

# The Same

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Preacher: Mike Deyle

[ 0 : 0 0 ] So this is the final week in our Advent series and it comes to us today with a handful of oddities. Advent is the season leading up to Christmas where we anticipate the birth of Christ and if you haven't noticed it's happened already.

So most of you have probably moved on and you're over Christmas over all of the trappings that that brings. And so today we'll be anticipating post hoc which is odd. You may have also noticed that our text today is not an Advent text and it doesn't seem to be in line with the sermon series that we've been in about the different names of Jesus.

Also odd. And then finally you have me which if you've known me for any length of time I'm sure Kara has probably certainly said how odd.

But if you'll hang with me I think you'll be able to see how we can draw a line through Psalm 102 through the different names of Jesus and land at the Christmas message. So it's helpful for me to start with a question so I'll invite you into my question.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] Does Christmas still matter? Christmas season at least for most of us is a pretty narrow and defined time. It begins the Friday after Thanksgiving and it runs up to Christmas Day.

And that's about four weeks most years this week. This year I think it was exactly four weeks. But that's give or take 7% of our year that we allocate towards celebrating the birth of Christ.

So if each and every one of us had, notice the air quotes, heavy emphasis. A Christmas spirit meter. Which we don't, to be clear.

But if we did, the best of us probably wouldn't break it into the double digits on Christmas spirit. So the old Grinch isn't looking so bad after all, is he?

And then something happens about this time of year. Just a few days after Christmas. We move on. Most of us won't think about Christmas again until next November.

[ 2 : 1 0 ] When the Christmas season comes in, it's ushered in with a steady flow of early Black Friday deals and countdown clocks telling us how many shopping days until Christmas.

So does Christmas still matter? The first Christmas was so long ago. So almost 2,000 years ago, how can it still be relevant today?

Life moves on and changes so fast. How can any of that old-timey stuff still matter? We have self-driving cars, the whole internet in our pocket, and you can even have your food brought right to your door.

It probably seems odd to think about Mary and Joseph and the shepherds treasuring and considering the good news, the gospel news that was just delivered to them by the angels.

Who has time to wonder these days? You can just hit up Google for a quick answer. And that also doesn't seem to be fast enough for us.

[ 3 : 1 1 ] Better yet, now we just look at the AI summary. There's no need to filter through those search results like we used to do in the olden days. So let me return to our question one more time, and I'll invite you in to consider it as we continue.

Does Christmas still matter? Sarah's going to serve us, and she'll read from Psalm 102. A prayer of one afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily in the day when I call.

For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and has withered. I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh.

I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places. I lie awake. I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop. All the day my enemies taunt me.

[ 4 : 21 ] Those who deride me use my name for a curse. For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink. Because of your indignation and anger, for you have taken me up and thrown me down.

My days are like an evening shadow. I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You are remembered throughout all generations. You will arise and have pity on Zion. It is the time to favor her. The appointed time has come. For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust. Nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

For the Lord builds up Zion. He appears in his glory. He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer. Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord, that he looked down from his holy height.

From heaven the Lord looked at the earth to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise.

[ 5 : 28 ] When peoples gather together in kingdoms to worship the Lord. He has broken my strength in midcourse. He has shortened my days. O my God, I say, take me not away in the midst of my days, you whose years endure throughout all generations.

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away.

But you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before you. So we don't have much background information about the psalm.

We don't know really who wrote it. We don't know the circumstances around it. But what we do know is that it's a prayer, and specifically it's a prayer of lament. And this psalm starts like most of the psalms of lament.

By first turning to God, and by secondly appealing to God to hear and to respond. There's an expectation that his prayer will not go unheard. He's confident that God will be present and hear him out.

[ 6 : 45 ] He says, Hear my prayer, O Lord. Let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily in the day when I call.

The psalmist is asking for God not to turn his back on him. In verse 2 he says, Do not hide your face from me. For God to hide his face means to remove his favor and to allow the psalmist to continue to suffer.

And in verses 3 through 11, the psalmist lays himself bare to God, and he describes his pain. This is the heart of his lament. And while that's very personal to the author of the psalm, one of the beautiful things about the psalms is that it's an invitation for us to connect with the same emotions and feelings of the original psalmist.

So as we walk through the next section, consider if you connect with any of the emotions he's going through. So he first identifies that life is short.

In verse 3 he says, For my days pass away like smoke. He may be experiencing both physical and mental suffering, but either way it's suffering. He's really going through it.

[ 7 : 57 ] He says, My bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and has withered. I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh.

So this section, verses 3 through 11, it's laid out as a chiasm. And that's kind of like when my kids see a Volkswagen Beetle. They like to yell slug bug and smack someone beside them in the leg. I'm not going to smack anyone, but I like to point them out because they help us to kind of see what the main focus is. Does anybody remember? I know we've talked about chiasms a little bit, but does any of the young people remember what a chiasm is?

Zip. None. Excellent. So it's a pattern in writing where the person writing will make a pattern, and then they'll stop, and they'll reverse the pattern.

It will go backwards like a mirror image. So it's kind of like a word taco. You got your shell, and then you add your layers, and then when you fold it, it's the same both ways.

[ 9 : 06 ] So the middle part of the taco is like the mirror pointing both ways. So in this case, our taco is an unusual taco. The outside has grass, and then bread inside, and then birds.

So you can imagine that would be a taco you might not want to eat. But at the center point, which is it holds the main idea or focus, that's verses 6 and 7.

And because of that, I think that, that's right, I see you back there. Because of that, I think it's a reasonable guess that most of the psalmist's pain is centered around his loneliness.

And he uses three good bird analogies to express that desperate loneliness. And I think they're worth returning to and considering and reflecting on, because I'm sure we can all relate on some level to being lonely.

Verse 6 says, I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places. I lie awake. I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.

[10:11] And from what I understand, the Hebrew in some of these phrases uses some kind of unique words that don't get used very often. And so some of the translation into English is maybe a little suspect.

We don't know exactly what kind of birds they are. But I don't think that really matters too much. We can identify, even if we don't know exactly what kind of bird he's saying, we shouldn't have too much trouble identifying with the feelings that he's trying to convey underneath that.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation. Feelings like you aren't welcome or wanted by someone or inside of a larger community. And these three phrases layer on each other to build and give us a sense of the vast loneliness our psalmist is feeling.

And to add to that, right at the beginning of 7, verse 7, he states, I lie awake. So daytime loneliness is bad, but at night, with no other distractions, the shadows of loneliness grow larger.

And our doubts speak louder to us in the quiet and still absence of distraction. There's no reprieve for our psalmist. There's no place that he can escape from it.

[11:27] He also appears to be cut off from community and fellowship, cursed by those around him, taunted by his enemies. He says, All the days my enemies taunt me, those who deride me use my name for a curse.

In verse 9, he gives us the ultimate picture of suffering. He says, For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink. We see many other places in Scripture where sitting in ashes is used as a metaphor for suffering or mourning, but this is taken to another level.

Back in verse 4, if we're using our chiasm and we're looking at that, our two bread references can kind of map on to each other. In verse 4, he says he forgets to eat his bread.

But here, he's eating ashes like bread and mixing tears with his drink. He's metaphorically consuming his suffering instead of eating something that will actually sustain him.

Our psalmist is taking on and enduring this suffering. He's viewing it as God's righteous judgment on him. In verse 10, he acknowledges that it is God who is sovereignly in control of things.

[12:45] Verse 10 says, Because of your indignation and anger, for you have taken me up and thrown me down. So we should note that he's not claiming to be wrongly suffering or he's asking for vindication like some other psalms will.

He's admitting that his actions, whatever they are, have brought about God's indignation and anger. It is God himself who has taken him up and thrown him down. So there's a few takeaways we can pull out of this section to hold on to as we keep moving.

And first is that he's brought this suffering upon himself. We don't really know, but if he is guilty of stirring up God's wrath, it doesn't stop him from continuing to approach God in prayer and petition to be granted mercy.

He doesn't let his own guilt get in the way of coming to God to ask for mercy. And if you felt the guilt of sin, let's let this be a model for us of what to do.

Let's bring that guilt before God. Secondly, he doesn't wait for his suffering to end to appeal to God. All of the language in verses 3-7 points towards present tense.

[13:57] Right now, he's suffering right now and yet he stops to pray to God right in the midst of suffering. When do you approach God?

Do you wait? Straighten yourself out? Get your life presentable first? This psalm should free us of that. Let's aspire to be people that draw near to God.

Verse 11, he says, My days are like an evening shadow. I wither away like grass. He's telling God that he feels near to death.

He's highlighting the fact that he has a clearly defined beginning and ending. And unless God chooses to show him mercy, he's likely pretty close to the end of that path. He can see it.

His life is fading away and he feels the shortness of it. He's connecting himself with ends, the ends of things, days and seasons. Evening shadows only come at the end of the day.

[14:59] Withered grass usually comes at the end of summer. And if we want to, you know, talk about Christmas, the Christmas season ending, we would talk about recycle, recycling, and garbage cans overflowing with cardboard and wrapping paper and plastic packaging.

You know, the ends of things. So verse 12 is going to turn. The psalmist's prayer here turns from a deeply personal prayer to more of a corporate prayer or a prayer for the whole of God's people. He refers to it as Zion. In 12, he says, But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You are remembered throughout all generations. You will arise and have pity on Zion.

It is the time to favor her. The appointed time has come. For your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust. Nations will fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

For the Lord builds up Zion. He appears in his glory. He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer. So his appeal to God here begins as a confession of God's sovereignty that it not only extends over his personal struggles but that God is Lord over all.

[16:31] He uses royal language to describe God as King. He's seated and reigning over all and also for all time. He says God is known throughout all generations.

Then he calls the king to action but it's a specific this call to action is a specific type of request. It's not like when my kids ask me if we're going to have dessert after supper on a normal weeknight when I probably just came home from work covered in sawdust.

they know I haven't been baking cookies rolling out pie crusts. I don't even I don't ever do that. So they know I haven't done it.

And then and then they ask they say hey are we having dessert tonight? And they're just throwing up a request. They're just hoping somehow against all hope that I'll just say yes and then we'll go out for ice cream or something because I certainly have not been making cookies.

That would be an unexpected yes. You hear that Diley? Kids unexpected. This is not that. This is like the exact opposite of that.

[17:47] This is a call to action to do something we all expect the king to do anyway. So I'll explain. So remember in Exodus Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with the tablets.

Do you guys remember what happens next? The golden calf. God says this generation won't enter the land. Moses intercedes. God relents. Then Moses makes a request that seems like out of nowhere and he wants to see God's glory.

You guys remember that? You tracking? Alright. Then when God passes by Moses when he's in the cleft of the rock he says something to Moses.

God's words to Moses tell us something of his own nature. He's revealing himself to us here. We'll look at Exodus 34 for that. God says the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[18:56] Keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

These are the words that God spoke between two big things between Israel's unfaithfulness and God renewing their covenant. This is very similar to our psalmist.

He's not letting guilt get in the way of asking for mercy and not waiting to get his act together before approaching God. The psalmist is appealing to God's very nature that he himself revealed to us saying God will act not because God's people deserve mercy but that's because who that's who God is.

He's essentially saying you're still on the throne now like you were back then and because you're enthroned, you're the king and you have the power to act. You're still the same God today that you were back then to that generation that you brought up out of slavery in Egypt.

Take action now like you did back then. So now some participation time for the kids. Have you guys ever seen a movie or a play or a picture with a king in it?

[20:24] Anyone? I was drawing a lot of blanks so I hope you guys have something. What's that?

Okay, good. So it doesn't really matter what it is but here's the question. What, when you see a king in any of those things or any other that you can think of, what are they usually doing?

if they're like in their royal court? Helping people?

I'll make this easier because I'm asking terrible questions today. This is on me. Are they standing or sitting? They're sitting. Yeah, big fancy chair, throne, we call that.

And they're sitting. That's what they usually do, isn't it? They do, Nate Bergetzi, he'd say, they do the most sitting. That's what we normally see them doing.

[ 21 : 27 ] They sit on their throne and the people around them, they stand. Those people are ready to carry out orders that the king decrees. He says something, they do it.

No standing necessary. He's got people for that. But what happens when a king stands? Everybody else stands up.

Something's going to happen. Action's going to happen. When a king rises out of their throne, they're personally taking things into their own hands. They're saying, this is important, I'm going to do it myself.

So it's only for something important that they need to do themselves. So when a king rises, we would do well to pay attention because something important is going to happen.

So verse 13 in this psalm, it's incredible because the king above all kings, the Lord God, is rising from his throne. It says, you will arise and have pity on Zion.

[ 22 : 32 ] It is the time to favor her. The appointed time has come. And what's the thing that causes the Lord God, creator and sovereign overall to stand?

What is so important that he decides to personally attend to? We'll see the answer in verse 17. You can look right there.

He says, he regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer. it's the prayer of the destitute that causes him to stand. Now that word in Hebrew, you can have a laugh at me saying a word in Hebrew that I have no idea.

It's arar. It means naked, bare, stripped away.

I believe it comes from the idea of a tree root being stripped back and bare. the thing that causes the Lord God to stand up and take action is a simple, lowly prayer from someone with nothing, nothing to offer a king.

[ 23 : 46 ] So verse 18, it says, let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord. He tells us that y'all better write this down, because when God responds, God's response is going to be so good, you're going to hand this down from generation to generation.

And here's what the psalmist says God does when he does get up. Starting in 19, it says, that he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, that the Lord may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise.

When peoples gather together, and kingdoms to worship the Lord. Isn't that good news? Doesn't that sound a lot like the gospel message? God answers the prayers of the destitute, and he comes down to them and saves those destined to die.

All who he saves, declare his name and offer up praise and worship. love so the psalmist has called the Lord to come and to hear him out, and he's poured out his lament to God, he's confessed the sovereignty of God, and how he acts according to his nature, to love and care for his people, hearing and responding to his prayer.

It has grown into a great crescendo of praising God's glory, but now he's going to bring the volume way back down, and he's going to circle back to his current personal suffering. So he's leaving the corporate prayer, the prayer for Zion, and now he's going to address his own suffering.

[ 25 : 32 ] Verses 23 and 24, it says, He has broken my strength in mid-course, he has shortened my days, O my God, I say, take me not away in the midst of my days, you whose years endure throughout all generations.

the psalmist acknowledges that God's in control of his circumstances, and he says that God is the one who has broken his strength and shortened his days, yet he casts himself upon the mercy of God.

And in 24, it's a very small prayer inside the whole of this larger prayer, it sums up his request, he says, O my God, I say, take me not away in the midst of my days.

This is as simple and small prayer, God, don't take my life from me now. Let me live a long, full life. He confesses that a full life for him is just a fleeting moment to God.

He sets his mortal human nature right up against God's eternal nature. And the psalmist is sure of who God is, and he knows that God's mighty to save.

[ 26 : 44 ] And he's also identified himself as belonging to God. You see that in his little prayer? He says, my God. And we don't know the outcome.

We don't know the rest of the psalmist's life because we don't know who it was. Whether he was blessed with a life full of days or his days were cut short, we don't know. But his assurance of his personal relationship to God doesn't lie in his faithfulness, nor does his assurance that God's people, corporately, that Zion will continue to gather and worship and praise the name of the Lord. No. It isn't in human faithfulness. It isn't in doing the right things. It isn't in observing the right feast days.

it isn't in making the right offerings. It isn't in offering a perfect prayer that will satisfy God. All of that can be good, but none of that provides any real assurance of his relationship to God, of our relationship to God.

Remember in verse 17 that he's the destitute. He's bare of anything to offer. He has no value to bring. His assurance is that God's promises are not novel ideas or some side project that God's working on.

[ 28 : 08 ] God's promises to his people are rooted in God's own very nature. It's not simply what God does, it's who he is. And if we look at verses 25 and 28, we'll see that they hold, they'll help us, they hold the interpretive key to the psalmist's assurance of his solid relationship with God.

He's buried the lead and he's placed it way at the end. His assurance is solid because God is solid. Verse 25 says, Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away. But you are the same and your years have no end.

The children of your servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before you. Our assurance of God's promises to his covenant people are rooted in the fact that God doesn't change.

God's promises will never fail because he is unchanging. He's immutable and eternal. Though each generation passes away, the promise of God holds firm, fixed, and unchangeable.

[ 29 : 26 ] I've already used them as an example, so we'll stick with it. We'll dance with who brought us. Or we brought, I don't know, the generation that God brought up out of Egypt.

They died in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness, but God's promise continued with Joshua leading the next generation through the river Jordan, right?

They settled in God's promised land. His promise didn't die with that generation in the wilderness. It's still extended to the next generation. You guys doing good?

You want to do what I said we'd do earlier, talk about Jesus and the names? We should do that now. All right.

So the names or the titles that were revealed to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds before the birth of Jesus, they show us something. They show us what we should expect from Jesus.

[ 30 : 33 ] It's a foreshadowing. Another way we can look at these monikers is that they're the sure and definite promises of God. Each of the names given to Jesus are a promise from God to his people through Jesus.

So there was three names we looked at. We looked at Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus, the Lord saves, and Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah.

Jeremy said the smeared one, which is real good. If the different names are promises from God, then just like we see in Psalm 102, the promises of God rest upon God himself and not his people. But there was a breakdown through the entirety of the Old Covenant with God, a problem with the promises God made to his people in the Old Testament.

And that problem is God's covenant people. They were unfaithful. Throughout the entire Old Testament, time after time, God would partner with humans, and the humans can't hold up their end.

[ 31 : 44 ] Things seem to be going well for a while, and then sin rears its ugly head again. And so something will need to be different for this new promise, this Christmas promise, to be better than

the Old Covenant or the Old Promise.

The promises of God are to bear upon this little baby boy. Jesus himself is the bodily fulfillment of the promises of God to his covenant people.

And if it's true, then the promises hinge on Jesus. How can we be certain that the promises are good if they rest upon this baby instead of the Lord God Yahweh, God Most High, as described in Psalm 102?

If the little baby was just a standard issue baby, like all of us here today, human mother, human father, then no, Christmas would not still matter.

It never really would have mattered. But, here's a Christmas surprise for you, and I know Corey, you wear a size Ford F-150, but that's not what we have today.

[ 32 : 58 ] We'll turn to Hebrews chapter 13 verse 8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

That's a lot better than a Ford anyway. The author of this letter is making an incredibly bold declaration. He's declaring that Jesus, the eternal son, who became a human baby, is the same, unchanging from before time, before time began, and on into eternity future.

And this claim doesn't just come out of nowhere. This is one of those glowing blue hyperlinks. that connects to a different part of scripture. And wouldn't you just like to guess at where we'll find ourselves if you click it?

Right back to Psalm 102. Surprise, surprise. Verse 27. You want to click to the next slide? It'll layer them together, I think.

it says, but you are the same, and your years have no end. The author from Hebrews is tapping into this verse.

[ 34 : 09 ] He's pulling these two things together. With that declaration that he's making in Hebrews, he's making a very clear statement that opens up Psalm 102.

It's like a flower that's finally opened. It contained beauty before, but now that it's open, the full beauty is finally revealed for us to see. Everything that's true of God in Psalm 102 is equally true of Jesus.

The names given to Jesus, the promises that rest on him are good because he is God the Son, fully man, fully God. And because Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of God, and he is fully God, he's equally immutable, he's unchanging, always the same.

So with fresh eyes, and Psalm 102 opened up to us fully, let's look back at it at a few spots. I think we'll see that the promises contained within the titles given to Jesus are in fact the very same things that provide comfort to the psalmist in his lament.

So the first name is Emmanuel. God with us. In verses 1 and 2, it says, hear my prayer, O Lord, let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress.

[ 35 : 32 ] Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily in the day when I call. His initial cry out is asking for God to be personally present with him in his pain.

His comfort is that God is with him. God is the second name is Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. And verse 12 gives us that.

It says, But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You are remembered throughout all generations.

His comfort is found here with the certainty that God is king, enthroned forever over all creation, for all time, and has the power and ability to stand up and take action.

His will cannot be overturned. He is mighty to save. And now remember that God stands up also for the destitute. Not only does he have the power to save, he also acts at the appointed time.

And that's where we see the name Jesus, the Lord saves. That comes in at verse 19 and 20. That he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die.

[ 36 : 48 ] The new news, the glad tidings, the message of Christmas is really no new thing. It's a fulfillment of a really old thing. It's not a pet project or a passing thought.

It's the fulfillment of promises made long, long ago when God first walked with his children in the cool of the day. So does Christmas still matter?

I'll ask the question differently. Does anyone doubt? Does anyone waver in their faith? does anyone cry out, how long, O Lord?

If the answer to any of those questions by any of God's children is yes, then absolutely Christmas still matters. So, if you're not yet a believer, then since Jesus is the same, he's still able to save you,

still ready to hear your prayer, your groans, still ready to act.

So call upon Jesus. He is an unchanging hope in a changing time. If you are a follower of Jesus, let your faith rest upon this promise.

[ 38 : 06 ] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We, brothers and sisters, are not like Jesus. We will change. Our circumstances will change.

Our commitments will change. our communities will change. Some of these changes are slow, and some are very fast. Some changes are good, and some are very, very hard.

You and I, we will wear out like a garment, but Jesus will be the same, and it's a good thing he doesn't change, because we still need to be strengthened by grace that only Jesus can supply.

And the brightest reminder of that grace that we have to look at is the Christmas message. That Jesus Christ stood up from his throne and came down to be with us.

Christmas is a sparkling little promise that the Son of God came to us to once again walk with us, to be the fulfillment of God's promises that humans couldn't keep.

[ 39 : 23 ] Christmas still matters because it's a bright spot of hope, hope that waits for Jesus. Christmas still matters because of our assurance of faith.

Our endurance rests on this promise. He is the same. Would you guys join me in prayer? Jesus, we come to you at the end of this Christmas season.

We come to you today as the destitute. We confess that there is nothing we can do to earn your merit or favor, and still we raise our prayers to you.

Lord, continue to hear our prayers. I pray that you give us strength and courage to be the kind of people that draw near to you, people that return. Help us to remember that the promises given to us at the first Christmas apply to us all year long, not just a few narrow weeks of the year.

We need the comfort that only you can provide, and we need to be continually strengthened by your grace. Help us to continue to place our trust and faith on the solid foundation of your unchanging nature.

[ 40 : 36 ] In your name we pray. Amen.