

## The Power of Ministry Grace

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

June 13, 2021

I invite you to return to 2 Corinthians 4, and we'll wrap up the three-part series that we have been doing on the Christian ministry. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, today we're looking at verses 13 to 18, the last part of that chapter. But we will begin by reading the whole chapter, starting in verse 1. 2 Corinthians 4:1.

Paul writes, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled," only, "to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded

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the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel, the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants,” or slaves, “for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

“For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will

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raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

That describes, that chapter describes a true ministry of the Gospel. That describes, or should describe, every faithful church. Describes a church that is doing the will of the Lord in the Lord's way. And I just want to tell you at the very outset, as we wrap up this three-part series today: this is what ministry looks like. And I just want to encourage you, wherever God takes you from this point forward, accept no substitute. This is what ministry looks like.

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The ministry of the Gospel, in which all of us, as church members, all of us are partners in this ministry, this ministry is a grace from God. Our salvation starts by his grace, by his grace alone. Our sanctification, also, by his grace. Our participation, then, in Gospel ministry, that is also by the grace of God. It's God's grace through and through, from start to finish, from here to eternity.

God's grace is what produces faith in us, which Paul speaks to in verse 13. His grace is what gives us the hope that we have fixed our eyes upon in verse 14. God's grace is what produces the love that drives and motivates our ministry in verse 15, and it's his grace that instructs us in verses 16 through 18, in giving us an eternal perspective that we need for conducting ministry. You can see faith, hope, and love, all given by grace, an eternal perspective on life, that too by God's grace, so that wisdom comes by his grace as well. All of this by the grace of God.

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And you can even think about this section in particular, the Reformers must have had this in mind when they thought about the five *solas* of the Reformation. Paul put faith in what he believed. He trusted the Scripture. That's *sola scriptura*; that's *sola fide*. We see all of this is by the grace of God alone, *sola gratia*. We can see all of it is centered on Christ, so *solas Christus*. Christ alone. And all of it to the glory of God alone, *solus Deo gloria*. This is, really, a reformation text. They discovered, rediscovered, what real ministry should look like after being under the shroud of Roman Catholicism for a millennium.

We, too, in our country, have been under a shroud of false versions, false understandings of ministry. People who call themselves pastors are preaching this very Sunday. Or, if you call it preaching. They're sharing thoughts from a lectern or walking around on a stage, giving counsel, some of it downright poisonous. And I'm afraid that many in our country are still under that veil, a shroud, really, of unbelief, because they cannot see their way through to the true grace of God and to a true ministry of God.

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Since it is the grace of God in the Gospel that explains everything: our salvation, our sanctification, ongoing participation in the ministry of the Gospel, it is fitting that God gets all the credit, and we get no credit. Again, that is contrary to so many purported ministries, things that pass them off, -selves off as churches, and people who pass themselves off as ministers, pastors, who draw so much attention to themselves. Since it's God's grace from start to finish, shouldn't God get all the credit? Shouldn't he get all the glory? As Paul writes about in verse 15, it's all to the glory of God. Psalm 115:1, we just read, "Not to us, Oh Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory." That's why we live. Is there any greater purpose or cause? Not at all.

And so, for our four points this morning in our outline, I want to show you four graces of God that empower Gospel ministry. Four graces of God that empower Gospel ministry. Any true ministry that you see, you can measure them by these four graces from God. Are those graces of God active in and through that ministry, that church, and that, those shepherds that you are listening to? And the immediate application, obviously, here in our setting, in our context, the immediate application is to

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pastors and elders, to those who are charged with the shepherding of God's flock. But the application extends, and I would say not extends forced, it's not a forced extension, this is a necessary extension of this teaching. It extends to all of you. All of us as Christians. This applies to us. We are all partakers of and partners in the Gospel ministry.

So, as I've been praying for you, and I've been praying for this time we have together, my prayer today is, is a four-fold prayer: that God will deepen our conviction, that God will give us grace to deepen our conviction; that he'll strengthen our resolution; that he'll direct our motivation, so that our motivation is properly focused and accurate; and that he'll inform our aspiration, what it is that we aspire to, and that he'll do that by the outpouring of these four manifestations of his grace in and among us. That's my prayer for all of us today.

First grace, number one. First grace is conviction in ministry. Conviction in ministry, energized by faith. Conviction in ministry, energized by faith. Conviction in ministry comes from believing God. Taking him at his word. As Paul says, there, in

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verse 13, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe," or, present tense: we are also believing, "and so we also speak," we are also speaking." The continual habit, the ongoing habit of our lives is believing, and therefore, speaking. This is what we do.

"Spirit of faith," there, that's not another way to refer to the Holy Spirit. He is not talking, he's not calling the Holy Spirit a, the spirit of faith. He is talking, there, about a spirit of faith as an attitude of faith. Spirit, that which animates us. That's what, which gives us life is a, a life of faith. So, he's talking here, really, about conviction. Specifically, it's the conviction that comes simply from believing God. As I said, it's from taking him at his word; reading what it says and trusting, believing, acting upon it. Sadly, it's not a trait that's common among many so-called preachers these days, let alone a number of professing Christians. But it is a vital, indispensable virtue, energizing a true, faithful ministry in the Gospel.



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Former Princeton Seminary Professor, Dr. Hughes Oliphant Old: he published a massive, seven-volume work called *The History of the Reading and Preaching of Scripture in the Christian Church*.

Seven volumes. Started publishing in 1998 and finished, I think, in 2010. History of Reading and Preaching of Scripture in the Christian Church. And in volume seven, the final volume, it was on contemporary preachers, listening to their preaching and giving commentary. And one of the preachers he listened to was John MacArthur.

Dr. Old took up the question: "Why do so many people listen to John MacArthur?" He's a man trained in, not John MacArthur but Hughes Oliphant Old, is a man who is trained in liberal theology. He's accustomed to liberal preaching. And so, Dr. Old was truly mystified at why so many people would listen to Dr. MacArthur's preaching. So, in his research he gathered a series of sermons from Matthew 8 and Matthew 9, which, Dr. Old had personally found very, very difficult to preach. They're accounts of Jesus calming the storm, casting out demons, healing different people of different maladies. They're stories that all had one theme: a supernatural element. All in Jesus' ministry, the power of God, miracles in Jesus' ministry; and that

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conflicted with the skepticism that Dr. Old had imbibed from his enlightenment training.

Dr. Old wrote this, "The place where I have always had the greatest trouble is the whole matter of exorcism. I really do not believe in Satan, demonic spirits, demon possession. Maybe I ought to, but I don't. I'm willing to agree that I may have been too strongly influenced by the intellectual world in which I was brought up to fully grasp the full teaching of Scripture, but that is the way it is. What is more than clear to me, after listening to these sermons, is that those who can take the text the way it is seem to make a lot more sense of it than those who are always trying to second guess it. Surely, one of the greatest strengths of MacArthur's preaching ministry is his complete confidence in the text."

How did John MacArthur find complete confidence in the text? How did any of us find complete confidence in the text? For John, for all of us, he submitted his reason to Scripture. He let his intellect become a tool to educate his faith. He followed the dictum of Augustine, who said, "I believe in order to

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understand." That is well, what Paul is speaking about here, "We believe therefore we speak." His ministry comes out of a deep believing, a conviction. And that is the same spirit of faith that Paul found attested to all through the Scriptures. It's the common experience of every believer throughout all time that to believe is then to speak.

That quotation comes from Psalm 116. You can actually return there, if you'd like to. Psalm 116. This happens to be right after the text that we read this morning for Scripture reading. So, you can find your way back there quickly. Psalm 116. Paul, Paul quotes this because something in this psalm stands out as quite remarkable to him, but it's interesting to even imagine what drew him to this psalm in the first place.

The quotation, in the, in this quotation, and in the psalmist, the, er, in the psalm, the psalmist begins this way, he says, "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he 's inclined his ear to me," and, "therefore I will call on him as long as I live." Why is he calling upon the Lord? Verse 3, because "The snares of death encompassed me; the

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pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. And, and, "then I called on the name of the LORD: 'Oh, LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!'"

So, we can imagine why Paul was reading such a psalm in light of what he has written in 2 Corinthians 4:8. "Afflicted, not crushed; perplexed, not despairing," and so on. Times like that in ministry drive you to the Psalms. And so it was with Paul. He was driven to the Psalms; his mind was saturated with the teaching of the Psalms. He found such comfort there, such hope. He learned how to face suffering. He saw, in and through his suffering, just like the psalmist has seen all through the Psalms, he saw the goodness and the wisdom of God in his suffering. Gave him perspective. It gave him an anchor for his hope.

And, as Paul meditated on Psalm 116, which is a psalm of gratitude for deliverance from suffering, he stumbled across a precious gemstone in verse 10. "I believed, even when I spoke," or, in the Septuagint translation, that's what Paul was quoting from when he wrote it in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "I believed

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therefore I spoke." And that's followed by, in Psalm 116:10, it's followed by the consequence of speaking out in faith because we believe, we speak. But then, "I am greatly afflicted." I am severely afflicted.

And people say to me, Well, Travis, why don't you just stop speaking? You shouldn't say such things because you know it generates conflict. And you know it creates controversy. I can't help myself. I believe, therefore I speak, even though I know I will greatly suffer for it at times.

But that's the pattern, the same spirit of faith shared by all true believers throughout all time, throughout all history, without any exceptions. We believe, and therefore we speak, and therefore we suffer for it. No wonder Paul received such comfort from that psalm. And, and a great comfort in the gem there in verse 10, I believed, therefore, I spoke.

The Hebrew word, there, translated, believed, in our text, it's the verb *aman*; means to believe in, to trust in, and it corresponds to the Greek verb *pisteuo*. And, inherent in the verb

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is the idea of not just believing and trusting, but obeying. That's the outward fruit of believing. Inherent in it is obedience. The Hebrew scholar, Walter Moberly, says, "*Aman* has the added sense of acting in response to what's heard." Acting in response to what's heard with trust or obedience.

But from that verb *aman*, interestingly, there come several concepts, and they form the very foundation of practicing any true religion at all. It starts with the noun coming from the verb *aman*: the noun *emet*. *Emet* is the Hebrew word for, truth. Psalm 119 is a clear example, where the psalmist rejoices in the Torah, the law of God, the truth, the teaching of God, the commandments of God, the statutes, all of that. Verse 1, verse 43, "...take not the word of truth," *emet*, entire, "utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules." In verse 142, "...your law is true," *emet*." Verse 151, "...all your commandments are true," and verse, in fact, verse 160 says, "The sum of your word is truth..."

Whether it's the whole or the parts, whether it's individual commandments and statutes, or it's the entire sum of your word;

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the psalmist says he is affirming the verbal, that's the individual parts, and the plenary, that's the whole, inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. That's contained in the word *emet*, and it's taught all through the text of Scripture in the context. In other words, we believe, *aman*, because it is truth, *emet*.

In addition to the inerrancy of Scripture, *emet* also includes an affirmation of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture: that what it says it says with a divine authority, and what it says it says to perfect sufficiency. Moberly says by referring to Scripture as *emet*, the psalmist, quote, "...does not just mean that they are true as opposed to false, but," the, the, "they also have the character of being trustworthy and reliable for people to base their lives on." He goes on to say, "Old Testament usage of *emet* characteristically takes on moral implications." End Quote.

So what Paul is seeing here, what he's saying to us, what he's written to us, is that by acknowledging Scripture as true, it obligates you, then, to do something with it; to do something

about it. Namely, to speak. Shows up in another word that comes from the verb *aman*, and that's a familiar word we say all the time, *amen*. We say it as, ah-men, or ay-men. Moberly says, "To say *amen*," genuer, "genuinely is an act of self-commitment, for it implies appropriate action on the part of the speaker." Think about that when you say, amen. Is that what you mean when you say amen? A commitment of obedience? Are you professing out loud before all these witnesses when you say amen: That is true, and, therefore, that is what I will do. Can I get an amen? You've just bound yourself.

Putting that all together, here's how Paul interpreted and applied that little pearl from Psalm 116 verse 10, he's basically saying: I believed, therefore I take action, namely, I speak. I open my mouth with God's truth; I let that out. I believe God's Word is true, *emet*, because it's divinely inspired; it is verbally and plenary iner, inerrant, no errors. Therefore, it's authoritative, it binds my conscience, and therefore, it's all-sufficient.



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So, by acknowledging that, I'm obligated to respond with the *amen*, my pledge of commitment, binding my will to the outworking of my conscience that is convinced and convicted that this is true. I can do nothing about it. I have to act on it. Since I believe, therefore I must take action. I've a solemn, a holy duty, to speak what I know to be true. That's what Paul is saying.

And folks, that is the conviction of ministry. That believing conviction is what drives all true preaching. If that conviction is not in the preaching it does not come across as authoritative, it doesn't have an exhortative element to it, it doesn't command the conscience, it doesn't call people to obedience. It just, at the very best, without that believing and that conviction, all, at the very best all it does is just roll out a series of facts for people's consideration. It leaves them untroubled by it, in their conscience. This is a conviction that Paul has in the ministry that's energized by faith. His faith, what he believes, what he knows to be true binds his conscience. That instructs his intellect. That commands his will. It says to him, this truth says to him, you go out there, and you say something. You get out there, and you speak the truth. You

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preach the Gospel. So, energized by true faith, that is the speaking that comes with power, with divine authority.

Spurgeon says, "The most powerful speech which has ever been uttered by the lip of man has emanated from a heart fully persuaded of the truth of God. Not only the psalmist, but such men as Luther, and Calvin, and other great witnesses for the faith, could each one most heartily say, 'I believed, therefore have I spoken.'" Again, it's the same pattern for every true Christian. It's the same spirit of faith. We share it; shared by all true believers throughout all history with a, without any exceptions. We believe, we speak, and we suffer for it. As the psalmist said, "I believe therefore I speak," And then that common consequence of speaking out: "I am greatly afflicted." I'm being persecuted for this.

Returning over to Psalm, er, 2 Corinthians 4, verse 13, Paul has described his familiarity with the affliction that he suffers for the sake of the Gospel, already . And then in verse 13 he focuses on the reason and the comfort for enduring affliction: conviction energized by faith. "We have the same spirit of faith

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according to what has been written, 'I believed therefore I spoke,' we also believe, and therefore we also speak."

As Dr. Hughes Oliphant Old, wrapped up that section on John MacArthur's preaching, he returned to that question: "Why do so many people listen to MacArthur?" He says, "This product of all the wrong schools," in his judgement, "how can he pack out a church on Sunday morning in an age in which church attendance has seriously lagged? Here is a preacher who has nothing in the way of a winning personality, good looks, or charm. Here is a preacher who offers us nothing in the way of sophisticated, homiletical packaging. No one would suggest that he is a master of the art of oratory. What he seems to have is a witness to true authority. He recognizes in Scripture the Word of God, and when he preaches it is Scripture that one hears. It is not that the words of John MacArthur are so interesting, as it is that the Word of God is of surpassing interest. That is why one listens." End Quote. May the same be written of us, amen? I say, I told you, be careful saying amen. You know it obligates you. But may the same be true of us.

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That first grace of God comes in the form of conviction for ministry, and that is energized by faith. Here's a second grace of God, number two. Second grace of God: resolution in ministry, sustained by hope. Resolution in ministry sustained by hope. Resolution, that's just a, a noun form of being resolved in ministry. And in ministry we must be resolved if we are going to endure. This is what gives endurance, patience, long-suffering and that is what we need to endure all the affliction and persecution in ministry; the disappointments, the troubles, the sadnesses, the sorrows. A resolution in ministry, it's sustained by hope.

Look at verse 14. Well, we'll back up. We'll read the whole thing. "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what's been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak." Then this, verse 14, "knowing." How does he know? He believed, right? So, he's studied. His mind is instructed from the Scripture and now he knows. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." So, he's informed by faith, and Paul now knows, he understands, he carries a deep conviction, and that sustains his endurance in ministry. He is

resolved to press on, knowing the hope of resurrection, knowing the hope of final reward.

And I want to give you five characteristics of the hope that produces that resolve. It's, it's a, it's not just a remarkable resolve on a human level. This is a resolve that is divinely imbued by grace. This is a resolve that comes only by the grace of God. It is super-human. It is not explainable because Paul is such a strong guy, or Luther, or Calvin, or any of them. They're just men. But there is something at work in all these men that we admire, heroes of the faith. It gives them a great resolve in ministry and causes them to endure faithfully to the end. We see them all in verse 14.

First, notice it's a theological hope. It's a theological hope because it's centered on the reality of the true and living God, "...knowing that," notice it, "he who raised Jesus..." Don't get caught up just in Jesus and miss the "he who raised him." This is the same, he, who is going to raise us also. And this is the God that Paul has been talking about all the way through.

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In verse 6, he said, This is the, "God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness.'" This is the God who brought all reality that we know into existence. This is the God that explains us. The same God who "...has shown in our hearts," verse 6, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It's the God who shined and is shining. It's the God of all power. It's the God of all light, the God of all truth. So, Paul's conviction, here, his resolution, comes in knowing God, in knowing who God is, that he has great power. He knows the will of God. He knows the sovereign purpose of God. It strengthens Paul's resolve because all of his hope is in this living God, all of it. And that's a well-founded hope. That's a great bank to deposit your hope in, because this God is one who always keeps his word.

Second, not only a theological hope, second, it's a, an historical hope. Historical hope. It's, in other words, it's grounded in historical reality, the actual facts of Jesus that are recorded in the Gospels. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus." Paul calls him, calls Jesus, Lord here. And, and he's been using the word Christ, the title, Messiah, the Anointed One. He's been using the title Christ, Christ Jesus,

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the Lord Jesus, Christ. But here, he drops that title because he wants our focus to be on his lordship, and his humanity. Jesus' lordship was most prominent for Paul when he first met this Jesus on the Damascus Road.

Acts 9:3 says, "As Saul approached Damascus, suddenly a light from Heaven shone," all, "around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said," instinctively, "'Who are you, Lord?'" Not, who are you, Christ? Not, who are you, Jesus? "Who are you, Lord?" He knew this is a Lord. He knew this is master. And Jesus answered to him, "And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise,'" now he starts commanding him, rise, "'enter the city, you'll be told what you are to do.'"

Paul is confronted, there on the Damascus Road, with real history. Everything that had been reported to him by all those Christians, all those crazy people from that sect called The Way, all those people that he went after, tried to imprison, wanted dead; he's confronted with the actual facts now. There's no denying it. The stubborn fact, in particular, of a

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resurrected Jesus. And that's the one who commands Paul's conscience as his Lord.

Third, notice it's a Christological hope. We're talking about the Lord Jesus. We'll sum it up by calling, referring to him as the Christ. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will," also, "raise us with Jesus." He's Lord, so when he says, follow me, he intends we do that from now on. He intends we follow him wherever he goes, whether it's to affliction and suffering, but also the resurrection, and into eternal glory. And, notice, his command is the very essence of our eternal life. This is the hope of the Gospel, itself. Because of spiritual union with Christ Jesus, the Lord, by God's grace, through faith, we, with Christ, we have also died with him. Colossians 2:12 says, "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you," also, "were raised with him through faith in the," powerful, "powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." "And he who raised the Lord Jesus, he will raise us also with Jesus," Paul says, elsewhere.



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So, it's a Christological hope, it's a historical hope, it's a theological hope. Here's a fourth one: it's an eschatological hope. It's an eschatological hope, which means it's forward-looking. It's future focused. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus," that's past tense, *aorist*, "will raise us also," future tense. He'll raise us with Jesus. So, Paul's, notice Paul's view of the future, here. Though he goes through suffering, and affliction, and trial, and dark times, and disappointments, and suffering, and sadness, his view of the future is never foreboding, it's never fearful, it's never pessimistic. Whether we die and await the resurrection of our bodies, or the Lord comes and then transforms our mortal bodies "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet," 1 Corinthians 15:52, "...the dead will be raised imperishable. We shall all be changed." "...the dead in Christ will rise first," 1 Thessalonians 4:16, and, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." It's an eschatological hope. It's forward-looking, it's future looking, and the future is not dark and gloomy. It's bright, it's optimistic, it's filled with joy and anticipation. Imagine the perspective that brings to a lifetime of ministry.

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Brings us to a fifth aspect of Paul's hope. So first, it's a theological hope, then a historical hope, a Christological hope, an eschatological hope, and finally, it's an ecclesiological hope. And ecclesiology is just a way of referring to the church, the corporate people of God. It's an ecclesiological hope, which is to say: it's not merely individual. It's just not, it's not just me and Jesus, it's us together with Jesus. It's a corporate hope. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."

The verb there, to present, it's *paristemi*, it's a verb that means, to place before, or place aside, but it's the idea, here in this context, of presenting someone to someone. It's something that might be done when presenting a gift to a sovereign, or introducing a guest before a king.

It's a beautiful picture, here. Something's wrapped up in what gives Paul such resolution, what makes him resolved in ministry, what sustains his hope. What encourages him to endure and to persevere is that he will stand with these people. I anticipate that, as well. I know the elders do. All of us should anticipate

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that. We're going to stand together there! He's going to stand with these people, the ones to whom he ministered.

Not only, he'll come with them not only in resurrection, but he'll be there at the presentation, as well. Paul with those whom, to whom he ministered. He, along with them, along with the churches that he served, is to be presented like a gift, by the Lord Jesus Christ, to God. When it is, when, as he says in 1 Corinthians 15:24, "...when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father..." Christ will present us. He'll raise us from the dead. We'll do that together. We'll go up together, and then, when we enter into the throne room, into the glorious majesty of the king of heaven, himself, God, who is there. Jesus says, "Here I am, and the children that you have given me." What perspective, right, for ministry. I mean, does any affliction even show up on the radar as a blip when you think about that majesty and that glory?

Just a quick thought about applying the points from that verse to ourselves. If you're someone who's prone to gloomy, forebo, foreboding thoughts about the future, when you think about that

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conversation you need to have with so-and-so that you had a conflict with and you just, your, your stomach knots up; when you think about those bills you have to pay or that job, or that guy you're working with on the job, or that supervisor, or those author-, and everything knots up; if you struggle with being a somewhat negative person, perhaps even a bit critical-spirited, look, meditate on this verse. Let the truths of this verse saturate your mind. Let them change your heart.

Comes, try this, compare, go to s, 2 Corinthians 10 and following, 10, 11, 12, and follow, trace all of Paul's suffering. Just, and then go to Hebrews 11, not the part about reward, but the part about suffering for faith. And, and go through that. And then compare your struggles to those struggles. Think about the power of hope to completely change their orientation, on the pages of Scripture, change their orientation toward the future, to change their attitude, and then ask the Lord to do the same for you. Cause he will. He answers those kinds of prayers. He loves to show himself faithful and powerful to give his grace to those who struggle, like all of us.

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So, don't be a joy-stealing drain on everybody else around you, okay? By being a gloomy, sad-faced, negative attitude person drain, you know, you walk into the room, and the raincloud comes with you, and everything's dark, and... I mean, I'm not busting any of you, I've been like that; I've been that person. And you know what I, what, what I say to justify it: Oh, I'm not a pessimist, I'm a realist. If you want to be a true, biblical realist, then you have a positive outlook about the future. You're not negative in your attitude.

A true realist knows that God is triumphant. That the resurrection is true, that there's power in us, working in and through us, through the conviction of the Gospel. So, believe the Scripture. Know the truth. Meditate on the hope that's yours because of Christ and his Gospel. It's all centered in God, it's grounded in historical reality, it's incarnated in Christ, it's shaped by a triumphant future, and shared by all the Christians around you. So, let's do this. Let's do this.

So, the conviction of faith, resolution provided by hope, particularly this beautiful reality of a shared joy, of a

corporate consummation, together, being presented before the King, not only sustained Paul's resolve, it led to a third grace, here. Number three: motivation in ministry excited by love. Motivation in ministry excited by love. Says there, in verse 15, "For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God." Motivation in ministry excited by love.

This is such a marvelous verse, verse 15, because I think it so beautifully and simply summarizes the motivation for every true Gospel ministry, for every true pastor, every shepherd, every elder, this is why we do what we do. This is why "...we proclaim not ourselves," verse 5, "but Jesus Christ as Lord," and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." It's so grace, verse 15, it's so that grace will extend and superabound, and so that it'll be increasing thanksgiving among everyone, to the glory of God. This is why we do what we do. Grace is such a vital concept.

But, listen, how often grace is poorly explained, poorly understood, by, even by some Christians. How many times have you

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heard when someone has blown it, I mean like committed a pretty grave sin, and you hear someone say, "I think we just need to give her some grace." To any casual observer, giving grace, sounds like overlooking sin. Giving grace, in that sense, sounds like ignoring sin and just letting it go, never confronting it. Give them grace, means to, Ah, pretend it doesn't, didn't happen. That is not grace!

You might make a case, *might*, make a case that it's mercy. But you got to realize in, in the Scripture, even mercy sees, and acknowledges, and deals with sin because of the sake of mercy. So, maybe it's mercy. Overlook certain faults, and mistakes, and things. I understand mistakes, faults, errors; but sins? Maybe mercy, certainly not grace, not in the biblical sense. If any of you are making that mistake in your language, Give them grace, please stop that, please. Just don't do that. It just creates confusion about what true grace is. Because true grace is God's power for salvation and sanctification, to be made holy. Grace deals with sin; doesn't let it go, doesn't overlook it. Grace deals with sin because we love people.

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Simple definition for the word, *grace*, you've probably heard this before. It's, it's very profound definition. *Char, charis*, in the Greek, *grace*. *Grace* is unmerited favor. You've probably heard that. *Grace* is unmerited favor. It's a benefit conferred upon someone freely, not on the basis of any merit. No hard work merits, or earns, *grace*. No good looks, no job well done, no, A for effort not because you have such a wonderful personality, God doesn't show *grace*. *Grace* is purely an expression of divine goodwill. If you want more elaboration on that, read Romans 5. Romans 5, that talks about, "...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." While we were still rebellious and ungodly, Christ died for us. While we were the most unlovely, God gave *grace*. There is, make no mistake, there is no merit involved in *grace*. *Grace* is gift.

So, seeing *grace* as gift, as unmerited favor, it's a good start. And we can see how there is a common, and a universal aspect of God's *grace*. We see his *grace* everywhere, really. He shows *grace* by letting a kid enjoy an ice cream cone on a hot, summer day. We can see God's *grace* in giving sunshine to the beachgoer and rain to the farmer. We can see God's *grace* in the air we breathe, in the food we eat, in the relationships that we enjoy,



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in the babies that are born, in the sunrises, sunsets, in the flowers that cro-, go across, grow across the countryside.

Beauty, joy, satisfaction, contentment, all of those are an expression of God's common grace: favor, from him, that is unmerited, it's unearned, and it's a favor that he shows to all humanity. He shows that favor, by the way, without any exception, without any qualification. The very worst sinners, Hitler himself, enjoyed good food, saw beautiful sunrises, sunsets, had his perch up in the Eagle's Nest and had magnificent views. God even gave grace to him.

But Paul's talking, here, about a very particular grace. He's talking about God's special grace, a redeeming grace for his people, and his people alone. If you turn a few pages to your right to 2 Corinthians 8:9, you see a saving grace of God, which is a particular expression of God's grace, to save his people in Christ. Paul writes, there, chapter 8, verse 9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

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That is a special, particular grace of God for his elect, for his people. God gave Jesus Christ, the Lord, to them. Though rich, becoming poor; through his poverty you become rich. That is favor. That is unmerited. The incarnation of Christ, it's his earthly ministry, it's, it culminated in crucifixion, and, and then eventual resurrection, all for our forgiveness and justification. Someone described it as, quote, "...the act of loving condescension in the willing humiliation of Jesus Christ." That's right. All of that together, then, is a special grace, it's a particular grace, a saving, redeeming grace of Christ.

But look across the page at chapter 9, verse 8, because this is another kind of grace which is also particular, and this is a, an empowering grace, 2 Corinthians 9:8. Paul writes, "...God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." Man, notice the universal terms, there: all sufficiency, all things, all times, abounding in every good work. That's called empowering grace. So, the first grace, the first particular grace is a redeeming grace; a, a grace that

causes salvation. And it's a grace that empowers sanctification, too. The second particular grace is an empowering grace, which is what empowers the work of the ministry.

From start to finish, the grace of God is the power at work in every true ministry. That which energizes and sustains our ministry is also what motivates our ministry. The saving, sanctifying, empowering grace of God, we want to see that effectual, productive, transforming grace of God, we want to see that superabounding. We want to see that just magnified. We want to see it explode and spread everywhere. And that's the word that Paul uses, here, *pleonazo*. *Pleonazo*: To greatly abound, to superabound, to be, and, you can describe it in terms of not just extent, but intensity, so, more intense, more pervasive, extending to more and more people, more places, with increasing intensity, increasing effect; superabounding.

Listen, this is the beauty of Gospel ministry. This is the real joy. Whenever God allows us to see some of the fruit of ministry, as pastors, as shepherds, and really, as all of the, for all of us, as Christians, when we're involved in ministry

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and it's been difficult, we, at that time, we get to see some of the fruit of ministry. By God's kindness, we get to see that sometimes. We get a front row seat to see God's grace in action with its power to save, to sanctify, to strengthen, to overcome. We see God's grace deliver people from slavery to sin. Oftentimes, we, we can see this in such degrading sins, corrupting sins, soul-destroying sins.

God's grace is active to deliver people. God's grace teaches forgiven people to forgive others, to reconcile and restore relationships. God's grace gives the desire for righteous thinking, for righteous living. It clears the conscience, it clarifies the mind, it resolves the will, it brings dignity and blessing by living that way. All by God's grace. God's grace turns formerly covetous, greedy, bitter, discontented people into, now, grateful people, gracious people, contented, rejoicing in the satisfaction of knowing, knowing God as Savior, because I am so unworthy, and what a great Savior, and then obeying Christ as Lord because every single one of his commands means life for us. And God's grace superabounds.

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It has a corresponding effect on thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is, then, the response that overflows from this heart that is enraptured with God's grace. Grateful heart, abounding in hearts that are forgiven. Thankfulness flowing forth from those who are being transformed, because they see their progress in the Gospel. Flourishing in those who, overcome by grace, setting sins aside, and living in righteousness. All such gratitude coming out of that, as they personally experience the grace of God in their own lives.

And then, not only in us, but when we see it happening in other people, when others become recipients of God's grace, when others are being saved, when others are beginning to grow, when others are receiving God's empowering for grace, not only for salvation and sanctification, but then, as they're deployed in ministry. Now we see God's empowering grace to, to strengthen them for doing the work of the ministry, and that pattern just repeats itself over, and over, and over. On and on it goes, all through history.

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A grace like this goes through Paul to the Corinthians. It goes, that grace goes through the Corinthians to other churches. That grace goes through all those faithful churches down through history, all through history, reaching us, eventually. Here we are, because of this grace. It superabounded, because look, it changed the entire western world. It's fueled missionary enterprises to other parts of the world. And, by the grace of God, we want to see his grace extend even further, superabounding in and through us, extending and spreading out from us to our own Jerusalem, and Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And, the more the grace of God abounds in us, when that happens, the more thanksgiving saturates our own gospel witness to others. We're not, we're not reluctant witnesses to the saving grace of God. We're not, we're not reserved when we're talking about a Gospel that saved us. We are excited, we are thankful people. We are so filled with gratitude we cannot contain talking about what God has done for us. And that's what brings the saving grace of God to others, teaches them to praise and thank God with us.

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What meta, motivates all this? It's love, isn't it? It's love for God. I love him for what he has done in me, to me. I love seeing God honored as God. I love to hear him praised and thanked for the manifest goodness that he shows to people every single day. Love motivates that. Love motivates this Gospel ministry. Love for others, as well. To see our neighbors, family, friends, coworkers, to see even pure strangers, to see them saved, sanctified, converted, delivered, set free, redeemed, rejoicing, thankful, and then witnesses of all that to others, that's what we love to see.

So, it's love that drives our local evangelism. It's love that motivates our formal outreach efforts: Red Team, Green Team, evangelistic Bible studies going on in and through this church. Love motivates our informal efforts, too, loving our neighbors by telling them the Gospel truth, teaching them the grace of God.

It's love that drives our church's ministry as a corporate body, livestreaming our preaching, broadcasting our preaching on the radio, extending the grace of God to our region, to our state.

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It's love that drives the, drives the entire missionary enterprise. The whole missionary impulse is driven by this love. We want to see the grace of God increase; we want to see it spread around the world. We want to see it do its powerful work to convert more and more worshipers to God, so that they give all honor, and all praise, and all glory to God, because, why? Because he's so worthy. He's the only one worthy! Love him, so we love others, and we want to see them converted, become worshipers.

If our ministry is not saturated, then, by divine grace, then it's not ministry at all, is it? It may have the form, the shape of ministry, it may look from outward observance to be ministry, but if it's not, if it's not animated by the grace of God, if it's not driven by his grace and his power, it's not ministry. Call it something else, because it's God's grace that has got to be working in and through the leaders of a church, in the church itself to produce conviction, and resolution, and motivation. The grace of God produces faith, hope, and love.



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And those three virtues are at work in a fourth grace, fourth grace. Number four: aspiration in ministry. Aspiration in ministry, educated by glory. Aspiration in ministry that's educated, or instructed by glory. Paul comes, as you see in verse 16, he comes kind of full circle from the opening statement. He says, "So we do not lose heart." Said the same thing back in verse 1, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." We saw that a couple weeks ago, the fact that Gospel ministers, they exist at all, they have that Gospel ministry at all because God is merciful. He is a God of mercy.

And yet, that ministry that we have, by the grace of God, it means affliction for us. It means difficulty. It means trouble, sorrow, pain. It could lead to broken relationships, and rejection, and scorn, and reviling, and slander. It can even, it can even get, become hostile and violent: persecution, even death. But our minds are instructed by divine glory. We look beyond what is seen at what is unseen. We look beyond the trouble, and we see the triumph. Sets our perspective, it directs us to worthy aspiration, to worthy ambition, it teaches

us what's worth aspiring to. We'll cover all that in last few verses, here.

"So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." Let me give you just a one-sentence summary of all of that: walk by faith and not by sight. Just walk by faith and not by sight. That just captures the whole thing.

Faith in unseen realities gives perspective. It sets the mind on things above, not on the things that are on the earth. And the more you do that, though your mortal body wastes away, through all the, the release, through the Fall, of sin, and death, and destruction, and disease, and chaos, and everything that comes on this earth, and though, though our mortal bodies succumb to that over time, some sooner, some later; we waste away, and at the same time, while that's happening, the outer man wasting

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away, the glory of God shines brightly in us evermore, revealing the true, spiritual life inside, day by day renewing us after the pattern of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Notice the contrast in that section, verses 16-18. Verse 16, he's teaching by way of contrast, so, such an effective way to teach. Verse 16, the outer self versus the inner self, wasting away versus daily renewing. Verse 17, lightness versus weightiness, momentary versus eternal, affliction versus glory. Verse 18, as well, things that are seen versus things that are unseen, things that are transient and temporary versus things that are, then, eternal, lasting, permanent.

In verse 16, though the outer self, the body, is dying, the inner self, the life of the inner man, the spiritual life that we have, given to us from God, God is renewing that spiritual life every single day. He injects his life into us. How does he do that? How does the, though the outer man wastes away, how does he, how does he renew us day by day? Well, he does this by the grace of affliction for the sake of the Gospel, which is in verse 17.

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It's not just suffering for suffering's sake, it's affliction for the sake of the Gospel. "Through," verse 17, "affliction he is preparing for us," or, as the other translations put it, producing in us, "an eternal weight of glory..." Another translation says, "For our momentary, light affliction is working out for us an eternal weight of glory," beyond all, "far beyond all comparison."

God uses affliction to chip the clay pot, to put cracks in the earthen vessel, to expose the treasure that he has deposited within each one of us. Affliction, he uses it for the sake of other people, also. So, it's for us. It's so that we can see his work in us, as we, the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. But it's also for the sake of others. He chips all this away so that others can see how we suffer righteously, how we go through affliction, and it reveals even more glory from God.

"Affliction," as one commentator said, "is like a sharp knife that cuts one cord after another that holds us to this earth and

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to its earthly glory.” Good way of putting it. Paul describes the affliction as light and momentary, which is not to deny the pain of any of it. This isn’t some kind of a philosophical stoicism, denies the reality of nerves within our body that alert us to pain, hunger, fatigue. The denial of our emotions that are truly hurt by people when they treat us so poorly, when we’re trying to just be faithful to Christ. Why would they do that? Why would they say such things? ‘Course we’re going to think that. ‘Course it hurts.

The affliction, any affliction, internal, external, it’s light. It’s bearable. Why? Because it is momentary. Affliction doesn’t last. It’s just part of this temporary life, part of a passing existence. Two seconds into the eternal state, the light, momentary nature of affliction is going to come into sharp focus, then become a distant memory. The affliction doesn’t compare well to the glory. They’re not equal at all. In comparison to the affliction, or contrast, is affliction light, momentary, the glory is weighty. It’s eternal. In fact, it’s weighty because it’s eternal.

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The word, *weight*, used here is *baros*, for which we get the word, *barometer*. *Barometer*, you know, is an instrument for reading *barometric pressure*. *Barometric pressure* is a measure of the *weight of air in the earth's atmosphere*, and it's a *weight that presses down on us at any given moment*. That's *weight*. Concept of *weight* connects to that Hebrew word for *glory*, *kāḇôḏ*. The root meaning of *kāḇôḏ* is *heaviness, weightiness*.

*Affliction can only be light, be price, precisely because it is momentary*. Lenski says that "Every moment and its pain are over in a moment, and so the next. It is never anything *but momentary*. The moments keep flying away. They never amass and concentrate. Not one moment is able to continue even for a day." End Quote. *Glory is the opposite of that. It's not light, but weighty, precisely because it is eternal*.

Lenski provides us I think, with a really helpful illustration, he says, when, "When ten years' worth of affliction are spread out over all the seconds of the ten years, well, the spread becomes very thin and light. But if ten years' worth of affliction were centered in one second, that would be *weight*,

indeed. In contrast to the affliction, which is light, momentary, spread over years, the weight of eternal glory is centered in one second." Lenski says, "The glory is one incomprehensible, weighty concentration, being timeless, eternal." That is such a perfect way to illustrate what Paul is conveying about the glory of God, here.

How does Paul maintain this perspective about affliction, "It's light, momentary; it'll pass"? How does he maintain this mindset about suffering for the sake of the Gospel? How does he, verse 1, verse 16, "never lose heart," but always maintain good courage, patient endurance, hopefulness, confidence? Well, by looking, verse 18, looking, "not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, the things that are unseen are eternal."

Affliction is useful to help us see that because it helps us to despair of ourselves. Affliction that is greater than us helps us to see, very quickly, that it's not by our own strength. It's not by our own power, it's not by our own cleverness, our own intellect, our own ingenuity, our own planning, our own

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preparation. It's not because we have enough insurances bought and paid for. Affliction helps us to give up on our own power, forsake any human solution, and turn all attention and devotion to God.

Things seen, things not seen, the verb *blepo*, visual perception, physical sense of sight. But we are looking, that's the verb, beginning of the sentence, verb *skopeco*, we're concentrating on, we're fixing our gaze, and our eyes, and our attention watchfully upon those things that cannot be seen, the invisible realities of life, spiritual realities. Those things are revealed to us by God in Scripture. And the more we fix our gaze, the more we focus our spiritual perception, and the vis, invisible God, made visible, by the way, in Jesus Christ, the more our attention turns away from temporary, passing realities of this physical life, like affliction for the sake of Christ.

We turn to the invisible realities, the weight of eternal glory. The more we're being renewed by God, day by day, though, even though our outer man is wasting away, it doesn't matter to us. We let this body go. Not, let it go, like don't exercise and



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don't eat right, I'm saying we refuse to pay attention to it, be too concerned about it anymore.

So, folks, in the last three weeks, we've seen that Paul has described a true ministry. What I said to you at the beginning, I just want to repeat: accept no substitute. Don't overlook. When you see faults, when you see faults in our church, pray for us. Pray for us to repent. Pray for us to come right. If you need to, after praying for some time and things aren't changing, you come and talk to us. Why? Because we care to do this. We don't want to become dissuaded from anything but truth.

We don't want to be off track and off course from faithfulness in ministry, because there is one looking over us who's, who we're going to stand before and give an account one day, all of us shepherds, pastors, elders, we're going to give an account for every single one of your souls. We take that seriously. So, accept no substitutes. Whether here, or whether you go elsewhere, accept no substitutes. Pastors and elders, Christian men, Christian women, may the God of all grace pour out all this

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grace upon us, so that we're faithful in Gospel ministry. Let's pray.

Father, as we've learned, now we pray that you would do what we ask, that you'd keep us faithful to the ministry that you've given us, that you'd pour out your grace in the Gospel by the Spirit in Jesus' name. May you deepen our conviction in the truth, give us an unshakeable faith in your holy Word so that what we read, we believe, and what we believe, we speak, and even the more so as we suffer for it. May you strengthen our resolution through a living and abiding hope in your promises, as we read and believe, and as we believe and then we speak, may you reinforce, even through the affliction, the suffering, our resolve, so that we endure for your sake.

May you direct all our motivation according to the love that you poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom you've given to us, so that we love you with all devotion, with our heart, soul, strength, and mind, so that we love our neighbors as ourselves, and we long to see them all know you, as well. And, Father, please direct our aspiration, our ambition. Turn us away

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from worldly ambition, from things that are pride-inducing. Turn us away from the things that are visible, and fix our spiritual sight on the things unseen, things that are abiding because they are eternal and most glorious. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.