

Guest Preacher - Mr Stuart King (North Harris)

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Preacher: Mr. Stuart King

[0:00] You can maybe just turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 16 again. And we'll really just consider things from verse 25 to the end.

We're just going to look at this well-known story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer. But just before we do, we'll ask a blessing upon the remainder of our time together.

So we'll just say a short word of prayer just now. Gracious God, Lord, we again give you thanks that we have your word that's readily available to us, Lord. We ask that as we seek to glean much from it in the remaining time that we have today, you would speak to us through that word, Lord.

We are so grateful that we are able to gather here in your house, which we know is a privilege not afforded to everyone across this world, Lord.

We pray for those in all corners of your vineyard where it is not even possible to mention your name, let alone meet as we do this day. We pray for the persecuted church.

[1:09] We pray for those who meet maybe as we do this moment underground in silence and secrecy with the feet of persecution, Lord. So we pray for them, but we give thanks that even as they gather in small numbers, we are promised from your word that where two or three are gathered, we are blessed with your presence, which we are today here in Barvis, Lord.

So we pray that you would bless our time, that you would speak to us through your word, that you would reveal something fresh to us, and that we would go away from this place, that we would chew upon that word, that we would meditate upon the passages that we read, and that we would seek to memorise them as well as we shared with the young ones, Lord.

So bless our time together, Lord. Go before us in all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Okay, you can maybe just keep your Bibles open at Acts chapter 16.

Again, we're just going to look at this conversion of the Philippian jailer. However, I was wondering just at the beginning, the Christian life, it's often not what we expect it to be.

It's often very different from what we expect it to be. We often assume that if we are following God's will, then life should maybe become easier. I know that there are pastors on other ends of the world that will preach this prosperity gospel, which we know is not the case.

[2:32] But oftentimes we think that life should be easier. We assume that maybe our obedience that we have should sometimes bring comfort, possibly. Maybe our faithfulness should bring blessing.

And the sacrifices that we make should have an immediate impact in our lives. Yet the experience of many believers is the exact opposite of that. There are times when obedience to Christ leads not to comfort, but to conflict.

Maybe not to applause, but to opposition. Not to ease, but with suffering. And it raises a question that every Christian asks at one time or another.

And it's what do we do when faithful obedience appears to bring hardship rather than blessing?

What is it that we do? And this is exactly where we find ourselves here in this passage of Acts chapter 16.

It's where we find Paul and Silas during this time. They've been preaching the gospel, as we read of earlier on. They've been serving Christ faithfully. They've done exactly what God has called them to do.

[3:38] And now they find themselves beaten. They find themselves bruised. And they're sitting inside of a prison cell. Humanly speaking, everything appears to have gone wrong for Paul and Silas.

Their mission appears to be failing. The gospel appears to be hindered. And the enemies of Christ appear to be winning. But the wonderful reality of this passage is that God is still at work.

He's at work in ways that nobody can see. And really the great lesson that we read of here in Acts 16 is that God uses suffering. He saves sinners and he advances the gospel through his sovereign power.

We may be weak vessels being used by him. But it's his power that does the transformative work. And as we kind of work through the passage in the remaining time that we have left, I just want us to really look at three things that we'll see along the way.

And the first of those things that we see here from the story of Paul and Silas is that we see faith that worships in suffering. We see faith that worships in suffering.

[4:46] Just look at it again in verse 25 there. At about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them. You can just consider the scene in your mind's eye.

Maybe you've read this passage a thousand times, but I want us to maybe just in our mind's eye have a look and consider what we see here. These men, Paul and Silas, they've been beaten. Their backs are open wounds.

Their feet, we see at the end of verse 24, they've been placed in stocks. They're sitting in the innermost part of a Roman prison and it's midnight. It's not even the brightest part of the day. It's the darkest part of the day. Yet what do we find them doing? They're praying. They're singing. And they're worshipping. It's worth just pausing for a moment and asking how these two wounded men could sing at midnight.

They probably thought a good night's sleep is exactly what they were looking at. But no, you think of us here worshipping in this wonderful building here, comfy seats, a lovely place to come and to hear God's word and to sing together.

[5:54] We're in comfort. But there's nothing naturally joyful about a Roman prison. We have these two men. Their backs are bleeding. Their future at the moment is uncertain.

Humanly speaking, they have every reason to despair. Yet their circumstances do not dictate their worship. And why is that? It's because their view of God is greater than the experience of their suffering.

Throughout scripture, we find the same pattern. We see Job worshipped when everything had been taken from him. David sang in the wilderness while fleeing from Saul. Habakkuk declared that even if the fields yielded no food and the flocks were cut off, yet he would rejoice in the God of his salvation.

People of God have often discovered that some of their sweetest communion with him come in their darkest hours. Maybe that's the same for you.

Maybe that's the same today for you. One thing I want us to maybe think about here when we're looking at Paul and Silas, notice what they're not doing. We often look at what they are doing, but what are they not doing?

[7:04] We don't see them complaining. We don't see them accusing God. We don't see them questioning God's wisdom. Instead, they are praising him in the midst of their turmoil.

What do we see at the end of verse 25? It says, again, About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Look deliberately tells us that these other prisoners were listening.

These prisoners have now become witnesses to this praise and this worship. And in God's appointed moment, an earthquake shakes the prison and every chain is loosed.

What does this teach us about God? What does this tell us about who God is? Well, it tells us that God remains absolutely sovereign even in our suffering. Nothing in this chapter, nothing in the Bible, but nothing in this situation was outside of his control.

The beating that they had was not out of his control. The imprisonment was not out of his control. The prison itself was not outside his control. God has not lost control over the events, as some would maybe suggest.

[8:15] And from our perspective, Paul's in prison. And from God's perspective, Paul is exactly where he intends him to be. The Lord has purposes that Paul cannot yet see.

And us today, brothers and sisters, it's often true in our own lives. We sometimes view our circumstances through the lens of the present moment. Talking there to the young ones about my studies, the Greek and the church history, this first term that I'm going through.

A lot of it just feels like it's not getting into your head, and it just becomes somewhat overwhelming. And it's sometimes hard to see the end of this four-year program in the midst of term one. But that's what we often do.

We view things in our own circumstances, in our own moment, rather than seeing the bigger picture. But God always views our circumstances through the lens of eternity.

That brings us really to an important question. How can Christians endure suffering without despair? The answer is not found in all these self-help books, and just be really positive, have a more positive outlook.

[9:20] It's not found in working hard to develop a natural resilience. It's found in the character of God himself. Paul and Silas know something about God that enables them to endure what they are experiencing.

They know that he reigns. They know that he's sovereign. They know that he's good. They know that he's just. They know that he's loving. The God who was with Joseph, we cast our minds back to the Old Testament.

The God who was with Joseph as his brothers sold him. It's the same God who was there with Paul and Silas. It's the God who sustained Daniel and Babylon. It's the same God that is with Paul and Silas.

And the same God who led his son to the cross is still governing every detail of Paul and Silas' lives. Joseph could look back and say, You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. It's what Joseph learned in Egypt, Paul is learning here in Philippi. And what Paul learned in Philippi, every believer will soon come to learn.

[10:27] John Flavel, in one of his books, perfectly illustrates this. He says the providence of God is like Hebrew words. It can only be read backwards.

God's providence in our lives is often understood backwards. It's never understood by looking forward. We often look back and we can then see God's hand on our lives.

Just think of, if you're a believer, your own testimony, there will be times in the past where you can see the Lord's hand in your life. And Scripture teaches that God governs all things for his glory and for the good of his people.

Christians are not promised an easy life. They're promised the presence of God. Christian joy is never rooted in our circumstances. It ought to be rooted in Christ and in Christ alone.

If your joy depends upon Christ, then it rests upon one who never changes. Paul and Silas here understood that truth.

[11:28] And that's why we find them singing here in prison. They knew that the God who rules the prison is the same God that rules the universe. And some of us maybe need to hear that this morning.

Maybe we're trying to interpret God through our circumstances, when we ought to interpret our circumstances through God. If we begin with our trials, we will become discouraged.

But if we begin with the character of God, we discover reasons for hope, even in a dark night like Paul and Silas had here. Perhaps you feel as if you're sitting in a prison of your own this morning, maybe carrying grief, disappointment.

Maybe you're carrying an illness. Maybe carrying anxiety. Maybe you're carrying unanswered prayers. Perhaps you're asking, Lord, why has this happened?

Don't be discouraged if you're asking that question. You're not alone. Just have to look at the book of Psalms, and you see plenty of times. Psalm 10, Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

[12:36] Psalm 13, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? Don't be discouraged if you're asking these questions. But the passage here should be a reminder to us that hardship that we all go through is not evidence that God has abandoned us.

Paul could have thought he was abandoned, but he was not abandoned. Silas was not abandoned, and neither are you. God is still working, even when we cannot see it ourselves.

Anyone can sing when the prison doors are wide open. Faith sings while they're locked, and remain locked at midnight. But while they sung, who was it that was listening?

We see that the prisoners were listening to them. And the world is listening today. People around us are watching how Christians respond, how they respond to suffering, how they respond to much joy, how they respond to success, how they respond to much blessing.

There's a constant lens being looked, a microscope, sorry, being looked upon Christians. And when believers continue to trust Christ in hardship, they bear a powerful witness to the worth of the gospel.

[13:50] Which really brings us to our second point, that God's power brings salvation. Luke turns our attention now to the jailer himself. We've seen Paul and Silas' situation.

Now we have to have a look at the jailer himself. But what comes before we look to the jailer? We hear of this earthquake that comes. We see these prison doors flying open, chains falling away, and the jailer awakens.

He rightly and understandably assumes that everyone's escaped. They've all gone, and knowing Roman law, he's preparing to take his own life. He knows that he's condemned for allowing these prisoners to go.

Then in verse 28, we see Paul shouting to him, do not harm yourself, for we are all here. What a remarkable moment. Man who'd guarded the prisoners is now protected by the prisoners.

The man who had shown no mercy now receives mercy. And the jailer does what we would hope we would all do, and he rushes in trembling to them. And he asks this great question, probably the greatest question anyone can ever ask.

[15:01] If you're asking a question about the meaning of life, wherever you are in your own situation, this is probably the greatest question that we could ever ask. In verse 30 he says, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

This is probably one of the most remarkable scenes in the book of Acts. A few hours earlier, this jailer was just simply doing his job. He had no apparent interest in Christ.

He had no concern for eternity. He had no sense at that moment of his spiritual need. Yet now he stands trembling before Paul and Silas, asking this great question, what must I do to be saved?

What happened in his life? Well, God happened. The Lord had disturbed his false security and awakened him to his need of salvation. This jailer's understanding of what it meant to be saved is likely influenced by what he heard about Paul and Silas from others.

He knew who these prisoners were, knew why they were being locked up, but it also was probably formed from what he heard at midnight, from what he was hearing them singing and what he was hearing them praying would have influenced his understanding of what it meant to be saved.

[16:14] And he knew he needed something. And Paul gives one of the clearest answers in all of scripture. There's no huge list of requirements for this jailer. Verse 31 tells us, he says, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.

This tells us that God delights to save sinners. The greatest miracle in this passage is not that this earthquake came about, nor the greatest miracle we need of here is a conversion of this jailer.

Earthquakes can shake prison doors, but only God can shake the human heart. Chains can fall off the feet of prisoners, but only God can break the chains of sin.

Everything in this passage has been moving forward to this moment. The suffering that Paul and Silas went through, their imprisonment, the worship that they had, the earthquake that took place and the prison doors opening.

God was orchestrating events to bring one sinner to salvation. And there may be some among us that find the conclusion of this quite confusing. Maybe we want to believe that salvation is ultimately something that we contribute to God.

[17:23] What's my role in that? Scripture constantly points us in the other direction. We see that the jailer contributed nothing to his rescue except his need.

He knew something needed done. Everything else is provided by Christ. Notice again, we've looked at what Paul and Silas were doing and we considered what they were not doing.

What did Paul not say to the jailer? He doesn't say try harder. He doesn't say improve your life. He doesn't say get along to the prayer meeting or you've not been to enough services on the Lord's Day.

He doesn't say go and earn God's favor. No, he says believe. Believe. Salvation is not achieved. It's received.

And that's what we hear in this passage. Christ has done everything necessary. He lived the life that we could not live. He died the death that we deserve to die.

[18:27] He rose again in victory. And sinners are called to trust him. This is the heart of the gospel. And if among us, if online or in person, if you're not yet a Christian, the jailer's question must

become your question.

What must I do to be saved? God's answer today to you and your circumstances is the exact same as it was then. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn from your sin. Trust in Christ. Rest in his finished work. Just think about the parable of the lost sheep. The well-known parable to us.

We see that sheep heading off into the wilderness. It leaves the flock, departs, leaves the other 99. It doesn't find its way home by becoming a better navigator while it's trapped in danger.

It doesn't work out where it's been and work its way back. No, the shepherd must come and rescue it. Spiritually speaking, that's the condition of every sinner. We don't need assistance.

[19:32] We need salvation. We don't need advice or guidance. We need Christ. Many believers have loved ones who remain outside of Christ.

It may be children, grandchildren, friends, neighbours, spouses. And perhaps you're maybe tempted to think that they will never come to faith. I can't remember how many times I've asked my colleague or my friend to come to church or to even just come along to a Bible study or to come to an event in the church.

Maybe you think they will never come to faith. I want you to remember this jailer, this Philippian jailer. Nobody would have ever expected his conversion, yet God saved him.

No one, absolutely no one, is beyond the grace of God. Paul and Silas simply remained faithful.

They did not know what God was going to do.

They just simply trusted him. And the same principle applies to us. Our responsibility is faithfulness. God's responsibility is in the results. And perhaps you're maybe somebody who sat under the gospel for a number of years.

[20:41] This is maybe not the first time you've been to the church to hear God's word. Maybe you know the scriptures. Maybe you've been memorizing as we spoke to the young ones. You know many of the passages. But you've never personally rested and trusted in Christ.

I want you to know that the Lord's invitation is not hidden to you. It's wonderfully clear. It says, believe in the Lord and you shall be saved. Not tomorrow.

Not when you become better. Not when you have come to another 50 more services. Or not when you've been to the prayer meeting. No, it's not even when you become worthy.

Because we will never be worthy. But today, we can come just as we see this Philippian jailer did.

That then kind of moves us on to our final point where so we've seen Paul and Silas and that in their faithfulness where God remained faithful through their suffering.

We've then seen that God's power can bring salvation which we see through the Philippian jailer.

And then what we see in the remaining parts of this story is that God vindicates his servants.

[21:48] The magistrates decide that they want this matter quietly resolved. They didn't realise that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. They just want the whole thing swept it under the carpet let them go and we'll just let everything disappear.

And they send word to release Paul and Silas. But Paul refuses a secret departure. Paul refused to go. Why is that? Why did Paul refuse to go peacefully when he had the opportunity?

Well the reason is it was no longer a personal matter. There was a public injustice that had taken place. The authorities had publicly humiliated them. The authorities had publicly beaten them.

Therefore the authorities must publicly apologise for their wrongdoing. And so the magistrates come personally and they escort Paul and Silas from the city. And at first sight we may be looking and thinking why has Paul done this?

It maybe seems unusual. Why not just quietly leave? Why insist on this public acknowledgement?

One of the writers one of the commentators sorry explained that Paul understands that the reputation of Christ's church here is at stake.

[22:57] This is not pride. He's not seeking for an apology out of pride. This is a pastoral concern. The young Philippian congregation would remain in that city long after Paul had departed.

their witness must not begin under a cloud of criminal accusation. And it shows us that God not only saves his people but he vindicates his people.

The Lord allowed Paul to suffer. The Lord allowed Paul and Silas to be imprisoned. But the Lord also ensured that the truth would ultimately be seen. At midnight Paul appeared defeated.

By morning the authorities are apologising and a jailer has been saved. The situation has completely reversed. And that's often God's pattern. The cross is followed by resurrection.

Suffering is followed by glory. The story here of Paul and Silas in the prison also reminds us that God's vindication does not always come immediately.

[24:00] Sometimes it comes in this life. Sometimes it comes from midnight to the morning. Sometimes it comes only on the last day. Yet we can know from the promises of God that it will always come.

God governs every authority under heaven. The magistrates believed themselves to be powerful but in reality they were under God's sovereign rule. This points us ultimately towards the last day. There are many injustices in this world that will never feel that they're never corrected. Many faithful believers are falsely accused. many Christians suffer unfairly.

You just have to look. It's not often on our news but you don't have to dig too far to see the persecution of Christians in Nigeria and North Korea and all these other places across the world. Christians are suffering daily even at this very moment but God's final judgment will set everything right. No wrong will remain unanswered. No truth will remain hidden.

[25:02] no faithful service will be forgotten. Many believers carry wounds that no one else can see. Words that were spoken years ago about you may be false accusations may be misunderstandings that were never corrected injustices against you that have never been made right and perhaps you find yourself a longing for that vindication.

This passage left our eyes beyond human court to God's throne. The judge of all the earth will do right. Not one act of faithfulness will be forgotten.

Not one tear will be wasted. Not one injustice will remain unresolved. Perhaps you've experienced unfair criticism. It could be in the workplace. It could even be within the church.

Perhaps you've been treated unjustly. This passage reminds us and you that God sees. God knows and God remembers. Paul's not driven here by vengeance.

He's driven by concern for Christ's church. Christians are not called to retaliate. We're called to trust in God. The same Lord who preserved the Philippian church is the same Lord who preserves his church today.

[26:22] The church does not survive because of human strength. it survives because God alone sustains it. As we leave this prison scene in Philippi, what is it that we see?

What do we look at and see from these two men? We see two believers singing in the darkness. We see a hardened sinner brought to repentance.

We see mighty rulers humbled before the purposes of God. He is governing the suffering of his servants. He is saving those appointed to eternal life.

He is building his church. He is overruling the powers of this world. The prison could not stop him. The magistrates could not frustrate him. Satan himself could not and will never defeat him.

And therefore Christians among us, believers among us here, I want you to take courage. Your circumstances are not in control. God is. Your future is not uncertain as it may be looked in this story.

[27:25] God is in control. God reigns over your future. Your suffering is not meaningless. Just like Joseph, God will use it.

Therefore, we should worship him in suffering. Trust him in uncertainty. Witness for him faithfully and rest in the confidence that the God who opened the prison doors in Philippi still rules over every detail of his people's lives today.

So as we go away from this place, as we step back from the verses that we read of here in Acts 16, three great truths stand before us. When believers suffer, God is still sovereign.

When sinners seem beyond hope, God is still able to save. When God's people are mistreated, God will always vindicate them.

Therefore, what should we do as we leave? We should worship him in our suffering. We should trust him for salvation and we should rest in his vindication. Because the God who ruled the prison in Philippi still rules every circumstance in your lives today.

[28:39] And for those again that are not yet Christians, like this jailer at the beginning at the night, maybe that's who you are, maybe the Lord means nothing to you, maybe you've been forced to come along here, maybe that's how you feel, maybe you think I'll never become a Christian, or maybe the opposite, you think I'll maybe become a Christian later on, I'll do something later.

The answer to the question, well, sorry, the question that you should be asking is that which the Philippian jailer asked himself, sirs, what must I do to be saved? And the answer will always be the

same, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Believe in the Lord Jesus. Just as we close, I want you to remember these words that one of the commentators wrote that I was reading. He says, the chains that bind God's servants can never bind the God they serve.

The chains that bind God's servants can never bind the gods that they serve. So whatever circumstances you find yourself in, whatever difficulties, it may be times of great blessing, we should always remember that we ought to believe in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved.

There is nothing you bring to the table, just as the hymn writer wrote, nothing in thy hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. We can't lay up all of our church attendances, we can't lay up our memory verses that we have in our head, we can't bring before the judgment seat our knowledge of the Bible, the nice things and the good things that we've done, for none of it saves, only believing in the Lord Jesus is that which will save us.

[30 : 17] Amen and may the Lord bless those very short reflections on his word. We'll close with a word of prayer before we sing. Gracious and ever blessed Father, again Lord we give you thanks that we have this story that we're able to turn to, a story of salvation, a story of faithfulness from you to Paul and Silas, a reminder of your sovereign power in all things, in the earthquake that came, in the prison doors that opened, the chains that were loosed, and in the salvation of the jailer, Lord.

We give thanks that this is not something that we look at in the past and look at from a distance, but this is a reality for us today. The same question posed by the jailer should be the same question being posed by us all, for we know that the answer will always be the same.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. So we give thanks, Lord, for that promise. We give thanks that you are indeed a just God and that sin that affects all of us must be punished.

But it's in your grace and in your mercy that you sent your son to die for us so that we would be clothed in his righteousness. You sent him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we may be made righteous.

So we give you thanks for that gift, although we are entirely undeserving of it. We thank you that you saw fit in your sovereign will from before time began to institute that salvation plan which we can see in your word from the beginning of Genesis through to Revelation as that golden thread of salvation.

[31 : 50] We're able to turn to those pages and see the love that you have for each and every one of us, Lord. So we give thanks for your word. We pray that as we go away from this place that we would meditate upon that word, that we would read the surrounding passages, but that we would be reminded again of the wonderful glorious God that we have, that we don't expect or we are not expected to do anything in and of ourselves, for we know that there is nothing we bring to the table.

Apart from you, we can do nothing, and that applies not only to various aspects of our life, but especially to our own salvation, Lord. So we pray for those, especially this afternoon who don't know you, those who have maybe made a conscious decision this day not to come to your house, not to hear your word.

We pray for them, Lord, and ask that you would make yourself known to them, that you would reveal your peace to them, that you would reveal your light to them, and that they would recognize that there is something, like this jailer did, there is something in and of ourselves that requires salvation, and that there is nothing we can do, nothing we can bring to the table.

So bring them to their knees as they cry out for mercy, Lord, seeking that you would be the one that enters into their lives, Lord, and grant us all opportunities to share, just as Paul and Silas witnessed at midnight singing and praying, give us those opportunities to witness to those loved ones around us, maybe even in our own homes, in our workplaces, in the local community, grant us those witness opportunities to share the gospel, not only just asking for opportunities, but a courage and a boldness to take the many opportunities that present themselves each and every day to share your word, even to share the hope that is within us for those of us that know you, Lord.

So be with the congregation here, Lord. We ask that you'll continue to bless them, bless them during this period of vacancy as well, Lord, and we ask that you would, even in that time of vacancy, that there would be much blessing in the congregation here, Lord.

[33 : 52] So forgive us for all of our sins, Lord, be round us and keep us, and all that we ask is in the name of Christ, our Lord, Amen. We will conclude this time by singing from Psalm 121.

Psalm 121. We'll obviously sing the whole of the psalm. Again, just a reminder to us not to look inwardly, not to look at ourselves, not to look at anything that we can bring to the table, but that we

would lift our eyes to heaven.

So I, to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need, my safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. Thy foot he'll not let slide nor will, he slumber that day keeps, behold he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not nor sleeps.

The Lord he keeps, the Lord thy shade, on thy right hand doth stay, the moon by night thee shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day. The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill, hence forth thy going out, and in God keep forever well.

So we'll sing the whole of Psalm 121 to God's praise. I to the hills will lift my eyes, from west of the my name.

[35 : 22] My safety covered from the Lord, to heaven and earth hath made.

Thy foot he'll not let slide nor will he slumber that thee keep.

Behold thee that keeps Israel, he slumbers not nor sleeps.

The Lord thee keeps the Lord thy shake on thy right hand thou stay.

The herd by die thee shall not smite, nor yet the sun by day.

[36 : 47] The Lord shall keep thy soul, he shall preserve thee from all ill.

Hence forth thy knowing God he!

He forever will! We'll conclude with the words at the end of the book of Jude.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever.

Amen.