

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Stand Alone

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Seek First

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Matthew 6:31-33



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It's so good to see at Providence, if you're in this venue or in all of the other rooms this morning or perhaps even at home, welcome, we're really glad to see you, and all of you who are guests with us this morning, we want to welcome you as well. We're really, really glad that you have joined us. I want to ask you, we'll actually be in Matthew chapter 6, and so if you have one with you, you can certainly turn in that book there. If you don't have a Bible, there's a lot of Bibles in the chairs near you, and if you don't have one at home you can take that home as a gift. But we're really glad that you've joined us on this last day of 2017, and as a new year dawns on all of us, and perhaps you're more inspired than at various other times to take stock of your life and maybe even to make plans or maybe a goal or two, I want to use this time this morning in Matthew chapter 6 to exhort each and every one of us to make room in our life and our plans and our aspirations for the Lord and for his word.

So I always love to pray, and I want to ask you to pray that God would use this text to just work in your own life. So if you would, let's bow, let's pray. Father in heaven, we come to your word and we believe that this Bible is just that, it's your word. We believe that you're the creator of all things, that you sustain all things by the power of your spoken word, that you have fulfilled the promise to rescue us in sending your son, Jesus. You who are so committed to our good, gave us your word. We believe it, and yet we confess, just as the father did of the little boy in the gospels when he confessed, "I do believe, but God help me with my unbelief." Would you help us, God, to anchor our heart to the heart that is yours, one that is trustworthy, and one who is kind and generous and who is totally committed to our good.

I pray, Father, that you would use this time, that you would use your word, that you would speak to each one of us. I pray in particular, God, that you would help us to lay before you what causes us stress and anxiety even this morning and that you would give us wisdom as we consider the priorities of our life. So I ask that you would speak through weakness, that you would glorify Jesus Christ alone as we read words that came out of his mouth on this amazing hill in Matthew chapter 6. So we look to you, we need your help, and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, over here there's some jars, and let me ask you this, if this jar that's empty is your life, and you have the opportunity to fill it with something this year, what do you want to make sure makes it into the jar? There's a lot of different options, you know this, life is full of larger rocks like this one, larger priorities that all of us would look at and go, "Well, that's clearly more important than this." It may be people in your life, it may be your job, it may be dinner, I don't know what that is for you, but there's larger rocks certainly than various others.

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Then life also has things like a marble, that it's still there, it's tangible, it takes up space, it's hard, it's things like maybe your hobbies or what you do, maybe it's sports, maybe it's basketball, things that are not life and death and yet they're important to you and so they take up time, they take up resources in your life. Then there's things like the sand here, that is still there, it takes up space, it's hard, and perhaps this would represent something like social media, right? Which is there, it takes little moments of our day and we really don't think they take that much, and then all of a sudden you actually look at how many minutes are in these venues and they fill up an amazing amount of our life.

If you have the opportunity to really think, and I think this time of year it's really important to do this, you think about your life, if it was an empty jar and you had big priorities and then you had marbles and then you had sand, and all of the things that these represent, what would you want to make sure made it into your life in 2018? Now some of you have seen something like this and you say, "I think I've seen this before. I think what he's going to do is he's going to put the big rocks in and he's going to put the marbles in, then he's going to put the sand in." I'm not going to do that, because I'm just going to tell you, they don't fit, okay?

This is the reality of life. It's a great illustration, right? That you start with the larger priorities and then you put the smaller priorities in, and sure enough they all fit. But the reality in life is, that's not true, it doesn't all fit, not everything fits, you can't buy everything, you can't do everything, you cannot be everyone's best friend, you can't be at everything, you can't join everything. So therefore you have to make decisions of what makes it in and what stays out of your life.

This requires us to be people of priority. Now priorities are fascinating if you really think about it. In fact, if you don't prioritize things in your life, what you'll end up doing, what most people do in life, is they economize on the big rocks, they fill up their life with an amazing amount of sand, and then they get to the end of their life and they have regret of what they put their life to. So I want to encourage you not to economize on what's most important. But I do want to ask you, what is, what must enter your life? What is a big rock? What are the things you say, "This is going to be a part of 2018"?

What's interesting is, when you look at the Bible, the Bible doesn't really use the word 'priority'. Its equivalent is the word 'seek', and you find this in many places such as Psalm 119:10, that says, "With my whole heart I seek you." What's he saying? I prioritize you. You can only seek one thing with all of your heart. If it gets all of it you've got nothing left. That's his priority. He's saying, "I'm going to prioritize you in my life."

I want you to maybe think about this idea this way, that the word priority is really the same word as seek within the Scriptures. Actually six days, right, let's just say you have a daughter and you open up presents and finish all the presents, get the tree, and all of a sudden you go to your daughter and say, "Sweetie, there's actually one more gift for you. It's actually the biggest one. It's going to be your favorite one, and it's in the very back room. Why don't you seek it? Go find it." What are you doing at that very moment? What you're actually doing is urging your daughter to prioritize that gift above everything else that is currently in and around her life. She may be sitting in Grandmother's lap at that very moment, and what you're saying is, "Leave the priority of Grandmother's lap right now and go seek this gift."

It may be that you're actually encouraging your daughter who may have one or two other toys near that have already been opened, that she already likes, and maybe she's already playing with them, and what you're saying is, "Prioritize this gift even over those gifts that you've already received." You're also asking your daughter to prioritize that gift and seeking and finding that gift above everything that might distract her between where she's at and where that gift might be. There might be a puppy, there might be cookies, or there might be other things that are in between, and yet what you're saying when you say, "Go seek and find it", you're saying, "Prioritize getting there; that's important."

To seek is to prioritize. With that in mind, I want you to listen to Jesus' invitation to each one of us as to what he believes we should seek, what he believes should go first into the jar of our life. He says in Matthew 6:25, he says, "Therefore I tell you do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven [or the fire], will he not much more clothe you? O you of little faith. Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' Or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek [or prioritize] after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Three things I want you to see that Jesus invites you to seek this year and really the rest of your life. The first is that he invites us to seek his righteousness. You see this in verse 33 when he says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." Let me tell you something about Jesus and something about you: he knows you, he knows everything about you. He knows what's in you, what's around you, where you've been and where you're going. He knows why he created you, your created purpose. He knows what you're afraid of, he knows what you're anxious about. He knows every one of your plans and aspirations. He knows all of your resolutions before they're even thought, and he also knows our peril.

Now you have to understand something about this, okay? Jesus, the Son of God came to earth, he began to do his ministry, and all of a sudden there was a great big crowd of people that come and they want to spend time with Jesus. He goes up on a mountain, they all go up there and he sits them down, and Matthew 5, 6 and 7 is his sermon, someone just recorded it and wrote it down. He's just writing it down. This is what he said to them. There he says, "Seek first his kingdom." You see, Jesus understood something about us and that is that apart from him we are all in tremendous peril. You see, Jesus knew that God's wrath was mounting like this giant tidal wave, and that all of these people, just like us, were relying on sandcastle kingdoms of our good works, just like this one.

There's a lot of people whose entire life is built on sand, and their entire life is built out of sand. The Bible says in Romans 2:5, it says that God's wrath is literally being stored up against all of our godliness. In other words, you and I have not gotten away with anything, anything. Every sin will receive its just and perfect penalty. That's what the Bible says. He knows that we were in this kind of peril and that we were building our kingdom upon our own good works, assuming that it would be able to withstand the storm when we stand before God. So he pled and he said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." In other words, what's he's saying is, prioritize the righteousness that will bring you to heaven. This is the most important thing about life. Everything that you think is important in life pales in comparison to you going to heaven. This life, you may be here 70, 80, 90 years; eternity is forever, forever!

You think about all the questions that consume our days: what should I study? Should I ask her to marry me? Should I say yes to him? Which college should I go to? All these football games. What should I eat? When should I start my diet? Should I eat everything first in the kitchen that was all stored up from the holidays, or should I wait? All these questions you have to understand are terribly insignificant in comparison to being judged by a sovereign God who requires moral perfection in order to go to heaven. That's exactly what he requires, friends.

Matthew chapter 5, Jesus says, "You therefore must be perfect for your Heavenly Father is perfect." This creates sort of a mystery on the earth that humanity if we pause long enough from all of the sand, the things that distract our attention to what matters most, it causes all of us to force, to say, "I have to have an answer to this question." The apostle Paul put it this way, he says, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness." It is a mystery. We know, God says, you must be perfect because I am perfect, and yet we know that none of us are morally perfect. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

What's interesting is, what Paul does is he reveals the answer to this mystery, not by prescribing what we must do, but by talking about someone else entirely. This is how he says it, the rest of the verse says this, he says, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He [Jesus] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up into glory."

In other words, what he's saying is that Jesus took on flesh, he lived a righteous life, and then he died for our sin. And when he rose from the dead he was vindicated, he was seen, he was proclaimed, and he was believed upon. You say, "Well, what does this have to do with the mystery of godliness?" Well, 2 Corinthians 5:21 explains it this way, he says, "For our sake ..." That's you and me. Our sake. For our good, our benefit. "He ..." That's God the Father, "made him ..." that's Jesus Christ, the only backup. "For our sake [God the Father] made [Jesus Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

So do you see what he's saying? That throughout time and in every culture in time and space there have been people who knew that there was something that was needed, a kind of righteousness that would bring them into heaven. When the New Testament wants to talk about the kind of righteousness that's required, he says, "This is a great mystery." Then instead of talking about what we need to do, what vows we need to make, what gifts we need to make, where we need to serve and how we need to spend our life, he says, "Let me talk about someone else entirely. Let me talk about the one who was perfectly righteous. Let me talk about the only person who's ever lived on this earth and merited going back to heaven. And then let me tell you that this is the kind of person, this God, Jesus Christ, when he rose from the dead he says that, 'If you will trust me, if you'll admit that you have a need, a moral need that you cannot fill, you cannot fix yourself, and you believe upon my accomplishments and confess me as Lord, not only will I take away your sin, but I will give you my perfect righteousness.'"

This is what he means when he says, "Seek first his righteousness." The most important thing you can prioritize in life is leaving this place and going to heaven. That's the first thing that must be certain in your life. So, friends, let's trust Christ and receive his righteousness. If you've never done that, if you've never believed in Jesus Christ, you're still counting on your righteousness, I want you to know that it's like a sandcastle awaiting high tide. Yet his righteousness is a tower that lasts and is firm forever. Believe in him, trust him, he will forgive you, he will save you. He will give you his righteousness.

What's interesting, particularly for those of us who've already trusted Christ, one of the amazing benefits of the gospel is that it anchors then all of our new aspirations and goals and resolutions to the finished work of Christ. So if you think about what plagues most of our hearts when it comes to making goals and resolutions, for most people in the world what they're going to do is write down resolutions that help them alleviate regret or guilt, some way to make them feel better about themselves, because they don't feel good about themselves.

But notice what the gospel does, it's like a ladder that's propped up. The very bottom of the ladder is us in our sin, the very top of the ladder is perfect righteousness. What he's saying is this, that when we trust Christ as Savior and Lord we immediately within our position in Christ get to stand and sit and even build a house on the very top rung. God sees us as righteous because of his Son. Because of that, when you and I sit down and we start to think about the aspirations and goals and maybe even resolutions of our life or of our year, of our month, we get to do so based on the finished work of Christ, meaning we're not creating goals to help us feel better about ourself and our relationship with God. We're creating goals that actually respond to a right relationship with God. Do you see the vast difference? It's the difference between doing stuff to earn a place at the table, and being a family member and you're at the table.

This is what the gospel provides for each and every one of us. But listen to me, whenever we are distanced emotionally or mentally, from the truth of the gospel our heart will constantly revert back to our worst day or our best day is something that we're going to rest upon and we will make resolutions accordingly. In other words, if you distance yourself from hearing or reading the gospel your heart is inclined to drift back to trust just a little bit in how well you're doing this week, that God may be more pleased with you this week because you've had a quiet time five days this week. You see, this is why I want to encourage you, you need to read the Bible yourself. This is why as a church family we put together a little tool.

Now, the second application is this, it's let's prioritize reading the Scriptures in particular this year. You see, the Scriptures are the safety deposit box for the gospel. When we read the Bible, we're reminded every time we open it up of the merit of Jesus Christ who's been given to us. We're reminded of his love, we're reminded of his faithful-, we're reminded of his righteousness that's already been given to us. So we need to be in the Scriptures. If you wait until Sunday, if you leave this place and you go six days before you come back and you're not reminded of the gospel, you will spend time this week in doubt and regret and guilt, wondering if God is really all that pleased with you. You have to be reminded of it frequently.

So we put together a little tool. It is that, it's a tool. You notice there's no bars on the outside, that's because it's not a prison, it's a tool. If it becomes a prison to you, I want to encourage you to throw it away. It's only a tool. Now what's in the tool? The tool is just a daily reading and then a little space to write down any thoughts or any questions that you might have about what you read. Now this journal will actually take you through the entire Bible in one year. What I want you to know is this, is what is most important is not that you finish the entire Bible, it's that you enjoy God's word at a pace that is right for you. It's not a prison. So if this is too fast for you or too much, then just read less, slow down. If you skip a day or a week or a month and you think, "Well, okay, it's over." Just jump back in to wherever that day is. If you have a thought, write it down. If you don't have a thought, don't write it down.

But what I can tell you is this, is that when I in my life devote the first few moments of the day to God and his word, it's amazing what takes place. The first thing that happens is he alleviates a lot of my anxiety. He absorbs that anxiety. He prioritizes my day. He helps me to fight sin and all the temptation. He reminds me of my place before him. He informs my decisions. He comforts, he encourages, he convicts, he brings me to confession.

You know, it's interesting, if we were to ask people to raise their hand, I'm not going to do that, but if I asked you to raise your hand and said, "How many of you believe that this book, the Bible, is the word of God?" A lot of you would probably raise your hand. Then if I ask you the same question and said, "Now how many of you have read it from cover to cover?" It's amazing how there would be a huge discrepancy between those two. This is really confusing to people outside the church because they look at us and they say, "Wait, you believe that the creator of all things wrote you a book that's infallible and inspired by him and you don't read it?" Think about that for a second. That book is so precious, it is so important. There's no saving grace in reading it, but in reading it you see who saves you, you see his righteousness, you see his gift to you and to me.

So I want to encourage you to do something which is ... I don't think it's bold, to be honest with you, the whole book can be read in 72 hours. I don't encourage you to do that, I just know it can be done, because you can go online and say, "Read the Bible to me." And someone will read it to you and it'll take about 72 hours, the whole thing. Providence, we've not read this book because we're too busy, we've not read it because it's not the biggest rock in our life. I just want to encourage you, prioritize reading this book this year.

The second thing Jesus invites us to, is he invites us to seek his kingdom, to seek his kingdom. You see this also, he says, "But seek first the kingdom of God." See, when Jesus told us to seek first his kingdom, his primary passion, I believe was that we would be converted and saved and be forgiven of our sin. But its secondary passion is that you and I would invest the remaining days of our life in his kingdom, that it would last forever.

So when Jesus rose from the dead, it's interesting, he created a redeemed people, that people that would be forgiven, but he also gave them a very specific job description, and that was that they would actually live, they would exist to glorify him by introducing all peoples to Jesus Christ and growing them up to love and worship him.

Literally, this is what we find within Scriptures, he says that, I'm on a mission and I'm going to create a church, a people on the earth, through which I'm going to fulfill my mission, that through them I'm going to introduce people to my Son, Jesus Christ and I'm going to grow them up to love and worship him. This is what we are as a church, this is our mission, and everything we do is about this, introducing people to Jesus Christ and growing them up to love and worship him. Every few years what we do is we set before us a vision. Now a vision is simply that, it's not a mission. A vision is simply saying, if we were to be faithful to do some of this stuff, what could it look like? And then be inspired by the picture of what it could look like, we might actually sacrifice what is necessary in order to see that come to pass.

So six months ago we started this vision that's called Plant here at Providence. It flows out of two verses really that are on the screen. When it says, "Whatever one sows, that will he also reap. So let us not grow weary of doing good. For in due season we will reap if we do not give up." So what we're saying is, for three years we want to plant very specific seed, good seed, into three very important fields, in the hope that God is going to do something amazing with that seed for his glory and for his honor.

What we looked at, there's three parts to this, and you can see them on the screen, the first field is the church, we want to plant our lives. Your life is the seed, and the church is the field. This is an important place to him. People are changed here frequently. The Bible says that this body called Providence, even though there's several of us, is that every single person is important to the body. He actually says we're all members of the body. So he says, you know, some of you may be the hand, well, if the hand dislodges from the rest of the body not only does the hand lose life, but the body loses the ability of the hand. So we want to ask you and to consider, "Hey, what does it look like to plant our lives in the church?"

Second is to plant the gospel in the city. This city is an amazing place with all kinds of valuable people to God, every single one of them. The wonderful good seed is the gospel that can change those lives. So we want to be faithfully sharing the gospel. Then the third thing is to plant churches in the world. In other words, we want to go to places that have no churches right now, that have no believers or there's very few. We want to go and we want to share the gospel there in the hopes that God is going to bring some of them to faith and we're going to help them form local bodies, local churches, so that they can become like a lighthouse in their own community. So that people can come and hear in their own language and their own tongue and their own culture, how Christ can forgive and how Christ gives his righteousness.

So we want to plant our lives, the gospel, and churches, in three really, really important fields. What I want to ask you to consider in 2018 is to make a resolution to prioritize planting one seed, a seed in each soil this year. To prioritize planting a seed in each one of these soils this year. You think about planting our lives in the church. Let me just say that many of you plant bags and bags and bags of seed at Providence, it's not just one seed. This place is in large measure what it is because of people just like you. You serve and you give and you pray, and you come and you're engaged in small groups, and you support and you're totally engaged. Just so incredibly grateful, so grateful.

Then there's some though, you kind of look and you think, "All right, there's this need." What we want to encourage is, it may not be that you can do everything right now, but what's one seed in your life that you perhaps could say, "You know what, I'm going to plant it in this local body." If you're in town with family or friends and you have another home church somewhere, listen, do it there, plant your life in that church. It may be to start giving. It may be to start serving in some way. It may be to join a small group. It may be to become more regular in the way that you come and you worship the Lord. However it is, what seed can you plant for the good of your local church?

Then you think about to plant the gospel in the city, who's somebody in your life that you might be able to pray for, maybe build a friendship with, specifically so that you can tell them about Jesus Christ this year. Then to plant churches in the world, what can you do there? Well, a few months ago, if you remember, we actually laid before you 16 mission trips. That's certainly not the only way, but that's a way. You may be able to go on a trip, you may be able to say, "I can't go, but I can definitely pray for the trip." You may say, "You know what, this is how I'm going to plant, I'm going to take 10 minutes every single day that they're gone on that one specific trip, I'm going to pray through every single name who's going on that trip, every day while they're away." That might be a seed that you could plant.

It may be that you say, "I can't go and, man ... How do you say that? I don't like to pray." But it may be you say, "You know what, I would love to help somebody financially to be able to go on that trip." However it is what can you do to be planting seeds so that churches can be planted in and around the world? You see, the hope that we have comes from the very last passage that we looked at in Ephesians. Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church." He's able to do more than we can. He's able to do more than we can.

Of course there's a lot about this passage that's about fear, and that's why the third invitation is this, is that Jesus invites us to seek his faithfulness, to prioritize his faithfulness, literally to include in the equation of your priorities and decisions the fact that God is going to be faithful. You see, Jesus knew that priority decisions create anxiety. If you notice where this passage even comes from, if you look one verse before we started reading, he ends with, "You cannot serve God and money." They're two rocks, they don't both fit in the jar. God can be your God or money can be your god. One of them has to be outside the jar. The fact is, is anytime things come in a jar and things are left out, that creates anxiety because we wonder, did I make the right choice?

After saying you can't serve both he says, "Now a lot of you are really worried about what you're going to eat, what you're going to drink, and your clothing." He leads us all the way through this passage knowing, you see, he's knowing that resting in his righteousness means that we can't rest in ours, and that creates anxiety. Planting seed in one field means we're not planting those seeds in another, and that might create anxiety. Investing the first few moments of our day in the Bible as opposed to something else means that I'm not investing my life in those things and that can create anxiety. So what does he say to us, he says, "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat or drink or wear?' For the Gentiles seek or prioritize all these things and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them.

You see, Providence, we're not going to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness until we prioritize his faithfulness. In other words, what I'm saying is, add God's faithfulness to your equations. If you knew God would be faithful, what would you resolve to do this year? What would you resolve to do? To help us, he says, "Hey, why don't you consider two things." He goes, "First, let's consider the birds, just consider the birds." There's a bird right here on the screen for you if you need help, right? Consider a bird. They're beautiful. God created them and God feeds them. It's interesting he says that the birds, they don't store up in barns for the day of God's demise because they believe that God's going to be faithful tomorrow. He says, "You're more valuable to God than a bird."

Then he says, "Let's also look at the flowers of the field, let's look at this lily. Look at the astonishing glory, look at the astonishing color that God ..." It says, he dressed. I love the words. He says that he, clothes the grass of the field. That's like a mom dressing, clothing a little child in order to go to a concert. God's like, let me create this flower, I'm going to clothe it with something. He says, "You know what, even Solomon, the richest man in Israel's history, in the whole world, even he wasn't clothed by one of these lilies." Then he says this, God says, "I care more about you than I do that flower."

See, flowers, they don't toil because they know that God is going to clothe them in due time. So, Providence, let's trust that God will be faithful tomorrow. Let's trust that he will be faithful tomorrow. I know that investing in one field knows that we can't invest in another. And I also know that every field has a spokesman, and they're saying, "This is the field you need to invest in. Every rock, every piece of sand, every marble, everything in life has someone saying, 'If you do this, this will make you happy.'" This is why you need to always look back at the character of the promise-maker.

I ask this question, has anyone ever been as committed to your good as Jesus Christ? This is how the New Testament says it, Romans 8, he says, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" What's he really asking there? This is what he's saying, if you can trust this sovereign God of the universe with your soul, do you not also think you can trust him with your hour? Or with your relationship? Or with your dollar? With your ability? Can you not trust him? Of course you can trust him. So, Providence, let's seek him, and let's seek him first this year, okay?

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, thank you, thank you for your kindness toward us in Jesus. We're so thankful for all that you make available. We're thankful for the invitation even at the beginning of the year when we're so prone to take stock of our life, the invitation to rest, the invitation to trust your faithfulness, the invitation to prioritize your faithfulness and your righteousness and your kingdom. God, I pray that you would use this and you would use this passage to alleviate our anxiety and to help us to be people of priority. We thank you, God, that we get to give to you now, and not only out of our resources but even out of our hearts, we worship you, and we pray that you would take these things and glorify Jesus Christ with them through the ends of the earth. We love you, we are grateful. We thank you that we go into a new year armed with all of your promises and your faithfulness to them. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.



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