's a reason the Proverbs say enjoy your youth because the difficult days come. You live in this tension of holding on, holding on, holding on, and yet within you, you're a believer and you want to be free. And you read in Revelation like I'm looking out at the freedom, you read in Revelation of the glory to come. Wow, I want that. But no, I still want Babylon. Freedom is offered to you. Freedom to not ever have to lock your doors again. Freedom that no more will you ever feel the pain of death again. No longer pain in a body that's already dying right now as all of you are sitting here. You've come to the realization as the coach yelled at me, as I became totally weary, I don't love basketball anymore. You don't love Babylon anymore. And the more and more as the Lord trains you and grows you, he opens your eyes, this place is killing us. Right? That's Revelation 18. "I took a millstone for you guys and I put it around that woman and I dropped her in the sea and she's done. You'll never have to deal with this again. You're free."

Notice here what's happening now in Revelation. Heaven breaks out in ultimate joy and praise and leaping around like the man who was healed in Acts 3. "After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.' Once more they cried out, 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders and the four living

creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!' And from the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.'" All the heavenly courts, all the multitude of the saints are pictured here, you. What are they doing? "You saved us from that. You delivered us from that. You judged Babylon for us. You rescued us and our children. You did it all and here we are in eternal glory with you." And a voice breaks out from the throne and says, "Praise him! Praise him! He did what he said he would do. He fulfilled his word. That word is true." You're there. Because you see how wonderful he is, you're experiencing the ultimate bliss of happiness. You made it. You made it. There's no more sorrow. There's no more oppression. There's none of this. You have rest. You have rest.

Truth to be told, we're oppressed. and don't even realize it at times but the Lord is telling us, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered in the heart of man the wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love him." The ultimate expression of freedom, of joy, of rest. Here's my favorite part tonight. "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'" Come in. Here's the imagery. The feast has begun. You are the bride of Christ. You've been prepared by God all these years. You're totally radiant in his sight. Pure. Just. Your sins have all been dealt with because of Jesus. And guess what? Once this is all over, the feast begins.

Can you imagine stepping into it for the first time, you guys? Can you think about it with me for a minute? You look around. New resurrected body. You're absolutely overwhelmed. You've never seen anything like it. The hall is splendid. You take a step, and you look, and there's Abraham. There's Moses. There's Elisha. There's Paul. All these figures I've heard preach my whole life. But then I look up, and there's the bridegroom and he has a cup in his hand. "Come here. This is for you. This is for you. I promise we're going to drink this anew in the Kingdom. This is for you." In the wedding feast, John knew, the groom would come in the best attire with his friends and they would sing and they would bear torches and they would come to the betrothed, and they'd have a great procession taking his bride home, and they would take the bride into the dining hall and the great feast would be spread of the most glorious festivities for seven days. Just pure happiness and bliss.

"I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping or the cry of distress. No more shall there be an infant who lives but a few days." Have you lost an infant? "Or an old man who does not fill out his days." I'm dealing with that right now. "For the young man shall die a hundred years old." He's using figures here. He's not saying there's going to be death. He's saying this is not going to happen. "The sinner as a hundred years old shall be accursed." In other words, no one's going to be that young. They're going to live forever. "They shall build houses and

inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat. For like the days of a tree shall be the days of my people and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity." Yeah, living in Babylon, we know that. "For they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. The dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in my holy mountain."

You know, when Jesus was asked at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, "Are you going to make the water wine? What are you going to do about this problem of no wine?" Remember what he said? "Why are you bothering me? It's not my time yet." You understand that? "My time's coming. I'm going to pour the wine in that feast forever." That day's coming. From heaven, you sang tonight, "He came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died." John is so overwhelmed at this point, he is so overwhelmed. Can you feel it? He falls down and starts worshiping the angel. The angel says, "Get up. Get up," whoever this is, "worship God." He wants you to see how overwhelmed John could hardly control himself with this thought. And that's what's coming.

I'm reminded of Revelation 7. "How much longer, Lord? How much longer," they're asking? "Just wait a little while longer until the rest of your servants and their brethren, who would be killed as you were, is completed." I don't think he'll mind tonight, but if he does, he'll forgive me. John B. this morning said to me, he goes, "Well, pastor, this is hard." He said, "I think this is the way the Lord's calling me home." And I said, "John, we'll all be there soon. This is all coming down our path soon." But think of what's just held out for you. Think of what the Lord's promised you all tonight. Think of what was just described. Do you want to stay in Babylon? I don't. I know we hold on but the Lord wants you to know, "I've got all this for you, and I'm going to deal with her. So come out of her. Come out right now. Come to me. And I promise you, real soon, we're all going to be together drinking and having a feast together of the new wine. Just a little bit longer. Just a little bit longer and Babylon you will see no more."

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for such comforting words tonight. Thank you for such a splendid encouragement of the glory that is ours. And we know that we're not promised any time here. We could go out this week and it could end. But you've been so good to tell us these things and to give us light and to save us by the precious blood of the Lamb. "From heaven," we sang tonight, "he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died." And we look forward, Father, to this feast that's coming. Our minds are so small, our grip is still too tight on Babylon that it's hard for us even to imagine. But prepare our hearts for this. Give us strong faith to believe it and let us see so clearly as we have been through this book what you've done for us in delivering us and setting us free so that whether we live or die, even if that's

*tomorrow, we belong to the Lord and nothing indeed can separate us from that love.
Thank you for such an encouraging word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*