

# Faith On Trial

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if you're in your Bible, if you can turn over the page to Acts chapter 4, we're going to read verses 1 to 22 and also appear on the screen. Acts chapter 4 verses 1 to 22. Peter and John have just been preaching to the crowd explaining the significance of the lame beggar being healed. And now verse 1, as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed and the number of the men came to about 5,000. On the next day the rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with Annas the High Priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and all who were of the high priestly family. And when they had set them in their midst they inquired, by what power or by what name do you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good indeed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astonished and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another saying, what shall we do with these men?

For that notable sign had been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and we cannot deny it, but in order that it may spread no further among the people let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in his name. So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man whom the sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old. Now I thought about beginning this sermon by asking if anyone had ever been to court but thought that might not be a wise question. But the passage we have before us is a courtroom drama. It's a very special court case though because this is the first time that is recorded that this is the very first time that Jesus' followers are taken to trial, are brought to court for what they believe, at least the first that is recorded. The defendants you'll see are Peter and John, two of Jesus' twelve apostles, they are witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, they are founding members of the early church.

And verse five tells us that against them has gathered the whole ruling council of Jerusalem. The elders, the scribes, the chief priests, all the family of the high priests are all standing against James and John seeing what they're going to say for themselves. And the issue on the table is that Peter and John have healed a lame man as we read of earlier in chapter three. You might think surely that's no crime but the problem is what happened next. Peter and John didn't just leave it there, they didn't just walk out of the crowd, they explained that the significance of it was that this is a sign that points to the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead. The healing of the lame man, if you like, was proof that Jesus was not dead but that he was risen and that he was reigning and he was at work in this world bringing this lame man literally back onto his feet. And that truth that Jesus had risen from the dead was something that the religious leaders had literally tried to bury. And so they wanted nothing, they wanted Peter and John to shut up and say nothing more about it. So Peter and John here there are standing on trial for what they believe and you might say in some ways this was the first test for the early church. Verse four tells us that thousands of people have already believed but will it continue? You see last time the apostle Peter was questioned he was, he denied Jesus three times and that was just when he was questioned by a servant girl. Now Peter stands before all these rulers and elders, all of the bigwigs, the religious elite of Jerusalem and he's being questioned for proclaiming Jesus. Will it happen again? Can the followers of Jesus stand up to this questioning? Can the message of the cross stand up to cross examination?

Or will it all fold? This is a make or break moment and Luke the historian knows this. That's why he's recorded it, that's why he's placed it here in the beginning of the book of Acts. Because this may be the first time that followers of Jesus are being questioned but Luke knows it won't be the last. As we've seen over the past 2000 years God's people have continually been questioned for what they believe. Now sometimes that is involved standing before a court that continues to be the case in different countries as people stand trial for what they believe but most often we're questioned by friends, family, colleagues, people we know or people we don't know, not in an aggressive way. But if you're anything like me often even the questions from, even questions from people we know really well, even questions that come from a well meaning we can still struggle to answer.

We can still feel like what on earth do I say? Have I said the right thing? Have I said something wrong? And I think we can be and sometimes we can come away feeling unsure about what we believe. Someone can throw a question left field we can think I haven't thought about that. How can a good God allow suffering? I'm not sure. What do I say in response?

[ 6 : 39 ] Does that mean I'm believing a lie? It's easy for us when we're questioned to maybe doubt, to maybe start shaking, to have for our faith to start shaking. And so Luke has recorded this trial really to assure us, to calm our fears. Peter's witness testimony is as much for us as it was for that courtroom on that day. He lays out the evidence. He lays out the verdict for us as much as for them to show us it's all true. Jesus really did rise from the dead. Jesus really is the only one who can save. This is the test case if you like that we come back to. And so that when we face questions and doubts we can be confident in what we believe and we can be confident to speak about Jesus. We've got three points as we look through this. They get shorter as we go through. So don't worry when we get to the last point. It's Jesus first we're going to see that Jesus is the risen cornerstone.

Jesus is the risen cornerstone. And the big question that Peter and John asked in verse seven is how is this lame man walking? How did you do it? And Peter's answer and to all the people of England, let me just read again from verse 10. He says, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you. The builders which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. How is the lame man walking? Well, very quickly, simply, Peter says Jesus is risen. Peter's logic is simple. The lame man was healed in Jesus's name, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, that same life giving power.

There's evidence of that in this lame man being lifted up onto his feet being healed. If you like the lame man is walking proof that Jesus is risen. His proof that Jesus isn't a lifeless, powerless, defeated corpse in a tomb but that Jesus is risen and he's reigning as the Son of God. Now Peter could have stopped there but he goes on to explain why the resurrection matters. And as an aside, can I just say the resurrection is never simply a historical event that we can look at from a distance. It has implications for every single one of us. The resurrection will always challenge us. We always have to, we can't be an agnostic observer if I can put it that way. It has implications. It must affect our lives because as we'll see, it either proves that Jesus is a God who is worthy of all our worship or if Jesus didn't rise from the dead then we've wasted our lives but I'll get onto that.

I'm running ahead. Peter lays out the implications in this parable in verse 11 which is a quote from Psalm 118. He says, this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders which has become the cornerstone. We sung of this verse in Psalm 118 and it speaks of someone who is rejected and judged as nothing but then vindicated and given pride of place. If you want to kind of imagine the scene, imagine you're walking past the building site and some builders are laughing at an architect's design thinking, well, this guy doesn't know what he's talking about and as they laugh, they chuck a large stone into a skip. But the next day those builders are nowhere to be seen and there the foundation of the building is the very stone that was previously thrown in the skip. The architect has restored the cornerstone to pride of place in the building. And Peter says that is a parable if you like that has been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the stone. Jesus is the cornerstone who was rejected by men when he was put to death on the cross but now vindicated in his resurrection. And that brings us to our first implication. Jesus is vindicated as the cornerstone. The healing of the lame man is a sign that Jesus is not dead but alive.

And it vindicates Jesus. It proves that Jesus is right. It proves that everything he said was true. It verifies that everything that Jesus said was true. In our illustration, if the stone the builders rejected stayed in the skip, we would know it's rubbish. But since it's made the cornerstone, we know that it's the most important piece. By raising Jesus from the dead, God is saying Jesus was right. Jesus really is the Son of God. Everything Jesus said is verified before our eyes. If he stayed dead, we would know that he was just a man who made some big claims about being God. But nothing came of it when he died. His resurrection validates. It vindicates his claims. It proves that he really can rescue sinners because he really can. He really did rise from the dead. He really did defeat death.

[12:06] And Luke wants us to be sure that Jesus is risen and reigning because the resurrection is the foundation of everything we believe. Resurrection isn't optional. It isn't a debatable part of the Christian life. If someone doesn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then they're not trusting in him. They're not following him. They're not a Christian. It is as simple as that. Jesus' resurrection is foundational to what we believe. And the word of the...

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then the words of the apostle Paul, we are fools to be pitied for making him the center of our lives. We have wasted our time because pull away the resurrection and we've got nothing to stand on. We might forget sometimes that the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. We know that when we talk about the resurrection to people, sometimes it can sound ridiculous. It can sound crazy to claim that Jesus is risen. But it sounded equally crazy to the original audience 2000 years ago. Neither Jews or Greeks believed that there was an individual bodily resurrection. It sounded equally crazy to them. People would have... When the disciples, when the first early church told people that Jesus had risen from the dead, they probably got similar reactions to you if you speak about Jesus. People think you're gullible. They might think you're irrational. They might look at you, maybe just listen politely as if you're telling them that there's fairies that live at the bottom of your garden. You might think that the center of Luke as a welcome friend who comes alongside of you and says, look, you're not crazy. Jesus has risen. The sign of the layman walking proves that all this is true.

Jesus really is risen. The parable of the rejected cornerstone though doesn't just vindicate Jesus. It also exposes the religious leaders as bad builders. If we're going to play who's who, then in verse 11, just as Jesus is the cornerstone, then Peter says the religious leaders are those bad builders. And first they're bad builders because they rejected Jesus. You see, these were people who should have known their Old Testaments, who did know their Old Testaments, but they missed, they ignored, they refused to look where all the lines were, all the arrows were pointing. They should have recognized that Jesus was God's promised King. They should have seen that Jesus was the cornerstone. They should have been the first to put him in pride of place and exalt him, but they didn't. Instead they thought the cornerstone was rubbish and they put God's King to death. They're exposed as bad builders for rejecting Jesus, but also rejecting the sign. They see the layman healed.

They hear everyone else talking about it. The crowd can't deny it. The religious leaders in verse 16 say they can't deny it. This isn't a matter of debating whether a miracle occurred.

This is a matter of looking where this miracle points. The evidence is literally standing in front of them, but they refuse to believe. They refuse to look where this sign is pointing.

[ 15 : 25 ] And they're so determined that no one else believes it. You get the impression that they would rather this layman, this man became lame again, rather than having this evidence walking about that shows that Jesus is, has risen. The religious leaders are exposed as bad builders, but why does that matter to us? You might think, you know, that's clearly helpful for the people in, in the early church. They know that these religious leaders aren't on their side. They know that they're not the people to listen to. Well, Luke once asked in a similar way to be sure that those who deny Jesus' resurrection are on the wrong side. When you're in the minority, it's easy to think, well, maybe everyone else is right.

And the early church was certainly in the minority. You know, as they proclaimed Jesus risen from the dead, they, there was just to begin with just a few hundred believers.

Even then when it was a few thousand, they were still in the massive minority with the might of the Roman world and all of the prevailing beliefs around them. I imagine people found it difficult when people they had grown up with or people they respected said, you're wrong. Jesus was just a man who died. Get over it. Move on. You're wasting your life following this Jesus. And it's, it can be especially difficult when the people who are opposing us, the people who are in the majority are meant to be the intellectuals. I remember seeing that in Sonnet when I was working in San Andreas free church. Often I was very common for students to have periods of really doubting what they believed because their professors would often tell them, sometimes theolog often theological theology professors or tell them they're wrong. They would tell them that the, that actually what they believed about the Bible wasn't quite right. And so the, these students would think, well, but this person is the expert. This person's read a lot more than me. How can maybe I'm the one that's got it all wrong, but you don't have to be in a university to, to have that kind of, to have those kind of questions. There's plenty of intellectuals on YouTube or in writing books that will say that there is no clear evidence for Jesus rising from the dead. And it's easy to think, well, but they're the experts. Maybe I've got it wrong.

Well, I like to imagine Jesus sitting down with someone having those doubts. Sorry, not Jesus. I like to imagine Luke sitting down with someone having those doubts. Maybe he would have taken them to meet the lame man and said, look, this guy was lame for 40 years and now he's walking. How do you think that happened? What power on earth do you think could, could change that man's life? It's only Jesus risen from the dead. Maybe he would have introduced them to Peter or John or showed them one of the letters of the apostles, letters that we still have people who are eyewitnesses of the resurrection and said, look, okay, even if you haven't seen Jesus from the dead, you can trust these guys, they're eyewitnesses.

Maybe he reminded them, look, your teachers may know the scripture as well, but if they deny the resurrection, well, they're actually not the intellectuals. They're not actually as smart as they look. They're as smart as the builders who throw the cornerstone, who throw the main piece of the puzzle in a skip. Jesus is vindicated, the religious leaders are exposed, but we also see here that the apostles are authenticated as Jesus' witnesses.

[ 19 : 01 ] And that's really key. We've seen how the sign points to Jesus risen and exalted. We've seen how the sign was undeniable. And Jesus gives the apostles signs like this one throughout the book of Acts to accompany their message to prove that they are the true and genuine witnesses, that they are people we can trust. And that's important for us because none of us were eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Our faith does not and cannot rest on seeing the bodily, seeing Jesus. Instead, our faith must rest on the testimony of the apostles, and Luke wants us to be sure that we can trust them. They didn't just make it up. Their message and this, and the miracle goes together to prove that Jesus rose from the dead. This verifies them. This means that we can trust them. You'll chat to many people who will say we can't trust what the Bible writers say and maybe that's you tonight, or maybe you've had people say that to you. Or we need to ask, maybe ask back or think for ourselves, well, what makes the apostles untrustworthy? Have you cross-examined their accounts against other writers? Have you, have you rigorously investigated the reliability of the documents?

And we can do that. We should do that. Our Christianity isn't a faith worth believing if it doesn't and cannot stand up to historical scrutiny. It's right to look into it and we need to do look into it. Please don't just write off what the apostles say just because you don't like it or don't agree with it. Acts 4 reminds us that from the very beginning people have rejected Jesus not because of the evidence, but in spite of the evidence.

So whether you'd call yourself a Christian or tonight or not, I hope this passage should give us certainty about who Jesus is, about Jesus' resurrection. It should assure us that those same questions that were fired, that maybe fired at us, were fired at the apostles and they passed with flying colors and that no one could deny what they say because the evidence was standing in front of them. Jesus is vindicated. The religious leaders are exposed. The apostles are authenticated. And so Peter says as a consequence, because Jesus is the cornerstone, because Jesus is risen, the big implication of that is that there is salvation in no one else. Jesus is the only name by which we can be saved. We see that in verse 12. He says, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name among heaven, under heaven, given among men by which we may be saved. And that's our second point. Jesus is the only name that saves. The healing of the lame man proves that Jesus can save. Just as the cornerstone, Jesus is vindicated, he claimed to be the savior of the world, the resurrection proves it. But the healing of the lame man also gives us a picture of the saving power of Christ. You think about this, this man had been lame for more than 40 years. He was helpless. He was totally reliant on other people to carry him to the temple every single day to beg. But Jesus' name changed all of that. In chapter three, you read how immediately, as soon as Peter said the words in the name of Jesus,

Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk, suddenly this man leapt on his feet. This wasn't a slow gradual process that he did a bit of physio. He just suddenly leapt on his feet.

The muscles just formed like that, strengthened and up, he jumped. And it's a wonderful picture as well of how Jesus saves people from sin. You see, sin is a bigger problem than being lame. It affects our whole body. It's worse than paralysis. But just like that guy was completely unable to do anything for himself. So the sin has that same effect for us. We're not just lame, we need to be lifted up onto our feet. And more than that, the Bible says we need to be raised to life. We're less like a lame man and more like a corpse. Jesus' name though changes all that. In Acts 221, Peter says to the crowd that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus shall be saved. And now he says that there's salvation in Jesus' name. The name of Jesus does more though than just to rise, put lame people onto their feet. It raises people from death to life. If you're here and you're trusting in Jesus, the name of Jesus has raised you from death to life. It has freed you from slavery to sin. It has brought you into God's family. It has restored you to a relationship with the God who made the universe, with the God who loves you and the God who wants to know you. Jesus' name is the only name. Jesus' name is the name that saves, but it's also the only name that saves. Do you notice he says there's salvation in no one else, no other name under heaven. That means you can travel the world, you can go and meditate on the highest mountain, you can, I don't know, you can go and what do people do? Pray at all the different temples in the world. You can go through any number of religious rituals, but no other name can save you. No other name can save those we love, those who need to hear the gospel. Their greatest need is only found in Jesus. They can't look anywhere else. No one else in Calaway has the answers they need. No one else in Calaway, no other message can fill that void in their heart, can save them, bring them from death to life. Only Jesus' resurrection, only the message that we preach and speak of here and in next door can save them. And Peter says there's no other name given among men. What he means is that this isn't just a message for Jews, it's a message for all people. Whatever ethnicity, whatever religion, whether it's male or female, Jesus is the only name that can save. And that would have been earth shattering to Peter's original audience. Not just because Peter is saying that the message of the gospel that is for all people, but because he's saying you can't just be saved by your Jewish heritage, all of the people standing in front of him, they thought they were right with God. They thought they were part of God's family and in God's good books because they were the religious leaders. And

[ 26 : 07 ] Peter has simultaneously opened the door and shut it to them as well. He said all the sacrifices that you, any number of sacrifices, any Jewish pedigree, religious heritage, all the things you've done, that cannot save you. Salvation is only in Jesus's name. You could say in a similar way, our heritage couldn't save us. You can be related to as many ministers and elders as you want. You can have been to church more times than anyone else in this building, but only Jesus's name can save. Salvation is in him alone. And we might be thinking, well, Peter clearly hasn't heard of religious pluralism. You might have people say to you, well, aren't there lots of ways to Jesus? Isn't it, or are there lots of ways to God? Isn't kind of coming to God like there's different ways up the mountain. There's no one religion is right. Surely it's arrogant. Surely it's exclusive to say that Jesus is the only way. The problem is that simply can't be true. If there was more than one way to

God, Jesus wouldn't have to die. God wouldn't have sent his only son to die on the cross, to take his, the punishment that we deserve for sin, if there was another easier way for people to be brought back to God. And that's the crux. There is only one name by which we must be saved, because there is only one solution to the problem of sin. If Jesus died and stayed dead, then Peter's speech would have been, there is no name under heaven by which we can be saved. If Jesus didn't die, there would be, there would be no hope for humanity. But Jesus is the cornerstone. Jesus did rise from the dead. He is the only name by which we can be saved, because he's the only one who has, who has conquered death, who has risen from the dead, who has taken, who can take our sins on his shoulders, who can pay the price for our sins, who can reconcile, who can bring us back to relationship with

God. And for that reason, Jesus' claim isn't bigoted. It isn't arrogant. And Luke wants us to be sure that it is the only way we can be saved. You might have spent your life rejecting Jesus. And maybe you're now, you're only realizing that you've spent your life throwing this, the main stone in the skip. But the good news is that Jesus saves. And that he opens that invitation even to those who have rejected him. Remember Peter is saying this to the religious leaders. He isn't, he's preaching the gospel to them. They are the ones that were responsible for Jesus going to the cross and dying. We can have done, we might think we've done things that are far too unimaginable, that are far too bad for God to ever want us. But Peter says there is salvation in no one else. And Jesus offers that salvation to anyone who would call on his name. And the news that Jesus saves is something we also need to be assured of in our Christian life. When we're burdened, when we feel weighed down with sin, whether it's repeated sins, secret sins, things we would hate anyone else to know. We need to be assured again and again that Jesus saves, that only

Jesus saves. We might be tempted to just try to bury it. We might think that I just, that this disqualifies us from coming to the Lord's table. We have to remember that Jesus saves, that his blood can cleanse us from even the worst and foulest sin. Maybe it's, maybe we're not worried about ourselves, maybe we're worried about someone else, maybe it's children or siblings or parents or a spouse who doesn't know Jesus. Or maybe losing hope. Maybe we're feeling, can anything really change? Will they ever believe? Or we can take heart because as surely as this lame man was raised to his feet, as surely as Jesus was raised from the dead, God can raise people and he still does raise people from death to life. People we may not even expect. People we might think have, how we'll have nothing more to do with

Jesus. Jesus is in the business. He was at work then. Jesus being risen and reigning doesn't mean Jesus isn't at work now. He continues to bring people from death to life. Being sure that Jesus is risen from the dead enables us to stand when we are questioned. It enables us to not waver when we face doubts, but it will also compel us to speak and that's what we see. I just want to see finally from the apostles. For Peter and John, the result of confidently knowing the truth isn't just that they're able to stand there and take the waves of questions and not buckle under pressure and not run away, but it's that they can't help but speak about Jesus. This trial for them isn't a terrible experience, but a wonderful opportunity to speak about Jesus. You almost seem like they can't wait for them to ask the question. They're taken in custody. You can imagine them thinking overnight, I can't wait to stand before all these religious leaders. What a wonderful opportunity to tell them all about Jesus. When they can't corner Peter and John, they tell them to stop speaking.

[ 31 : 59 ] I love Peter's response from verse 18. They called them and charged them not to speak, or teach at all in the name of Jesus, but Peter and John answered them, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge. For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. We cannot but speak. Silence is just not an option for them. I remember helping a friend with a DIY job in their house and a pipe.

Let's just say neither of us were very good at plumbing. I don't know how, but water was spurting out rapidly from this pipe. I did the first thing I could think of and just clapped my hand onto it trying to stop that flow of water. You'll know that however strong you are, that doesn't do anything. The water just sprays out everywhere. There's no way you can stop that force of water pressure. You need the proper tools for one thing. It's similar with Peter and John. Holding back the truth about Jesus was just impossible. It was about as impossible as trying to stop the water pressure just with your hand. The news that he's risen, the news that he alone can save just bubbles and gushes out of them.

It's like a high pressure pipe. It has to come out. It's easy though for us to think, well, I have the opposite problem. I'm like a tap where you turn it on and water is only dripping and dribbling out. I struggle to speak about Jesus. I'm the opposite of this gushing water pipe. Here's where I think I've found one of the biggest encouragements looking at this is in verse 13. We read, now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astounded and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. Where does their supernatural boldness come from? It comes from being with Jesus. Verse 8 from Peter, we read, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Now the apostles were ordinary men. They were especially commissioned by Jesus.

Yes, they were eyewitnesses of his resurrection, but they were ordinary men. They had been with Jesus and they had received his spirit and you and I are ordinary men and women. We do not, we have not seen Jesus in the flesh, but the Bible tells us that if we're trusting in Jesus, we actually have a closer relationship than simply seeing Jesus, that we're united to him, that we can know him intimately and wonderfully and that God gives his Holy Spirit into each one of our hearts. We are every bit as empowered as Peter and John to be able to speak of Christ.

Jesus can help us every bit as much to speak of him and the more, and I think in some ways we need to just, what we need to pray is that we'll be as convinced of the resurrection and of the power of Jesus to say as they were. They didn't bubble up about Jesus because they were like, yeah, he's risen, yeah, Jesus' name can save. That's old news. They were bubbling up about it because they thought this was the best thing that ever happened, that this was world-changing.

[ 35 : 14 ] They knew that the resurrection of Jesus, they knew that salvation in his name was the best thing that they could say to these people standing before them, that the only thing that would make a difference in their lives, we do have, we have the only good news, the only hope that everyone needs around us. They can't find it anywhere else, where salvation is in Jesus' name alone.

Jesus has risen, no one else, and that's why we need to point people to him, and we need to pray that God will press that truth on our hearts so that we can't help but speak, and that when people ask us questions, it will be like the flood doors open, and we'll hopefully coherently and winsomely and faithfully speak about Jesus. We're going to find ourselves being asked questions.

We need to pray that we'll be asked questions, and passages like this, don't they, they show us that Jesus is vindicated, that while rejected by the world, that Jesus really is risen from the dead, that we are on the right side of history, that he really is the cornerstone who is exalted.

So let's pray that God would press those truths on our hearts, that he would make us certain of those truths, so that we might have the boldness to speak, and that people might be saved to the glory of Christ. Let's pray.