Happy Are the Persecuted

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0:00] If you don't know me, my name is Sean. I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church, and it is my great joy and privilege to preach God's word to you this morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. We've been in the Beatitudes for the last six weeks. This is the seventh and final week we are in the Beatitudes.

We'll be focusing today on the eighth Beatitude from verses 10 to 12, but I will read the entire section verses 1 to 12 before we start. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, we confess that living in this world sometimes can feel like being on a treadmill where the course of this world is always seeking to take us backwards.
So Lord, we seek this morning to be addressed by you from your word, that we may not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but instead be transformed by the renewal of our mind. Increase in our hearts this morning through the ministry of your word, a heavenly mindset that our deepest longings would be for the hope of eternity, not for the comforts and pleasures of this world. Make us a people who would be glad and rejoice to be persecuted for the name of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
[2:01] If you are able, please stand to honor God as we read from his word. Matthew 5, 1 to 12. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Blessed are the people of heaven, for they shall be called sons of God.
[3:45] Biblical truth that has been borne out by thousands of years of history. Speaking of the persecutions and the sufferings that Christians endure, and speaking of the persecutions that he himself endured, Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3 verse 12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

not some but all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus and not might be persecuted but will be persecuted because of the universality and the inevitability of persecution for Christians all over the world it is necessary for us to be prepared by this eighth and last beatitude Jesus means to comfort us and to console us blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven if you are persecuted for righteousness sake then you are not to be pitied you are to be envied because you are the happy fortunate blessed one how so Jesus teaches us that all who see Christ's kingdom and his righteousness will be persecuted but we can rejoice for our reward is great in heaven so first we'll talk about the reality of persecution secondly about the reason for persecution namely righteousness and thirdly we'll talk about the response to persecution rejoicing first I want to convince you of the reality of persecution apart from the tens of thousands of Christians who were killed under the Roman Empire some of which is recorded in our New
Testament there have been countless more Christians killed for their faith and I've shared this with you on multiple occasions four million Christians were killed by Genghis Khan four million by Tamerlane 1.2 million Armenians most of whom were Christians were killed by the Ottoman Empire and if you think that's a long long time ago in a far away place 20th century was the worst scholars

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estimate about 12 million Christians were killed under the Soviet Union 106,300 Christian pastors were were killed in Russia alone scholars estimate that Christians who died from secular anti-religious violence in the 20th century number over 25 million worldwide which is more than all the previous years in church history combined according to open doors USA and I think I have a graphic to show for this hundreds of millions of Christians face extreme persecution in countries like North Korea Somalia Yemen Eritrea Libya Nigeria
Pakistan Iran Afghanistan Sudan and India one in seven Christians are persecuted worldwide one in five in five in Africa and two in five in Asia last year alone four thousand seven hundred and forty six sorry four thousand four hundred and seventy six Christians were murdered seven thousand six hundred and seventy nine churches or church properties were attacked four thousand seven hundred and forty four Christians were imprisoned for their faith now I readily concede that the persecution in the US is not as intense as the persecutions elsewhere in the world but that doesn't mean that there aren't milder forms of persecution even here it's not only being stoned to death that counts as persecution he says in verse 11 blessed are you when others revile you persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account persecution can involve simply being reviled insulted excluded slandered and I know firsthand that that happens to Christians and I know secondhand from talking to many of you that people here in Cambridge and Boston often insult and speak ill of Christians you believe that the Bible is God's word you believe that this world was created isn't that so primitive hasn't science made God unnecessary to our understanding of the world you believe that marriage and romance should be between one man and one woman you believe that abortion is sin last month president Trump commissioned a new task force on eradicating anti-Christian bias and many Americans and media outlets collectively roll their eyes they openly wondered
Christianity is the largest religion in the world and largest religion in the U.S. how can there possibly be anti-Christian bias in the United States of America I can understand why people think that way but if you think that way you are mistaken the fact that some political elites invoke God's name and Christianity to get votes from Christians doesn't mean that they are actually Christians for the true Christians who subscribe to the historic biblical faith growing anti-Christian bias has been obvious for many years Aaron Wren is a cultural analyst and an author of the book Life in the Negative World Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture his book has been featured on many national platforms including liberal media outlets that usually don't cover such topics like the New York Times he describes the years leading up to 1994 as the positive world when being a Christian was a net social positive and Christian moral norms were pervasive and upheld in society this was the time of the moral majority and the Christian religious right that dominated the culture wars and the politics and then he describes 1994 to 2014 as the neutral world when society increasingly took a neutral stance toward Christianity and traditional orthodox Bible-based Christianity became one of many religious options in a pluralistic world it neither enjoyed broad support nor was it widely opposed by the culture starting in about 2014 shortly before 2015 Obergefell vs. Hoge's legalized same-sex marriage
[10:45] Wren argues that we entered the negative world where being a Christian is a social and professional negative particularly among elite circles like the ones that many of you guys are in this is when Christians being a Christian meant being associated with the bad guys Christian moral norms were increasingly viewed as harmful regressive and as a threat to the public moral order I can mention many concrete examples of this in 2011 Vanderbilt University banned 15 faith-based groups from campus for their refusal to follow their school's new policy of mandating that all student organizations must accept any student regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliation as leaders of their campus groups so a staunch atheist who opposes God and thinks that Christ maybe was a myth and a legend and didn't even exist can become a leader of the Christian campus group that was mandated by Vanderbilt University out of those 15 faith-based groups that were banned almost all of them were Christian groups with the few exceptions of some of the Mormon groups that were kicked out

University of Iowa followed suit in 2018 in 2014 Bowdoin Christian Fellowship was kicked off campus for upholding traditional Christian sexual ethical standards for its student leaders in 2017 when reformed Christian pastor Timothy Keller was selected for the prestigious Princeton Theological Seminary's prestigious Kuiper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Witness many students, alumni, and faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary protested because

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of Keller's commitment to complementarianism the belief that men are called to lead their households and that men are called by God to be elders and to lead churches despite the fact that that has been the historic view of the church for most of the last two millennia Princeton gave into pressure and rescinded the award despite the fact that Tim Keller has really been an exemplary, thoughtful, and compassionate public theologian for decades in Massachusetts in Massachusetts pro-life pregnancy resource centers many of them explicitly Christian that's where they get their pro-life convictions that try to help women in crises pregnancies face enormous political backlash and pressure

Senator Elizabeth Warren and Governor General Healy are on the record for saying that they want to shut down every single one of these crisis pregnancy centers in Massachusetts and throughout the country since 2023 Massachusetts has been spending millions of taxpayer dollars to fund the campaign to steer women away from these crisis pregnancy centers and to other places where they can get abortions instead on Easter 2023 an arsonist burned down a church building here in Cambridge persecution is very real, my friends it's worse in other parts of the world so let us not be caught complaining about persecution that we experience because it's really nothing compared to what most of the world experiences but exists here and it has existed everywhere in every age because that is what the Bible says that is the reality of persecution now let's look at the reason for persecution verse 10 tells us blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake sometimes I admit

Christians are persecuted for being obnoxious or rude that's not what this verse is talking about even when we disagree with people we are commanded by God's word to not be quarrelsome to correct our opponents with gentleness if we are persecuted because we are disagreeable and quarrelsome we are not blessed as this verse talks about it says in 1st Peter 2 20 for what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure but if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God if we are persecuted for our own wrongdoing and our own misbehavior then the consolations and the promises that this beatitude offers do not apply to us if we are maligned by people because we are violent and abusive or because we steal and are dishonest or because we meddle in other people's affairs then we should be ashamed says 1st Peter chapter 4 15 to 16 yet if anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name that's the point if you suffer for being a Christian if you suffer for righteousness sake

Jesus says in verse 11 blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you on my account on account of your allegiance to Jesus then we should rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted what then is righteousness for which we are going to be persecuted in order to answer that question we need to again observe the structure of the Beatitudes that I have pointed out to you a few times before there are 8 Beatitudes total verses 11 to 12 are an expansion of Beatitude number 8 verse 10 we know because of it's dealing with the same content and because of the change in the pronouns and this division is confirmed by the repetition of the promise theirs is the kingdom in verse 3 and verse 10 in the first Beatitude and the last Beatitude this is the only repeated promise and it serves to bracket the Beatitude together as a unit as a single unit and once we recognize that there are 8 Beatitudes we also can see that there are 2 distinct halves because the last Beatitude of each half mentions the word righteousness in verse 6 and verse 10 verse 6 is blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness meaning those who lack righteousness but long for righteousness and then verse 10 says blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake meaning those who are now full of righteousness and are persecuted on account of it so this emptiness and fullness capture the themes of the two halves of the Beatitudes the first four Beatitudes deal with emptiness being poor in spirit mourning being meek those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and then the second half deals with being full being full of mercy being pure in heart full of your devotion to God purity in heart being a peacemaker because your peace that you have from God in Christ overflows toward others and lastly being full of righteousness being persecuted for righteousness sake so then being persecuted for righteousness sake entails all of the preceding Beatitudes righteousness is described it describes the kind of people that are described in the Beatitudes they are the righteous ones we are persecuted for being merciful when the world wants us to resist governing authorities we don't like but instead we submit to them as the Bible commands us to and then we're reviled for it when the world wants us to retaliate against people who wrong us who believe wrong offensive things and then we forgive them and we show them mercy we're despised by the world and condemned as weak people we are persecuted for

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being pure in heart because to be pure in heart is to will one thing namely to please God the world instead wants us to conform to its sinful patterns to its own ideas of morality and the public good but the people of God take another course and for that reason we are spoken of as evil we are persecuted for being peacemakers when we proclaim the gospel of peace and invite people to be reconciled to God people who are by their very nature enemies of God reject us the world wants us to point fingers and pass blame on our enemies but when we instead obey Jesus' command and love our enemies and pray for them as the Bible commands us then we are slandered as a result [19:55] Jesus summarizes in Matthew 5 17 to 20 that righteousness in short is obedience to all of the scriptures all of the commands of God which Jesus expounds and fulfills!

in the rest of the Sermon on the mount but why would people persecute us for righteousness? why do they do that?
isn't righteousness a good thing? isn't righteousness eminently reasonable and doesn't it promote human flourishing? yes it does so why does the world persecute us for it? because the sinful world is diametrically opposed to God and scriptures make that clear John 3 19 to 21 is illuminating and this is the judgment the light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God when you are in darkness your eyes dilate right to allow in as much light as possible because that's the only way you can see anything in the dark but then as soon as you step out into a brightly lit room or out into a sunny day it's you can't open your eyes it's blinding because you can't handle the influx of light your body your eyes are still adjusted to the darkness in a similar way people who are accustomed to darkness and accustomed to sin cannot stand the light why do assaults and robberies rapes and murders all usually happen at night because people use the cover of night cover of darkness to do evil sinful people hate the light because they don't want their sinful works to be exposed and this is why
Christians are persecuted for righteousness sake if you are a woman who dresses modestly and prioritizes the imperishable inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit rather than dressing scantily and provocatively putting on elaborate ornaments to attract attention to external beauty your female friends might call you a prude if you are chaste and refuse the sexual advances of a man who is not your husband then you might be called frigid or cold because the light of your chastity exposes the darkness of illicit sex you will be persecuted for righteousness sake if you are hanging with your bros and everybody's betting on sports and gambling and getting drunk and getting high but you refuse to do that you might get sober shamed
I had to look up all these words because I didn't know what they were trying to stay relevant you know Google knows a lot because the light of your self-control and purity and sobriety exposes the darkness of debauchery and indulgence if there's an outcast family member that nobody in your extended family wants to talk to and they always work hard to work around to exclude them and then you extend a hand of love and reconciliation and invitation your family might resent you and call you disloyal weird holier than thou because the light of your peacemaking exposes the darkness of hatred and ostracism if you try to be a good steward of your financial resources and you prioritize simplicity rather than luxury generosity rather than splurging on yourself then people might call you frumpy and look down on you for lacking class or lacking style and so on this is inevitable those who live in darkness hate the light
[24:57] James 4 4 says you adulterous people do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God you can't have both you cannot serve both God and money you cannot serve two sovereigns you're either a friend of God and an enemy of the world or a friend of the world and an enemy of God brothers and sisters we are commanded in scripture to love and pray for our enemies we are not commanded to confuse our enemies for our friends 1 John 2 15 to 17 says do not love the world or the things in the world if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him for all that is in the world the desires of the flesh the desires of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the father but is from the world and the world is passing away along with its desires but whoever does the will of God abides forever we do not belong to this world brothers and sisters we belong to another world to another kingdom to another king we do not follow the prince of the power of the air the ruler of this world

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Satan no we follow Christ the king who has authority over heaven and the earth the clearer our allegiance to Jesus Christ in our lives the fiercer the world's persecution will be for this reason if we're not facing any persecution we should take the opportunity to examine our lives I think there are several possibilities for what might be happening if we're not getting persecuted one it may be that we are worldly Christians you become conformed to the world instead of being transformed by the renewal of your mind there's very little friction between the world and us that's worldliness theologian David Wells puts it this way in his book God in the Wasteland worldliness is what makes sin look normal in any age and righteousness seem odd do you love the things of this world if the sins of this world look normal to you if they look good and pleasing to you and if the teachings of the Bible seem strange to you seem otherworldly to you that's a telltale sign that you'll become a worldly Christian if so you will not be persecuted because you are of the world and you must repent two it's a second option it may be that you are an incognito Christian a secret Christian that doesn't share his or her beliefs with anyone it is no coincidence that right after this last beatitude
Jesus talks about not putting our lamp under a basket but instead putting it on his stand so that he can shine its light and give light to everybody in the house so that our good news that our faith in the good news and the good works that we do as a consequence might shine before others it's intentionally in that order have you hidden your Christian convictions under a basket does anybody know that you are a Christian at your workplace or at your school if nobody knows you're a Christian of course they're not going to persecute you for being a Christian or for being righteous and maybe that's precisely your intention but if you're doing that then you miss out on the comforts and the blessings of this beatitude three it may be that you are just not persecuted yet if you are living out your faith in public as we all should and your allegiance shows then I assure you that you are moving the needle in one direction or the other 1 Corinthians 1 23-24 says this preaching Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God if you proclaim the gospel you're doing either one of these two things you're either putting a stumbling block in front of people who will oppose God or you are preaching and demonstrating the power of God and the wisdom of God you're going to move the needle one way or the other so if you're proclaiming the gospel and you're not being persecuted it may be because the people around you that you're bearing witness to are being moved in the right direction because they're actually coming nearer to Christ or if they're going to reject Christ it's in a matter of time sooner or later you will be persecuted this is the reality that we must come to terms with if we're trying to win the affection and the approval of this sinful world we will not be a thriving Christian it's futile for us as Christians to try to win the acclaim and the applause of this world even if you get it
I assure you it will not last very long Jesus told us that the world will hate us John 15 18 to 20 if the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you if you were of the world the world would love you as its own but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you remember the word that I said to you a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will also persecute you the sinful world persecuted Jesus and executed him on the cross and if we are to follow Jesus we also must take up our cross daily and follow him and sometimes you will even be persecuted by your fellow Christians so-called Christians the nominal Christians the worldly Christians just as Jesus was most intensely persecuted by his own fellow Jews Luke's version of the beatitude sets up a powerful contrast in Luke 6 22 to 26 there
[32:04] Jesus says very similar thing blessed are you when people hate you when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the son of man rejoice in that day and leap for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven for so their fathers did to the prophets and then he continues with a woe but woe to you when all people speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets when the sinful world speaks well of you and loves you and acclaims you that is not something to be happy about or be proud of it's something to be worried about such a person is not to be pitied but such a person is not to be envied but pitied so why brothers and sisters do you seek the affection and the approval of this world we set ourselves up for so much spiritual stagnation and grief because we want the world to accept us and love us as its own when

Jesus tells us that we are not of the world he has taken us out of the world so do not be surprised 1st Peter 4 12 to 13 says at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as to something

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strange were happening to you but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings fiery! trials tribulations! persecutions the hatred of the world are the love of the world and the approval and the applause of the world that is abnormal that should surprise us that's the reason for persecution righteousness now finally let's look at the response to persecution rejoicing when we are persecuted for his sake Jesus says in verse 12 rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you Jesus is not here telling us to be sadistic people that enjoy being persecuted for its own sake we are grieved by persecution we mourn for the persecutors and pray for them because they know not what they do but we rejoice nonetheless for reward because your reward is great in heaven and here's the secondary reason how do we know that our reward will be great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you we see numerous examples in scriptures of how prophets were treated they were persecuted and they were killed but these prophets

Jesus says in Matthew 10 41 will receive a prophet's reward of course the chosen servants of God the prophets of the Lord will receive a great reward and so if we are being treated like them then we can rest assured that we too will receive that reward because we are identified with them we share their company and their reward in order to be Christians rejoice when we are persecuted we must be people who live by faith and not by sight we must be people whose longing and whose hope in eternity is deeper and stronger than our desire for the comforts and the pleasures of this world this is the secret to faithful perseverance for Christians this is the secret to endurance till the end keeping in view of the end Hebrews 11 compels an impressive list of faithful saints many people call that the hall of faith and there's a common thread that runs through all of them and binds these saints together and that is faith and hope

Abraham Isaac and Jacob lived as strangers and exiles on the earth why because they were seeking a different homeland because they desired a better country that is a heavenly one because they were looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God and then it mentions Moses why did Moses refuse to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin why did Moses do that because he says he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking to the reward in heaven on what are your spiritual eyes fixed my brothers and sisters is it fixed on this world or is it fixed on the world to come is it fixed on the kingdom of earth and all the trinkets that it offers or is it fixed on the kingdom of heaven and the eternal imperishable treasures that it offers this explains why the saints of old rejoice when they were persecuted for

[37:38] Jesus' sake in Acts in Acts 5 40 41 when the apostles are beaten for proclaiming Jesus and they are charged never to preach in the name of Jesus again as they are released they go out rejoicing it says that they were counted worthy to suffer this honor for the name in 155 AD when Christian pastor Polycarp was being burned alive for his faith in Jesus Christ before he died he thanked God in prayer saying that he was counted worthy to suffer for his name for a more modern example Richard Wermbrand a 20th century Romanian pastor he was imprisoned and tortured under an atheist communist state in Romania but then he wrote later on about his fellow Christians in Romania this way I have found truly jubilant Christians only in the Bible in the underground church and in prison why are these persecuted

Christians so happy why do they rejoice 1 Peter 1 167 tells in this you rejoice Though now for a little while if necessary you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ trials and temptations the persecutions that we go through they test and prove the gold if you take gold jewelry to a pawn shop sometimes they will put a little lighter on it the fire to distinguish whether it's to find out whether it's fool's gold or real gold if it's fool's gold and it's mixed with other kinds of lesser alloys less valuable alloys then it will burn it will become deformed but if it's real gold it will just get cleaner and brighter that's how you know what's pure gold it's the testing of fire that proves the genuineness of gold when we are tested we come out from that with stronger assurance and faith in that our faith is genuine and that our hope is sure and that we indeed belong to

God and that we have a heavenly reward to look forward to contrast that with the parable of the seeds that Jesus tells in Matthew 13 doesn't he say that there are seeds that are planted on rocky soil and because of the rocks because of the shallow ground it sprouts up very quickly because it

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doesn't need much time to grow root into that shallow soil but because the root is so shallow as soon as the scorching sun comes out the sprouted seed withers and dies and Jesus explains the parable that first immediately receive it with joy but because they have no root they endure only for a little while and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word immediately he falls away persecutions test and prove the genuineness of our faith and so that is the lot of all true believers and we read about this in the assurance of pardon in 1 Peter 2 isn't that what
Jesus did for us he was reviled and he did not revile in return he was persecuted he was driven he was taken to the cross and he was killed Jesus is not calling us to come to a place that he hasn't already gone to Jesus has already gone there and imagine if Jesus said well this is a little too much pain I will not go through this we would all but instead he says in Hebrews 2 that Jesus for the joy that was set before him endured!
the cross despising the shame it's because Jesus endured his persecution that we can be assured that there's salvation for us and we can hope in that and long for that and endure with faith in that reality are your eyes set on the joys and the rewards that are set before you because then and only then we can endure our own cross and despise the shame and follow a crucified Lord when we're not persecuted we wonder am I a worldly Christian am I an incognito Christian am I not living as a witness for Jesus can my faith withstand the fires of persecution but when we are persecuted for righteousness sake and then we endure and we persevere through it and we come out of that then it is clear yes now
[43:14] I know clearly which side I am on now I know I am on the side of the prophets of the Lord now I know that I am with Jesus my Lord and Savior who was crucified I am identified with him and I suffer with him and even if the whole world were to frown at us isn't the smiling countenance of our Lord Jesus Christ enough isn't that worth all the persecutions because if we suffer with him and if we die with him then we'll also be raised with him let's pray together heavenly father shake us out from our slumber this the lowing effect of the pleasures of this world that make us desire and seek more of this world

Lord wake us up Lord shake us out of the reality shake us out of the illusion rather the delusion that we can be chummy with the world that we can become one of them that we can be loved and approved by them oh Lord give us purity of heart to seek and to will one thing to please you Lord oh Lord prepare us so that if we were to be given the privilege of suffering for your name being persecuted for your name that we all to a member would rejoice and be glad in
Jesus name we pray amen to

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