

Easter Hope

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[0 : 0 0] Isaiah chapter 9, starting at verse 1. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.

In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Nathalai, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

For as in the day of Medin's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[1 : 1 1] Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I promise I wouldn't forget.

Hello, my name is Darren, for those of you who haven't met me. I am part of the vestry at St. Silas, and I work for an organization called The Navigators. And tonight we are going to look at this subject of hope.

So as Martin said, we have been doing these kind of little mini-series on the impact and the effects of the resurrection. So we did two a few months ago, and then we're going to do one tonight and one next week.

And so tonight we're going to look at the idea and the concept of hope. And we're going to do it in two different parts. We're going to do ten minutes now on some reflections on Isaiah. Then Aileen's going to come back up and read another passage, and we'll have some more reflections on the impact of that passage.

[2 : 2 0] Hopefully it'll make complete sense when we do it. But I don't know about you, but when you use the word hope, how do you use it? We use the word hope for loads of things.

I know I do. I am a Celtic season ticket holder. So every time I go to Park Head, I have this high hope that the unexpected will happen. I was at Celtic PSG at the beginning of the year, where on the way in, we're all like, we've got great hope.

We are going to defeat this team that have spent 500 million euros, of which they proceeded to beat us 5-0 pretty easily and embarrassed us. But we have this common language of a word that indicates we want something good to happen.

And it's often to do with things that we have very little control over, of hope that the weather will change, or of hope that this thing will happen. And it's often something we want to do but have no control over.

We have this quote from a guy called Tim Keller, who says, I'll put the timer on just to make sure I don't ramble on for hours.

[3 : 25] He says, And without hope, we don't really function very well.

I work as a therapist part-time. I work with many people who have lost their concept of hope. There's a psychological reality that when people do not have hope, they can give up. But actually, when they have hope, people can endure some of the most painful situations that man can face.

I turned 35 this week. That's halfway to 70. I don't know if that makes me middle-aged. Some people older than me tell me I'm not. But people who are younger than me tell me that is definitely middle-aged.

And the midlife crisis, as I have observed in my own life this week, is this lack of hope. It's something in the moment of, uh-oh, where is life headed? That's part of the nature of hope is, where are we headed?

Without something to focus on, without something that we are pursuing, we can start to get anxious. We can start to get panicky. We can start to make irrational decisions. I know I can start to make hugely irrational decisions to try and give meaning to the present based on a changeable future.

[4 : 49] Can you go to the next slide, please? When you see this image, how would you describe it? It's a very basic thing you've all seen before.

Is it half full or half empty? Is hope just a case of optimism? Are Christians supposed to be optimistic people?

Or are we supposed to be pessimistic people? Because optimism is just a case of how you interpret the facts that you see in front of you. You just think, I see what's happening here. And actually, I think this is going to be great.

I think the way things are going to pan out would be just fine. Whereas you have another group of people who do the absolute opposite. They can look at the exact same situation and go, no, you're completely naive and ridiculous to think this will be fine.

This will be an awful, tragic set of events. Spring. Like, I know the amount of people who's suddenly become really optimistic now it's spring. We're going to have great weather. We're going to have an amazing time.

[5 : 46] Actually, life is great. I think people, I suppose I would probably be in this category of like, nah. You need to live in Glasgow for 15 years. Spring makes no difference. It just raises your expectation just before winter comes back.

And if you want to put your hope in that, you can. But hope, I think, is not optimistic or pessimistic. And if you were to talk about Christian hope, which is what we're going to talk about tonight, I don't think we have room for ultimate pessimism.

So, a person that looks at the world and thinks that everything is just completely negative, then I think the gospel message of the resurrection doesn't leave us room for ultimate pessimism.

Because we as people confess a Christ who comes into the world and has come among us to identify in the pain of the world and do something about it. So, ultimate pessimism, there's no room for that completely in Christian hope.

However, optimism can sometimes just purely be a bit naive. Optimism can just be, yeah, I think things are going to be fine. I know a lot of people who just think that's the way things are.

[6 : 58] Things are going to be fine. If you take serious a lot of the reality of what the Scriptures are exploring about the depth of human nature and the sin that drives through the heart of every man and the brokenness of the world, this idea that if things just carry on, they will just be fine, there's no real room for that either.

And actually, how do you have optimism when you find yourself in situations where there's no evidence to suggest things will get better? Actually, the only conclusion you can come to is, man, this is not great.

If, again, you are over the age of 18, you were born in the year 1900s, which means you have lived and been born in the bloodiest century mankind has ever seen.

You had more murderous acts and killed more people in this one century than ever before, and that is our legacy. What's the hope of things just getting better as we go forward? That's what we want to look at tonight.

So I'm going to pray, and then we're going to look at Isaiah, and then we'll carry on. Father, we thank you that when we look at the resurrection, we're looking at it from the other side.

[8 : 07] We're looking at it from the side of the risen Christ. But we know that you yourself went through this journey through death and into light. So I pray that as we consider this concept tonight, that you would help us, wherever we are coming from, with our own sense of what it means to be people of hope.

Would you help us to see the things that we are putting our hope in, and help us to find a hope that is in you, a hope that is real, and a hope that is tangible, and a hope that is good. That's that in Jesus' name. Amen.

So Cardinal West, who is a professor of ethics and religion at Harvard University, he said this about optimism. Optimism and hope are different. Optimism tends to be based on the notion that there is enough evidence out there that allows us to think that things out there are going to get better.

It is as much more rational and deeply secular than anything else. Whereas hope looks at the evidence and says, it doesn't look good at all, but I'm going to make a leap of faith, and I'm going to go beyond the evidence, as in what I can immediately see, in the attempt to dream new possibilities.

Hope is based on dreams that become contagious enough to allow us to engage in heroic actions against the odds. This is hope. And again, you can take that quote and say many things about it, but what he's getting at is Christian hope, the hope of faith, looks beyond circumstances to something that allows us to live in a way of faith in the present.

[9 : 45] And that's the working definition I have of hope. It is not purely how do I analyze what I see in front of me, but this kind of robust and profound thing that when we hold it and claim it, it can apply to anything life will throw at us.

It doesn't matter how beautiful or painful or both it is. And the resurrection is a beautiful picture of that. It starts with death and defeat, but actually ends in new life and the beginning of a new story.

Could you go to the next slide, please, Andy? So, yeah, you just go through them, please. This is what we're going to look at just now with the hope of the king.

So, in Isaiah, you have this seven verses that we're going to briefly look at. Now, these verses are often associated with Christmas. Obviously, it's not Christmas, so we're going to have a look at them now.

So, this is written 250 years after King David, and it's a pretty dark point in Israel's history. This great kingdom, all these promises that they'd been building up for, they'd seen become a reality in the kingdom, and now they're at the point where the last part of the kingdom of Israel is about to be taken into exile.

[10 : 59] Assyria, this great empire, are going to come in. And it's because of this story that the kings before have abandoned the covenant with God, and they've started worshiping all these other gods. And they've allowed every type of injustice, and every type of abuse of the poor, and the foreigner, and everything they promised not to do before the covenant with God, they have done it.

And this is the consequences of what's happening. And he starts with this verse. It's something that's happening in this lifetime, where he says, nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress.

In the past, which is his present, he's humbled these lands. But he sees that something good is going to happen. What basis does Isaiah have to say anything like that?

There is nothing he can look at and say, come on, Israel, we just need to be optimistic here, that things are going to get better. Partly, that's the nature of Christian hope.

It's about a God who is bigger than our circumstances. It's a God who is faithful to his people. So still, even though Israel have wandered completely from their path, Isaiah has been given a message from God about who God is and his character, that he is still for his people.

[12 : 14] Because when we're dealing with the God of the Bible, human sin and rebellion and power systems never, ever have the final word. But God's grace, God's love, and God's power to take situations of darkness, and when we return to him, bring light.

And that's what he starts to say in the next few verses. In the latter days, God will honor this land by shining a light back into it. In verse 2, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light, and on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned.

That's a very powerful image, because I'd imagine for them it would have been like, the lights have gone out, where is God? They'd have been left with questions like that. We look at the passages, and particularly the book of Psalms, and people have these aching questions of, where is God?

Because this prophecy, this picture of the light will come back, and the light will do something new. And what is this light? It's this restoration that he talks of in verse 3. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy.

They rejoice before you, as people who rejoice as a harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing, dividing the plunder. That this time will come again, where they will rejoice, like they found a great treasure, that they've worked all this time of a harvest, that that is the kind of joy he perceives is going to happen.

[13 : 35] In the midst of absolute decimation, he has this picture of hope, being something that God will do when he comes, he shows his light, and will bring newness again. In verse 4, he says, it will be like the time of Midian, which is a reference to the story of Gideon in Judges, and where all the corruption and power, all the bloods of the oppression and war will be cleansed, when God turns up and turns back the lights of the people towards him.

And it kind of ends with this picture of a child that will be born, who is described in three ways. As a counselor, and again, that doesn't mean a very good therapist, although I'm pretty sure Jesus would be a brilliant therapist.

But in the biblical language, a counselor is almost like a strategic thinker, like somebody who knows how things are going to work out. A counselor would advise kings and powers and authorities.

It's a picture of a God who understands what's going on and has a plan. A mighty God and an everlasting Father. So this child is going to be called God, and this child will be the Father.

It's a very direct note to Jesus as the Son of God here. He is the embodiment of Israel's God, a living, walking picture of God's faithfulness.

[14 : 58] And He will be the Prince of Peace. And peace for us often just means the lack of fighting. So like in Northern Ireland, they have tons of peace walls, which just stops people fighting. Whereas peace in the biblical sense, it isn't just the absence of conflict.

It is the presence of the shalom of God, which is the pre-fall existence of man's relationship with God. Everything restored. You have a God who is a strategic.

You have a God who is a mighty and everlasting Father. And you have a God who is the Prince of Peace, the restorer of all. And this God will come back among His people. So when we look at the resurrection, when we look at life today, we have this picture of a king.

Can you go to the next slide, please, Andy? Can you just... For this hope is based on the promises of God to send a king. So the promises of God are the thing that gives Isaiah and all the people of Israel to come hope.

The resurrection is an absolute confirmation of all those promises. And the promises still to come. So when we talk about hope, it's not just like a willing, oh, I really wish this is going to happen.

[16 : 11] It is, it has in one sense happened. And we can have trust in that because it's not just about our circumstances, but something to do with the nature of the promises and who gives the promises.

If I make a promise to someone, then I'll try my hardest to keep it. But there's a good chance I'll either forget or do something stupid and mess up.

This is the God of all creation who has the power to raise from the dead. So we hope in the resurrection is God's way of saying that even death, the ultimate end, the ultimate place of chaos, the ultimate place of pain, I have a promise for you beyond this.

Peter talks about the implications of this when he says, according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

It's a beautiful picture of a living hope. So it's not just a hope of what's to come, it's a living hope for today. But this promise, a promise that is concrete, influences how we live today.

[17 : 24] If we have a shaky hope in the future, it doesn't matter what it is, if it's shaky, it'll create shakiness in the present. A hope that is concrete, a hope that you can look in history as much as anything else to a Jesus who walks to the other side of the tomb and says, this thing that I've got for you, I am here as the king, the king that has been promised, and I will still be with you even until the end.

And we don't just hold that as a nice idea, it brings robustness to every situation that we face. If anyone would like to come up and read the next section, we're going to look at two of the implications of that.

So the next reading is from 1 Corinthians 15, verses 12 to 20, and it can be found on page 1156 of the Church Bibles.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel, sorry, starting at verse 12, pardon me, but if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[18 : 40] If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.

You are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, cheers.

Thanks. So the Old Testament points forward, these promises that Isaiah has, we have in the book of Isaiah, in the Scriptures, the New Testament makes loads and loads and loads of points about how Jesus is the fulfillment of this.

[19 : 58] And if you want to know more about that after, you can speak to Martin, and he'll tell you how to do that. But it is loaded, all the epistles, with that Jesus is the fulfillment of these promises. And it's based on God's promises to send us a deliverer.

And two of the implications, and there are hundreds of implications of where hope influences our lives when we look at it through the lens of the resurrection.

But two of them we're going to look at tonight is this idea of the physical reality of the resurrection. So hope for the body and hope for creation are two of the things we're going to touch on before we come to an end.

So particularly in 1 Corinthians, but in other letters as well, there's this kind of argument that the resurrection has kind of either already happened, as in that's it, this is just the life we have, or the resurrection from the dead as bodies isn't really a thing.

And Paul is writing a corrective of both of those mistakes of the resurrection. And he is saying that Jesus, the fact that Jesus raised from the dead as like a physical human who can touch things and eat things and interact with people is very important because it has implications for us as well as implications for the way we see the world.

[21 : 16] And the first implication is that the material is good, that the physical is not a bad thing. He embodies humanity physically, literally when he comes into the earth.

He doesn't go away as a spirit and disappears into the clouds. I've had lots of family members staying this week and I've had one of my stepbrothers staying and he made a proclamation of faith a few months ago and he's still working that out as a 15-year-old.

But he told me he thought the idea of heaven was pretty boring, that we'd all just hang around in the clouds forever. And I was like, yeah, that is a pretty boring picture of reality because it isn't the picture of reality that the Gospels present.

There is a picture where the physical beings we are are somehow going to be resurrected in the way that Jesus is. That death is not the end, there is way more to come as opposed to things enter into a static-ness of just floating around, feeling good about everything.

The resurrection of the body for each one of us as proved by the resurrection of Jesus is that death is not the end. So one of the correctives that Paul is speaking about is this is it.

[22 : 30] The resurrection of Jesus happened. And this is the only life we have. Just live it well. The Scriptures do call us to live this life well, but not because it's the ultimate, but because it's the beginning of something more to come.

A physical reality where we are mysteriously reborn in new bodies, in a new creation. Revelation talks of not of us going to heaven, but to the new creation where the heavens and the earth will be destroyed and this new thing, bringing the best of both, will be put together.

You go to the next one. So we will have new bodies. I don't know what you think about that. I don't know what that makes you go in your heads as to what that even means, it looks like. And I am not an expert on new body theology.

However, there are certain things it will talk about that we are no longer perishable. Corinthians talks about how we are wasting away. And we are. My knees cannot hack playing three games of five asides anymore.

Maybe they were never designed to do that. But we are living in a vessel that we're conscious of the fact, whether it be through illness or just as we grow older, that is perishing. We live in bodies that Romans will talk about as being dishonorable.

[23 : 48] The kind of things that we do with our bodies for good or for worse are out of sync with how we are created to be. We can abuse our bodies in so many different ways.

Yet we will have this resurrection body where the opposite will happen. It will be the most honorable expression of who we are created to be because it's been re-filtered through the lens of the image of God.

Our bodies will be no longer weak or infinite, therefore finite. This robust idea that creation is good, creation was good, and will be good again, and that physically we are somehow headed towards that.

You go to the next one? It prevents a midlife crisis. It should do, anyway. Again, that doesn't mean it prevents the idea of questions, but it affirms that this is not the end.

That when I'm at my peak, whenever that was, I don't know, maybe 10 years ago, actually, that's nowhere near to the peak that God has for each and every single one of us. Oh, there's two people in their resurrection bodies.

[24 : 56] They were supposed to be there from the beginning. Sorry, Andy. But it also gives us a hope for creation. The creation itself was good and will be good again.

So these passages, it's the same idea that our bodies, if Jesus is not risen from the dead, as 1 Corinthians is talking about, then we are not risen from the dead either, and if we're not risen from the dead, then the whole thing is kind of pointless.

And that's the same of creation. So Romans talks a lot about the idea that creation is going through these different stages. So could you go to the next point?

So nature is good, but it will be perfect and not deadly. So I know a lot of people who think we just need to go back to nature, that mankind is just muddled around with structures and societies, too much, and we just need to hit reset and return to nature.

And mankind would be brilliant if we did that, missing the point that nature is clearly very deadly if you watch the amount of hours of nature programs that most of my family watch. Like, if you went to the jungle and just thought, I'll just be part of nature again, then I don't know how long you would last.

[26 : 06] But the nature that is going to be good is the one that God will bring into the new creation, where the world that is His and was designed for good will be a place where we dwell.

Again, the best aspects. Revelation is this fascinating language where things that are described as being present in the new creation are like the best of culture. These different trees and different boats that are like random throwaway things, but it's like God handpicks the best of His creation.

It says, it will be here in my new creation. Next slide. That nature is broken because we are breaking it. We're breaking it faster than we can fix it.

And again, this is not going to be something God casts away, but the resurrection affirms a hope. But yeah, while we're called to steward the world and we're called to look after it, and that is definitely something as Christians we should be involved in, we have a hope that what we see in the world is not the end.

That shouldn't lead us to inaction, but actually help us to know this is headed somewhere. Creation is headed somewhere. The gospel doesn't just begin with us being bad people and then let's just try and behave, but actually creation and humanity was good and made in God's image.

[27 : 20] It has gone radically off track through rebellion, but it will be brought back through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He reopens all this stuff that we can have hope for again. Can you go to the next one?

And that's part of the reason that nature is described as being in frustration. It is eager. It is partly in the Old Testament, nature is described as singing the praises of God. It's the same in Romans 2 and 1 where you can look at creation and it creates this sense of awe that it can sing something of who God is, but it's also groaning.

It is anticipating something that is to come. It is anticipating the new creation itself. It is waiting and eager to be there too. And that brings us on to the kind of final point of what I want to talk about, which we'll finish up with.

The hope is painful because it's eager, it's waiting for something. But no hope, as 1 Corinthians 15 talks about, as in, or hoping the wrong thing is futile.

So he says at the end, Paul says, It's a pretty strong thing he kind of saying here, that if Christ is not raised from the dead, then this is all pointless.

[28 : 51] This is all an absolute waste of time. Another way of reading verse 19 is if your hope is just that Christ has done something now and he's doing nothing in the future, then that is also something to be pitied.

I was at a wedding this week with a lot of friends I've not seen in like 10 years. And just as we were sharing stories, there was like, you do the stories of who's doing what and that kind of minor competition of who's doing best in life.

But later on, as we actually started chatting, the pain of people's lives, we talked about a friend who's recently lost a child, of people whose marriages are breaking up, of people who are suffering with cancer, of one of our brothers who's been given months to live.

And how do we have hope? We're a table of Christians. What does it mean for us to have hope in those moments? Is it crossing our fingers and going, yep, this will get better? Or is it a hope that is beyond this moment that says this stuff is temporary?

It is painful and it is sorrowful. Yes, definitely. But there's something more to come. Because without that, we just shut down. This picture, sorry, is from The Dark Knight Rises.

[30 : 00] Have you seen The Dark Knight Rises? Great. I'm going to read you a quote from Bane, the villain of The Dark Knight Rises. So Batman has been caught, he's been put in the prison and he asks Bane, why didn't you just kill me?

And he's like, I'm going to crush your soul. That's what Bane says. And he says, there's a reason why this prison is the worst hell on earth. Hope. Hope. Every man who has rotted here over the centuries has looked up to the light and imagined climbing to freedom.

So easy, so simple. And like shipwrecked men turning to seawater from uncontrollable thirst, many have died trying. I learned here that there can be no true despair without hope.

And he goes on to talk about how he'll terrorize Gotham. I was really tempted to do the Bane impression. One of my brothers told me I'd do a very good impression, but I'm not going to. When you look at and think about the Isaiah passage, that came true.

But it took 700 years for Jesus to appear and do what he did. It's a long time to wait. And in that time, we have some of this literature of the wrestling of being patient.

- [31 : 15] The Psalms are this beautiful book of holding on to God's promises, yet knowing this is what life is like. Without hope, we just know what life is like, and we shut down.
- We refuse to hope again, and hope becomes too painful. Hope becomes too much. You go through too much pain, and you're like, I can't hope again. I can't. It's too much. I don't want to do it. But if we have no hope, then we just stay in that place.
- Or if we have hope in the wrong things, it can actually increase the sense of despair. Could you go to the next one, please, Andy? So hope is about trusting in God's promises, but it's also in God's freedom and His creativity for how He is going to fulfill those promises, and that is difficult.
- There's no two ways about it that it's difficult, but it's made real when you look at the resurrection story because it covers the multitude of pain, absolute abandonment.
- I was here on Good Friday, and Martin was taking us through this, reflections on Jesus' sayings on the cross, and you have physical abandonment. You have spiritual abandonment.
- [32 : 26] You have social abandonment. You have absolute isolation on every level, and at that moment, what reason does Jesus have for hope other than the trust that He knows of who God is?
- And He says, I hand my spirit over to you. It's a very powerful picture of hope beyond just, well, I just need to be optimistic here. It is something concrete that Jesus looks to, and He says that now you can look to too, each and every single one of us.
- Okay, well, next one. hope in just this life is to be pitied, but hope in the resurrection is just the beginning.
- It's just the beginning physically for us, physically for creation, and for loads of other things. So 1 Corinthians 15 concludes that if our hope in Christ is only about this life, then our hope is to be pitied.
- But if it's more than that, this life is just the beginning. And how do we speak that hope to one another? How do we speak that hope to the world? How do we even begin to speak hope in that way when we find pain in the present?
- [33 : 39] Do we just say, don't worry about it? Or do we say, yes, there is pain here, but Jesus is to be death itself. It gives you room to take what you're feeling and hold it before a God who's made radically massive promises about what He will do in the future and calls us to trust.
- And not just trust because we bumble around in the dark hoping that He's right. It says trust because look what I have already done. I have already fulfilled my promises through my Son. And He has risen and this is the beginning.
- The beginning, the first fruits. That's what it's described as in verse 20 of 1 Corinthians. This is the beginning of what is more to come. When you look at the resurrected Jesus, but it was not what people expected.
- It was longer than they expected and it wasn't even, He didn't even defeat the enemy that a lot of them want. They want to defeat Rome. But He talks about, I've defeated this inner battle that's going on in you that's called sin.
- And returning each and every single one of you back home, back to a new creation, which will bring new bodies and a new world and a new heaven. And these mad, like mad, great big thoughts about where creation is headed.
- [34 : 52] It's not heading into some sort of narrow little corridor. It is the expansion of all things under God's rulership. And to hope in that brings meaning and joy in the most painful of places.

It doesn't make it go away, but it holds it against something bigger and says yes, yes to that. I'm going to finish and Craig will come up.

So I'm just going to quickly pray. Father, we thank You that hope in the resurrection gives us hope for today as well as hope for us what is to come regardless of the situations we face.

But I thank You that You, therefore, also don't just ignore the situations that we face, but You call us to look and raise our eyes even in the most darkest of times. Would You help us to embrace in all areas of who we are what it means to have hope in You?

And to help us know that because of the resurrection our faith is not meaningless but actually gives us great hope for what's to come. Help us to celebrate that as we sing.

[36 : 07] I ask that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.