

Matthew 1:1-17 - Doug O'Donnell

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It is good to be back with you, I guess, for the fourth year in a row. I think last time I was here, sort of used the joke, I'm kind of like the uncle that shows up in Thanksgiving and just stays until Christmas is done.

It's a little bit like that. I'm also maybe like that crazy uncle who decides for his first sermon, let's do the genealogy of Matthew. So thank you for bearing with me. Why don't we pray and then we'll dive into this wonderful passage.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the fellowship that we can have together, sitting under your word with me here once a year. And Lord, we thank you for the richness of your word as we'll see today as we look through Matthew's genealogy.

We pray, Lord, as we think of the second coming of Christ and we turn now to the first coming that you would help us stay awake. Help us stay awake as we long for him. Help us stay awake even as we listen to God's word now, Lord, so that we might rejoice in our Savior, Emmanuel.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. If you've ever stepped into a synagogue or you've opened a Jewish prayer book or you've glanced at the flag of Israel, you have seen what's called the star, actually it's called the shield of David.

[1:14] It looks something like this. This is from a prayer book. You've probably seen it on Israel's flag. Long before it became a symbol in Judaism, it appeared just an ordinary decorative item and pottery and seals and floor mosaics.

But by the Middle Ages, Jewish communities, especially the mystical ones, began to use this overlapping pair of triangles, this shield of David, as a picture of protection.

They called it the shield of David because God had shielded David. He had protected him. Psalm 33, 20, The Lord is our help and our shield. And slowly, quietly, the shield found his place on synagogues and wall banners and manuscripts.

And by the 18th, 19th century, it had become the global symbol of Jewish identity. Now, I start with a short history, not to make a political statement.

Some of you will be glad to know. Others of you will be sad to know. But because the shield of David is a fitting symbol for a central idea that Matthew expresses in his genealogy, which I'll get to in a minute.

[2:24] I also want to use it because I think this symbol is visual. And today you're going to get, as you have here, a six-point sermon.

Not a three-point sermon, not a four-point sermon, not a five-point sermon, but a six-point sermon today. Aren't you glad I'm here? The first point, if you have your Bibles open, is that Jesus is the Son of David.

Jesus is the Son of David. Let me point out three details, and then I'll explain why they're important and how to apply them. Look with me at the first verse, Matthew 1.1.

It reads, The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. That's the top of our text. And look at the tail of the text, verse 17.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations. From David to the deportation, the exile to Babylon, 14 generations. And from the deportation of Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations.

[3:25] Now, I'll talk about the Babylonian exile later, so children, wait for that. For now, I just want you to notice a few things at the start of this section.

Matthew starts with Jesus as the Son of David before Jesus is labeled the Son of Abraham, even though chronologically Abraham comes before David.

Second, also notice that David is only one of three people who receives a title, and a little bit of extra information is provided about him. In verse 16, we're told that Joseph is the husband of Mary. In that same verse, Jesus is called the Christ, just another name for anointed one, or king. And then we're told in verse 6 that Jesse was the father of, and here's this extra title added, David, the king. Notice one final detail in this final verse, namely that Matthew goes from Abraham to David, and then from David to the deportation of the Babylon. And notice that repetition of the word 14, 14, 14, 14.

[4:30] Why does Matthew structure his genealogy this way? The genealogy is historical. These are names of real people from Jesus' real family tree. But there are more names that he actually could have included here.

So why limit himself to 14 plus 14 plus 14? Well, some scholars point out this is a mnemonic device. That is, it's something that aids our memories. Like Israel's leaders place stones of remembrance as physical markers to help God's people remember something God did in this region of the world, his saving acts in history.

So Matthew places, you might think of it this way, three rocks of remembrance, and on them he writes names and 14 generations from one to the next to the next.

So some scholars point out that this structure is a mnemonic device. Others suggest that the number 14 is also a literary device called a Jumania. I think I might have pronounced that right or something close to it.

And in Hebrew, each letter has a numerical value. So Aleph, the first letter, is worth one. Dalet, the fourth letter, is worth four. Vav, the sixth letter, is worth six.

[5:40] And you get the idea. Well, the word David in Hebrew, and it looks like this. David in Hebrew, there's just consonants used. And it goes this way. In Hebrew, you have Dalet, Vav, Dalet.

So you have four, six, four, which equals, children, 14. 14. Mic drop. Matthew, you see, is telling his first readers, predominantly a Jewish community, a Jewish Christian community, those who've converted to Christianity.

And every reader since, Christians and those who should be Christians, if you're not one of them today, he's telling us poetically through this structure, as well as prosaically through his story, that Jesus is the son of David, underline David.

So what? What's the importance of all this information about the connection between David and Jesus? Well, the answer is the Davidic covenant. And what's that?

The Davidic covenant is a promise, a covenant that God made to King David, that one of his descendants would establish a kingdom that would last forever. Let's listen to 2 Samuel 7.

[6:56] When your days are fulfilled, when you lie down with your father, that is, David, when you die, I, God, will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, your bloodline, and I will establish his kingdom.

He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. You see, Matthew, what he's doing here with his genealogy of Jesus and this clear connection to the Davidic covenant is making clear to us that Jesus is the promised king.

He's the promised king. And that's a theme he's going to draw out chapter after chapter after chapter throughout his gospel. For example, I think of the first declarations and responses to Jesus in the gospel of Matthew.

You might remember shortly after Jesus' birth, what do we have? Wise men from the East journey to Jerusalem asking, where is him who is born king? King of the Jews.

And then when they find him, here's their response. When they saw the child with Mary's mother, they fell down and they worshipped. They worshipped the king. Then fast forward to the end of Matthew's gospel, Matthew 28.

[8:03] After Jesus' resurrection, he announces his kingly reign. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. So not just king of the Jews, king of the universe. He announces his kingly reign, the reign of an ongoing kingdom.

And behold, I am with you always. And right before that, what do the apostles do once they see the resurrected Christ? Well, they worshipped him. Exact same response as the magi.

And it's the right response to King Jesus. It should be our response as well. We should join the wise men. We should join the apostles. We should join the children who cried out when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Hosanna to the Son of David.

Jesus is the Son of David. We praise that God through history protected David. My wife is reading through 1 and 2 Samuel all those times. God protected David.

Those are not inconsequential stories. God protected David so that he might protect his offspring. And he did this in so many different ways so that from the royal bloodline, the Lord Jesus Christ might come to save us.

[9:16] Hosanna. Save us. That's the first point. Jesus is the Son of David. He is the righteous ruler of God's forever kingdom. The second is that he is the Son of Abraham.

The Son of Abraham. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. A few years ago, I listened to a compelling message from Marvin Rosenthal, who's a Jewish believer in Jesus, who recently went to go be with the Lord.

He explained that one of the key proofs that convinced him of Jesus' Messiahship was actually Matthew's genealogy. And to illustrate the point, he drew on his days back as a U.S. Marine in the 1950s.

During rifle range training, he and the other Marines would fire at targets from 200, 300, and 500 yards away. At those distances, they couldn't clearly see if they had hit the mark, so one of them would crouch down behind the target in a nine-foot trench beneath the target.

After he heard 10 shots, you want to make sure you hear 10, he would come up, he would look at the target, he would calculate the score, and then he would communicate the results by raising a pole with a different colored disc attached to it.

[10:33] The disc color announced how accurate the shooter was. So for example, if he hit the bullseye, it would be a red disc. And the pole marker would go up and down for each shot in that color.

So each time you hit a bullseye, it would go up and down. Six shots, hit the bullseye, six times up and down. However, if the shooter hit all 10, the score didn't bother with 10 motions, he just spun the pole around.

It's a sign of perfect accuracy. Well, Rosenthal makes the point that for a Jewish audience, one steeped in genealogical precision, Matthew's genealogy does that and did that for him.

It spins the pole. It's 10 out of 10. And the bullseye, in the bullseye, right next to Jesus, the son of David, he will fulfill the Davidic covenant, is Jesus as the son of Abraham.

He came to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant as well. In Genesis 12, God makes this promise to Abraham. Go from your country.

[11:38] He was not a Jew yet. Didn't exist. Go from your country, your kindred, and your father's house to a land I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.

In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. You see, through Abraham and his offsprings, God is going to raise up a people, he tells Abraham.

Israel, who's going to be a blessing someday to the entire world, to Gentiles, all the other nations on the earth. Now, once again, on this fulfillment of this covenant, as it's illustrated throughout Matthew, we can turn to the Great Commission, where Jesus, based on his kingly authority, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

He commands us, as the church, to go and make disciples of who? All nations. Of all nations. And then, if we just kind of work our way backwards in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew highlights the faith of a Roman centurion, right there at the cross after Jesus dies.

He says, truly, this was the Son of God. And then, the Canaanite woman, with her great faith, guess what she calls Jesus? She calls him, Lord, Curie, Son of David.

[12:47] And then, another Roman centurion who likewise shows remarkable faith. He believes Jesus can heal his servant even from a distance with a mere word. And then, of course, there's the Magi, which we just look at, who acknowledge him as king and worship him.

You see, with these stories, these stories of faith, Matthew is illustrating that Jesus has come to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant, to be a blessing to all nations.

And in the first verse of the Gospel, he implicitly states that Jesus' mission is just that, that it is inclusive. It's inclusive. Now, not inclusive in the sense of the way the word is often used today, in my hometown, there's a church that has a wooden bench that's right near the front door, right near the entrance.

On the back, slats of the bench are the colors of the rainbow. And then, written on the back, drop rail, are the words, all are welcome. Now, that church, with the rainbow symbols, a biblical symbol that's been, of course, hijacked by the queer community, is appealing to those who live a homosexual lifestyle to come in, that they're welcome, even though something like that is condemned as a sin in Scripture.

Now, I believe that in the coming of Jesus and in the proclamation of the kingdom, he warmly welcomes all who repent of their sin and come to faith in him. His kingdom, I'll put it this way, it is absolutely inclusive.

[14 : 16] He welcomes all and exclusive. He welcomes all who come to him in faith. He's the son of Abraham. His gospel is good news for all the nations, good news for all who, like Abraham, believe.

So, the first point, Jesus is the son of David. The second, he's the son of Abraham. The third, and related to this idea of inclusion, is that Jesus came from and came for the outsider, and especially is socially scandalized.

Did you notice that Matthew includes five women in his genealogy? This is unusual, as the focus of Jewish genealogies for legal reasons was on the male descendants.

You may have noticed in the Scripture reading the word father repeated 39 times. Luke's genealogy, in chapter 3 of Luke, does not mention any women, as would be typical of a Jewish genealogy.

So, it's unusual that Matthew mentions five women. What is also unusual is that four out of the five ladies are Gentiles. Mary was a Jew from the line of David, but Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, one of the worst enemies of Israel, and a people who the Israelites were forbidden to marry.

[15 : 31] Ruth was a Moabite. The Moabites traced their lineage back to incestuous lot, and they, as a people, did a lot of bad things. And then there's Bathsheba, who was the wife of Uriah before she was the wife of David.

Uriah was a Hittite, another enemy of Israel. Now, while Bathsheba was very likely an Israelite, through marriage, she legally, at that point, became a Hittite.

Now, once again, by including these Gentile women, Matthew reemphasizes this theme of Gentile, all nations, inclusions. He also plants the seed of a unique and extraordinary feature of Jesus' ministry.

He's not only going to minister to Jews and Samaritans and Gentiles alike, all are welcome, but He will also minister to women, and often women who are on the edges of society, the poor and the prostitutes, those who are in physical, dire physical need, like the bleeding woman hemorrhaging for 12 years, Peter's mother-in-law with this deadly high fever, Jairus' dead daughter.

He will minister to people in dire physical need and dire spiritual need, such as the sinful woman who anointed His feet, such as Mary Magdalene who Jesus delivered from seven demons.

[16 : 51] You see, our Lord taught, He healed, He defended, He forgave, He blessed, He drew women who were at that time culturally viewed as outsiders, especially in key religious roles.

He brought them into His inner circle of disciples. This is why Matthew sees fit to note them, women, both at the end of His gospel, they're the first to witness the resurrection, and here at the beginning as well in the genealogy.

He is pointing to the theological truth that Paul will later write about. For as many of you were baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ. This is your new identity above all things.

There is neither Jew nor Greek or Gentile. There is neither slave nor free, we might think outsider or insider. There is neither male nor female.

You are all one in Christ Jesus, and if you are in Christ, then you are, back to verse point two, Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. Now Matthew is also with the mention of women and his genealogy.

[17 : 57] He's rolling out the red carpet for the first story he's going to teach us in his gospel, namely what we'll look at next week, the birth of Jesus through Mary. Through Mary.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Jesus came from and came for the outsider and the socially scandalized.

That's the third point. And Mary certainly ticks both of those boxes as an outsider and as a socially scandalized person. She was pregnant, unwed teenager from the nowhere town of Nazareth.

She is pregnant, of course, and we know what the other people in the story don't know is she is innocent. She's innocent, while most of the other women mentioned in the genealogy are not as it relates to sexual sins.

Tamar, you might remember, got dressed as a prostitute to get her father-in-law, Judah, to give her lawful offspring. And that plan worked. That's how Perez and Zerah, the twins mentioned in verse 3, came into this world.

[19:03] So forget about the soap opera tomorrow or the latest episode of The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills. Just read Genesis 38 tomorrow. Then we have Rahab, who didn't disguise herself as a prostitute, but she actually was a prostitute in Jericho, that wicked town where the walls came tumbling down.

Of course, as we know from the books of Joshua and Hebrews and James, she became a woman of faith. However, the scandal of her past is what it is. Finally, we have Bathsheba, who was certainly taken advantage of by King David, but she was, in my estimation, not perfectly innocent. She was, after all, taking a bath out in the open within the king's view, and she didn't say no to his advances, which the law tells us, God's word tells us, that she should have in such a situation. She's to cry out for help. Either way, even if she's 1%, I know she was in a tough spot, or 2% to blame, she was involved in an adulterous affair, one that cost the life of her first husband and her first child, and one that certainly marred her reputation.

They all, Ruth I will include too, as a widow, a Moabite widow, they all ticked the socially scandalized box. They also, and to move on to the fourth point, they ticked the I am a sinner box.

[20:24] Mary included, as she acknowledges in the opening lines of her Magnificat, my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, my Savior from my enemies, but also my Savior from my sins.

Yes, every, the one thing that every person in Jesus' family tree, other than Jesus, has in common is that there is none righteous, no, not one. The fourth point is that Jesus came from sinners for sinners, from sinners for sinners.

sinners. My oldest daughter, Lily, is an MA student over at Wheaton in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program, and earlier this month or last month, she gathered some information from me and my wife and I think from our parents as well for her presentation that she had to do on her family tree or family of origins, the geneogram.

And here's just a snapshot of my side of the family, a few of the highlights or lowlights. I won't go to my wife's side, it's much worse than my side.

So my father's side was the west of Ireland, my mom's side from the west of Scotland. Both were deeply religious, many devout Roman Catholics, yet two children that we know of were born out of wedlock of historical interest.

[21:44] Both of them were named Sean, many generations apart from each other. My grandfather on my mother's side, probably the saddest thing in our family history, was an alcoholic and he abused his children, at least two of them, maybe all three of them, and likely his wife.

His wife, when my mother was, I think, eight, ran off with another man, never to be seen again by my mom until she tracked her down in her old age.

And before she died, my grandmother and my mom and her got together and met face to face. My grandmother wasn't sorry for anything, she did. And she didn't want a relationship with my mom or her two siblings who were both still alive.

So addiction, abuse, abandonment, I come from a family tree of sinners. You come from a family tree of sinners if you didn't know that.

And Jesus, though he was without sin, he came from a family tree of sinners as well. Now let me highlight some of the lowlives and the lowlives of otherwise respectable people in his family tree.

[22:55] I have in part covered or uncovered some of the women's sins, so let me just touch on some of the men's. Abraham, twice lied about his wife.

Jacob was a long, long time, lifelong schemer, deceiving, manipulating, running away from all the messes he created. Judah sold his brother into slavery and slept with his daughter-in-law.

Then he moved farther down the royal line and this pattern of sin continues. David, Israel's greatest king, committed adultery, engineered murder, and then he covered it all up. His son Solomon, he'll tell us in his own writings and Ecclesiastes, he had a love of money and idolatry and sex.

He was an addict in those three areas, I'd say. Rehoboam's arrogance split the kingdom. Abijah walked in the sins of his father, Asa and Jehoshaphat. Good kings overall still stumbled through

foolish allegiances, unbelief, and misplaced trust.

Then we come to the darker chapters, believe it or not. Jorah murdered his brothers and led Judah into idolatry. Uzziah, marched proudly right into the temple as though he was a priest, something he should not have done.

[24:07] Ahaz, oh Ahaz, burned his own son and shut the doors of God's temple. Manasseh, perhaps the worst of the bunch, filled Jerusalem with blood and bowed before every idol he could find, even though by grace, later in life, he actually repented.

Josiah, otherwise exemplary, died in disobedience. Jeconiah's wickedness helped pave the way for the exile. Now, as we look with our collective memories of these stories, and this is what Matthew is doing here, he's kind of saying a name and assuming his readers know the story behind the name. As he's just doing that and taking out just a few of the dead bones from the closet and scattering on the floor, we wonder why. Why are you doing this? Why inform us that Jesus did not belong to the nice, clean world of upper-middle-class respectability, but rather he belonged to a family of murderers, cheats, cowards, adulterers, and liars?

Well, the point is too obvious to belabor. Matthew wants to show us what Paul will teach us in 1 Timothy 1.15. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world for sinners, for sinners.

Jesus came not for the righteous but for the unrighteous, for sinners, like Rahab the prostitute, like Matthew the tax collector. He came for sinners, like me, and for sinners like you.

[25:37] Mary will bear a son, the angel of the Lord, told Joseph, and you shall call his name Jesus. You know what the name Jesus means? Yahweh saves. Why will you call him Jesus?

Because there's his mission. He will save his people from something, from their sins. He will save his people from their sins. Jesus came from sinners but he came for sinners.

Now think about how Matthew traces this theme throughout his gospel. Jesus will identify with sinners right away, right at the start of his adult ministry, at his baptism. He'll be plunged into the waters to say, I am going to take on the sin of the world.

And he will preach next in Galilee, he will preach that light has come to those who are dwelling in darkness, the darkness of sin. He will, like a good shepherd, go after the straying sheep.

He will forgive people of their sins, such as the paralytic, the sinful woman Matthew, and other very serious sinners. And of course, he dies between two sinners. And as he does that, he will pay the astronomical debt that we cannot pay to God so that all who trust in him from all the nations will be given God's eternal forgiveness.

[26:52] Jesus came from sinners, but he came for sinners. That's the fourth point. And two more to go. We're doing great. Point five is that in the genesis of Jesus, and I'll explain in a minute, in the genesis of Jesus, the exile is over.

Now I say genesis because the word for genealogy in Greek can be rendered genesis. The book of Genesis of Jesus Christ is how it could be woodenly translated. I don't know if you've ever seen Greek transliterated.

It's, you know, it has the Greek word and then it has it, what it looks like and sounds like in a way that we can look at it. The transliteration is literally genesis here, how you would see it in English. Now, this is important to know because with Jesus, Matthew was telling us we have a new genesis, a new beginning, one that is far greater than the first. For whereas God in the first genesis fashioned the highest heavens, the deepest oceans, the hills and the valleys and the flatlands of the earth, now in his son he has poured into those places grace, grace upon grace, all over the place. But not only is there this new theme of a new creation, as Matthew's signaling to us by this word genesis in verse 1, but there's also the theme that Israel's spiritual exile is finally over, as Matthew makes clear in his climactic statement in verse 17.

[28:19] So all the generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations, from David to the deportation or the exile to Babylon, 14 generations, but then from the exile of Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations.

Matthew here teaches us that thus far in salvation history there are three key movements and we can think of the history here as a capital letter N and I'll do it so it's your way.

The first 14 generations, they go from Abraham up to David and then they go downward from Solomon to the Babylonian exile, but then they come back up again as Jesus will take people out of exile as he comes at Advent.

Now how does Matthew throughout his gospel, after the genealogy, signal that with the coming of Jesus, the exile, Israel's spiritual exile, is over?

Well first he tells us that we're going to meet Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, implicitly declaring that the glorious presence that departed from Israel at the time of the Babylonian exile has finally returned to God's people.

[29 : 31] Second, Jesus is going to relive Israel's story, the first few chapters of Matthew's gospel. He's called out of Egypt, he passes through the waters, he's tested in the wilderness, he ascends on a mountain like Moses to give a law.

So he's going to relive Israel's history, but he's going to succeed everywhere that they've failed. And third, Jesus announces that the kingdom of God is at hand, he heals and he restores all of the things that the blind will see and so on and so forth, the lepers that Isaiah promised would happen when the captives were set free.

And he forgives sin, which certainly signals according to Daniel 9 and Jeremiah 31 that the exile is over. And fourth and finally, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles.

That was the first place to fall in judgment to the Babylonians. That first place to fall now becomes the first place that the light of the gospel is going to spread throughout the world.

So you see, in the coming of Jesus, Matthew's signaling here with his structure, with his last sentence, that the exile is over. The spiritual exile for God's people is finally over.

[30 : 44] And point six is that the human baby, Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem, is the heaven-sent divine Son of God. The human baby is the heaven-sent divine Son of God.

In Matthew 1, 22 through 23, the angel of the Lord reveals to Mary and Joseph that the virgin conception and Jesus' birth, all of this, was to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet, by Isaiah.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus is Emmanuel. The man, Jesus, is God with us.

The human, Jesus, is God. And how did Paul put it in Colossians 2, 9, in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. Now, to be honest, in all my research this week on the names and the genealogy and what's going on and why, I worked some overtime this week, I forgot something of, or too much of, the awesomeness of the incarnation, of the incarnation.

And it wasn't until I opened Charles Spurgeon's commentary on Matthew and I read, marvelous condescension that God should be a man, but I love this next line, that God should be a man and have a genealogy, and have a genealogy.

[32 : 04] Marvelous condescension. We think it's a wonderful thing when a rich businessman volunteers for a night to help at a homeless shelter providing food and comfort, companionship to the poor.

We think it's such a wonderful thing when a professional athlete or movie star gives her time to conduct a free clinic for inner city kids and such are wonderful things. We recognize and we appreciate, we applaud the humility, the condescension.

But what marvelous, unfathomable humility and condescension it was when God became man.

When we read Matthew 1.1, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, alongside Matthew 1.23, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, it ought to be enough for us to stop and think, to pause and praise, just to join the angelic chorus this first Sunday in Advent and always singing, Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, hail, hail the incarnate deity.

Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel. Hark the herald, heaven sing, glory, glory be to the newborn king. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the richness of your word. Thank you for the gospel of Matthew, which you by your spirit breathed out and inspired. Something that may seem unattractive to us as we're not familiar with genealogies and yet quite attractive to ancient Jews and even modern Jews as it appeals to something that they care about.

[33 : 37] We thank you that you care for your people in that way. We thank you, Lord, that we can see, as Gentiles, most of us, the riches of your goodness. And we thank you that in Jesus we have the son of Abraham, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic prophecy and Lord, also the fulfillment of the Davidic prophecy.

We thank you we have a king, but we have a humble king who loved us and came for us and saved us from all our sins. To him be all the glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.