

The Danger of Anger

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 5, beginning in verse 21.

! If you're there, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together! Jesus is preaching here in the Sermon on the Mount, and He says, You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, You fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are walking with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

Genesis 3 explains how sin entered the perfect world that God created, how it entered through the sin, the disobedience of Adam and Eve. In that chapter, God pronounces the curse of sin and the severe consequences and dysfunction that sin will bring to the relationship between Adam and Eve, and also their relationship to God, their Creator. Genesis 4 opens with the birth of Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. The Bible says that Cain was a worker of the ground. He was a farmer, while Abel was a keeper of the sheep. He was a shepherd. In Genesis 4, 3 through 5, we read that in the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Bible does not give us explicit details about why Cain's offering was rejected.

[3 : 10] Some say it was because Abel offered a blood sacrifice and Cain didn't. Others believe God rejected Cain's offering because unlike Abel's, it was not the first or the best of his crop. Both those beliefs can be simultaneously true. But I think it's safe to say, knowing what we know about God and the rest of Scripture, that there was something about Cain's attitude that contributed to its being rejected by God, his offering being rejected by God. And even though God rejected Cain's offering, as we continue on in that chapter in verses 6 and 7, we see God in his grace coming to Cain in his anger.

And this is what he says, the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.

God's questions gave Cain an opportunity to confess his sin. God did the same in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. God gave Cain the opportunity to repent here. And in his love and his grace, he also presented Cain with a warning and a choice. He could refuse to be ruled by his anger, by accepting responsibility for his own bad attitude and his own lackluster offering, and get his heart right with God. Or, if he chose not to do that, his actions would lead him further into sin. Sin was crouching, God says, like a predator, prone, and ready to overpower and consume Cain. He refused to let God's words guard his heart from a sinful form of anger, which again crouched at the door of his heart and leapt into action, becoming Cain's ruler as he led his brother out into a field where he murdered him in cold blood.

This was the first murder of many recorded in Scripture, the first murder of many recorded in human history. Today, murder is a common occurrence. So common that unless a murder involves bizarre details, multiple persons, or someone famous, it is only briefly mentioned in local news reports.

Murder is commonplace in our society. It's also something our society is entertained by. I've confessed to you in the past about my proclivity for true crime books and TV shows.

[6 : 44] I like stories of the good guys bringing the bad guys to justice. Not long ago, I was watching Dateline, 48 Hours, one of those shows, and Danny, my wife, asked me, why do you watch this stuff?

Which got me thinking, and then shocked by the answer for entertainment. Jesus says something very shocking in our passage today. He says that the person who is ruled internally by anger and hatred is as guilty before God as the person who has committed murder. To this point, Jesus has challenged the belief and practices of the scribes and the Pharisees who turned their attention into external observances regarding systems of regulations and practices that they had developed, which they believed in doing those things externally, they were giving the impression and feeling that they were truly obedient to God and that they themselves were righteous people.

But Jesus drives home the point, the reality, that the righteousness that God requires is first internal. External behavior only pleases the Lord when it corresponds to internal attitudes and motives. This truth is one that God has clearly communicated in the Bible. In the Old Testament, after King Saul disobeyed God, God said he would seek a man after his own heart to serve as Israel's next king. That man was David, who at the end of his life gave this instruction to Solomon, and his son and his heir to the throne. In 1 Chronicles 28, 9, he said to him, and you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind. For the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you. But if you forsake him, he will cast you out forever.

When Solomon dedicated the temple to God, part of his prayer in 1 Kings 8, 39 was this, if your people sin, then here in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know according to all his ways. For you, you only know the hearts of all the children of mankind. Hannah and I later likewise warned King Asa in 2 Chronicles 16, 9, for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro and throughout the earth to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless towards him. These men who ruled other men understood that to rule well, God must be the one enthroned and ruling in their heart. The New Testament commands the same truth, presents us with the same truth. In 1 Corinthians 4, 4 through 5, the Apostle Paul says, For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his condemnation from God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus drives home the truth that the good deeds performed by the proud and self-righteous scribes and Pharisees fell short of the standards and the heart condition that describes those who are truly ruled by God and thus citizens of his kingdom. They are people, Jesus has already said, who mourn over their sin. They are gentle and they are humble in spirit, seeing their need for God to save them, and thus they hunger and they thirst for his righteousness.

[11 : 18] Jesus devoted much of this sermon to expose the false principles and motivations of the legalistic system that the scribes and the Pharisees created, in which they ultimately were replacing the Word of God with. In verses 17 through 20, Jesus affirmed his belief that he fulfills God's Word and that God's Word is without error. Jesus also warned against those who would relax or who were relaxing God's commands that he issued in his Word as he called people to a more radical, internal, and transformational kind of holiness. And now in verses 21 through 26, Jesus makes the shocking statement that no one is truly innocent of murder when their heart is ruled by anger and not by him. And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that those who are truly ruled by Christ refuse to be ruled by anger. Those who are truly ruled by

Christ refuse to be ruled by anger. Well, why does this matter? Well, it matters because we're all tempted to believe, like the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day, that we are basically good people.

Compared to Adolf Hitler, Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, or any other person who has committed murder, you will feel pretty good about yourself. But God doesn't compare your standard of righteousness to other people.

He compares your righteousness to himself and to his standard. And as the Bible says, we all fall short, way short of that standard. We all fall short of the glory of God. As it pertains to anger in our sinful condition, we can feel justified even in hating someone else and think because we haven't

committed the physical act of murder that we're innocent. But Jesus says that murderous actions are rooted in a heart that is ruled by anger.

And it makes people would-be murderers and therefore guilty before God. These words of Jesus may come as a shock to you today. Because I'm sure that you, like me, have some people that you're angry with right now.

[14 : 04] We may be deceived into believing that our anger is righteously motivated when reality is we are guilty before God of committing the sin of murder in our heart. If you are truly saved, if you are truly ruled by Jesus Christ, you will refuse to let anger rule in your heart. How do you refuse to let anger rule in your heart and rule in Jesus' place? Well, from this text, Jesus gives three principles about his ruling in our heart that if applied will guard your heart against the sin of anger which is crouching at your door.

The first principle he shares is that those whom Christ rules perceive the ramifications of anger. Those whom Christ rules perceive the ramifications of anger. Verse 21 begins with the first of six antithesis statements Jesus uses to both challenge and correct the scribes and the Pharisees' belief that righteousness comes through external observances or external actions. Jesus begins in verse 21 by saying, you have heard that it was said of those of old. In the preceding verses, remember, Jesus informed the crowd that their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees. And before saying that, Jesus affirmed that he had come in fulfillment of the Scriptures not to abolish them. So in this statement, understand that Jesus isn't challenging Scripture, but the teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees and their adherence to external legalistic forms of keeping the law that bypassed the heart.

rabbis of past generations were often called fathers of antiquity or the men of long ago. And it is to them, it's to those of old or the ancients as it may be translated in your Bible.

It's to the scribes and the Pharisees that this refers to. Jesus was contrasting his teaching and the true teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures with the Pharisees and their teaching and their oral traditions that had accumulated over the previous several hundred years and which altered and corrupted God's revelation. Jesus continues and he says, you shall not murder.

Well, that's one of the Ten Commandments. We need to also understand that Scripture differentiates murder from killing. Murder deals with criminal action and it does not refer to capital punishment, just warfare or accidental homicide or even self-defense. The command is against the intentional killing of another human being for personal reasons, whatever those reasons might be.

[17 : 23] The traditions of the scribes and the Pharisees, those of old was that, as Jesus continues, whoever murders will be liable to judgment. The traditional penalty for murder was liability to a civil court. But what is missing from that is any reference or regard for God's holy character and his displeasure with murder?

With murdering someone who is created in his image. The tradition of the ancients said and did nothing to address the inner attitude, the heart issue of the one who commits murder.

We heard some ancients of old debate a couple of weeks ago. So, there were many interesting takeaways from that night. But one thing that I found intriguing was the question about opioid addiction in the United States. The responses from each candidate was basically talking about prevention, how to prevent these drugs from entering our country, external actions. And that's good. That will help. But the real issue is the heart, isn't it?

Our society should be asking, why are so many people taking these drugs? Why are so many doctors prescribing these drugs? Why are so many people depressed and feel like this is what is the only thing, I should say, that will help them? But to ask those questions would lead to answers that our society desperately wants to avoid. The scribes and the Pharisees wanted to believe that external actions made them righteous and it prevented sin's influence. But to look within the heart would reveal how desperately sinful they truly were. And to the realization, hopefully, that they need God's help.

But they were too prideful to admit that. And so, they were lowering God's standard of righteousness by suggesting that a person who committed murder only with their hands was the one who was liable to the court, but said nothing about the person in their internal heart and that sin originating from that place.

[20 : 27] And so, in verse 22, Jesus says, but I say to you. Now, here comes the contrast. Not again, a contrast with Scripture, but with rabbinic tradition. Jesus was saying in effect here, let me tell you what Scriptures truly say.

You cannot justify yourself because you haven't physically murdered someone because the action is first committed in the heart. And in God's economy, in God's evaluation of things, you are not innocent.

Jesus continues in verse 22, To be angry with someone, to hate someone, to curse someone, or to slander another person.

Jesus declares, shockingly, that person is guilty of murder and deserves a murderer's punishment. Many people in the heart are angry towards someone to such a degree that their true desire is for that hated person to die.

[21 : 58] The fact that fear of civil repercussions, lack of opportunity, or cowardice to commit the act does not diminish that person's guilt before God, who sees the heart, who knows the thoughts.

Jesus' main point here in through verse 48 is that even the best of people in their hearts are in the same boat as the worst of people.

God searches the heart. He knows our true thoughts. He knows our true intentions. Jesus' words would have sounded extreme to his listeners as they probably do to you today.

Jesus is shocking our hearts back into rhythm. He's splashing cold water on our dull senses. He's waking us up to the reality that God is not merely concerned about your external actions, but the condition of your heart, which is the source of your actions.

Jesus made this truth plain in Mark 7, 20-23. And he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[23 : 32] All these evil things come from within. And they defile the person. Watch your heart. Guard your heart.

The ramifications we've heard Jesus say are eternally great. Now someone might be thinking, well, Jesus got angry a couple of times, at least a couple of times, when he cleansed the temple.

And that's true. There is such a thing as righteous anger. And I think that we need to see more of that from Christians. But that anger is motivated by things that dishonor God.

And we need to be careful. And we need to be sure that we aren't confusing a sinful form of anger with a righteously motivated kind of anger.

Paul warns us about this in Ephesians 4, 26-27. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

[24 : 44] Make sure that it's the right kind of anger or else you're giving the devil an opportunity. Make sure that your anger is motivated by love for God, not love for yourself.

Because if anger rules in your heart in place of Jesus Christ, the ramifications will make you liable, Jesus says, to the hell of fire.

The second principle in how we avoid anger ruling in our heart or refuse to let it rule in our heart is that those whom Christ rules prioritize reconciliation.

They understand how serious he takes it. They take it seriously. And so, those whom Christ rules prioritize reconciliation. In verses 23 through 24, Jesus continues, So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.

First, be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Here, Jesus makes the point that just as sin and righteousness are first of all internal matters of the heart, so is worship.

[26 : 06] The Jews realized that sin caused a fracture. It caused a breach in one's relationship with God. And so, sacrifices were offered to restore a right relationship with Him.

And I think here Jesus may have had in mind the Day of Atonement when a worshiper would come to the temple with an animal sacrifice to atone for their sins and for the sins of their family members that they would be reconciled to God through the shedding of that animal's blood.

And as the worshiper approached the court of the priests, as He led that sacrifice to that place, He would put His hand on top of its head and He would basically confess His sins over that sacrifice who would then become their substitute, who the priest would then take and lead in to perform the sacrifice.

And it's as if Jesus is saying in that case, you're walking your sacrifice, you're there at the temple, you're about to hand that over to the priest and you realize I am not right with someone.

I hate, I'm angry at someone. And I need to leave this sacrifice here. And I need to go pursue reconciliation with that person before I come back and pursue reconciliation with God.

[27 : 38] Because a person who truly seeks to be reconciled to God and receive His forgiveness understands how their many sins have invoked God's righteous anger for all the ways that they've dishonored Him.

And if they truly understand God's grace, to forgive those sins through a sacrificial substitute, they will have an internal desire to be like God, to be like Jesus, and to be reconciled to others, to both those whom they've sinned against and to those who have sinned against them.

To do otherwise is to present God with a sacrifice with worship that is hypocritical and empty. Because repentance hasn't truly taken place. And this has always been God's requirement. In Jeremiah 7, 9 through 10, we read, will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me?

God is saying, in this house, which is called by my name, and say we are delivered, only to go on doing all these abominations. The crowd listening to Jesus should have known that God demanded sacrifice and worship that was motivated by a contrite and humble heart, a heart that submits to his rule and wants to be made right with him as evidenced by their desire to be in right relationships with those who likewise bear his image.

[29 : 43] Worship that is truly conducted in spirit and truth is not enhanced so much by better music, better acoustics, better prayers, or better preaching.

True worship is enhanced by better relationships between those people who come to worship, who love the Lord, and who have been made a recipient through salvation of his forgiveness and his grace, and then who extend that same forgiveness and grace to others in the church.

if there are fractures here, if there is discord in the church, the people out there, they'll know it.

Likewise, if there is peace here, if there is harmony and unity in Christ here, people outside of here will know it.

If we are serious about being like Christ, if we are serious about following him, if he is truly the Lord of our lives, we will prioritize reconciliation with one another and with those who are outside of this body.

[31 : 05] So, how do we prioritize reconciliation and refuse to let anger rule in our heart instead of Christ? I think at least a couple things are helpful.

One, remember who you were before Jesus saved you. Don't forget who you were before Jesus saved you. Colossians 1, 21 through 22 says, and you, speaking of Christians, who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

don't forget who you were before Jesus saved you by reconciling you to himself. Also, remember who you are now that Jesus has saved you and he's commanded you as his redeemed child to be someone who seeks reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5, 18 through 20 says, all of this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and, see this, gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, now counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

[32 : 35] reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us, we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

If you refuse to pursue reconciliation, if you refuse Christ's rule in your heart, if you choose to be angry and stay angry instead, what does that say about you?

What does that say? about your claim to be a Christian? What does that say about your state of salvation?

Either you've taken God's grace for granted or you've never truly received it in the first place. Would you rather harbor a grudge or please God?

Would you rather be reconciled to others or remain at war with them? Would you rather be like Christ who saved you and who justified you by reconciling you to himself or would you rather be self-justified and choose not to seek or extend forgiveness to others for the offenses which they've committed against you which are far fewer than the sins and the offenses that you've committed against God your creator?

[34 : 05] Jesus knows your heart he knows your thoughts he knows if you're angry and he knows who you hate and he's saying to you through his word go to that person be reconciled with that

person will you prioritize that?

You know I think you could make the argument successfully that the entire Bible is a story about reconciliation and so how can you cherish this book and love the Savior it proclaims and not desire to prioritize reconciliation?

Now the third principle for how we refuse to let anger rule in our heart instead of Jesus those whom Christ rules pursue restoration they pursue restoration reconciliation produces restoration when a relationship is broken by anger and hatred and reconciliation is pursued often the result is restoration of that broken relationship that's the point of church discipline that Jesus gives us in Matthew 18 if your brother sins against you go and show him his fault and make additional attempts bringing others if necessary so that restoration will take place in verses 25 through 26 Jesus gives an illustration of two people on their way to court one owing an unpaid debt to the other and he says in the beginning of verse 25 come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court

Jesus says come to terms quickly squash the issue extinguish the fire before more damage is done and more things go up in flames don't be so proud to say or to not say I'm sorry don't be too prideful to ask someone how can I make things up with you how can we make things right how can we make things better my wife tells me that I'm good at arguing and she doesn't mean it as a compliment and I've learned and I am learning that it is better to pursue reconciliation than to try to prove that I'm right in our sinfulness we tend to excuse our actions and justify them rather than admit and confess that we've been wrong or that we are wrong

Francis two-gun Crowley was a notorious criminal whose three-month crime spree in 1931 resulted in the death of many civilians and the murder of a police officer Crowley's crime spree came to an end on May 17th during a two-hour shootout with the NYPD which was witnessed by 15,000 bystanders and I'm thinking what are these people doing run you're gonna get caught by a bullet but anyhow after suffering four gunshot wounds and surviving Crowley finally surrendered to the police and when they took him into custody they found a blood splattered note inside of his coat and this is what the note said he wrote it himself under my coat is a weary heart but a kind one one that would do nobody any harm what a load of baloney or malarkey yeah right he was maintaining his own self righteousness his own self justification all the way to the electric chair the the [38 : 22] Jews living in Jesus' time lived under Roman rule under Roman law which provided that a plaintiff could bring the accuser with them to court to face judgment however the two were permitted to settle the matter on the way to court and typically the judge would accept that settlement whatever it was but once the court got involved there was no turning back so Jesus continues in verse 25 warning if you don't come to terms quickly the consequences will be more severe he says lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard and you be put in prison truly I say to you you will never get out until you have paid the last penny the precise penalty Jesus alludes to here is not clear but his point is plain enough isn't it we are to make every effort without delay to make our relationships right with others before our relationship can be right with

God and we must avoid whatever or we should want to avoid whatever discipline might come with our refusal to let Christ rule in our heart and anger instead so if you are angry with someone and allow anger to rule in your heart Jesus says you're guilty of murdering them and that sin has severe ramifications instead Christians like Christ pursue reconciliation and restoration settling with those whom we've sinned against before more severe consequences arise for our refusal to do that Charles Spurgeon said a lean settlement is better than a fat lawsuit make peace with the utmost promptitude!

This is what Romans 12:18 commands us to do doesn't it? If possible so far as it depends on you live peaceably with all not just fellow Christians but with all beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord to the contrary if your enemy is hungry feed him if he is thirsty give him something to drink for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head and that's not retributive that's a purifying act so how does Jesus want us to adjust our lives to his teaching about anger well I think it's this repair the relationships that your anger has fractured and I think we could even say repair the relationships that other people's anger has fractured you know maybe you've heard

Jesus' words this morning and the Holy Spirit has convicted you and you're ready to go find that person to be reconciled to that person and if so then praise God that's wonderful but maybe you've heard these words and the Holy Spirit has convicted you through them but the thought right now of

being reconciled to that person makes you feel really anxious what should you do well look and understand here there's no there is no sidestepping the urgency that Jesus gives us in this text understand that he makes this an urgent thing go be reconciled be restored to that person make it a top priority but I'll offer one suggestion that I think can help you towards that and that is to start praying for them now start praying for them now and be praying for reconciliation and restoration with that person now because

I think what you'll find is that it's hard to stay angry with someone who you are seriously praying for God will change your heart I had a pastor friend who was telling me about an experience he had in his church where you know people were just really upset I don't remember what it was what he did but people were really upset with one another and they were upset with him and the leaders of the church were upset with him and after one meeting with his deacons he stuck around and another one of those deacons stuck around as well and my friend said to him sometimes pastors will use my friend when they really mean themselves I'm not meaning myself here this truly was a friend of mine and my friend said to him you're probably angry with me too aren't you and the deacon said [43 : 51] I can't stay angry with someone who I'm praying for pray for that person pray and mean it that there'll be reconciliation and restoration and don't use that as an excuse well I just need to pray more about it Jesus says Jesus doesn't just say he commands make it urgent make it a priority it matters to him it should matter to you now listen if you if you're here this morning and you're not saved it doesn't matter how good your relationships are with other people if your relationship isn't right with God then you will suffer eternally glory in the fiery hell that Jesus talked about because we've all sinned and we've all fallen way short of God's glory none of us can meet that that perfect standard the

Pharisees and the scribes thought they could lower it by saying hey if you do these things and there's a lot of them but if you do them you'll feel good about yourself and Jesus raises the bar back up you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven we've all sinned we've all fallen way short of the glory of God and God in his grace sent his son Jesus Christ to this earth truly God and truly man live sinlessly on this earth for the purpose that he would go to the cross and there die as a sacrifice to atone for our sins Why?

That we would be restored that we have eternal life and if you're here this morning that's what he's calling you to right now be reconciled to your creator be reconciled to me your savior and it's as simple as what we heard this morning as I shared from Jackson's testimony just an acknowledgement that I'm a sinner and I need a savior do that and be reconciled to him but again if you're a believer and you're angry and your heart is ruled by hate understand that Jesus says the time is now seek that person out make sure that

Christ is the one who is truly ruling in your heart and be reconciled and restored and it doesn't mean that you just say well let's just sweep that issue under the rug and just forget about it no you go to that person and you talk about it with the hopes that there will be forgiveness given grace extended and Christ will be glorified!

in that let's pray Lord this is a this is a hard word from you God we're sinful people and every day Lord as your word says we sin and we commit offenses against you we dishonor you but Lord your word reminds us that you're gracious to forgive us of all of our sins God so often unlike you we feel like we are justified to stay angry we feel like we're justified to hate others and Lord we're pretty good at coming up with reasons why we are right to remain angry and we're pretty good at hiding the fact that that person that we're angry with is someone that we really do hate

[48 : 03] Holy Spirit I pray that through your word you will continue to convict our hearts of this that you will continue to bring your words to our minds that this is something you expect us to do and to do right now and that this matters to you and if you're truly the Lord of our lives if you truly rule in our hearts then it should matter to us God I pray for those people that that we're angry with for each person in this room for each person listening Lord you know that person you know their name and I pray God that you would also in the ways that you do create those opportunities that we would rather avoid that we would come across them that we be forced to have this conversation and that

Lord in doing so there would be reconciliation and restoration which takes place that there would be peace in our lives that there would be peace in your house we need your help!

in all trust that you will in Jesus name Amen