

Seeing Christ in the Psalms, Part 1

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[0 : 00] Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.

And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.

And his face was like the sun, shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, fear not.

I am the first and the last. And the living one. I died. And behold, I am alive forevermore.

[1 : 13] And I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen. Those that are and those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Lord Jesus, in this early text in the book of Revelation, we see you in all your glory. Putting all of that glory to work for the sake of your church.

The great concern you have as you reign above all things is your people. We praise your holy name for who you are and for the fact that you love us.

What an amazing insight to see. The high and lifted up one. The beginning and the end. Holding in his hand.

[2 : 25] His precious people. Lord, let us worship you well this morning as we open your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. You can be seated.

And if you'll open your Bibles to the book of Psalms. We'll be in chapter 1 today. Psalm chapter 1. And we'll be just looking mostly at the first two verses.

Which read, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked. Nor stands in the way of sinners. Nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law he meditates day and night. Now if you weren't here a couple weeks ago, I articulated what my intention for the Psalm series this summer is.

And that is, I just want you to love this book as much as I do. And with that in mind, I understand that there were a number of obstacles that were in my way as I learned to love this book.

[3 : 34] And I want to deal with one of those obstacles. And tell you how overcoming it became such a blessing to me. I was reading through a list of German, good German words the other day.

And I found, you guys hear me when I try to read Hebrew words, even in English. I'm really bad at it. And I don't want to concern Dove, but I find that I can read German words really well.

I don't have trouble with those. And one of the words that I read, and I was fascinated by the etymology and the origin of this word, was das umheimlich.

Das umheimlich is a word that emerged in the Freudian age of dream interpretation, where they were looking for a word that described something that seems both familiar and unfamiliar.

Something that seems right, but also off in some degree or another. And that word became translated in English as uncanny.

[4 : 47] Uncanny. Something that is familiar enough to be recognizable, but also something that's a little off or different than we expected it to be.

I think when you open the Psalms and you attempt to embrace them, as I hope that you will, you'll find some aspects of the Psalms to be familiar. For instance, the beginning of Psalm 1.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. That sounds familiar to me.

I've been taught from a young age, as I'm sure you have been, that bad company corrupts good morals. I've been warned since I was a child to be careful who I chose to spend my time with.

I've heard a lot of sermons about worldliness. And maybe a little deeper than that, this text reminds me of a phenomenon that some of us maybe need to remember.

[5 : 49] Something you know, but let me just remind you. And that is, is that sometimes the people that are the most happy to spend time with us are the least helpful. The people in this early section of the Psalms are people who are glad for you to walk with them and stand with them and sit with them.

I feel like this is a good thing to remind teenage boys and teenage girls. There's this concept I've noticed over the years of traveling, especially into dangerous places, that I call the nefarious gregarious.

It's the person who is super friendly who actually wants to kill you. And that's kind of what this is talking about. Someone who is, come in, lad, and know me better.

But the intention, of course, is actually quite dark. And of course, the world is that way toward us. It's eager to welcome us in, eager to have us stand and sit and walk with them, so long as we submit to them.

And so there's something about this Psalm that's familiar. There's a caution against worldliness about bad company and so forth. But there's also this next section that is kind of unfamiliar.

[7 : 05] It's familiar, but it's also kind of not. It says, But his delight, the blessed man, is in the law of the Lord. And on his law, he meditates day and night.

Well, that's familiar because it's something we know we ought to do. But it's unfamiliar because it is idealistic. None of us meditate on the law of the Lord day and night.

What you're going to find when you read the Psalms is that there's just a little too much perfection in the protagonist's voice to be your voice. You know that Das Unheimlich, it became uncanny.

And as computer graphics advanced to a certain point, AI, not AI, but CGI models began to make people. And the problem emerged as we began to make people on CGI was that they were perfectly symmetrical.

They were perfect people. And we could tell that something wasn't quite right. And so we came up with the term to describe this weird phenomenon when you watch a CGI child, or CGI child, a CGI character that's too perfect.

[8 : 21] We describe it as the uncanny valley. It's like that's just a little too spot on. When you read the Psalms, you're going to encounter a voice that's just a little too perfect for you in good conscience to relate to.

Unless you're like a psychopath, you're going to read some of the things in the Psalms and think, that's more than me. One of the areas that I mentioned in the first sermon was that claims of extraordinary righteousness.

You get to a Psalm like Psalm 7, 8. The Lord judges the peoples. Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to my integrity that is in me.

Well, you know, if you're a normal person with any self-awareness whatsoever, you get to that moment and you say, Das Umhamlik. That's not me. I can't pray that.

Psalm 17, 3. You have tried my heart. You have visited me by night. You have tested me and you will find nothing. That's not me.

[9 : 36] Psalm 5, 10. You'll see something else happen. Because of this high degree of righteousness, there's a high degree of righteous indignation against the wicked.

And you'll read Psalms where there's a call of cursing on the enemy that you would not feel comfortable praying because you're kind of the enemy to some degree.

Psalm 5, 10. Make them bear their guilt, O God. Let them fall by their own counsels. Because of the abundance of their transgressions, cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.

No, I can't pray that without thinking about a little sinful me. Psalm 35, 8. Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it.

And let the net he hid ensnare him and let him fall into it to his own destruction. See, you're going to encounter a voice that is too righteous for you to identify with and too righteously indignant for you to identify with.

[10:44] The truth is, is that while Psalms is a book expressing human emotions, the speaker of most of the Psalms comes off, in some respects, to have superhuman properties.

Now, this is very important. This is the first obstacle necessary to overcome, to enjoy the Psalms. You've got to figure out what to do with this uncanny valley.

One writer who I'm especially appreciating right now on the Psalms wrote this. It has long been common to remark that the book of Psalms is a most human book in the sense that its various prayers cover a wide range of emotions and sentiments, that there are virtually no situations in the moral life for which the Psalmist provides no appropriate words of prayer.

But the Psalter is a veritable mirror, as it were, of the human spirit facing the manifold and varying conditions of our destiny. All this is true, of course, but taken without further qualifications, it may represent a truth easily misunderstood.

For the humanism found in the Psalter is not based solely on the universality of its human aspirations and sentiments. The Psalter is not human in merely the same sense that the Iliad is human.

[12:07] These works, after all, do likewise cover a multiple range of emotions, sentiments, convictions, with respect to man's situation, his moral freedom, his duty, and his destiny. It is important to stress, nonetheless, that the Psalter is human in a far deeper and more properly theological sense.

The humanism of the Psalter is a humanism rooted in the incarnation. The Psalter is not human merely because it speaks for man in general, but because it speaks for Christ.

The underlying voice of the Psalms is not simply man, but the man. Psalms are written from the perspective of the prototypical human.

It's important to understand in the economy of God that when he created Adam, he did so in the likeness of Christ who would one day be born in human flesh. Christ did not come following the pattern of Adam.

Adam is following the pattern of Christ. We essentially wind up, as we go through the Bible, with two possible views of man.

[13:14] And the view of Christ as the man is not necessarily initially comforting because he's too good.

How do I connect to that? That's what you need to understand when you read the Psalms. The man, Christ Jesus, is the voice behind all of these claims of self-righteousness and self-indignation. In fact, in our Psalm today, we read, blessed is the man. And even in the Hebrew there, we see a real clear indicator that that's talking about a particular person.

The underlying word in the Hebrew there, and also in the Greek, and also in the Latin, is not Adam or Anthropos, not referring to man in general, but it is a particular person referenced in this text. Then the early church fathers said very clearly as they read Psalm 1, that there is only one man who fits the description presented here, and that is the man, Christ Jesus.

[14:23] So that's a key to reading the Psalms, seeing Christ in reading the Psalms. We'll talk about that today, and we'll talk about it again next week. And then on Father's Day, we will talk about spiritual warfare in the Psalms.

Today, we need to understand that when we read these glorious representations of righteousness that are a little too big for us, they fit perfectly for Christ.

And we need to be happy when we go to the Bible and do not see ourselves. We need to be happy about that. We'll talk about that a little bit today as well.

To begin with, we'll say this. Only one person can say that they have never, not once ever, walked in the counsel of the wicked or stood in the seat of sinners or sat in the seat of scoffers.

Only one person can say that, and that is Jesus Christ. Let me take you through a little tour of the Gospels, showing Jesus, obeying this perfectly. In Jerusalem, there was the Passover feast.

[15:27] This is John 2, 23 through 25. Many, this is early in his ministry, many believed in his name. And when they saw the signs he was doing, they believed in his name.

But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man. For he himself knew what was in man.

Jesus was totally immune to the seduction of flattery. John 3, 1 through 3, Nicodemus, a teacher of the law, approaches Jesus at night and says, I know that you are of God, for no one could do the works you do unless he was of God.

And Jesus is completely disinterested in receiving his compliment. He says, you don't know anything. Because unless you've been born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.

So we see Jesus totally immune from flattery. We see Jesus totally immune from pragmatic counsel. When we look at the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, we see that the devil offers him three of his fundamental desires.

[16:36] First one was the most immediate, and that was, you haven't eaten in 40 days, make bread. The next two were Jesus's desires to rule the nations, Psalm 2, and also to prove that vindicate the father.

The devil comes to Jesus in Luke 4, 5, and says, here are all the kingdoms. I will give them to you. I will give their authority. I will give their glory to you if you will worship me. And Jesus resists this. He does not take the counsel of the wicked. But in Matthew 16, I think it gets even a little harder because this time it isn't Satan appearing as Satan in the wilderness, but Satan appearing as his good friend, Peter.

In Matthew 16, Jesus says, the time is coming for me to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and then on the third day to be raised.

And Peter, this time, filled with the satanic urge to keep Christ from the cross, says, far be it from you, Lord, that this shall ever happen.

[17:52] And Jesus turns to him and says, I'm not going to listen to you. I'm not going to walk in your counsel. I'm not going to sit with this wicked thought. Get behind me, Satan.

You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. So there's only one person in this room, and he's the one we can't see right now, who has successfully obeyed Psalm 11 and resisted at every turn the opportunity to be under the influence of the world.

Now, before we move on, I think this is worth noting. You will hear people say that Jesus was a great radical and a great nonconformist. As a man who loves hierarchies, hierarchies, conformity, submission, I want to urge you away from such thinking.

Jesus was not a nonconformist. He resisted the world's structures because he was a hyperconformist to the Father. See, what worldliness is, what you are when you're worldly is you're a submitter.

You're just submitting to the wrong thing. And how did Jesus resist conforming to this world? He was a hyperconformist. I and the Father are one.

[19:16] No light between me and the Father. I do what the Father says. I only do what the Father says. I only speak the words the Father gives me. Jesus was not a radical nonconformist.

Jesus was a radical hyperconformist, rightly submitted within the hierarchy provided to him by the very nature of God. Jesus resisted, and this psalm is about him.

And that's a really good thing. This is the next point. I want you to see that when you go to the Bible and don't see you, you're being given a gift.

It's a good thing. It's not a bad thing. Here's what I would encourage you to understand what the Psalms is doing will do for you if you will just submit to it for an extended period of time.

It will force you to remember that the central duty of the Christian is to worship Jesus Christ. That is not a profound statement, but it is perhaps so benign and common that you've forgotten.

[20:32] Your central duty as a follower of Jesus Christ is to look at him and adore him. That's your main job.

We're talking about worldliness, and I think as I've thought about worldliness, I think the most worldly thing about me and probably many of you is that I do not reflexively enjoy simple worship. I want to work. I want to accomplish. I would rather feel bad about myself than good about Jesus. Anything I can do to look at me rather than Christ.

I love to go to the Bible for a moral lesson, for a tip on how to lead my family, even for a tip on how to love others. The hardest thing, the most worldly thing about me is how hard it is for me to sit at the feet of Jesus and choose, as Mary did, the greater portion and look and say, I will now give you my attention and my adoration and my affection and be content to do that, at least for now.

And that's what this book will do for you if you say, you know what, Chris, you just said something that I completely identify with. I'm telling you now, over a period of years, reading Psalms, five Psalms a day in the parking lot of the job that I went to when I was planting my church in St. Louis. [22 : 11] I just had to, you know, stuck in the car. We didn't have TVs in our cars back then, weirdos. And I just had to say, listen, this is the commitment I've made.

I'm going to read this book and what is this book requiring of me? I tried to get around it, friends. I tried to use this as a how-to. I tried to use this as a manual for life. I tried to get around it and tried to use this as a church growth book, whatever.

But no, it says, no, no, no, no. Here's what you need the most. Here's what the central book, the largest book of the Bible is telling you. You need to learn how to worship Jesus Christ. That's what you need.

Here's the deal. If you want to learn doctrine, the Psalms can help you do that, but there are other books in the Bible that would be better for that. If you want to learn about family life, the Psalms have something to offer you, but there are other books in the Bible that can help you do that better. If you want to learn eschatology, I don't recommend the Psalms. There are other books for that. Isaiah, by the way. Isaiah, not Revelation. Isaiah.

[23 : 20] There are other books for that. But what you need to learn, what I need to learn, is what the Psalms insist you learn. And that is how to look at Christ and worship him.

There is no better book for you, for most of us, to read on a daily basis than the book that grabs you by your little baby cheeks and says, hey, look at Christ.

This is what you and I need the most. It is a transparent intent of this book written by God himself to make you look at Christ.

And it starts off on a roll, man. Psalm 1, we have got the blessed man, the man, the perfect, moral, righteous man. Psalm 2, we have the king, the cosmic king, who will rule the nations with an iron rod.

Psalm 3, we have the suffering servant. Oh Lord, oh Lord, how many are my foes? how many are rising against me? God is saying at the introduction of the first three chapters of the book, this is not about just any person.

[24 : 36] This is about a person who is perfect. This is about a person who rules with perfect, sovereign power. And this is about a person who has suffered a perfect death for the salvation of his church.

This is not about you. It's about Christ. So if you want to really lean into the Psalms, you have to overcome that thing we've talked about before, which we call narcissism.

Where the instinct is is to immediately, like we do with photos, family photos, to instantly look for ourselves in the photo. As I mentioned at the call to worship, we were out west and the first day we went to the Grand Canyon.

And I was greatly disturbed and tried not to be too judgmental, but I am getting older and it's easier. I was greatly disturbed, as was my wife, who's also just as old as I am.

Doesn't look it, but she is. We did struggle a bit to see all the people getting off the buses and spend their entire time, no kidding, their entire time inserting their face into the Grand Canyon.

[25 : 54] Selfie after selfie after selfie after selfie. It became really clear that we have a group of people that don't know how to simply look at something for its own truth, goodness, goodness and beauty.

But rather, they have to put themselves in the thing for the thing to have any meaning to them. If you think that that's a problem that you want to either avoid or be cured of, go on a Jesus treasure hunt in the book of Psalms.

And you will learn how to escape that terrible affliction. I want you to know that I'm not telling you to do this just because you should.

I'm telling you to do this because you should and because it is the thing that actually works to change you. Here's the deal.

Worship is never wasted because you become what you behold. Do you know that? You become what you behold. You are transformed into the thing that you routinely treasure.

[27 : 04] Whatever you worship is what you will be like. Show me what you worship and I'll show you who you will be down the road. And the problem that most human beings in America struggle with is they worship, they look at themselves and so they become themselves and it's just this

terrible feedback loop.

The Bible's not, I'm not just saying something here. The Bible's very clear on this. The Bible says that when we are saved, we have a new identity. The Bible calls it a new man, a new self. But it also says that we have to put on that new self and we have to rehearse it to ourselves and get used to this new skin that has been provided to us through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Well, how do we do that? How do we put on the new self? How do we actually become the new thing that God paid for us to become? Colossians 3.10 says, put on the new self. Here's what, listen to this, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. That makes my point but not as clear as the next verse.

[28 : 15] 2 Corinthians 3.18. And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to the other.

where is the transformation coming from in this verse? Beholding the glory of the Lord. Friends, I want to give you the most encouraging thing I think I could say to several of you.

Again, benefit of having a smaller church, we know each other. So I'm thinking of people when I say this. I want you to listen to me very carefully. I think it's likely, more than likely, that all of your sins and your struggles with temptation, that the many times you have strayed and faltered and failed, were all meant by God to teach you one central life-giving lesson.

Jesus is so much better than I am. and that that lesson is a hard one for self-absorbed people to learn.

But it is the lesson that transforms the soul. The simple lesson of worshiping Jesus Christ because he is better than me in every way is the thing that changes me.

[29 : 40] And that's why I want to encourage you to go to the Psalms to see Christ. You actually do appear in the Psalm 1 and in other Psalms.

In Psalm 1, you appear twice. You're definitely not the main character, but you do appear twice, at least in the book of Psalms. First of all, you are in the first half of Psalm 1.

The Bible says that the heart is deceitful and wicked above all things who can trust it. That's Jeremiah 7.10. So when you follow your heart, you are walking in the ways of the wicked.

So there's one part where you're there. When you lean on your own understanding, when you take your own counsel, when you do what is right in your own eyes, you're following a wicked person.

In a slightly more optimistic sense, you also appear in verse 3. It says that the reward for Jesus' perfect righteousness, his total resistance to worldliness, his perfect conformity to the Father, is that he is like a tree planted by streams of water that yield its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither, and in all he does he prospers.

[31 : 03] So where are you there? You are the fruit of Jesus' righteousness. You're the consequence of his cross.

you're the reward for his perfect obedience. Isaiah 53.10 makes this extremely clear.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

You are his offspring. You are the fruit off of the old apple tree of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus obeyed this perfectly, he was rewarded with fruitfulness.

And you're the fruit, and I'm the fruit. And because we are fruit off of a certain tree, we have no choice but to act like the thing we came from. So in that sense, once we get Christ sorted in a psalm, then we're free to think through the moral implications for you and I, but only after we've thoroughly and properly worshipped Jesus for being better than us.

[32 : 23] And then we can say, you're better than me, but I am of you. So now I have to figure out how to act like you. And so then I can go back through the moral wisdom of the psalm with Christ at the center, and then I can learn how to apply it.

And in this particular case, what's the command? Not to do, it's the worldly thing, but we've already said that the way that Jesus fulfilled that command was by being perfectly conformed to the Father. So the question is, how do you, what are you supposed to do to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night? How does that work for you? By studying Christ.

This is very important. For the Christian, the proper application of the call to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night is to meditate on Christ, who is the perfect fulfillment of the law.

As Jesus told the Jews, Moses writes about me. How do you meditate on the law of the Lord? Jesus is the fulfillment of the law of the Lord.

[33 : 30] He is the personification of the law of the Lord. I'm just telling you to do the thing. I've been telling you to do the whole sermon. Worship Jesus. Meditate on Jesus.

Paul tells the Romans, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. As we read in our call to worship in Hebrews, long ago, God spoke through other things, through prophets.

But in the last days, he's spoken to us through his son. So the answer to how do I meditate on the law of the Lord day and night is to worship Jesus. All of the godly Puritans understood that the primary power for life change did not come from reading books about life change, but came rather from meditating upon Jesus Christ.

Richard Sibbes wrote, the serious meditation of these things, talking about meditating on Christ, will put a glory upon our souls and the believing of them will transform us from glory to glory.

Charles Spurgeon talked about this all the time. In one place, he says, I know of no means under God so profitable for producing faith as thinking of Christ.

[34 : 44] I'll wrap up with this application. Again, pastoral in nature. Some of you have given your minds to things you really shouldn't have given your minds to.

The brain has a way of being trained. It's a lot like a grass field and you've worn pathways. And those pathways tend to be followed reflexively over time. It's kind of like breaking an ankle.

The first time, it's almost inevitable that you'll do it again and again and again. Some of you have given your minds to things that have taken control of your minds. Some of your minds are basically captive to past pain.

Some of your minds are consumed with concerns about what others think of you. Some of your minds are consumed with regret, fear, lust, or greed. And here's the thing.

You really regret giving your mind back one day back then to that thing because you didn't understand that when you give your mind to something, that something takes over your mind.

[35 : 47] and now you feel completely helpless to undo this pattern of thinking that has captured you. You gave it permission after all. You didn't know.

But it's running you right now. And it really annoys you. It really hurts. And to be honest, if you could go back and catch you in that moment when you started allowing your mind to wander down this path of anxiety or lust or comparison or resentment, you would because you understand now that you gave something the steering wheel and your brain is, after all, this plastic thing that takes the shape of the way you use it.

and you really regret it. But you find yourself powerless to overcome it. You are stuck in the counsel of the wicked.

That's what's happening. You've sat. You're not standing, you're not walking, you've sat. And it's one of those chairs you're having trouble getting up from. Well, I have much sympathy for you.

I've been there. I could tell you there's only one way out. And it's not a magic pill. But it's actually the thing you should have been doing all along and it's the thing you will eventually need to learn to do anyway and that is to worship Christ.

[37 : 22] You need to learn how to make Jesus your mental obsession. how to meditate on him day and night. It is only the expulsive power of a new affection, a very powerful affection, only a certain affection that will get you out of the ditch.

You need to learn how to go to the Grand Canyon of God's glory and just stand there uninterrupted with your own face and behold the glory of Jesus Christ.

the Bible says this will transform you from one degree of glory to the next. This is how you take every thought captive. Paul tells us make it obey Christ.

Every time your old way of thinking introduces itself you need to think about Christ. You need to think about Christ and that's the subject for the sermon next week.

Focus less on stopping various thoughts and focus more on fulfilling the purpose you were created for. That is to worship Jesus. Now as we think about communion I want you to notice something.

[38 : 34] That everything I've been saying is built into the command that Jesus gives for communion. What is communion for? Jesus says remember me.

Is that because Jesus is super vain and just wants you to remember him? No, it's because this is the way that your life is going to change by thinking about Christ.

Communion is merely a means of grace that flows along the basic mechanics of transformation in your whole Christian life. It is simply the reminder to remember to think of Christ.

So I'm going to pray for us and I'm going to pray for you. I'd like you to come and partake. We've got two tables set up of the elements and just grab them and come back to your seat and I'll lead us in partaking. Let's pray.

Father God, we bless your holy name for giving us Jesus Christ. He is worthy of actually every single brain cell that we have. He is worthy of all of our time and contemplation and none of us are in any danger of being too heavenly minded to be earthly good.

[39 : 41] Most of us are exquisitely worldly in the sense we are not big fans of standing there and looking at you and worshipping you. And Lord, as we come to the table today, we come as people who have so imperfectly fulfilled the command we see in Psalm 1 and 2 and our only hope is in the one who has fulfilled it not only for us in terms of giving us forgiveness for our sin, but also, Lord, that the power that we need to follow you is found in your obedience.

As we come to the table to engage in this act of remembrance, which is a mental thing, would you help all these people who felt seen when I talked about difficulties changing their thinking, would you help them, Lord?

Let this initial moment of communion be an installment from you to them of your faithfulness. if they will just keep looking to Jesus at a time of your choosing, when you have taught us the supremacy of Christ deeply enough, you will help this person be free from this way of thinking.

Lord, may we see freedom in focusing on Christ. Bless this time of communion. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Come.