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That Little Quiz

1 John 1

Prayer: *Father, we just want to thank you for this day, this opportunity, this gathering. Lord, this is all from your hands and we are grateful for it. We just want to pray as we get to this part of the service, Lord, where we have the privilege of opening up your book, we would also have the privilege of your Holy Spirit, that you'd be guiding us, that you'd be accompanying us, that you'd be making these words of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well I've mentioned before what I believe my job description entails, and I think I once expressed it to somebody who actually asked me what I thought my job was. I said, "Actually it's very simple," I said, "my job is to help you fall deeper in love with Jesus Christ." Let me explain to you why I think that matters more than anything. You see there are three different ways that people relate to the gospel. There are those who are, number one, determined to earn their salvation; there are those who are determined to finesse it; and there are those who simply love Jesus

because he first loved us.

Now those who are determined to earn their salvation include those who identify as Christians and as non-Christians alike. It's anyone who feels that as long as I try to be a good person, I trust that my goodness will somehow get me through that qualifies. And it doesn't matter what faith is person has, it could be Buddhism or Islam or Christianity or Judaism, doesn't make any difference. If their general belief lines up with that, they're thinking that somehow they're able to earn their salvation. That's not rare at all. This is what the majority of your friends, your neighbors, your relatives, your colleagues, this is what they believe whether they express it in religious terms or not. It's basically hoping that I'm good enough for God.

The great preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse once spoke about a diagnostic quiz that he used to give folks when he wanted to see what they really believed about the gospel. I forgot the exact details but I'm thinking that he asked them if you die this afternoon and you met St. Peter at the gates of heaven and he asked you why should I let you into heaven, what would you say? And please understand, there's absolutely no scripture whatsoever that says St. Peter's going to meet you at the gates of heaven. That doesn't exist. This is only a diagnostic quiz, so there's some

poetic license going on here. But the point of it is that there's only three different answers that someone could give to that question, two of which are not just incorrect but are spiritually deadly. For many years now I found this little quiz while chatting with folks to get an idea of what they think the gospel is to be very useful because their answers can oftentimes give you a very quick insight into whether or not they understand the gospel.

So the first answer and sadly probably the most popular answer to the question: Why do you think you deserve to go to heaven is, "Look at my record." I mean nobody actually puts it that way. People put it a lot more modestly. They may say, "I'm not the best and I'm not the worst" and "I try my best" and "I hope for the best," but it's basically telling God, "Please, just look at my record." The problem here is that God doesn't judge us on a sliding scale based on our ability. Instead he judges us on the very same standard of his holiness and his perfection. And a holy and perfect God has no choice but to judge his people by a holy and perfect standard and that standard is perfection. Jesus made that crystally clear when he said something shocking in the Sermon on the Mount. He said this in *Matthew 5:48*, he said: *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Well that's devastating news to people who want God to simply look at their record, because it's their record that will universally condemn

them. I mean we all use the phrase "nobody's perfect" because we all know that's precisely true, nobody is perfect. We understand that with a shrug of the shoulders. God sees that and says -- quote -- *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* You think well, that's a pretty high bar, isn't it? I mean who in the world doesn't fall short of that? I mean the glory of God? The only one who never did was Jesus Christ. Actually there was one other, actually there was two other who were on earth at that time who could also make a claim to perfection, and that was Adam and Eve. When they ate that forbidden fruit in the garden, they, too, joined the ranks of every human and they, too, became imperfect. But the problem is God's standard never changed because we could no longer attain it. It remained one of absolute perfection.

So here's the problem: No one gets to heaven unless they are perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. The Ten Commandments were just an expression of God's perfect standards that we all hopelessly misunderstand. You know people think if you try your best to live up to the Ten Commandments, God somehow grades you on a sliding scale with lots of credit given for good intentions. But that's not even close. The Ten Commandments are a list of ten non-negotiable demands of perfection in ten different areas of human endeavor and to fail in the slightest degree to obey even one

of those commandments is to give up the perfection that God demands of all of us, causing the entire effort to fail. That's why James says in *James 2:10*: *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* Well, the good news is Jesus came to earth in order to rescue those who had failed and become guilty of all of it. The difficult part is getting us to understand that.

Jesus once told a lengthy story about the fate of those who insisted that their righteousness was good enough for heaven when they were totally mistaken, and Jesus spoke about a wedding feast and a guest who demanded the right to attend the feast clothed in his own righteousness. This was someone who insisted, "Look at my record." This is the story that Jesus told. It's in *Matthew 22*. It says: *And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them."*

Now this is not the gospel that goes out to everyone, this is the first gospel, the gospel call that went out to the Jews. These were folks who were called to be priests who would bring the good news of the gospel to the rest of the world, and so God calls them all to his wedding feast and the response is indifference, which leads to hostility, which leads finally to murderous persecution. This refers to the many prophets that God sent to the nation of Israel who were treated shamefully and killed. Jesus says in verse 7: *The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.* Well Jesus is referring to an event that would actually take place in the future. Israel would be destroyed, the king was angry, Rome did send troops and burn that city down. Verse 8, Jesus says: *Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'* And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. And again this is the gospel going out to every tribe and nation and tongue, and God is sending the good news out to all the world that man's imperfection has been taken care of by God himself going to the cross and paying the price. But man still resists saying over and over again, "God, just look at my record." God paints the picture of heaven as this wedding feast and everyone at the feast is clothed not with their

own imperfection but with the white robe of perfection that Jesus has purchased for all who place their faith in him. But at that feast is one man who stands out. He's refused the garment provided, insisting on his own clothing. He's a picture of a man choosing his own righteousness rather than God's provision. Verse 11 says: *"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment."* Well all the folks there at the feast have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. This is a picture of heaven itself and those who are fit to be there and not one of them is fit in and of themselves but only because of the righteousness they've acquired which is represented by that garment. They've acquired it by faith in Christ. But there in the midst of Jesus's story stands a man decked out in his own righteousness. Verse 12 says: *And he, that's Jesus, said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.* You see, speechless is the perfectly appropriate response to someone who's just learned that his righteousness can never come close to the righteousness that God demands. Again, Jesus made it crystal clear in his sermon on the mount that God's demand of his people is absolutely unattainable. Jesus said, *"You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* So it doesn't matter how good the man thought he was, he could never attain the moral perfection that God demanded. So the man in the story like anyone else who figures that they're good

enough for God decided that his robes were white enough on their own and he was tragically mistaken. Verse 13 says: *Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* *For many are called, but few are chosen."*

These are folks who were stunned, and they're stunned because they feel their righteousness should have been more than enough for God. These are not folks who are simply mistaken, these are folks who are now gnashing their teeth at God, demanding that he sees things their way. And this is the fundamental nature of hell itself. I mean the story says the man is cast into outer darkness where there's gnashing of teeth, and this again speaks to what hell itself is like.

Awhile back I was listening to a podcast of Elisa Childers and she mentioned that she had always thought of the gnashing of teeth as a sign of distress, a sign of deep grief. She pointed out that the scriptural definition of gnashing of teeth is far different. It's not grief. In fact it's rage and it's bitterness. In the New Testament we have an example of that rage in the account of Stephen's death. I mean here's Stephen, he's standing before the whole council and he's giving the whole history of Israel and then he castigates all of the religious leaders. This is what he said. He said: *"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still*

uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him."

Well, their reaction to Stephen was not one of repentance, it was one of unbridled rage, and this is how it's described. It says: *When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.* Well, that's not grief, that's rage. I mean the psalmist also describes the gnashing of teeth this time as scorn and mockery. This is *Psalm 35*. It says: *But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; assailants gathered against me without my knowledge. They slandered me without ceasing. Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me.*

In *Lamentations*, it's unbridled scoffing. This is *Lamentations 2:16*. It says: *All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they scoff and gnash their teeth and say, "We have swallowed her up. This is the day we have waited for; we have lived to see it."*

See, the man with no wedding garment is in hell because he relied on his own garment, his own righteousness instead of Christ's, and his response is not one of grief or pity, it's one of defiance and anger. It's the response of every single inhabitant in hell forever. I mean the reason why hell is an eternal state is that

those who are in hell infinitely prefer it to heaven. Hard as it may seem to think that. And they're gnashing their teeth not in grief at their status but in anger and rage at God and his kingdom. I mean I've always said hell appears to be a place that's locked from the inside, devoid of God's presence and any shred of goodness and full of people so consumed with their own bitterness towards God that the last place on earth they would ever want to be is heaven itself. I mean I used to wonder how it could be that people who wanted absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with God while they're there on earth could be transformed simply by the act of dying into people that now sought out his presence. I mean as awful as it seems, it seems reasonable to conclude that people who have no use for God on earth will continue to have no use for God once they've left this earth. And as much as they might hate being in hell, they would hate even more the hideousness in their eyes of heaven. And such is the fate of those who insist on telling God, "Just look at my record."

Now the second answer that Barnhouse spoke of was silence. He said some folks might say, "I don't know what I would say," or "I'd have nothing to say on my behalf." That would at least be accurate, because God says at the throne of his judgment when the demands of his absolute perfection are revealed, every mouth will be stopped. This is what he says in *Romans 3:19*. He says: *Now we know that*

whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. Well unfortunately being accurate is a far cry from being saved. Silence speaks to having your notions of what is right and true and righteous and good so thoroughly blown up that you have nothing to say in response. That's how many who think they can finesse their way into heaven will respond. These are folks who want heaven but they also want earth as well, perhaps even more so. They want to know how much can I love the world and still be eligible for heaven? They're those who have grown quite used to the art of serving two masters. It's a hopeless task. This is how Jesus put it in *Matthew 6:24*. He said: *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."* Well there Jesus is singling out money but you can add anything else you want including career or family or life itself. Listen to what Jesus said in *Luke 14:26*. He said: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Say what? Well, Jesus here, he's not instructing us to hate our own families, I mean, after all, the fifth commandment requires us to honor our parents and Jesus tells us to love even our enemies. So we ask what is he getting at here? Well, simply that Jesus expects all

relations with everyone beside himself to seem like hatred by comparison.

I mean let's say you're the top sprinter in the state at your high school and somehow or other you arrange to have a race with Usain Bolt, who's the fastest human alive, you could be forgiven for afterwards saying to everyone, "I'm the slowest runner on earth." I mean by comparison you might feel it but you're not. And what Jesus is demanding of us is not hatred of those that we're close to but instead a love so deep and complete by comparison to every other love that we have, it seems like hatred. Now if you think that Jesus might be more demanding than you're comfortable with and either you really do believe you can serve two masters or you just don't know enough about who Jesus is and what he did, and that part we can address. I mean, the fact is God demanded absolute perfection in all ten of his commandments knowing that the demands of that law will absolutely impossible for fallen man to keep. God had two solutions: One was to condemn all of mankind or the other was to take matters into his own hands, and that's precisely what he did. He became a human being, he lived a perfect life so that he could offer up and apply his perfect life to our life of sin, and when Jesus went to the cross, he went as our sacrifice, literally becoming our sin so that he could absorb the just punishment for our sins and thus render them powerless.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* So when we by faith accept him as Lord and Savior, he then exchanges his perfection for our sin so that now we can stand before a holy and perfect God with his perfection and his righteousness now credited to our account. This is how *Colossians* puts it, it says: *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* That's what Jesus went through in order to justify us, in order to make us worthy of heaven, in order to pay our debt of imperfection and clear our record so that we could stand fully justified before God.

Well now imagine trying to compare our own personal righteousness to God's righteousness. And you see how foolish and empty it is for someone to say to St. Peter at the gates of heaven, "Hey, I deserve to come in. Look at my record." Well, so far we've seen that those who cling to their record are lost, and those who realize they have nothing to say are lost as well. So what is the one answer to that question: "Why do you deserve to come into God's heaven?" Well, the simplest way of expressing it is to take that line from that well known hymn that says: "Nothing to thy

throne I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." See, those twelve words basically sum up what the right attitude toward the gospel is. They're spoken by a person who realizes that no matter how good we think we might be, we will never be close to the flawless perfection which is only acceptable to God and of God. So we bring precisely nothing to the throne. Our basis for entering heaven is simply to cling to the cross as the only way to give us the righteousness we need to enter heaven. And so our love for Jesus is centered on the cross.

So now ask yourself, is that the kind of love that I have towards Jesus Christ? Do we love him because he first loved us? You see, if we don't, it's either because we're choosing to serve two masters. We're really trying to finesse our way into heaven or we simply just don't know enough about Christ to grow our love for him. That's why all I've been saying these last 30 minutes is by way of introduction to a letter that's designed to help us grow our love for Jesus. You see, I mentioned those three categories in the beginning of this message: The first is those who think they can earn their salvation; the second is those who think they can finesse it; and the third is those who simply love Jesus. There's a reason why that is the place that everyone needs to be who names Christ as Lord and Savior. See, there are all kinds of different motivations for living out the Christian life, some of them good,

some of them not so good, some of them deadly. There are those who try to live out the Christian life thinking that they have to work and earn their salvation. That can easily move from not so good to deadly because, as we just discussed, there's no way that we can earn something that's given away for free, and that's grace. God's insistent on that. *Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

There are plenty of Christians who live out their Christian lives heavenly burdened by the sense they're just not doing enough, their performance is sub par. They're so used to working out their own salvation they forget that it is God in us who is working it out. Lots of Christians struggle with the balance between easy believism and a work-based gospel. And you know the works folks see grace as a cheap and easy way and the grace folks see the works folk as desperately trying to earn God's favor, and it's so easy to get caught up in each of those excesses. And what we're truly seeking for and what automatically puts everything in balance is simply falling in love with Jesus. I mean ask anyone who's fallen in love and they'll tell you that doing and working for someone that you're head over heels in love with is not work; it's pleasure. I mean it's one thing to have a nasty boss tell you you're going to have to dig him a six-foot ditch, it's another thing to have your wife

or girlfriend ask you, "Could you put in a flower bed for me right here six feet long?" Same ditch, different motivation, and it makes all the difference in the world. And that's precisely what we aim for in our Christian life, to be so head over heels in love with Jesus Christ that it affects every single aspect of our lives, because it's that love that makes working out our salvation a joy and a pleasure.

One of the main differences between Jesus and any other person or leader is that the more you know Jesus, the more deeply in love with him you will grow. I mean that's not the way that it normally works for human beings, especially those that we put on a pedestal, I mean the more we learn about them, the more human they become, the harder it is to love or even admire them. Well not so with Jesus. The more you learn about Jesus, the more you realize that this man was also God in the flesh doing virtually everything perfectly with a humble servant's heart. I mean just picture the knowledge that you can glean about Jesus as a three-year-old. I mean you can understand Jesus, he's nice and he's good and he's strong but that's about all you can get. Well, compare that with someone who has studied Jesus all his life and the Jesus that he discovers is good and he's strong but he's loving and he's joyful and he's peaceful and he's patient and he's kind, and he's meek, and he's gentle and self-controlled all to an extent unmatched by

any human who's ever lived. The more you learn about Jesus, the more you realize that everything about him is wonderful and marvelous beyond measure. I mean I came to Christ some 48 years ago. My understanding of Jesus, of who Jesus is today is vastly different than my understanding of who he was 48 years ago. And it's grown over time in height, breadth, width and depth and it's made me grow because it's my life's goal to imitate him. And one thing that I've learned in all of those years is that what I now know about Jesus constitutes is tiny fraction of what I will continue to learn for all eternity. We know so little about the God who became flesh and laid down his life for us because our capacity to know is limited by our human experience. And it's a fact that we will spend most of eternity just growing our capacity to take in how marvels he is. Paul describes that process in *2 Corinthians 3:18*. He says: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* I mean, beholding the glory of the Lord as a three-year-old and beholding it as a fifty-year-old is transformative. Well, just imagine growing in degrees of glory -- quote -- *"being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another"* solely to be able to comprehend the height, the breadth, the width, and the depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. I mean the fact is the knowledge that we will all

have of Jesus in glory ten thousand years from now will make the deepest understanding that we could possibly have on this planet seem like that of a three-year-old.

And I say all of that by way of introduction to the book that we're going to spend some time studying these next few weeks. It's the first of the apostle John's epistles, and its focus is on Jesus and our relationship to him. Thanks to Andy who begged me to do this book over and over again. I finally said, you know something, this is time. This is a book that touches on many, many aspects of who Jesus is that can expand our understanding and therefore grow our love for him.

So let me just open up the beginning statement of this letter. This is *1 John 1-4*. John says this: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us -- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

Now my first reaction to a paragraph like this is that it's trying to cram so much information and so much wonderful insight into so few sentences that I feel like I'm talking to someone who's seen something so amazing and so profound that he's just trying to say too much too fast. I mean I feel like I need to say to this, slow down, slow down for a minute. Speak slowly so we can understand you. And in a sense that's what John is and that's basically what he's trying to do.

Let me just repeat the first opening lines. He says: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.* Now those words "from the beginning" should sound familiar because it brings with it the familiarity with John's gospel and its opening paragraph which says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.* So John's first order of business is to establish the fact that in the beginning there was God the Son actively engaged in creation. And we all know Genesis opens up with the same statement. It says: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* It states that right from the beginning of all things including time and space was God the creator of all things. Not nothing, not chance, not the big bang by itself, but God. John's gospel puts it this

way, it says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* So he says this word was with God and was God. Well you can't do that unless there's more than one person in God, and that's one of the reasons why we believe in the trinity, the third person being the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So this word was with God, and was God and all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

So who's this mysterious person named "Word"? Well in the original Greek, the word for "word" is "logos." The statement says in the beginning was the logos, and the logos was with God and the logos was God. So John refers to this person in Greek as the logos and this is the Greek word that we get our English word "logic" from, and it essentially means "that which gives meaning to." The big picture is this: Within the Lord Jesus Christ all life has meaning and purpose. Outside of him it has none, ultimately none. So the text says in the beginning was the logos or word, who actually did the creation of all things, and then John tells us this amazing fact about this Word in his gospel. He says: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* So John tells us the logos, the very same creative force who spoke the

universe into being with its black holes and galaxies down to our planet with its mountains and oceans animals and plants, that logos, that Word then gave up all of his power to become a human baby in the womb of Mary. *And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.* You mean Jesus isn't 2,021 years old? That's correct, he's not. The Son of God existed before time existed. He became Jesus of Nazareth 2,021 years ago. John's first sentence in this epistle of his carries the same thought but it also reflects the times that he's now in. I mean it's some fifty years after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension and John's probably writing from the island of Patmos where he's been banished, where he wrote the book of Revelation. And he recognized that this false teaching of gnosticism is everywhere, and it taught that the flesh could be easily deceived and that Jesus could have been a spirit, he could have been a phantom. So John, the eye witness, he's going out of his way to insist that Jesus was a real flesh and blood person that he had real physical contact with.

So this is how he opens up his letter. He says: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.* So what John is saying is understand something, this Jesus, this is somebody that we heard and we saw, this is a guy that we touched with our own hands. He wasn't a

ghost. He was a real flesh-and-blood person. And John goes on to say, and by the way, we didn't just experience a physical Jesus, we didn't just see a body, we saw something much, much bigger. We saw the person, the life, the ministry, and the glory of who Jesus was. That's the next statement he makes. Verse 2: *The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.* So John is saying we saw Jesus on the micro level as a real, physical person and on the macro level as God, the Son who was there from the beginning with God as the author of all creation. And then John states his purpose in writing this epistle. Verse 3, he says: *That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.* John says there's but one way to make joy in this life and the next complete, and that's by fellowship with the Father and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you know what each of us go before God's judgment throne, if you thought you can say, "Look at my record," well the fact is you can't, *because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* And if you've never given much thought at all to the spiritual reality of life, you'll probably be speechless to find *that every*

mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

So our hope for this study of 1 John is that as you grow in your love for Jesus, that you will grow enough to know the only answer that counts forever. It's stated in *John 3:36*. He says: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."* There's a simple way to put that that kind of captures our goal for this study. It's nothing to thy throne I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Let's pray.

Father, we just, we want to grow in our love for you. I want my motivation for my Christian life to be an overwhelming love for Jesus. Not that I'm trying to earn something, not that I'm trying to check whether or not I've done enough or whether or not I'm operating in the right sphere, I just want to be in love with Jesus. And Lord, we need your Holy Spirit to help us grow in that way, we need your word, we need your power, we need your Spirit. I pray you would give me the ability to deliver to this congregation that kind of love. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.