

Living in a Combat Zone

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Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0 : 0 0] Well, when we travel through Africa, we go South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, if you get yourself to Malawi at some time in your life, and they've got a very strange habit when you ask for directions in Malawi, very friendly nation, wherever you are, no matter how far you've got to go, you ask someone, listen, I need to get to such and such a place, how long is it, you invariably get greeted with one of those big African smiles, and they say, it's not far, it's not far, just around the corner, just over the hill, regardless of how actually far it is, which is fine if you are going just around the corner and over the hill, but Malawi is a big place, and you're traveling in your broken down Land Rover Defender, and you're worried about petrol.

So if you're running out of petrol, being told it's not far, it's not going to be helpful. Or worse, what if there's lions around the corner, you know, this is Africa after all, and you're in your open top car, you didn't know that you had to prepare and close the top or get some other protection, or what worse, what is worse, this is still Africa, what if there's a bunch of hijackers waiting around the next corner, and you didn't get your gun out in time, or you didn't take a left or right turn.

So being told that there's no problem up ahead when there is a problem, it's not helpful. You want to know what's coming, so you can prepare.

And today's letter to the church in Smyrna is a word from Jesus to his church, prepare for something way worse than lions or gangs or hijackings.

It's a call for the church to prepare for a life in the combat zone. It's a call to arms.

[2 : 0 3] It's a call saying, boys, we're in a war here, and there's going to be fighting up ahead. Now, it's a short letter, it's literally four verses or so, but it packs a punch.

And in fact, it's placed here in the seven letters to highlight one of the major themes in Revelation, and that is that there's this monstrous, colossal, spiritual, cosmic level conflict going on in the world. We don't see it. We don't know it. We're South Africans. You probably all had a lack of briar this weekend, not realizing, not thinking really, that actually we're engaged in spiritual warfare just because we're Christians.

Christians, and we, as the followers of Jesus, are caught up smack bang in the middle of it. And the last thing you want to do is go into a war without knowing there's a war going on because you're going to get into trouble really quickly.

But like all good commanders, all good army commanders, Jesus doesn't just tell us we're in a war zone, and then, hey, good luck boys, he tells us what the traps are to look out for and what we can do to make it safely home.

[3 : 2 5] So today's letter, today's message is about living in the combat zone. Now, it might come as a bit of a surprise to some that we are living in a spiritual combat zone.

We don't normally think of Christianity as cosmic battle terms. Depending on your flavor of Christianity, depending on your relationship with Jesus, maybe it's coming to Sunday every now and then.

Ah, Christmas is coming up, that'll be nice. Sing a couple of songs, maybe send a few little pretty pictures with butterflies and a verse with cursive writing. Maybe Jesus is here to bless you, make your life better.

This talk of cosmic battle doesn't fit in with our picture of Christianity, but it should. This cosmic battle stuff should be in the forefront of our minds when we think of Jesus and of our Christianity and how we live our lives, because that's how the Bible describes what's happening in God's world. So this cosmic war was started by us, by us, when Adam gave into temptation and let sin and Satan and death into the world, ruling it and ruining it.

[4 : 50] All those centuries, all those millennia ago, that war started shortly after God made the world. We took the wrong choice, and instead of goodness, blessing and life, sin and judgment and death and Satan, these evils, these alien powers, forces trying to shape and reshape God's world into their image, but really to break it down and destroy it, came into the world.

In God's plan, it took some millennia to send Jesus, and it's through him, through the Bible tells us his death and resurrection, particularly his death and his resurrection, as we saw today now in Revelation, in our singing, the lion and both the lamb.

Having sent Christ, there's been a decisive defeat that has begun the downfall of these evil forces. It's begun the downfall of Satan and his demise.

And so in God's plan, the way that God's spiritual combat works, defeat is certain, but God has left the mop-up operations to us, the church.

I guess it's only fair, we're the ones that started it. So he's helping us, but we've got a role to play to fix this world. And that explains why, if you're a Christian, there's going to be an added element of suffering and hardship to your life.

[6 : 23] Because when you become a Christian, you join the fight for the liberation of the world, and Satan is going to fight back with everything he's got. This little church in Smyrna was feeling this kickback big time.

Jesus knows that they're going through, essentially going through hell. And there's two things that are noteworthy about this particular letter. Firstly, notice Jesus doesn't have anything bad to say about the church.

In most of the other letters, there's an admonition. Hey guys, you're doing okay, but watch out for this. That doesn't seem to be the case here with the Smyrnans. They're doing pretty well under the circumstances.

But secondly, and maybe what's surprising for us, is that the help Jesus gives isn't to take them out of the fight, but to help them in the fight.

So have a look at verse 9. Jesus says, I know your afflictions, and I know your poverty, yet you are rich.

[7 : 35] I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are sinning like of Satan. So he says, guys, I know what you're going through. I know what you're going through. I can see it. You've got nothing.

People are slandering you. I can see what's going on. Verse 10. Well, he says, don't fear. Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

He doesn't say, don't be afraid. You're not going to suffer. He says, don't be afraid about what you are going to suffer. So he knows we're going to go through thick waters. His church here is going to go through thick waters, deep waters.

And in the clangor, don't be afraid of what you're about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you'll suffer persecution for 10 days.

You think to yourself, okay. 10 days in prison, I think you can manage that. But then he says, be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

[8 : 41] Ooh, okay. So Jesus knows we're going through rough waters. It can get really rough as his people. But there's some promises for us to hold on to. Now, this doesn't sound like being a Christian is going to be fun.

Not for these guys. Not at this point in time. But, you know, like war isn't fun. It's hectic. There's an urgency.

It's scary. It's life and death type of stuff. But knowing that being a Christian means that we're in a war, that here in Smyrna you can see who the adversaries are.

There's people, the Jews who are causing all kinds of nonsense at that time. But behind them is Satan and the devil.

So we're in a war zone. We've got these adversaries. They're pushing down. They're causing suffering. They're causing tribulation. Affliction in my NIV.

[9 : 48] Whatever your translation is. It's something that's a grinding motion. It's something that's grinding you. And you can't take it. Knowing you're in a war.

Knowing that makes you a Christian soldier. Because people caught up in war are soldiers.

Knowing that then, look at the church as a kind of an army.

Knowing that you face a deadly enemy. Ask yourself, what kind of a soldier are you? Are you taking your role as a foot soldier of the risen and conquering king seriously?

Is there an urgency to your Christian walk? Or are you just ambling along? Playing at being a Christian. Waltzing around the battlefield. Trying to be as comfortable as possible.

One thing is for sure. When you're in the army, comfort goes out the window. You don't go around looking.

[10:54] When you're in the trenches, you're not looking around for a comfy couch. You're in the trenches. You don't actually care how you're feeling.

You can take a lot of stick. A lot of discomfort. Because that doesn't matter. What matters is making sure the enemy doesn't kill you. And making sure you kill the enemy. Making sure you stay alive. Making sure the boys around you stay alive.

It focuses your mind on certain things. And other things become less important. But maybe you're busy waltzing around. You don't realize you're in a war. You're playing at Christianity here.

Maybe what we need to do is to take Jesus' words a little bit more seriously. And have a look at what kind of Christian Jesus wants in his army. Now to do that, Jesus speaks about this kind of thing where his people are going to go through tough times.

Try and keep your hand in Revelation 2. But turn with me to Matthew chapter 10. Matthew 10. And Jesus, in his ministry here in Matthew 10, has come to a point where it's time to send his disciples out.

[12:19] To start this war. There's war language here. It's a battle that Jesus is going to be engaging his people in. I'm just going to highlight a few verses.

So he's calling his 12 disciples. These are his chosen sort of shock troops. And verse 6, he says this. Matthew 10, verse 6.

He says, Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay. But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Ah. There's a bit of a promise there. But there's promise of going through dark times and there's promise of eventual salvation. Verse 28. Don't worry about the world around you.

[13:43] Don't worry about these guys. That actually means nothing. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Verse 28. Of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

And then down to verse 38. These striking words. Whoever doesn't take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

But the promise. Whoever finds their life in this life, meaning you're looking for comfort, looking for your meaning in this life.

Whoever looks for or finds their life in this life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. I'm going to go back to Revelation again.

Jesus, as the commander, is telling his foot soldiers, boys, we're in for a fight here. But don't worry. I'm the commander. I'll look after you. So nothing can damage you.

[14:53] No one can touch you unless I say so. It's under my control. We'll see that coming out in the letter to Smyrna. But essentially he's saying don't have an overvalued view of your own value.

If you're a follower of Christ, don't have an overvalued view of your own value. You need to know where you are in the grand scheme of things. You're replaceable.

You're a foot soldier. He's the commander. We're the ones that carry out the commands. And like any war, there's going to be collateral damage. But if you're going to go down in a fight, Jesus says he wants you to go down fighting for him.

And the reason is you can go into this fight all guns blazing. Give it everything you've got. Jesus is the ultimate battlefield medic.

You know when he gets shot, you call the medic, and boy, you hope they can patch up those wounds. Well, Jesus has resuscitation powers so strong he can and will bring you back from the dead.

[16:09] As he says in our passage in verse 10, be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.

Well, that's something to look forward to. Not so much the bullets though. So facing these things is hard.

We're going to be tempted to give in to fear. That's what it says. Don't give in to fear. We're going to give in to doubt. Is this really going to happen? Is Jesus really going to win?

This feels really uncomfortable. I really don't like this. And of course, we'll be tempted to give up. You know what? This is too hard.

I'm going to join the other side. It's natural to feel these things. But because we serve in the army of the risen king, we, as his people, as his soldiers, have supernatural powers, or almost, if you want to call it, supernatural weapons that others don't.

[17 : 18] And if we use them, they will see us safely home. The first point I just wanted to make is we're caught up in this cosmic conflict, which we don't often think about.

But this cosmic conflict is front and center in our passage today. But it's front and center in the book of Revelation. And if we're honest, we find ourselves in that conflict today. We see it poking out in all kinds of places.

And it's helpful to know that the Bible sees it in those terms. That, yeah, there is a conflict going on. It explains why you find hardship in your life. Why you're struggling with things. And people, maybe family members, that are opposed to you.

Maybe a workplace that's opposed to you. Even here in South Africa, we're not immune to this cosmic conflict. And in fact, it's getting worse. So how are we going to make it home?

How are we going to make it through? We've got all these evils. These poor Smyrnans had groups of people against them. They had Satan against them. How are they going to get through it?

[18 : 24] How are we going to get home? Well, Jesus doesn't leave us defenseless to face the enemy by ourselves. He gives us a whole quiver of weapons to make sure we're fully equipped to not just get through persecution and suffering, but in fact, to overcome it.

And in verse 9, the first thing we need to do is count our sufferings as precious to Jesus. We need to count our sufferings as precious to Jesus.

Jesus says, I know your afflictions. I know what you're going through.

I know how bad it is. I can see what's going on. Life is... Living a Christian life is not easy.

Living a Christian life is hard. But it is worth it. I mean, life is hard anyway. None of us gets through life unscarred. The thing is, in Christ, your scars, your hurt, your sufferings have total meaning and significance.

[19 : 35] Because they are known to Him. They are known by Him. And they are precious to Him. In the same way, a mom or dad cleans our cuts and wipes away the tears, Jesus feels for and counts our wounds and scars as precious to Him.

It identifies us as one of His. We can show off our wounds with pride. In a sense, in a Christian life. Think of it like the springboks. We all saw them coming off the battlefield at the World Cup. And Jesse Creel, Andre Pollard, do you remember how they looked?

Like, just gashed. And they... You know, they go onto the field, their hair's all very nice. And they come off... It's just a mess. Okay. And bruises and lips and blood.

And they are loving it. They're smiling. Well, they've won. But the wounds don't matter. They've played a game.

[20 : 43] They've played it hard. And they... And you know what? We all... Guys do this. I don't know if girls do this, but guys do this. Hey, boys, just check. Oh, do you see a gash down my back here?

Oh! We show off our scars. Because it means we've done many things. We've fought a battle. We're proud about it. The last thing you want is to come off that field of battle with pristine, white, prissy shorts that haven't got any mud on them.

And just come back and go, ooh, that was a hard fight. Because the rest of the guys will be like, well, what... Hello? What were you doing out there? Yeah, wounds are hard.

They're not nice. And I'm talking about all kinds of wounds. Spiritual, psychological, physical.

They're hard. But if you're fighting for Christ, he considers them special and precious.

And they mean something. The second thing we've got to do is use our faith to look beyond our immediate reality.

[21 : 58] We need to use faith to look beyond the immediate reality. So the temptation in suffering is to be consumed by what's happening in front of your eyes and what your senses are taking in.

It's almost impossible not to. Although in Christ, it's not impossible. Your enemy will look unbeatable. You will look small.

You will feel small. They will look like they're invincible. You will look weak. They will look like they've got all the resources and you've got nothing. Whereas, when you look with the eyes of faith and you believe what is written, not in what is seen, because what is written is by God, the exact opposite is true. They're beaten. They're already defeated. We've already won. [23 : 08] It doesn't look like it. It doesn't feel like it. But that's what the Bible tells us is true. They look invincible.

You look powerless. When, in fact, you've got the power of the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit working through you to do exactly what he tells you to do, to be afraid of nothing. But these things are only seen by the eyes of faith. And so you've got to do a bit of training to trust in what the Bible says is true and totally disregard what's happening in front of your eyes. So we're still in verse 9. I know your afflictions and your poverty. So that's what it looks like from the outside world.

Yeah, you actually are going through it. But let me tell you something, Christians. Jesus is saying. You look like, now poverty here is not poor. Poverty here is you've been stripped of, you've got nothing.

[24 : 12] And they do that to people. It happens. Everything is gone. You've got nothing. And Jesus says, that's not true.

They say you've got nothing. I'm telling you, you've got everything. You're rich because you've got me. But if they've taken everything, how can I be rich?

I mean, what's going on here? Well, in Christ, you've got an absolute treasure hoard of mighty spiritual gifts. And we've got to use them as liberally as we can in this world.

The great apostolic example of having nothing but having everything is Paul. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 6, where Paul talks about the two sides of this coin of what's, it seems like one thing on one side, but there's a totally opposite truth, a biblical truth, a real truth on the other side.

So, 2 Corinthians 6. And from verse 3.

[25 : 34] My heading in the NIV is Paul's hardships. He's just reminding the Corinthian church what he's gone through for them.

So that when they get uppity, it just kind of shuts down those little conversations about them, thinking that he hasn't done a lot for them. So he says, well, you know, I didn't put a stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited.

Rather, as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way. In great endurance. Now, there's a gift. You don't think you've got the power to carry on?

Paul says, in Christ, I've got the power to carry on. He's going to tell us how bloodied he gets. But he puts one foot after the other, and he keeps going, and he doesn't stop.

Oh, what, I mean, really, is it that bad, Paul? What kind of troubles? Oh, let me tell you. I've had troubles, verse 4. I've got hardships and distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments and riots, in hard work and sleepless nights and hunger.

[26 : 51] Now, every now and then, I have a rough week at work. Every now and then. This doesn't happen a lot. This is a cool place to work. But, like, the computer doesn't work, or the S-com goes off, or the milk goes off.

And I'm like, oh, no, it's so hard. I've got to go buy milk. I've got to go all the way to shop right. Take a... This is what it means to battle it out in the workplace.

None of... And it's not just me. None of us have worked like this to this degree. Okay? So, those are the things that are bugging Paul.

So, where's the strength here? Well, I continue, verse 6. Paul says, well, my ministry, what I do as a Christian, I continue my work with purity.

I don't curse. I don't shout. I don't throw my toys out the cot. But, with understanding, with kind of trust. Ooh, patience and kindness in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love.

[28 : 03] Okay? So, if you've got what's happening to Paul on one hand, and you see him doing these things on the other hand, that means there's a power there.

There's weapons there. There's stuff that you can do that no one else can do because you're a Christian. You wouldn't have known that he's going through these things. He actually feels embarrassed telling the Corinthians about it.

Later on, he says, I must be out of my mind going on about this. But you guys, you know, you asked for it. And now I'm going to let you know. Thank goodness he does. So that we do know what it looks like to go through hardship and yet still be a Christian. Verse 7.

Well, I've got truthful speech on my side. I've got the power of God with me. I've got these weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.

So he's ready to go. And then, you know, guys, it doesn't matter how the going goes, whether it's up or down. I'm constant.

[29 : 06] Verse 8. Through glory and dishonor, through a bad report or a good report, I'm still genuine. I get on with this thing.

But people regard us as impostors. They call us liars. Did you hear what sounds so sad about me? It doesn't bother Paul. But he's known by God.

But other people regard him as unknown. Who's this? Who's this? Who's this? Who's this Paul? What are you? Where are you from? You know nothing. Some guy rose from the dead. Oh, you must be crazy. Just talk nonsense somewhere else, man.

But he's an ambassador of the living Christ. And you trust his words and your life will be changed like that. Which is more power than any other power known to man.

The words of the gospel. God knows me. You don't know me. I don't care. Okay, yeah, we're dying. But we live on.

[30 : 07] Beaten and yet not killed. And here's these opposites again. Well, yeah, I'm sorrowful. Or maybe people consider us sorrowful. Yet we're always rejoicing.

It's noticeable when you read the accounts in Acts and in other passages. When the guys are thrown in prison. What do you hear? Lion and the lamb.

Made for the king. Oh, king. Singing better than that. But they're singing. Which means they're happy. They think it's cool being in jail.

Rejoicing. Poor. They don't have anything. Paul had to make tents for a living. To finance his trips. And yet, making many rich. Because of this message. Freeing the world from these powers that want to ruin and rule over them.

[31 : 12] And I've got nothing, Paul says. And yet, we possess everything. Because of the risen Christ. Isn't that cool to have?

Now, compare what we've got to Paul. And what have we got to complain about in our lives? I don't think we've got a lot to complain about. Now, this is a supernatural power that only Christians can possess.

But it takes faith to value these things. And you will only find them valuable if you value Jesus himself. I guess it's a test for those who are worried about losing income.

So, back in Revelation 2 again. They're poor because they've had stuff confiscated. And if we face tests ourselves, it could be that we often could be scared of losing our job.

So, one of the first things we'll lose is our income in South Africa. There's a potential loss of income rather than being thrown straight into jail. Although, that's not beyond the realms of possibility anymore. If you're following the latest stuff that's coming out of our parliament.

[32 : 24] And various Christian groups. There's the hate speech bill. There's the marriage bill. There's all these equity laws. And other laws. And we could find ourselves in trouble with the law.

This is a test for those who are worried about losing their income. Do you count yourself as richer in Christ with nothing than having all the income you need, but thinking you need more income than you need Jesus? Be careful of that.

Because faith says the opposite of that. And I know it's hard. Okay. That's why it takes faith and it takes the power of God. But it also takes training on our side.

But that's cool. If you're not worried about losing income, then you can't be threatened with the loss of income. If they tell you, oh, but you'll lose your job. Oh, yeah. You'll go to jail. Well, all right. I can sing in jail. I'm richer without your income than I've got with Christ.

Then they can keep it. You've got Jesus. You'll be more of a blessing without their income than with it. And if you think like that, you're victorious in that battle.

[33 : 35] Does that make sense? Yeah. And then, thirdly, the ultimate weapon, lastly, the ultimate weapon that will get you through all these hardships and persecutions, is Christ himself, but in particular, his resurrection.

Have a look at verse 8. I'm back in Revelation 2 again. Verse 8.

So look who's writing this letter. To the angel of the church in Smyrna. To the leaders. To the angel of the church in St. Mark's in Plumstead.

You're getting a letter from your king. These are the words of him who is the first and the last. Who died and came to life again.

Now when that guy talks to you, so all the other enemies are coming at you. So what? They've killed him.

[34 : 43] He's come back to life. What's the problem? Try your best, guys. I've got this guy who's dead. He's come back to life again. So he's on my side. You've tried it already.

It didn't work. You know what? Try it again. And we'll see who's left standing. Verse 10. Be faithful unto death.

Yeah. But you'll get the crown of life. And then to end it all, verse 11.

Listen to what I've said. Take note of the good stuff. Let it undermine and overthrow and overshadow and totally destroy the bad stuff.

Hold on to what I'm promising. And here's what I'm promising. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. So friends, in this battle that we're going to face in our lives, that we face every day, that may or may not get worse, as time goes on, it's likely that it will get worse.

[35 : 57] That's okay. We just fight harder. Jesus is everything we need. He's the first and the last. It's the beginning and the end. The starter and the finisher.

Do you remember that famous scene? It's a great movie scene. Not Highlander.

Not Macbeth. It's Mel Gibson in Braveheart. And they're all standing there. The two armies are facing each other. And I think it's an Irishman.

I've got to say that. Or it's him. It's Mel Gibson. He charges off. And they're like, where are you going? I'm coming here to fight, boys. Why? Because he's going to win. That's when you want to pick a fight.

Jesus came to pick a fight. His death and resurrection kicked off World War III in spiritual terms. We're scared.

[36 : 55] But he's like, well, guys, they killed me. I came back to life again. So what's the problem? Everything we need consists in his death and resurrection.

His death stops your death from being the final word in the story of your life. His resurrection gives him the ability, the power, and the authority to give you not just life to die again, but eternal life. That means you will never die again. And that life starts now. So it confirms it and lets you know that you've got it. But this is why Revelation, like all the New Testament letters, emphasize both Christ's death as his payment for sin, but also his resurrection as the foundation for the ultimate real tangible hope that we can hold on to.

We've seen this already in Revelation 1. I'm just going to just remind you again. So I'm just going to look at verse 4 in Revelation 1. The whole letter to the whole church as it's happening here.

Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come. In other words, the first and the last. And from the seven spirits before his throne. And from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

[38 : 18] And when you've got that kind of king on your side, you can have a million enemies. But that's okay. Because they can't kill you dead, dead. They can stop you from breathing from it for a little while.

Yes, and? So you lie down for a bit. That's okay. All your brothers take this to your place. Your sisters.

And then later on you spring back to life again. Fitter and stronger and more ready to fight. What about verse 17 and verse 18?

After this, in verse chapter 1. After this amazing vision of Jesus from verse 12. Just an incredible vision. John says, When I saw him, verse 17.

I fell at his feet as though dead. And this being, this first and last, this alpha and omega, this Lord, this risen God of flesh and gold and fire.

[39 : 25] Just puts his hand on John. And he says, hey man. He says, don't worry.

Don't be afraid. I'm the first and the last. And I'm the living one. I was dead.

I was dead. And I'm alive. And I've got the keys of death and Hades. And so you're going to go down. That's fine. I've got the key to your tomb. You're just going to go to rest for a little bit.

And then all that's going to happen. Clink, clink, clink. Clatter, clatter, clatter. Dylan. Boom. The battle's over. You can come out now. Cool.

So in the end, the worst that can happen is that you're separated from your friends and family for a short while. You'll have a lovely, refreshing sleep. One day you hear your name being called. You wake up.

[40 : 26] All your aches and pains and fears and tears are gone. And you see everyone again. And you begin to share in the rewards that have been promised.

So the whole story ends in Revelation 20 as it always does. So let's end our time there. 21.

This is what's coming for us. Verse 3. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Well, look, boys. The dwelling place of God is with man.

He's going to live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be there with them as their God. He is going to wipe away your tears from your eyes.

He's going to breathe life into you. So the death and the scariness and the fear of death is gone. There's going to be no mourning. No reason to cry.

[41 : 40] To fear hurt. No pain. Because all the former stuff, the bad stuff is gone. And only the good stuff is here. And he says, Behold, I'm making all things new and continuing to be renewed.

And he says, Write this down. Because these words are trustworthy and true. So trust in them. So that you won't be paralyzed by fear. And he says, It's finished.

I'm the Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end. I'm in control of history and destiny. To the thirsty. To the ones who want. Or give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

And the one who conquers. Who stays firm. Will have this heritage. And I will be his God. And he will be my child. Amen.

Let me pray for us. Lord, you are the Alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end. The one who holds the keys to death and Hades.

[42 : 52] The one who was dead and who is living forevermore. Lord, we can't even. We can sometimes touch and understand how incredibly powerful you are. But Lord, we need this vision of you as the risen one who is our king.

And calling us to your service on a daily basis. To get rid of fear. And worry about income. And what people will say.

And mean things that they say to us, Lord. That doesn't matter. We can take it. Lord, help us to take it. Because we're really bad at taking it. Make us strong. And help us to serve you as our king.

Amen. Amen. Amen.