

“’Tis of a Thawing Nature”

Luke 1:57-80

17 December 2017

A few weeks ago I told you that God’s providence was like glitter- that it gets everywhere because it is everywhere. God’s providence, or sovereignty, is all over the pages of the Bible. But providence isn’t the only attribute of God that is all over the pages of Scripture. God’s mercy is also all over the pages of the Bible. In fact, as soon as Adam and Eve sin, what are they met with? Mercy. God comes to them with tenderness and compassion. Do they still have to deal with the consequences of their sin? Absolutely. And so do we! We have to deal with the consequences of their sin!

But we see God mercifully interacting with Adam and Eve after they have flat out rebelled against Him. And as you read the Bible from beginning to end, this is how God deals with sinful mankind. He is merciful. And one of my favorite preachers, the Puritan Richard Sibbes, is very helpful when it comes to understanding God’s mercy. I’ve been reading his exposition of 2 Corinthians chapter 1 where he discusses in length that God is *“the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort”* (2 Corinthians 1:3).

The writings of Richard Sibbes have influenced such notable preachers and theologians as John Owen, J.C. Ryle, Charles Spurgeon, and more recently John Stott, Martin Lloyd-Jones, J.I. Packer, Mark Dever, and Tim Keller. Richard Sibbes has been a great help to me and to countless others. He was given a few nicknames in his day. He was called *The Sweet Dropper* and *The Honey-mouthed Preacher* and *The Heavenly Doctor Sibbes*. He was given these nicknames because his sermons were consistently encouraging. In his preaching he sought to highlight the grace and mercy and love of Jesus. Sibbes said this about Gospel-centered preachers: *“they woo for Christ, and open the riches, beauty, honour, and all that is lovely in him.”*

It was even said that heathen men would stay away from Sibbes’ preaching for fear of being converted! He was so gracious in his preaching and consistently highlighted how loving and merciful Jesus is that pagans avoided church because they knew that if they heard Sibbes speaking of Jesus, then they’d get saved! Just like the apostle Paul said in Romans 2:4, it’s *the kindness of God* that leads men to repentance. And unregenerate men in Sibbes’ day knew this, so they stayed away from his preaching!

That’s why he was called *The Sweet Dropper* and *The Honey-mouthed Preacher* and *The Heavenly Doctor Sibbes*. Here’s an example of his exposition from 2 Corinthians 1-

God is styled a ‘Father of mercies’ to thee, a God of bounty. All is to allure thee to repentance, to allure thee to come in. He is not merciful by accident, but he is naturally merciful in himself. He hath bowels of mercy in himself. ‘Mercy pleaseth him,’ Micah 7:18... He is more glorious in his mercy than in any other attribute... His mercies are like himself... There is not one attribute set down more in Scripture than mercy. It is the name whereby he will be known, Exod. 34:6, where he describes it, and tells us his name. What is the name of God? His longsuffering, and mercy... The Scripture doth wonderfully enlarge his mercy beyond all dimensions whatsoever.

God’s mercy is the one attribute revealed in Scripture more than any other. God is more glorious in His mercy than in any other attribute. And His mercy is revealed more in Scripture because of what? Our sin! There’s a whole lot of sin in the Bible, right? And because there is a whole lot of sin revealed in the Bible, then there’s a whole lot of mercy too. Which is why Richard Sibbes said this-

THERE IS MORE MERCY IN CHRIST THAN SIN IN US.

We all know our hearts and we all know our sin. It is ever present with us and at times it feels like it is the most powerful force in the entire world. But as we’ll see today in Luke 1, there is far more mercy in Jesus than there is sin in us. And that’s good news that I need to hear. And it’s what the characters in our story need to hear too.

LOOK AT VERSES 57-63...

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered.

God’s mercy, compassion, and tenderness is seen here in the fact that Elizabeth delivers a baby! It’s a very personal mercy. We’ll see the corporate aspect to mercy later when Zechariah recounts how merciful the Lord is to the nation. But here, this is a very personal mercy. God has personally assisted Elizabeth.

Personally comforted her as she gave birth. How so? Remember, she is old. She's "advanced in years." Imagine giving birth at 60, 70, or 80 years! I don't know how old she was, but she was "advanced in years." Luke tells us that twice and he also refers to her in her "old age." So she is old. But God has mercy on Elizabeth through her delivery. Luke wants us to know at the very beginning of His gospel that God is full of mercy, rich in mercy.

He tells us this in verse 58 that the Lord "had shown her *great* mercy." This is not just a little bit of mercy from God. This mercy was great! The word "great" is from the Greek root *megaluno* which means what it sounds like- "mega, great, big, magnify." God's mercy was "megaluno", enormous, large, and overwhelming to Elizabeth. I love that Jesus isn't stingy with His mercy! He just throws it out like Oprah! "There's mercy for you. And for you! And you! And you!"

Jesus is not stingy with His mercy and compassion and tenderness. He comes to us in all of our sufferings and comforts us. Far from being this detached, distracted, disinterested curmudgeon, Jesus is very much concerned with all of our sufferings and hardships. He is very much moved by and concerned with what you are going through right now. And as I typed that last sentence up as I was working on this sermon, Jesus reminded me again that He is very much moved by and concerned by what is happening in my life. I literally had to stop as I typed that sentence and believe again that Jesus cares for me, and all that I'm going through in my life.

And here in Luke 1, He cares about an old woman who is dilated and being told, "*It's time to push.*" This is "megaluno" mercy that shows up in the maternity ward.

But we have to use our imagination here. Imagine Elizabeth screaming at Zechariah, "*I can't do this! I'm too old. I'm advanced in years, honey!*" And remember what happened to Zechariah earlier in the chapter? Zechariah is mute! He can't encourage Elizabeth to use her *Lamaze* skills. He can't say anything to encourage her that she is going to make it. He can't tell her, "*You can do it, honey!*" But Elizabeth is not alone because God has, literally as the Greek says, "*magnified His mercy toward her.*" She is not alone. God has magnified His mercy toward her.

Listen, I don't know what you are going through in your life during this season of Advent, but you need to know that you are not alone. Jesus is with you. He will magnify His mercy, His compassion, His tenderness toward you. That great promise of the prophet Isaiah that Elizabeth was waiting for is true for you too. Today.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Elizabeth and the nation of Israel were waiting for this promise to be realized. They were 3 months away from seeing this promised begin to unfold with the birth of Jesus. They were waiting for God to show up. And that's what the name Immanuel means: *God with us*. He is with you right now. Magnifying His mercy toward you. "Immanuel, God with us." This is what Isaiah and the God-fearing people in his day were clinging to. They were clinging to the promise that God would be with them. As the nation of Assyria trampled on Judah and all seemed hopeless, they had a promise that they could hold onto: God is with us! Immanuel!

And isn't that the way it always is for God's people? We always cling to God's promises. Certainly Joseph and Mary needed this assurance of Immanuel, because in Matthew 2 King Herod will try to kill baby Jesus. Joseph and Mary would need the promise of Immanuel, God with us, in chapter 2 because the most powerful person in the entire world at that time, the psychotic King Herod, would put a bounty out on their baby's head! So they needed this promise of Immanuel! And isn't that the way it always is for God's people all the time? "God with us" is all that holds us up when we feel like life is going to swallow us up!

And as "advanced in years" Elizabeth starts to push, she needs to know that God is with her. Immanuel.

One name in the Hebrew language, *Immanuel*, translated with 3 simple words into English, *God with us*, can give you all the hope you need this Christmas- *Immanuel, God with us*. In the darkest times of your life- *Immanuel, God is with you*. In those moments when you feel like life is falling apart- *Immanuel, God is with you*. When you are so overwhelmed with life and you think that you just can't go on- *Immanuel, God is with you*. When you find yourself in situations that are just so overwhelming and you don't even know what to do, where to begin, what to say, how to respond, and you just feel hopeless, and maybe even feel like dying- *Immanuel, God is with you*. When you are at the end of your rope- *Immanuel, Jesus, God is with you*.

And what I love about the name Immanuel is that it is made up of 3 parts in the Hebrew language.

Immanuel is composed of the preposition "with" (*im* means "with") and it is affixed to the 1st common plural pronominal suffix (*anu* means "us"). And then at the end you have the name "El"- which means God- it gets attached to the end.

Preposition: *Im* = with

1st common plural pronominal suffix: *anu* = us

The name: *El* = God

Im-anu-El. The Hebrew grammar may be confusing or boring, but it's one of the most beautiful words in Hebrew! And it just might be what you need for Christmas this year! Maybe the thing that you need for Christmas is a Hebrew preposition and the Hebrew 1st common plural pronominal suffix! And when you take a Hebrew preposition and you attach the Hebrew 1st common plural pronominal suffix to it and then you attach to it God's name, what you get is a Hebrew promise that God is with you!

Sometimes that's all you have.... but it's all you need. God is with you. Sometimes that's all you have.... but it's all you need. Immanuel. God with us. And it's not just some theology. It's not just a doctrine. And it's not just a name that is composed of a Hebrew preposition and the Hebrew 1st common plural pronominal suffix attached to the name of God. It's more than that. It's a person! It's Jesus! Jesus is Immanuel, God with us! That might be just enough to get you through whatever it is that you are going through today. Jesus is with you right now!

Sometimes all you can do is just keep saying over and over again, "*God is with me. God is with me. God is with me. God is with me.*" I do that often. I did it this week. And I picture Elizabeth repeating this over and over as she is in labor. "*God is with me. God is with me. God is with me. God is with me.*" You might want to try that the next time you get stressed out or worried or scared to death. It's true. Merry Christmas, Grace! God is with you right now.

But back to our story.

Notice in verse 58 how Elizabeth's friends heard about God's great mercy to her and they show up to see her. They rejoiced with her. They entered into this moment with her. Oftentimes, "*God makes his invisible mercy visible by sending people of mercy to give mercy to people who need mercy*" (Paul Tripp). Elizabeth needed God's invisible mercy and it came in the form of her family and friends who were there to comfort her. To cook for her. To clean for her. To hold her hand and tell her that it was going to be okay. To come over and hold the baby so she could take a much-needed nap. That's God's mercy in action.

So 8 days go by and Zechariah and Elizabeth take the boy down to the temple to get him circumcised. Notice in verse 59 that the people who gathered wanted the boy to be called "Zechariah" after his father. They wanted to call him "Junior." This was the custom. If not "Zechariah" then the baby at least should have been named after someone in the family. And yet we see Elizabeth breaking with the cultural norms to be obedient to God's word, which was spoken to them by the angel Gabriel.

Elizabeth states that the boy's name will be "John." The group of friends and family who are gathered then look to Zechariah, but he's mute. So Zechariah asks for a writing tablet, where he writes, "His name is John." Now, remember what we saw 2 weeks ago: John means, "Yahweh is gracious." So through the birth and naming of John, God was reminding His people, "I am gracious. I am full of grace." John was a "grace child" sent as a message and a messenger of God's grace to His redeemed people. God was trying to get a point across to His people: Yahweh is gracious. Yahweh is merciful. Yahweh cares. Why? Because we tend to forget how good He is! Right?

Remember, the nation of Israel was under Roman oppression. Herod was a crazy psycho leader who in Matthew's gospel will slaughter every baby boy aged 2 and under. Remember too, that it had been some 400 years since they had heard God speak through one of the prophets. And now God was beginning to speak to his people through an old lady miraculously and mercifully giving birth in her old age. Most people weren't expecting an intervention from God this way.

Who would have guessed that God would cause an old woman to get pregnant? God was shattering all of their perceptions. He was doing stuff like He often does: *in surprising ways*. That's how Jesus rolls. He often works in surprising ways. You might want to get used to that. You might want to become comfortable with the fact that Jesus often does things that will shatter your perceptions. You might want to come to grips with the fact that Jesus will very often do wild and unexpected things in your life that will absolutely leave you flabbergasted. You might want to get used to saying, "*I totally did not see that coming.*" That's discipleship.

Many people were thinking, "*If Yahweh is gracious, then why are we under the control of Rome? Why does this crazy psycho leader Herod keep saying and doing crazy psycho things?*" Yet God is letting His people

know once again that *He is gracious* because an old woman just gave birth to a boy named "Yahweh is gracious." And as verse 65 states, the story of John's birth began spreading throughout all the hill country of Judea. People began having conversations about how gracious Yahweh is. God is setting up the scene for the arrival of His Son Jesus.

Now, lest we get on a high horse here, don't we do the same? Things get dark and bleak and start to fall apart in our lives and what do we think? *"God must have forgotten about me. Why are things going wrong? Where is God? Does Jesus really care about me?"* And yet God is there all along waiting to intervene in His time, with "megaluno" mercy, to magnify His mercy toward us, and when He does, and He will, we see His hand so clear, so evident, that we can then say, *"God, You are indeed gracious! You are merciful! You really do care about me!"*

God intervenes in the lives of His people and He often does it at the last minute and in surprising ways that shatter every category that we have. That's how He gets the glory! We want God to get the glory but the way He often gets the glory is by putting us in very impossible positions so that He is the only One who can help. And that's how He gets the glory. And one way that He gets the glory is when His mercy is on display. God is more glorious in His mercy than in any other attribute.

THERE IS MORE MERCY IN CHRIST THAN SIN IN US.

Back to our story.

LOOK AT VERSES 63-66...

And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

As soon as Zechariah wrote on the tablet, every one is confused. *"John? Why John? Where does that come from? No one in the family is named John."* And as they are all talking about what Zechariah has written, his tongue was loosed! Imagine 9 months of silence. I believe what Zechariah said next is recorded in vv. 68-79, which we'll look at in a moment. I believe that when Zechariah was able to speak again, he took his son John in his arms and sang the song that we have in verses 68-79.

And after Zechariah sang this song of praise to Yahweh, verse 65 says that fear came over all the people. They couldn't believe what they just witnessed and what they were hearing: Zechariah could speak again! And His first words were a song about how God has magnified His mercy toward Israel. And then the word began to spread. People began talking about it. It was all over *Facebook* and *Twitter*. And the people wondered what kind of child John would be because the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zechariah's song in verses 68-79 was all over the airwaves. It was the most listened to song on *Spotify*. And what a beautiful song it is! It's a song which affirms God's covenant-keeping character. It's a song about how faithful God is to His people and His promises. It's a song that highlights the out of this world mercy of God. It's a song declaring Yahweh's covenant promises. It's a song about the "megaluno" mercy of God.

Zechariah's song was a fresh reminder that the Lord was breaking into the world and preparing His people for the coming of the promised Messiah, the Redeemer, their Savior, Jesus Christ. But don't lose sight of the fact that the nation of Israel had to wait a long time for these things to happen. They heard the Savior was coming. Redemption was on its way. But they had to wait. They had to wait for John to be born, wait for Jesus to be born. Wait for both to grow up. Wait while John prepped the nation with sermons highlighting God's mercy like we saw in Mark 1. Wait for John to preach sermons highlighting God's mercy so that it would begin thawing the hearts of God's people. Wait 30 years for John to start preaching and being the forerunner who prepared the way of the Lord. Wait for Jesus to launch His ministry. Wait 3 years for Jesus to go to the cross. And then wait for Jesus to return and set up his eternal kingdom. Wait, wait, wait!

Christianity entails a whole lot of waiting. We have to wait too. We're just like them. Today you are hearing that God can bring redemption out of your mess, but you have to wait too. You have to wait to see how God will bring good out of the mess in your life.

The nation had to wait, even though there was a buzz in the air. *"What does John's birth mean? What's happening? What is God going to do? Is the Messiah coming? When will the Messiah deliver us and set up His kingdom?"* And what started the buzz? Zechariah's song that he sings here. Zechariah hasn't spoken in

over 9 months and his first words are a song about how merciful, caring, kind, and compassionate Yahweh is.

LOOK AT VERSES 67-80...

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

2x Zechariah sings of God's mercy. In fact, mercy is all over Luke chapter 1. Luke wants us to come away from this section of his gospel with the understanding that God is full of mercy. Mercy is mentioned 5x in chapter 1: vv. 50, 54, 58, 72, 78. Why does this song of mercy spread throughout the hill country? Why is God causing this "mercy song" to spread like wildfire throughout Israel? Because His mercy is what will prick their hearts to return to the Lord. His mercy, His kindness will lead them back to repentance.

John Bunyan said, *"Mercy is the antidote against sin. 'Tis of a thawing nature; 'twill loose the heart that is frozen up in sin; yea 'twill make the unwilling willing to come to Jesus Christ for life."*

That's why Zechariah sings of mercy. Because mercy will thaw the cold heart out. Mercy will melt the heart frozen in sin.

LOOK AT VERSE 78...

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God...

What will this baby boy named John do? Prepare the way for Jesus. Prepare the way for salvation. He will come preaching sermons that highlight the mercy of God to sinners. Why? Luke tells us, *"because of the tender mercy of God."* Because God is merciful. Because God will not forsake His people, even when they forsake Him. His mercy is tenacious. His mercy is all over the pages of Scripture. The Bible wonderfully enlarges His mercy beyond all dimensions whatsoever

And the word translated "tender mercies" (*splagchna*) means "bowels of mercy, guts of mercy." The idea is that the Lord feels His mercy and compassion for us in His gut. It's this passion, this feeling of mercy that you feel in your gut. Jesus feels it in His gut for His people. And because Jesus feels this overwhelming mercy in His gut, Richard Sibbes said, *"He cannot restrain His bowels of mercy long."*

Jesus cannot restrain His mercy. He just moves out in mercy and compassion toward us. You see it in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve. He comes quickly in mercy.

You see it with the Ark of the Covenant. The lid of the Ark of the covenant was called the *mercy seat*. What was inside the Ark? The law of God. The 10 Commandments. Inside the Ark was God's law, which condemns all of us as sinners. And what was over the law? The lid, the mercy seat. The mercy seat was a type of Christ, covering the law, covering the curse. And even though we are guilty of the curse a thousand times, God in Christ is merciful. Christ is the mercy seat. God meets sinners at the mercy seat. Where does our sin and God's holiness, as expressed in the law meet? At the mercy seat. God meets sinners at the mercy seat.

And you see His mercy at the end of the Bible. What's hovering over God's throne right now? John tells us in Revelation 4-

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Revelation 4:2-4

What's hovering over God's throne right now? A rainbow! A rainbow! What does that mean? Well, in Noah's day, the rainbow was the covenant sign of God's mercy to sinners! And when John says that God has the appearance of jasper and carnelian, here's what he means:

Jasper- there were several stones in ancient times called *jasper*. This stone was translucent, clear as crystal. It sparkled and flashed when polished. So what John means when He describes God this way is that God is infinitely glorious and holy.

Carnelian- has a reddish color, like fire. So what John means when he describes God this way is that this is God's anger at sin. This is the righteous anger of God at man's sin.

So you have God's character, which is holy and glorious and then you have this red-hot hatred of sin.

And then there's the rainbow! And then there's the rainbow! The covenant sign of God's mercy! The rainbow hovers over the throne of God, suggesting God's mercy. The holiness of God, the glory of God, the red-hot anger of God at man's sin is surrounded by the symbol of mercy, the rainbow!

In other words, divine mercy overarches all of God's deeds. God's mercy overarches all that He does. The rainbow hovering over the throne of God is eternal proof that God's mercy overarches all that He does. Which means that when we turn away from God, He doesn't turn away from us. He is merciful toward us. Hear His heart toward His people in Hosea:

My people are bent on turning away from me... How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. Hosea 11:7-8

I think these are some of the most beautiful words in Scripture. God's people have continually turned away from the Lord, and yet His heart moves toward them in compassion and mercy! And that is exactly what is happening here in Luke 1. The nation of Israel had turned away from the Lord. So Yahweh is revealing His heart for His rebellious children so as to allure them to love Him. He is sending Zechariah's "mercy song" song throughout the land. He is sending John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. Why? "*Because of the tender mercy of God*" Luke tells us.

God's heart "recoils" within in Him when His people walk away from Him. When we run away from Jesus, His heart recoils, it is overthrown with compassion and mercy and so He moves out in tenderness toward us. Yes, He disciplines us (Hebrews 12:5-11), but His knee-jerk reaction is one of kindness, mercy, tenderness, compassion. After all, what leads us to repentance? The law? The whips, terrors, and threats of the law? No! His kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

And we see His kindness here in Hosea 11 because when we run away after other lovers, Yahweh's compassion grows warm and tender. The Hebrew word for "warm" (*kamar*) that Hosea uses is used of an oven heating up (Lamentation 5:10). God's anger does not flare up when we sin, rather His compassion does! His heart heats up like an oven, not with anger, but with compassion, with mercy, with tenderness!

Richard Sibbes said, "*And when we feel ourselves cold in affection and duty, the best way is to warm ourselves at this fire of His love and mercy in giving Himself for us.*" (*The Bruised Reed*, p.81)

Let me ask you: Is your heart cold today? Is your heart frozen up in sin? The best way to warm yourself is at the fire of His love and mercy. Come warm yourself around the Gospel today. Come warm yourself at this fire of His love and mercy in giving Himself for us.

THERE IS MORE MERCY IN CHRIST THAN SIN IN US.

May the warm and tender heart of Jesus warm your heart for Him today.

"'Tis of a Thawing Nature"
Luke 1:57-80
Sermon Study Questions

1. How do you typically view God? Cranky? Merciful? Distant?
2. Describe a time when God's invisible mercy was made visible to you by merciful people.
3. Read Hosea 11:7-8. What do God's people typically do? How does God respond to us?
4. If your heart is cold and distant to the Lord, how will you warm it? What warms our hearts to Jesus?

5. Quotes from the sermon:

Richard Sibbes

God is styled a 'Father of mercies' to thee, a God of bounty. All is to allure thee to repentance, to allure thee to come in.' He is not merciful by accident, but he is naturally merciful in himself. He hath bowels of mercy in himself. 'Mercy pleaseth him,' Micah 7:18... He is more glorious in his mercy than in any other attribute... His mercies are like himself... There is not one attribute set down more in Scripture than mercy. It is the name whereby he will be known, Exod. 34:6, where he describes it, and tells us his name. What is the name of God? His longsuffering, and mercy... The Scripture doth wonderfully enlarge his mercy beyond all dimensions whatsoever.

"He cannot restrain His bowels of mercy long."

"And when we feel ourselves cold in affection and duty, the best way is to warm ourselves at this fire of His love and mercy in giving Himself for us."

John Bunyan

"Mercy is the antidote against sin. 'Tis of a thawing nature; 'twill loose the heart that is frozen up in sin; yea 'twill make the unwilling willing to come to Jesus Christ for life."