

Mark 3:20-35

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[0 : 00] Go ahead and take out your copy of God's Word and turn to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 3. We proceed with our study through Mark's Gospel account.

! We have come now to chapter 3, verse 20. Mark chapter 3, I'll begin reading in verse 20.

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, He is out of his mind. And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.

And he called them to him and said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.

And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand. But is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man.

[1 : 07] Then indeed he may plunder his house. Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter. But whoever blasphemies against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

For they were saying, He has an unclean spirit. And his mother and his brothers came. And standing outside, they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you.

And he answered them, Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking about those who sat around him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.

Please pray with me. Father God, we thank you for your word, and the reading of it, and the preaching of it. And pray, Father, this day, by the power of your Spirit, for those of us who know you, and have been given the gift of the Helper, that you will apply these words to our heart, that we might be transformed this day.

And I pray, Father, for anyone here who may not have placed faith in Christ, who may not believe he is who he says he is, and that he did, in fact, accomplish the things that we see recorded in the Scriptures, that this will be the last day that would be true of them, that they might believe today and be saved.

[2 : 31] And we pray this in Christ's precious, holy, and magnified name. Amen. So this is a bit of a chunk of text, particularly for us as we typically try to take a little bit smaller bites of things and ruminate on them a bit more.

But I had a very difficult time not including verse 20 down through 35. For most of you, as we read that, you probably noticed that we passed by a couple of subheadings.

Please know that those are not inspired in any way whatsoever. From the ESV that I'm reading here, these are inserted, and most of us have the same insertions of this.

But you'll find that as we looked at verse 28 and verse 29, this is the text that is often talked about. This is where the unpardonable sin is preached from.

And there's lots and lots of misunderstanding about what that is and what that means. And I hope for us here, those of you who are regulars with us, this causes a little bit of grief in you to see when he says at the end of verse 29, but is guilty of an eternal sin.

[3 : 41] What does that mean? Because we preach a gospel of forgiveness. A gospel that comes by grace alone through faith and Christ alone forever.

We believe that our sins are expunged from us. That they are cast as far as the east is from the west. That they are forgotten. That when God looks at us who have believed in Christ, He sees the righteousness of Christ.

So we preach a gospel of forgiveness. And here we see it taught that there's a sin that cannot be forgiven and that should cause a little bit of conflict in you until we arrive together, I hope, at what this really means and how we should understand it.

There are lots and lots of entirely unacceptable understandings of what the unpardonable sin is. Some people believe it's just simply saying something against the Holy Spirit.

That if in some way you speak poorly of, it's what this term blasphemy means, is to belittle or to utter a, some kind of a condemnation against the Spirit, that you are therefore cursed.

[4 : 47] That there is no way you could possibly ever have forgiveness and acceptance in God. I've actually seen some people make the case that it's perfectly acceptable to cuss in God's name and Jesus Christ's name, but not in the Spirit's name, which if you think cussing is cool, that would definitely take your cool factor down if you cuss the Holy Spirit's name.

That's not what this means. Rather commonly, it's believed to be that it's the act of denying some work of the Spirit, whether that's a real work or a supposed work.

The charismatic movement is classic for railing this against those of us who don't believe that the Spirit works in exactly the same way they do, that we are committing a blasphemy of the Spirit because we don't think that the falling out and the speaking in tongues and all these things that are happening in these particular settings are actually the work of the Spirit, and therefore that is a blasphemy of the Spirit.

I'd say to you now, none of these are what Jesus means at all. There are some more acceptable understandings of it, although I think we'll see as we look at the context together that they're a little bit narrow.

One being an act of resistance which belittles the Holy Spirit so grievously that He withdraws forever with His convicting power. So we're not able to repent and be forgiven.

[6 : 08] Others say that it's simply, as Jesus is responding to the Pharisees, that it is to say that Jesus worked by a power other than the power of the Holy Spirit. And both of these things are true in their proper sense, but I don't think they're quite inclusive enough of what Jesus is trying to teach here.

And so let me tell you, not to leave you hanging too long, quick summary, and then I'll build the case for why I believe that what Jesus is saying here is that the unpardonable sin is denying that Jesus is the Christ or the anointed one with finality.

Denying that Jesus is the Christ with finality. And I arrive at that by looking at the context. That's why we started in verse 20 and we're ending in verse 35.

It's incredibly important. But before we even get to that, we should look at the context of the Gospel of Mark to this point. There have been many proclamations up to this point that Jesus is in fact the Son of God, the Christ, the one who has come to bring forgiveness to His people.

Mark states that in chapter 1, verse 1. He says the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. John the Baptist makes that declaration in chapter 1, verse 8.

[7 : 27] He says, I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit and God the Father have declared that Jesus is the Christ. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove, which would have been representative of both the indwelling power of the Spirit in His life and the blessing of the Spirit.

And God spoke out of heaven and said in verse 11 of chapter 1, You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased. This was a fulfillment of messianic prophecy.

2 Samuel 7, 12-14. A promise given to David speaking of his son Solomon, but in a greater way speaking of the Christ.

Nathan said to David, When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son. This is speaking both of Solomon and of our Lord. And Jesus has declared this of himself, that he is the Christ.

[8 : 35] When he states in chapter 2, verses 10-11, that he has the power to forgive sin. And in chapter 2, verse 28, when he says that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. This has been established, this reality, throughout the book so far.

Now as we look at our text today, beginning in verse 20 and going through verse 35, there emerges a common literary device that was used in the days of Mark.

I've said to you before that this was a rhetorical writing, not in the sense that we use rhetoric today, which is typically pointless argument or unvaluable argument, just meant to convince people of something.

But this would have been considered valuable argument, based in fact, but aimed at convincing us of something. You see here, we're being driven towards understanding that Jesus is in fact the Christ.

And he uses a literary form called a chiasm. It's not important for you to write down, but I happen to know what it's called. So there you have it. It's called a chiasm. And he follows a pattern, beginning in verse 20 and working himself down to verse 35.

[9 : 45] And a chiasm is reflective. So if you can track this in your mind, we have A, B, C, C prime, B prime, A prime. They reflect one another.

And we see this in verse 20. We see a crowd. In verse 21, we see Jesus' family. There's A and B. C, verse 22, we see the scribes. Then in verses 23 through 30, he addresses the scribes.

Verse 31 through 33, he addresses the family. In verse 34 through 35, he addresses the crowd.

This is significant.

It means that this was meant to be taken together. So as we look at verse 28 and 29, and we really try to understand what is it that Jesus was teaching, we can't simply look at verse 28 and 29.

We have to look at the context. We have to back up to this broader picture of this situation that's happening with the scribes and the crowd and his family.

[10 : 45] Very significant in this way. So let me say to you again, my assertion is that the unpardonable sin is denying that Jesus is the Christ with finality.

The same account of this story in Matthew chapter 12. Let me ask you to actually turn there. I'm going to show you a few things from this text. Matthew chapter 12, verse 32.

Jesus says, And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

So here, Jesus is saying, If you speak words against me, Jesus, the Christ, you'll be forgiven. But if you speak words against the Spirit, you will not be forgiven. So this seems to be contradictory to the very thing I just told you, that the unpardonable sin is denying that Jesus is the Christ with finality.

So as he's making this point to us, we must understand why would he have chosen to say this the way that he said it. Now note firstly, in verse 32 of chapter 12, he uses a term he gives to himself consistently and constantly, son of man.

[12 : 01] He talks about his humanity in this case. And we see many, many insults railed against him, many blasphemies spoken against Jesus himself as he is here on earth.

So keep that in mind. But also recognize that when Jesus was here on earth in human form, his will and his power, his will and his power as he was absolutely God, his will and his power bowed to that of the Father and of the Spirit.

He set aside that part of his deity. Jesus could have come down and done whatever he wanted to do, but he set it aside and he bowed that will and that power to that of the Father and of the Spirit.

John chapter 5, verse 19. Jesus says, Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.

Right? He was humble in that way. He took direction from the Father. John chapter 14, verses 10 and 11. He says, Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his work.

[13 : 16] Here's the Spirit abiding within him. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or else, believe on account of the works themselves. So both the things that he spoke and the things that he did were in submission to the work of the Father and of the Spirit.

So here we have this understanding that he's bowing now to the will of the Father that is accomplished by the work of the Spirit. And we have to then talk a bit about what is it that the Spirit exists to do?

Why is it that not believing that Jesus is the Christ with finality would be to blaspheme the Spirit? Would be to insult the Holy Spirit of God? It's kind of a phrase that we've lost. I think it's been mentioned here now in the last couple of months a couple of times. But that the Spirit of God is

often referred to as the shy spirit.

The Spirit of God works in this world not to magnify himself, as many believe, but to rather magnify and exalt Christ.

[14:22] Listen to what Jesus says about the Spirit. John 14, verse 26. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit... So we see this term Helper. He defines for us what he means.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and to bring remembrance to all things that I have said to you. He is going to come to help you remember all of the things, he's speaking to the apostles, that Jesus had taught them.

Chapter 15, verse 26. Jesus says, But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

Chapter 16, verses 12-14. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

For he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

[15:26] So here is the work of the Spirit. It's to exalt Jesus as the Christ. So denying that Jesus is the Christ with finality is to blaspheme the Spirit and that his work is not taking effect.

It's not having an effectual work in your heart. All of this is really a matter of the heart. Not so much about what we say, but about what we believe.

About who we are at our very core. And we become who we are as Christians by the work of the Spirit. We were once dead in trespasses and sins.

Our hearts were stoned. But God sent his Son that by his Son, he could send a Spirit into our hearts to make them hearts of flesh. That we might believe that faith would be birthed in us to pursue him and be disciple-making disciples of Jesus Christ.

So this is a matter ultimately of the heart. I hope you're still in Matthew 12. I didn't deceive you and tell you I wouldn't show you something from there and just show you verse 32. This is the more extended account of this interaction with these scribes.

[16:43] Now, I want to point out to you that in verse 22, the record in Mark is that the scribes who came down from Jerusalem... Jesus at this point has already had many scribes and Pharisees following him around, railing accusations at him, trying to discredit the things that he was saying to be true of himself.

Ultimately, what he would be crucified for would be for blaspheming God, for saying that he himself was God. And here we see now kind of a raising of the bar. They've called in the big shots.

The scribes were the theological experts of the day for apostate Judaism. Right? So they've called in the big wigs now. The ones who reside in Jerusalem have now come to accuse him.

So beginning in verse 30 of Matthew 12, Jesus sets for us some position. He says, For whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Two categories of humanity. Those who are with Christ, who believe he is who he says he is, and those who do not. Verse 31, Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

[18:01] It's our same thing we found in verse 29. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Now here we go.

Here's my context. It's so important. Jesus goes on to say in verse 33, Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad.

For the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak.

For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned. Our words give evidence of what we believe. Right? Out of the outflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

[18:59] So for you to deny that Jesus is the Christ with finality, and I'll explain what I mean by that here eventually, to deny that gives evidence of where your heart is.

If you do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are not regenerate. You do not have the Spirit of God. You do not have that seal that the accomplished work of Christ was done on your behalf and therefore you are damned.

But if you do, if you do recognize that Jesus Christ is who He says He is, you believe in His person and His work, you can have great confidence in that.

this is important doctrine for us. It's important for us to get this right. As John MacArthur said, properly understanding this brings comfort to the fearful and should bring fear to the comforted.

Those of us who understand the weight of sin, understand the great offense that it is to our God should be fearful of judgment. But this should bring us great comfort that we believe that Jesus is the Christ.

[20 : 09] That His accomplished work on the cross has meaning for my life today. That there is no thing that I can do that will not be forgiven by grace in Christ.

There's a fairly common argument made, was originally penned, I'm sure it was made prior to this, by C.S. Lewis. It's often summed up as the liar, lunatic, or Lord argument.

If you ever heard this, it's an argument against Jesus simply being a good and moral teacher. I heard it said that a lot of people in this world think that Jesus was just a rather good guy. I've heard very few people say that He wasn't.

Just kind of a good guy, but He made some really audacious claims, didn't He? He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to be the way, the truth, the life. And so, C.S. Lewis wrote in this great quote, essentially, in summation, that you have to believe either that He's a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. And I think He probably pulled that from this text itself. So listen carefully to what C.S. Lewis wrote in a book he wrote called Mere Christianity. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

[21 : 28] He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg, or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was and is the Son of God, or else a madman, or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. The things he said were so audacious that we either have to dismiss him completely or worship him as the Christ.

We see in our text here, we see all of these different summations of who Jesus was. Liar, lunatic, or Lord. The Pharisees are essentially the scribes who are accusing him of being a liar.

Verse 22, they said, and the scribes came down from Jerusalem and were saying, he is possessed by Beelzebul and by the prince of demons. He casts out the demons. This term they gave to him, Beelzebul, was a bit of a changing of a common term used of the devil.

[22 : 36] We use today Beelzebub. It's used five times in the Old Testament and it's derived from a Canaanite god, the lord of the Ekronites, which was Beelzebub, which meant in Hebrew lord of the high place.

But they had changed that word a bit and just swapped out the B and replaced it with the L and that one little letter changed the meaning to mean lord of the flies.

Interesting. Right? Which expressed the Jewish disdain for the god of the Canaanites. This was their way of really saying that they hated Satan.

Right? This false god. That was a way of really belittling him. And this is the very accusation that they're making of Christ who has said, I am myself god. They're calling him the great antithesis to who God is and was and will be forever.

And that is this false god of the Ekronites that they contorted the word to mean the lord of the flies. They're accusing him of being a liar. They're calling him something completely different.

[23 : 48] And he responds to them so cleverly as Jesus always does in our first recorded parables that we see in the Gospel of Mark and we'll see many more in the coming months.

Verse 23 says, And he called to them, Hey, come over here. And he said to them in parables. And he essentially goes through a number of true statements. Things that would be really hard for anybody to deny.

How can Satan cast out Satan? That makes no sense. How can someone who is possessed by Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

Much civil unrest. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. Those of you who are married know this to be true. Your house will not stand if you seek strife in it. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is coming to an end. He's simply rattling off points. How ridiculous is it that you're making an accusation that I'm casting out evil spirits and you're saying I'm doing that by an evil spirit.

[24 : 50] That makes no sense. And they would have been entirely on board with him at this point. But then he makes an even more audacious statement when he says, No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man then indeed he may plunder his house.

And he's referring here to the world being Satan's house and Satan being that strong man. So you wanted to break into somebody's home and they're there.

You've got to do something with the man of the house or else you're not going to be able to take his stuff. He's going to overpower you and call the police. This is what will happen. You come into my house you better come armed.

You better have more ammunition and better aim than I do if you're going to plunder my goods in my house. This is what you would have to do if you're going to plunder somebody's house.

So it would take a stronger man to accomplish this. So Jesus is again proclaiming his deity. Who's stronger than Beelzebul? God.

[25 : 51] And that is the very thing that he's saying to them here. I am working by the power of the Spirit. I am working by the power of God and that is how I'm able to cast out demons.

A very simple and poignant argument. Jesus is the Christ. You could take Jesus for a lunatic. It's a possibility. We see his family here do that very thing.

They come to him. He's more than likely in Capernaum. He's not back in Nazareth Nazareth in Bethlehem but in Capernaum kind of his home base for where he was operating and there's such a crowd that they can't even recline at table and eat.

They're pressed into the house. They're pressed in around him and his family comes and they're in probably with good motive trying to get him out of the situation he's found himself in with countless thousands of people pressing him in around him to see these miracles because they just think that he's crazy.

They just think that he's absolutely lost his mind. I like to muse we have no record of it but I like to muse about what it must have been like to be the brother of Jesus and hear your mom and dad say to you constantly why can't you be more like your brother?

[27 : 02] It cracks me up or what it would even be like to raise a perfect child I'm not sure I have no idea what that would possibly look like I can dream of that but here they come to him and they have missed the point at this station in their life.

They do not get who he is. Here in the record they're denying that Jesus is the Christ. Are they not? They're calling him a lunatic.

They think he's absolutely out of his gourd. There's no way that our brother that my son Mary like Mary she was visited by an angel who told him who he was going to be.

She gave birth to an immaculately conceived child. How could she not believe at this point? Right? We know that it's her because we see later on that his mother and brothers are outside.

Don't piecemeal this up. This is all happening at the same time. They've come. We see the record of them coming. He's inside dealing with the scribes and the crowd reports that his mother and his brothers are standing outside to seize him.

[28 : 05] Right? Because they think he's crazy. The blessing of this is that Jesus must be denied as the Christ with finality for that not to be forgiven.

John 7.5 says for not even his brothers believed in him. But then we have a record in Acts 1 that as they were fearfully gathered together and praying together, those who were faithful to Christ, his mother and his brothers were there.

That they had accepted him for who he is and who he was to them. Right? So it's important for us to see that that is the case. Just because you've denied that Jesus is the Christ at some point in your life doesn't mean that you can't begin to believe by the work of the Spirit that he is now the Christ. Right? That can happen. So you must reject to be guilty of an eternal sin. You must blaspheme the Spirit by rejecting that Jesus is the Christ with finality.

So you live your life, you go about your days, and when you pass and you're judged, if you have not believed that Jesus is the Christ, you don't believe in his person and his work for the forgiveness of your sins, that will not be forgiven.

[29 : 20] And there is your consistency with this gospel of forgiveness that is taught over and over and over and over again in the Scriptures. This entire book speaks of Christ and this gospel of forgiveness.

It is all about redemptive history. So the final thing that we're left with is to believe that he's Lord. To believe that he's Lord, verse 34 and 35 in Mark chapter 3, he looks around at those who sat around and he said, here are my mother and my brothers.

For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. John chapter 6, beginning in verse 26, Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

So there's a massive group of people that followed him around everywhere and as we've said repeatedly, these people were not to understand as disciples of Christ. Many of them, most of them, were following him because of the things he was doing.

He was feeding them. He was healing sicknesses. He was giving all this affirmation to the gospel message that he was preaching. But we're not to understand that they all were regenerate believers that were pursuing him and he gives us evidence of that in John 6, 26.

[30 : 34] You are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

For on him God the Father has set his seal, the Spirit. Then they said to him, what must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered, so here's the question they're asking, right?

We get this, verse 35, whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. What is the will of God? This is the question they ask in verse 28. Jesus answered them, this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.

Want to be in the will of God? There's your starting point. Believe that Jesus is the Christ. John 6, 40. Later in that chapter, Jesus says, for this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

And how do we do this? How is it that we become regenerate? Well, it's a work of the Spirit, so hear that clearly. It is a work of God on our behalf.

[31 : 43] He works in our hearts. He shifts who we are and causes us to believe. But that has to have some necessary outflow. There has to be some visible evidence of this thing happening, and there's a life of that.

Oh, the New Testament is full of all the things that should be happening in our lives if we do have faith in Christ. But the simplest and the first thing that starts at regeneration and continues on, Romans 10, 9.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Back in Matthew, this is why he's saying that we will be judged by the words that come out of our mouth.

And so we ought to believe that Jesus is who he says he is. You've only got three categories that you can put him in. Call him a liar, call him a lunatic, or bow at his feet and call him Lord.

There's a great, great stake in this whole thing. There's a meta-narrative that hangs over this world. And it is the reality, no matter what people's stories are, whatever situation they come from, whatever country they were born in, socioeconomic, ethnic, it does not matter.

[32 : 52] There's a commonality between all mankind, and that is that we are affected by sin. That it has changed who we are, and it has made us rebels. Standing in opposition to God.

That everything we do is in hatred of him. It sets us up on our own thrones. The sovereign of heaven, we try to supplant him in our own lives. And this is a damnable offense.

God will send those who are found in this state to hell forever. Rightly so. Justly so. Don't think that's unfair. If you think it's unfair, you don't understand sin. You deserve this if this is where you stand.

But then he sent his Son, righteous, perfect, in every respect, to be the perfect sacrifice on our behalf. That he might trade with us our sin and give to us his righteousness.

That we would be seen in him. So God doesn't pass over sin, but he punished our sin in Christ. And if you're not found in Christ, you have an eternal doom waiting you.

[33 : 55] This is the most important question. There's this meta-narrative, this reality that all of us are headed towards death and miserable death forever. How do we fix that?

That is the question that everyone needs to answer in their hearts. So today, if you have already answered that question, and I truly hope everyone in this room can say it with great confidence, Jesus is the Christ.

I know that. I can say that with finality. I know forever and ever I am redeemed in him. Praise God for that. But if not, I'd ask today that you repent and believe.

I've said things about the Spirit working in your life and you may not even understand what that looks like. If there's anything going on in your mind that ascends to this kind of truth, just respond to it. That is the work of the Spirit in your heart.

Just respond to the Gospel of grace in faith. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.