

Received Unto God Only Through Righteousness

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Bible Text: John 10:1-18
Preached on: Sunday, November 7, 2021

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We read the word of God this morning in two places, two books, three chapters, 1 John 10, the gospel according to John 10 where a number of those "I am's" that I concluded the congregational prayer with are found. We'll read the first 18 verses of John 10.

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. 4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. 5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. 6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. 7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. 10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. 17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Then turn again to the book of Romans, two brief passages. First of all, in Romans 1, remind ourselves what verses 16 and 17 teach. Romans 1:16, Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," notice this is the gospel, the good news, "for it," the gospel, "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it," that's what that word "therein" means, in the gospel is, "the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Then in chapter 3 toward the end of the chapter in the 20's, notice how often righteousness is mentioned: 21 righteousness of God; 22 righteousness of God; 24 justified is the same idea; 25 toward the end, righteousness; 26 righteousness. And what the apostles is talking about there at the end of 24 notice, is Jesus Christ, "Whom God hath set forth," that is, he holds him out like this for all of you to see, God has set Christ forth for what? "To be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness." When God set forth Christ, what God wanted you and me to do is say righteousness, that's what we see when we see the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's on the basis of those passages and others like it that we have the teaching of the Catechism in Lord's Day 5. The back of psalter on page 5, we have Lord's Day 5 Questions & Answers 12 through 15, and then you notice that the first part of the Catechism is finished and here comes the second part of man's deliverance and Question 12 asks,

Q. 12. Since then, by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, is there no way [that's a very important word in the sermon this morning] is there no way by which we may escape that punishment and be again received into favor?

A. God will have His justice satisfied; and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves or by another.

Q. 13. Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?

A. By no means; but on the contrary we daily increase our debt.

Q. 14. Can there be found anywhere one who is a mere creature, able to satisfy for us?

A. None; for, first, God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man hath committed; and further, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it.

Q. 15. What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?

A. For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.

Go back to that first question before you close your psalter: is there no way by which we may escape that punishment? Is there any way? That's the question that needs to be pressed upon our hearts this morning and really a question that ought to come out of our hearts. Is there any way we can escape the judgment and justice of God and be received again into God's favor? Is there any way?

Now I think that's a problem for us who've grown up in the church or spent most of our adult life in the church; we don't think about that question. We say we've been received into God's favor. I don't need to ask that question. What use is it? And yet it's a very important question all of us need to ask all the days of our life. How can God receive us? What way is there for us to escape the predicament we're in and be received into the favor of God? That's how the first Lord's Day in the section on deliverance begins. The Catechism has, as it were, drawn a circle all the way around us in the first Lord's Days, a circle that went all the way around us, a circle that kept being drawn more distinctly and darkly so that we see that it is indeed a complete circle. It's not that one question drew a part of the circle, another question drew another part, but each question draws the entire circle around us so that there's no way that we can escape.

The first question is: is it possible that a righteous God will simply let people go and be merciful and only merciful? And the answer is: no. So the circle was put around us. You can't escape that way. Another question is: well, then isn't it possible to say God is not fair because we can't do what God requires of us? And the answer is: no, it's not possible to escape that way because God is fair. He made us upright. So the Catechism explains very clearly that God created us good after his own image, and it's our fault that we can't, it's my fault that I can't obey, and the circle is drawn even more sharply and clearly. I can't escape that way.

So the circle kept being drawn and kept being drawn so that the line is dark and distinct and we come to the question that Lord's Day 5 asks: is there no way, no way to escape? I say again, you've asked that question, have you not? And I ask that question, do I not? Or is it the case that we're simply careless and don't care about that question and we say to ourselves on a Sunday morning when it's beautiful outside, I'm sure glad when Sunday is going to be finished and I get back to my work, make more money, plan what I can purchase and the fun things I can do. I'm not really interested in asking a question like that. You're not careless this morning, are you, or am I?

Or if you say, well, I'm not careless but I'm not really thinking about that question because I was born in the church, raised in a Christian home, baptized by the minister, made confession of faith, I'm a member of a good Christian church and I've made a confession of Christ all my life. And so I'm presumptuous. You don't presume that this morning, do you? There are going to be millions and millions of people who face the Judge someday when they die; they have to stand before the righteous Judge and answer to him. You mustn't say, well, I was born in a good Christian home and I was baptized by a minister and I've been a member of the church all my life. That's not what God requires of you. You mustn't presume anything. You must always be asking over and over so that

the cycle of the Heidelberg Catechism's threefold parts, or three parts, are always in my mind: I am in sin. Is there any way that I can escape? Is it possible for me to escape?

And the answer of the Catechism brings us to this theme for the sermon this morning that we may be received unto God through righteousness. The way to escape is righteousness. You may become impatient, we'll talk about that in a moment. I have often become impatient when I come to Lord's Day 5 but we mustn't do that. Let's be very careful this morning and make sure we understand that. We may be received into God's favor in one way alone, and that is the way of righteousness. So let's see that this morning, first of all, that the only way of righteousness; secondly, the human impossibility of providing that way, I can't, you can't, God must; and then in the third place, something a little bit different than I put in the bulletin, I made a mistake by not including in that third point the word "faith," God's way of righteousness through faith in Christ and that's what we're going to emphasize in that third point. So received unto God through righteousness: in the first point, let's see that, that's the only way, righteousness; in the second point see we can't provide that; and then in the third place, see that faith is required in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We read Lord's Day 5 this morning or this afternoon when you get home, and see that the answer that the Catechism gives is a biblical answer and I emphasize that because we're tempted to say the answer that the Catechism brings here is logical, it makes sense, the answer here sounds very Calvinistic, rigorously Calvinistic but is it biblical? I want to know, you say, is this answer drawn from the Bible? And I am saying and want to demonstrate this morning, it is a biblical answer, and the more we learn of the way of salvation, the more we're going to appreciate the Catechism's carefulness and patience slowly and deliberately to walk us through the knowledge of our deliverance. Don't go too fast here. Be very careful here and start out with this step: the Catechism's answer is biblical. God demands righteousness and that's biblical. It's also logical. The Bible is very logical and it's Calvinistic because Calvinistic is scriptural, but what we want to see is that it's biblical and not now by looking at a text or two from the Bible, we'll do that also, but by looking simply at what God put on display when he sent our Lord Jesus Christ. God declared in Jesus Christ his righteousness.

We're tempted to think Ursinus and Olivianus commissioned by elector Frederick the III to write a good Catechism for the young people, by the way, and to unite those in his realm to confess one faith, we're tempted to think that that preacher and that seminary professor sat down together and came up with logic. Logic. Or if it wasn't simply logic, they found a couple of texts in the Bible that say righteousness is the way. And they certainly did and we will, and then they wrote down Lord's Day 5 and again repeated it in Lord's Day 6, and preceded it by Lord's Day 4 that says the very same thing, justice must be satisfied. You make a great mistake if you imagine that those two men, godly men Ursinus and Olivianus, were trying to be logical or scholastic or Calvinistic merely, those two men were doing nothing more than looking at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and asking the question: what is that all about? Why Jesus on the cross? And why the life of Jesus, all of it, led up to that cross and only to that cross so that though Jesus maybe tried to find another way to provide for God's people, there was no other way than that way.

And now I use the picture of a funnel. All of the Lord Jesus Christ's life funneled him to that one way of the cross, and Ursinus and Olivianus simply saw that. They were looking at the cross and they were listening to Jesus who also asked that question, "Is there any other way? Father, if there be any other way, let me take it." And God said to him from the time he was a little boy to the time he was ready to be arrested and hanged on that cross, "No, there's no other way. One way. Righteousness, righteousness, I must have my justice satisfied."

So you do that, let me do that this morning or this afternoon as I meditate upon this sermon. There is a presupposition that we must make here, though, about that cross and that is that that cross was determined by God and that God was in control all of the life of Jesus that led him to the cross. If you don't believe God was in control, then you're going to go off-track badly here, and that's why many say that God was not in control here, that wicked men were in control and wicked men funneled Jesus from this way and that way and finally brought him to the cross, and wicked men were demonstrating wickedness there at the cross, and that what we see at the cross is not a demonstration of God's righteousness but a demonstration of a man's willingness to suffer injustice, and then that becomes the gospel for them, we must be willing to follow Jesus who was able to suffer injustices, unfairness. Now you do that too and you'll be good Christians. No. If we understand that God was in control in the entire life of Jesus to put him into that one spot where he ended his life on the cross, then we will come to see what Ursinus and Olivianus came to see, the righteousness of God is only one way.

So if you see that, then you understand that Lord's Day 5 isn't discouraging in a negative way. For years I preached this and I always was somewhat discouraged, and gradually I've come to see that though I may be discouraged by this, being discouraged is not something wrong, not at all, but the discouragement comes from the depths of a sincere child of God's heart, is there any way? And God says righteousness. I want to know a way out, is there any way out? Righteousness comes the answer. Isn't there any mercy? Righteousness comes the answer and that, to me, from a certain point of view is discouraging but it's discouraging in a good way because I must be discouraged from taking this way or that way and see that there's only one way, and all of us now need to imagine that we are like those sheep or cattle that need to be put into a shoot. They're all scattered, the farmer brings them into a big pen and finally he needs to bring him into the corner of that pen where he can examine every one of them one-by-one. That's what we need to do too. Not that way, says the good shepherd, not that way but this way.

Now let's all go together and see the importance of this answer. Righteousness. It's like a father discouraging his son who can't afford a car except a very cheap beat-up car that's embarrassing to him, discouraging that son from buying a new car and borrowing money to buy that car. "Don't do that, son. That's not going to be wise, son." And then the son is discouraged by the father's answer but that discouragement isn't something bad, it's good. He must be discouraged from going that way. "No, son, not that way." Or the parents discouraging a daughter who hasn't been asked out yet and wants to be married, and then is asked out by an unbelieving man or a man with whom she's not one in the faith, and parents say to her, "No, no, don't take that offer, not that way." And then she's

discouraged but it's not bad that the parents discourage her because that way or that way is going to be ruinous to her and be miserable for her.

And I think now that I've belabored that point, you understand what we're saying here and the approach of the Catechism. It is not discouraging in a wrong way but in a right way. Isn't that exactly what Jesus did? Let's look at what Jesus said to his disciples, to his sheep. He said, "When I leave there are going to be all kinds of shepherds who call themselves shepherds but aren't. They're wolves. There are going to be all kinds of men who call themselves Christs but they aren't. They're false Christs. Don't follow them. Don't go that way. There is only one way. One way. Take heed," Jesus said in Luke 21:8, "that ye be not deceived for many shall come in my name saying I am Christ. Go ye not therefore after them."

Is there any more important warning to be made today for young people and for old people, when having seen the one way, we see another way that's very attractive to deliver me from my misery, from the sense of guilt and shame on account of my sins, to escape from the power and clutch of the devil in me to seek some other way? Is there any more important word these days to be heard than that word, "Not that way. Not that way. This way and this way only. It's the way of God's righteousness."

So the Catechism is saying be patient, don't be in a hurry, be very very careful, take one step at a time, there's mercy coming, but listen to this first. And we know that because when the first question is asked, "Is there no way," the Catechism doesn't say, "No, you're shut up to guilt and shame and misery. You're going to be condemned. There's only hell for you." The Catechism does not say that. The Catechism says God will have his justice yet. "Can we....?" No. No. But listen. "Can they be found somewhere else?" No. "Someone, somewhere else?" The answer is no. "What sort of mediator and deliverer then?" But the emphasis in this Lord's Day is not what sort of mediator then but the emphasis in this Lord's Day is, "You can't and this is the way God requires us to go."

And if you think about it, the more the Catechism describes God's righteousness, the more it magnifies God's mercy, the more it shows you that that's not a way, and that's not a way, and you see this way, you say, "That's mercy. Oh, that's mercy. This wouldn't have been mercy. That wouldn't have been mercy. But God's way is a way of mercy." Let's learn something about that this morning and then let's do what Ursinus and Olivianus did and see very clearly the cross of Christ as God demonstrating his own righteousness. I use that motion so that you can see what Paul is doing in the book of Romans.

Let's turn to that book again a moment and see in chapter 1, first of all, the chapter that we looked at before; chapter 2 we looked at before to emphasize the wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God and the justice of God that's going to punish, now let's look again and remind ourselves of chapter 1, verse 15, Paul says, "I am ready to preach, not ashamed of the gospel, the gospel is the power of God, and in the gospel," verse 17, "in the good news of God is declared righteousness." Here's the gospel. Do you see what's written in the gospel? Righteousness.

Paul makes more clear the point he's making in verses 25 and 26 of chapter 3, 25, "God set him forth." That's a very important verb there. It's doing what I did a moment ago. If I have something that I alone can see and I need you to see it, I'm going to set it forth to you. That's what God is doing. When he takes Jesus Christ on the cross and shows him to you, what do you see written there on the cross? What is the first word in this good news to you? It is God's own righteousness, and Paul even repeats that, 25, at the end, "to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins," and then in 26 again, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness." Did you see it the first time I showed it to you? If you didn't look, "I declare," God declares, "righteousness," and it's that kind of passage that Ursinus and Olivianus were looking at when they wrote this answer in the Catechism and then they look back at Jesus and all of his life long, and all of what Jesus was doing, and all what the people wanted Jesus to do, be a King on this earth, feed them with bread, earthly bread.

"Jump off the temple and display your power." Look at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and see what the devil was trying to do, take him off that path that led to the cross. "How about this way, Jesus?" No. "How about that way, Jesus?" Not that way. And Jesus finally having resisted all of those temptations which really represented all of the temptations of his life, set his eyes to the cross because there is the satisfaction of the justice of God and the demonstration of God's righteousness.

So Lord's Day 5 says a real man must suffer, a perfect man must suffer, and he must be more than a man because a mere man, even if he's perfect, will not survive the righteous wrath of God and be able to come out the other side of it and provide that righteousness to us. He must be a superhuman being, above a human being. A real man, perfect man, and a superhuman being, that is, God. God.

Would you like to be the redeemer of the people? Would you think that you perhaps can provide for your own righteousness? Would anyone volunteer to come up here, as it were, I speak foolishly to think about that, and say, "Yes, yes, I could"? You're a man, that is, you're a human and that's good, but before you come up to propose that you can make that satisfaction, I ask you, are you righteous? Perfect? Sinless? Because a man who doesn't have perfect sinlessness before God can't satisfy for himself and he can't satisfy for anyone else either. And if perhaps you could propose that you are sinless and you want to stand up here and be the propitiation for the sins that you've committed and perhaps the sins of a few others, do you know what's going to come down upon you to pay for sin? The wrath of God. You wouldn't last an instant. You and I cannot provide what we need and we need to see that, we need to see that with the same deliberateness and the same careful one step at a time, so that I come to the end of my rope and say, "I'm hopeless. I'm helpless."

I read in the Reader's Digest some years ago, and we still get that old magazine, I don't read it much anymore, but I read in the Reader's Digest some years ago one of those drama in real life stories of two, they're called spelunkers, they're scuba-divers who like to explore underwater caves, and these two men were exploring underwater caves in South America and as all wise spelunkers would do, before they went under the water

into these dark caverns, they would tie one end of a long rope to a rock or a stake where they started, and the other end of that long rope on their belt so that as they went through these dark murky caves and tunnels, they would be able to follow that rope back to where they started. And to their great horror, the rope came loose on one end and they were not able to find their way out. One did, who knows how, and the other didn't. And the one who didn't kept trying this way, and then he surfaced in a subterranean cave with a little pocket of air, not this way. He'd go back down under and surface again in another little pocket of air and dark and no way out, and he did that until finally all of the air in his tank was exhausted, and the batteries of his flashlight were spent, and he realized, "I'm going to perish. I can't get out. It's not in me to do it." And that provides just a dim, a dim illustration of what we must feel when we think of providing the way out ourselves.

Now I understand and you do too the limitations of that analogy. One man did on his own but don't think about that, just think of this: that man came to the end so that he realized he is going to perish unless someone rescues him, and in the end someone did rescue him. Professionals came, found him, led him out so that he was delivered. But here's the point: it's not this way, and we need to surface, as it were, in this subterranean cavern. Every time we propose a way and see it's not possible for me to get out that way, hopelessly lost, not that way, let's ask some questions and see the answer to those questions, as it were, as we surface in this cavern. Not this way. Another cavern. Not this way.

The first way we try to find out is, as I said earlier, that I, myself, am able to pay. Can I pay? And the answer is no because you keep increasing your debt. Imagine for a moment that you had a debt of a billion dollars and you know you can't pay a billion dollars but you'd like to try. You're only going to spin your wheels and go backwards because every day you increase that billion to two billion, and four billion, and eight billion. It would be like that boy who bought a new car, borrowing money and saying to his dad, "I'll pay it back," but he doesn't have any source of income and every day he needs to put more gas in the car, he fixes the things that are wrong with the car, and another bill comes and he can't pay. He daily increases his debt. That's the point we need to make. If we want to propose that we pay by our obedience and good works, we're going to come up in that subterranean cavern and see that sign, "Not this way. You can't get out here. It's impossible for you." And that's what the Catechism says in Question 13, "By no means, but on the contrary we daily increase our debt."

Then we propose another way. Let's find a righteous man. Let's look for a sinless person who maybe can satisfy the justice of God. So we go down that tunnel and through that murky water and come up in another subterranean cavern and there on the walls of that cavern a dim light shows, "Not this way." There is no perfectly righteous man that you can provide. Where is he? We're all descendants of Adam, we're all corrupt with the corruption of his nature who when he fell into sin, received a corrupt nature and all of his children are corrupt in him, and all of us are guilty in him. Is there anyone who is righteous? God looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand and there was not one. Not this way.

Well, maybe I can find somewhere, and now we know already the case is hopeless because there is no righteous man, but imagine that we could find a righteous man who had no sin, no actual sin, no original sin, no original guilt, no pollution of nature, let's find that man once just in our minds hypothetically and present him. So we take that next tunnel. Don't you realize the sign in that cave says, that if you find a man who's perfectly righteous, never committed any sin, and propose him to be subject to the wrath of God, he'll perish in an instant?

There is no way that you can provide your righteousness and that needs to live in our souls, people of God. We need to go home today and think about that. We mustn't presume, we certainly mustn't be careless and say we're not interested in that question, but we certainly must not be presumptuous either and say God's provided a way and then become bored with the gospel. It needs to live in your soul like it must live in the soul of that man who is rescued by professional cave-divers who knew that he would have perished had they not come. It needs to live in our souls so that we're grateful people of God, and we live every day like that man must live, waking up in the morning thinking, "I wouldn't be here if they hadn't come to deliver me."

It makes you think of the story of Nate Saint and the Elliots who were down in South America many years ago who were killed. Nate Saint's father was killed by the Inca Indians, and then a long story made short, one of those killers became converted and the son of one of those who was killed now becomes a friend of the killer, and the killer who knew he was guilty, standing under the judgment of God goes with the son of the one he killed to speak. That's his life to speak about how good God is to bring him to faith though he was a murderer.

Imagine that. Imagine that, that God would deliver you and yet you mustn't imagine that, it's true. This is what needs to live in our souls so that we are a people of God who every day can't keep our mouths shut about how good God is to us. Don't ever get bored with the gospel. Don't ever presume upon salvation. Don't ever seek any other way of salvation for yourself, and don't think for a moment that one of your works you can contribute to God, and ask God, "Are you please with me because of this? Do you approve of me because of that?" And God says, "Away with your works for now, that is, for you being approved in my sight. Your works don't count for you being approved in my sight. There's one way." Be conscious of this every single day so that we give glory to God and our hearts are aflame and we're overwhelmed with amazement and we live in devoted love to God.

One way. Righteousness. Provided by Christ. We can't. And now received by faith. Received by faith. I'm going to end the sermon this morning because that's what the book of Romans emphasizes, propitiation by faith in him. Faith. Now in your mind go home, in your mind go home and sit by yourself, in your mind go home and wake up tomorrow morning, put your feet on the floor and just sit there and think about your own guilt and what you deserve, and let me do that, and that overwhelm me, my guilt because one sin is enough to make me go to hell, and I have many more than one sin. And my guilt because of my connection to Adam, and my guilt because of my corrupt nature, make me worthy

of God's wrath upon me. I feel that in my conscience. And then in your mind's eye, go to your deathbed and lie there and see your children around you, and they don't know what you've done. You've confessed sin but they don't know what you've done. You do, though. What do you want them to say to you but words coming out of their mouth will comfort you, what you want them to say to you and what you want to see is the Lord Jesus Christ on display as a testimony of the righteousness of God so that with the hand of your soul which is faith, and the mouth of your soul which is faith, on your deathbed you reach out and say, "Christ is mine. I believe him. I trust him. I look back at all of my works, I know I'm filthy, I need Christ."

Then draw back for a while from your deathbed and look again at tomorrow and what you may face tomorrow, and the clutch of sin upon you and the grip that it has of you, so that you are perhaps impenitent in a certain sin and say, "I can't escape. I'm stuck. I don't know any way out." And then though your children may not be with you to tell you to look at Christ, you and I look at Christ with the hand of your soul which is faith, and the mouth of your soul which is faith, take him and eat him and find him, him to be the power you need to repent, to turn, to break, to humble yourself. Him and him alone.

All of the doors are going to go shut on you, they're all going to slam shut, and if, to change the figure a little bit, they're not locked shut, you open them up, it's going to be fire out that door and only fire, and fire out that door and only fire, you are encircled by the testimony of the righteousness of God and God says, "One way only." Go to Christ who said, "I am the bread of life. There isn't any other bread for you to eat than me. I'm the light of the world, you're going to be in darkness if you don't come to me. I'm the good shepherd, all of the other purported shepherds are not good, they're all hirelings, they're going to abandon you in time of need. I'm the vine, I'm the true vine. There's life alone for you when you're united to me. I'm the way, the only way to the Father. I'm the door. I'm the door, come through me." Faith in Christ. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for Jesus and pray for forgiveness if we have ever become lackadaisical or bored with the gospel. Write it upon our hearts that there is no other way than the way of repentance and faith in Christ, and then make us a glad people. There is mercy with thee, when they find it alone in thee. Provide it for us, heavenly Father, by working what thou hast worked for us, now in us, and send us home with humility, with gladness of heart for the Lord Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.