

# The Church, the Theater of God's Glory

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[ 0 : 00 ] Open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 3. Ephesians 3 and we'll read verses 14 through 21.

Ephesians 3, 14 to 21. And Paul has just said to the Ephesians, in him and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

And so he encourages them, do not be discouraged. And then we pick it up in verse 14. For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

[ 1 : 23 ] And to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Forty years ago this month, we began meeting together on the Lord's Day to worship our God.

We were meeting in the music room of the Bremen High School just up the road on Grant Street. That was after Stan Heaney had led a group of 30 of us through a year-long study of the book of Romans on Wednesday evenings.

And we came out of that study with a deeper understanding of the sovereignty of God in our salvation. That it was eternally planned by God and we were predestined to be adopted as His children.

And that He gave His own Son then to die in our place, to turn God's wrath away from us by taking it Himself for us. And then He sent His Holy Spirit to our hearts to quicken us from the dead.

[ 3 : 14 ] And then to live in our hearts and to produce that fruit of salvation in our lives all the way, perseveringly to the end.

Well, there was great interest after that year of seeing a church forum to proclaim these glories of our God and His grace and the salvation of sinners.

So we agreed upon the name Grace Fellowship Church. We wanted a church that emphasized the grace of God as the scriptures do and where grace characterized our fellowship together in Christ. So after studying the doctrine of the church, 23 initial members covenanted to walk together as a church in submission to Christ. Many of those have since joined the church triumphant above. Seven, I believe, are still with us yet today. And then after three years in the high school, we built the north end of this building and moved into it in 1986.

[ 4 : 21 ] And then in 2008, we added this end onto the building. So now, here we are today pausing to acknowledge a 40-year milestone in our history.

And we want to say loud and clear that the Lord has done great things for us and we are glad. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to your name be the glory for your love and your faithfulness.

Now my main point for this special occasion is simply this. The church of Jesus Christ is the place where God is displaying His glory.

The church of Jesus Christ is the place where God is displaying His glory. And the key text for our sermon this morning is Ephesians chapter 3 verses 20 and 21.

Now unto Him, that is unto God, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power excuse me, according to His power that is at work within us to Him be glory

in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

[ 5 : 48 ] Amen. Did you see it? The place where God is displaying His glory is in the church that is in Christ Jesus.

And what unites us with Christ is faith. Faith in what Jesus has done for sinners. Jesus Christ, who is Himself the full radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of the divine nature and by faith in Him were joined to Him forever.

Now God has always had a people and He always will. His church, the ecclesia in the Greek, His called together ones.

They've been called out of the world to be called together. So, who did He call out of the world but part of the world? Hell-deserving rebels like us.

And He called us together in Christ as His unique people. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. So God has chosen His church to be the place where His glory is being displayed.

[ 7 : 07 ] It's not the only place to be sure. Psalm 19.1 says the heavens are declaring the glory of God. The skies are proclaiming the work of His hands. So you go out and you see a beautiful sunset or you see the northern lights or you go out at night and look into the sky and you see the billions of galaxies each containing billions of stars and God's glory is being shown.

We can look through the camera on satellites and we can see the shapes of these galaxies. Some are elliptical.

Some are in spiral shapes. We can see supernovas, cataclysmic nuclear explosions of white dwarf stars, whatever those are.

But they're beautiful to see and in so doing God is displaying His glory in the creation. but not only as we look up. The whole earth, Isaiah 6.3 says, is full of His glory.

There's not a plant or flower below but makes His glories shine. And so standing before the roaring waters of the Niagara and just seeing those tons and tons of water pouring over the falls unceasingly.

[ 8 : 30 ] Or maybe standing at the Grand Canyon, that colorful painted rock and it takes our breath away. God is displaying His glory in the creation.

It caused John Calvin to say this, the whole creation is a theater in which God is displaying His glory. Now the Apostle Paul is adding that the church of Jesus Christ is another theater where God is putting His glory on display.

For the church is the beginning of His new creation. The new creation that far surpasses His glory in His old creation.

For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus. And as His new creation, you see, the church is now this unique theater in which God is showing forth His glory.

To Him be glory in the church. Now the church of Christ today is despised, isn't it? Even among professing Christians, fewer and fewer are taking the church seriously.

[ 9 : 46 ] And the world, it scoffs at the church today. It tells us to shut up and keep our ideas to ourselves. It sees no glory in God and in the church that is His.

And we get that, don't we? Because we know that Satan, the God of this age, has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the glory of Christ in His gospel.

In fact, we too saw no glory in Christ and His church. We were bored with church. Maybe our parents made us go to church.

Or if we went to church. This is before we were converted. We went for all the wrong reasons. We saw no glory in Christ. And so we wrote over His church, Ichabod, no glory.

And yet the church is God's great plan to gain glory to Himself. This is God's plan A for which there is no plan B. God will be glorified in His church and in Christ Jesus.

[ 11 : 01 ] Now how is God's glory being displayed in the church? Well, the book of Ephesians earlier has said that He's displayed the glory of His wisdom. It's said, it's revealed the glory of His love and mercy, the glory of His grace.

But here in our text, Paul emphasizes the glory of God in the display of His power. You see that in verse 20. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

According to His power that is at work within us. He's able to do. That language is highlighting God's power. So, what is God able to do?

Jeremiah says, Ah, Lord God, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched hand.

Nothing is too difficult for You. Now there's plenty that's too difficult for us, but God wants us to know that there's nothing too difficult for Him.

[12:10] His power is infinite without boundaries. The only thing that restricts God's power is His own will in what He decides to do with that power.

So, what is God by His great power able to do? Well, He's able to do all that we ask Him to do. Wow, that's a lot.

But that's not all. He's able even to do all we could imagine Him doing. He's able to do more than all we could ask or imagine.

He's able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine. Paul is heaping up superlatives to demonstrate the power of God, the glory of God's power in His ability.

And this is not merely some theoretical power. This is real power in exercise. And notice where this power is operating. His power that is at work within us.

[13:23] Right now, presently, at work in His church. This is no natural power. This is supernatural divine energy. It's not manpower. It's God power.

God. You've seen signs along the highway at construction sites. Men at work. Paul would erect a sign over every true church of Christ.

God at work. Something is happening here that can only be explained by almighty supernatural power of God.

God. So, then, the reason the church is the theater of God's glory is because it's His supernatural power that is there on display in His church.

I simply want to unpack that this morning and show you how that's being done. I have five points.

And the first way God is demonstrating His glory and His power within His church is because of the context in which the church militant now lives.

[14:28] she's not yet in heaven. She's yet in this world that is under the control of the evil one, 1 John 5, 19.

So, God is greatly glorified to have a church growing and thriving in a world that is hostile to it. It's like a flower thriving in the hostile climate of a parched desert.

You say, how's that happening? Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not be able to withstand it.

The gates of hell will not be able to resist it. Such is the power of Christ in His church as He's building it.

So, though all hell is combined along with the world to tear down what Christ is building up, His church, it's still growing, it's still spreading, it's still invading every tribe and language and nation of the globe with the gospel, the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:46] So, any church of Christ that remains in this hostile world is a great glory to God who is the one preserving it. The church is like that burning bush in the wilderness that Moses saw.

It was burning but it wasn't consumed. And why was that? Because God was in that burning bush and from that bush He spoke to Moses.

You remember when Jesus ascended into heaven before He left He told His disciples, His church, to go and make disciples of all the nations, to baptize them in His name and then to teach them to obey everything and what?

And behold, I will be with you to the end of the age. I will be with you. That's why the church of Jesus Christ has lived through many fiery persecutions and has not only survived but actually grown and thrived the stronger for it.

The blood of the martyrs has actually become the seed of the church. That's not natural. That's supernatural. That's because greater is He who is in you as the church than He who is in the world.

[17:04] So that's the first reason that God is being glorified for His power because He's maintaining His church in a hostile world. Secondly, God's glorious power is on display in the church in the conversion of every man and woman, boy and girl.

Every addition to the church is a glorious display of God's power. The Bible says we're born spiritually dead in our sins. So we're dead toward God.

We're living our lives for ourselves glad to be away from God. John 7, 7 Jesus says the reason the world hates me is because I tell them that what they're doing is evil.

So I want to know what kind of power does it take to bring a sinner to turn away from the sins that they love and to turn toward and trust in Jesus Christ whom they hate.

What kind of power is needed to do that in one sinner? Well, the Bible gives us three pictures of this power of God in conversion. in everyone who's added to the church of Jesus Christ.

[18:19] The first is the power of the resurrection from the dead. So there's a dead body in a casket and it's your job to resurrect that body.

And you say it's impossible and of course it is. But that's the kind of power God has. You remember Jesus was three days dead in the tomb and by God's almighty power his lungs began to breathe and his heart began to beat and his blood began to circulate and his brain and his organs began to function again.

God had raised him, his son from the dead three days dead and he ever lives never to die again. That's power unknown to man.

the very same power that raised Christ from the dead must work within us to bring us to life spiritually because the Bible says we were spiritually dead and because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ when?

When we were dead in our trespasses it's by grace you've been saved. That's chapter 2 and verses 4 and 5 of the same letter. We were dead in our sins and it was then when we were dead we were gone no life toward God that in love he quickened us to life he raised us from the dead.

[19:51] I was 15 years dead and God made me alive with Christ. Some of you were 20, 30, 40 years dead before Christ quickened you to life.

This week I heard of a man who was 100 years old 100 years dead went to church all the time regularly read his Bible regularly taught Sunday school class stone dead toward God and then Christ made him alive God made him alive with Christ as a 100 year old man and he trusted in what Jesus has done for sinners.

he was made alive. What is God's power? It doesn't matter when you were made alive that is a demonstration of supernatural power of God.

The second picture we have of the power of God in conversion is that of a new creation. A new creation. You remember that when God created the world and then in the first day he just spoke let there be light and there was light.

Well that's the kind of creative power just to speak and the world just pops into being according to what he said. That kind of power must be operative in any sinner's life if he is to be made alive in Christ.

[21:18] So Paul can write in 2 Corinthians 4 6 God who said let there be light has made his light to shine in our hearts to give to us the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Our sin blinded minds would never have seen glory in Christ never wanted him had he not opened our eyes by a new creation a creative power nothing short of another creation.

If any man be in Christ he is what? A new creation a new creation creation the old is gone the new has come they have been remade recreated by God we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus Ephesians 2 10 that is why Jesus told Nicodemus you must be born again born of God born of his spirit or you will never even perceive let alone enter the kingdom of heaven you have to have a new start you have to be started all over again you have to be created over again and that is the power of God that is displayed in the salvation of every sinner who is brought in as another addition to the church a new creation and thirdly the power of God in creation is likened to a heart transplant and of course when I say a heart transplant I am not talking about that muscle that is pumping blood throughout your bodies that is the symbol but when the Bible speaks of the heart it means the soul the spiritual part of our being the center of our personality that thinks and desires and chooses the soul the heart of man we don't even know what it is we can't see it we can't take an x-ray and see the soul we can't touch it we can't go in and operate and take a soul out and put a soul in and yet God does he can and he does Ezekiel 36 26 says that he takes out that heart of stone that stubborn will that resists him that affection that doesn't love God but loves our own way and he comes in and he takes that old soul heart out and he puts in a pliable fleshy heart that loves the things of God and chooses freely the things of God it's a heart transplant and now instead of running from God and ignoring God and wanting nothing to do with God we now want to draw near to him we want to know him we want to love him and serve and obey and trust him that's a that's a power this world knows nothing of it's the power of God and every time that happens God's glory is put on display in

the church in the church so God's been doing this ever since the fall of man ever since man fell into sin and turned their back on God and we all come into the world with our backs toward God God's been doing this very thing so there's Peter and he's preaching on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem seven weeks after Jesus of Nazareth was nailed to a cross now here's Peter timid Peter who denied three times that he even knew who this Jesus was he's boldly proclaiming the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ when he's done 3,000 people turned from their sin and trusted in the Savior and were saved it's like a nation being born in one day this little church some 120 had gathered there in Jerusalem to pray makes me wonder did anyone ask God to save 3,000 people on the first day did anyone even imagine it but God did it it wasn't long after that all hell breaks loose and the hatred of Christians is stirred up in

[ 25 : 50 ] Saul of Tarsus and he goes from house to house and he arrests Christians and he kills Christians breathing out slaughter against the church is the language of scripture and I wonder was anyone in the church asking God to save Saul of Tarsus did anyone even imagine that God could do that oh I'm sure they were praying that God would protect them from Saul and maybe even remove Saul but was anyone bold enough to ask God to save Saul of Tarsus that very well could have been far beyond what they could ask or imagine but God did it didn't he he saved Saul of Tarsus and he made him the greatest preacher of the gospel save second only to the Lord Jesus himself that's the great power of God absolutely nothing is too difficult for him and every addition to the church your addition my addition every time someone is converted causes an eruption of praise in heaven to the praise of his glorious powerful grace and so the church

God's new creation his raised from the dead heart transplanted bride is the stage on which God is displaying the glory of his power thirdly God's glorious power is not only on display in the conversion of a sinner but on the ongoing sanctification of his people that process of transforming us into the very likeness of Christ we come into the world looking more like the devil than Jesus and this process of sanctification is to transform us into the likeness of Christ the makeover of all makeovers and yes conversion changes us radically it turns our hearts around as we just said but though we're radically changed at conversion we are not perfectly changed no we come into the church with plenty of baggage from the old man that we were the flesh is still active within us opposing whatever the spirit wants the flesh doesn't want that's still going on in my heart isn't it in yours that's what

Paul says was going on in his heart in Romans chapter 7 and so in other words the transformation is not yet complete and that's why Paul writing to the Corinthians says that he's like a woman again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you until Christ in all of his holiness is now seen complete in you that's where we're headed that's where we're going and that means there's still much work to be done so what is the church is the workshop where everyone is undergoing the change the Holy Spirit is God's on-site agent he comes to live in us to do what to empower us to put off old ways of thinking and living and to put on new ways of thinking new attitudes new ways of living God's living stubborn sins will never be put to death apart from the power of the Holy Spirit his power that is at work within us both to will and to do what pleases him Philippians 2 13 so now being converted our eyes are no longer blinded and so we read the scriptures with unveiled faces and as we look with unveiled faces we behold the glory of Christ in the scriptures that which we never saw we now see glory in Jesus and as we behold his glory we are being transformed from one stage of glory to another into his likeness which comes from the Lord who is the spirit this is the makeover you see and oh what a power it is there is power to root out the old Adam little by little and to recreate the image of Christ in our hearts and in our lives so that even though outwardly we may be wasting away many of us are and feel it yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day the spirit at work within us reproducing the life of

Christ the very soul of God life of God and the soul of man that's power remember in Acts 4 when Peter and John were arrested for preaching in Jesus name they were brought before the high court of the Sanhedrin Peter boldly quoted the Old Testament saying the stone you builders rejected has become the cornerstone the capstone salvation is found in no one else for there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved in the name of Jesus Christ and then the Bible says when they that's the Sanhedrin when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled ordinary men they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus there's something about them that reminds us of him and whenever that happens glory from

[ 31 : 57 ] God is being shown on the earth they're being made more and more into the likeness of Jesus and when you stand up in a hard place and bear witness for Christ glory is coming to God what a power to take a timid Peter who denied three times that he knew him and to turn him into a man as bold as a lion they took note he had been with Jesus and so the fruit of the spirit as that's being shown God is showing the glory of his power when you suffer evil like we just prayed for our brethren in Chile and they don't fight back and get revenge they overcome evil with good glory comes to God he's showing the power of his grace to change us into the likeness of

Jesus who suffered more and committed himself more to that judge that judges righteously when you trial after trial piling upon you still hold on to the promises of God and yes especially that promise that we know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love him who are called according to his purpose God and so you you you you're expecting good from your good God even in the midst of the storm the trial God is glorified remember folks it's not just the world it's not just the church that you are on the stage the stage in which God is glorified there are unseen Spirits here this morning both good and bad there's an unseen father and son and holy spirit watching there's a whole spiritual host of onlookers spectators and when they see the power of God in the soul God is glorified they see the power of God in a Christian's life God is glorified and that power is at work in them not just for a while and then it peters out no he enables us to persevere in holiness to the end of our lives to the very end that means we go on repenting and believing all the way to heaven repenting believing trusting in Jesus Christ in the face of fiery trials from the devil temptations the allurements of the world the flesh within you know that swallows up the greater population oh but there's there's a holy bride of Christ who are keeping themselves pure how do they do that they are kept by the power of God 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 4 and 5 they're kept by the power of God and so they're keeping themselves pure for their holy bridegroom that's the power of

God he's able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before his presence with great joy to his glory let me just mention one more way that God's power is being displayed in his church and it's what Paul prays for us it's by giving us power together as a church to grasp the love of Christ that is beyond knowing look what he says there in Ephesians 3 17 to 19 Paul prays that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God and how God's glory is seen in the church that together by God's power is able to grasp something of that love of God in Jesus Christ because it makes the people of God to become lovers of God and of one another and of a world in need of our Savior it pulls down and obliterates by God's all surpassing power all the things that divide people in our world that's chapter two of Ephesians Paul's been there he's treated that that in Christ church God has done what man could not do he has united Jew and Gentile into one body there were no two people on the planet that had more prejudice against each other than Jews and Gentiles it was hate and be hated that was the order of the day Jew and Gentile I want to ask you what is a power strong enough to kill prejudice and bring people together into one it's not in our politicians it's not in our education system it's not in our money it's not any of these plans of men to try to unite and overcome prejudice the world can't do it but

[ 37 : 32 ] God did it and he's still doing it for absolutely nothing is too difficult for him bringing together through Christ by bringing them both before Jesus Christ as helpless sinners to cast their souls on him and in reconciling them to God he reconciles us to each other what a glorious savior what a power in God is being displayed in his church you see it's the theater in which the power the glory of God is being displayed and that's why verse 21 excuse me I've jumped down too far so there you see how the church of Christ is the theater in which God is displaying his glory now here's the encouragement for us today verse 21 says to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations generations who we have who know to you deserve

God's glory billions and in sanctification, and in preserving us, and teaching us to grasp something of that love with which we're loved, and to tear down divisions.

And that should give us confidence for the future generation. It should raise our hopes, and our prayers, and our efforts for the next 40 years, should Christ tarry.

As we look at our nation and the world today, the outlook is bleak. It's falling apart at the seams. The foundations are being destroyed. Oh, but the church of Christ is secure.

She's absolutely secure in Him who has all power given unto Him, and He rules over every authority and power with all things under His feet, and has been appointed as head over everything for the church, His body.

[ 39 : 39 ] Ephesians 1, 19-22. For the church. He reigns over everything with that power for His church. And that's why verse 21 says, To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

You see, these two are inseparable. They've been inseparably joined together. The church is His body. He's the head. You can't divide them anymore.

They've been joined. The church is the bride. And He is the bridegroom. They've been joined together. And so for all eternity, they will not be separated.

And that is God's plan. For demonstrating, putting on display His glory in the church. And in Christ Jesus.

Together. For the church is chosen in Christ. The church is redeemed in Christ. The church is united to Christ.

[ 40 : 39 ] The church is called to union with Christ. It's sanctified and preserved in Christ. And one day will be glorified in Christ. And so God's glory in the church and in Christ Jesus doesn't end with the return of Christ.

Doesn't end with the end of this generation. No, it says it goes on throughout all generations. And then forever and ever. Amen. Ever and ever.

Never will be a time that God is not displaying His glory in His church. And in Christ Jesus. Who are forever joined. Forever to be together.

In the coming ages. God wants to show the incomparable riches of His grace. Expressed in His kindness. To us. In Christ Jesus.

For the coming ages. He'll be displaying the glory of His grace. And love and mercy. And power. From heaven. He came and sought her.

[ 41 : 44 ] To be His holy bride. With His own blood. He bought her. For her life. He died. And there she will be. The church. His radiant bride.

The makeover complete. Without any spot or wrinkle or blemish. Of sin. Of any kind. Perfectly reflecting. The beauty and glory of her bridegroom Jesus.

Sharing in His glory. We read it again. This morning in our scripture. Sharing in His glory. There she is. She's seen Him face to face. And she's now become like Him.

And. What a prospect. Set before us. Who belong. To His universal bride. The church of the living God. Just a brief application. And we're done.

And it's this. If the church. United to Christ. Holds such an important place. In God's display. Of His glory. Let me ask you. What place.

[ 42 : 42 ] Does the church have. In your life. Is it a central place. Or is it something out here. On the fringes. Of your life. This is a call.

For us to. Align ourselves. In our lives. In our schedules. In our pocket books. In everything. That we are and have. With that.

Which God. Is displaying. His glory in. The church. And in Christ Jesus. And then secondly. Let us pray for God.

To increasingly be glorified. In His church. It's universal. And that's why we pray. For missionaries. And pray for churches. In other places. We are wanting to see.

The gospel run. And not be hindered. And to see. More and more glory. Being given to God. In His church. And in Christ Jesus. Let's. Let's.

[ 43 : 35 ] Let's take these words. And. Pray big things. For God's glory. To be seen in His church. Let's leave our puny prayers behind.

Thou art coming to a king. Large petitions with thee bring. For His grace and power are such. None can ever ask too much. Indeed. He's able to do immeasurably more.

Than all. We could ever ask. Or imagine. And then. There's some of you here this morning. I want to ask. Are you sure that you are in. Christ Jesus.

And in His church. Is He your Lord and Savior. Are you joined to Him. By a. A faith. That is not dead. But is living. And producing.

The fruit of the Spirit. The life of Christ. Are these your people? Are God's people. Your people. Is His glory. That for which you live. Or are you still.

[ 44 : 31 ] Outside of Christ. To die. Outside of Christ. Is to be forever. Outside of Christ. And so I want you to look. This morning. To another theater.

On which God's glory. Is displayed. It's the middle cross. Outside of Jerusalem. Two thousand years ago. And there hangs. The Son of God. And He's being damned. For sins. Not His own. But it's showing. The glory of God's holiness. God's holiness. Is so glorious. Angels. Tie their face. God's holiness. Is so great. That when. Sin. Is put on Christ. And He bears it. To the cross. God turns His back.

Of any kind of love. Demonstrated to Him. And pours out. His anger. And His wrath. God is that holy. This is the theater. For seeing the glory.

[ 45 : 29 ] Of God. In His holiness. His justice. His righteousness. Oh. This is the theater. Where you get to see. The grace. The glory of His grace. And love.

And mercy. What kind of God is this. That He would give His one and only Son. To there take the condemnation. For sinners. That hated Him. This is the theater.

You need to look at this morning. And to see. The glory of God. In Jesus. And Him crucified. To throw down. Your weapons. And to come.

And to surrender all to Him. In faith. In repentance. And to join us then. On our way to heaven. Through the merits of Christ. Alone. And therefore to praise Him.

Alone. Forever and ever. The Lord has done great things for us. And we are glad. Not unto us. Oh Lord. Not unto us. But to your name. Be the glory.

[ 46 : 25 ] For your love. And your faithfulness. For your power. Amen.