

The ABC of Time

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help, and the Lord's enabling, this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 3.

And we'll just read again at verse 1. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 at verse 1. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven, a time to be born, and a time to die.

These opening words of Ecclesiastes chapter 3, they're very familiar to us. And they're very familiar to us not only because they're often read at a funeral, but also because they're so poetic.

And these poetic words of Ecclesiastes 3, they're known to many and they're loved by many because in them we're reminded that there is a time for everything in life.

And you know, it never ceases to amaze me that even though the book of Ecclesiastes is 3,000 years old, it's still as relevant for us today.

[1 : 20] Because Ecclesiastes, as we know and as we've been seeing over the last few weeks, Ecclesiastes is a sermon that was preached by King Solomon near the end of his life.

And in this sermon, Solomon is preaching about the need to live your life with an eternal perspective. Because as Solomon came to discover for himself, he said that we can possess great knowledge and we can have lots of wisdom.

We can even be the wisest man who ever lived, but we can still live our lives in a foolish manner.

And sadly, Solomon learned this the hard way. Because as we read in the account of Solomon's life in the book of Kings, we see that Solomon had great wisdom, but he lacked godly wisdom.

And that was his downfall because Solomon struggled with the temptations of the world. And failing to resist the temptations of the world, Solomon, he fell. And he backslid very far away from the Lord. But what's remarkable is that the book of Ecclesiastes is said to be Solomon's sermon of repentance. And Solomon is speaking from his own experience, but he's speaking with regret.

[2 : 31] And Solomon regrets that he was sucked in by the vanity of this world. And he regrets that he swallowed the lie that this world can give to us all the pleasures that our heart desires.

And now as an old man looking back over his life, Solomon humbly admits that even though it may have seemed good for a time, it's all vanity.

It's all vanity. He says, vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanity. All is vanity. It's all meaningless. It's empty. It's futile.

It's all chasing and striving after the wind. It's striving after the things that will never satisfy. And you know, having discovered what this world offers us, that it offers nothing but vanity, Solomon's hope is that we will listen to his sermon in order to spare ourselves the bitterness of learning what he learned.

And in this sermon, Solomon is calling us to examine our lives. He's calling us to look at our lives and ultimately live our lives with an eternal perspective.

[3 : 40] Because if we're not living our life with an eternal perspective, then Solomon says you're wasting your life. You're wasting your life. And Solomon's plea in this sermon is don't waste your life.

Don't waste your life. Don't waste your life living for yourself and living for the pleasures of this world. Because he says what is of the utmost importance and what is of eternal value is our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

But you know, when we come to this chapter, we have to see that in order to press upon us the need to live our lives with an eternal perspective, Solomon reminds us that we are all governed by time.

We're all governed by time. In fact, I believe that this chapter, it's all about time. And in it, Solomon is giving to us the ABC of time.

The ABC of time. Because Solomon says that there is appointed time, there is beautiful time, and there is crucial time. The ABC of time.

[4 : 51] Appointed time, beautiful time, and crucial time. So if we look first of all at appointed time. What Solomon says about appointed time.

Look again at verse 1. He says, For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill, and a time to heal. A time to break down, and a time to build up. And as Solomon calls us to live our lives with an eternal perspective, he reminds us in this chapter that we're all governed by time.

And we're governed by time because we're not like our creator. We are so unlike God. God. Because God is infinite.

We are finite. God is eternal. We are bound by times and seasons. God is unchangeable. But we are constantly changing. And all our circumstances around us, they're constantly changing.

[5 : 53] My friend, we are so unlike God. Because we are governed by the times and seasons in our lives. And you know, it's so true, isn't it? That every minute of our day is governed by the clock.

And every day of our week is governed by the calendar. And every year in our lives, it's marked by the day of our birth. We are governed by time.

And Solomon says that everything that happens in our lives, it takes place between two times.

There are two times that are governed. Our time to be born, and our time to die.

And these times, he says, they are the most momentous occasions in our life. And between these momentous points, he says, all the other times and seasons take place.

The time to plant, the time to harvest, what has been planted, the time to weep, the time to laugh, the time to mourn, the time to dance. All these times take place between our time to be born, and our time to die.

[6 : 59] But with all these times in our lives, Solomon is reminding us, we are governed by time.

We are governed by time. And you know, it's because we're governed by time that we make plans.

It's not wrong to make plans. We have hopes. It's not wrong to have hopes. We have dreams. It's not wrong to have dreams. But what Solomon is saying is that our plans and our hopes and our dreams, they have to be viewed with an eternal perspective.

We have to look at life and live our lives and make all our plans and our hopes and our dreams according to God's plan. Acknowledging that God is sovereign.

Acknowledging that God is in control. Acknowledging that our times are in his hands. We have to look at every moment in our lives and acknowledge that all our meetings and all our partings and all our joys and all our sorrows and all our good news and all our bad news.

We have to look at every moment in our lives and acknowledge that we are not in control. We are not in control. We are not sovereign.

[8 : 09] We're not in control of our own lives. We're not in control of our plans or our hopes or our dreams. My friend, our times are not in our hands.

But you know, when we live our life without God, and when we live our life as if there is no God, and when we make plans and hopes and dreams without even acknowledging God, we are saying to God that our times are in our hands.

And when we think that our times are in our hands, we live our life without thinking about eternity. And we don't prepare for eternity. We have plans and hopes and dreams, maybe for ourselves, maybe for our children, maybe for our grandchildren.

But when we make all our plans and hopes and dreams without acknowledging or involving God, Solomon is saying we are not living our life with an eternal perspective. Because what happens when things don't go according to plan?

What happens when our hopes are dashed? What happens when our dreams are shattered? What do we do? What do we do when life takes that unexpected turn?

[9 : 27] What do we do when what we wanted to happen, and what we planned would happen, and what we hoped would happen, and what we dreamed would happen? What do we do when these things don't happen? What do we do when we're not living our life with an eternal perspective, and we're confronted with the realities of life and sin?

What do we do when things don't go the way we planned? When we lose our job, or things don't go well at work, or illness creeps in, or death breaks into our home and into our family?

What do we do when our lives are turned upside down in a moment? Well, some just say it couldn't be helped. Others say, well, that's just the way it is.

Some even turn against God and blame Him for all the bad things that happen in life. They ask, where is God in this? How can a good God allow this to happen?

Why do bad things happen to good people? But my friend, the person who asks that question is not living their life with an eternal perspective.

[10:42] Because what Solomon is seeking to remind us is that we are not in control of the times and seasons in our life. Our times are not in our hands. But when we look to the Lord, and when we trust in the Lord, do you know what we discover?

We discover that He knows our situation. And He's in our situation. And in our situation, He's doing all things well. As I know what James says to us in his letter, you remember his New Testament letter, James says, Come now, you who say today or tomorrow will go into such and such a town and will spend a year there and will trade and make a profit.

Yet you do not know what a day nor an hour will bring. What is your life? Says James. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Then he says, Instead you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. And what James is saying, it's the same thing as Solomon here.

Live your life with an eternal perspective. Live your life looking to the Lord. Live your life trusting the Lord in all things. Live your life not leaning upon anyone or anything else.

[12:05] It's no wonder Solomon said in Proverbs 3, Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path.

My friend, trust the Lord of providence. Trust the Lord of providence. And you know, that's what the psalmist was doing in Psalm 31 that we were just singing.

When the psalmist considered all the trials that were taking place in his life, he had to confess, My times are in your hands. And that's what Solomon wants us to confess to the Lord.

My times are in your hands. Solomon is calling us to trust the Lord of providence. And you know, the doctrine of God's providence, it's one of the most beautiful doctrines in the Bible.

The word providence, it just means seen beforehand. Seen beforehand, meaning that God has seen it all take place before it happens.

[13:15] And the Lord knows what will happen because all the times and seasons in our life, they have been appointed by him. And you know, I want to say to you today, it's good to read your Bible.

It's good to read your Bible because there's no better book in all the world that will speak into all your situations and give you help and strength and peace and comfort when you need it most.

It's good to read your Bible. But you know, there's another book that we must read alongside our Bible. And that's the book of providence. Because when we read the book of providence and we consider our own lives, we're unable to see that nothing happens by chance.

There are no chance meetings. There are no random events in our lives. Nothing takes place by accident. The Lord who has seen it all beforehand, he is the one who has commanded everything. He has governed and ordered all things because he is the Lord of providence. And maybe for you, my friend, your particular book of providence has been a hard read.

[14:27] And it may be difficult for you to turn the pages because you just don't know what's coming next. You have experienced so much already and you're afraid of, well, what's around the corner?

I just don't know. You don't know what's written in the story of your life. Yet at the same time, is it not true that the greatest comfort and the greatest assurance to you is that the Lord of providence knows?

He knows what you're going through today. And he knows what this week ahead holds for you. He knows what's in your cup. And he knows what you need because he knows you.

He knows you intimately and personally. And you know, this is what we have to grasp that the hard providences which we face in our lives are not to drive us away from the Lord.

They're not to drive us away. No, every providence in our lives, everything that takes place in our life is to make us realize that we need to depend less upon self and more upon the Lord.

[15:31] And is that not what Job came to discover? After he lost his home and his family and his possessions and his health, Job lost everything.

And Job had many friends telling him that it was all his fault and that he was to blame for all that happened in his life. But what's remarkable is that Job trusted the Lord of Providence and he confessed about the Lord.

He knows the way that I take. And when he has tried me, I will come forth as gold. For he performs the thing that is appointed for me.

And many such things are with him. My friend, trust the Lord of Providence. Trust the Lord of Providence.

Someone once said, and you know it just sums up exactly what Solomon is saying, our disappointments are God's appointments. Our disappointments are God's appointments.

[16:42] But in it all, we are to trust the Lord of Providence. And so Solomon is, he's giving to us the ABC of time. And he's reminded us that all our times, they are appointed time.

But then Solomon draws attention to beautiful time. Beautiful time. Look at verse 9. He says, What gain is the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.

He has made everything beautiful in his time. Also he has put eternity into man's heart. Yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

And so in Solomon's poem, in the first eight verses of the chapter, he reminded us that God has appointed a time and a season for everything in life. And even though we see that everything around us is constantly changing, yet it's all under the providential care of God.

He's working all things together for good and for his glory. But what Solomon highlights then in verse 9 onwards, it's very interesting because he asks, What gain has the worker from all his toil?

[17:57] What real profit is there from all that the worker does in the time that is allotted to him? What meaningful, lasting enjoyment is there between our time to be born and our time to die?

He's asking, What contribution do we really make in the years that have been allotted to us? And Solomon is reminding us that it's very, very little. Yes, he says, Life is to be enjoyed.

We're to enjoy what God has given to us. We're to enjoy our work and our family and all our pleasure. We're to enjoy these things, but we're to enjoy them in the right perspective.

We're to enjoy them with an eternal perspective. And you know, this is the great irony about the day and age in which we live. You know, we have amazing advancements with technology to make life easier.

And just take, for example, the washing machine. It washes clothes in an hour. Take it out of the washing machine, throw it into the tumble dryer. Dries the clothes in an hour.

[19:09] Take it out of the tumble dryer, put it on the iron. Drying, ironed in minutes. Everything sorted in such a short space of time. We've made all these amazing advancements with technology that make life easier and quicker.

It's freed up our time. But the greatest irony is we've never been so busy. We've never had to deal with so much pressure.

Because there's pressures from work, there's pressures from family life, there's pressures from the community and things we're involved in, pressures even from church. There's so much pressure.

And we're all rushing around, we're all in a hurry, we're all trying to beat the clock, trying to get as much done before the day is out.

And we're all so busy, so busy that we don't have time. But my friend, what are we so busy with? What is it that we're busy doing? What is it that makes our time so precious?

And Solomon says, time is precious to us because God has put eternity in our heart. And because God has put eternity in our heart, we all know deep down and we all realise that our time is short and our time is precious.

[20:28] But instead of living our lives with an eternal perspective, it's often the case that we fill our lives with everything else so that we don't have to think about eternity.

We take all the gifts that God has given to us, great gifts, and we make them our idols. And we fill our lives with all these things to make sure that we don't have time to think about eternity.

And you know, that's why people don't want to become a Christian. They don't have time. Their life is so full that they don't have time for God.

They don't have time for church. They don't have time for Christianity. They don't have time for Jesus Christ. And yet Solomon is saying that God has put eternity in our hearts not only to make us see that our time is short and that our time is precious, but also to make us see that our life is vanity

without God.

It's vanity without God. It's all meaningless, futile, empty, chasing and striving after the wind. And you know, we waste so much of our time, don't we?

[21 : 40] Whether it's overtime at work, endless hours of watching TV, sitting, looking at Facebook or Twitter, nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves, nothing at all.

But Solomon is challenging us and he's asking us, in light of eternity, how much time do you use to prepare for eternity?

How much time do you give to your spiritual well-being? How much time, how much of your time is profitable for eternity?

And it's a challenging question, isn't it? Does my busy, high-pressured, full life, does it cause my Bible reading to suffer? Does it cause my prayer life to become shorter or non-existent?

Does it cause my church attendance to become more and more infrequent? Does it interfere with my commitment to the Lord and His cause?

[22 : 44] And you know, they're challenging questions. But the reality is God has put eternity into our hearts so that we will prepare for eternity. God has put eternity into our hearts so that we will live our lives with an eternal perspective.

It's all so that we will look towards eternity. And you know, it was Augustine, he was one of the early church fathers in the fourth century. That's the quote in the bottom of the intimations.

he wrote many confessions to the Lord and they're in a book called Augustine's Confessions. And one of Augustine's confessions was, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.

You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you. And that's what Solomon is saying to us here. that God has put eternity into our heart to make us restless.

God has put eternity into our heart so that we will seek him and live our lives for his glory. And you know, this is the wonderful thing about the Bible.

[24 : 00] The Bible is a book about eternity. Because when God created Adam, he created Adam for eternity. He put eternity in Adam's heart.

But at the fall, Adam's disobedience brought the curse of eternal death upon all mankind and the prospect of eternal punishment. But in his grace and mercy, this is the wonder of the Bible, the eternal God inaugurated an eternal covenant that would secure an eternal kingdom through the work of an eternal redemption by the blood of an eternal son.

And the resurrection of Jesus, it guarantees that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

My friend, the Bible, it's a book about eternity. eternity. And it's telling us that God has put eternity in our hearts, that God has made us for himself, and our hearts will continue to be restless until they find peace in him.

God has put eternity in our heart in order to make us see that he makes everything beautiful in his time. And in the Bible, the story of redemption is a beautiful story.

[25 : 27] It's a beautiful story of how the Lord has worked in time in order to prepare sinners for eternity.

And that he has done that work through the person of Jesus Christ. And you know, we are to look to him, we are to see his beauty, we are to know his forgiveness in the gospel, we are to live our lives for his glory, we are to live our lives with an eternal perspective.

And we are to say with the psalmist in Psalm 27, we'll be singing it later on, one thing, one thing I of the Lord desire, and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may, within God's house remain, that I, the beauty of the Lord, behold me and admire, and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire.

my friend, the God of eternity has done something beautiful in time in order to prepare sinners for eternity.

And that's what Solomon is telling us here, he's giving to us the ABC of time, and he's reminding us that our time is appointed time, our time is beautiful time.

[26 : 48] But then thirdly, Solomon reminds us that our time is crucial time. Crucial time. If you look at verse 16, he says, Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness even there was wickedness.

I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. And you know, having drawn our attention to God's providential care over all the times and seasons in our life, and then made us aware that God makes everything beautiful in his time through the person of Jesus, Solomon now turns his attention to the time of God's judgment. Because if God has appointed all our times and seasons, and if God has appointed the time when Jesus would die upon the cross for sinners, then he says, God has also appointed a time when everything will be brought into judgment.

And Solomon draws attention to God's appointed time for judgment by speaking about the injustice in the world. He says that instead of justice and righteousness, there is wickedness.

There was injustice. There was unrighteousness. There was lies and deceit. There is wickedness. There is wickedness. But as Solomon reminds us, as he says, he says, if there is a time for every matter under heaven, then God has appointed a time for judgment.

[28 : 28] Yes, God allows injustice. He permits unrighteousness. He withholds his wrath, but only for a time.

My friend, God is long-suffering, but he is not all-suffering. He will not allow injustice and unrighteousness and lies and deceit to go unpunished.

God will not allow wickedness to continue forever because he has appointed a time for judgment.

And that's what Solomon says to us at the end of his sermon in chapter 12.

He says, God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. God will reveal everything, he says.

What has been hidden will be made plain. What has been crooked will be made straight. What was concealed will now be revealed. Everything will be brought into judgment.

[29 : 31] And you know, the Apostle Paul reminds us of the serious nature of this judgment when he says in 2 Corinthians 5, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether good or bad.

We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account. And that judgment day, he says, is an appointed time.

And the appointed time for the day of judgment is the day when Jesus Christ returns in all his glory. But of that day and hour, says Jesus, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, but my Father only.

But on that day, says Jesus, the Son of Man shall come in all his glory and the holy angels with him.

And then he shall sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be gathered all the nations and he shall separate them one from the other as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats.

With the goats, he will set on his left hand and the sheep on his right. And what Jesus makes very clear to us is that we don't know when judgment will happen.

[30 : 48] But we do know that judgment will happen. And what's crucial is that we have to be ready. As Jesus says, be ye ready for at an hour when you think not, the Son of Man will come.

And we can only be ready by trusting in the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all our sin. We can only be ready if we're living our lives with an eternal perspective. But you know, Solomon, he doesn't leave it there.

He not only says that God has appointed a day of judgment, he also reminds us that God has appointed the day of our death. Look at verse 19.

He says, For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same. As one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath and man has no advantage over the beasts for all is vanity.

All go to one place. All are from the dust. And to dust all return. You know, we miss many appointments. Doctors appointments, dentist appointments, school appointments.

[32 : 03] But the day of our death is one appointment that we will not miss. the Bible solemnly reminds us that it is appointed.

It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment. And if we will not miss the appointed day of our death, then we will not miss the appointed day of judgment.

judgment. But you know, my unconverted friend here today, you don't need to wait until the day of your death.

And you don't need to wait until the day of judgment to know what your verdict will be. You already know. You already know that the law of God condemns you because of your sin.

You already know that sin separates you from God. You already know that were you to die in your condition today without Christ as your Savior, you would spend an eternity in hell.

[33 : 10] You don't need me to tell you that. You already know that. And you don't need to wait until the day of your death or the day of judgment for you to know what your verdict will be.

But I don't want you to wait. I want you to act. And I want you to act now. I want you to act today. And you know, this is what I love about Paul. When he says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. He goes on to say, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

Knowing that God will act in righteous judgment against sin, knowing that God will say to the unrepentant sinner, depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire, knowing that it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, we persuade men and women, boys and girls, to commit their life to Jesus Christ.

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. Knowing the terror of what God does in righteous judgment, we persuade you.

[34 : 34] We plead with you to commit your life to Jesus Christ. Christ. I'm sure we've all heard the saying before, never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.

Well, the American evangelist, D.L. Moody, he learned that lesson the hard way. On the 8th of October, 1871, D.L. Moody was preaching to a large congregation in the city of Chicago.

And he was preaching on the text in Matthew 27, What shall I do with Jesus called the Christ? But as with most preachers, Moody ran out of time.

He ran out of time during his sermon. And so he brought his sermon to an abrupt conclusion by telling his congregation, I want you to take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week.

And next Sabbath, we will come to Calvary. And we will then decide what to do with Jesus. But you know, what Moody didn't know was that many people in his congregation wouldn't see next week to decide what to do with Jesus.

[35 : 48] In fact, they didn't get another opportunity to hear the gospel and decide what to do with Jesus. Because that night, many people in his congregation died.

That was the night of the great fire of Chicago. and the city was burned to the ground. And as you would expect of a minister, D.L. Moody, he deeply regretted that he had told his congregation to wait until next week to decide what to do with Jesus.

He learned never to put off until tomorrow what you can do today. And I'm sure that that's why D.L. Moody was such a great evangelist.

That's why he had such passion. Because he knew the terror of the Lord. And he sought to persuade people to commit their life to Jesus Christ.

He knew that it was appointed unto man once to die. And after that, the judgment. And that's what Solomon is trying to do here in his sermon.

[36 : 55] He's trying to persuade us. he's trying to persuade us that between now and the appointed time of our death, it's all crucial time.

It's crucial time. But we don't know how long we have. We don't know the day nor the hour. But what we do know is that the day and the hour to come to Jesus Christ for your salvation is now. It's now. The Bible says very, very clearly now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. Not tomorrow. Not later on today.

Not next week. Not next year. Not at a more convenient time in your life. But now. Today. Today. Today is the day of salvation.

salvation. My friend, I warn you today, you might not get another opportunity to hear the gospel. You might never sit where you are today again.

[38 : 09] So why are you going to risk your eternal well-being by putting off until tomorrow or a later date what you can do today.

What you can do today and what you can do today is say to the Lord, create within me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.

Commit your life to the Lord. My friend, Solomon has taught us today about the ABC of time and he's reminded us that our time is appointed time.

Our time is beautiful time and our time is crucial time because the time to come to Jesus for your salvation is now.

It's now. Now is the accepted time. today is the day of salvation. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

[39 : 16] Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee that our times are in Thine hand, that Thou art the one who is sovereign, the God who rules and who reigns over all things, and that even today was an appointed time.

It was appointed by Thee that we would be in church this morning. It was appointed by Thee that we would hear Thy words speaking to us, that it was an appointed time, and that Thou art one who reminded us in Thy word that Thou art a God who does beautiful things in time, and providing salvation through Jesus, but Thou art also the God who warned us that we have crucial time, that our time is short, help us then we pray, or not to wait a moment longer, but to be led to the rock that is higher than us, to commit ourselves to Jesus, to leave this world behind us and cling to the rock, and to know him and to love him for time and for eternity.

Bless us then we pray, go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We shall conclude by singing the words of Psalm 27.

Psalm 27 in the Scottish Psalter, page 236, we're singing from verse 4 down to the end of the double verse mark 6. One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire, and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire.

Down to the verse mark 6 of Psalm 27, to God's praise. good thing I of the Lord desire and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire, and that I in his holy place may ramble me inquire, for he in his pavilion shall be hide in evil days, and secret of his tent me hide, and on a rope me raise, and now in not this present time mine head shall lift thee, above all those that are my foes, ungrounded come pass me, then pour unto his tarp knuckle,

[43 : 24] I'll sacrifice his bring, of joyfulness I sing, yea, I to God will praise his sing, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore, Amen.