

Who Do You Think You Are?

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[0:00] Okay, and all please do take a seat there, and turn with me back in your Bibles to Romans! If you would, we're going to carry on that reading as Donald was saying, reading from verse 12 down to the end of the chapter. We've just sung of the Lord Jesus as God's Messiah, the cosmic king, the priest king, and he's the one who reigns now and rules among us as he speaks to us in his word. So let me pray, join me in prayer if you would, and then I'll read the rest of Romans chapter 5. Our gracious Lord God, we thank you that your Son, Jesus Christ, is King. We thank you that he is Lord, that he is the Lord of the Church, he is the firstborn from among the dead, he is the one who reigns over and above all things and all people, and particularly reigns and exercises his rule now among us. As we hear your voice as our Father, as we hear his royal commands, as by your

Holy Spirit you shed light upon us. Please do so, triune God, as we hear your voice now. In the reading of this word, in the meditations of our hearts, in the words of my mouth, please please in every way instruct us and lead us, we ask it, to the Lord Jesus himself.

We pray that we would truly see him, that we would meet him, and would you give us the grace of hearts that burn within us as we know what it is to love and live for him. For we ask it in Christ Jesus' name.

Amen. So, Romans chapter 5, picking up again at verse 12. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned, for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now this is God's word to us this evening, and it's a pretty big chapter, big in many ways, quite long, lots of ideas, lots of truths, lots of huge importance. So slightly ambitiously we're going to be working our way through the whole chapter this evening, and then tomorrow morning, Lord willing, we'll be looking at Romans chapter 6.

They together form a little subunit within this wonderful, great letter to the Romans. But Lord willing, they'll be very encouraging, nourishing truth for us all to be considering, particularly actually on a weekend where we're going to be sharing the Lord's Supper together. There's much here that will flow into our own hearts and minds as we come to the bread and the wine tomorrow morning.

[4:15] But I want to begin by asking you a question, familiar to many if you're a fan of the TV show, who do you think you are? It's a well-known program. I've occasionally watched it. It's an interesting thing. Genealogy is sometimes a big deal for many. Where do we come from? I know that a classic Highland greeting back in the day and still occasionally is, who are your people? What family do you come from? Who are your ancestors? Where do you find your roots? And I could tell you a little bit about myself. You could tell me a little bit about yourself. I was born in Hong Kong. I grew up in Kreef. I've lived around the world. I've had the privilege to minister down in Durham and now in St. Andrews. It's an interesting thing to learn about one another. But it's more than interesting because we're not just talking about place when we're asking who you are. We're talking about what makes us tick. Who are your people? Who do you think you are? What are the streams that have flowed into your own river of life that make you you? The words that have shaped you for better or for worse? The smiles given or withheld? The relationships that have been nourishing or challenging? The different places you've lived. All of us bear something of a record of our lineage, of our forebears, not only genetically but spiritually, emotionally, mentally. And ultimately, who we are, as we're going to see throughout not only chapter five but into chapter six tomorrow, is ultimately one of the greatest questions in the world. Because who we are, where we come from, inevitably shapes our life now and our expectation of where we're headed. And the canvas that Paul paints on here in Romans is as far back as our first father Adam, as we've read, and as far forwards as the eternity that is to come. And as Paul traces the lineage, the genealogy, the family tree of the Christian and of those who are not yet Christian, he is painting on such a broad palette that actually we'll find that it will shape our thinking. It will shape, I hope and pray, our living, our worshipping, our loving, and our speaking. Because Romans five and six tells us that story at the truest level of identity possible. And my hope and prayer is that we will discover that together as we go. I mentioned that the chapters five and six, they are just a little snippet of this great letter. So don't worry, I'm not going to give you an overview of the whole letter in any great detail. I would love to talk in more detail, but go and grab Donald or Joe or one of the the elders and they'll take you through Romans if you would like to. Very briefly, chapters one to three of Romans, chapters one to three, verse 20, tells us the story of humanity as in great need of God's salvation. Paul states really clearly that every single person, whatever their own spiritual ancestry, whether they're Jewish or non-Jewish, the two great kind of people groups he was working with, he says whoever you are, you are under the present wrath of God for rejecting the truth that you know about him. Whether you know about him from the creation in which we live, whether you know about him from the law, from the Old Testament as we would call it, he says all have fallen short of the glory of God. Everybody suppresses the truth about God. I don't know if you've ever tried this with like a beach ball at the seaside or you've seen someone do this. You press it down and you hold it for as long as you can. You might wedge it between your legs, but eventually that ball is going to pop up out of the side. He says that is what we, humanity, wherever in history we're situated, have done with

the truth about God. We've suppressed the truth about God and we've exchanged the worship of the true God for the worship of the things that he himself has made. And as such, we are under judgment.

So Romans 1 to 3, everybody needs God's salvation. And then the greatest little word in the whole of the Bible, in Romans 3 verse 21, but, all are under judgment, but God has now provided the way of salvation. And Romans 3 through to the end of Romans chapter 8 really is all about the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ alone. The one who has died for sinners, the one who reveals God's perfection and his justice, the one who, if we trust in him, saves us. That's chapter 4, to have faith like Abraham. And then now in chapters 5 and 6, Paul wants to do two things. He wants to press home to the believer the confidence they can have if they are trusting in Jesus Christ, whatever their spiritual lineage. And he wants to join the dots between our identity in Jesus now and the life we're living while we wait for his return.

And then as the letter unfolds, he'll answer questions to do with ongoing sin in our lives and the place of the law. He'll look at the future that will come when the suffering of this world ends. He'll answer massive questions about the sovereignty of God in salvation. And the closing section of the letter, chapters 12 to the end of the book, he's really applying these truths to the nitty-gritty life of that church in Rome. He's wanting them to obey Jesus, to make him known, and to live a united life together. So there's a kind of whistle-stop tour of Romans. But as I've said, chapters 5 and 6 are pressing into who we are in Jesus Christ. And here's the first thing that I'd love you to note if you are a note-taker or just to take account of as we go, is that the Christian is someone who is justified and secure in Jesus Christ. This is verses 1 to 11 that Donald read for us earlier. You'll notice verse 1, Paul starts, the reason I've given us that overview is because he starts with a big therefore, in light of what he said, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if any of you are into logic, you'll really like the way Paul writes in Romans. He often gives these little compressed statements of truth that you can unpack to a huge extent. Look at verse 2 with me. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. That is who the Christian is, he says.

Someone who is justified, who stands in grace, and who rejoices in hope. And justified is one of those Bible words that is so important. It comes up all through the New Testament. It's a word taken from the law court. You can sometimes feel when you're standing in a pulpit that you're... Whether you're the one who's sort of prosecuting or under trial can sometimes vary, I think, depending on the expressions of those out in front of you. I feel very welcome among you, let me reassure you. But justified is a legal word. It's to do with innocence rather than guilt. It's to do with perfection rather than corruption. And it's the word that God uses in his word to describe the reality for Christian people now. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ, he says, you are justified. It means God has declared and made you innocent now of the charges that are rightfully brought against us because of our sin. Righteous now, such that on the last day, that verdict will be made public. It's a wonderful statement of the security, the innocence before God of the Christian. And you'll see, verse 1, that it is justified by faith through which we have peace with God. You see, justification is not about us. If we were to beam up behind me my spiritual CV, my merits and demerits, the ways in which over my life I had obeyed Jesus and disobeyed him, the ways in which I had not only failed to speak the right things but actively spoken the wrong things, the acts of love I've done imperfectly as well as the acts of unkindness that I've done deliberately.

[13:13] If we were to list all of those things, it would be made painfully clear. I wouldn't be here, by the way. I'd be off. I'd be away. I'd be on the train back to St. Andrews. I couldn't stand before you if you could see that, let alone stand before God. We could beam up every single one of our spiritual CVs, and it would be exactly the same. There is nothing in us that makes us righteous, but righteousness is found outside us in the person of Jesus. That's the wonderful message of the letter to the Romans. He is the propitiation, the sacrifice that deals with our sin and God's anger against us, and all we have to do is trust him by faith to lay hold of what he has done.

And as a result, God declares us righteous. He looks at us and says, you are innocent. My favorite definition of faith comes from an old dead Dutch theologian, a guy called Wilhelms A. Brackel. He puts it this way. He says, we understand that saving faith is the outgoing act of the heart whereby someone, in surrendering to Christ and receiving him, entrusts body and soul to him in order that he would save him. I love that. The outgoing act of the heart, not turning inward, but going out to Jesus and saying, yes, Lord, I trust you. I need you. You are the one who's going to carry me, body and soul, and you're the one who's going to save me. And God says, through faith, like that in Jesus, well, then we are declared just. And as a result, this is Paul's logic, remember, we are standing in grace. We're not standing in judgment. We're not standing before the dock with God as a judge who hates us. We're not standing saying, please, God, I did lots of good stuff today and ignore the bad stuff. We're standing freely before God who loves us and has pardoned us.

And so, as a result, we rejoice in hope. And we're going to see that in the second part of this chapter, that we are saved now, and so we are certain or can be certain for the future. That's how Paul unpacks it in verse 6. Do you notice? Cast your eyes down with me and look at that. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person. They perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And the cheek of the visiting preacher, I want to ask you another question. Not only who do you think you are, but does God love you?

How would you answer that question? Does God love you? Paul would say, yes, he does. If you are someone here tonight trusting in Jesus Christ, exercising faith in him, God loves you for now and forever. You might notice that logic again with me. While we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. God loves us so much that while we were still sinners, while we were actively running headlong away from God, Christ died for us. Paul knew of what he spoke. Paul was on his way to persecute and kill Christian people when the risen Lord Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and said, Paul, Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me? Paul says elsewhere in his letters that he is the chief of sinners, that he is one untimely born, that he was a hater of Christ and his people. Yet while he was sinning, Christ died for him. And that is true of us as well. And therefore, verse 9, now that we have been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Many Christian people of every age and stage really struggle with the knowledge of whether God loves them or not. Of confidence that actually on the last day when Jesus returns in judgment, as he surely wills, scripture says. People can struggle with that sense of whether they will be saved on that last day.

[18:03] And Paul says, well, because you're justified, because God loves you and has shown his love for you, you need not fear what will come at the end. That is how secure you are. I've had the privilege in the early part of my ministry of working with Christian unions up and down the country and have still been able to speak evangelistically at different uni contexts. And a number of years ago, I was speaking at Durham University, where I studied, and was interviewing a man called David Packie Hamilton. He was a loyalist terrorist in Northern Ireland and was jailed at the age of 22 for murdering someone, just executed him, walked up to him in the street and shot him. And he became a Christian at the Mays prison. He told this story, it was amazing, all these very privileged students at Durham. It's a bit like where I am now in St. Andrews. People are pretty well to do.

They're all sitting there in a tent, about a thousand of them, listening to this guy talking about the way he was told the gospel in the Mays prison. A former terrorist who was the prison hairdresser was the best evangelist because he said he'd be giving you a shave with an open cutthroat razor. And as he was shaving, he'd ask you what you thought of the gospel and if you were secure in your eternal future. And he said he did rather focus the mind.

But joking aside, he became a Christian. And after that event, there was a Q&A; time. The single biggest question that people could not get their heads around was the confidence with which this man knew that he would be saved on the last day. I asked him the question, given everything you've done, are you confident that when you meet Jesus, he will welcome you into his heaven? And he instantly, humbly, said, yes I am. Because Jesus died for me while I was still a sinner. And so many of the young men and women there wrote down on their various kind of feedback comment sheets that they could not get over that confidence, but that they wanted that type of assurance is the word often used.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And so, as a result, the Christian is uniquely qualified to have hope.

So we come to this end of this first bit of the chapter. Look at the bit with me that I skipped over. I'm sure that you guys as astute listeners noticed that we haven't yet looked at verse 3 to 5.

- [20:38] Let me read this wonderful chain that flows and is anchored in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Through him we have also, verse 2, obtained access by faith.

Verse 3, not only that, But we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. You know, one of the privileges of being a visiting preacher is that you can say things very bluntly because you don't always know people very well.

But one of the sorrows is that you don't know people very well. I don't know many of you at all. But I don't need to know you well to know that every single one of you here will be listening as someone who either is suffering in some fashion or will one day suffer.

It's what it is to live east of Eden. And Paul says, In our sufferings, because of Jesus, we are able to rejoice.

- [21:58] And suffering in Romans is broad. It can cover all sorts of aspects of living in a fallen world. But one of the specific sufferings is our own ongoing battle and sorrow over the sin that remains in our lives.

The whole of chapter 7 is taken up with this Christian experience of knowing the good we want to do but failing to do it. And so whether you are someone here tonight who is struggling against sin, or is feeling the weight of a fallen creation, if you're groaning inwardly, that's the language that comes up three times in chapter 8, Paul says you're not alone.

That's normal. But wonderfully, you're not alone because you're in Jesus Christ. And in suffering, we can rejoice. Because as we suffer in Jesus, well, actually, we are able to endure.

It produces endurance. We see that in Jesus himself. We see that in his church. And then endurance grows character. So all those dads who said to you, it's character building when you did something you didn't like.

They were right, even if for the wrong reasons. I love that line.

- [23:16] Hope does not put us to shame. You can hope in Jesus tonight. And that hope is as anchored, as certain, as rock-solid sure as the love of God displayed in his son who died on the cross for you.

So we are justified now and secure in Christ. We can be confident as we come to the table tomorrow, not because of what we have done, but because Jesus died.

And so even as we come to share in the bread and the wine tomorrow, we don't come glorying in our own righteousness and perfection, but looking to Jesus, the one who did it for us.

We can be confident and rejoice in hope. And the big reason for that is because life and not death is found only in Jesus Christ.

This brings us on to verses 12 to 21. Down in St. Andrews, in the bit of town where we live, there's a wee path that goes along the back of our estate.

- [24:26] And it's absolutely fringed by pretty big and mature oak trees. So there's loads of acorns at the moment lying around the garden for one reason or another. Our dogs love to eat them.

It's not good for them. We always find the acorns later, shall we say. But the acorns are everywhere. And with this passage in my mind, it got me thinking that really we are talking here in the back end of chapter 5 of a tale of two trees, a tale of two family trees.

You know, an acorn's amazing because in that acorn, you've got not only the oak tree that might come from it, but you've got every other oak tree that's going to come down the line if that kept falling and sprouting and fruiting and falling and sprouting and fruiting.

And Paul here takes us to one acorn, as it were, one head, one representative of the entirety of the human race in Adam. And he says, here is one option.

Here's one family tree. Everybody is in this tree and from this tree unless you're put into the other one by faith. And he lays out Jesus as the other option.

[25 : 32] It's kind of a tale of two family trees that makes sense of who we are. And in verse 12, he starts with talking about Adam. And notice how this flows on from where he's been.

There's another therefore there in verse 12. How, Paul, you might say, can you be so certain that if I'm trusting in Jesus, I will be safe now and forever from God's judgment?

How can you be confident? He says, well, because Jesus is better and bigger and greater than Adam, your first father. Verse 12, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

He says, look, every single one of us is an apple from the family tree and Adam is the big tree and he is the one who sinned.

Adam fell, death enters the world and so death has spread through the whole world. Verse 14, death reigned from Adam to Moses even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam who was a type of the one to come.

[26 : 44] We weren't the ones who were there in the Garden of Eden. who doubted God's word, who rejected his love, who rebelled against his law. But we are those who are chips off the old block and we have sinned in and through Adam himself and in our own actions.

The one man, we're told, in verse 15, trespassed, but then sin has abounded and judgment has abounded and flood into the world such that wherever we turn, we see that the taint and the mark and the brokenness and ultimately the judgment of God.

I was listening to the radio the other day following the recent scandal that's hit the Metropolitan Police. You may have seen it, the videos that emerged from Charing Cross Police Station. And it really struck me, listening to the people talking about it, the surprise and the horror and the condemnation that just because people are wearing a police uniform, they might somehow not fall prey to sin and to transgression and to corruption.

And it just struck me very powerfully that in Scripture, in Jesus, in God's word, as Christians, we have an account that makes sense of that, that wherever you go in the world, whatever uniform somebody is wearing, whatever position they might hold, whatever office they might exercise, even within the church, outside of Jesus Christ, we are all children of Adam.

And so as we live, sin is always going to be there in some fashion. That makes sense of the world in which we live, though it is sad and though it is grievous.

[28 : 33] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, one of the prisoners of communist Russia, wrote a famous book called The Gulag Archipelago. He said that the line between good and evil runs through every human heart.

Absolutely bang on. Because in Adam, we're told, all sin and so all die. That is one family tree. But Paul is only laying out that one to show the contrast.

You see, if in Adam we have sin and judgment and condemnation and death, well, in Jesus Christ we have the opposites. We have gift. We have justification.

We have righteousness. And we have life. Do you see that in verse 15? A massive but. Again, Paul loves his contrast. Every time you see a contrast in Scripture, it's worth asking, okay, what's come before?

What now comes? The free gift is not like the trespass. See all the different language of contrast? We have it in verse 15. We have verse 16. The free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin.

[29 : 40] And he contrasts everything that has happened. Adam sinned and so all fell. Adam sinned and so death reigns. Adam sinned and so all sin and so all die.

But into that void, into that blackness, steps, Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And his free gift is so different.

It's different in nature. We're talking about life here rather than death. See that verse 15? If many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

There's a difference of that nature. There's a difference of quality. Rather here than death reigning, verse 17, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

There's a difference in power. Adam set off this cascade, this waterfall of transgression and death and blackness. And there's Jesus standing alone at the bottom of it and his one act of righteousness reverses that whole flow.

[30 : 59] He absorbs into himself the death that we deserve. In the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul will say he became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.

And because it is different in power, it is ultimately different in scope. Verse 18, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification, that word again, and life for all men.

We, in Jesus, are taken from Adam's family tree and put ultimately into God's himself. We are united to Jesus, like being grafted from a dying tree into a living one.

And so we can now bear fruit, we'll see tomorrow, because ultimately of Christ and not ourselves. Now, there's so much here that ultimately we could look to try and land and apply.

Time is against us, and so I just want to focus on one thing before we consider Paul's conclusion. It is simply this, we started with the question, who do you think you are? The answer Paul would have us give right now is those who have faith in Christ alone.

[32 : 25] What he wanted for the Romans then, and I take it for us today, is to have our gaze, our minds, our hearts, so transfixed upon, oriented towards, focusing in on Jesus Christ himself, that we would go to him alone as the source of life, as the source of hope in the face of suffering, as the source of righteousness in our own battles against sin, as the source of life.

If you're someone who is a Christian here tonight, I know that'll be the vast majority of us, do not go anywhere other than Jesus, whatever the current joys or sorrows that life is bringing for you.

John Calvin said of this passage that there is nothing the devil loves so much as to bring on mists before our eyes that we would not see Jesus. But God, in his word, clears those mists away that we might gaze upon Christ.

Go to Jesus alone tonight as we prepare for the Lord's Supper tomorrow, and every day the Lord gives you until he returns. And if you are here as someone who's looking in upon the Christian faith, you're so welcome.

I know that the church here loves to have you around. Let me urge you that if you're making sense of Christianity, you only again look at who Jesus is. The great question, if you want to answer, who do I think I am, who do I want to be?

[33:52] Well, it begins and ends with who Jesus is. Outside of him, you are only in Adam, and the only end of that family tree is death. But in Christ, there is life and righteousness, and ultimately, as we finish, grace reigning.

Verse 20, Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Anytime you're reading something and you realize that somebody has made up a word to express a truth, you know you're dealing with something big. And slightly hidden behind our English here, I know that you're not meant as a preacher to do this and say in the original Greek because it just sounds really geeky, but in the original Greek, the word for grace abounded is a word Paul made up.

Literally, it is grace hyper-abounded. Paul is so wrapped up with the extraordinary, overflowing kindness and generosity of God in bringing life through Jesus.

And he says, yes, sin has reigned. As soon as Adam and Eve were ejected from the garden, sin has been the boss, but now in Jesus Christ, grace has hyper-abounded. It has overflowed, like the can that you shake and crack open, and poof, out it comes.

[35:24] That is what now has erupted into the world in the life and the death and the risen life of Jesus, such that if we hold on to him by faith, that hyper-abounding, overflowing, over-frothing grace of God is active in our life now.

That's the privilege we stand in in this new age. That's the privilege we rest in if we trust in Jesus Christ. That is the grace in which we stand, the grace that now reigns even at the right hand of the Father and who will one day return to judge the living and the dead.

Grace might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life. And tomorrow, as we look at Romans 6, we'll start trying to answer the so what questions that may well be clustering.

What difference will that make to us day to day, Monday rather than Sunday, as we await Jesus' return? But for now, let's look at the Lord Jesus and enjoy his hyper-abundant grace.

Let me pray, and then we'll sing. Our gracious God and our heavenly Father, Father, we thank you so much for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[36:39] There is so much, Lord, here in your Word that we confess we can struggle to wrap our heads around, so much that is too wonderful for us to fully comprehend, too much even of your grace for us to take in, so conscious can we be of our own sin and our own unworthiness.

And yet we praise you that that is precisely the point. We are unworthy, and yet while we were still sinners, in our unworthiness, Christ died for us.

We praise you that in full knowledge of our own personal and corporate unrighteousness, your Son, Jesus Christ, laid down his life, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to you as our Father.

Father, and we thank you that by your Spirit now we can glimpse something of the super-abounding, hyper-abundant grace in which we stand.

Help us, we pray, to take you at your Word. And I pray particularly for any who are really wrestling with questions of their own standing before you. By your Holy Spirit, lead them to the rock that is higher than they are.

[37 : 58] fix the eyes of our hearts upon your Son, Jesus. Even now, we pray, would we know more of your love for us through him?

Would you teach us of your grace and make us so conscious of Christ that we would be less conscious of ourselves? Where we are self-loathing, cause us to trust Jesus.

where we are self-exalting, humble us, and cause us to make much of Jesus rather than ourselves. Where we are fearful, grant peace.

Where we are suffering, give us rejoicing. And where, Lord, we are needing that enduring, character-filled, hopeful life of Christ.

give it as you promised to do so, we pray. So be gracious to us, Father, we ask it in the Lord Jesus' name. And we can ask that with confidence, not on our merits, but on his.

[39 : 03] For we ask it in him. Amen. Amen. Amen.