

There is a Way That Seems Right

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[0:00] Let's turn in God's Word to the book of Proverbs this morning. Chapter 14. Proverbs 14. This book is a collection of wise sayings.

! Indeed, a collection of the very wisdom of God! In which we have these rich nuggets of truth put into just a few words. And in these words we are told about reality.

The way things really are. The way God is. The way we are. The way life is. And I want you to look this morning with me at just one text.

Really two, but you'll see what I mean when I say one text. Chapter 14 and verse 12 of Proverbs. There is a way that seems right to a man.

But in the end, it leads to death. Now turn over to Proverbs 16 and 25. Chapter 16 and verse 25.

[1:11] There is a way that seems right to a man. But in the end, it leads to death.

And you say that sounds exactly like chapter 14 and verse 12. And it is. And I know of no other proverb in this whole book that is repeated word for word besides this one.

It is. It is. It is. It is. It is. here is something you cannot afford to miss. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death.

In other words, not everything in this world is as it seems, as it appears. And if we're not careful, we'll be easily duped, tricked, deceived.

Maybe you've bought a vacation package over the internet, and when you got to the site, you found it was not exactly as the picture showed it. Or maybe it was a car you purchased, because it seemed like a good deal.

[2:20] And six months later, you realize it wasn't all that it seemed. You now have a lemon on your hands. We learn through these experiences that not everything in life is as it seems.

And that's what our God is telling us here. That there is a way. There is a road that seems right to a man. But it's not all that it appears.

Because in the end, it leads to death. Now the picture here is of a traveler making his way to an intended destination. And the traveler is you.

The traveler is me. For life is a journey. And to live is to be traveling. So right now, each one of us are traveling.

We're moving. We're going somewhere. And the important question for us this morning is, where are we going? What is the destination at the end of the road that we are on?

[3:23] The Bible holds out only two destinations. Two final destinations. Of heaven and of hell. Of unspeakable bliss and happiness and unspeakable torments.

Of life, eternal life. And of death. The second death. The lake of fire. So, which it will be for us depends on which road we are traveling in this life.

That's what the Bible teaches. That's what Jesus said when he says in Matthew 7, Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the road that leads to destruction.

And many enter through it. But small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life. And only a few find it.

Now, I'd like for us to consider this morning, why is it that the road to death and eternal destruction has so many travelers on it? And I believe our proverb gives us the answer.

[4:32] Because there is a way that seems right. It looks good. It promises what I'm after. It looks like the right way to go.

It all makes sense. This is it. But in the end, it disappoints. As it leads us to death. John Bunyan was an English Puritan who wrote a story about a pilgrim making his way to the celestial city of heaven. He called it Pilgrim's Progress. And he pictures this same reality for us in his story. He has Christian traveling along this narrow road that's leading to heaven.

But the way was rough, and his feet were sore from traveling. And as he looked over on the left side of the road, he noticed a very pleasant meadow. It was called Bypath Meadow.

And travel looked much easier there. It was a smooth, there was a smooth path right alongside of the narrow road.

[5 : 43] It looked more enjoyable. And since it seemed to be going to the same place as the narrow road, he thought, what's the harm? And so he climbed over the fence into Bypath Meadow and was walking along this smooth road.

But it only seemed to be going to the same place. For we read, as night came on, he did not notice that the path ever so slightly began to depart from the narrow road until it finally wound around and actually was going the opposite direction of the narrow road leading to life.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. And every day people are choosing the road on which they will travel.

Every day people are choosing which way they will live their life. And they're choosing not based upon where the road ends, but because the road is easy, because the road is fun, because of who's on the road with them, because of all the short-lived pleasures of sin found on it.

But it's heading to death, to eternal destruction. Sadly, the end does not come into consideration at all.

[7 : 06] People are living for the moment for today. And since this way seems right, they follow on. Now, it's no proof that a way is right, then, just because it seems right.

If you notice, chapter 16 and verse 2 says, all a man's ways seem innocent to him. All a man's ways, that which he loves, that which he seeks, they seem right to him.

So, it's no proof that a way is right, just because it seems right to you. Perhaps you've been in a situation where telling a lie seems right.

Just twisting the truth a little bit seemed like the thing to do. It was the way that seemed right for you. It would get you out of all kinds of trouble. And so, almost without even thinking about it, the lie just tumbled out over your lips.

It seemed right. And yet, Revelation 21.8 tells us that the end of all unrepentant liars is the lake of fire. The way that seems right is not always right.

[8 : 24] And so, God is telling us in this text to not be fooled by these many different ways that seem right to a man, but that end up in death, the second death of hell.

So, we're all traveling this morning. And it's not in man that walks to direct his way. It's not in me. It's not in you to direct our own way through life.

We don't have what it takes. Because all we see is the path until the next bend. And we don't see beyond the bend. Or we don't see over the hill.

But God, in heaven, sees it all. And he sees the end of the road from the beginning. And he can see where we're traveling. And he knows what lies ahead.

And he's so kind that he draws alongside of us travelers and he tells us what's at the end of the road that we're traveling on. Isn't God good to us?

[9 : 27] He wouldn't have to do that. We've turned our back on him. We've gone astray. We've all chosen our own way. He could just let us find out and be surprised. But he's so gracious.

He comes and tells us that those ways that seem right to a man end in death. So, what I'd like for us to do is just to consider three ways that seem right to a man.

The Bible exposes many of these ways but there are at least three that I think we need to consider because they are so popular today. And perhaps some of you are on these roads that seem right but only lead to death.

Well, first of all, there is the way of mere religion. And natural man defaults to this position that we are saved by our own religious good deeds.

And parents, you need to know that your children naturally tend to believe this. That if they're a good boy they'll go to heaven. If they're a good girl they'll go to heaven. But if they're a bad boy they'll go to hell.

[10 : 35] You need to know that's naturally how the heart thinks. It seems right. Doesn't it? It seems right that if I'm bad I go to hell. If I'm good I go to heaven. Such is man's fallen mind.

And in all the systems of religion around the world except for biblical Christianity salvation is earned by something that man does. If our deeds that are good can only outnumber our deeds that are bad well we're in.

Eternal life. Ask a person why God should let them into heaven. And they'll tell you well I go to church I've been baptized I read my Bible I pray I try to live by the golden rule treat my neighbor as I want to be treated.

Try to live by the ten commandments I'm basically a good person I've never done anything that deserves to go to hell. all as if salvation comes by living a good life you see as if a little religion puts everything right this is the way that seems right to many many people.

It's to be feared that religion damns far more than it saves because there's so much of religion that is false religion that's based on a man's own good deeds to get him into heaven.

[12:07] And sadly many are in churches today they're sitting in churches just as you're sitting here and they're thinking that their church attendance and their gifts in the offering plates are somehow contributing to their making it to heaven at last.

It's a way that seems right to many people the Lord Jesus had to deal all the time with such people in his ministry. It's not a new thing it's an old thing it's as old as man's sinful heart.

It was the cherished belief of the Pharisees those separated ones in Jesus' day it was the cherished belief of the religious leaders the spiritual directors of Israel in the days of Christ it was the way that seemed right to them.

And so in John 3 we read of a man a Pharisee named Nicodemus who came to talk to Jesus at night. And this Pharisee was also a member of the high court of Israel a leading teacher perhaps the leading teacher of Israel.

He was very careful about the way he lived keeping all the requirements of the law the ceremonies it was hard to find a more religious man in Israel than Nicodemus.

[13:29] And he fully expected that his good and religious deeds would land him a place in heaven when he died. And Jesus flatly tells him you're wrong you're wrong Nicodemus unless you are born again you will never see much less enter the kingdom of God.

God your nature is so defiled that you need to be born again what you are on the inside your mind your desires your will is so corrupted that unless you're born all over again unless there's this supernatural change of your heart you'll never see the kingdom of God.

You see your heart is a factory of sin and it needs to be transformed by the almighty power and grace of God. Nicodemus you must be born again and that's not something that you can do no you must be born again this is something that God the spirit must do flesh only gives birth to flesh and spirit only gives birth to spirit you don't contribute to this birth any more than you did anything to contribute to your first birth you must be born again and furthermore your sins are so offensive to God that he sent his one and only son into the world to be lifted up on a cross and punished in the place of sinners and unless you believe in him Nicodemus you will perish you will not have everlasting life you see salvation does not come by anything that you have done but by trusting in what

Christ has done so lost are you Nicodemus that only Jesus can save you you see this was the message that Jesus gave to this self-righteous Pharisee and he went home that night shaken and uneasy about the things that he heard because it directly challenged the way that seemed right to him he'd grown up in these ways it's all he'd ever known it's what he had taught and preached and now he's being told that's not the way to eternal life but rather the way to death it's interesting to follow the story on through John's gospel and you see this Nicodemus finally coming to faith in the Savior when Jesus was lifted up on the cross he's one that goes and helps take him down and give him a proper burial faith in the Savior and his sins were forgiven he was born again he had new life he trusted in Christ

Saul of Tarsus was another Pharisee and he was following the same way that seemed right to him he had learned it from the feet of Gamaliel a leading rabbi in Jerusalem and he was confident that all his works would bring him to heaven he had come from the right stock of Jewish parents he was a Pharisee he had been circumcised the eighth day he was a law keeper he had a faultless righteousness he thought to put him in good standing with God but he came to see that the way that seemed so right was so wrong for God showed him his sin he didn't have this faultless righteousness at all he showed him that he was a sinner and he needed a savior he showed him that the requirements to get into heaven is not just the best you can do it's perfection it's perfect righteousness and Paul came to Saul came to see that he had not attained unto that that the only righteousness that would get him into heaven was

[17:25] Christ righteousness Christ obedience Christ blood put to his account by believing and so his longing became to be found in Christ not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith for by grace you are saved through faith and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God not of works so that no one can boast Paul's writing like that all the time those are his words that that's converted Saul of Tarsus writing and his writings are full of it you come to Galatians and he says a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ so we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law because by observing the law no one will be justified

Titus 3:5 he saved us not because of righteous things we have done but because of his mercy why is this converted Saul of Tarsus ever making the same point we're saved by grace not by works not by righteous things we have done because there's a lot of people who think that's the way you're saved he himself had believed that once it had been the way that seemed right and he sees a whole nation of Israel following that same line that same road and he's in their faith saying no this isn't the way to life it's not by our works of law keeping but it's the righteousness of Jesus it's his law keeping put to our account and received by the open hand the empty hand of faith and so Jesus to some who were confident of their own righteousness told this parable in

Luke 18 two men went up to the temple to pray one was a Pharisee there's that that one that thinks he's got enough good works to get him into heaven and the other was a tax collector and tax collectors were notorious for taking from people more than they had a right to take they were thieves so a very religious man and a very outwardly immoral man and they're in the temple to pray this is the story and the Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself God I thank you that I am not like other men robbers evildoers adulterers or even like this tax collector we can always find someone that's worse than us can't we and so this man is pointing to others worse than him and then he starts to congratulate himself before God I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all that I get as if God is to be impressed with his righteousness he's so good you see that's the prayer of the Pharisee thank you I'm not as bad as these guys and I thank you that I am this good meanwhile the tax collector stood at a distance and he would not so much as even look up to heaven so guilty so aware of his sin that he could not look God in the face but beat his breast and said God have mercy on me the sinner he has not one good word to say for himself but he just begs for mercy and now Jesus drives the point of the parable home I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God this man went home from the temple right with God whereas the other man went home still under

God's wrath and displeasure for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted which man are you like this morning are you thinking that you're better than others and because of what you've done God ought to look upon you with favor and accept you into heaven or are you like this poor tax collector and you see you have done nothing to earn heaven nothing to deserve God's favor only that which should deserve God's punishment Jesus is exposing the way that seems right to a man and he's showing us it leads to death everyone in the temple that day would have looked at the Pharisee and thought that man is going to heaven and they would have looked at the low down tax collector and said that man is going to hell and they had it exactly wrong there is a way that seems right to a man but it's all wrong and it's still wrong and people are still not getting it right though these verses have been in our

[23:01] Bibles for 2000 years if you come to the day of judgment trusting in what you have done to get you into heaven you'll be damned if you come clinging to the goodness of Jesus his death on the cross for you the sinner you'll be saved it's by coming and receiving Christ now this is good news for any sinner this morning whoever you are whatever you've done it can all be forgiven you for the sake of Jesus he's obeyed enough he's suffered enough he has enough righteousness to cover all your sin so you come to him and receive his righteousness as the free gift received by faith you don't make yourself fit for God by your own deeds you come and let Jesus clothe you in his righteousness for God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God now I say the gospel is a wonderful thing you may have come in here this morning a lost sinner on your way to hell on that road that leads to death thinking you're on the road that leads to life but you can go out of here on the road that leads to heaven you came in a sinner you can leave saved forgiven a child of God just that quick you see the way that seems right to a man says oh it takes a whole life of good deeds to work your way up to heaven no the way that

leads to life says it's by an instant of believing in Jesus that you're made a child of

God that by falling into Jesus arms jumping into his arms trusting in him you're made righteous on the spot blessed be God for Jesus that's one of the ways that seems right to man but leads to death the way of good works salvation but there are other ways that seem right to a man that seem to be leading them to heaven but they are really not leading to heaven at all the second way I'm calling the way of easy believism I don't like the title but I couldn't come up with a better these people know that a man is not saved by works but by grace but they turn the grace of God into a license to sin and this is a popular perversion of Christianity in our day as well it's filling churches with people claiming to be Christians who live no differently from the world and yet are assured that they are going to heaven it's a salvation without repentance it's a salvation without new birth it's a salvation that does not lead to holiness and does not lead to obedience of God's commands and there is no such salvation taught anywhere in the

Bible it's simply one more of those ways that seem right to a man they reduce salvation they they bring it down from salvation from sin to merely salvation from hell now that's reduction the salvation that God gives is not just salvation from hell at the end it's salvation from sin remember the angels words to Joseph speaking about Mary she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus Savior why because he will save his people from their sins he didn't just say he'll save his people from hell in the end no he will save his people from their sins the salvation that this Jesus this Savior comes is a salvation from sin like pride and lust and greed and self centeredness and gossiping and anger and lying and every other sin he will save his people from their sin and if you don't want to be saved from sinning then you don't want this Savior so you ask them why they think God should let them into heaven and they'll tell you because they made a decision for Christ one day so many years ago or they walked an aisle or they said a prayer they may have done so but they never truly came to

Christ to be saved from their sins to be saved from sinning they have no interest in that they still love their sin they still want to go their own way still want to be their own boss they don't want to be saved from sinning they want Jesus to be their Savior from hell they're not interested in Jesus as their Lord their master but Jesus never gives man such a choice you read the gospels and you find Christ offering himself freely to the worst of sinners take me he says to the woman at the well take me he says to these who were prostitutes and tax collectors and vile sinners but he offers himself as he is as a prophet to teach us the will of God this is the way to live as a priest to die for our sins and to plead with God for us and as a king to rule over us and to defend us he offers us as a savior from sin he offers himself as a lord a master to teach us how to live conversion to

Christ is no small thing and that's one of the ways that seems right to a man it's been reduced to a little human decision that somebody made some place and because of that little decision they think I'm going to heaven no matter whether or not they have been changed by the inward working grace of God Jesus said if anyone would come after me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me that self that's been running your life for however many years you are however old you are that self must be denied no longer will your life be lived based upon what self wants you must deny yourself it's death to self you'll need a cross on which to die and you must follow me wherever I lead you must follow now that's the requirement that's the response to this offer of

[30:13] Jesus come come and take me come and follow me come all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls get in the yoke with me and follow where I'm going it's unconditional surrender isn't it that Jesus requires in the gospel if you would be my surrender all your rights to me as your lord and master in world war ii the axis nations called on japan to make an unconditional surrender and they were not willing to do so so he dropped an atomic bomb on their city of hiroshima and again called on them to make an unconditional surrender the whole city was leveled tens of thousands of people were killed and others were dying daily but the emperor and the war council were still not willing to give it up they were wanting to cut deals they would surrender under four conditions and so three days later we dropped a second atomic bomb on

Magasaki and an unconditional surrender followed no conditions we surrender was their response and that is the response required to make peace with God no deals the deals are off no I'll follow you this far Lord Jesus you can have this area of my life but not that no deals the call of discipleship the call to come follow him to be a Christian is all or nothing and so we come and we say if you will have me I'm yours that's the big wonder of it all that he would have us and so all cutting of deals all

my plans and dreams I take my hands off and I say Lord Jesus where you lead me I will follow I'm clinging to nothing take me

I'm yours now there are many who profess Christ who do not follow Christ they say we've accepted Christ into our hearts we've made a decision for Christ but they've never come to the end of themselves with unconditional surrender I'm yours Lord and they're on the way that seems right to a man but that ends in death you know the Lord Jesus dealt with these people in his ministry and he lovingly confronted people on that road and said listen I know you think that this road you're on is leading to life but let me tell you it's not leading there at all in that wonderful sermon on the mount he comes to the end and he says to them not everyone who says to me Lord Lord not everyone who professes to be a Christian who says Lord you're my Lord you're my master not everyone who says that will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven many that word should be underlined many will say to me in that day

Lord Lord did we not prophesy preach in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles then I will tell them plainly I never knew you it's not that I knew you then when you were preaching and working miracles and then we've had a falling out I never knew you depart from me you evil doers you see what Jesus does he says let me walk you to the end of the road you were on you're saying I'm Lord but you're not doing the will of my father you're not obeying the commands that have been you're not following me you're not denying yourself you're not taking up any cross and and following me let me show you where many will expect an entrance into heaven and will be denied they've never been born again they've never surrendered to Christ don't get it wrong he's not saying you haven't done enough good deeds you haven't done enough obeying to get in that simply shows the fact that you don't have a new heart you do not have saving faith because all saving faith will produce a life of surrender to Christ the apostle Paul had to deal with people in his day on this road that seemed right and so often in his different letters to different churches there was the church at Corinth and some in the church at Corinth thought that they could be Christians and go on living in their Corinthian lifestyle he says to them in 1 Corinthians 6 9 through 11!

[35 : 46] do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters or adulterers or male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God and that is what some of you were but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God you were once that kind of people you are no longer but don't think that because you've prayed a prayer that you can go on living like the Corinthians and still get into heaven at last he tells the people in Galatia don't be deceived God cannot be the one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction the one who sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life there's no sowing to sin and reaping eternal life doesn't happen you might deceive yourself but you can't mock

God and so over and over throughout his epistles I don't have time to take you to these passages he keeps saying that no such person will inherit the kingdom of Christ regardless of how many times they say Jesus is my Lord regardless of how many songs and choruses they sing about Christ being theirs why so many warnings because so many find this way that seems right in their own eyes I wonder if any here this morning are on this way that seems right in your eyes and you've made some profession of faith but you don't have a new heart so you don't have a new life the answer is not try harder the answer is not try to obey just a little harder screw up your courage and your determination and roll up your sleeves and get busy living the

Christian life no that's not the answer at all that's another way that seems to save you and when he saves you he saves you inside and out and he makes you a new creature and you will walk a new way and you will follow him and you will take up your cross and you will deny yourself so come to Christ for the first time make an unconditional surrender to him give yourself to him trust in him and this is what he will do for you of his good pleasure he is the vine that will produce the good fruit in all who are savingly attached to him get into Christ and he will put his spirit in you and move you to follow his decrees and move you to be careful to keep his laws faithful is he who called you who also will do it what a salvation what a savior but there's another way that seems right to a man that really leads to death and it's the way of procrastination and this person knows the true gospel this person knows that their good deeds won't get them into heaven only

Jesus will they know they must make an unconditional surrender to Christ in faith and they fully intend to do so one day and so anytime any conviction of sin comes from reading the scriptures from somebody witnessing or a sermon that's preached well anytime conscience is smiting and bothering he can silence it all just by assuring himself I'm going to do that someday just not today and so the road he's on seems so right to him because he's not out and out rejecting Christ he's not saying I understand the gospel I don't believe it I don't want it he's not doing that he agrees with everything the preacher says he knows it's important to come to Christ he's going to get around it just not today later and I'm afraid that some of you young people are on this road and you're promising yourself that one day

I'm going to get right with God one day I'm going to come to Christ oh I want to warn you that the road you are on though it seems right to you leads to death and destruction when you hear the gospel you promise that you will come to Christ later I want to ask when when when will you come to Christ young person or you say after I get to high school and then you get into high school and you find that high school has its own temptations and its own things to keep you occupied later when when I get to college and you get to college and you find that college has its own temptations and it's harder in college to drag yourself to church and so you stop going to church and you don't hear the gospel tugging at your heart anymore later later then you marry someone who has no intentions at all of living a life surrendered to

[41:56] Christ and you see with every step of rejection and procrastination it's getting harder and harder and harder to come to Christ it's getting easier every time you put off Christ for another day it becomes easier to do it next week and the next day the next week not easier and it's all part of the deception of the evil one who wants to make you feel you're on a good path because after all you really intend to come to Christ I want you to see very clearly this morning you're rejecting Jesus nonetheless you may not reject him all at once you reject him by piecemeal little by little but you still reject him and each time you reject him is a great sin to not believe on God's one and only son to hold him at arm's length

God and and God will not see life for God's wrath remains on him you see there's only two responses to the Lord Jesus and his gospel to those who receive it's eternal life to those who reject you're still under the wrath of God you say but I mean to but I just haven't got around to it yet well then you're not believing you're still rejecting and so the way that seems right to you the way of procrastination is the way of rejection it's the way of living under God's wrath and if you die under God's wrath you'll come to see that indeed this road that seems so right ends in death so we've looked at three ways that seem right to a man good works salvation an easy believe ism makes a profession without possessing

Christ and procrastination are you on any of these roads the fact is if you're not in Christ right now you're on one of these roads or some other road that seems right to you you're not in Christ right now if you're not believing on Christ right now as you sit there you're on one road or another that seems right to you that's why you're on it seems the right way to go right now but it leads to death you think that every step on the road is leading you to heaven but it's going the other direction can you see the kindness of God kindness of God our Savior coming alongside of us travelers this morning walking with us for 45 minutes and saying let me help you understand something about the way that you're on it doesn't lead to life it's going to death my friend so consider the road that you're on consider where it's going how kind that he would urge us off the wrong road and onto the right road many wrong roads leading to destruction only one road leading to life

Jesus says I am that road I am the way I am the truth I am the life no one comes to the father but through me get on that road get into Christ this morning are you sure that the road you are on leads to heaven are you sure are you dead sure that the road you're on leads to heaven if not give yourself no rest until you know for sure that itself can be another road that seems right just to be content I don't know oh that's a that's a bad road to be on too be sure this is life and death a breath between you and destiny of heaven or hell come now let us reason together says the Lord though your sins are as scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they are red like crimson they shall be as wool!

Seek the Lord while he may be found call on him while he's near today today if you hear his voice harden not your heart such is the word of our God such is the welcome of our Savior may you come to him if you've seen this morning that the road you're on leads to destruction get on to the right road you do it by coming to Christ he's not down front here you can meet him right!

[46:27] in your seat! Call on his name pray to him trust in him to save you he will save you now if you only trust him now let's pray our father thank you for such a savior thank you for sending him to obey in our place the laws that we had broken thank you for sending him to the cross to suffer all the punishment that our law breaking deserved thank you for coming to us many of us Lord you've come and brought us into Christ we were once on a way that seemed right to us and we weren't seeking you maybe we thought we were but we were deceived and you came and sought us and we give you thanks this morning and it's our desire that you would come alongside others that are on the road that leads to and show them the end of their way and bring them to this wonderful Savior and do it now we ask in Jesus name Amen