

Imitating the Incarnation

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Take your Bibles and turn to Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2, verses 1-11.

If any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[1:46] Well, we've been studying the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the Christmas tree is taken down and all the decorations are stored away and we're back into the ordinary routines of life, what is there about the incarnation that is to affect the way we live the rest of this year, and indeed every year that God gives us?

What lasting effects should it have upon me that the eternal Son of God, without ceasing to be God, also became man, that he might die for me and take me to heaven?

So we're looking at the implications of the incarnation, the applications of this truth. How should it affect me? What should I do with the incarnation?

And we've seen four things so far. We saw that we are to believe and confess it. There's no genuine Christianity that does not confess and believe that Jesus Christ is God and man.

We are to adore and worship this God-man. It's not only a doctrine to believe and to confess, but it is a person, the God-man, to worship and adore.

[3:09] And then we are thirdly to make use of the God-man. He's there in heaven for us, a real man. And he's there for us.

And he's on a throne of grace for us. And he can sympathize with us. And he can help us so we make use of our high priest, who is both God and man. And then thirdly or fourthly, we're to imitate him.

We are to be like Jesus Christ in the incarnation. We notice that the doctrine of the incarnation is found in some of the most practical segments of the Apostle Paul's letters to the churches.

He's writing to the Corinthians. How do you spur believers on to excel in the grace of giving? Well, you do so by holding before them the incarnation.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

[4:13] Are you becoming poor financially, poor to enrich others? That's the clear implication of the incarnation.

And now today we find ourselves in Philippians chapter 2. Verses 5 through 8 are some of the grandest statements on the incarnation of Jesus Christ found anywhere in the scriptures.

And where do we find them? We find them in a letter to a local church in Philippi. And why does Paul write about the incarnation? Because he sees it as the remedy to the common sins that were marring and threatening to harm the church's unity in Philippi, hindering their service to one another.

He sees the incarnation as the remedy to these sins. They're the same sins that are found in every congregation to one degree or another. They are the self-sins.

The self-sins. Those sins that have self in front of them. Like self-preoccupation. Being stuck on ourselves.

[5 : 34] Thinking of our own interest. And that trumping any interest of others around us. Or self-importance.

Self-importance that thinks that I am better than others. Self-importance that is ever consulting my needs and my desires.

Or self-promotion. Self-will. Demanding to have it my way. Those self-sins produce the ugly offspring of rivalries and quarrels, complaining and arguing, and needless disagreements among the people of God who are looking out for number one.

That's the context in which we find this wonderful passage on the incarnation. Now how does Paul deal with these problems?

How do you deal with the self-sins and with Euodia and Syntyche who are fighting together and arguing and complaining and rivalries in the church? The things that we have hints of throughout this letter to the Philippians.

[6 : 47] Well, Paul certainly urges them to unity. If you're there in Philippians 2, look at verses 2 and following. He urges them to have the same mind.

To have the same love. To have one spirit. One purpose. So he does urge them on to unity. And he certainly urges them and exhorts them to a humble forgetfulness of themselves out of loving concern to others.

Notice verses 3 and 4. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. I mean, don't do anything. That would draw attention to yourself. Nothing out of self to put yourself forward. Don't do anything with that kind of motivation.

But in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Their opinions, their ideas, their needs, their interests as more important than your own.

[7 : 51] Each of you should look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others. So he is here exhorting them to these graces.

These self-sacrificing graces of love to others. But then he sets before them the incarnation of Jesus Christ and calls upon them to imitate Christ in his incarnation.

Verse 5. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus. Have the same attitude in your heart that was in Christ when as God he became a man.

He who, being in the very nature of God, with all the rights and attributes and qualities of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Do you see that humble, self-sacrificing, forgetfulness of his own interests out of the greater concern for our interests?

[9 : 17] Jesus Christ in his incarnation is the perfect example of all that the apostle is here urging the Philippian believers to be and to do.

They are to do nothing out of selfish ambition. What do we see in the incarnation? We see Jesus Christ not acting out of selfish ambition, not acting out of concern for my interests, but rather in humility, putting the interests of others before himself.

It's that example that is meant to urge us toward this behavior. And the apostle Paul fully expects that imitating Christ, that all these people problems would dry up at the root and the sins, the self-sins would wither with self-forgetfulness.

So the apostle Paul in Corinthians and here in Philippians, he's using the incarnation as his biggest gun. He's got smaller guns and he's got smaller motivations.

We saw that last week. Yes, he holds before them the Macedonian churches and their giving, but oh, his biggest gun is the way Jesus being rich became poor for us.

[10 : 36] And so here we see the same thing. The incarnation is his biggest lever of motivation. In Corinthians, the incarnation was the crowbar to open our checkbooks with sacrificial giving.

Here in Philippians 2, the incarnation is the crowbar to make us forget about ourselves and to sacrifice our own interests for the interests of others by humbly serving them.

Or to put it another way, the incarnation is his motivation to get us to think outside of the box of self. So here's the box of self. And in this box, I don't consider anything without asking what's in it for me. And what will this do for me?

And how will it affect me and mine? And so I'm in this box of self. And Paul holds up the incarnation of Christ to pry us out of that box of self to where we start to think more highly of others and put their interests, their needs, their wants, their ideas above our own.

[11:53] B.B. Warfield, writing on these verses, entitled his sermon, Imitating the Incarnation. Now, anytime we talk about imitating God, there are obvious limits to how we can do that.

Jesus Christ was the eternal son of God. None of us start out as God. And so we can't, as God, stoop so low and become man. There's only one God-man.

And in one sense, the incarnation cannot be repeated. It was an event, a one-time event, as much as the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But the spirit of the incarnation is to be repeated over and over in every disciple of Jesus Christ.

Think of it this way. Husbands, in Ephesians 5.25, you are called, remember, husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church.

You're being called to imitate Christ, aren't you? There. You imitate Christ in his love for the church. There are redemptive aspects about Jesus' love for the church that you cannot imitate.

[13:11] Husbands, you can't die for your wife's sins, can you? So there are limits to how you can imitate Christ. Nevertheless, husbands, that doesn't get you off the hook of needing to so love in a way that is reflective of that love that Jesus had for his bride.

So it is when we come to speak about the incarnation and imitating the incarnation. No, we can't as God become man. But the spirit that moved the God to become man is to be alive and well in us.

Let's not forget Paul's main purpose in this whole section. He wants us as the people of God to humbly stoop to serve each other in the body of Christ.

And so he says, come with me and view the ultimate stoop of him who was everlasting God and who became men. None could start higher.

None could stoop lower. And this great stoop then, as we read in Philippians 2, moves all the way from heaven's glories, all the way down the stair steps to the hellish cross of Calvary.

[14:29] And what marked the Lord Jesus at every step in this stooping is self-humbling, self-sacrifice, self-forgetfulness, concern for the interests of others, not his own.

It's what Warfield calls self-sacrificing unselfishness. That's a mouthful. But it's the opposite of our self-sins, isn't it? Self-sacrificing unselfishness.

Now, that's what took Jesus to the death of the cross. Our text tells us he humbled himself and became obedient unto the death, the death of the cross. There's that humbling.

But his humbling wasn't just as the God-man to go to the cross. His humbling started way before that, when he left heaven, when as God he became man.

That was the first step in this humbling, self-forgetful, putting the concerns of others before his own process. It started in heaven.

[15:36] It started as God humbled himself to become man. That tells me that there is in the very nature of God a concern for the interests of others.

There is in the very nature of God a concern that sacrifices self-interests to enrich others. It's part of who he is as God.

It's not just true of the God-man, Jesus. It was true of him when he wasn't man. He was nothing but God. He had this desire to sacrifice his own concerns for the good, the eternal salvation of others.

And that's what Paul is holding before us. Think what he had.

The worship of heaven. Everyone acknowledging his worth. The glory and majesty and splendor that his father had. He had it equal with him. That was his.

[16:44] But rather than hanging on to it, the text says that he did not consider this pre-incarnate glory with the father. There's something to be grasped, to be held on to.

It was his, but he didn't say mine. Kids, do you have things that are yours and they're rightly yours? They were given to you and maybe a brother wants it.

And you don't say mine, but you rather give it to your brother or your sister. That's what Jesus did. Eternal glory was his, but he didn't grasp it and say mine.

I'm going to keep it. He rather laid aside the enjoyment of his glory that he might come and enrich a world of hell bound sinners.

He did so by making himself nothing. Our text says. Making himself nothing. A nobody in men's eyes.

[17:43] In order to save us. He became a real servant. A real human being. So who is he now? Now that he's become a man, a servant. Who is he who's so lately shown in majestic splendor, brighter than the sun?

Well, he's just the carpenter turned preacher. He's the man from Galilee. That's all he is. In the eyes of men. Nothing that we should desire.

And despised and rejected Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. Nazareth. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? So Jesus, though he was the most important one, was willing to become a nobody in man's opinion.

Even though he was actually king of all. You see the sacrifice? You see the unselfishness in that? The pure unselfishness and self-sacrificing love that considered our interests above his own. Sacrificing the enjoyment of his own pre-incarnate glory with the Father. Letting it be eclipsed so that men could not see it. I've read of a mother forgetful of herself running into a burning building out of concern to save the life of her dear children.

[19:06] What would cause someone to run into a death trap? Well, it was the love for the child that for the moment caused her to forget her own interests.

He, being God, saw me in my need. He saw me in my death trap of hell.

He saw where my sins were taking me. The hymn writer says, He saw me plunged in deep distress. And he flew to my relief. But in order to relieve me, to save me, he had to become man that he might die for me. Well, he forgot about himself and his own self-interest and enjoyments out of the desire to relieve me of my misery.

And he became a man that he might become sin for me. That he might die for me. Self-sacrificing unselfishness is what we see in the Lord Jesus incarnation.

[20:13] And that's the lever that Paul is using to pry us out of our selfish ambition, our high views of self.

To rather sacrifice our own interests out of ambitious concern for others. Do nothing out of selfish ambition. I wonder if I have ever done anything without anything of self in it.

Sometimes people are asked to share their most embarrassing moments. And I don't know, but it almost seems like that's what John might be doing in John chapter 13.

As he writes in his gospel, we were tired as we arrived at the upper room that night to eat the Passover with our Lord. And we were sure glad for that borrowed room.

It was completely furnished. Everything was there. There was the basin at the door, the pitcher of water, the towel for washing the feet. And the only thing missing in the whole room was the servant to do the servant's dirty work.

[21:21] And none of us were in the mood that night to wash each other's feet. I must confess that that very evening we had been arguing along the way among us about who was the greatest.

And so, frankly, it wasn't the first time we'd had that argument. It was rather an ongoing argument that we just renewed from time to time. And that night in the upper room, we were back at it.

And we were full of ourselves. We were full of selfish ambition and vain conceit. So none of us were about to wash the feet of the other. We thought it beneath us.

We'd much rather eat with dirty feet than to play the servant to each other. And so, with the water and the basin and the towel just staring at us, no one moved.

Until he got up. The Son of God. And he took off his outer garment.

[22:25] And he dressed himself in the form of a servant. Folks, this is picture language. We are meant to understand something through this picture. That's what he tells Peter.

You don't understand what I'm doing, but later on you will. So, he laid aside his outer garment and he dressed himself as a servant in a towel around his waist.

And proceeded to get down and wash our dirty feet. All 24 of them. And I don't know when I've been more embarrassed than when he, the Lord of glory, was down like a slave washing my feet.

When I had been too proud to wash my brother's feet. And I say if it wasn't John's most embarrassing moment, it perhaps should have been.

To see the Son of God down on his knees. Nothing makes pride look uglier. Nothing makes selfish ambition look more foolish and out of place.

[23:26] When we see him stooping so low. And then he told us, I have set you an example to imitate. Now you do what I have done.

You do it to one another. And my point in bringing up this illustration from John 13 is that if the example of the God man. This one who is God and man stooping down to wash feet is so devastating to proud self-importance.

What should the example of the incarnation be? Because in the incarnation we have God stooping to serve man. We have God humbling himself.

We have God disrobing, if you would, that outer garment of his glory that he enjoyed with the Father. We have God disrobing that resplendent glory of heaven.

God clothing himself with a lowly human nature. Taking on the very nature of a servant, a slave. We have God dressing himself to serve, not to be served.

[24 : 37] We have God sacrificing. His own interest. And not just to wash our feet, but to wash our souls in his own precious blood.

That's what we have in the incarnation. And that's an example powerful enough to wither our selfish ambition.

I think Pastor Jason has been referring a couple of times to a dark hole. Have you ever seen a scientific presentation of what a dark hole in space looks like?

It's like a funnel of water. The toilet draining in its water. Going down into a central pipe.

And it's not water. It's matter of outer space. And it just sucks into it. Everything around it. That's what we are by nature.

[25 : 38] We're that dark hole that sucks everything in. It's got to be about me. And that's the very thing that Paul is putting his finger on. In the church at Philippi.

And in our hearts. It's that idea of we live our lives in the box of self. And we don't think outside of it. But here's help. Here's help. For people who have natures.

By nature. Who suck everything into our self. Who by nature can't think out of the box of self. Here it is. Here's the incarnation. This is meant to help us. That's why it's in our Bibles.

And I do find help in it. I find that spending 15 to 20 minutes just meditating upon this incarnation of Jesus. That he, God, stooped to serve my salvation.

[26 : 34] In becoming man. To become sin. To die for me. I find something strange beginning to happen in my own heart. And all my desires to be something.

Feel so out of place before a God who made himself nothing. And all my desires to be a somebody are pathetic.

Before a God who made himself a nobody. For me. And preoccupation with my rights. And my interests.

And my comforts. And my ease. And everything that I do out of selfish ambition and self-importance. Becomes a stench in my own nostrils. As I am viewing his self-sacrificing unselfishness.

And I find renewed desires in my hearts to be like the Son of God. With self-sacrificing love poured out in the service of others.

[27 : 36] Where for the moment I forget about myself. Out of interest. In my brother. My sister's needs. It's when I see God stooping that I can pray with Amy Carmichael.

God harden me against myself. The coward with pathetic voice who craves for ease and rest and joy. Myself.

Arch traitor to myself. My hollowest friend. My deadliest foe. My clog whatever road. I go. It's in the light of the incarnation that I want more of this attitude of Jesus.

More of this God likeness. To stoop low. To lift others high. To become poor. To make others richer. To become nothing. To make others something.

What will it mean to imitate the incarnation of Jesus Christ in our church life? That's the context of the incarnation in Philippians 2.

[28 : 40] What will it look like to imitate the incarnation? Well it means when you come to church you don't expect everyone to minister to you. You see?

It's not the dark hole sucking all the attention my way. No we don't come to church with that. Who's here to minister to me? It's a whole different attitude isn't it?

That's not what Jesus did. No we come on the lookout for others in need. We come on the lookout for the concerns and interests of others.

Who looks low that I might lift up with a word of encouragement? Who can I rejoice with? Who has good news that I can come alongside and rejoice in their successes?

Who has sad news that I can come along and weep with them? Who can I spur on to love and good deeds by my own love and good deeds? I don't need to tell you what that kind of an incarnational attitude does for the unity of a church.

[29:49] When we all come with greater concern for the needs of the others. It causes our hearts to be knit together in love. That's why this portion on the incarnation is in our Bibles.

It's meant to do that very thing. So that we willingly sacrifice getting in the last word. Having it our way. Getting the credit for something.

People with the incarnational attitude of Christ are not out there pushing their own personal agendas. They're not arguing for their own preferences. They're not seeking their own glory. They're not tearing others down to put themselves forward.

And that's why Philippians 2 is in our Bible. And that's why we have this beautiful passage on the incarnation. So that beholding, contemplating the glory of God in the stoop of the incarnation.

We might be changed into the very same likeness. Which comes from the Lord who is the spirit. That's how it happens. That's how Christ's mind in the incarnation becomes ours.

[31:01] Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. How does that happen? How do you get the mind of Christ in the incarnation? Well you get it. By beholding it in him. Adoration is the key to imitation.

It's as you adore Christ stooping for us. That we become like him. That's what 2 Corinthians 3.18 says.

That it's beholding him stooping. Until you stoop yourself. And forget about yourself in the service of others. So fix your eyes on Jesus in the incarnation. And see how that works upon your heart.

As a lever to move you outside the box of self. To thinking of others more highly than yourself. We have in Jesus the pattern of this spirit in the incarnation.

But we also have the power to go and do likewise. That's not found in us either. It's found in the one who is both the pattern and the power. And so we draw this attitude from Christ himself.

[32:11] That's why we behold him. We adore him. And by faith we ask. And we draw this grace from Christ. Like a branch. Sucks sap from the vine.

And so as we are beholding this attribute of self-sacrificing. Unselfishness in Jesus. We're saying oh Jesus make me like that. And beholding him we're transformed into his likeness.

Now. It wasn't until this year that I saw the connection with the rest of. This chapter of Philippians 2 with what we've just studied.

And that's that. In the rest of the chapter. Paul introduces us to two incarnational men. By which I mean two men whose lives were stamped with the mind of Christ in the incarnation.

The first one's Timothy. In verses 19 through 24. He's Paul's most valuable co-worker. To say he's a valuable man to Paul is an understatement.

[33:16] Notice what Paul says in verse 20. I have no one else like him. How's that for a word of praise? No one. Paul had a lot of co-workers didn't he?

But he had no one like this man Timothy. What made him so valuable? To the apostle Paul. What made him so useful to the to others that they ministered to and to Christ's kingdom?

Well it was this incarnational attitude. It was the mind of Christ in the incarnation. And. He says I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

Isn't that what we saw in Christ? Christ. Though being God took a genuine interest in our welfare to the point of sacrificing his own for ours.

And Paul says that's what makes. Timothy so valuable. He has a genuine interest in your welfare. To the point of sacrificing his own immediate interests.

[34:18] And that's what makes any man or woman or young person valuable to any church. Any family. Any people. Any business. A genuine interest in the welfare of others.

To the point of sacrificing. Our own interest in serving theirs. It's also what makes Timothy so rare. Because he goes on to say in verse 21. And for everyone. In contrast to this one.

Everyone else looks out for his own interests. Not those of Jesus Christ. How sad that there are so few Timothys out there. But how precious there are that there are any Timothys out there.

Who have tasted of this grace in Jesus Christ. And have been transformed by that grace. To be like him. Self-sacrificingly.

Unselfish. May it mark every one of us. Increasingly in this coming year. There's another man he wants us to meet.

[35 : 25] He's Epaphroditus. The last five verses. 25 to 29. He calls him my brother. My fellow worker. My fellow soldier. He's your messenger Philipians.

You send him to take care of my needs. And now I'm sending him back to you. And when he gets there. Verse 29. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy. And honor men like him.

Why honor such men like Epaphroditus? Well he tells us. Because. Verse 30. Because he almost died for the work of Christ.

Risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me. You see he was so preoccupied serving God's servant Paul.

Then he forgot about himself. He forgot about the risk to his own life. And he was. Almost died for the work of Christ.

[36 : 21] Christ. Like his savior. He did not count his life dear to him. But was willing to lay it down. For others. Do you see the incarnational stamp of Christ upon these men?

Forgetful of self. To the. Point of laying down their lives for another. And it brings us back to verse 4. Each of you now. Each of you.

Should look not only to your own interests. But also to the interests of others. That's the spirit. Paul. The Holy Spirit as well. Who inspired Paul. Is seeking to instill in the Philippian believers.

Seeking to inculcate in our lives. The spirit that was so evident in men like Timothy. And Epaphroditus. Who got it from the Lord Jesus.

Who perfectly exemplified this self-sacrificing unselfishness. In his incarnation. In becoming man. So may this. Attitude of Christ ever mark.

[37 : 26] This church. And every believer. In it. Where nothing. Nothing is done. Out of selfish ambition of pride.

But where all take a genuine interest. In the welfare of others. So caught up in their concerns. That we. Rejoice with them. In their successes. As if they were our own.

And we weep with them. In their sorrows. As if they were our sorrows. And we pray for grace for them. Even as we pray. For ourselves. And we show deference.

To one another. Wanting as much. To understand the other. As to be understood. By them. And we're willing. To play second fiddle. To anyone here.

We're willing. To wash anyone's feet. Willing to walk. The second mile. The third mile. The fourth mile. For our brother. Or our sister. In Christ. So that brings us.

[38 : 25] To the question. Well how far. Should we go. In this matter. Of self-sacrificing. Unselfishness. How far will you go. In this matter. Of incarnate.

Of imitating Christ. For the good. Of your brothers. And sisters. This far. And no farther. How low. Will you stoop. To serve others. Is that beneath you.

Only this far. How much. Will you suffer. How much. Will you sacrifice. And if we ever think.

It's costing us too dearly. And we're. We're sacrificing too much. All we have to do. Is look over in the yoke. And see the Lord Jesus. And see. God.

Became a man. That he might become sin. That he might die. For us. And suddenly. When we're thinking. Of what Jesus did.

[39 : 22] Any talk of limits. And drawing a line. In the sand. And saying. I'll go this low. But no. It all seems so foolish. Doesn't it? No.

Let this mind. Be in you. That was in Christ. Jesus. That's our aim. To be. Like him. And this implication.

Of the incarnation. If it really sinks in. Will then start to measure. Our spiritual health. And the health of our church. By how much there is. Of this attitude. Of the incarnation.

So let us. Let us imitate. The Lord Jesus. But let us also. Worship him. Because in the incarnation. We see what kind of God.

We have in heaven. He is a. He is a God. Who is willing. To sacrifice. Something of his own. In order.

[40 : 18] To serve. Our. Interests. God. Now some people might say. Doesn't that put man. At the center. And God now. Exists. For man's good. I don't believe it does.

For a moment. God is at the center. But what kind of a God. Is he. Who in order to enrich us.

Become so poor. Forgets about his own. Enjoyments of heaven. To save us. What kind of God is it. That does all things.

For his own glory. It's the kind of God. That causes us to bow. And worship. And wonder. That this God. Should stoop down. To lift us up. And how does the section. On the incarnation end. Verses 9 through 11. Well therefore God. Because Jesus stooped so low. God did something.

[41:19] And in what he did. He showed how much he values. This self-sacrificing. Unselfishness. In his eternal son. Remember. The voice that boomed from heaven.

And this is my son. With whom I'm well pleased. What's he so well pleased. About his son. Nothing more than this. Quality. That is found.

Right to the core. Of the eternal Godhead. The willingness. To sacrifice. To enrich others. Therefore. Since he stooped so low.

God has exalted him. To the highest place. And given him a name. That is above every name. That at the name of Jesus. Every knee should bow.

And every tongue. Confess. That Jesus Christ. Is Lord. To the glory of God. The Father. Can you see in that. God's pleasure. In his son.

[42:15] Self-sacrificing. Sacrificing. Unselfishness. This is the only life worth living. The life like our Lord Jesus. May. The very passage on the incarnation.

Move us. To go. And to do likewise. Thank you Father. For sending your son. To save us from our self. All these self-sins.

That we. By nature. Find natural. Thank you for this greatest example of all. In our Savior's incarnation. And thank you for a sight of him afresh.

We asked you to. Show us more. About Jesus. And we pray that as we leave this place. This word. And this view of our Savior. Would not leave our hearts. But would shape the very way.

We think about ourselves. The way we think about others. Even as you thought about us. When we were lost in sin. Thank you.

[43:16] And we praise you in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.