

Treasure Seekers (Matthew 6:19-34)

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[0 : 00] Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moss and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moss and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness? No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life?

[1 : 11] And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear?

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. So let's invite Pastor William. Thank you, Venus.

Afternoon, everyone. It's good to see all of you here. Thank you. Well done for making it to the end of November. What a year it's been. Yeah, I just want to echo that reminder.

[2 : 16] If you would love to join the Chong family on a crazy week of jumping into the Bible and having all kinds of other fun as well, yeah, do come and chat to us if you want to find out more.

It's probably consistently for us the past 10 years making a sacrifice of a week to kick off the year right, okay, with God, with God's people.

We've loved it. So if you're interested in coming along, come chat with us. Love to see you there.

Let's pray and ask God to speak to us now. Father, we live in such a distracted world, a world that gleams with so many things that we wish we had, we wish we had more of.

We wish we could find our security and turn our eyes this afternoon as we dive into your word, as we let your spirit shape us from the inside out.

Let's change us so that we treasure the wealth of this world less and less, but seek first your kingdom and your righteousness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[3 : 32] What do you want to be when you grow up? It's a common question, isn't it, that you get. Sometimes it's from the aunties and uncles, right? What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you want to be when you graduate from university?

Sometimes it's from your friends. Now that you've graduated, what's your next ambition in life? What's your next goal? Or maybe you're still at school and you're picking subjects for next year. What are you going to be when you grow up? What's your plan for life? Actually, before I was a Christian, I told my friends in year nine, I wanted to be a bachelor for life, was what I said.

And then they all laughed at me. And then, like, the next year it changed completely when things change. But then every year I had a different ambition. I was always chasing. One year I wanted to be a world-famous musician.

And then, obviously, there were much more creative people than me. And then that had to change too. And some of your ambitions are fairly straightforward, I'm sure, right? I want to get my learners or I want to pass my exams, land a job.

[4 : 35] Maybe some of your ambitions take years of hard work and sacrifice. Maybe starting a new business. Maybe getting a boyfriend or girlfriend. Owning a house. Having a family.

And in this passage that we just had read by Venus, Jesus is teaching his followers about ambition too, right? He talks about ambition. Did you see in verse 33? Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

So how do we get there as God's people? What does it look like to have this kind of ambition in our life? That's what we want to explore today.

Remember who Jesus was speaking to. This is the Sermon on the Mount. Remember, he sat down and he's teaching his disciples, all listening really close. But then there's a massive crowd, okay, just in for the ride, listening in as well from a distance.

This is the audience. And perhaps there's some similarities to our world today. In this world of first century Israel, who Jesus was speaking to, God's people, they kind of lived amidst two different cultural forces, two different worldviews.

[5 : 42] One was the world of Jewish religion. Jesus was speaking to mostly Jewish people exclusively most of the time. This was a world that they lived in where it was full of rules and fences, do's and don'ts.

To be loyal to your people was the ultimate righteousness. And all the better if everyone knows it and sees it. And then the other world that God's people lived in in the first century was the world of Greek and Roman materialism.

Okay? Sure, the Greeks and Romans, they worshipped gods. Yeah? But they're kind of like those little, you know, idols you see in Chinese restaurants, right? You just kind of pay lip service to them, right?

And as long as you had a good house, good food to eat, people at your command, your real goal in life was to chase after the wealth of this earth, right? Even better if everyone can see it.

That's two different worlds, isn't it? A world of devotion to God and a world of devotion to stuff. And just as these first disciples that are listening to Jesus right now, but just as they were caught between these two worlds, as God's people here at PCBC, we are often caught between the crossroads, aren't we?

[6 : 53] We're caught between two worlds, staying separate and getting comfortable in our surroundings. Last week we talked about our religious devotion, right? How we need to be genuine.

Sure, some of us may struggle with our religious piety. That's why we need to pray and fast and to give sincerely. But I suspect more of us struggle on this end, getting comfortable, struggling with materialism.

Because advertisers, they persuade us, right, to upgrade our devices every year, don't they? We scroll with longing at how influencers online dress and live.

Look at them. Look at them. So cool. Even our parents, they might tell us on the one hand, right? We grew up in church. It's good to go to church, kids, but make sure you get at least a master's so that you'll really have a safe job, right?

We swim in this society, don't we, that preachers blessed are the rich and wealthy, the powerful, the upwardly mobile. Thankfully, the Lord Jesus has just the words for us.

[7 : 57] He knows our struggle. And he points us to a better, richer way of life. That's what we have in our passage today. Where he shifts his focus from what we talked about last week, the religiosity that was fake and wanting to be genuine in our prayers to wanting to be genuine with our stuff.

He's teaching his followers not to live like the pagans, the godless people who chase after things like food and drinking clothing. Instead, he wants us to have a better ambition. So how can we have godly ambition?

Ambition that is of the kingdom of heaven. How should we view wealth and security, friends? What priorities should followers of Jesus have in today's world?

From our passage, we're going to look at two main things. And they're linked together, so try and follow the logic with me. From verses 19 to 24, Jesus describes two ways to prioritize wealth in our lives.

There's two ways to prioritize wealth in our life. And then flowing from that, we then see two ways that we approach worries and anxieties. From verses 25 to 34.

[9 : 08] You see the two passages that we just had read, they're linked together. There's two ways that we can prioritize wealth. And that flows into two ways that we'll think and worry about life.

Let me read verse 19 to 24 again. Many years ago, St. Francis of Assisi, he took one look at these verses and then he concluded, Christians must therefore be the poorest of the poor.

Now, Francis is a nice guy, but I think the first thing we should clear up is that Jesus here is not saying you can't own anything. The key words are in verse 19.

Have a look at that again. Do not store up for yourselves. What Jesus here is critiquing in our lives is accumulating stuff selfishly for yourself.

He is criticizing buying the 10th pair of shoes when you already have nine. He's criticizing being the first to get through Black Friday sales when you actually just bought stuff last week from the same store.

[10 : 30] He's criticizing getting the third coffee maybe when there's kids that you know who are going to school hungry, when your friend can't find a job, accumulating and spending selfishly.

And he's rebuking that fantasy, isn't it? That life is all about getting fat wallets and growing bank balances. He's criticizing the fact that, the assumption that people will love you more if you have more spending power.

And in this passage, his critique comes through three really simple but profound illustrations. He uses three different illustrations for his heroes. The bank, the I, and the slave.

Three contrasts. Do you see that? First illustration. He talks about the bank, as it were. Verse 19 literally reads, do not treasure treasures on earth.

The picture here that Jesus paints is a place where you'd keep your passport or your jewelry or your list of passwords. And it's a great illustration because nothing was safe in the ancient world.

[11 : 38] Imagine that you lived in Jesus' time. Everything was so transient. You could grow a crop and then get all of it get eaten away by locusts, right? Rats and mice could kind of break into your food stores and eat it all up.

A thief could plunder your house and carry away all the things that you hold dear. And yet, it's no different in our day and age, is it? We think we can store things forever, but then we lose them. We lay mousetraps, but they still find their way in. We use screen protectors and our phones still break. Cars depreciate. Nothing lasts forever.

And rather than placing our security in earthly wealth, Jesus says this, let's prioritize heavenly wealth instead. Look at verse 20. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

Treasures in heaven. Jesus is saying, look, you can't take all these earthly investments with you after you die anyways. So, if that's a bad investment, find a better one.

[12 : 45] Your character. Your Christ-likeness. Your faith. Your maturity in Christ. Investing in maybe gospel partnerships. Donating to Christian causes.

These are the kinds of investments that have eternal value and are what God's children should pursue instead. Right? Because these things don't need content insurance. And they're safer.

A safer investment than anything else this world can offer. A few years ago, there was a big phrase. There was a real shortage of this delicious, delicious food. Well, it wasn't a food. It was a drink. I wonder if any of you raided the stores trying to find this bottle once upon a time.

When it first came out, thank you for being honest, Vicky. When it first came out, I was out there too going, the shelf's empty. The shelf's empty. Where is this bottle of milk that everyone keeps talking about that I really, really need to have?

[13 : 48] And finally, I think we had to go to Hamilton or something. It was there. And then we had a day out and we had this big bottle, 750 mls. And then as we had it, we ended up playing tricks on ourselves.

We said, oh, this is so good. Let me try a little bit of it. Oh, don't drink too much. Don't drink too much. We've got to savor it. So let's sip it slowly. Can we share it in like little, little, little sips?

That's what happens, isn't it? We treasure something so much that it starts to change our behavior. Whether it's chocolate milk, whether it's cold hard cash, our careers, our gamer ranks, whatever.

The principle's the same. Whatever we start to protect jealously, maybe fiercely, shows where our security is. What our true self is actually longing for.

That's the treasure principle that we see in verse 21, right? For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. We want to remember that one.

[14:50] Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You could call it the Gollum principle. You want to remember Gollum from The Lord of the Rings, the movie, The Little Critter?

The more he held onto his precious, that ring, the more it shaped his true self. He used to be human and then he became more and more like the thing he treasured. Okay? Until he was no longer recognizable.

What we treasure shapes our hearts. The love of money, Paul says, is the root of all kinds of evil. That's the first illustration, the bank.

Jesus moves on and he, from verses 22 to 23, he changes illustrations to the eyes. And at first glance, I think, as we read this, maybe some of you were trying to go, how is this related?

What's an ad for a spec saver's got to do with what Jesus is talking about here? The connection we need to make here is that it's all related and we just need to find out how. This is how. In Jewish and ancient Near Eastern thought, okay, the eyes were associated with greed, envy, stinginess.

[15:57] Have you ever heard the phrase, green-eyed monster? All right? I think even in Chinese, you talk about the eyes wanting to be slanted, right? And it's not a good thing to have slanted eyes.

For example, when Moses warns the Israelites not to be stingy to each other, the Israelites have this concept too. He literally says this in Deuteronomy 15, 9.

Don't let your eye be evil towards your brother. In other words, don't be stingy. Don't be stingy. Don't be stingy. That's what's going on here. This is the light of Jesus' teaching. When we see through healthy eyes, we are generous.

If our eyes are sick, literally evil in this passage, it means our vision is clouded. We can only see through the lens of greed and envy, selfishness. What our eyes gaze at, our heart wants.

And so just as two small eyes can affect our whole body, where we fix our eyes, our ambition as it were, can shape our whole life. Healthy eyes fix on a generous God, one who will steer us towards being generous with money to each other.

[17:08] And yet if you have evil eyes, we start to look at the gift instead of the giver. It makes us stingy, controlling, not wanting to pay the bill all the time.

It turns us into blind men and women, groping in the darkness. And Jesus' quick fire goes to the next third illustration, verse 24.

He talks about the slave, right? No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and money.

Most of you here work, right, in a company. You have a boss or a manager. Some of you are self-employed, that's okay. But go with me here.

Imagine you had a boss. However, Jesus' language is not kind of employer-employee relationship. It's a bit stronger. The text actually literally reads, no one can be a slave to two owners.

[18:11] And I wonder how you felt when you read that phrase, you cannot serve or be a slave to both God and money. It's such an attack on our culture's storyline, isn't it?

Right? Western individual culture says this. You can be yourself. You don't have to care what they're going to say. You can be free. You can do what you want. Those of us who grew up in this environment, we don't like being told what to do or what job to go for, what to study at uni.

But notice Jesus doesn't give the option that we are not slaves and we are free from anything at all, any master. Because here's the thing.

We are all slaves to something or someone. You see, if you are pouring out your heart and soul into getting more stuff, if your passion is about earning more stuff, if your ambition is about having more, you're not really free, are you?

You're not really free. You may think you're free, but you're just a slave to money, to the God of stuff. Can I tell you as a struggling idolater to the God of stuff, idol worshiper to the God of stuff, the God of stuff cannot love you back.

[19:31] It can't carry the weight of your devotion and love. If you're here this afternoon and what makes you feel safe and secure comes from what you own or what you wish you owned, listen again to Jesus, verse 24.

You cannot serve both God and money. Around this time last year, a few of us at college, me and a couple of friends, we recorded a song that one of our lecturers wrote, actually.

He's a pretty well-known songwriter in Australia. And the idea is that we would sing it as we prepared ourselves to be sent out as gospel workers. And in this song, the line that strikes me the most, it's a song called We Will Declare Your Glory.

And in verse 3, it goes like this, grateful and plenty, content in our need, willing to suffer, repenting of greed, we are yours.

Repenting of greed. I wonder if you've ever thought about repenting of greed before. This is my reaction. What? Hang on. Repenting of greed? I can repent of lots of things, but greed?

[20 : 41] I mean, I quit my job to go to Bible college, right? Greed? You can imagine Peter and Andrew's reaction as they're listening to Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount. What? You're telling us not to love money?

We just left our fishing business to come follow you. We don't have to repent, surely. But no. Any of us, rich or poor, can struggle with worshipping God's gifts instead of the giver himself.

Friends, if making money, if financial security is our main goal in life, then we are not worshipping God, we're worshipping money. I belabor the point because I think Jesus does, right?

He uses three illustrations to try and get through to us. I think he knows that we will dodge and deny that we struggle with greed. I mean, it's easy to admit if you have an anger issue, right?

He just has to say it once in the sermon, and you're like, oh yeah, I relate. Yeah, I get angry. You know if you struggle with adultery or not, right? Either you've done it or you haven't, or last.

[21 : 47] But I think greed is a sin that kind of camouflages itself. You can be greedy and then hide it and justify it some other way, right? You can buy a \$250 jacket and say, oh, but it was on special.

It was on special. Or you might say, I'm a poor student. Yeah, I'm a poor student. So I think when that Christmas appeal comes for those families, I'll just let the people who work have a go.

Maybe you're being wise with your money. Or maybe you're greedy and you're worshipping the God of stuff. So how can you and I tell, friends, whether we need to repent of greed?

Well, do what Jesus does. Ask yourself with these three pictures, how do you invest? Where do you look? Who do you serve? Right?

Maybe another way to put it, check your bank account. Check what's on your screen. Check your calendars. They don't lie. They'll tell you where your time and money and your treasures go. Where your worth is put in.

[22 : 53] And friends, I also think we need to, on the topic of greed, be sceptical of the kind of fake Christianity, or Christianity light, or even false Christianity that's being taught in some churches.

And maybe what they say kind of goes like this. If you trust God, you'll become wealthy. Or maybe this God wants you to come to New Zealand and to have a great life and to settle and be secure.

He wants you to be blessed with money and a family, whatever your heart treasures. They might even say that God is for you. He wants to bless you. And what they actually mean is we're stuff of this world.

And the more we listen to their podcasts, buy their merch, soak in their culture, the more it will crowd out the real message of Jesus. Right? And how he taught, how he lived, how he died.

If you are being sucked in by this false teaching, read your Bibles. Our God, our God Jesus, never had a powerful crew. He never owned a single bit of real estate.

[24 : 01] He never gained a prestigious title. In Matthew 8, 20, he had no place to lay down his head. He was despised and rejected in the eyes of the world. If we follow Jesus, we should expect to follow after the pattern of Jesus' life.

He's gonna fix his eyes to the cross. He's gonna serve his Father's will. He's not gonna have much in terms of material things. And yet he was wealthier than the richest man or woman on earth.

Friends, I'm so encouraged when I hear stories from you of the sacrifices you make. I'm trying to fight against the God of greed. Each time I hear someone eat out less so that they can give more to a needy family.

Each time you are sacrificing your time and your treasures for Jesus' sake. Each time you unsubscribe to a time waster and invest in a relationship with a vulnerable person.

This is following the real Jesus. This is living out kingdom priorities. This is saying, I'm gonna approach money differently. Praise God. You are storing up treasure that will not spoil or fade.

[25 : 11] It's been kept by a king who is worth more than all the riches this world has to offer. Right? So that's two ways that we can prioritize wealth.

Right? Not treasures on earth, but treasures investing, serving in heaven. And so in the rest of chapter six, Jesus basically follows on from what he's just said about treasures, how we view wealth, and how we view anxiety and worries of this life follow straight through.

Let me show you what I mean. Let's read verse 25. Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

What's the key phrase there in verse 25? Anyone have a guess? Do not worry.

Yeah. Good one. Anyone else? Anyone else? I think the key phrase, sorry to burst your bubble, is therefore. All right? Because you want to read, okay, this is learning how to read your Bibles right.

[26 : 21] When you see a therefore in the Bible, what do you want to ask? What's the therefore? Therefore. Okay? You'll get this. You'll get this. Look, the two passages are connected.

Jesus is saying, it's only once we understand money and wealth rightly, then we will know how to face the worries of this world. What we treasure, friends, shapes what we trouble over, doesn't it? Doesn't it? We get anxious over what we feel insecure about. And if it's money, we're going to get anxious about money. And look, I understand. We live in the most anxious generation in history, right?

We get reminded of this all the time. And it kind of becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. And at the same time, our world is more and more obsessed with stuff.

Become more and more materialistic. I wonder if they're connected. I wonder if they're connected. I think Jesus thinks so. And so that's why he says, don't worry about your life.

[27 : 24] Some of your translation might say, don't be anxious. So let's keep following his argument here. Notice he just starts asking rhetorical questions, right? Let's keep going. Isn't life more important than what we eat and wear?

Yeah. Look at the birds, he says. Look at the birds that your father nourishes. Okay? Aren't you more valuable than they are? Yeah. Well, does worry make you grow taller?

Live longer? No. How about those flowers? Look at those wild flowers in the field. They're more scuffed than King Solomon himself, right?

Won't God clothe you much better than those flowers? Yes. Look. If God is going to care after birds and flowers, he will care for you too.

Don't worry. Don't worry. Verse 31. Do not worry then. Saying, what shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?

[28 : 25] For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Now, Jesus does something clever here with his words, right? He uses the word seek or chase after twice. He makes a comparison. He says, verse 32, the pagans, people who live without God, they run after stuff.

And yet, Jesus says, run after God's kingdom instead first. Seek his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

That is the two different ways that every human being approaches worry and anxiety, by chasing.

Okay? So all of us are going to be chasing anyway. So what I'm saying to you, and what Jesus is saying to you, is that either we chase after material security, or we will chase after his kingdom and righteousness first, and then he will provide the security anyways.

Anyways, there's no middle ground. Right? He doesn't say, seek only his kingdom and righteousness. He's not calling you to be a monk, or a nun, or something.

[29 : 31] He's saying, seek first. It's not wrong to plan for your future, to buy a house if you need to, to put food on the table for your family. Those are good things. After all, if you're a bird, right, you still need to go and pick out seeds and insects, or whatever.

If you're a flower, you need to put roots in the soil. That's fine. But when we see God's kingdom first, right, when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, like in the Beatitudes, as first priority, do you know what?

Our Heavenly Father says, he will provide everything you need anyways. And Jesus, he's not dissing all anxiety. He's not saying it's only caused by money. Right? Maybe some of you here suffer from an anxiety disorder.

This is not what he's talking about here. He's talking about anxiety caused by worrying, chasing after the God of money, when you become greedy instead of righteous.

And Jesus says, look, when you do that, it will just fracture you into anxious men and women. It will just make you someone who always wants to compare yourself with others, never satisfied, always seeking.

[30 : 36] Maybe some of you here, you're still seeking. You're not quite sure that you're, you've found a living relationship with Jesus. But you're just chasing and chasing.

So can I ask you, what are you chasing in this life? Are you so caught up in what everyone else worries about? What they wear, what they eat, what they drink, who they're dating, where they're studying.

Are you a slave to the God of human ambition? Submitting to its demands on your life, always anxious, never satisfied. Is that you?

If it's you, my friend, Jesus invites you to seek him first, to turn away from the God of stuff, to trust and obey a king. This is the gospel. Who had all the treasures of heaven, yet gave it up to live among us, to die in our place, and to bring peace from every single worry that we have.

Ultimately, the worry of death and separation from him. This is the good news. Jesus paid the ultimate price, his own life, so that we might be his ultimate treasure.

[31 : 44] I'll say that again. Jesus paid the ultimate price, his life, so that we might be his ultimate treasure. And you know what? For you and I, whether you're a Christian or not, the way to break free from our slavery to whatever God, whether it's money or sex or power, is to treasure Jesus.

To treasure Jesus, the source of forever worth, the source of forever riches. When you know that Jesus treasures you enough to die for you, to lay down his life for you, that frees you from being trapped to finding your worth in your career, your job, your status in life.

It does. Early this year, I went through several months without steady work, and I had to relearn this principle, right?

You can be a Christian all your life, or much of your life, and you still need to relearn and repent.

Because when lockdown hit, and I remember the blur of filling out job application after job application, unemployed and worried, chasing, feeling anxious, I fell into that trap again, right?

Of putting my human ambitions first, I'd subconsciously slip back into placing my worth in what I own, or how much money I could put on the table. I needed verse 33, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

[33 : 07] I needed that reminder then, and I still need it now. How about you? How about you? Maybe you have financial problems right now, and you're not sure how things will work.

Maybe you've been following Jesus all your life, but kingdom ambition used to get you fired up, it's now kind of taken a back seat. Maybe you're about to commit to a new chapter of serving Jesus, an internship or some new job, but you're not sure where the money will come from.

God's reminder is to seek first his kingdom. Put me first, friend. See how I will provide for you.

Something that we'll need reminding of all our lives, as our friends live more and more differently to us, as they earn much more than us, as they spend their time and money more differently.

And yet our Father promises us, you will lack nothing. You will never lack anything. Because in Christ, friends, we have a treasure, don't we? A treasure more profound, more precious than anything money on earth can buy.

So let's continue that path. We follow Jesus, because he reminds us here, there's two ways we prioritize wealth, and it leads to two ways we will approach all our worries in this life.

[34 : 31] So friends, either we're going to point our hearts to wealth that fades, or our hearts to wealth that is forever. In our groups, I hope that you'll spend some time reflecting on this, and that you'll think about how we store up and save up what we look at, what we spend our time thinking about, that we own up if there's greed in our life.

I want us to discuss how knowing Jesus is our treasure makes a difference to how we view material things. And friends, it would be great if we could challenge each other to think of one way to be more ambitious about our wealth as we follow Jesus.

So, can I pray for us as we do that soon in groups? Father, we thank you.

We thank you that you did not spare your only son, Jesus, that on a hillside many years ago, the greatest treasure on earth was strung up like a common criminal, beaten, crucified.

And there as he hung, as the world mocked and ridiculed the Son of God, there was our greatest treasure actually given for us.

[36 : 01] We thank you, Father. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that even if we have not much on this earth, even if we see others around us gaining more, we have Jesus and he is worth more than anything else.

Help us to turn our eyes away from the things of this world that grow strangely dim and to turn and fix our eyes on Jesus, our lion, our king, our provider, our treasure.
We pray these things in his name. Amen.