

Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer
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This morning we're continuing on in a sermon series through the summer that I guess you could call like a "Jesus Is..." series. I don't know. Basically what we're doing is looking at exactly who Jesus is, not necessarily who He was; who He is today, the impact that it has in our lives today. This is to prepare us for the fall as our senior pastor, Lord willing...our senior pastor, Larry, and his wife will be back worshipping with us at the first part of August. They're in Africa right now visiting some different missionaries. And so in the meantime what we are doing is we are going through different passages that tie in and relate to what we see of Jesus...who He is today. And we're doing that based out of, in many ways, Colossians 1 and the first part of 2.

What we're going to look at today is actually directly tied into Colossians 1:16-17, where it says

By Him [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

And what we're going to be looking at today is Jesus is currently, today, He is the creator and sustainer. We're going to do this by primarily looking at two different texts that hit on this element...John 1, first five verses or so there, and then Hebrews 1, the first three verses or so. Both of those books end up making very concrete, very direct, statements about exactly who Jesus is, and then the whole rest of those books...they are spelling that out and unpacking all the ramifications of that claim that they make at the very beginning. And so I'll invite you to turn with me to John chapter 1...Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, New Testament...about two thirds of the way through...about that far through the Bible if you're not familiar with where it is. We'll also have it up here [on the projector screen]. Basically what we see is that Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer, and John 1:1 it says

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – John 1:1-5

We're going to stop right there and talk about these first five verses for a few moments. Before we get into it and start unpacking a few elements of Jesus' nature that we see here I'll just point out two things. One—the Word that it's talking about is Jesus. Ok? This becomes more and more and more apparent as you continue reading on through John 1. The Word, the Light, the Life that he is talking about here is Jesus. So you could just as well say 'In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God,' and continue on down there. Ok? That's one reason why we go here is because this is speaking directly about Jesus. The second thing that I'll highlight just real quickly is in John 1:5, *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* Again, speaking about Jesus, and the news and the knowledge of Him and what He has revealed about the Father; and what it says is that the darkness has not overcome it. The implication is that it is still currently true. It's not just that Jesus was this...this truth that John is starting to tell us. It's not just that Jesus was that; it's that He still is. He Has not been overcome, He has not been conquered; He still is today currently the Creator and Sustainer. Everything that was true about Jesus is true about Jesus now. He has not been overcome. He is still the undefeated champion of everything, ok? So I'm just pointing that out, because it's very important that you understand that we're talking about Jesus and it's talking about this in the current tense, present tense is the implication of what he's going to unpack.

So what is it that we see about Jesus? Well, the first truth that we see here, and we'll go through four of these real quickly...the first thing that we see in verses 1 and 2 is that Jesus is eternal. It says that *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* He was in the beginning with God. Now this is important here that you realize that what John is making a claim of is that Jesus is eternal. In the very beginning, when time itself came into existence, when all of creation came into existence, that very first moment Jesus already was. He is completely outside time itself; He is timeless and eternal. That has huge implications that we'll look at a little bit more fully in just a moment. Jesus is God. Because there is only One who is eternal. There is only One who is timeless. Jesus...in the very beginning He already was. He's eternal. He always has been, He always will

be. He never began to exist. That's something that I'll highlight here that distinguishes, oftentimes...there are churches and religions and individuals who call themselves by the name of Christ who are not Christian. They may call themselves by the name of Christ, but they deny the fact that Jesus is eternal. They teach that Jesus was perhaps created, perhaps He is the Spirit-child of a heavenly Father and He was born at some point in the past. What they are saying is basically there is a time when Jesus began. He is not eternal, He is not timeless, He was not there in the beginning, which is a complete contradiction of Scripture. And it's a complete denial of the true nature of Jesus Christ. And so they may call themselves by the name of Christ, but they have actually denied who He is. So I'll just point that out.

The second thing that we see is actually tied into this, and it's the truth that Jesus is eternal, but He is also eternally in relationship. He's eternally in a relationship. We see through Scripture He's eternally in a relationship with the Father and with the Spirit. Here in John 1 it's speaking primarily in reference to the Father. But it gives this idea that He is in relationship with the Father because it says, *"In the beginning was the Word", was Jesus, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And He was in the beginning with God."* There is this idea that not only is Jesus eternal, but He has always been in the presence of the Father. They have always existed together; and we'll hit on this in just a moment...two persons, one God, but They have always existed together in perfect relational community, perfect relational community. There are a couple of implications for this, two of them that we need to understand, and this is why I highlight this. The first implication is this, and this may be a rude awakening if you've never heard this or you've never really thought about this because it goes totally in the face of modern American self-help, self-worth, everything else. God does not need you. *God does not need you.* He doesn't need me. Guess what? Before He created the universe, before He created mankind God was not lonely. He was not sitting around saying, 'Man, I'm so lonely. I just...Oh, I've got an idea! Why don't I create somebody to spend time with me?' No! He was not lonely. He was living eternally. He existed eternally in perfect relationship. He was completely satisfied, completely self-sufficient. He doesn't need you, He doesn't need me. That's a sobering thought. But the cool thing is, the flip side of that is that He has always been eternally relational. And by His grace, for no other reason than just simply the fact that He wanted to share that with a creation, He decided to create us, and His desire is that He would bring us into that perfect relational communion; that we would actually be...not because He needs it but because He wants to, in His grace, pour out His goodness and love and mercy on us. He desires...He created us for the sole purpose of entering into relationship with Him and just basking in the glory of His perfect relational unity and community, His love, who He is, His nature for all of eternity. We have a God who is immensely personal, which is completely different from eastern religions, which is completely different from all kinds of other things; it's completely different from Star Wars, ok? The 'Force', you know, this impersonal thing that surrounds us, it binds the...I forget the whole mantra of what it...the Force that binds us all... No! Completely wrong. The Being who holds everything together is Jesus, and we're gonna see that a little bit more fully. And He has eternally been relational and personal. It's not some impersonal 'Force' out there in the universe that binds everything together. And it's a very personal relational Being that desires to have a relationship with us.

There's a third thing, a third truth, that we see here. Jesus is distinct in role but equal in substance with the Father. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* What this is hitting on is *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* How does this work? This is the audacious claim that is completely unique in Biblical Christianity that says there is only one God, there has never been nor will there ever be any other God. There is one God. Still yet, somehow, that one God exists in three persons—Father, Son, Spirit. One God, three... How does that work? I don't have time to fully go into all of this, and even if we spent a half an hour or more...we could spend all day long and to tell you the truth, we are finite beings trying to wrap our minds around an infinite God, and at some point we will fall short. But with that said, I will just try to explain this real briefly where hopefully we can get a picture of kind of what John is trying to capture here.

This illustration, this analogy, comes from a gentleman named Abbot back in the 1800s; I believe he was a Franciscan priest, or ...I forget. But basically he wrote this short story called "Flatlanders", I believe. But basically the whole idea is this. Imagine, if you will, we all live, say, on a chalkboard. Ok? On a flat land. And we are all circles and squares, ok? Everyone in here...we are all two-dimensional beings who are circles and squares. Right? Now then, let's say there is this being who is a sphere. This being-who-is-a-sphere from a whole other dimension, a third dimension, wants to have a relationship with us. But we have never experienced...it's totally outside the realm of our understanding what a third dimension would look like, what a being with a third dimension would look like. How is it going to reveal itself? Well, it's going to start passing through this chalkboard and revealing itself. Where it first touches the chalkboard it'll be a little point, and then as it continues to pass through this point expands, expands, expands till it gets to about halfway through and then it comes back together and shrinks back down to a little point until it's finally passed all the way through. And the whole time this sphere is saying 'Listen! I'm not a circle! I know I may look like it, but I'm not just a circle...I'm a sphere! I'm from this whole other dimension! I'm from outside.' And there are circles and squares who look at it and say, 'No, not possible. All

there is is circles and squares.' And there are those who say, 'Yes, if there was a sphere and it passed, that's what it would look like. That's what it would...it matches up. Ok, I can't fully understand a sphere, I can't picture it, but ok. If there is, that's what it would look like and I trust that.'

Now, that's kind of an oversimplified version, but basically it's the same idea with the trinity. God is a being who is completely unique. He exists on a level and in a dimension that we do not comprehend because, to tell you the truth, we're just a bunch of circles and squares. The only reason we can have any knowledge of Him is because He has revealed Himself to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, and in His Scripture, His word, declaring, 'Listen, this is who I am, this is My...and I want to have a relationship with you.' And so, somehow, what John is trying to say here is that Jesus is distinct in role, but equal in substance to the Father. There is one God, but three persons. Ok? It's the Trinity.

We'll go on and we'll look at this fourth truth here. Jesus is the creator of all, and I underline that, all that is created. Verse 3 says that "*All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*" There's two implications here that have direct bearing on our lives many times today. One—that means Jesus created everything. That seems...ok. Jesus created you. He created me. He created everything. What that means is He also has rights over everything. He owns it all. He can do whatever He wants to do with what He has made and really, we have no right to object. That is a tough pill to swallow in a modern, western mentality. But it's a simple reality. It would be like...it would be like an artist who paints some sort of painting and then, all of a sudden, ridiculous as this sounds, all of a sudden the painting starts objecting like 'Wait a second...you shouldn't make it this way! You shouldn't play it out this way!' Or a story objecting to the author, 'You shouldn't make the story line out this way! That's not the way it's supposed to go.' And it's like 'What? Who are you...I'm the author! I'm the artist! I get to say exactly what happens, and I get to say where it starts and begins; I get to say how it all goes.' The simple reality is Jesus has full authority over your life, and when you are not recognizing that, when you do not acknowledge that, in effect you are saying 'Get out of my face!' You are spitting in His face and you are saying, 'Listen, You may think You're the artist; You may think You're the creator. But ultimately I will paint myself, and I will end up painting a better masterpiece than You could ever paint.' That is completely ridiculous and the height of arrogance, which is also the essence of sin.

That's one implication. The second implication is, again, there are different individuals, churches, groups, that call themselves by the name of Christ that deny this right here. They believe that Jesus was the first thing created, or perhaps He was the first thing born. It's a spiritual birth to a heavenly Father in a premortal life, a premortal existence; He was the firstborn, the first one to be born. Here's a thought. What this is saying is anything that was made...right here...without Him was anything made that was...anything that was made, Jesus made it. What that means is either John is lying or wrong, or Jesus made everything and no one made Him. He always existed. He was never born spiritually in some premortal life prior to this. Jesus has always existed. He made everything. Otherwise He would have had to make Himself. It's like the painting, once again; the painting ... no. That's ridiculous. That's something worthy of M. C. Escher's artwork right there, ok? Wow, ok, nobody knows... M. C. Escher...look him up sometime. Cool artist, totally wacked out. Anyway, but this whole idea is that Jesus has made everything, and if anyone denies that and says that Jesus was made by anyone, anything, even if He was literally born in some premortal existence, they've just denied the eternal nature of Jesus Christ. And though they may call themselves by His name, they have just denied the truth of who He is. And they do not actually know and worship the creator of the universe.

We're gonna go and, if you'd like to, flip over to Hebrews chapter 1. Hang a right, go to the tail end of Paul's letters after, like, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and we're gonna look at Hebrews; Hebrews 1:1-3, saying

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He uphold the universe by the word of His power.

We're gonna stop right there, and the author of Hebrews goes on beyond that and develops it more fully. But we're going to stop here. And what he begins claiming is that Jesus is the creator, but not only is He the creator. He upholds the universe. God the Father, through the power, the word of His power, His Son, upholds the universe. The idea is that Jesus is the anchor. He's the glue; He's the center of all that exists. All that has come into being is held together, is sustained, is maintained by Jesus. It's this idea that, you know, if any...if at any point Jesus stepped back and pulled back His sustaining power...the only reason that we believe that the sun will come up tomorrow is because Jesus continually sustains even the laws of the universe by the word of His...by His power. The only reason that we trust that the sun will come up tomorrow is thus far Jesus has been faithful to continue to

sustain the very existence of the universe. And even if we don't realize it, we're trusting implicitly, unconsciously, in God's faithfulness, even though, sadly, people deny it with their mouths and with their lives. Again, it kinda goes with that whole thing—God has written the truth of His nature and His existence on our hearts. But we'll leave that aside.

What it reminds me of is my dad. He used to fly Hueys, like back before I was born, back in the day. He was a helicopter pilot. And I've heard different stories, but one of the things that I'm like, it explains a lot...generally I've...he's said that helicopter pilots are a little bit more brooding, they're pessimistic, they totally subscribe to Murphy's Laws that anything that can go wrong will go wrong. And part of that is when a helicopter stops working properly it falls like a rock at best. Ok? As opposed to airplane pilots who generally are bright-eyed, optimistic. Why? Because if their engine stops, if something goes wrong, they at least have some measure of control and they can try and...as opposed to dropping out of the sky like a rock. Ok? That's his explanation. I don't know. See, do a little kind of non-empirical kind of test of airplane pilots and helicopter pilots, you know, and see if it holds up. But he told me...this is funny...he told me about this little, I don't know, nut, big, small, I don't know, bolt, this nut in the helicopter. Called the 'Jesus nut.' Somewhere, I don't know...that's what they call it. And it's somewhere up in the propeller, you know, the blades the props and everything, and it's some sort of nut up there that if it breaks, if it comes out, if all of a sudden anything happens to it, all of a sudden the entire mechanism, all the force that's going on there totally rips the whole helicopter apart...so quickly that basically all you have time to do is exclaim one thing, one word before all of a sudden your entire existence ends. And so they call it the Jesus nut because that's the only thing you have a chance to exclaim, and because that is the only thing that is holding it all together. That's basically...seriously, I don't know. I've never flown Hueys. It think it's an accurate analogy.

Jesus is the only thing that holds it...and if for some reason He pulled His sustaining presence out of existence, you wouldn't even have an opportunity to exclaim anything before everything ceased to exist. It would all fly apart. Jesus even hit on this a little bit at the tail end of Matthew 7, the Sermon on the Mount, where...and hopefully you guys know this section of the Sermon on the Mount. There's the little kids' song "The wise man built his house upon the ..." Ok, either we didn't, like, grow up singin' the same little children's Sunday school songs, or you guys are... Ok, "The wise man built his house upon the..." [Congregation shouts "Rock!"] Rock! Ok, and "The rains came down and the floods come up..." and then the house on the rock... [Congregation says, "Stood firm."] Stood firm! Oh, ok, we're there. So now, at the same time, ok, then "The foolish man built his house upon the..." ["Sand!"] Yes! Ok, the rains come down, the floods come up, and the house... [many answers] Splat!! Come on! It falls down...no! I mean, it goes Splat!! Splat!! Splat!! Splat!! Ok? You guys have apparently never worked with kids, or don't have them, or something. Houses don't just fall down, ok? They go splat in very amazing...just crazy, insane ways.

Here is the thing about this song, ok? And here's a little parenting tip for you if you have had kids. We learn a massive amount of theology through song, which is why it's extremely important that we think through the words and what we are saying when we sing even here in our congregation. And that's something that I appreciate about Joel, is he works through that; and our music leaders, as they are working through this, to say, 'Ok, what does this say?' Because here is a very sobering reality that a lot of times we don't teach our kids about that song. That song is not about good carpentry skills. It's not. It's not about good dirt work. It's about the fact that if you build your life and your entire existence on anything other than the rock of Jesus Christ, and Him alone, your life, your whole existence, will go splat; because ultimately there are storms and tsunamis of life that are coming your way, that will totally wipe you out. And the only thing that will allow you to stand is directly determined by how firmly grounded you are in Christ and Him alone. How's that for some theology in a fun little children's song? That's what the song is about. That's what Jesus was talking about. It's this idea that He upholds and sustains everything. If your existence, your life, is not founded on Him, your life will go splat. Now, here's the thing. I love this, and how does this...how does this apply to life? Well, it's basically the idea that yeah, your life will go flying apart and you will never gain the significance, the meaning, the existence, that you know in your heart you desire if your life is not firmly grounded on Christ.

Mark...I love the gospel of Mark. He...Mark...you read that gospel, it's like an action movie, ok? All of the gospels, they're a little bit different. Ok? They are. Some are kind of like the Sundance Film Festival, artistic type, where they're very...the words that they...they're very descriptive and artistic. They still portray the same truth; they just do it in different ways. Mark? He's down, dirty, he's just telling you right...it's like this everyman's action movie of the gospel, is basically what it is. You don't believe me, I mean, seriously, the first five chapters of Mark make me think of, like, "Rocky", they do. I'm serious! I'll explain. Which makes sense from my perspective, and I know it's not a full, perfect analogy, but you think about...Mark is the gospel...Mark was an assistant to the Apostle Peter, ok? Mark recorded the gospel according to Peter. That's what the gospel of Mark is, the gospel that Peter preached. Peter...what does it mean? Rock! Yes, ok. And it's not his given name when he was born. His name was Simon.

Jesus said, 'Dude, Simon, I'm giving you a new name. We're calling you "Rocky"', ok? Because it totally matches his personality and the plans that God had for him. But you read this and it's...seriously, it's like this whole line-up of heavyweight champion bouts where you see it's...you end up, you see it's Jesus versus disease. First round, Jesus knocks disease out. Disease doesn't have anything on Him. Ok, you go next, you see it's Jesus versus demons. They don't even...they run away at the sound of His name, because they're like, 'Man, I saw what He did, and we have no power over Him.' They are totally defeated. Jesus versus disaster, the storm. It's like it goes to step into the ring and He says, 'Dude, sit down and shut up.' He's like, 'Be still, be quiet, stop!' And it's a total forfeit. Ok. I mean, seriously, that's what happens with the storm. You come and it's Jesus versus death, the undefeated champion. Here it is, never anything that has matched it. And He knocks it out, first round again. It's as though Jesus is just opening up a can and Mark is taking names. That's the way the first five chapters of Mark read. And what Mark is doing is he is driving home the fact that Jesus has power over everything, every single aspect of creation. Jesus has full authority over it all. Nothing can even stand in His presence or continue to exist unless He allows it to. That has very profound impact if you work that into your heart and realize that that same Jesus is the One who desires you to enter into a relationship with Him.

Before September 10th, 2003, I gave a lot of lip service to that. That was a transformational point, transformational date in my life in many, many ways. From that moment on, basically from that moment on I look at it and I realize I don't know how much time I have. The only reason I am here even to speak to you today is simply because God has allowed me to be here at this moment. I have no idea how long that will last. And so I have to make the most of every single moment for His glory. That applied even to the way that I approach school. Students, just a little word here. How do you approach your studies? Are you doing it for God's glory? Anyway, that's...

But here's the thing. What happened on September 10th, 2003? Basically, I survived an IED, a roadside bomb. Total miracle, and I don't totally have time to go into all how it came about. Basically, I was in the mountains of Afghanistan. We were on our way home after about a week-and-a-half-long mission up in the mountains, and I was the commanding officer of my little separated unit here where we were operating independently. And this...And we were given the task of bringing some Toyota Hiluxes...basically it's like a Toyota Tacoma...back to our base; unarmored vehicle, civilian vehicles for special ops guys to play with. And basically I decided I would ride in one of those, myself and my radio operator, because, basically I figured at least if something happens I know where I'm going. Ok? My senior NCO, the senior enlisted man, sergeant, he came up to me and he was not very happy because where we were going there'd been a whole lot of contact with enemy in the area. And he basically looked at it and said, 'Doesn't make sense, get in a fight, lose the commanding officer in the first few moments of the fight.' And basically he couldn't order me out of the truck, but I looked at him and I told him, "Listen, I know where I'm going, ultimately if God says it's my time to go home then it doesn't matter where I'm at, if I'm in an unarmored truck or I'm in one of the up-armored gun trucks, I'm gonna go home. I can't hide from Him. At the same time, even if I'm in an unarmored truck, if it's not time for me to go home, then guess what? Nobody can touch me." Makes no sense to him; he's ticked off, but he can't order me out of the truck. He goes back, we head out. A couple of hours later that was proven. Up in the mountains, basically, there was an IED. It blew. It was a perfectly-targeted IED initializing an ambush. So it targeted my truck, unarmored truck. Left this nice silhouette of my truck with shrapnel and everything in the rock wall to my right. Somehow, miraculously, not a single piece of shrapnel hit my truck. And other than some hearing loss I didn't have anything touch me. Complete miracle where there was...the guys behind me who were atheists looked at it and they were like, 'Ok, I don't necessarily believe in that Jesus guy yet, but there is no way to explain what I just saw. That is completely against the laws of physics. That didn't...but I saw it. And I can't deny it.' And so that spurred a whole lot of questions and conversations after that.

But it's a simple reality that my life continues to be given to me simply at His good pleasure. He doesn't always do that. Eighteen days later I had a friend, Ernesto Blanco, who was killed by an IED in Iraq. I never woulda got through ranger school without Ernie. Seriously, I would not have passed the mountain phase of ranger school without Ernie. Very, very godly man that put me to shame in my walk in every way. Why did God save me, why did God spare me miraculously, but not spare him? I don't know. I don't. But I must affirm the fact that He is the creator and sustainer, and He has every right. He spoke me into existence and continues to give me existence. He spoke Ernie into existence and gave him existence. And when He decided that, 'Ok, it's done, he's comin' home to see Me,' it happened.

You see, the thing is that a lot of times we actually forget this in our lives, that ultimately Jesus, the One whom we claim to have a relationship with...He's the creator; He's the sustainer; and ultimately His word is the only one that matters. And sadly, we turn away in fear. We silence ourselves in fear because we're worried about what other people will think about us if we speak the truth about Jesus Christ. We're worried about what other people think of us. And so we don't speak to the one true God, Creator, Sustainer of everything that has come into existence, Jesus Christ. We look at it, and there is a certain confidence there that as we work this reality, that Jesus is the

Creator and Sustainer of everything, as we work it into our hearts there is a confidence there. And it's like 'You know what? I don't care what you think of me. I don't care if you think it's foolish for me to turn down this promotion that will give me more money, because it will take me away from what is most important in life. And so I will do this, even though money calls this way.' I don't have to place my importance, my identity, my existence, my worth, my value in the possessions I have. I can walk away from it all if that is what Jesus requires me to do with my... If Jesus... I've been very honest. If Jesus... Different people have talked to me about this at different times. It's something...and I told Larry when I came on, I said, "Listen, I'm here as long as God has me. But the moment God says, 'Guess what? You're goin' over here,' my family and I...we're walking, even if that's the Muslim world." Because ultimately He has the final authority and the final say over my life.

And by God's grace I hope and pray that that will continue to be true. And that is only true in my life so far is that I'm trusting in Him and working His reality into my life. Because ultimately I'm a sinner. I am. My tendency is I want to write my own life, I want to call my own shots, I want to reject His authority and turn away from Him. And it is only by His grace, by the blood of His Son, by Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer who died in my place on the cross so that I could enter into a relationship with Him. It is only by His grace. Because I trust in that, because I have trusted that He has the ability and the power to forgive me, even though I don't deserve it...it is only by that grace that I even continue to exist, much less to have a relationship with Him. And if that is true in my life, and as I work that reality deeper and deeper into my heart, then I will have less and less and less problems going where He wants me to go, doing what He wants me to do. The extent of my problem following Him wherever He leads isn't a problem with Him; it's a problem with how deeply embedded I have worked this truth into my heart, and how deeply and how much I've allowed the Holy Spirit to work it into my heart. Jesus is the Creator. He is the Sustainer of everything. He has rights over everything, including my life.

So what I'll do is I'll ask you to stand and we'll close. We'll close in prayer. And basically, this prayer is just a prayer asking Jesus Christ, the Creator and Sustainer of everything, to give us the confidence to speak to the truth and grace that He, and He alone, offers.

[Congregation sings the prayer for witness song]

Thank you. Go in His grace.