

Protect Them

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0 : 00] And turn in your Bibles to John 17. John chapter 17. Scripture tonight will begin with verse 6.

And I'll be reading up to verse 16. John 17, 6. Jesus praying to his Father says, I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.

They were yours. You gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you and they believed that you sent me.

I pray for them. I am praying, not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours and all you have is mine.

[1 : 08] And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world. And I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that scripture would be fulfilled.

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

I have given them your word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Thank you for that good singing.

[2 : 23] That's encouraging to me as we consider these themes tonight of the Father's love. Not all people in the world are treated with the same grace of God, which is just to say that God is sovereign in the way that he dispenses his grace.

There is a most privileged group of people, sinners greatly favored by God, who are set apart from the rest of the world by the fact that Jesus prays for them.

And here in John 17, we're listening in to our Lord, talking to his heavenly Father, first about them, and then tonight we see where he's actually praying for them.

Who are these people? Well, last time we saw these are the people, not of the world, but those whom the Father has given to Christ. Seven times in this chapter, the Savior refers to them as those whom the Father has given me.

It's his favorite way of talking about his people in this chapter. They are his cherished love gifts from the Father, given to him before the creation of the world in that eternal covenant of redemption, and then for Christ to come and to live for them, to die for them, to rise for them, to ascend for them, even now to pray for them, even for their salvation.

[3 : 53] It was for them that he prays. And it was to them especially that Jesus had revealed the Father, both by his words and by his person, for to have seen him was to have seen the Father.

It's for those who had accepted and believed and obeyed God's words that the Lord Jesus gave them, even when the rest of the world was rejecting God's word.

And so when they accepted and believed and obeyed God's word, they brought glory to God. They brought glory to Christ, as he says, glory has come to me through them.

And so when you, disciples of Christ, hear and accept and believe and obey the word of God, you bring glory to Jesus Christ.

And he can say to his Father, Father, glory has come to me through them. Well, these are the ones Jesus prays for, many of you here.

[5 : 01] That was verses 6 to 10. And up to this point, we notice that Jesus asks nothing for his people. He's just talking to his Father about them.

Now this evening, we shift to his actual prayers and petitions on their behalf. So we move then from who Jesus prays for to what Jesus prays for them.

And in this prayer, we'll see four petitions that he makes. Protect them, sanctify them, unify them, and glorify them.

And since this prayer is a prototype of his high priestly work in heaven now for us, we can learn from it that this is what he is praying for us even now in heaven.

And it not only reveals what he's praying for us, what he desires for us, but it reveals his heart toward us as we see the things that he asks on our behalf.

[6 : 11] So for tonight, just the first petition, protect them. Protect them. Twice in this prayer, we hear our Savior praying this for them.

Verse 11, be holy Father, protect them by the power of your name. Verse 15, protect them from the evil one.

Again, we heard it this morning in Sunday school when the Lord wants to emphasize something, it's often by way of repetition. And here we see something of the urgency and necessity of this petition in its repetition as he's pleading with the Father for our protection.

The word here means to take care of. Take care of them, Father. Watch over them. Keep them. Preserve them. Protect them.

Like a shepherd who protects his sheep. Or like parents who take care of their own children. Or like a sentinel on duty who keeps watch over the camp of his fellow soldiers.

[7 : 25] This word protect, it's a word that implies danger. You don't need to protect someone if they're not in any sort of danger, do you?

So the implication of this petition is that there are dangers to be faced. There are wolves who would prey on your sheep.

There are evil people who would lead your children astray. There are enemies out to destroy your comrades. So get the picture of where we are.

Jesus is leaving his disciples. He's lived for 33 years on the earth. The same evil world that you and I live in. And now he's leaving.

But they're staying. And so as he leaves, the very first petition out of his mouth for his disciples is, Father, protect them. Protect them.

[8 : 21] No one knew the dangers better than our Lord. He himself was tempted in every way like we are. So he had entered into battle with temptation and danger.

No one knew the strength of our enemy better than he did. Having drawn the intense hatred of the world more than any other. And knowing what he knows, he prays at once for their protection.

Verse 11. He says, I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world. And I am coming to you, Holy Father. Protect them in your name.

The name you gave me. So that they may be one as we are one. We're going to look at that prayer for unity that we be one later on. He's going to pray for that several times in this prayer.

But there are three things that make his request for protection so urgent and necessary. There is, first of all, the opposition of the world. There is, secondly, the hostility of the evil one who rules this world.

[9 : 34] And there is, thirdly, the fact that Jesus, their good shepherd, is leaving them. All of which makes it so urgent that the Father protect us.

Well, these facts spell danger. The first, the opposition of the world. Many professing Christians fail to see the danger of the world.

And it's seen in the way that they toy with the world. They flirt with the world. With its ways, its fashions, its music, its entertainments, its pleasures.

As if there's no danger here. But the world, by definition, is anti-God. Anti-Christ. Anti-Christian.

And so this world is not a safe place for Jesus' sheep. The entire fallen world is hostile to God. Not neutral. Not neutral. At enmity with God.

[10 : 37] And with his cause, as Romans 8, 7 says. And that was seen in what they did at last when they could finally get their hands on God. They nailed him to a cross.

They would rather that there be no God. That is the bottom heart of the world. In John 7, 7, Jesus said, the reason the world hates me is because I testify that what they are doing is evil.

So the world hates Jesus. And now here in chapter 17 and verse 14, Jesus tells the Father why the world hates his disciples. He says in verse 14, because I have given them your word and the world has hated them.

For they are not of the world. For they are not of the world anymore. Then I am of the world. So the very same word of God that is so precious to us is despised by the world.

It rubs the world the wrong way. It tells them things they don't want to hear. And earlier in this prayer, Jesus said, Father, they have accepted your words.

[11:52] They have believed them. They have obeyed them. And their very faith and life, ordered by your word, draws down the hostility of the world upon them.

Furthermore, I have sent them into the world to declare my word. And because of this word of mine, the world hates them. The world hates them.

You know, I just came to my mind right now, driving to church one Sunday morning, I saw some folks walking on the sidewalk to church. And they had their Bibles in their hands.

It's a beautiful sight. They were not ashamed of the word of God, to carry the word of God and to be seen with it. But that's the word that is the cause of the world's hatred.

And not only for the word of God, they not only hate me because of the word of God that I love, but secondly, Jesus says, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

[12:59] Now, they once were the world. They once followed the ways of the world, Ephesians 2.2. But they don't belong to the world any longer.

And so they're out of step with its values and morals and thoughts and desires and goals and pursuits. And if you are not of the world, then you stand in the way of the world's progress toward immorality.

Your holy life convicts them of their unholy lifestyle. The light is shining and they hate the light that shines from your life.

It exposes their sinful life. And your gospel witness condemns them for rejecting Christ and living for self and calls them to repent or perish.

That's not a popular message. And because they love darkness, they hate the light of your life and your words. So the lines are clearly drawn.

[14:07] James says, friendship with the world is enmity with God. So following Christ and his word makes you an enemy of the world.

Earlier this same evening, Jesus had told these disciples in chapter 15, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

And if you belong to the world, well, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. You see, Jesus sees to the heart of the situation. He sees the world for the God-hating, Christ-hating, Christian-hating, word-of-God-hating world that it is.

So he prays, Father, protect them. I'm leaving the world, but they're staying in it. That's what makes the world such a dangerous place.

[15:20] It not only persecutes and threatens us, but it also allures and seduces us, offering us what our own flesh hankers for. And so it actively applies pressure to squeeze us into its mold, ever exerting its influence upon us, to be conforming to its ways of thinking and living.

We saw it this morning, didn't we, as we thought about how we think about work and how the world around us is pushing us to conform to its mold. It's why even bold Peter cowered three times, saying he didn't even know who Jesus was.

Why? Because of the pressure of the world. It's why even Demas, who was a fellow worker with the apostle Paul. Now, Paul didn't just take anybody along with him.

Remember, he didn't even want to take John Mark along because he had deserted. But he did take Demas along. And yet, so strong is the pressure of the world that Demas, Paul says, forsook us having loved this present world.

You see, the world is not only persecuting us, but it's sucking us into its way of living. And that's why Isaac Watts asked in his hymn, is this vile world a friend to grace, to help us on to God?

[16:50] What have you found? No, it's just the opposite. It would stand in our way, our journey to heaven, and try to distract us and call us aside from nearness to God.

And yet, it's through this world that we must make our way to heaven, as through a minefield with many hidden and subtle dangers that all war against our soul, that would keep us from arriving safely in heaven.

And so we are warned not to love the world and the things that are in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, of what we have and who we are.

Because if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. It's why we're commanded to no longer be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

And that's a present tense. Go on being transformed by the renewing of your mind. And if I need to be continually, ongoingly transformed by the renewing of my mind, it says to me, John, you still have some conformity to the world to be repented of.

[18:06] There are still some ways that this world has successfully squeezed you into its mold. You need to constantly be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Therefore, Jesus prays, Father, protect them through the power of your name. The power of your name.

The name of God stands for the God of the name. It stands for all that God is, all of his attributes.

Father, protect them through your name, through who you are.

Father, bring all your attributes to bear upon protecting these sheep that you've given me. Is it not a comfort to know that the one who prays for our protection from the world has experienced the very same opposition from the world and knows exactly, therefore, what to ask for?

Oh, I know this pressure from the world. I know this allurements. I know what they're going through. And so Jesus is able to petition the Father to protect us with the special mercy and grace that we need.

[19:19] He knows all those dangers of which we're not even aware of. And that he's the one who said just before this prayer, at the very end of chapter 16, it's there before you, that in this world you will have trouble, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.

That's the one who's praying. Father, protect them from the world. And I have overcome it so we can be of good cheer. In verse 15, he says, my prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

We'll look at this more next time under the next petition. But Jesus has a reason for not taking us out of the world.

He could have, and we might sometimes wonder, why didn't he? The moment we're saved, just take us to heaven. But he tells us point blank that that's not his will.

That's not what he's asking. Though the world's a dangerous place, I'm not asking you to rip them out of it, as if to keep us untouched from the world's persecutions and allurements and temptations.

[20:39] He rather wants us in the world, but not of it. In the world. But to protect us in this hateful world, you see, is to his greater glory than to take us out of it.

One old writer, the A.W. Pink quotes, puts it this way. It is more wonderful to keep a candle burning in a bucket of water than in a lantern.

It's more of a wonder to see a candle burning in a bucket of water than in a lantern. It's more of a wonder to see a Christian protected in a dangerous world than to see him in heaven, where there is no danger.

And that's one reason. Jesus keeps us and wants us in the world, but not of it. So that's his prayer. Not take them out of the world, but preserve them. Keep them in it. So James is beheaded. Did God the Father not protect him?

[21:57] Yes, he did. Peter is spared, but both were protected from the evils of the world that would have turned them away. James does not abandon God, even facing the sword.

Peter himself was spared, but would later give his life as well as a martyr. So I simply mention that to say that when we think of the prayer for protection, we shouldn't think of it as, well, that means nothing difficult and hard can happen to me.

No, we may be slaughtered like James was, and yet the Father was protecting him from the worst evil of abandoning and betraying Christ.

So that's his prayer. Protect them. And that's what he prays for you. But another thing that makes this petition so urgent is not only the world, but the hostility of the evil one.

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, verse 15, but that you protect them from the evil one. That's a reference to the devil, to Satan. When I was last in Grand Rapids, I picked up Joel

Beeky's book called Fighting Satan.

[23 : 13] And it begins with these words, if you are a true Christian, Satan hates you. Now that got my attention. If you're a Christian, a true believer, Satan hates you because you bear the image of Christ and because you were snatched away from him.

1 John chapter 5, verse 19, John says, we know that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

So the world's a dangerous place and it's a dangerous place because it's under the control of the evil one. Yes, it's under God's sovereignty and he can only do what God ordains, but the world's God, the world's master is Satan.

They're under his control. And that's what makes the world such a dangerous place for Christians because the world does the devil's work of lying and tempting and persecuting Christians.

It's the devil who's called the tempter in Scripture. He's the one orchestrating the temptations against the people of God. And though he may stir up other people to tempt us, the Apostle Paul reminds us that our struggle is never really just against flesh and blood, people, but rather against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, against Satan and his hellish hosts that hate us because we belong to Jesus.

[24 : 53] when's the last time you've prayed? Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one.

He's real. And it's one of the reasons Jesus prays for our protection. Sometimes he's stirring up persecution against us to scare us from the path of duty.

Other times he's alluring us to draw aside from the ways of God, shooting his fiery darts thick as hail sometimes, planting ideas in our minds, thoughts that have their origin in hell, suggesting sinful responses to mistreatment.

And he has no scruples of hitting you when you're down. He hates you. He appeals to our own remaining desires of indwelling sin and he knows best how to package sin to make it look good for me, for you.

He hides the hook and he presents the bait. And he knows your own peculiar weaknesses, your vulnerable times, your appetites, and he presses the attack there.

[26 : 16] He's been at it for 6,000 years. He's an expert at human nature. And if Adam and Eve fell to his temptations in a state of protection, what hope do we have of outwitting him, of standing against his assaults as the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve?

We're no match for him. As the hymn says, on earth is not his equal, not you, not me. And yet our hope, our only hope, our only need is that Jesus prays for us.

Holy Father, protect them from the evil one. So there's Peter and he's listening to Jesus that night. And he hears Jesus praying to the Father, protect them, Lord.

And he's hours away from a struggle with the fear of man in the courtyard of the high priest. He'll just be a little servant girl. Some others will be involved, gathered around the fire there.

But behind it all is the devil. He's orchestrated this whole thing. And Peter's going to fall hard. He's going to fall miserably. He doesn't even know how weak he is, does he?

[27 : 31] Maybe they'll abandon you, Lord, but not me. Never me. And on this night, Jesus assures him, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you.

You see, there's the danger and there's the remedy. Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, to throw you around like you were in a sieve, and yet I have prayed for you, Simon, so that your faith may not fail.

That's what he's after. He's wanting to destroy your faith, but I've prayed for you that your faith may not fail and when you've turned back, strengthen your brothers.

So if Satan had his way, Peter would not have just denied him three times, the Lord three times, but ongoing denial to the place where he would have forsaken the Lord. His faith would have failed entirely.

But he's protected by the prayers of Jesus. And yes, he stumbles and falls, but his faith is protected.

[28 : 40] It's a flickering flame. But behind the wall, there's someone pouring in the oil of grace to keep it flickering even though someone is dumping buckets of water upon it as Bunyan portrays in Interpreter's House.

And so by the prayers of Jesus, Peter repents of his fall and his faith was restored and he spent the rest of his life in service to his Lord encouraging his brethren and he dies a willing martyr identifying

with the Lord Jesus that he once said he didn't know.

all because of the prayers of Jesus. And what do we owe to the prayers of Jesus for our protection? Well, we owe our preservation, our perseverance all the way to our entrance into heaven.

If we arrive there safely, we will owe it to the prayers of Jesus for us. how many ways of escape have opened up for us because of Jesus' prayers?

How many times have we been diverted from temptation, distracted by other things, been spared from certain temptations during times of special weakness and vulnerability from a strength of a temptation that would have been too much for us?

[30 : 07] or have been strengthened just in time so that when the temptation come, we didn't give in to it. We were caught in a moment of strength that we had to resist and we were able to bear up under it and to resist again and again.

We've been protected and all in answer to the prayers of Jesus for us. I say, how many times has he protected us and we've not even known it?

But he's always been praying. Or we have fallen and our strength has failed like Peter, but his prayers have brought restorative grace to us so that repentance was renewed and our drooping faith revived and all in answer to his prevailing prayers to the Father.

Without that, we would have shipwrecked the faith dozens of times. times. So this prayer for their protection is urgent because of the dangers of this hostile world that we live in and also because of the devil who rules here and hates us.

But there's another reason why this prayer for protection is so urgent for these disciples and it's this, the third point, the fact that Jesus, the good shepherd, is leaving them, is no longer going to be with them as he has been.

[31 : 36] Verse 11, I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father, so protect them.

Verse 12, while I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name that you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that the scriptures would be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you. So for three years, the disciples had known what it was to have the good shepherd right there with them, guarding them, protecting them, shielding them as a mother hen with her chicks.

How many times when the enemies, the Pharisees came out attacking them, accusing them, Jesus stepped in and defended them with an answer that left the Pharisees without a thing to say, the truth that exposed their lives.

Many were their temptations and trials to forsake Jesus. and to go back to a Christless Judaism, John 6 records that at that point in Jesus' ministry, many other disciples went back and followed him no more.

[33 : 02] These men too came under those attacks and pressures and yet these disciples did not forsake him. Why?

Because Jesus says, I protected them. I protected them. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name that you gave me.

The same name by which he now calls upon the Father to protect them by his name. You see, it's the same divine nature. There's only one God and that divine nature is shared by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so, all the attributes of deity that Jesus used to protect his disciples are also found in the Father and Jesus appeals for the Father to protect them by his name.

So, yes, he kept them by that divine nature for those three years and it was so effective. Jesus' protection was so effective that not one was lost.

[34 : 12] You say, oh, but doesn't it say except for one? Yes, it does, but it first says none were lost but the one doomed to destruction. So, it wasn't because of any failure on Jesus' part to protect them that Judas was lost.

You see, he never was one of those that the Father had given to the Son. and charged with, you go and live for him, die for him, rise for him, protect him. Now, he wasn't one of them.

He never really was one of the sheep. He was rather a wolf in sheep's clothing which was all part of the eternal plan of God according to the Scripture. It says, it all happened according to the Scripture.

Father, according to the plan that you made. Jesus' protection is so effective that not one was lost. Now, in a few minutes, Judas and the arresting mob would arrive.

Jesus would go out to them. What would he say to them? Who are you seeking? Jesus of Nazareth. I'm he. I'm he.

[35 : 22] I'm the one you're after. Take me and let them go. You see, he's protecting them. He knows what they can handle and what they can't. Let them go, shielding them. And just hours later when the infinite wrath of God was threatening and standing against his disciples, Jesus would come to the cross to the place of punishment and say to his Father, take me and let them go.

He's protecting them. He's living for their protection. And this is the one who has been protecting and keeping them safe so that none of them was lost.

But that was the case. Now he is leaving them. And earlier that evening when he told them that, it caused them great fear and sadness.

For his going away would leave them exposed to this great danger. And they would be as sheep without a shepherd. And so Jesus prays for their protection. And he entrusts them into the loving care of his heavenly Father.

He gave them to me, Father. I protected them. I kept them safe so that not one is lost. But now my work is finished. And I'm coming back to you. They can't survive on their own.

[36 : 37] There's no match for their dangers. So now, Holy Father, you protect them by the power of your great name, the same name that you gave me. All the divine attributes combined for their protection and all with the same concern that I have for them, you have for them.

For all that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine. Care for these disciples. Well, our dangers are real, but so is our ongoing protection in the care of our heavenly Father in answer to the powerful prayers of Jesus.

Now remember, Jesus is intentionally praying all of this in the presence of his disciples. They're listening as he's praying.

And in verse 13, Jesus tells us that this prayer is not only for the ears of his heavenly Father, but it was for them to hear. He says, I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

Now consider this. Jesus is just hours away from his death and his spirit returning to the Father. If he waited until his return just hours later to the Father to make this prayer to the Father, Father, protect them, well then, his prayer would be no less effectual in protecting them, but it would mean his disciples would lose the comfort and joy of having heard Jesus pray for their protection.

[38 : 22] And so he says, Lord, though I'm coming to you now, I'm saying these things while I'm still in the world within earshot of my disciples so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

So don't miss the heart of Jesus in that statement. the heart of Christ for his disciples and not only just for those 11 who originally heard his prayer, but for us because they heard it and wrote it down. We've read it and we know that this is his heart toward us. If he'd waited to heaven to pray to the Father, we most likely would not know of this prayer and so we would lose the joy that it brings to us.

And so this prayer, as I've said, is a window into the heart of Jesus for his people. His great concern is not only for our protection, but also for our full joy of knowing his protection.

And as the next petition will show, he not only wants us holy, here we see he wants us happy. He wants the full measure of his own joy to be in us.

[39 : 37] what a kind savior we have who delights in the well-being, in the joy of his servants. What a kind shepherd who not only prays for our petition, but prays in a way that will minister to our fullness of joy.

So he wants us to hear how precious he is, how precious we are to him. As he speaks to the Father, these are the ones you gave me, Father. We can sense his love for us.

He wants us to hear how pleased he is with our accepting and believing and obeying his word. And to know that this has brought glory to him through us.

He wants us to hear how he's left us in the world on purpose. It's not a, it's what's going to happen when you see me killed and later ascend to heaven.

It's not an accident. It's all planned. It's on purpose. I'm leaving, but I'm leaving you here. And it's a wonderful thing to know. He knows all about its dangers.

[40 : 38] He wants us to hear how much we mean to him and how concerned he is for the Father to protect us as he pours out his heart to the Father for our protection. That not one of us be lost.

And all of this, you see, so that we might have the full measure of his joy in us. So Christian, that's his heart for you tonight. His heart is for, his own joy to so fill you, to fill your cup full and running over in this wicked world that opposes you, especially in this world where you have such danger and hardship and opposition.

Yes, in this world we will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. And we can have joy in our troubles, a joy he wants you to have knowing that why does he want us to have this fullness of joy?

Well, he delights in our enjoyment of his protection, but he also knows that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Our strength to do what?

Our strength to persevere. Our strength to keep fighting the good fight and not to lose to the world and the devil and our flesh. Our strength in the trials that we face to the very end.

[42 : 02] So, let his joy in your joy fill your cup full to running over. How blessed we are to know that Jesus prays for us and to know what he prays for us.

So, here is our safety and our protection, but also our comfort and our joy to know that the one who didn't let any one of those 11 be lost is not going to let any one of you who are hanging on to Christ alone for salvation ever be lost.

He ever lives to intercede for us. Peter and the others may sleep when they should have been praying, but our Jesus never slumbers or sleeps in his watch care over us.

Every day, every hour, moment by moment, I'm kept in his love, I'm kept in his prayers, while we sleep, he prays, while we work, he prays, while we play, he prays, and it's what he's doing now.

Look up and see him there, ever living to intercede for you. Drink it in for your encouragement and rejoice to know that you will never perish because Jesus will never stop praying for you.

[43 : 21] If you're outside of Jesus Christ, you're in a dangerous place. Get into Christ. Trust in him and he will pray for you even as he prays for all of his disciples.

No one gets to heaven without Jesus, without his blood being shed for them and without his prayers to the Father for them. What a blessed privilege.

Happy, thrice happy, the people who have a part in the prayers of Jesus. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory and majesty, power and authority before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen and hallelujah. Let's go in the strength and the joy of the Lord.