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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Must I Always Obey?

Transcribed Message
April 23, 2023
Romans 13:2

The Declaration of Independence. July 4, 1776. The unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America. The second paragraph begins like this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and their happiness." So wrote the framers of the Declaration of Independence.

Here's what we know for sure. In 1776 when that document was produced and put forward and the war of independence occurred, that was a pivotal moment in human history. Everybody would agree with that. The subsequent writing of the Constitution of the United States of America probably has produced a document unlike any document in human history and it has allowed and enabled and established for freedoms and things that many people in this world and in world history have never experienced or enjoyed. It is such a blessing to live under that. The men who wrote these documents were by and large religious men. I suppose that statement has been debated obviously for a couple of hundred years as to the extent of that religion and what the nature of that was in each of their individual lives. But no one could argue that they were by and large religious men. Your understanding of Romans 13 determines which side, if you had been alive in 1770 to 1776, would have largely determined which side you might have found yourself on. Would it have been the side of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism who urged restraint on the part of the colonists? Or would it have been on

the side of Jonathan Mayhew, who said to rebel against tyrants is to do the will of God, to obey God? How you understand Romans 13 obviously largely would answer that question.

So we're going to come again this morning to Romans 13. We're looking in particular this morning at the second verse and what we want to ask of the text of Scripture this morning and what we sought to establish last Sunday when we started in this 13th chapter was putting ourselves under the word of God. Always seeing ourselves not as over the word of God, but as being under the word and recognizing that the people of God throughout human history have literally lived out their faith under every form of government and tyranny imaginable to the human heart. That we know for sure because history has borne witness to that. But we come to this passage this morning and we're asking the question: What evidences are there in the word of God that when God's people face certain circumstances in which they believe they need to resist the government, under what circumstances does God bless those decisions and affirms them as being the right ones? When is it right? What does it look like? Are there any guiding principles for what it is that we should do when we find ourselves in that kind of circumstance? That's what we want to ask of Romans 13 this morning. As we do that, here is my thought. The big idea is simply this. Obedience to the government is the believer's responsibility. We disobey only when government usurps the place that is rightfully God's alone.

We go back to where we started last Sunday. This is a quick review. We remind ourselves that Romans 13:1 and 2 and the rest of this chapter is a continuation of chapter 12. You say that is the most obvious thing that you could point out this morning and yes, it is. But it is not only the most obvious thing that we can point out, but in my mind it is largely one of the most crucial things to understand when you come to Romans 13. Do not disconnect your thought process from chapter 12 and jump in to 13 without bringing chapter 12 with you. Chapter 12 requires of us to not be conformed to this world. There's a lot of stuff out there today that clearly is conforming to this world in the way that we see ourselves, others, and government. We better be discerning and we better be alert and we better be aware of when we're being conformed and poured into the mold of the world's thinking. Because what Paul does in that 12th chapter, you

remember, is to say right at the front don't think more highly of yourself than you should be thinking.

So we began with the spirit of humility. So important I think. All of the time but especially in some respects when you come to this 13th chapter. It also reminded us from about what verse 9 to 18 says of principles of self-denial. Yes, self-denial. Not the claiming of rights but the denying of one's rights. Do you see how important that is? Do you see how helpful that is when you come to chapter 13? A believer is called to a life of humility. A believer is called to a life of denying one's self. Then when you come to the 19th through the 21st verse in that very difficult section of the last part of that 12th chapter in which Paul is talking literally about your enemies and people who want to do you wrong and harm, what does he call on you to do? Trust in God, not yourself. It seems to me with that in mind in chapter 12 that's why you literally have to remind yourself every time you come to chapter 13 there's something that you need to remember as you come to these verses. Humility, self-denial, trust in God. That informs how you understand chapter 13.

Chapter 13 establishes two principles. We looked at two things and in specific God is sovereign. The end of that first verse. There is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God. There are two points that flow out of this truth of God's sovereignty. The first one is that government is ordained by God. Government is ordained by God. God is not a spectator watching the unfolding of human events. That is deism. That is a view that says God just starts things in motion and then He lets history unfold itself. That's not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is a God of providence. He is a God of sovereignty. He is a God directing the affairs of men and women every day of their lives. What God says to us is government is ordained by God and there is nobody in a position of governmental authority but that God knows they are there and He has allowed them to be there. Here is a very important point that Paul makes.

The second one is this. I believe flowing out of the idea of God is sovereign is secondly this point that the legitimate government is the one in power. The legitimate government is the one in power. Paul says those that exist have been instituted by God. Think about that for a moment in light of what I read at the beginning in the words of the

framers of the Declaration of Independence. They said government is in power as those who are governed allow them to be. I believe Paul has a little different slant in his understanding of that truth. In our own country you realize that the last four presidents of the United States of America have all faced from differing sides comments about their legitimacy to be the president of the United States. It started with Bush. It was true of Obama. It was certainly true of Donald Trump. And it is now true of President Biden. I say to you as followers of Christ that should be of concern to us. Paul is establishing the sovereignty of God. Daniel 2:21. We looked at it last week. God says I am the one who raises up kings and I am the one who deposes them. Isaiah 45:1. Isaiah references Cyrus as being God's anointed. Yes, a secular godless king who would bring down nations. Isaiah said he was God's anointed man. That is remarkable language that I think we need to be mindful of and I think we need to be aware of. Whatever your view might be of January 6th and the events that happened there, Romans 13 needs to be understood as the backdrop to whatever your opinions might be. You need to filter your view of those events through Romans 13. That's personal opinion. I just offer that as an aside. God is sovereign. God is the one who establishes those who are in authority. The legitimate government is the one that is in power because of what that first principle actually establishes.

The second thing is everyone is to submit. That was verse 1. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. Look at verse 2: "Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." That is a weighty word from the Spirit of God through the apostle Paul to us today, just as it was to those believers in the 1st century. Everyone is to submit.

What is the very first word of verse 2? Therefore. In light of what I have just said. In light of the groundwork that I have just laid. In light of the framework that I just established. God is sovereign. God is the one who raises up kings. God is the one who deposes them. Therefore, verse 2. Because of that, in light of that, with that in mind, he would say resistance to authority results in divine judgment. Resistance to authority results in divine judgment.

However you understand Romans 13, don't treat it lightly. Don't be brash in your view of current events or past events. Be humble, I think, would be again the beginning

point. Paul's words speak of the gravity of disobedience to human government. That's clearly what he is establishing. He is writing in the late 50s under Nero. The persecutions had not yet broken out the way that they will. Peter says almost the exact same thing five years later right on the cusp of these incredible persecutions that are about to break out. The Spirit of God knew exactly what He was saying to His people in terms of the time frame of events that in the providence of God were going to unfold and break upon them. He says to them resistance to authority results in divine judgment. Even if we strongly disagree with our government. Even if it's incredibly inconvenient to obey our government. Even if there is persecution and oppression as there would be to these people who are just receiving this.

Back in January I came across an article that I stuck in my file because I knew we were coming to Romans 13. It is entitled "Pastors Around the World Apply Romans 13". The title itself was fascinating to me. Pastors around the world. How I look at Romans 13 through the eyes of a citizen living in the freedoms and blessings of the United States of America is one thing. But let me hear from fellow pastors all around the world and how do they understand Romans 13 and what are they teaching and sharing with their people in all kinds of circumstances? Here is a pastor in Iran. How would you like to be trying to minister and have a Christian church under the Iranian regime? He says this: "Some think that Paul is picturing an ideal government in Romans 13. I disagree. Paul acknowledges there's no authority except that which God establishes." He lives under an oppressor. He lives under a government that just this last week or so told business executives and owners to report any woman who reports to work who is not dressed appropriately. And he says there is no authority except that which God establishes. Whatever the authority, good or evil, we know it's from God and it falls under the purview of Paul's command. I have much respect for that guy.

Here is a pastor in the United Arab Emirates. "Paul was well aware of rulers who had mistreated people including himself in the past. He certainly understood that unjust rulers had wrongfully crucified Jesus. As someone who'd been hunted, beaten, and imprisoned by government authorities, Paul wasn't naïve about the evils of the Roman Empire. Yet he still calls for submission to them." A pastor in India. Depending on where you are in India, there's increasing oppression and opposition to the gospel there. From

India: "If Romans 13 could be valid in Paul's day when Nero was the Emperor, it's hard to imagine any situation where it wouldn't be valid today." A pastor in Russia writes: "Romans 13 applies to all kinds of systems as long as the sinful world requires such a structure of human authority." That's hard. Those people are living out the truth of Romans 13 in ways probably we have not yet but may at some point experience as well. Paul says resistance to authority results in divine judgment.

Then the second thing I want you to see out of that point is to obey is a good testimony for Jesus Christ. To obey is a good testimony for Jesus Christ. That's the point of verse 2. There is something more important that is at stake and that is the testimony of Jesus Christ. Our natural disposition and inclination is to lawlessness. I said that last week. Our natural inclination in whatever structure we find ourselves under authority, it is just the nature of the human heart to want to resist and push back against or to commit acts of civil disobedience. The most powerful tool that we have is living a godly life. that's the most powerful tool we have in this world as followers of Christ. To live a godly life even if we don't like what the government does. Even if it's not convenient. Even if it becomes oppressive and persecuting. There is a greater witness involved. Our government's morality or lack of morality does not influence what Paul says here in Romans 13.

Let me just take 30 seconds to step back into something I said last week that has caused me to shut down the ask-Carlton-questions line. That passing comment about Christian nationalism seems to have resonated with many. I think in part and what I say about that really flows out of what I just said. There is a greater testimony at stake. That's what we need to keep in mind. I think a lot of the things said about Christian nationalism flow out of that confusion and a lack of understanding about what different people mean when they use those words. I fully understand that there is a segment that looks at Christianity, whatever its flavor, and wants to speak pejoratively about us in any way that they can. There is an element at work that uses the idea or the words Christian nationalism with something of a sneer and a mock and a very pejorative tone. I understand that.

But I hope that all of us understand that Christian nationalism is not something that somebody just made up on our left to accuse us as Christians of. There is some of

that but that's not the full picture of Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism has been alive and well around the world, not just in America, for decades and decades and decades. When I think of Christian nationalism, my concern is the wedding together of Christianity and the gospel and government. We talked about that last week in terms of the different structures under which God's people have functioned and lived for the beginning of time. My heart is to understand that there's a difference between rightful Christian patriotism.

I am a patriot. My dad was a Marine at the end of World War II. My father-in-law fought in Korea. My cousins and uncles fought in Vietnam. I have a son and a daughter-in-law who have given over 30 years of their life to the Army guard, have gone and deployed various times into dangerous places. I am a patriot. I love America. But here's what is also true. I love Jesus more. I love Jesus more. I love the gospel more. I want us to be an influence in every sector that God has us including the public square. Of course, we need to bring the full impetus of our holy righteous living and the opportunities that God affords us in this country that we live in to influence our government. I'm not speaking against that. What I am concerned about is identifying more as an American than as a Christian. I am a Christian who happens to be an American.

I don't know the origins of birth of everybody at Covenant. We are largely a white suburban congregation. That's just the demographic of where we live. That's where we are. But I do know that even in this context, we have people who have been born in various parts of the world. I would imagine 15 or 20 different countries could be represented as origins of birth that make Covenant their home or are visiting Covenant. Every one of those should feel intensely welcome, not because they're embraced by Americans, but because they're embraced by Christ followers. This is the beauty of the church in the body of Christ that we go across all of those boundaries. That's the miracle, that's the mystery, that's the wonder of what God wants to do.

Someone told me this statement this morning, so this is not new with me. Someone told me this morning a beautiful quote: "The kingdom of God is not going to arrive on Air Force One." That was a quote from Charles Colson and if anybody should know about government and God, it is Charles Colson. That nails it for me, because if

you believe that the kingdom of God is going to be brought about by government or by an individual man, then you and I have just parted ways in terms of how we see the role that God has for us as Christ followers. That was my thought last week. I don't know if that clarified it all, but we'll keep the question line closed for a couple more weeks.

Let's move on here now. When is it right? Is it ever right? When to disobey? We said at the outset that obedience to the government is the believer's responsibility. That's Paul's statement in verse 1. We quoted Robert Huldane last week. All-encompassing, absolute, unqualified statement. It is all of that. The Spirit of God knew exactly what He had Paul write here, and He also knew that within the storyline of redemption and within the storyline of God's people, there were going to be times where there might be situations that called upon them to disobey. So we ask the question: What are the possibilities that God's people would face a circumstance in which Romans 13:1-2 need to be understood as no longer applying to them in the specific way of demanding submission and obedience to the government? I've listed for you as we look at these biblical examples. I've listed for you six different passages and eight different examples from Scripture in which you see specific cases that God's people resisted government authority and acted in civil disobedience. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on these. We're familiar with most of them. Let's just run through them to refresh your memory.

Exodus chapter 1 is the first one. The Hebrew midwives are told by Pharaoh when a baby boy is born to a Hebrew woman make sure he doesn't live. Commit infanticide. Kill the baby. It should not be allowed to live. The Hebrew midwives disobeyed the command of Pharaoh and the text says that God blessed them for their disobedience to a direct command from the king. Exodus chapter 5, Pharaoh and Moses are negotiating. Moses has put forward what he needs. Pharaoh said let's just adjust your way of worshiping your God and let's make a few changes and you go worship God in this way. Moses says no, we're not doing that. We're going to disobey that command and we will hold our ground. In the third one in 1 Kings 18, Obadiah is told by King Ahab to kill all the prophets of God. Round up all the prophets of God and kill them. Obadiah saves hundreds of them, hides them in a cave, feeds them, gives them water, and saves their lives. In Daniel chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar issues the

command that everyone should bow down and worship him. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say we can't do that. That violates the commandments that God has given to us. We are willing to give our lives. Let's throw them into the fiery furnace and see what happens.

Daniel 6. Darius issues a decree that nobody should be praying to anyone but him. What does Daniel do? Daniel goes home after the decree is issued, he opens his window, gets on his knees, and as he had done every day prior, he prays to God. Now the interesting thing about that is God never said go open your window and get on your knees and pray. Daniel could have kept his windows closed and had a wonderful prayer life going right there in his own home and nobody would know. But he didn't do that because he knew what was at stake and God blessed him. Acts chapter 4 and on into chapter 5, Peter and James and John are told not to preach the gospel. Don't do it. Peter says we have to obey God rather than men. Revelation 13. A command goes forth to worship the beast. Believers refuse and are martyred for their faith. You have those specific examples right out of Scripture in which Romans 13 requiring obedience of government is clearly set aside and God blesses those people.

This brings us to this general principle. Civil disobedience is justified when the government seeks to take the place of God. Civil disobedience is justified when the government seeks to take the place of God. To me, the key word is of God. They seek to take the place of God. So instead of being under God, the government seeks to take the place over God, takes the place of God. Romans 13:1. there is no authority except from God. When government takes the place of God, the Christian is not only expected but is required to obey God rather than to obey man. When you look at those examples and the general principle that flows out from them, it seems to me that there are some conclusions that you can draw from those examples that consistently show us what it is that God expects of us.

Let's do that. Let's look at these conclusions. There are six of them all together in these two categories. There is a category that I'm just going to refer to as legitimate disobedience. When is it right to disobey? There is a second category it seems to me called illegitimate disobedience. When it is wrong to disobey? I would begin by noting first of all that there is in that first example of when is it right to disobey a religious issue

is at stake. There is a religious issue at stake. On the other side of that it's a political issue. In every one of the examples given to us in Scripture, there is a religious issue. There's an issue of conviction. There's an issue of conscience to the word of God. The word of God has spoken to the issue at hand. Take the life of every Hebrew baby. I can't do that. Bow down and worship me. I can't do that. Kill prophets of God. I can't do that. Don't pray to your God. I have to. Don't preach the gospel. You can't silence me. Every one of those is a conscience conviction issue that's drawn right out of Scripture.

It seems to me on the other side when you have illegitimate disobedience and it is wrong, it's largely because it's a political issue. There are hundreds of them, aren't there? There are all kinds of hot button issues today over which we might say I don't want to do that. The government has a view on global warming. Maybe you agree with that. Maybe you don't. It's not the basis of civil disobedience because it's a political issue. There are issues within healthcare over which we may disagree with the government's position on this or that. There may be areas in regard to immigration that we disagree with our government on. It's not a matter of civil disobedience. There are all kinds of issues. I could go on and stir up even more trouble. How about just taxation in general? There are issues about taxation. I should leave this one alone, but I won't. What about the whole matter of gun control? Gun control as I'm reading my Bible is not a God-given right. We better move on. I'm a gun owner. School choice. You can think of all hundred things that fall within the parameter of a political issue about which you would be hard-pressed to open your Bible and say God requires me to disobey my government on this point.

Second category. The law is negating religious freedom. It's taking something away or it's requiring me to do something that is in violation of the word of God. When I'm given no choice. That's the thing. That's what happened in every one of those eight circumstances that I put before you of examples of civil disobedience. In every one of those, people were not given a choice. They were told this is what you have to do. That seems to me on the other side of that, this limiting of religious freedom. That's a different matter. When government seeks to limit religious freedom that's not the same as negating religious freedom. In a sense, all laws of government are limiting, aren't they? They're limiting us in some way or another. We live within that structure. We live

within those boundaries. That's the nature of human law. But that's different than the negating of something of conscience and conviction that is drawn from Scripture. There are zoning laws. A church wants to build and the city because of zoning laws refuses and says they can't build there. Don't commit acts of civil disobedience against the government because they don't like the zoning law, or because the zoning law is inconvenient or it's difficult.

We won't spend any time here but I think a lot of the things that fell within the arena of Covid were similar to that. Frankly, I just begin with verse three. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, Carlon. as we moved into that whole Covid scene, there was lot of things that nobody knew anything about. I personally just extended a little more grace than normal as government health people tried to figure out all that was going on. Yes, they did for a period of time ask us not to meet and we went along with that for I don't know how many weeks. If they had left that in place, I'm pretty sure the elders of Covenant would have said at some point we have to obey God rather than man. But in those initial weeks when everybody was trying to figure it out, we acquiesced with that. Some of you thought that was not the right approach that we took. But that was the decision that we arrived at after hours of thought and prayer. The difference between that – limiting and not allowing – that's where this principle comes into play.

Then lastly, it's commanding evil. It's commanding evil rather than simply permitting evil. The biblical examples of civil disobedience was a command to evil. Take a life. Don't worship God like that. Don't pray. Don't preach the gospel. There was a command to evil, not a permitting of evil. If the government commands us to evil, we have to disobey. If the government allows evil, there is not grounds in my understanding of Scripture for civil disobedience. If they say we're not going to command you to do this but we're going to let somebody else do that, that's fine. I don't believe that's grounds for civil disobedience. When there is a permitting of evil as opposed to a commanding of evil.

Let's go back to where we started. None of this is simple. This requires thoughtfulness on the part of God's people. It is not easy. Christians are going to disagree. Humility is our posture. Self-denial is our posture. Trusting God is our posture.

How then do we disobey government? Let's look very quickly at these four principles for how to disobey government. If we get to that point where we have to disobey, what is it supposed to look like?

First of all, it should be refusal not revolt. It should be refusal not revolt. The objective is not insubordination and revolution. In Daniel 1, Daniel had his name changed. He did not revolt. He did not go into civil disobedience. Even when the king said eat this food, at that point Daniel said, wait a minute. That food, if I'm understanding the origin of that food and what all is happened with that, it is going to defile me under the laws of God. Evidently other Jewish young people arrived at a different conclusion, or if they didn't we don't read about it. But we read about Daniel. At that point, Daniel refused but he didn't revolt. He said can I have this other option, and it was given to him, wasn't it? He quietly went along with the choice that had been offered to him. He didn't revolt against the government. He didn't launch a hunger strike. He didn't stir up everybody else evidently, at least we don't read about that.

Secondly, it should be nonviolent, not violent. If at all possible, our civil disobedience should be peaceful refusal. The citizen does not take up the sword against the state. Proverbs 24:21 talks about that. It talks about the foolishness of aligning yourself with those kinds of people. I think of David as an example. David is anointed by God to be king. He has more than one opportunity to kill Saul who was trying to kill him. What does he say? He will not lay his hand on God's anointed. He was walking in humility denying himself trusting God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer left the United States in the early years of the beginnings of Nazism in Germany. He left the comforts of the United States, went back to his home country of Germany, and did so to disciple and to raise up pastors for churches in what he knew were going to be very difficult times. Everybody commends Bonhoeffer for those initial responses to the government and what was going on in Germany. I personally believe, and others believe this as well, that he stepped across the line when he attempted and joined with the group to assassinate Hitler, as evil of a man that he was. As much as everybody wanted him out of the way, I think it crossed that line. Civil disobedience is to be nonviolent, not violent.

Thirdly, disobedience is to demonstrate submission to God, not defiance of government. That's what we're trying to put on display. It is based on Scripture. It is a violation of conscience. We're not breaking the law to make a point. we're disobeying to show a higher allegiance to God.

Then finally, we must be willing to bear the consequences of disobedience. We must be willing to bear the consequences of disobedience. Legitimate disobedience does not exempt us from punishment. In Hebrews 11, there is a whole group of people who experienced horrible things in their lives because of government oppression and opposition. Certainly Daniel and his three friends experiencing what they did was true of that as well.

Let's go back to the very beginning where we started. We started with the reading of the Declaration of Independence. Whatever your understanding of Romans 13 might be with regard to that – whether you would side with John Wesley, whether you side with Jonathan Mayhew – maybe the British changed the narrative just enough by firing on unarmed citizenry, or at least not armed to the way that they were, at the Boston Massacre. And maybe, as the forces met at Lexington in which our men were told do not fire until you're fired upon, maybe that changed the narrative from being an unoffensive break and opposition to a war that is more defensive in battle. Some have suggested that. I think it has legitimacy. I think probably for myself I would've found it difficult not to be with Wesley on the front end, but hard not to be with Mayhew after that.

What do we take away? Christians are called to extraordinary models of civil obedience. Good citizenship requires both discernment and courage. God give us both. Jesus said that we're to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. We don't disobey with eagerness. We don't disobey with joy. I think, my friends, we are on the cusp of things in the United States of America that we have not experienced before. I don't know how as a Christ follower watching what's going on in our country you couldn't come to that conclusion. There are just increasing indicators that we are truly exiles in this land. It is good for us to remind ourselves frequently of that truth. We're looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. This world isn't our home. It is so very easy with all of the good things around us, with all of the blessings of life that we enjoy, it is so

easy to elevate those things to a disproportionate place in our lives. It is so easy for us to slide from a point of enjoyment and appreciation to a place of idolatry. That can be good things – family, marriage, children, grandchildren, work, the blessings of material things that God has bestowed on us, freedoms that we enjoy as citizens in this land. But we need regular reminders of who we are, of who we're called to be, of what our final destination really is, of what our home ultimately will be. I need that every day and I think probably you do too.

That's why Jesus said you need to learn to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves because it truly does call for great discernment and courage going forward. Our hope ultimately is in the gospel. Our hope ultimately is in the gospel. My hope is that that is where your hope is as well, that your hope is firmly upon the Lord Jesus Christ, that you know Him in a personal way. By that I mean you have at some point in your life come to understand that you have sinned and fallen short of all that God requires. What it is that God requires of you is that you began right there and acknowledge that you have sinned, fallen short of His glory, understand that His Son Jesus came to this earth, lived a perfect sinless life and yielded Himself to the cruelty of the cross for you and for me. He did it so that one day our trust and faith in Christ would set us free from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and ultimately from the very presence of sin and that we would enjoy living forever and ever with our Savior. That's our heart for you. If you don't know Jesus in that way please come and talk to Daniel and Cate this morning as they pray with you. let us know that by sending us a text or email. We would love to follow up with you. We want to see you on the other side. We want to be with you in God's kingdom forever and ever and ever.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for the blessings of Your word. Thank You for the truth of Your word. Thank You for the body of Christ where we can be encouraged together in this challenging journey. Father, we are here today for such a time as this. You have us here living in this time so that we can lift up Christ, so that we can lift up the gospel, so that we can make known Your greatness and Your glory. We thank You for that privilege. In Jesus's name, amen.