

The Sovereign Stirrer

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[0 : 00] If you're there, I'm going to read chapter 1, verses 1 through 11.

! Would you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together?! Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia,

Cyrus, king of Persia, brought these out in the charge of Mithridath, the treasurer who counted them out to Sheshbazar, the prince of Judah, and this was the number of them, 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels.

All the vessels of gold and silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazar bring up when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

R.C. Sproul is one of my all-time favorite pastor theologians. He wrote quite a few books. One of those books he wrote is called *The Holiness of God*, which if you're looking for something to read, I highly recommend and encourage you to read that book. It's a classic work of Christian literature, and in it, R.C. Sproul tells the story about a college course he taught on the Old Testament to 250 freshmen. Sproul writes, On the first day of class, I gave the students a syllabus, and I said, you have to write three short-term papers, five pages each. The first one is due September 30th, when you come to class. The second on October 30th, and the third on November 30th. Make sure that you have them done by the due date, because if you don't, unless you are physically confined to the infirmary or in the hospital, or unless there is a death in your immediate family, you will get an F on the assignment. And he asked, does everybody understand that? They all, 250, said yes.

[4 : 00] Sproul continues, on September 30th, 225 of my students came with their term papers. There were 25 terrified freshmen who came in trembling. They said, oh, Professor Sproul, we didn't budget our time properly. We haven't made the transition from high school to college the way we should have.

Please don't flunk us. Please give us a few more days to get our papers finished. Sproul said, okay, this once, I will give you a break. I will let you have three more days to get your papers in, but don't let it happen again. Oh no, we won't let this happen again, they said.

Thank you so, so much. Then came October 30th. This time, 200 students came to class with their term papers, but 50 students didn't have them. R.C. Sproul said, I asked, where are your papers? They said, well, you know how it is. We're having midterms, and we have all kinds of assignments for other classes, plus it's homecoming week. We're just running a little behind. Please give us one more chance. Sproul asked, you don't have your papers? Do you remember what I said the last time? I said, don't even think about having this one not in on time. And now 50 of you don't have them done.

Oh yes, they said, we know. Sproul said, okay, I will give you three days to turn in your papers, but this is the last time I will extend the due date. Sproul then asks, do you know what happened?

[5 : 47] They started singing spontaneously. We love you, Professor Sproul. Oh yes, we do. I was the most popular professor on that campus, but then came November 30th. This time, 100 of them came with their term papers, but 150 of them did not. I watched them walk in cool and as casual as could be.

So I said, Johnson, what? He replied, do you have your paper? He answered, don't worry about it, professor. I'll have it for you in a couple of days. I picked up the most dreadful object in a freshman's experience, my little black grade book. I opened it and I asked, Johnson, you don't have your term paper? He said, no. I said, F. And I wrote that grade in his book. Then I asked Nicholson, do you have a term paper? No, he said, I don't have it. F. Jenkins, do you have your paper? I don't have it. F. Then out of the midst of the crowd, someone shouted, that's not fair. And I turned and I asked,

Fitzgerald, was that you who said that? Yeah. He responded, okay, Fitzgerald, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. If it's justice you want, it's justice you will get. So I changed his grade from October to an F. When I did that, there was a gasp in the room. I asked, who else wants justice? I didn't get any takers. Sproul concludes, well, those students had grown accustomed to my grace. The first time they were late with the papers, they were amazed by grace. The second time they were no longer surprised. They basically assumed it. By the third time they demanded it. They had come to believe that grace was an inalienable right, an entitlement that they deserved. I took that occasion to explain to my students, do you know what you did when you said that's not fair? You confused justice with grace. The minute we think that anybody owes us grace, a bell should go off in our heads to alert us that we are no longer thinking about grace because grace, by definition, is something we don't deserve. I share that story with you this morning because I think it's a good illustration to describe the history of the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, prior to the events that we read about in the book of Ezra. As the book of Ezra opens, Israel's thousand-year history as a nation had come to a disastrous end. For centuries, even before the conquest of the promised land, time after time, they rebelled against God and his commands. They polluted their minds and their hearts by adopting the political and religious practices of their pagan neighbors. Time after time, they rejected God's prophets who warned that such sin would eventually incur his wrath. While there were moments of repentance and revival, it was not long before God's people reverted back to their sinful ways.

Israel's history was likewise fraught with interpersonal conflict and disunity that we can trace all the way back to Jacob, their patriarch, who presided over a house that was divided. The sons of his wives, Leah and Rachel, often contended with one another, as did the tribes upon entering the promised land.

Israel's first king, Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin. King David was of the tribe of Judah. And when he was crowned as Saul's replacement, the Benjenites rebelled. And after a long war, David succeeded in uniting all 12 tribes. But the frailty of this union was soon exposed when David's son Absalom promoted himself as the new king of Israel. Though he ultimately did not succeed, his efforts further sowed seeds of discord.

[10:19] After David's other son, Solomon ascended to the throne, and though the temple was constructed in Jerusalem and Israel enjoyed a time of economic prosperity and peace, there remained unrest.

As Israel continued to mingle and flirt with and ultimately adulterate their religion with idolatrous beliefs and practices of those who were their neighbors, who they were supposed to be a light of the truth to. They were called by God to be a light to the nations, but instead they continually disobeyed his commands. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam was set to become Israel's next king, but he was not a good leader. Jeroboam then led a rebellion which severed the nation of Israel into two.

Jeroboam became the king of the northern tribes of Israel, while Rehoboam remained king in the south, ruling in Jerusalem over the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Eventually, God's judgment came first to the northern kingdom in the form of the nation of Assyria. Later, Babylon rose to prominence, defeating Assyria and taking over their empire and expanding their own. And for 15 years, King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's most impressive ruler, threatened the southern kingdom of Judah, carving out pieces of their kingdom and exiling thousands of its inhabitants as they marched closer to Jerusalem. By 587 BC, on the eve of collapse, Zedekiah, the southern kingdom's final king, fled Jerusalem with his two sons in an attempt to avoid impending doom. However, he was captured on the outskirts of Jericho, taken 200 miles to Riblah, which was Nebuchadnezzar's base of operations for his western campaign, and there he was forced to watch the execution of his sons before his captors removed his eyes, ensuring that that was the last thing he ever saw. Zedekiah was then marched in chains to

Babylon, paraded before the people, never to be heard from again. A month later, Nebuchadnezzar's men returned and they methodically destroyed Jerusalem. They ransacked and they plundered the temple of its articles, taking its gold, its silver, and its other religious vessels. They deported Israel's best and brightest young men back to serve in their Babylonian courts. As a nation, Israel was finished, or so it seemed. The book of Ezra begins about 50 years after the fall of Jerusalem.

And in the first chapter of this book, we are reminded of a timeless theological truth that we see all throughout the Bible. It's the main idea for this morning's sermon. God appoints the rise and fall of nations to accomplish his sovereign will. But before moving forward in this text that concerns the returns of the Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, I want to back up. Will you back up with me when Solomon dedicated the original temple?

[14 : 22] After all of the pomp and circumstance of bringing the furnishings and the other articles into the temple, King Solomon dedicated the temple to God with a prayer. And he closes that prayer with these words.

I want to read all of it to you. It's a little bit long, but we need to see it. First, it's in 1 Kings chapter 8, verses 46 through 51. And here he's talking about God's people, the nation of Israel. They are the they.

If they sin against you, for there is no one who does not sin, and you are angry with them, and give them to an enemy, so they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy far off or near. Yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, we have sinned, and have acted perversely and wickedly, if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then here in heaven, your dwelling place, their prayer, and their plea, and maintain their cause, and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them. For they are your people and your heritage, which you brought out of Egypt from the midst of the iron furnace. And during their time in exile, as a result of God's discipline, God's people's pursuit of idols and their desire to be like the rest of the world began to go into remission. So you see, when Jesus is on the scene in the New Testament, we see that Israel no longer has an issue with idols. And that was a result of this discipline that they went through. They realized that pursuing idols brings God's wrath.

God uses discipline, He used that exile to accomplish His will, to purify His people, and to prepare them for the future and the eventual coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. And so the primary message of Ezra is that God orchestrated a past grim situation, Israel's exile and captivity, and would continue to work through a pagan nation and a pagan king and his successors to give His people hope for the future. Just as He did then, God continues to appoint the rise and the fall of nations to accomplish His sovereign will. In the case of God's people back then, it was to prepare them for the future arrival of Jesus Christ. In the case of God's people today, it's to prepare them for the future return of Jesus Christ. Ezra also teaches God's people today about how to maintain a holy community within a society that applies pressure on it and seeks to enforce a different system of values upon it. And though this book was written 2,500 years ago, it is God's Word and its instruction and encouragement are of great value to God's people today. If it weren't for God's sovereignty, and by that I mean His presiding over and ruling over all of history, His orchestrating and bringing all things to the ultimate end that He has foreordained, if it weren't for that truth, that reality, that God is sovereign, I don't know how I would sleep at night. And I'm just being honest with you.

I don't know how I would sleep at night. With the state of our nation, with the state of our world, with the development of artificial intelligence, with the ability of sinful men to launch nuclear weapons at any moment with the press of a button, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

[19 : 02] But I have peace. That doesn't mean I like what's happening. I don't. God's sovereignty doesn't mean that I don't have a responsibility to confront evil. I do, as do you. But I have peace in knowing that God is in control. And all things, all things will come to the end that He has ordained.

But maybe you don't have that peace. I pray that as we look at our text today, God will give you that peace. If you're full of worry today and fear about tomorrow, if you're concerned or maybe frustrated about how to maintain a holy, God-fearing community within a society that is growing increasingly hostile and hateful towards it, hang on. God's Word, through Ezra, will help us make sense of what it is that we're experiencing. It will challenge us also to rid ourselves of the corruption of sin and its influence in our lives, in our homes, and in our churches. It will encourage us to look to the future with hope.

Even as we live in the midst of ruin, the ruination of a culture that has turned its back to God.

God appoints the rise and fall of nations to accomplish His sovereign will. And we see that truth communicated in our text today in two ways. The first way we see that truth communicated is that God is sovereign over big events. God is sovereign over big events. The book of Ezra is 10 chapters long and it covers about 90 years of history. It records three different returns of the Jews from exile. And Ezra himself doesn't appear by name until about halfway through this book, about 80 years after the initial return of the Jews to Babylon. Ezra was the second of three key leaders sent by God from Babylon to reconstruct Jerusalem. Zerubbabel constructed the temple. We'll read about him in Ezra chapter 3. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls. His book bearing his name comes after Ezra.

And then Ezra was sent back to restore the people's worship. He was a scribe. He was a priest. Biblical scholars believe that he wrote the book that bears his name, Ezra, as well as first and second Chronicles. And we'll get to know him more and how he led a spiritual revival in Jerusalem as we continue to go verse by verse through this book. But for now, there is another person, another major player on the world scene at this time, the king of Persia, who would become known as Cyrus the Great.

[22 : 29] We read about him again in the beginning of verse 1. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia. Now, Cyrus is mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible. He reigned over the Persian Empire from around 539 to 530 BC. The first year of his reign was marked by the conquest of Babylon, an event described in Daniel chapter 5, verses 1 through 30. That passage describes a banquet, a feast, a feast, a party being held by King Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar. During that banquet, Belshazzar ordered the gold and silver vessels, the cups that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem.

He orders them brought to this party to be used by himself and his lords and his concubines as they drank wine, as they celebrated who they were, and as they challenged the God of whom those vessels were taken. And as they were doing this, an unattached hand mysteriously, miraculously appeared and wrote an inscription on the wall, holy graffiti. And it said, many, many, tekem and parson. None of Belshazzar's wise men could figure out what it said, so he called for Daniel. And Daniel, the prophet, was brought to translate the meaning of this strange text. And Daniel said, this is what it means. God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Babylonian hands had taken God's holy vessels and held them in contempt and dishonor as they challenged him. And now the hand that controls all people challenged them, and they were doomed. That night, Belshazzar died, and the Babylonian empire was defeated. One nation had fallen. Another had risen to replace it, as God ordained it 150 years before it happened. We read about it in Isaiah chapter 45, verse 1. Again, consider this is 150 years before the events that I just read to you, the fall of Babylon and the rise of Persia and Cyrus. God says, who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose, saying of Jerusalem, she shall be built, and of the temple your foundation shall be laid. Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, Isaiah 45, 1, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him, and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed. The Persian empire defeated and overtook the

Babylonian empire, and that was a major, the major event of this time and this place. But again, God, as we've seen, was the one overseeing it, appointing the rise and the fall of nations to accomplish his sovereign will. And that truth becomes even more clear as we read all of verse 1 in its entirety. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mountain of Jeremiah might be fulfilled. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing. It was the Lord who stirred Cyrus, to act. It was the Lord who paved and smoothed his road to victory. And while Cyrus may have thought that his great achievement was to win an empire, that was his greatest achievement, it was truly to be used by God to send his people back to Jerusalem to rebuild it. Isaiah 45, 13 says, I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level. He shall build my city and set my exiles free for the price or reward, says the Lord of hosts. This was God's plan. In addition to this, God had given his word to Judah that their exile would not be permanent. A truth that he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, which Ezra cites in verse 1. Jeremiah 25, 12 says, then after 70 years are complete, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. Jeremiah 29, 10, for thus

says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. Here's the thing, though. It was less than 70 years that they were in exile. It was more like 50 years. Even in God's judgment, there is grace.

God in his mercy, God in his mercy, knocked 20 years off of their sentence. And I think there's a lesson to learn in this for us. God will discipline those whom he loves, but his discipline serves a purpose to refine and to purify. And God would rather forgive. God would rather forgive than condemn.

[29 : 05] We are all familiar with John 3, 16, aren't we? How about John 3, 17? Let's read it. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that in order that the world might be saved through him. God was at work at this point to prepare the world to bring about the right time to send his son that people would be saved through him. Likewise, we need to be eager to resolve conflicts and extend grace to those who have wronged us. We should seek peace.

This doesn't mean we turned a blind eye to sin. This doesn't mean that we tolerate sin. This doesn't mean we act like doormats, but it does mean that we seek others' good. It does mean we seek society's good. And we do that by being an example and being a witness, not just with our lives, but with our words of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because we know that people will truly never experience peace until they first have peace with God. And you can only have peace with God through knowing Jesus Christ, his son, as your Lord and Savior.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 12, verses 16 through 20, live in harmony with one another do not be haughty but associate with the lowly never be wise in your own sight repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all if possible so far as it depends on you live peaceably 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 so doing you will be heaping burning coals on his head and there again we see the act of purification but all these things that we do in seeking peace with others we do it because we have peace with god through jesus christ and because we desire that they likewise hear the gospel and know jesus christ as their lord and savior let's look again at his decree in verses two through three again it says thus says cyrus king of persia the lord the god of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of earth and he has charged me to build him a house at jerusalem which is in judah whoever is among you of all his people may his god be with him and let him go up to jerusalem which is in judah and rebuild the house of the lord the god of israel he who is in jerusalem in 1879 an archaeologist in babylon dug up an artifact known as the cyrus cylinder this ancient clay cylinder dates to this period period in ezra in the inscription on that cylinder it tells of cyrus it tells of his allegiance to marduk the chief god of babylon and of his respect for uh the other gods of his subjects unlike babylonian rulers cyrus ordered all the people who were in exile to return to their homes and to take with them the objects of worship that the babylonians had plundered and used as trophies and he said take them back and rebuild your places of worship now cyrus was a dictator make no doubt about that but he was a dictator of a more benevolent sort he believed i think that the best way to maintain power was to allow people freedom to worship whatever god they wanted to just as long as when they prayed to that god they made sure to also pray to that god to help cyrus that was basically his thing so the decree mentioned here in verses two through three were a part of his diplomatic policy he ingratiated himself with the jews by using their terms their language to describe their god and i think cyrus being a polytheist believed that the gods had willed him to triumph so in his mind maybe he's thinking why not give something back to them but again we know this big event was ordained and orchestrated by the one true and living god who stirred cyrus's heart to fulfill his promise to accomplish his will and further set the stage for the arrival of jesus christ now look with me at the rest of the decree in the interesting language cyrus uses in verses four through five and let each survivor in whatever place he sojourns be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold with goods and with beasts besides free will offerings for the house of god that is in jerusalem now biblical scholars understand cyrus's term therefore survivor as referring to a remnant it had been 200 years since the kingdom of israel disintegrated as a result of their sin as the northern kingdom perished god preserved during that time a remnant the little kingdom of judah when they incurred his wrath his punishment for their sins god still was at work in their exile to preserve a remnant of the remnant whose hearts were the ones that he stirred to return home and continue to undertake the work of restoring the ruins of jerusalem so understand this god doesn't need a large group of

people to accomplish big things the whittling down of numbers has always been in god's playbook one of my favorite stories is uh gideon remember gideon and his army and he's matched he's he's he's outmatched he's got tens of thousands how what are we going to win this fight god and god says uh you're outnumbered but you still have too many we need 300 and so he takes 300 with him and guess what happens they win they win big it's a blowout we see it also uh with jesus we saw it with jesus didn't we when he first started out and his his ministry on earth he had throngs of people crowds of people who were following him but that by the time it came for him to die on the cross those numbers were much smaller and then when he resurrected it was those 11 disciples a few hundred others who were still following jesus and god used that small number of people to turn the world upside down as they preached the gospel and people were saved it's no different today for us we live in a nation that is crumbling we live in a world in turmoil but there will always be a remnant of god's people doing god's will and being used by him to accomplish his sovereign purposes until our lord returns as god continues to rule and reign over big events to achieve his sovereign will that's what we will see the next way we see this truth as a as a reality i should say i guess is in the second way so god is sovereign over big events god is also sovereign over small details verses five through six then rose up the heads of the father's houses of judah and benjamin and the priests and levites everyone whose spirit god had stirred up to go rebuild the house of the lord that is in jerusalem and all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver with gold with goods with beasts and with costly wares besides all that was freely offered now these verses are reminiscent of the exodus just as was the case with god's people then so was the case for god's people in ezra they were departing many of them were going to a land that they'd never seen before but god would provide what they needed not only for the journey but for the work he would have them to do and again it's no different with god's people today philippians 1:6 is one of my my favorite verses a great reminder paul says there of christians and i am sure of this that he god who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of jesus christ does that make you feel good that god is not only uh sovereign over the big events but he's sovereign over your life the good work that he's done in you when he saved you he'll bring it to completion you won't be forgotten by him and so i ask you what might the lord be stirring up in your heart today what things of this world might be distracting you from sharing his priorities do you think maybe that the task is too great whatever it might be or maybe you think that way because you're too focused on little you when you should be obedient and focused on our great big god verses 7 through 11 cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the lord that nebuchadnezzar had carried away from jerusalem and placed in the hands of his gods cyrus king of persia brought these out in the charge of mithridash the treasurer who counted them out to shes bazar the prince of judah and this was the number of them and i love this passage right here 30 basins of gold 1 000 basins of silver 29 censers 30 bowls of gold 410 bowls of silver and 1 000 other vessels all the vessels of gold and silver were 5 400 all these did shes bazar bring up when the exiles were brought up from babylonia to jerusalem this is why i love these verses and this is what we also need to see god is sovereign over the big events and the the big people and god is also sovereign over the pots and the pans and the bowls and the cups that were dedicated in the service in the worship of him as seen seen in the detailed numbering of these pots and pans and cups now think about this if god cares that much about pots and pans how much more does he care about you who bear his image he cares a lot these people were about to step out on a journey in faith they were they were trusting in the lord's guidance they were trusting his provision and again for god's people today nothing has changed i want to read a quote from you uh by derrick thomas on this text the close of this chapter he says as the chapter comes to a close with the words from babylonia to jerusalem a new era begins for the people of god nothing could signal more precisely the event governing this chapter than these words god has returned to his people in favor and a journey lies before them of greater significance than the trek to the city of jerusalem jerusalem had become a symbol of god's city just as babylon had become a symbol of the fallen world city there is no promise of instant health and wealth to the israelites return they have no homes to go to they must trust in the lord's guidance and provision [42 : 58] they must step out on a journey of faith looking to the lord every step of the way in faith they must trust that god will open a path for them to tread it is a pilgrimage to a city in ruins but in their hearts it will bring to mind the true nature of god's promise to a city that has foundations whose designer and builder is god with this journey every believer can identify and uniquely it is a journey that jesus took for us your life you may feel that it's in ruins that it's been wrecked by your sin that it's been wrecked by other people's sin you may think that god doesn't love you that god is done

with you you may believe that there's no hope for rescue that there's no hope for restoration that's a lie it's not the truth we've seen it in scripture we see it in the life of our lord and savior jesus christ who came to a world ruined and wrecked by sin who lived the sinless life required by god that you and i could never measure up to and he could do it because he was god and he died on the cross as a willing sacrifice as god to atone for our sins that by faith in him by trust in him by belief in him our ruined wrecked lives are rescued and restored and rebuilt better than they ever could have been that's who jesus is that's what jesus does and i hope that you know him i really hope that you know him because if you don't understand that just as god is sovereign over the big events and the big people he's also sovereign over the small things and the details and you're here and you're listening to this because he's ordained it and he's calling to you come to me i will restore you i will rebuild better than you ever thought imaginable there is nothing impossible for me you turn to him and you will be received by him with grace and with mercy and with love and with compassion so how do we adjust to our passage today i think it's this god's sovereignty should inspire courage in the present and hope in the future god's sovereignty should inspire courage in the present and hope in the future after the visigoths sacked rome in the 5th century a.d many christians christians who placed too much hope on the success of the roman empire they were in a deep state of shock and despair in this atmosphere saint augustine wrote one of the most important books outside of the bible in all of christianity and it's called the city of god the book presents human history as one of conflict between what augustine called the city of man and the city of god all of human history he says is a conflict between babylon the city of man and jerusalem the city of god the closing pages of scripture

we read record babylon as symbolic in revelations as the city of man and it reveals its downward fall and demise revelations 18.2 says fallen fallen is babylon the great as these pilgrims set their faces towards jerusalem a clear decision had been made in their minds and in their hearts just as jesus set his face towards jerusalem in the cross to fulfill god's sovereign will knowing that it would accomplish salvation for his people so we as god's people today must continually set our faces towards the city of god looking away from the city of this world babylon we don't need it it's no good for us its end is destruction it will fall but the one who knows jesus christ will live and they will live forever so set your face brother set your face sister on the things of god purging your heart and your mind of the things of this world because it will fall it will end in ruin but the one who stands on the rock who is jesus christ he will cause to endure and they will stand forever let's pray lord it's amazing we read your word read about events that happened thousands of years ago before our present day and yet lord as much as things have changed they really haven't people continue to reject you and hate you they continue lord to sin even your own people god we flirt with the world we mingle too much of its beliefs and its views with what you've commanded us in your word and as a result of that lord there's just so many churches that are anemic they're sick they're unhealthy and they're going to die because what they preach is not the gospel and not your word lord may we as your people here never arrive at such an end lord may you continue to keep us anchored and tethered to your word may we continue lord to trust in you to continue to keep our face directed towards you and god may we also be the kinds of people who aren't afraid of the pressures that this world puts on us to conform to its ways or soften the edge of your word god may we be bold and may we be courageous may we be people who are inspired today and who look forward to the future because we know that you are sovereign that you're in control that no matter what happens in our world no matter what happens in our lives you're not a god who panics you're not a god who's anxious you're a god who does not know what it's like to worry because you have all things under control and so god may that hope give us hope and may we be faithful to you during the time that you have given us to live until that day when you bring us home in jesus name we pray amen