



# CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

August 5, 2018

## **He Died for Us**

**Dr. Steve Walker**

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In just a minute, we're going to open God's Word together. Before we do that, we have a few things we want to do. First of all, we want to dismiss all the elementary-age children. This is family month at Canyon Hills, where we invite all the kids to come in and worship with Mom and Dad. If you're of elementary age, Pastor Alex is over there by that door. You can go! You can go to your place. Have fun! Enjoy your time together.

While they're doing that, I want to call for our offering. Whenever the ushers are ready, they can come and begin receiving the offering. While they're doing that, I want to give you just a few updates of stuff that just goes on. Sometimes, if you're traveling or you miss a Sunday here or there, you just don't get to hear some of the things that are happening in the life of the church, and so I want to just remind you.

First of all, right now, as we speak, we have a team of young adults in Japan with one of our pastors. The college-age and career-age people in the church are there. We are about to experience something we've been dreaming about for many years. We're getting really close to planting a church in a country that is the second most unreached nation in the world when it comes to the gospel.

We started dreaming about this many years ago and we are getting so close. We just got an Instagram video from them this weekend, showing us the location, the actual facility building they have chosen for this church plant, and so we're excited to let you know that is happening really as we speak.

Another thing I want you to be aware of is that this fall is our annual biblical counseling training conference. Every year, we help train people in the church and in churches all over this region on how to counsel each other. Here's what we believe. Here's our conviction. *Every Christian is a counselor.*

Now, you might not believe you're a counselor, but you are, because eventually, at some place and point in your day, week, or life, someone is turning to you. It could be a child, a friend, a

parent, a neighbor, or anybody. Someone is turning to you, looking for encouragement, advice, or input into their life. In that moment, you are a counselor.

Now, you may be a terrible counselor, but you are a counselor. Over 10 years ago, we committed to continue to grow in learning how we can encourage and help each other, especially in times where we need encouragement. So, I want to just let you know. Go to our website. Don't miss it. There are seven tracks this year. Track three has all new subjects and topics. You can't take any of the tracks until you take track one. Please be aware of that.

Another thing I want to update you on is that this past week, we had an outreach into the Hispanic community in our neighborhoods here. It was more like kind of an old-fashioned vacation Bible school, day camp, and sports camp all combined this past week. It was a tremendous success and it took many of you volunteering, especially those of you who are bilingual. I've heard great things about that. Just so you know, God is just making inroads with the gospel into our Hispanic community through some of our ministries.

Finally, I want to update you on our second location. Last fall, the elders and pastors stood before you and declared that we are never going to have five services on a Sunday morning. Four is the limit. Praise God. Hallelujah. We're not having any more than four. Yet as a result, we realize it's time for us to start looking for another additional location. It's not going to be a video venue where my face is up on a screen. We're going to use live worship and live pastors from our preaching team.

The update for you is that there's no update. We have not found a location. We are working full-time with our brokers, and everything we looked at has just not turned out to be useful for us. So, if you are here and you own a building that seats about 750 people and has parking for the same, somewhere north of here, would you let us know? We'd be glad to buy it or take it off your hands. I mean, we're looking everywhere. We're still doing our best, but we have not found the right spot yet.

All of that is just to give you an update, just to catch you up on some stuff, some really neat things going on in the life of the church. All right. All done with that.

Let's open our Bibles to Mark, chapter 15. Today, we come to the final minutes of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. I have purposely moved us very slowly through this section of Scripture, mainly because there's a huge danger for us as Christians. The danger is that we become too familiar and too comfortable with this humanly horrific sin and yet divinely beautiful act of God's redemption.

I don't think it's hyperbole for me to say that everything we believe and hope in for this present life as well as the future life after this life... Everything you and I believe in, everything we place our faith in, spiritual speaking, hinges on the last 48 hours of Jesus' life on earth. Everything about our Christian faith stands or falls based on what we've been talking about, reading through, and studying through in the gospel of Mark, specifically the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

So, today, we are going to continue to move through this scene as slowly as we need to so we never lose sight of the horror and hope we have from it all. Are you ready for that? Let's stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to pick it up right where we left off, verse 33.

**"And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'Behold, he is calling Elijah.'**

**And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"**

Father in heaven, I just plead with you, God, that these words would come back to life in our hearts. I pray, God, that as we find ourselves trusting in them we would never lose the emotion and the horror of this moment. I pray, God, that you would renew in our hearts the hope it brings but also the desperation it reveals. God, we ask you now to speak to us. Have your way in us. Change us. In Christ's name, amen.

I'm going to jump right in. Let's be clear.

1. *Rejecting Jesus is the highest form of evil.* Make no mistake about it. The greatest wickedness in the universe is the rejection of the Son of God. I need you to be convinced of that, Christian. Rejecting Jesus is the highest form of treason. In this murderous scene of the crucifixion, Mark tells us it's the sixth hour, which is noon. He tells us that from noon to 3:00 p.m., darkness fell over the whole land.

Now, two other gospel writers tell us the same thing. Skeptics have been trying to dismiss this as some coincidental midday eclipse. The cynics will try to brush this off and say it just happened to be, obviously, that there was an eclipse that day that Jesus was on the cross. The problem with this is that scientifically, we know the longest solar eclipse in the history of solar eclipses, as far back as we can go, has only been 6 minutes and 55 seconds. So, to have some three-hour eclipse just naturally and randomly happen is nonsense and you should not give it any consideration.

The question for us is...why darkness? If God caused the darkness (and we believe God did this), then why? What's the significance of this sudden descending darkness on the earth for three hours? Does God just like messing around with the light switch in heaven? Is this some dramatic effect? What's behind it? Here's what we know. In Scripture...

*A. Darkness is associated with the presence of unrelenting sin and God's judgment.* In the Bible, darkness often describes man's depravity and God executing his wrath upon that depravity. It

goes all the way back to Exodus. You remember Moses, Pharaoh, the 10 plagues, and God wanting Pharaoh to let his people go?

When Moses brought upon Pharaoh and Egypt the ninth plague, we read in Exodus 10, verse 21, **"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.'"** That darkness lasted three days. No sunlight. God's judgment upon the unrelenting rebellion in sin of Pharaoh rejecting God's commands.

We see it all over the New Testament as well. In Matthew's gospel alone, we read Jesus' description of the coming judgment and anger of God over the Jewish people's refusal to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. In one of those verses in Matthew, chapter 8, Jesus said, **"...the sons of the kingdom [the Jewish people] will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** He's speaking of those who refuse to accept Jesus as their Messiah.

As we've seen in these couple of verses and in many others in the Bible, the presence of darkness is the manifestation of God's wrath and judgment on the wickedness of sin, yet please don't be confused. God is not full of wrath. No, God is full of holiness. Wrath is that divine response provoked by sin and wickedness, especially the wickedness of rejecting Jesus, who is the Son of God.

Now, we struggle today, in our day. There's a huge struggle. Nobody wants to hear about a God that judges us. Nobody. In fact, Peter Kreeft points this out his book (one of my top 5 books I've ever read), *Christianity for Modern Pagans*. He writes, "Everyone in pre-modern societies knew sin was real, but many doubted salvation. Today it is the exact opposite: everybody is saved, but there is no sin to be saved from." Doesn't that describe our day? No sin to be saved from, including the sin of rejecting Jesus. We're all going to heaven; we can live without Jesus.

B. *Sin is associated with separation from God in death.* This is what makes sin so serious that God manifests his wrath, anger, fury, and judgment over it in darkness. The Bible is clear: darkness represents sin, which represents death, which represents separation from God. There's a natural evolution of wickedness there.

Let's just go all the way back to Genesis, chapter 2. God creates man and woman and places them in a garden of perfect paradise. Now, it was paradise because God's unfiltered protection, provision, and presence was with man. Yet...listen to me now...in the garden, they also had God's promises.

God promised them two things. "Trust and obey me and live content, happy, and in peace in my loving presence forever. Disobey me and you will surely die." Well, one chapter later, in Genesis, chapter 3, they were deceived by Satan. They didn't believe God. They believed Satan's lie instead, so they disobeyed God and were cast out of the garden. Just as God promised, two terrible deaths immediately entered humanity.

The first one was the curse of *physical death*. Now, all humanity must face the sobering reality that only God gives and sustains life. There was nothing they could do to maintain their life. Only God. At that moment, it was appointed once for every man to physically die.

The second death that entered humanity is what I would call the curse of *spiritual death*. Total separation from God. Sin made it so there's no relationship with or access to God. Isaiah describes it in these simple terms. He says, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and God and your sins have hidden his face from you so he does not hear you." Both the body and the spirit of man died that day in Genesis, chapter 3.

One of the things I love about Christianity (and I want you to love this about it as well) is that it explains a lot of stuff that the world has no answers for. Christianity is worthy of respect on a human level simply because it understands the real problem in our world. The real problem in our world is the human heart.

Man, separated from God, is totally lost, inescapably selfish, and unhappy. No presence of God, no provision of God, no protection of God, and no peace with God in our spiritually dark and depraved condition leaves us enslaved to our own passions and our own lust.

In Romans and Ephesians, our sins are called fruitless deeds of darkness. In Colossians, we read that Satan rules the world in darkness. He loves to magnify the fun and joy of sin, but Corinthians tells us he also loves to blind the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the glory and holiness of God in the face of Jesus.

Rejecting Jesus is not only the greatest sin and wickedness, but this rejection, this unbelief throws open the door to every other form of depravity. Every sin we commit starts with rejecting Jesus.

R.C. Sproul is in heaven now. He said something to the effect that every time we sin we are committing practical atheism. Every time we sin we convince ourselves God isn't there, God doesn't care, God doesn't see me, or God doesn't exist in this moment. One of the things I love about Christianity is that it explains the reason for suffering and evil in the world.

2. *Only Jesus can save us from God's wrath and judgment.* The bottom line is that Jesus is the only way out of this inescapable darkness that comes from being separated from God due to our sin. I love the words of Jesus in John, chapter 8, verse 12. Jesus said, "**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**" It's so simple and yet so beautiful.

Now look at verses 34 and 35 with me. They're interesting. "**And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'Behold, he is calling Elijah.'**" They ran and put a sponge on a stick and were putting it up to his mouth, and someone said, "Wait! Let's see if Elijah will come and take him down."

See, they thought it was his lack of power that was keeping him on the cross that day, when all the while, it was his love for us that kept him there. They thought it was his sins that condemned him, when all the while, it was our sins that condemned him to death. You see, Jesus doesn't lead us out of darkness, he doesn't save us from our sin like some escape hatch out of a prison cell. No, Jesus shines the light on our sin and then he leads us out of the darkness of our sin by paying for our sins, purchasing our pardon with his own blood.

Revelation 1:5 says it so profoundly. Jesus freed us from our sins by his blood. This is so important, Christian. It's so important for you to remember today that Jesus didn't ignore our guilt and just declare us innocent. All of our sin is real, and it's all deserving of the curse of death. No, Jesus took our guilt upon himself and satisfied God's justice.

That may explain that horrible cry in verse 34, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" Those are unbelievable words, and they make sense when you remember 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." So, here's Jesus on the cross, bearing the full weight of all of our sin and death.

Now, he enters into a realm he's never experienced before. His complete identification with sinners involved not only a felt but a very real abandonment by his Father. That darkness that day was God's judgment being executed upon his Son in order that sinful people, turning to his Son by faith, may find salvation.

You see, the heart of the matter, church, is that my sin and your sin must be so absolutely horrendous if it takes the death of God's only Son to fix it. Our sin must be so devastatingly evil that God was willing to die to save us from it.

You see, it was our only hope. It was our only hope because Jesus, who was perfectly sinless and innocent of all guilt, was the only one who could present to God an acceptable sacrifice for you and me. He was the only one who had access to God because he was sinless. The sacrifice, the payment he brought to God for our sin was himself. Isn't this why we refer to such an ugly and horrific day in our faith as Good Friday?

I wonder if you fully understand the majesty of this moment on the cross. All week, I've just been praying, "God, somehow, help us to regain the depth, devastation, and destruction of sin in our hearts and help us to see the hope that we cling to every day of our Christian lives in a very real-time way."

I think what happens to us is we accept it, we believe it, we place our trust in it, and then just by the busyness of life, we just kind of stick this whole crucifixion stuff in the Gospels off to the side. We know it, we believe it, and we do Communion once a month to try to remember it some more, but we just kind of... I don't want to say we take it for granted, but we just forget about what needed to happen.

You see, it's only through the cross of Jesus that we can truly know God. It's only by looking at the cross and knowing what happened there that we have any way of knowing what God is like,

because when you look at the cross, you see things like his love, holiness, grace, mercy, compassion, and justice. That's where we find out about God on that level. There's no other place in the universe to know that about God. It's the cross of Jesus.

Do you know what else? It's only through the cross of Jesus that we can truly know ourselves. When you look at the cross we see that we are broken by sin. When we look at the cross we see both our depravity, our evil, and our condemnation as well as our hope of salvation. The cross reveals all of that.

Here's what we love about the cross of Jesus. It shows us that no matter how high our opinion of ourselves may be, we are not God. In spite of what the counselors, psychologists, and philosophers want to tell us, that somehow, inside us, resides this wonderful godlike goodness... In spite of that lie, we have to know we are not in charge. We are not in charge of our destiny. It doesn't matter.

I love when I hear on TV, you know, the wonderful counsel from all the very famous, rich, and accomplished people. "Just follow your dreams! You can do anything you want!" No, you can't! The reason we can't is because we're sinners, and sin breaks everything! Yet the cross also shows us that no matter how little we think of ourselves, our life is worth more to God than the whole world he created. He sent his Son to die for you and for me.

3. *Jesus died to bring us to God.* After Jesus said, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" Mark says, in verse 37, "**And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.**" Matthew and Luke tell us that at that moment, Jesus said, "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!**" John records that at this point, Jesus said, "**It is finished...**" Both are true. We're just not sure if Mark had in mind both or one of these.

I have a 50/50 chance here. I'm going to take a guess that when Mark said here in verse 37 that Jesus uttered a loud cry, I'm thinking he was referring to when Jesus said, "**It is finished...**" because the cross was ultimately the plan of God, not the plot of the Jews. When Jesus said, "**It is finished...**" he announced that the cross was the purpose of God, not just the punishment of the Romans.

The cross was the price and pardon for the sins of man. When he said, "**It is finished...**" he was announcing that the cross was the promise of God all the way back in Genesis, chapter 3, that God would defeat the presence of darkness and Satan's destruction of the soul of man in the lie to Adam.

Now look at verse 38. At this moment, he breathed his last, and instantaneously, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This curtain was in the temple and it separated everyone from the Holy of Holies that was in the temple. The Holy of Holies was that back room, that place where God's unapproachable and unreachable presence was represented, behind this curtain, by the ark of the covenant. In that ark were the two tablets representing the laws of God as well as the staff of Aaron, representing the salvation of God.

In that Holy of Holies, behind the curtain, only the high priest can go there, one time a year, to offer a sacrifice of blood in that room to get God's grace, forgiveness, and mercy for the people for another year, until he went back the next year. Anyone else who ever dared to go behind that curtain would instantly die because they could never be in the presence of God in sin.

That curtain was so heavy and so thick that no human could ever have torn it. Mark is very clear. It tore from the top down to the bottom. The ceiling of the temple in that day would have been between 60 and 80 feet high. To give you some perspective, this ceiling is about 24 feet high. Three times higher than this, the curtain went from the floor to the ceiling.

It was unbelievably heavy, and it was so thick that no human being could have torn it one inch, let alone 60-80 feet. It illustrates a divine intervention of God at the moment of his Son's death. It was God's sign that the eternal life that was destroyed in the garden by Adam's sin was now restored by Jesus' death on the cross. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews so beautifully describes this moment.

**"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience..."**

Wow! That curtain being torn apart was symbolic of, "Now we can come to God." The curtain we now walk through is the curtain of Christ's flowing blood that cleanses us from the sin that separated us from God due to the fall in Genesis 3.

Paul writes, in Colossians 1, **"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son..."** This whole transaction of the substitutionary death of Jesus on our behalf is called, in theological terms (you've heard it often), the *atonement*. It's our atonement.

*Atonement* means he fully satisfied the Law's death sentence against all of us for breaking all of God's laws. He satisfied our death sentence by making peace with God for us with his own blood. He took our sin and gave us his righteousness, so now we have direct access to the Creator who loves us more than we could ever imagine. He loves us the same on our worst day as he does on our best days.

There's this guy in verse 39 whom I can't wait to meet in heaven. I hope he's in heaven. It doesn't tell us he is, but I hope he is. **"And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"** This is an example of the power of the cross.

The soldier's spiritual eyes were opened. He looked at the cross, and seeing, he saw that Jesus didn't die for his own sin. Jesus didn't die for dramatic effect. He didn't die for man's approval. He looked and he listened to Jesus that day, and he knew his death wasn't an accident. His death was a mission.



That sadder that day saw that the cross wasn't something that was happening to Jesus; it was something Jesus pursued. Jesus died because he chose to. Jesus died because he needed to. It was our only hope for forgiveness and reconciliation. It was the only cure for the curse of sin on our souls, which was separation from God in eternal darkness, ultimately and eternally, where there'll be only darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

I end with two quotes from the apostle Paul, because his response to this marvelous atonement on our behalf is hard to improve on. In Galatians, chapter 2, Paul responds this way: **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** I wonder if that should not be a verse we read to ourselves every day.

He wrote later, in Romans, **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel [the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus], for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."** What does it mean? I want to see if I can just bring it right down into our laps. This means two things.

First, it means *you can trust God*. If you feel like your life is meaningless, lonely, fearful, or hopelessly stuck or unhappy, Jesus has made a way for you to confidently come to God with all of that, to bring it all to him to find his grace, mercy, purpose, value, and hope for which your heart longs. That's the place to take it.

Secondly, it also means *you can start over*. Listen to this. If you're living in sin and you're harsh, a hypocrite, an addict, an abuser, lazy, angry, immoral, or you just (fill in the blank), Jesus made a way for you to humbly come to God in genuine repentance and find that he can change you and you can exchange all of your sin for his righteousness. You can stop, you can be forgiven, and you can love. You can love God and you can love others.

I told you I was praying all week. I don't know if I've even done a mediocre job this morning in trying to get our hearts and minds wrapped around this again, but all I could think about this week was how there's only one way to respond to all this, and that's to worship. So, we're going to do that, just for a minute. I'm going to pray for us, and then we're going to worship God. We're just going to remind ourselves of the beauty of what we believe. Would you bow your heads with me?

Father in heaven, O God in heaven, I pray in Jesus' name that you would never, ever let us forget that the wages of our sin is death. God, help us never to lose the horror and desperation of the wickedness that resides in our hearts. Yet God, I also pray that you would never let us forget that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us. O God, may we breathe, look up, rejoice, hope, and find all of our rest in knowing that the cross ended all of that devastation for us who believe.

[Song]

Alone in my sorrow and dead in my sin  
Lost without hope with no place to begin  
Your love made a way to let mercy come in  
When death was arrested and my life began

Ash was redeemed, only beauty remains  
My orphan heart was given a name  
My mourning grew quiet, my feet rose to dance  
When death was arrested and my life began

Oh, your grace so free  
Washes over me  
You have made me new  
Now life begins with you  
It's your endless love  
Pouring down on us  
You have made us new  
Now life begins with you

Released from my chains, I'm a prisoner no more  
My shame was a ransom he faithfully bore  
He cancelled my debt and he called me his friend  
When death was arrested and my life began

Oh, your grace so free  
Washes over me  
You have made me new  
Now life begins with you  
It's your endless love  
Pouring down on us  
You have made us new  
Now life begins with you

Our Savior displayed on a criminal's cross  
Darkness rejoiced as though heaven had lost  
But then Jesus arose with our freedom in hand  
That's when death was arrested and my life began

Oh, your grace so free  
Washes over me  
You have made me new  
Now life begins with you

It's your endless love  
Pouring down on us  
You have made us new  
Now life begins with you

Oh, we're free, free  
Forever we're free  
Come join the song  
Of all the redeemed  
Yes, we're free, free  
Forever amen  
When death was arrested and my life began

Oh, we're free, free  
Forever we're free  
Come join the song  
Of all the redeemed  
Yes, we're free, free  
Forever amen  
When death was arrested and my life began

When death was arrested and my life began  
When death was arrested and my life began

[End of song]

[Song]

God the Father, Lord, you reign over everything  
Above heaven, earth, and sky, you're the sovereign King  
Knowing sin would separate, you designed a way  
To redeem my wayward heart; you're the God who saves

Father, mighty King, Elohim  
Jesus, Lamb of God, Prince of Peace  
Spirit, Comforter who intercedes  
Praise the Holy Trinity

God the Son, you gave your life to atone for mine  
In humiliating death, proving you're the Christ  
You were raised in victory, now in majesty  
At the right hand of the throne, you reign in all glory

Father, mighty King, Elohim  
Jesus, Lamb of God, Prince of Peace  
Spirit, Comforter who intercedes  
Praise the Holy Trinity

God the Spirit, give me peace, help me when I'm weak  
Be my guide in times of need, bring me to the King

Our God is an awesome God  
He reigns from heaven above  
O Father, Spirit, and Son  
Yes, you are an awesome God

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O Father, Spirit, and Son  
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O Father, Spirit, and Son  
Yes, you are an awesome God

[End of song]

Every Sunday at Canyon Hills, God draws people here who are still trying to decide if this whole Jesus thing is worth it. In every service on every Sunday, God brings you here who are still

wondering, "Does God love me? Does this matter? Is Jesus for real? If he is, why the cross?" I just pray that you're convinced that it's not only true and real, but it's your only hope. It's your only hope, and it's the greatest hope in the world.

So, if you are ready to take that step of repenting of your sin, being truthful with God, admitting, "I'm a sinner. I'm in the dark. I'm separated from you. I give up. I want you to save me..." If you're ready to take that step of faith, there are people standing up here all across the front of this room who would love to help you do that. They'd love to give you something to go home with today that will encourage you in new faith, in real faith, faith that changes us. I hope you'll do that before you go.

We have a few more Sundays in the gospel of Mark, and we're going to go just as slow as we have been going. Then, on Labor Day weekend, we're going to begin a new journey through the book of Ephesians, so let's enjoy this while we have it for a few more weeks in the Gospels. We'll look forward to being again next Sunday. We'll see you then.