

Grace Filled Doggedness

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[0 : 00] Joshua 8. We've recently heard how Israel was defeated by Ai.! Now we're going to read how they go back in battle against them at the Lord's command.

! So we're going to read chapter 8, verses 1-29. Then the Lord said to Joshua, Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you and go up and attack Ai, for I have delivered them into your hands, the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.

You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves.

Set an ambush behind the city. So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose 30,000 of his best fighting men and sent them out at night with these orders.

Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Do not go very far from it. All of you be on the alert. And I and all those with me will advance on the city.

[1 : 15] And when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city.

For they will say, They are running away from us as they did before. So when we flee from them, you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The Lord your God will give it into your hands. When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the Lord has commanded. See to it. You have my orders. Then Joshua sent them off.

And they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai to the west of Ai. But Joshua spent that night with the people. Early the next morning, Joshua mustered his men.

And he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai. The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it.

[2 : 16] They set up camp north of Ai with the valley between them and the city. Joshua had taken about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai to the west of the city.

They had the soldiers take up their positions. All those in the camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it.

That night, Joshua went into the valley. When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet the Israelites in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah.

But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city. Joshua and all the Israelites let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled toward the desert.

All the men of Ai were called to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel.

[3 : 21] They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel. Then the Lord said to Joshua, Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city.

So Joshua held out his javelin toward Ai. As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire.

The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising in the sky, rising against the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction.

For the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the desert had turned back against their pursuers. For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke was going up from the city, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai.

The men of the ambush also came out of the city against them so that they were caught in the middle with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives.

[4 : 31] But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua. When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the desert where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it.

Twelve thousand men and women fell that day, all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out the javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai. But Israel did carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of this city as the Lord had instructed Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day.

He hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body from the tree and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate.

And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day. Let's hear the word the Lord preached. Well, if you're going to live the Christian life, you have to learn to try again.

[5 : 54] Unless your Christian life is just completely different than mine, the way forward is through a lot of failures. The Christian life takes a lot of grace-inspired, dogged determination of coming back after falling down.

Hundreds of years ago, there was a king of Scotland. This is a well-known story. Maybe you've heard it. The king of Scotland's name was Robert the Bruce. And the king of England made war against him, brought in a huge army.

And the point was to drive Robert the Bruce out of Scotland and to take Scotland and to make it a part of England. And six times, Robert the Bruce led his Scottish army out against the English army. And six times, the English army won. Until finally, the entire army of Scotland was just scattered. And the king, Robert the Bruce, was forced into hiding. And then one rainy day, he was in a cave, thinking, pondering what he should do.

[7 : 14] He was tired. He was discouraged. And he noticed a spider up on the wall of the cave. And the spider was trying to weave her web.

And the spider was trying to get from one side of the one wall to another wall. And six times, according to the story, which sounds historically a little iffy.

But six times, she tried to throw her thread from one edge of the cave wall to another. And six times, her thread didn't make it. But, you know, the spider didn't lose hope.

The spider didn't give up. And the spider went for one more time and caught the other wall. And that's when it hit Robert the Bruce. Yes, I need to just try again.

And so he sent out messengers throughout the whole land with these hopeful messages to his discouraged people. And then a seventh battle was fought. And this time, they were able to drive the English back out of the Scottish territory.

[8 : 26] And that's why Scotland is separated, even to this day to some degree, from England. And so much of the time, that is the Christian life.

It's falling and getting back up and falling and getting back up. It's called perseverance. And perseverance is one of those virtues and characteristics that God is working into us.

It's part of our godliness. Because God is a God who perseveres. He stays on, even through difficulty.

So it's after failure doing it again. So I've preached a bad sermon. Or I made a phone call and I was trying to encourage someone and I probably didn't say some of the right things.

Or there's some good and there's some bad in everything that we do. Should we give up? Should I give up? Well, Joshua 8 teaches me, teaches us, to try again.

[9 : 34] To go back. Israel lost the first battle. Sin had intercepted God's blessing the first time around in Ai. But now it was time to try again.

And so God says to Joshua, don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. I've given Ai into your hands. It's time to move forward. It's time to get up.

It's time to try again. So my question for you, as we go into this text, is there somewhere, something, someplace, where you've given up?

Have you let fear, fear of failure, fear of the pain of falling down, or discouragement paralyze you? I just want you to try to, maybe you can't think of anything right now, but definitely as you go away from here, think of places where I've quit trying and that's not right.

Look at Joshua 8. God says, don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. You need to take that out of Joshua's mailbox and bring it and read it for yourself, because all of these things were written for us that we might find comfort and hope.

[10:59] And so if you don't at first succeed, try, try again. God in His grace helps us to do just that. And there's going to be three lessons tonight, and they're all about this trying again after failure.

Of going forward after defeat, moving on after failure, because chapter 8 follows chapter 7. The conquest of Ai comes after the defeat of Ai's hands, and that's how it is so often. There's defeat, and then there's victory. And so we need to learn the art of doing that. And there's three lessons, at least three lessons in Joshua 8, that shows us how to do this or why we can do it. It gives us some of the grace. It gives us some of the wisdom and understanding for getting up and trying again. And the first lesson is this, that God often is purifying us, or He often purifies us before giving us the victory.

He often purifies us, deals with our sin before giving us the victory. So a couple of weeks ago, we looked at Achan's sin, and he was faithless.

[12:16] He lied. He stole. He hid. But he was uncovered. The sin that he thought he had covered up, that no one would ever know about, it was laid bare.

It all came out, and he was punished. And you can't help but think that the rest of Israel learned a lesson.

It was a lesson in theology, not in words, but in deed, that our God is holy, that He knows, that He requires obedience. He is serious about sin, and He's serious about obedience.

And so you can imagine the reverence, the fear, the renewed sense of careful obedience as they go and march on Ai again.

That there was this renewed vigor to obey. There was this renewed purity that came from God uncovering and dealing with Achan's sin.

[13:21] Now, we see that in this case, God purified before He allowed further progress.

He purified His people before they were able to move on. And as we saw that, did it remind you of anything, of any story that we heard in the book of Acts?

Acts? We just came through looking through the book of Acts. Did Achan's story remind you of another story in Acts?

What's a story in Acts that happened sort of near the beginning of the gospel conquest? What was that story that, it didn't involve problems on the outside, but it involved problems on the inside?

What story in Acts involves people lying and trying to cover up their sin? Do you know what story I'm talking about?

[14:23] Ananias and Sapphira. You remember, it was near the beginning of the conquest, of the gospel conquest in Acts. There had already been a great victory.

3,000 people in Jerusalem had been saved. God had spoken the word. The gospel trumpet had blared. And 3,000 hearts, their walls just came tumbling down.

Salvation and victory was everywhere. But really, very close on the heels of that, unbeknownst to everyone, there was this worm at the heart of things. There was greed.

And there was lying. And there was idolatry and covering up. Ananias and Sapphira had sold a field. And Ananias, although all of it was his, he had presented the price of the field as the whole thing.

He lied in order to get glory from the apostles, meanwhile, keeping some of the money for himself. But nothing was hidden from God. Don't expect to get away with it when you're lying to the Holy Spirit who reads the very motives behind the thoughts of our hearts.

[15:34] And questions were asked. Opportunities were given to come forward and to come clean. But nothing happened. And Peter said, you have not lied to men, but you have lied to God.

And Ananias died. And Sapphira was given the same chance. And she lies. And she falls down dead. And what I want you to take away from that is learn what happened next.

And this is what it says after that. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. No one else dared to join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

I think that's saying that no one dared to join them that wasn't a real disciple. Because listen to what it says. It's saying people didn't want to be fakes. Because listen to what it says.

Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. Do you see the pattern of Joshua? Do you see the pattern in Acts?

[16:36] That purification. There's sin. And then there's purification. And then there's renewed growth and renewed progress.

Renewed victory. And what we should take away from that. What can we learn about that for our own lives? It's just this. That God is more interested in our purity than in our victory and in our progress.

God will put our progress, whatever that progress might be, He will put that on hold to deal with our sin.

To deal with our sin. There's no point in going forward if we are going forward holding our sin cradled in our heart, cherishing it and hiding it.

And so, have you hit a brick wall? You're not going anywhere. You're not making progress. It feels like you're bogged down in your Christian life.

[17:44] I just want to enter this as a possibility. But perhaps, not always, but perhaps, you need to look for your Achan.

You need to look for your sin. Are you cherishing some sin? Are you holding it close, not letting it go? And it doesn't matter if it's big or small. Achan was one man in a couple million.

Ananias and Sapphira were just two people. But sin is like yeast. You don't scoop up a whole cup full of yeast and put it in, you just take a pinch of yeast.

And it spreads through the whole dough. At our sister Jeanette's funeral, we heard about how she kept her starter for her sourdough bread.

Going. For 30 years. So yeast, I think this is how it works. I could be correct. Max is like, I'm no help. Thanks. Yeast that she put in that starter 30 years ago went from one batch to another batch and another batch.

[18:56] For 30 years, lived on and spread. Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 says that's what sin is like. A little yeast goes a long way.

11 is the whole batch. And so have you hit a brick wall? Maybe. Not always. But maybe God is saying, get the yeast out.

Deal with that sin. Even if it's a small sin, deal with it. We're not moving on until you are pure. And my encouragement would be take that lesson to heart.

In the story of Achan and in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, we see how serious God takes it. They died before conquest restarted.

God will have you holy. God will make you hate your sin. He is serious about it. And so don't make him, don't make it harder on yourself than you have to.

[20:02] For your own sake, why make God turn up the heat even hotter than he has to? We sing that song about having a conscience. How does it go? It's as quick as that.

You just notice it. And you deal with it. You deal with that sin. And that's our first lesson that what's how do we move on after failure?

We have to realize that God is going to deal with our sin. And so he often purifies us before he gives us progress. And so look to your sin and get it out. Repent. Confess. Now the second lesson is that the Lord is quicker to get us back on track than often we are.

The Lord is quicker to have us get back going than we often can be. So after a fall, after a failure, it's easy to lose heart.

It's easy to get discouraged. It's easy to want to give up. It's easy to think that God is against us. He's sort of put us in a holding pattern.

[21:04] He's sort of put us on the shelf. And we're just going to stay here for a while. And it seems that Joshua may have been prone to this discouragement. I mean, you've heard it again and again in the book of Joshua.

God saying, don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Remember when James said that Elijah was a man just like us.

I think what we're seeing here in Joshua is a man who's just like us with the same, given to the same doubts and discouragements, wrestling with these things just like we do.

He was a man just like us. But look how kindly God comes to Joshua again and again. Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Take that whole army.

Take your whole army. Go up and attack Ai. Achan's sin had interrupted God's blessing, but now Achan's sin had been dealt with.

[22 : 12] It was taken care of. It was over. There wasn't, was there any lingering anger? Was there any lingering wrath? Was God just sort of 75% for the Israelites now?

No. He says, don't be afraid. Get up. Go. Take the whole army and attack. It's God's doing. It's God back at the helm.

He's directing the whole Israelite army. And so what so often keeps us from trying again are these two things that God says don't be. Don't be afraid. It's fear.

It's discouragement. Have you noticed in your own heart? Have you read that? That paralyzing effect that those things have on us? If I'm afraid, I have a hard time trying something.

And if I'm discouraged, I have a hard time trying again. And I collapse in on myself. And I start going around and around in my own mind going nowhere.

[23 : 16] Doing nothing. It's really not so much laziness as it is fear. And so we sit there. But look who is ready to go.

It's God. Who's ready to get back at it? It's the Lord. The Lord picks us up. The Lord says, let's go again. Let's try again. Let's do it again. And you do that with your children, don't you?

I don't think there's any parent who ever just gave up after one time when you're trying to teach your child to ride their bicycle. You don't say, oh, you crashed once. That's it.

Let's quit. No parent does that. And God doesn't do that for us either. And so the child says, but Dad, I can't do it. And we say, yes, you can.

Yes, you can. Don't cry. You can do this. And then you put your hand on their back and you push them down the road again. And that's our God. He's quicker to get us back up off of our feet and get us going down the road than we so often are.

[24 : 21] It's never his reluctance. It's never his reluctance. And so has God dealt with your sin? Has he brought it to your attention?

Has he loaded your conscience and you've been broken hearted and you've repented and you've confessed it? Well, don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Try again.

That is a hard thing to get right. Sometimes we go through our repentance and our confession too quickly. That's what I would call just 1 John 1.9-ing it, where you just take it and you say, well, that's it.

And you abuse that passage. Sometimes we forgive ourselves and restore ourselves when God hasn't forgiven us nor restored us yet.

John Owen, the great Puritan, says, wait for the Lord to do these things. Don't do it yourself. So don't be hasty to move on and get going when you shouldn't be hasty.

[25 : 35] That is one danger. Moving too soon, not having real, true, deep heart work. But the other danger seems to be the danger that we see here in Joshua 8, where maybe in some senses Joshua and the whole community is a little bit shell-shocked, a little bit not sure of themselves anymore, not sure what they should do.

They're sitting here maybe in their fear and downheartedness when the matter is over. And we can do that too. So have you repented?

Have you gone to the cross? Have you dealt with Jesus? Have you given Him your sins? Have you used, have you really applied 1 John 1, 9 in its true sins about confessing your sin?

And then I would say believe the promise. Believe the promise that when we do that He's just and He'll forgive us of our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If you believe what God says about His displeasure for your sin, then why wouldn't you believe what He says about forgiving your sin? You know, that's selective faith.

[26 : 54] Believing half of something. And selective faith is a Satan kind of faith. It's the kind of faith that He wants you to have. He either wants you to believe God's all wrath and He has no mercy or He's all mercy and has no wrath.

Either one will do. Either one will damn you. Either one is Satanic. But real faith believes both. So if you're forgiven, then don't be afraid.

God is for you. God is 100% behind you for that next try. God is 100% behind you for that battle against sin and Satan and troubles and trials.

The sin is done. It's buried. It's thrown into the deepest sea. It's buried in that crimson flood of the cross. He's moved on.

So get up and move on with Him. The only time God lingers over our sin is when we linger over it in our hearts.

[27 : 56] When we cherish it in our hearts. But if we hate it and we leave it behind, He moves on and He says, don't be afraid.

Don't be discouraged. That's the second lesson. Now, the third lesson is really the entire rest of the chapter.

And it's a lesson about God's promise and our responsibility. God's promise and our responsibility. Because what you see in Joshua 8 and the whole of it is a plan.

Well, it's a promise. And then God gives Israel a plan to accomplish and to do. And so, the Lord says to Joshua, I have delivered, past tense, it's as good as done.

I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. But how, let me ask you, how was He going to give it to them? How were they going to get it?

[29 : 05] Was it going to be like Jericho? A miracle? Was it just going to happen? Was it going to just be like, you know, John Newton was wishing when he penned those words, I hope that in some favored hour he would grant my request.

Well, what do we see in chapter 8? We see strategy. We see planning. We see ambush and effort and fighting and sweating and working all day.

And it's take all the men. It's going to be a full effort. Remember the first time, it's like, why weary all the people? Remember that in chapter 7?

Why weary all the people? Just take two or three. Not this time. Everyone. All the people. All the fighting men. And so God gives Joshua a battle plan and it's because of some of the numbers and we're not exactly sure exactly what it is, but he says take one or two groups and hide them in ambush.

and when the rest go out to fight again, we're going to pretend to be running away from them, retreating. We're going to use that last defeat for our advantage. So we're going to pretend to fight.

[30 : 23] We're going to run back and when they all start pursuing us, then rise up and take the city. And then look at verse 7. After he gets this whole plan, he says, after you do all of that, it says, and the Lord your God will give it into your hand.

God promises them, Ai. He says, I'm going to give it to them. It's a grace. Whenever God gives something to man, it's grace.

It wasn't just going to happen without God's grace. Chapter 7 shows us that. But, again, what were they going to have to do to receive that promise?

to inherit that promise? Well, they had to work the plan. God said, it's going to require planning, and fighting, and sweating, and strategy, and violent action.

It's not, there's no let go, and let God do the rest. That's what J.I. Packer calls the hot tub religion. That's just like jacuzzi Christianity.

[31 : 33] No, just like Joshua, God calls us to be soldiers, to be servants, to be sold out and spirit filled.

So, who was to go? All of them. It was to be a maximum effort. So, how do you move on after defeat? How do you move on after defeat?

How do you go on after falling? Well, you do it with God's promise in your ear. they're going, they're marching to Ai knowing God has given us the city. And actually, that's so much of the encouragement.

That we're going to go and fight again, even though we lost the last time, and we know this time is going to be different because God has promised us. And so we go with the promise of God echoing in our ears.

Think of all those promises. I will be with you. I will help you. I love you. Jesus died to make you holy.

[32 : 34] Jesus died to bring you home. And with those gospel promises in our ears and reverberating in our hearts, then you go all out.

Maximum effort. One commentator wrote this. The way to strengthen melting hearts is to go forward in faith, not lamenting the past.

This has to do with what we saw in Sunday school this morning. Not lamenting the past or wishing the things were other than what they are, but rather building on the promises of God and putting our maximum effort into obedience to his commands.

promise. You see, it's both. God's promise and our effort. God's promise. The gospel is not, well, it is in opposition to relying on our works, relying on ourselves, but it doesn't stand in opposition to all efforts.

Charles Spurgeon was asked, how do you reconcile God's sovereignty with man's responsibility? responsibility. And his wonderful answer was, you don't need to reconcile friends.

[33 : 51] And isn't that what we see here? Israel? How is Israel going to win over Ai? How did they do it?

Well, they fought. They obeyed. Joshua was up early, staying up late. They followed the plan. They gave it their all. And if they didn't do that, they wouldn't have taken Ai. But how did Israel win over Ai?

God promised it to them and gave it to them. It was both. How do you get up after failure? You hold on to both of those truths?

That I have responsibility, but God has promised. And you hold on to both. And really, it's so dangerous, and that's what's so dangerous about let go and let God.

[34 : 58] That's what's so dangerous about any sort of hyper Calvinism. Any sort of thing where we are just waiting passively with nothing to do upon the Lord.

Waiting on the Lord is not waiting doing nothing on the Lord. That sort of passiveness of I am just waiting for God to do this for me, it ruins people in this world.

And it ruins people in the next world. The let go and let God Christian sits around waiting for God to hand them the victory, and we can all have that mindset, waiting for God to do something while I do nothing, and those people never progress.

They never take their eyes. They get knocked down and they stay down and it can seem so pious what they're saying. Waiting there on the ground, waiting for God to act, but God is saying to them like what he said to Joshua, get up, go, take all the men, try again, but they don't obey and they don't move forward.

And what ends up happening is they get confused, they lose heart, they become discouraged, they wonder what's wrong with their faith, they wonder what's wrong with why isn't God helping me, they don't move forward, not because God is stubborn and won't answer their prayers, but because they're not doing what God told them to do.

[36 : 48] God does give what he promises, but he gives it in the way of obedience and faith. And you see what I'm saying, it ruins you for this world. When you're that kind of Christian, you're inevitably going to be making little progress in despair, in misery, confused, wondering what is wrong, but to progress, to go on, to be able to take a fall and get back up and get going, you have to hold on to both of these things.

That I am responsible, and I desperately, I need God to help me. so it's ambush, it's plan, it's fight, it's obey, and it's I will give you the city.

Trust and obey. That's how we get up after a failure. That's how we make progress after falling down. But this waiting around for God to do something while I do nothing, not only will ruin you Christian for this life, but it will ruin anyone who believes it forever.

Because salvation doesn't come to those who just wait for God to save them. Yes, he promises, and he will save his elect, but it also says he saves all those who call upon his name.

He says, call, confess, repent, give me no rest. So the picture is, God, I won't even let you sleep.

[38 : 24] That's not waiting around for God to act. Yes, it is waiting for God to do something. You're waiting for God to save your soul.

You're waiting for him to forgive you. You're waiting for him to bring you to himself. But it's totally, that's waiting like a baby bird is waiting for their mother to come bring them food.

And the baby bird has his mouth wide open. And the baby bird is squawking and squealing. He wants fed. those are the people that God saves.

Maybe some of you are like baby birds with their feathers stuck like this and their mouth shut saying, I'm just waiting for God to save me. But your silence only says you don't want to be saved. you don't really want to be fed. Open your mouths. Squawk and squeal until he answers.

[39 : 33] Because those who call, he answers. Those who seek, find. Those who knock and keep knocking, that's who he opens the door for. Maybe you say, I just don't understand why I have to do that.

I don't understand how these two things go together. I don't understand why is it like that. And my really succinct answer, there's a lot bigger answers, but really my succinct and very practical answer is, does that really matter?

That you can't put these two things together. That's what he says to do. Naaman the Syrian, who had leprosy, he almost didn't get healed.

Because he thought, it's just dumb. I came all this way to dip seven times in the Jordan River. Aren't there cleaner rivers in my home country?

Why would I have to do that? And his servant's very practical answer was basically, why don't you just do what he says? You're not going to be helped if you don't do anything.

[40 : 52] You're not going to get anything by not doing anything. If you want saved, then you confess.

You tell them all your sins. You repent of those things. You turn away from them. You turn your heart and your mind against them. And you call out to God. And you cling to Jesus through the whole thing.

You cling to his promise that Jesus is the savior of sinners and I'm a sinner. And you cling to that until God answers. In other words, you squawk and you squeal until he saves you.

He says, open your mouth and I will fill it. Well, may God give you that grace to open your mouth and call out and be saved.

Let's pray. Our heavenly father, we do thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for these important and necessary lessons that we learn because we've all fallen many, many times and we need to learn to get up and to persevere believing and obeying.

[42 : 10] so help us to be like Israel. Help us to be like Joshua, strong in our faith and careful in our obedience, trusting you and obeying.

and I pray for the lost person here who is merely just waiting around, waiting for lightning to strike, waiting for you to do something while they do nothing.

I pray that you would open their eyes and their hearts to their true danger, their true hunger, their true need and make them load their conscience, bear them down until they truly see their and feel their need for salvation, that you would open their mouths and fill it with faith.

I pray that you would save. Please encourage our hearts as we go on our way. I pray for any brother or sister here who is discouraged in their Christian walk, who's been beaten up and fallen down.

I pray that you would encourage their hearts, take away their fear, bring Jesus Christ close and present to them, that they might lay a hold of him and take his hand and keep walking.

[43 : 30] I pray for them and I pray for their holiness. I pray for their happiness that you would bless them in every way. We ask and I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.