

“No Retreat”  
Psalm 11  
Pastor Rob Looper  
Pastor of National Missions and Church Revitalization  
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We will be looking at Psalm 11. This Psalm is one of the most important pieces of Scripture in my mind for our era. I'm not grading Scripture against Scripture and saying that some passages are more important than others, but this Psalm is so critical for us in our time as we prepare for our National Ministries Conference, whose theme is For Such a Time as This. We acknowledge that God who is sovereign has ordained for us to live in a time that is, for lack of a better way of putting it, treacherous. How do we live in treacherous times? We acknowledge that the Lord is who He says He is, He does what He says He will do, and He is our refuge. Please pay careful attention for this is God's holy and inerrant Word.

Psalm 11:1-7 says *[1] In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, “Flee like a bird to your mountain, [2]for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; [3] if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”*

*[4] The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man. [5] The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. [6] Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. [7] For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.*  
May the Lord bless the reading of His Word.

God faithfully allowed me to serve in a congregation as senior pastor for 20 years in Pensacola, Florida and June 28th, 2015 was any other Sunday in the life of that church, except for the Friday before, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled on Obergefell vs Hodges. Obergefell versus Hodges, if you remember, was that ruling that said that all 50 states had to recognize the marriages of same sex couples on the same terms and conditions as the marriages of opposite sex couples, with all the accompanying rights and responsibilities. You may remember it was a pretty distressing thing to consider.

That Sunday morning this is how I opened my message; ‘Friday, a lot of people, including myself, said in private conversation, on blogs, on Facebook posts, on radio, television, and by way of every other possible medium of communication that Friday's Supreme Court ruling on same sex marriage changed everything. I believe that's true mainly because of how it changes the legal landscape, primarily for those who oppose same sex marriage and among those especially for evangelical Christians. But the more I have reflected, I think it is probably more correct to say the change in our culture was in fact, a long, slow train that we have seen coming for years. It picked up speed over the last five years, but we cannot say that it was a surprise to anyone when that train pulled into the station Friday with the news that same sex marriage was a constitutional right. There was really no point in retracing the Christian communities lament over the exploding growth of American cult of tolerance, which worships the idol of self and has as its primary tenet ‘Thou shalt not tolerate anyone who does not share our view.’ No one fully immersed in our politically correct culture has the patience to consider any other narrative, but the current people should be free to love and marry whomever they want. No matter what they have said to the contrary, Bible believing Christians are on the wrong side of history. They are

haters. They are self-righteous. It's enough to make you want to give up trying to make a difference and to want to hide from the world altogether.'

That was 2015 and the acceleration of cultural and moral degeneration around us, I think we're almost numbed by it. Its speed is incredible. The exponential reality of what seems to crumble and what foundations that once were a part of our culture that we assumed and didn't even think about, haven't been chipped away, they have been obliterated. Again, it is enough to make you want to give up trying to make a difference and to want to hide from the world altogether. We have been numbed to some degree.

This past week in our staff leadership training, Pastor Stallings used an image from Nehemiah how the city of Jerusalem had laid in rubble for almost a generation and the people had gotten used to the rubble, to an unfinished temple. Is that where we are as a culture, as Christians, that we've just gotten used to the rubble of our society being what it is? Hearing things like 'Well, you can't expect people to think otherwise when they don't know the Lord Jesus.' That's true, but in the church we begin to see accommodation. Hearing things like, 'Well, you know, you can't be too hard on people.' We don't want to be unnecessarily hard. We don't want to just walk up and poke people in the eye as it were, and just be offensive, but the Gospel is an offense to a rebellious heart.

How do we approach this? How do we get unused to the rubble that's around us, the rubble of the foundation of our society, the rubble of our foundation in the church? When we have churches that have been evangelical and are jettisoning Biblical truths so quickly, do we run and hide? We do hide, in the Lord and that's exactly what David was facing here.

Psalm 11:1-3 says *[1] In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to your mountain, [2] for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; [3] if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"*

We don't know the historical situation that David is speaking of here but some commentators even think that what he is doing is just going over in his mind, his own temptation to flee, as he's talking to his own soul and then he's answering himself saying, 'How can you think this way?' More than likely, these are advisors of David's and whatever point it was in history, we know of two times in which David actually did go on the run, but he wasn't running away. He was running to find a place where he could reassert himself and he made that tactical move of flight so that he could rejoin the battle. The first occurred in his early life when he was unjustly hunted by Saul, knowing he had been anointed as the king, knowing he did need to engage ultimately the battle, but honoring the Lord's establishment of Saul as the king. Yes, he was running from Saul, but he was running from the battle.

The same thing happened with David's son, Absalom, who led a temporarily successful conspiracy to take his throne. In fact, this is what it says in II Samuel 15:13-14, *[13] And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." [14] Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."* He wasn't running away from his responsibility as king. He wasn't giving up the fight. But again, he was seeking that better position from which ultimately to engage the battle and the cause, which God had called him, which of course ultimately would succeed because Absalom's coup failed and it failed tragically because of David's loss of his son. David was not conceding defeat and exiling himself in these cases. He was still engaged in the call that God had given him.

So in Psalm 11, he is speaking against his own his own advice for when he did flee, how can he how can he say that we shouldn't flee when he himself fled? That wasn't the case. He did find his refuge in the Lord, but rejoining the battle is not what David and his advisors have in mind here. They want him to run. We don't know what this mountain is. It could be a place of safety, another citadel, but the idea that they have is basically, that the society around us has crumbled, the foundations are destroyed. We need to run and David's response to them is just exactly that – the foundations have been destroyed. What can the righteous do?

James Montgomery Boice says; 'When the foundations are being destroyed, the righteous need to be righteous.' They don't need to run. They need to stay and find their refuge in the Lord. Flee? Why would I run away when the situation is so dire and our cause is from God? When the wicked aim from the darkness, Psalm 11:2, at the upright and heart and remember the context here is the people of Israel. So we could say it's the church, if you will, the people of God whom David is talking about.

The very thought of running away for David was unthinkable, even taking a play from the enemy's strategy book for that's what the enemy wanted them to do. Jesus was once faced with similar advice. Let's look at Matthew 16. This is that portion of Scripture in which Jesus asks His disciples who people are saying He is. Matthew 16:15-23 says [15] *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [20] Then He strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

*[21] From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. [22] And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." [23] But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Going to the cross was Jesus mission, but to Peter it meant defeat. He couldn't even conceive what it could possibly be in terms of any positive terms. Peter's advice to Jesus was essentially to turn aside from that course, and Jesus shocking response was to address Satan directly through Peter. That's a pretty sobering thought. One minute Jesus is saying, 'Blessed are you, Simon, son of John for flesh and blood hasn't revealed to you what you just said' and the next minute He's saying, 'Get behind me, Satan' and looking at Peter. Peter was setting his primary thoughts on those of man not of God. In fact, He says those plans are hellish, demonic and He is sending them, as it were, right back to hell where they belong. Retreat is not an option for Jesus at all.

It's very similar to what David is saying right here. It's as if he's saying to his advisers, 'Your advice, it's from the enemy.' I was tempted to name this sermon, 'To Hell With Retreat' and I guess I just did, because that's where the advice of retreat belongs. In Matthew 16 Jesus says 'The gates of hell will not prevail' and that image, of course, is of the church advancing against hell and Satan and all that he attempts to establish in this world, in its false foundations, will crumble by the advance of the righteous Kingdom of God in the Church of Jesus Christ. Every Christian and all true churches of Christ in every age in which God has providentially

placed them ultimately stand in this juncture and the situation is also, as it was in David's, in the culture and in the church, the foundations are under attack. All around it seems as if the very foundations of righteousness, goodness and justice are crumbling. If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?

It's important for us to recognize that it is Christ's righteousness imputed to us that makes us righteous. Will see that in more detail in a moment so that we aren't going around as self-righteous warriors as in our own strength. We who name Christ's righteousness as our own have received it by grace alone and by nothing of our own doing and we stand in this place today. What are we to do? The Satanic doctrine of hell always advises us to give up the fight and run away to retreat from the fight by not voting or participating in the political process because it's not spiritual but corrupt. I hope you can tell by what I'm suggesting that it's not what we should do to secede from the culture, as it were, and establish outposts of Christians community in remote places like Montana or Idaho. Start over - modern pilgrims setting up new places to flee from the battle by accommodation even, by accommodating the culture through progressivism, giving in to what are often called to be winless stances in a culture on the part of the church. That's not a battle we can win. We shouldn't go there. How often have we seen this.

There's a great article by Kevin de Young in World Magazine this week online on how the church's silence is really just a process, and it always follows the same process. If we are silent, it is only a matter of time before we are accommodating. Now, I don't deny that such temptation is strong to just go somewhere where everybody's like minded and to start over. There's just one problem. It's called the Great Commission. We've been called to go into the world and retreat is not an option. Advance is our call, and we advance in the refuge of God. God alone is our Refuge.

That is David's answer to the claim that the foundations are destroyed. No, the foundations are not destroyed. God alone is our refuge. He's our foundation. In fact, He is our refuge because of the fact that He is the Sovereign. He is our refuge because of that sovereign reality. David drew strength and encouragement from the sovereignty of God. Psalm 11:4 says *[4] The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.*

David was strengthened by the knowledge that God is on His throne reigning and what that meant is that He sees what the wicked do. He's not blind. Sometimes it's easy for us to be tempted that God isn't watching, or at least He's aloof. Does He not see the same things we see? Is He not distressed by them? Yes, He is indeed. He's not blind. He's not blind to the injustice of the wicked, but He isn't also just watching. We can read that and think, 'yeah, He's watching.' It's just like when my kids were little and one of them was being harassed by one of their siblings and the third who was watching was just kind of aloof. One might think 'At least they didn't join in.' No, doing nothing was just as bad.

God's not standing there just watching other people being aloof. This phrase, 'His eyelids test the children of man' carries the idea of scrutiny and examination, but the image is something that we're very used to. We think eyelids can't see. What do you do when you're looking at something? You look up close. You squint your eyes. That's the image – God is peering at the world and He is squinting, as it were, examining carefully, not missing anything, His eyelids, as it were, tightened, so that He sees absolutely every single thing as He is weighing and examining. Yes, He sees what the wicked do and He hates what He sees according to Psalm 11:5. God sees that the wicked love violence. They are filled with treachery, viciousness and we must never forget that God hates with perfect righteous anger what He sees them doing. God's

sense of justice is far higher than ours. We must never forget that He is far more angry by the violence that destroys life. You must never forget that He is far more offended than we will ever be that the wickedness that exalts and institutionalizes sin. So we must not conclude that a lack of present judgment means He doesn't care or is inactive. He judges what the wicked does. He sees and judges.

Psalm 11:5-6 says [5] *The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.* [6] *Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.*

Now the certainty and finality of God's judgment is pictured by the scorching wind. If you have ever been in the Middle East as spring turns into summer, you can see it turns overnight – what green there is when the hot blast winds in the south come in and the deadness of the desert comes along with it, and that which was green one moment the next moment is brown and lifeless. It's a scorching wind. So where's the judgment? Looks like they're getting away with murder. Literally, it looks like the culture is winning. We know that God will judge at the end. Is that the only way it will happen? If that is the only way it's going to happen in our lives, it is still God's righteous, wise, providential plan to do so because the wicked will not get away with murder, injustice, violence, but it's a common struggle, not new to our day.

Psalm 37:12-15 says [12] *The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him,* [13] *but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming.*

[14] *The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright;* [15] *their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.*

Sometimes God brings judgment upon the wicked in their day, by their own violence, they consume themselves. God is not blind and He will judge. We have to wait for His time by trusting that He is indeed the One who sees in His sovereignty and He is our refuge. Believing and embracing this truth is foundational to our living faithfully as God's people, just as it was for David in Psalm 11. It has to serve as the backdrop to all things in our lives, because it reminds us that God knows what He is doing and that what He is doing, though perhaps not on our timetable, is wise, it is perfect, it is just. We sometimes think 'What are You doing? Why won't You act?' No, God is sovereign. God, is just and good. He is wise, He sees and judges so I trust Him and that's what David is saying. That's what we are called to do with the promise of who God is and what He does. So we must never lose heart but stand firm. We must never flee from the situations that face us as hopeless or beyond repair because God is sovereign and is not giving up His throne.

David is not advocating that we just stand there and kind of white knuckle it through life. It feels like that sometimes. Just like living right now is some kind of roller coaster ride, some kind of extreme bungee experience, and you just hold on till it's through and we can get off and that's when Jesus comes back. Before you lose heart and think, 'Boy, this is not what I bargained for' look at what David says in Psalm 11:1. He says that the Lord is my refuge. Those who belong to Him belong to the Sovereign God of the universe.

Now let's look at the last verse in Psalm 11:7 which says [7] *For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.* God is our refuge because He is our God. Now, you might say 'that's really great captain obvious, we really love that God is our God so He's our refuge, what in the world does that mean?' What I mean is that David is gripped by the conviction that God is not merely powerful enough, sovereign enough to be a refuge, He isn't merely a potential safe haven, David is utterly convinced that God is personally invested in being

the refuge of the righteous because of what He sees in them and what He is doing in them. It's at precisely this point that David proclaims that God does not only see the wicked, He sees the righteous. Look again at Psalm 11:4-5.

Psalm 11:4-5 says *[4] The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man. [5] The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.*

David further implies that He has placed His people at this very moment in time to test them for such a time as this. God in His sovereignty has said that this is when we are to live and to bear His name. As in Greek, the Hebrew word translated *teske* refers to the work of the metal smith. When applied to the wicked here, it is a turning to judgment, but here it's about refining. The righteous are tested to the point of refining, sanctifying and purifying. While the Lord's testing of the wicked finds them wanting and deserving of judgment, His testing of the righteous is altogether different, and that's because they belong to Him by His grace and mercy. They are His righteousness.

II Corinthians 5:21 says, *[21] God made Him who knew no sin to become sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* That truth was true under the Old Covenant as well as the Old Covenant people bore the image of the One who redeemed them as their covenant people and were being renewed in the Messiah that they looked forward to. We look back at His sacrifice and are renewed and made whole in Him. The underlying point of this Psalm is that tension – the gracious, redemptive contrast of the righteous with the wicked. God judges the former but He redeems, refines, and rewards the righteous. The reward from Psalm 11: 7 is that the upright shall behold His face.

Psalm 11:7 also says the Lord is righteous and He loves righteous deeds. He sees what His people do and He gives them what they need for faithful witness. So we are not just to stand, wait and watch. We are to do something. Not only is the Lord very aware of what is happening, He has put us in this very place to test us and designed and gained that we do something. We are not to run away but be what James Montgomery Boice said about us at this moment; when the foundation are challenged and being destroyed, what can the righteous do? Be righteous.

Now, this is where we have a temptation to become self-righteous. How indeed are we righteous? We're not talking about works righteousness. We're not talking about gaining God's favor by doing good works. We're not talking about showing ourselves to be holier than other people, condescending to them. What we're talking about is being the church; having been redeemed and then placed in this world for God's purposes as the people who stand in God as their foundation. It's essentially what Paul says in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

The Lord loves righteous deeds. The righteous, therefore, should do what is righteous. The good news of grace is that it saves us by His work alone and then by the same grace, He puts us back in the world to behave as righteous people, not perfect people, but a people who depend upon grace alone in Christ alone and in faith alone, live repentant lives and transformed by the renewing of their mind living in this world. In other words, the testing that God gives the righteous who live among the wicked is to do the righteous deed that God loves in the world as a faithful witness to who He is and who we are as His people. Don't flee, stay put and live out your faith before a watching world. The great thing is, God has told us what it looks like and

what those deeds are. We show our trust in Him as our foundation when we stand firm and we are committed to those things He has called us to be and do in this world before a world that is watching.

I like to put it this way; God has given His people a test and He's given us the answers to the test. It's not like we have to stand in the world, and say 'what is it that God wants us to do in this wicked culture?' He has given us the answers to the test. I had a seminary professor whose classes were rough sledding; to say drinking from a fire hydrant with all the information that was given was an understatement. As we would go through the class, he would stop and say, 'This is going to be on your exam.' Now, at that point, it was up to you to write that down. He considered that what we needed to learn in this class was so important in preparing us for ministry that he wanted us to remember it for the exam. It was what we needed to be tested on. He told us ahead of time and if you failed that test, you were just stupid or lazy or not paying attention. God has told us what's on, if you will, the test. He showed us what the testing is as He refines us in this world.

Perhaps there's no better place in which that is summed up than in Micah 6:8 which says *[8] He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* That's just being who we are as redeemed people – members of the heavenly outpost in a world that is in desperate need of the Gospel. There are two senses in which we may refer to this justice. First and foremost, we must do what God has said is just and right. We must acknowledge always the injustice of sin, but we must start there. Injustice is the result of sin and sinful oppression, and only the Gospel of grace meaningfully addresses it – not legislation, not unlearning racism, but realizing what sin is, and that only by the deliverance of the Gospel. If you want to be a justice warrior, share the Gospel, share your faith. If you want to fight against injustice, knowing that injustice comes from sin and that people are held captive by sin in their hearts and minds, we proclaim the Gospel. We carry out the Great Commission.

To do justice we must uphold God's Word and what it says in every place, not just sharing the gospel, but standing as a people who stand for life, for the foundations that God instituted before the fall – marriage, sexuality – we must carry out and seek justice for all until all are delivered from sin. There is no justice. We don't have to be jerks about it. It doesn't matter in the end when a heart is bent against the truth. You can say it as winsomely as you possibly could, and they will still be offended. But we still must say and do the right thing. No homosexual person should ever have his or her clear constitutional rights violated, and we should be for that, but we should not be for the creating of new and special rights. We must stand and act when our government both violates rights that do not exist and creates rights that don't exist. We call our leaders to account according to Romans 13 where God has called them to reward good and punish bad. That's our calling as believers to pursue justice.

Most importantly, we are to be who we are being called out of the world, to be the Church of the Living God and that what we learn from Micah – to continue to show kindness, mercy and walk humbly with our God. It's a simple clarion reminder – be who you are and it's challenging to show mercy to those who don't want mercy. They may not think they need it, but if we see them as who they really are, like us, people who need grace and apart from that grace are truly lost. We throw that phrase around, 'apart from the grace of God, there go I' but do we really believe it? What if it was me? Do I see someone in need of God's mercy as someone I would be willing to lay my life down for and to show them through acts of kindness, instead of judgment? They're made in the image of God, and they don't deserve to be treated as if they were

trash. Yes, they may not treat us the way that we treat them, but we stand because the Lord loves righteous deeds.

To walk humbly with your God is perhaps the most important for it means that we are submitted to Him to do His work, His way with His weapons. We have the weapons of warfare that are spiritual and the most important one is the Word of God, His Spirit and prayer. We are in this world as the people of God carrying out the Great Commission and being faithful to what God has called us to be as we proclaim and honor Christ. We engage in and support Gospel engagement in our culture.

We must stop seeking to avoid offense under the guise of loving mercy. That's not mercy. I don't want to be offensive. Well, if we love someone, we will tell them the danger and we'll tell them passionately, not dispassionately. We are talking about churches being who God's called them to be – being engaged in this nation, in the ministries that carry out Gospel endeavors.

Partnership with missions so you can develop wisdom to be those people who find their refuge in the Lord. How might you personally engage in that? Come to our National Ministries Conference to see and hear what's going on. In particular, I would ask that you would pray for the work of church revitalization for the churches that stand on the truth and are committed to means of grace ministries, building up the people of God, not by tricks or fads, being committed to planting healthy churches, supporting and encouraging healthy ministries that are founded on the Word of God and trust in the power of the Gospel as the way that God reaps His waiting elect. Then be willing to recognize that the chips will fall but we have to be willing to pay the price of whatever may happen because of that.

I don't want to end negatively, but these are treacherous times and it would be nice to say that every time we go out and we show kindness in God's name, people say, 'Oh, let me know about your Jesus.' It doesn't happen that way every time, but it does happen. There are people who are amazed that people would love them in spite of the fact that they know that they are on opposite sides of political, spiritual, cultural, sexual perspectives.

If you've not read yet, the book by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield Unlikely titled Confessions of an Unlikely Convert, I would ask you to do so. It's about how she was won by the faithfulness of Christians, a pastor and his wife and their congregation, simply being faithful, loving justice, mercy, and walking humbly with God. It's powerful. Don't flee, do righteous things, and God has told us in His Word how we are to do that but there will be consequences that we will have to accept.

Francis Schaeffer spoke at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in 1982, and from that manuscript he developed what would become his book, A Christian Manifesto. So, this life takeaway comes from what he read; 'I think the church has failed to meet its obligation these last 80 years now for two specific reasons. The first is this false, truncated view of spirituality that doesn't see true spirituality touching all of life. The other thing is that too many Christians, whether they are doctors, lawyers, pastors, evangelists, whatever, too many of them are afraid to really speak out because they do not want to rock the boat for their own project. I'm convinced that those two reasons, both of which are tragedy and really horrible for all Christians, are an explanation of why we have walked the road we have walked in the last 80 years.'

Why are you a Christian? Are you a Christian for some lesser reason, or are you a Christian because you know that this is the truth of reality? How much do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? How much are you willing to pay the price for loyalty to the Lord Jesus? How much do you believe in the power of the Gospel? Then don't flee. How can we, unless we flee to



the Lord, who alone is our refuge? Retreat? No retreat in the name and power of our God and of His Gospel. Let us advance for the battle is the Lord's.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord God, thank You for Your Word and the power of Your Word, but thank You most importantly, for Your Spirit and the power of the Gospel in people's hearts. I pray, Father, that You indeed will work within us so that we might do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with You in faith, and be the people that we are supposed to be. I pray, Father, that You would get glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.