

Lessons from the Life of Naaman

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[0:00] So most of you have been watching the American Gospel Christ Crucified movie with us on Sunday night.

And in that movie so far we've seen the true gospel contrasted with the false gospel. Put more bluntly, we've seen the true gospel perverted by unsaved people's incorrect ideas of who God is and how people can be saved.

The founders of the emerging church movement would like us to think that their ideas are new, but in reality a lot of their incorrect views of God and salvation have been around since the Old Testament times.

And as we look at 2 Kings 5 tonight, we'll see the false gospel and the true gospel illustrated by Naaman and those around him. As we look at the healing of Naaman, we'll see how Naaman and others typify what we see in our own society today.

And it's a large chunk of scripture, but I do want to go ahead and read the entire 2 Kings 5 before we get going so you have the whole chapter in your mind.

[1:10] So let's go ahead and read those verses now. Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria.

He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy. So Naaman went in and told his lord, Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.

And the king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy.

[2:17] And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, Am I God to kill and to make alive? That this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?

Only consider and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me. But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, Why have you torn your clothes?

Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.

But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

Are not Abana and Farfar the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

[3:27] But his servants came near and said to him, My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, Wash and be clean?

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God. And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel, so accept now a

present from your servant.

But he said, As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord.

In this matter, may the Lord pardon your servant. When my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter.

[4 : 44] He said to him, Go in peace. But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, See, my master has spared this name in the Syrian, in not accepting from him what he brought.

As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him. So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from his chariot to meet him and said, Is all well?

And he said, All is well. My master has sent me to say, There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets.

Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing. And Naaman said, Be pleased to accept two talents. And he urged him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags with two changes of clothing and laid them on two of his servants.

And they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house. And he sent the men away, and they departed.

[5 : 52] He went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, Where have you been, Gehazi? And he said, Your servant went nowhere. But he said to him, Did my heart not go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?

Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.

So he went out from his presence, a leper like snow. So as we said, rather than going into a deep verse-by-verse study, we're going to spend our time looking at how the people typify people today. The first thing we see illustrated in this chapter is that everyone has a problem. So everyone has a problem is the first of the twelve. And look at verse 1 again.

It says, Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor.

[7 : 00] If we stop there, we see Naaman had a lot of things going for him. He had a position of leadership, and he was successful in his work. He was described as any man would like to be.

It says he's a mighty man of valor. But tucked in this great description of Naaman, the writer is hinting at something we'll see throughout the story. Why does it say that Naaman was held in such high regard?

Well, it says there he was held in high regard because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. Even though Naaman has yet to realize it, he's only successful because of what the Lord had given him.

Naaman eventually will learn the lesson of Proverbs 19.21. Proverbs 19.21 says, Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Similarly, listen to Lamentations 3, verses 37 and 38. Lamentations 3, verses 37 and 38 say, Who has spoken, and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?

[8 : 13] Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Now, as we see him throughout the early part of this chapter, Naaman is a proud man, but he has a problem, just like everybody else has a problem.

The end of verse 1 tells us what that problem is. At the end of verse 1, where we see all the good things about Naaman, the writer simply closes the verse by saying, But he was a leper.

Leprosy was a dreaded disease that degenerated its victims and eventually proved fatal. No cure for it was known. We know that in Israel, lepers were normally isolated from non-lepers, but this was not always the custom in other nations, including Syria.

Naaman was able to carry on his duties as long as the disease allowed him to do it. We also know that leprosy in Scripture is a symbol of sin. Leprosy, like sin, was incurable by human means.

And we know that only God can cure sin and save the sinner. Naaman had many fine points, but he was a sinner. He tried to cover up his leprosy, but he couldn't cure it.

[9 : 26] Many people today similarly try to whitewash sin. And what they need is to be washed white, and only Christ can do that for them. Naaman's problem was visible on the outside, but everybody has the problem of sin, even if the sin is hidden from others.

Think about the words of Romans 3.23. Of course, Romans 3.23 says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And 1 John 1.10 says, If we say we have not sinned, we make him, speaking of God, a liar, and his word is not in us.

So Naaman's leprosy is a visible reminder that all people have a problem. The second thing we learn from this chapter is that anyone can point others to God.

So let's see how anyone can point others to God. Look at verses 2 and 3. They say, Now the Syrians, on one of their raids, had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.

She said to her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy. Raiding parties in Israel have provided a servant girl for Naaman's wife, and this girl tells her that Naaman could be cured if he would only see the prophet.

[10 : 52] Think about the contrast between Naaman and the servant girl. These two people are about as different as they could be. She's an Israelite. He's an Aramean.

She's a little girl. He's a great man. She's a captive servant. He's a commander. He has fame in the king's estimation. She has none.

All it says about her is that she waited upon Naaman's wife. Notice that the writer never even gives her name, but she has critical information that's very important for Naaman.

We need to notice something else about her, too. Despite her captivity, she's not bitter or unhelpful. Instead, she shares what she knows about the Lord and the prophet out of concern for Naaman and her mistress and her desire to see God's glory magnified.

So, in this way, she acts a lot like Daniel, Mordecai, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the other exiles who cared for the spiritual and physical well-being of their conquerors.

[11 : 56] The little girl's willingness to help Naaman certainly is a credit to her, but her desire to help may also indicate that Naaman and his wife treated his servants very well.

Later on, we'll see other servants point Naaman toward the cure for his problem. And from that, we can infer that the servants have high regard for Naaman. The third thing we see is that many people try to buy their salvation.

Many people try to buy their salvation. And Naaman was one of those people who at first thought he could purchase salvation. Look at verses 4 and 5. They say, So Naaman went in and told his lord, Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel.

And the king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

The king of Syria was delighted to hear that something could be done for this very valuable man that helped him in his exploits. And he immediately sent him to the king of Israel with a letter of introduction and a very handsome reward.

[13 : 11] Ten talents of silver represent about 750 pounds. And this compares to about 150 pounds of gold, which shows that gold had much greater value.

But keep in mind that in this day, the total of the two things was equal to about the combined annual wages of 600 common laborers. So this was a pretty big sum of money that Naaman had taken with him.

Naaman was willing to pay just about anything to be healed. And that's why we can see how he first thought he could buy his salvation. If I just pay somebody enough, they'll do what I need them to do if they have the ability to do it.

The next thing we see is that many people look to the wrong place for salvation. Many people look to the wrong place for salvation. And Naaman and the king of Syria show that as well.

The serpent girl pointed Naaman to the prophet Elisha. Instead, Naaman went to the king. Look at verses 6 and 7. They say, And he brought the letter to the king of Israel which read, When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant that you may cure him of his leprosy.

[14 : 28] And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, Am I God to kill and to make alive that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?

Only consider and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me. So the king of Syria at this time was Ben-Hadad and the king of Israel was Joram or also known as Jehoram in the Bible.

So Naaman obtained a letter of introduction from Ben-Hadad that was sent to Joram and apparently the letter didn't mention anything about Elisha. Instead, it simply requested that Naaman be healed. And the king of Israel was so infuriated by such an unreasonable request that he suspected that the king of Syria was looking for an excuse to attack Israel. In other words, he thought that when the king failed to heal Naaman, the Syrians would have the excuse they needed to invade.

So Israel's king certainly understands the futility of the letter. He knows he's no healer, but he has no idea of the deep personal pain and the child's pure motives that have caused this trip.

[15 : 39] To this point, Naaman hadn't made much progress, but his situation takes a turn for the better in verse 8. Verse 8 says, But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, Why have you torn your clothes?

Let him come now to me that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel. This actually is a rebuke to the king as well, because it's obvious that Elisha knows why the king had torn his clothes.

But in other words, he's asking, Why have you torn your clothes instead of believing that God can heal? Elisha views Naaman's presence as an opportunity to prove that there is a real prophet in Israel, which is just another way of saying that there is a real God in Israel.

The next lesson we learn is that many balk at the simplicity of the cure. So many balk at the simplicity of the cure.

Naaman certainly did. Look at verses 9 through 11. So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house.

[16 : 53] And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean. But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

So Elisha gave Naaman a rather simple task. Rather than doing it, Naaman left angry. Because of his personal greatness that we heard about in verse 1, his huge gift that he brought that we heard about in verse 5, and the letter from the king, Naaman expected personal attention to his need.

Elisha, though, didn't even go out to meet him. Instead, he sent his instructions for healing through a messenger. Naaman was angry because he anticipated a personal cleansing ceremony from the prophet himself.

D.L. Moody analyzed the problem accurately. D.L. Moody said, Naaman had two diseases, pride and leprosy. The first needed curing as much as the second. Naaman had to get down from his chariot of pride to wash according to the prescribed way.

The indication here is that Naaman believed the cure to be too simple to be true. Elisha asked for no payment. He required nothing from Naaman other than that Naaman obey his word.

[18 : 23] Similarly, today, many people and religions try to require something more than the gospel. Scripture, though, is clear that salvation is a gift from God.

Remember Ephesians 2, 8 and 9. That's where Paul wrote, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

As further evidence, listen to what Paul says to the Romans in Romans 10, verses 10 through 13. Romans 10, verses 10 through 13 say, For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

For the scripture says, Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The next lesson we learn is closely related to the one we discussed, and that is that many want to devise their own method of salvation.

[19 : 39] Many want to devise their own method of salvation. Look at verse 12. Naaman is still speaking here. He says, Are not Abana and Farfar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?

Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. In Naaman's mind, washing in Syria's own rivers should be better than washing in the Jordan.

The Abana River began in the Lebanon mountains and flowed to Damascus. Its clear water produced orchards and gardens, and the Farfar flowed east from Mount Hermon to the south of Damascus.

If Naaman needed to wash in a river, those two rivers were superior to the muddy Jordan. But it was obedience to God's word that was the issue, not the quality of the water itself.

Naaman had yet to realize that. That last sentence about obedience being the issue leads us into the next lesson that we learn from Naaman, and that is that obedience to God's word brings salvation.

[20 : 47] Obedience to God's word brings salvation. Look at verse 13. But his servants came near him and said to him, My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you.

Will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, Wash and be clean? There are a few things we can pick out from that verse. One is that the title father was not usually used by servants to address their masters.

So the use of the term here may indicate some of the warmth that the servants felt for Naaman. And that's why we can say along with the servant girl, he must have treated his servants pretty well because the servant girl wanted to see him healed.

So did the other servants here. And the servants here pointed out to Naaman that he had been willing to do anything no matter how hard it was in order to be cured. So he should be even more willing to do something as easy as washing in a muddy river.

How many people today would like to do some great thing for their salvation? In fact, a lot of religions today have people convinced that you do have to do some great thing for your salvation and keep doing it to keep your salvation.

[22 : 03] The truth is you don't have to do anything. Christ has already done it for us. All we have to do is receive it. We come as beggars and Naaman would have to come that way also.

Check out verse 14 now. Naaman actually listened to his servants. It says, So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan according to the word of the man of God.

And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. It doesn't tell us how Naaman was actually healed but a lot of people think he probably wasn't healed until coming up from the seventh dip.

It wasn't that he saw some progress every time that he came up. So if he really wasn't healed until the seventh time, can you imagine what he must have been thinking the first six times that he went into the river?

He had to be thinking, I told those servants that it wasn't going to do any good. I should be doing this in Syria. I already told him that once. But regardless of when the healing actually happened, Naaman obeyed the word of Elisha who spoke for God and he was healed.

[23 : 11] We have a few more lessons to learn. The next thing we see is that the truly converted are thankful. The truly converted are thankful. In verses 15 and 16, notice the difference in Naaman's attitude.

Those verses say, Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel, so accept now a present for your servant or from your servant.

But he said, As the Lord lives before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Naaman had looked to the prophet himself for a cure in line with the words of what the servant girl had told him.

But the way in which the cure was done made it clear to him that Elisha's God is a living person. And a lot of people think that's why Elisha didn't come out to Naaman the first time.

He wanted to make it clear that it was God that did the healing rather than anything Elisha did himself. As for Elisha, we see that he refused any gift from Naaman.

[24 : 26] The next thing we see is that the truly converted worship God. The truly converted worship God. Look at verses 17 through 19.

Then Naaman said, If not, please let there be given to your servant, talking about himself, two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any God but the Lord.

In this matter, may the Lord pardon your servant when my master goes into the house of Rimen to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimen. When I bow myself in the house of Rimen, the Lord your God pardon your servant in this matter.

He said to him, Go in peace. Naaman's request for Israeli dirt seems odd to us. Even Dave Crawford probably doesn't want to take Texas dirt home with him whenever he comes back from Texas this week.

But based upon the culture of that time, it makes a lot of sense. In the ancient Near East, it was thought that a God could only be worshipped on the soil of the nation to which he was bound.

[25 : 35] Naaman wanted a load of Israelite soil on which to make burnt offerings and sacrifices to the Lord when he returned to Damascus. So he wanted to take some of the Israeli soil so he could have that God soil with him.

So this request actually confirmed how much Naaman had changed. He previously had disparaged Israel's river and now he wanted to take a pile of Israel's dirt to Syria.

Verse 18 typically generates some controversy and in that verse, Naaman requests that the Lord forgive him for participating in the worship of Rimen when such participation is necessary to carry out his career responsibilities.

And Rimen was the Syrian version of Baal. Naaman seems to say here that this worship will not be real worship because he's already confessed that the Lord's sole existence and he's also confessed the Lord's sovereignty.

Elisha neither approved or disapproved this but he simply sent Naaman on his way. The next thing we see from this chapter is that false converts often are unmasked by greed.

[26 : 49] False converts often are unmasked by greed. Starting with verse 19 we see the sad story of Gehazi, Elisha's servant. So look at the end of verse 19 and we'll read through verse 22 here.

It says, But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God said, See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian in not accepting from his hand what he brought.

As the Lord lives I will run after him and get something from him. So Gehazi followed Naaman and when Naaman saw someone running after him he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, Is all well?

And he said, All is well. My master has sent me to say, There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talon of silver and two changes of clothing.

Going on to verse 23 and 24 now it says, And Naaman said, Be pleased to accept two talents. And he urged him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags with two changes of clothing and laid them on two of his servants.

[28 : 02] And they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill he took them from their hand and put them in the house and he sent the men away and they departed. Apparently, Gehazi justified his greed by reasoning that because Naaman was an Aramean, a natural enemy of Israel, he should at least be taken advantage of.

So Gehazi pursued Naaman to get something from him. Notice that's actually how the English Standard Version translates that. Think about the difference between Gehazi's greed and the generosity shown by Naaman.

Naaman still wants to reward his benefactor so he's more than pleased to give something to Gehazi. But Gehazi, on the other hand, is opportunistic and deliberately deceitful.

He's grasping at the gratitude which the principal Elisha has refused. And when he catches up to Naaman, Gehazi lies to get silver in clothing. Then he stashes the loot before he sees his master.

So Gehazi let his greed override his brain. Think of the things that Gehazi has seen Elisha do.

Gehazi was so greedy that he risked the likely result that Elisha would find him out.

[29 : 20] And that's the next thing we see. That's false converts' lies will be exposed. False converts' lies will be exposed. In verses 25 and 26 it says, He went in and stood before his master.

Of course that's talking about Gehazi. And Elisha said to him, Where have you been, Gehazi? And he said, Your servant went nowhere. But he said to him, Did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?

Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants? So in the previous section, we saw Gehazi lie to Naaman.

In this section, we see Gehazi lie to Elisha. This time, Gehazi has lied to a man who knows he has lied. After reminding Gehazi of his special spirit, Elisha rebukes him for accepting money for a healing ministry.

Elisha exposed him and Elisha reminded the greedy servant that it was no time to receive money or garments or other things that could be bought with the money. Gehazi had sinned greatly in giving the Syrians an occasion to think that God's free gift of grace was not free at all.

[30 : 42] And that's an important thing to remember there. He had sinned greatly in giving the Syrians occasion to think that God's free gift of grace was not free at all. The final lesson we learn from the life of Naaman is that false converts eventually receive the judgment of God.

False converts eventually receive the judgment of God. In verse 27 Elisha does pronounce judgment on Gehazi. Elisha says to Gehazi therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.

So he went out from his presence a leper. Like snow. Gehazi's greed had cast a shadow over the integrity of Elisha's prophetic office.

This made him no better in the people's thinking than Israel's false prophets who prophesied for material gain. The very thing that Elisha had taken great pains to avoid. Gehazi's act also betrayed a lack of faith in the Lord's ability to provide.

And as a result, Elisha condemned Gehazi and his descendants suffer Naaman's skin disease forever. Think about how this punishment was a twist for Gehazi.

[31 : 59] He had gone to get something from Naaman and he did get something from Naaman but what he got was Naaman's disease. So one man goes away healed because of his obedience while the other man, indeed the one who should have known what matters most, walks away with the leprosy.

another Israelite has made the tragic mistake of choosing a substitute for the Lord while a Gentile convert has discovered what his servant girl said about the Lord's prophet is true.

Jewish literature outside the Bible says that Gehazi never repented. Jesus' words in Luke 4.27 seem to confirm that fact. In Luke 4.27 Jesus said, So in the story of Naaman we find a classic illustration of the gospel of grace.

Naaman was the enemy of God being the captain of the Syrian army. Humanly speaking, his condition was helpless and hopeless because he was a leper. Being a Gentile, he was a stranger to the promises and covenants of God and he had no claim on God's blessing.

But God's grace reached out to touch his need. All Naaman had to do was to humble himself and obey the word of the Lord. He eventually washed himself in obedience to God's word and he came up a new man with new skin and a new heart.

[33 : 33] Of course the key sentence there is but God's grace reached out to him to touch his need. All Naaman had to do was to humble himself and obey the word of the Lord.

And that's no different today for people who want to be saved. We also see from this chapter that people who attempt to pervert the gospel of God and use it for their own profit eventually will be exposed.

We have many false teachers with us in the world today. We're correct to be upset by how they lead others away from the true gospel and profit from their own lives. But we also should pray for those false teachers.

Unless they repent, they're going to be like Gehazi and receive the judgment of God. In John 5, 21 through 29, Jesus summarizes the judgment that's coming.

Listen to how these verses pertain to the positive and negative things that we see in our lesson tonight. Here are John 5, 21 through 24, and this is Jesus speaking here.

[34 : 34] He says, name and story certainly fits Jesus' words in verse 24.

Listen to verse 24 one more time. Jesus said, Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment, but is passed from death to life. The scary part for Gehazi and others comes next. Listen to what Jesus said in verses 28 and 29 of John 5.

Jesus continues there, Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Gehazi and Naaman were living examples of what Jesus also reaffirmed in Matthew 23, 12. Matthew 23, 12 is the verse that says, Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

[36 : 13] Listen to that verse one more time. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. With that, let's close with the word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the reminder of not only the misconceptions of how people can be saved, but also the right way for people to be saved.

Help us continue to point the true gospel to people. Help us also to remember to pray for those people who are leading others astray. Let us never forget that they will face your judgment unless they repent.

Help us remember that they too are people who deserve mercy no more than we do, and yet you still saved us. Continue to be with us as we go through the week and bring us back safely on Sunday.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.