

Part 1 - Death for the Glory of God

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[0 : 00] Good evening. Our passage for tonight is John chapter 11. We're going to read the entire chapter, but we're going to look at the verse 16 verses. I invite you to turn in your own Bibles to there.

Like I said, we'll read the entire chapter, and it's a lot of verses, but I think the purpose of the story, the whole story back to back, will make more sense as we read the first 16 verses.

So we're coming to a very familiar story. A lot of us have heard the story of Lazarus, maybe in Sunday school. We hear it often at funerals. People use verse 23 at a funeral when they see Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We hear verse 35, Jesus wept, when people want to point out that Jesus was a man with emotions and had feelings and experiences like we do.

But John and all the other writers of the Gospels, they write these stories, these narratives down for a reason. They're there to tell us the history. They're there to tell us what Jesus did and give us a picture into what he's doing.

But the intention, the reason they wrote all these things down, these details in such vivid detail, is so that we may believe in Jesus. We may believe what they're writing and have eternal life.

[1 : 25] That's the purpose of the book of the Bible that God has given us, is that we may have eternal life. When John was closing out his Gospel, in the last two verses of chapter 20, he wrote, Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written, these things in Scripture are written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

So as we look at this story, again, these 46 verses tonight, I want you to not miss the intention firsthand retelling of something that John saw happen.

John wrote this narrative, he wrote this story of Lazarus for a reason. He gave us clear details written between chapter 10 and chapter 12 to show us another picture of who Jesus is and what he's doing on his mission on earth.

So let's read John chapter 11, verses 1 through 46. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus and Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

[2 : 31] It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, This illness does not lead to death.

It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this, he said to his disciples, Let us go to Judea again. The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you're going to go there again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day?

If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he is the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

[3 : 47] Let us go to him. So Thomas called the twins, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. Now when Jesus came, he found Lazarus had been in the tomb four days.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off. Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him.

But Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Jesus said to her, Your brother will rise again.

Martha said to him, I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? She said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world. When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, The teacher is here and is calling for you.

[4 : 54] And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, See how much he loved him. But some of them said, Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and the stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.

Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So he took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me.

[6 : 08] But I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me. When he said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The man who had died came out, his hands and his feet bowled in his strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth, Jesus said to them, Unbind him and let him go.

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and Martha had seen what he did and believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word, and I thank you that you have worked through your Holy Spirit to move men to write, in this case, John, to write things that he remembered while you were on earth.

And I pray that you would help us tonight as we look at this passage to be encouraged, to understand a little bit better and clearly how you are glorifying yourself, how you use circumstances to bring about your good and your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen. When I moved in the parsonage of my father's church in 1991, my brother, Ben, and I discovered a barn on the property.

[7 : 27] It used to look like a barn to a four- and a six-year-old. It was actually just an old garage with a loft in it. While we explored it, we found some old boards and some nails. And with the experience and skill of a four- and a six-year-old, we built a sorry excuse for a fort.

This fort was simply an old two-by-two board stretched across a room four feet off the ground, with boards running from it to the back of the building, creating some semblance of a two-story fort. Now, this two-by-two was an old, cracked, sagging foundation. Anything we built on top of it was only as strong as the board itself. As we soon discovered, we couldn't actually climb into our fort because it wouldn't support our weight.

We had to find more nails. We had to find more boards and prop up our foundation. We had to add new supports to it. We had to tack on other pieces and make changes because of where we started, of our choice of our foundation.

And just like a good foundation, a strong support, a good foundation is needed for building things. If you want to build a house, you need to have a good, strong basement. If you're going to build a

wall, you need to have two-by-fours.

[8 : 37] And if we had the budget, we might have done that. But when you build something, you need to have a good, strong foundation. And you come to the Bible, you need to have a good, strong theology.

Because when we look at a story like this, it's in there. If it's a story that tells us about something that Jesus did, we need to both let it tell us what Jesus is doing, but also look at it in regards to, well, what does the rest of Scripture tell us?

And we'll see some things in this chapter that look a little backwards. Even if we look at it from a very humanistic way of looking, they look wrong. In fact, many people looking at this passage express confusion or even disagree with how Jesus approached things.

Some commentators or liberal scholars look at this passage and decide that this Jesus that they see is incongruent with their theology, with their foundation.

And instead of fixing their foundation, make excuses for Jesus. Instead of looking and seeing, well, do I not understand who Jesus is? They tack on additional things to make to support their theology.

[9 : 44] See, John, the Holy Spirit inspired this passage, the story of Jesus, so that we would believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired every word, every detail, every motivation, every phrase for a specific reason.

So that we would believe, and believing, have eternal life. So, we need to look at this story in light of good biblical theology. We need to let it teach us about God and what He's doing against the backdrop of the rest of Scripture.

So, with all that in mind, let's take a detailed look at the story here. So, the first four verses in John 11, we've got this plea from Lazarus' family to Jesus.

Jesus is currently across the Jordan in a place where John had been baptizing. Just previous verses in John chapter 10, He escaped an attempted stoning.

The Pharisees heard Him say things like, I and the Father are one, and they tried to kill Him. So, He and His disciples leave and go about 10 hours east to the other side of Jordan.

[10 : 52] But meanwhile, near Jerusalem, in a village named Bethany, two worried sisters are watching their brother die. Now, maybe it was a sudden illness, or maybe it was just, it progressed very slowly.

The Bible doesn't tell us. It just says that He was ill. Verses 1 through 3 read, Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary, and her sister Martha.

It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. But Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to Him saying, Lord, He whom You love is ill.

So the sisters sent a messenger to Jesus with a very simple plea. Lord, the one that You love is ill. So this messenger, this person, leaves the house of a dying man, travels a better part of a day to go to Bethany, or to where Jesus is across the Jordan, to deliver this very simple plea.

Lord, the one that You love is ill. We would expect, at least our human nature would expect, that Jesus would hear and start off towards Bethany in order to heal the man He loves, right?

[11 : 59] I mean, maybe we'd expect, like He did with the centurion's servant, that He could just heal him where He was. If He didn't have to leave, He could just say, He's healed, and He would be healed. So maybe that's what the messenger expects when Jesus says that this illness will not end in death.

It's for the glory of God. But He doesn't leave. And if Jesus really loved Him, why doesn't He leave? We tell ourselves, when we bring our requests to God sometimes, that we expect a good God to do something. We expect, in our knowledge, in our wisdom, for an infinitely good God to do good things for us.

That a good God would do things. I mean, we often pray, we're going to go on a picnic, we pray that we want a nice day, and a good God would give us a nice day. But across town, a farmer's praying for rain.

So a good God would send rain, or a good God would give a nice, clear day. Well, God is motivated to help people. He's motivated to do good things for them the same way that we are, but in a much better, holy way than we approach it.

[13 : 19] Jesus wants to help people too. He wants good things for them. In fact, He wants the best things for people. And He shows that, He shows His desire to give them a good thing in verse 4.

And off the cuff, it doesn't seem to make much sense. Verse 4 says, So when Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was.

He stayed two days longer in the place where He was. I'm sorry, I think I got my notes out of order. Sorry. When Jesus heard it, He says, This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. This illness is for the glory of God.

This sounds very similar to what Jesus said when He asked, when He asked why a blind man was born blind. Was it his sin or his parents' sin? Jesus responds that it was neither in John chapter 9, verses 1 through 3.

[14:37] So turn over to John 9. It's a very similar story. for a different kind of response. Jesus says, As they were passing by, Jesus saw a man blind from birth.

And His disciples asked Him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man and his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, It was not that this man sinned or that his parents sinned, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

This man was born blind. He lived his entire life without seeing flowers, babies, sunrises, unable to work, putting a burden on the community and his family.

And Jesus says, the reason for his blindness, the reason for all those years of not seeing the beauty of God's creation, was so that at that time and that place, the works of God could be worked in him.

So now we have Lazarus, who by the time the messenger had reached Jesus, had already died. And the messenger is given a similar message to take back to Mary and Martha.

[15:45] Jesus says to him, This illness will not end in death. It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Can you imagine being that messenger?

Traveling back, very eager to tell Mary and Martha and probably Lazarus that Jesus said the illness wasn't going to end in death. But that it was to glorify God. Imagine you burst into the door to tell Mary and Martha the good news and you see funeral preparations.

Everybody's weeping. And they ask you, Did you find Jesus? Yes, I talked to him. He said it wasn't going to end in death.

He said it was for God's glory. And suddenly something seems wrong. What Jesus said doesn't match our experience. Jesus said it's not going to end in death.

But our brother Lazarus has died. Jesus said it's for the glory of God. But my heart is broken. Jesus says the Son of God will be glorified through it.

[16:50] But I don't feel like glorifying Jesus right now. The next two verses, verses 5 and 6, give us Jesus' rationale. But again, it doesn't seem to make sense.

Verses 5 and 6 give us Jesus' reason for staying. Now Jesus loved Mary, Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

See, God's ways are not our ways. Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. John loves to use this word love. If you read John's writings, he uses the word love 26 times in this gospel, 36 times in the book of 1 John.

And a few of those times in the gospels, we see examples of Jesus loving specific people. John was a disciple that Jesus loved. And in Mark, Jesus loved the rich young ruler who asked him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

And he loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But just like the rich young ruler, his love for this family does not mean that he gives them immediately what they ask for.

[18:04] At least not in the way that they ask for it. Mark 10, 21 says that Jesus loved the man, this rich young ruler, and told him to sell everything that he had and give it to the poor.

And he went away sad. And here we read that Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus. So he stays where he's at for two more days. What?

He loves them. And so he stays. Now, ultimately does Jesus not rush to heal Lazarus. He purposefully delays. He waits.

And the reason that we're given for his waiting is love. And here again is where that strong foundation, a strong biblical Christ-centered theology is critical to understanding what's happening here.

See, many people, like we talked earlier, make excuses for Jesus here. They say he was too busy. They say that things were going so well where he was that he didn't want to leave the blooming

ministry that was happening across the Jordan and decided to stay.

[19:12] Some will say things like, he really wanted to go, but the father wouldn't let him. And so he had to stay. Even though he had a strong desire to go, he had to stay because that was what obedience was.

At the end of the day, they're saying that since Jesus is good and a good person would have healed if he could have, something must have kept him from doing that. They say Jesus is reacting as best as he could with the circumstances.

He wanted to go, but he couldn't. But the other route, the biblical route, acknowledges that God is sovereign. I mean, not only does he know the future, not only does he know what's happening day to day, but he directs it.

He controls it with one singular purpose to bring about his glory. God seeks his glory.

He won't share it with anybody. He brings his children through trials so they are sanctified and he does it for his own glory. Turn with me to Isaiah 48.

[20:15] Isaiah 48, 9 through 11. This is talking about Israel refined for God's glory.

Verses 9 through 11 say, For my name's sake, I defer my anger. For the sake of my praise, I've assured it for you that I may not cut you off.

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction for my own sake. For my own sake, I do it. For how should my name be profaned?

My glory, I will not give to another. God's ways are higher than our ways. He didn't answer the prayer in the way the sisters asked. He gave them something better.

He gave them a glimpse of his glory when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Lord willing, if we get a chance to look at the other part of the passage, we'll see that actually we could spend time on the resurrection of Lazarus.

[21:21] But his love for them meant waiting. His love for Mary and Martha meant staying, even if it looked like he didn't care, in order to raise Lazarus from the dead so there was no question it was a work of God.

The Jews had a tradition that if somebody died, their spirit hung around for three days. After three days, the spirit was gone and they could be resurrected.

This is the longest time that Jesus has raised anybody from the dead. There were times when somebody had died frequently or recently. The widow's son, the servant girl, he raised them all relatively recently after they had died.

But nobody up to this point had been raised after four days of being dead. God showed them in raising Lazarus from the dead an amazing picture of his glory.

In his sermon on the passage, John Piper says that real love is giving us what we need the most. What we need most is not healing, but a full and endless experience of the glory of God.

[22:29] Love means giving us what will bring us the fullest and longest joy. And what is that? What will give you the fullest and most eternal joy? The answer of this passage is clear.

A revelation to your soul of the glory of God. Seeing and admiring and marveling at and savoring the glory of God in Jesus Christ. When someone is willing to die or let your brother die to give you and your brother that, he loves you.

Brothers and sisters, when we pray and you ask God, you beg God for something that's good and looks like God is not answering, don't lose heart.

Mary and Martha did get Lazarus back, but they got something much better. They saw the glory of God. They got a glimpse of his love for them and his glory.

Don't take God's delay as a no. God is seeking his glory. And if we're seeking his glory, if we're seeking to see God glorified, any answer that brings God's glory, any answer that shows us more of his glory, any answer that increases our joy in God is the right answer.

[23:51] Jesus is going to give them the best possible answer to their simple request of, Lord, the one you love is ill. Now, verses 7 through 10 are a key part of this answer he gives.

And when I first read it, it didn't seem to make much sense. It almost kind of sounds out of place. But think about the story of the entire context of John.

It does make sense. So let's look at verses 7 through 10 and then we'll talk about how does this play into Jesus' rationale for going and healing Lazarus later. Verses 7 through 10 said, After this, he said to his disciples, Let us go to Judea again.

The disciples said to him, Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you're going to go there again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of the world.

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him. So he waits, then tells his disciples, All right, it's time to go to Judea again. And the disciples think he's crazy.

[25 : 01] The Jews are just trying to stone you, and you want to go back? And Jesus' response seems a little cryptic. It seems a little out of place. We're twelve hours in the day, walking in the night, walking in the day.

What is Jesus talking about? What is he saying when, you know, if you walk in the day, you won't stumble, but if you walk in the night? Think about the times that Jesus says, phrases like, the hour has not come, or my hour.

Jesus tells his mother that his hour had not yet come when she asks for help at the wedding of Canaan. Jesus tells the woman at the well that an hour is coming when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The Jews try to arrest Jesus multiple times, but John says they didn't because his hour had not yet come. Shortly after the resurrection of Lazarus, John records Jesus saying multiple times that now his hour had come.

John 12, 27 says, Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I have come to this hour. John 17, 1 says, When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

[26 : 11] Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. Jesus is saying nothing's going to happen to him until it's time. People have been trying to kill him for almost his entire ministry.

Nothing will happen to him until God the Father is ready for it to happen. But, I think this is very important. His decision to go to Judea is a fatal one.

What happens in Judea will get him killed. Not right away, but when he goes and he raises Lazarus from the dead, it sets off a firestorm.

And the Jews plot even stronger to get him killed. And he knows this. He knows going to Judea will be the catalyst to his crucifixion. In fact, it's his intention.

He's walking in the day. He's intentionally working his way to the cross. He's working in the light.

But he knows that the hour is coming when he'll be put to death. In fact, I believe we can see in the next few verses he is working, really God is working, to set up circumstances for his death to orchestrate the events that will lead to his eventual crucifixion.

[27 : 26] So, I hope you understand the connection here. Jesus, by waiting, has ensured that there's a man now dead for four days.

And he decides after two days to go to Judea. So, you've got the day that the messenger came to Jesus, Jesus waiting two days, and the day it takes Jesus to go back.

So, four days later, Jesus comes and finds Lazarus dead for four days. And by waiting, it means he's going to raise a dead man that nobody can contest.

This man is walking around. Nobody can say, well, he was probably just swooning. He was stuck in a sealed tomb with no oxygen, already dead for four days.

And it's going to mean that people will seek to kill him because of the sign that he has worked. So, let's look at the last section here, verses 11 through 16.

[28 : 24] Jesus talks to his disciples about an underlying motivation. After saying these things, he said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

The disciples said, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now, Jesus has spoken of his death, but they thought he meant taking rest and sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake, I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.

But let us go to him. So Thomas called the twins and said to his fellow disciples, Let us go also, that we may die with him. We saw Jesus delay going to Judea, but now we see something even odder. Jesus, sorry, Lazarus is dead, and Jesus says, I'm glad I wasn't there. Not only did Jesus wait, not only did he hear the request of somebody who loved, he loved, not only did he hear the request of somebody that he loved, he's glad he didn't answer it right away.

He's glad he did nothing. What reason does Jesus provide? Why does Jesus say he's glad? He's glad he wasn't there, glad he didn't heal Lazarus right away, because something will happen there that will cause people, his disciples and others, to believe.

[29 : 58] When Jesus calls this very dead, decomposing man out of the tomb, and a whole, resurrected man comes out, something supernatural happened in this city.

Something that sent a shockwave through the community. Jesus said, It will not leave to death. It's for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.

And raising a man dead for four days is certainly a very glorious thing. It caused people, as we'll see in a little bit, to decide to believe in Jesus. It definitely brought glory to God, and it definitely brought the glorification of Jesus.

But as I read this story more and more, especially in the context of the entire story of John, in context, Jesus had escaped these people getting ready to stone him.

It's the death of Lazarus. He goes and eventually will be going to Jerusalem on the donkey, and will be a triumphal entry, and then eventually he will be crucified.

[31 : 06] As I think about this story, in that context of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion, I think the result of Lazarus' resurrection was going to bring God and therefore Jesus more glory than just the raising of Lazarus himself.

So the fact that Lazarus was raised gave God glory. Seeing a man brought back to life glorified God. But the result, what happened to the people around the city, what happened to Jesus after Lazarus' resurrection, was going to bring even more glory.

Jesus is glad he wasn't there to heal the one he loves so that his disciples may believe. He's glad he wasn't there to heal Lazarus so that his sisters may believe.

Remember, why did John write this gospel? Why did John feel the need to go in such fine detail in this story? so that you may believe and by believing have eternal life.

Jesus is glad he wasn't there to heal Lazarus so that I may believe. He's glad he wasn't there to heal Lazarus so that Craig may believe, so that Donna may believe, so that Jeannie may believe, so that Aaron may believe.

[32 : 25] He's glad he wasn't there to heal Lazarus so that you may believe and by believing have eternal life in his name. Now, John records two things happening when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

We looked at it in the very end of our last two verses. Verses 46, I think it's 45 and 46 in John 11. Two things happen when this man is raised from the dead.

Some believed and some rejected the most amazing sign that Jesus had ever performed prior to his resurrection and went and told the authorities. 45 and 46 say, Many of the Jews, therefore, had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. People who saw a man raised from the dead figured the best response was not worship, but to make sure he got in trouble.

People who saw a man brought back from four days, rotting, thought that the best response was to make sure he died.

[33 : 41] In fact, later on in the passage, in John 11 and 12, they plot to kill Lazarus because he's such a testimony to what happened that it's causing people to believe in Jesus.

So, this resurrection of this man, this bringing back to life this dead person, caused the Pharisees to be even more and more incensed and more upset.

And eventually, as you see later on in this chapter and the next, it's going to bring about such anger that they will seek to kill him. So, as you look at these people, the responses of these people, the Jews who came with Mary and Martha and some believed and some went to the Pharisees, I want to ask, what is your response?

What do you do with this story? John has written this, obviously, in very much detail so that we may believe and by believing have eternal life. What will you do with this story?

Will you harden your heart and reject Jesus despite the overwhelming proof? Will you believe? Will you trust this Jesus? Will you trust his love even if he answers your request in a better way than what you were asking for?

[35 : 03] Even if it hurts? Even if it means losing a brother, a daughter, a father, a spouse? What will be the response of your heart?

Belief or bitterness? This story sits between chapters 10 and 12, not just as a lesson on trusting God, not just as some comfortable phrase to use at a funeral, not just as an example of Jesus' emotional capabilities.

It is those things, but it exists to demonstrate the sovereignty and the love of God in working all things together for good. It was written to tell us about Jesus. It was written so that every detail would bring us to a better, more clear understanding of Jesus and what he's doing. It was written so that you may believe and by believing have eternal life. Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for your word and I thank you for your love and the way you have worked detail after detail to bring about Jesus as a baby and then living a life on earth and then bringing about circumstances that would lead to his crucifixion, all the while glorifying yourself and showing yourself as powerful. So I pray that you would help us work in our hearts, help us to trust you, to believe you, to meditate on your word and to allow its inspired work to work in our hearts.

[36 : 37] In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.