



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Scripture: Various

2000

TULIP Series: Part 4 “Irresistible Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

Let's open with a word of prayer. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for this time together. Thank You for the opportunity that we have to consider the subject that we will consider tonight, and look in some depth, (in the amount of time that we have), at Your sovereignty in bringing us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We thank You for that great truth. We thank You for the reality that we who believe in Him do so because of Your grace, certainly not because of our ability or our desire. But You overcame all of that with grace that super abounds to bring us to a knowledge of Your Son, and an entrance into life everlasting, and all of the great privileges and blessings that accompany that—which we cannot even begin to fathom. Well, help us to begin to fathom, to some degree, the grace that saves. And we look to You to bless us, to teach us, to guide us in our thinking, to open our minds to Your truth.

We pray that for ourselves and for the other classes that meet tonight. We pray for the young people that You would bless them greatly as they study and they fellowship together. Bless our time of study and bless our time as well of prayer afterwards. We commit our whole evening to You in Christ's name.

Amen.

(Message) There is a popular notion today that there is such a thing as a 'self-made man'. You've probably heard of the self-made man. You've probably said it yourself, or thought of individuals as being that. But it's a myth.

And that becomes obvious with just a little thought. Did Albert Einstein grow his own genius? Did Michael Jordan make himself tall and agile and 'able to leap over tall buildings in a single bound?'

Did either one of them decide the times and places where they would be born, which allowed them the opportunities to apply the abilities that they had? Because had they been born at a different time, 100 years prior, we'd never have heard of Albert Einstein. I don't even know if we had basketball 150 years ago, but we wouldn't know who Michael Jordan is.

Now, you may have a lot of drive and vision, and it may separate you from your friends and your colleagues, and distinguish you a great deal in the field in which you live and work—but did you give yourself a healthy body, or a sound body, or a sound mind? Because you need that to have those kind of virtues. There are many people who don't have that, who have been invalids all their lives.

We could go on and on with this, but the point is, while we are responsible to use all that we have, what we have and what we are, is all a gift—and it comes from God. There is really no self-made man or self-made woman. But the idea is very common in general thought. —And it's also popular in theology. There is a doctrine of the self-made man. I've never heard it put that way, but there is, in essence, a doctrine of the self-made man, and it goes back a long way.

Around the year 400, a monk from Britain appeared in Rome. His name was Pelagius. He gained a lot of influence there in the aristocratic circles of the city as a teacher and a moralist. Pelagius denied original sin. He claimed that man was not born sinful, that he is able to do all that God requires of him—even to be perfect; if he only wills to do it.

According to Pelagius, the ability to be saved is found in the lost sinner's heart, if he will just use it. And so he denied the necessity of 'birth from above'. He denied the inward work the Holy Spirit. He believed that man is *free* and man is *able*—and he took offense at Augustin's prayer in the tenth book of his *Confessions*, "Give what you command, and command what you will." That attributed everything to God. That was Augustin's way of saying, (and saying in a prayer), 'LORD, everything that You require of us we can do only by Your grace.' So, "Command what You will, but give what You command" 'or we will not be able to accomplish that'. And in the view of Pelagius, that undermined moral responsibility—and he hated that prayer.

Well, it doesn't undermine moral responsibility, of course. The commands of God tell us what we ought to do. But they do not tell us what we are able to do. In fact, the whole reason for the Law was to expose our sinful condition, and our *inability* to meet its demands. You can see that in the New Testament. Read Galatians chapter 2, verse 21, and Galatians chapter 3, verses 21 and 22, where Paul explains the purpose of the Law. In fact, in Romans 7 where he deals with that as well, he points out how the Law, 'Provoked him to sin—it stirred it up within him.'

So a great debate followed in which Augustin triumphed over Pelagius. Pelagianism was rejected at the Synod of Carthage in 418, and at other Synods and Councils that followed. And Augustinianism, (which holds to Total Depravity and holds to Total Inability), was recognized as orthodox.

But Pelagianism never really dies—it's always with us. In one sense it's with us because it's the 'natural theology'; it's the 'theology of the natural man'—it's paganism. It's dressed up in Christian garb, at least it was with Pelagius, but essentially it's paganism. It says, 'Man's okay, and he can take care of himself. And if there is salvation, well, he'll save himself.'

But Pelagianism's also found within the church in a modified form known as 'semi-Pelagianism'. And that's what Arminianism is; it takes a compromising position between Augustinianism and Pelagianism. The Arminian recognizes that grace is

necessary, that the natural man cannot be saved—that he cannot believe without the work of the Holy Spirit. But he also believes that the Holy Spirit is not enough. The Holy Spirit needs man's cooperation if His work is to succeed.

In the fourth article of *The Remonstrance*, (which we have quoted, I think, in most of our lessons), is the original Arminian statement of faith. In the fourth article they write, "Grace is not irresistible; for many resist the Holy Spirit." And that is a common theology today.

Edwin Palmer, in his book on *The Five Points of Calvinism*, quotes an evangelist as saying, "There is one area in your life that God will never touch, your will. He will never cause you to believe. That's your job. Only you can do it." Now that, I would bet, is the view of most evangelical Christians today. They hold to free will, and to the self-made man.

But is it biblical? Does *free will* and cooperation have its root in Paul or Pelagius? The Calvinists, at the Synod of Dort, believed it came from Pelagius. And they rejected that position of the Arminians and their 'Fourth Point' in their response to *The Remonstrance*, with the 'I' of the acrostic TULIP, "*Irresistible Grace*". 'Man, apart from grace, is by nature dead in his sins.' Then, *irresistible grace* follows necessarily, because depravity, inability, spiritual death eliminates any possibility of cooperation. The dead don't cooperate with the physician.

Well, that's our subject tonight, in our fourth lesson on TULIP, *Irresistible Grace*. It answers the question, 'Who ultimately makes the difference in salvation, man or God?' Man must believe; there's no debate about that; that's not the question here. In order for a person to be saved, in order for a persons to be justified, he or she must believe in the Gospel.

But why do some believe and others not? Why is it that two people, on the same occasion, under the same circumstances, could hear the Gospel, the same Gospel from the same person, but one receives the Gospel and the other rejects it? What's the reason for the difference?

Paul answers the question, with a question, in 1 Corinthians 4:7. He writes to the Corinthians, (who are rather full of themselves; rather boastful about their spiritual condition—why they were what they were, and what they had), and he asks them, "Who made you to differ? And what do you have that you did not receive?"

Well the answer, of course is: 'We have nothing that we have not received. All that we have is a gift and God is the one who makes us what we are' That's the point of his statement. We have faith—we have wills that are willing, because of *irresistible grace*.

Well, to understand what this means, I think we first must understand what it does not mean. That seems to be the pattern we've followed, (and most do when they deal with each of these points), because the name itself sometimes isn't as helpful as we'd like. It fits the acrostic, TULIP, and we don't like to mess with it too much, because it will change it to some word that doesn't exist—but '*Irresistible Grace*' is not altogether satisfactory. It sometimes is misunderstood to mean that, 'God causes people to act against their will, to seek what they don't want.' So that *irresistible grace* is thought of as some 'irresistible force'—like an avalanche of snow that sweeps everything away in its path. It takes away the alpinist and the villages, sweeps them on to some destruction. Or it's like a kidnapper who seizes a helpless child and carries it away.

God, of course, never forces or coerces man to do anything. He doesn't make people do what they don't want to do, or drag sinners off to heaven kicking and struggling against their wills. That's the caricature that is sometimes given of irresistible grace—but it doesn't mean that.

Irresistible grace means, 'that those whom God has chosen, His elect ones, will ultimately be brought to faith by the Holy Spirit'. It doesn't mean that there's no resistance. The Arminian is right in saying that men do resist the Gospel. But the resistance, contrary to the thinking of the Arminian, the resistance is never finally successful because the Holy Spirit will ultimately change the elect from hating God to loving God—from resisting Him to willingly surrendering to Him in faith.

But, because of the misunderstanding that sometimes occurs, the word *irresistible* is 'replaced' with other expressions—some that are preferred are *efficacious* grace, or *effectual* grace, meaning that it is 'ultimately effective'—or *unconquerable* or *certain* grace, because that is the point: Grace is certain to succeed; grace cannot be conquered. It is unconquerable and those who are conquered by grace are conquered by it gladly, happily, willingly.

Total Depravity, you'll remember, doesn't mean that man doesn't act freely. We covered this to some extent in our first lesson on this subject: On the subject of Total Depravity, and that 'Man is not a robot'. Total Depravity does not mean that. He's not made to act against his will. He's not forced to live a certain way. Man always acts freely; always does what he wants to do; always does what he or she desires to do.

But that doesn't mean that he or she has 'free will', that he is able to choose the good or the bad equally—as Pelagius taught. He does not have that ability—it does not exist; and the Bible does not teach it. But he does choose freely in that he chooses according to his desires, he chooses according to his nature—and does so freely.

Man's problem, though, is that he always desires to do what is contrary to God's will. That is the nature of fallen man. Man hates God and loves sin. If that seems like a harsh statement, (and if the proof for it from the previous lesson that we had has grown dim in your minds), then Romans 8 verse 7 makes it plain: "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God...". "...hostile toward God", and so Paul says, "...for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." It's hostile toward God; it won't subject itself to the will of God; it's willfully set against it, and it cannot submit itself to the will of God. So 'Man rebels.' —He rebels freely, though. But in saying that, saying that, 'He rebels freely' —that is not freedom.

Man is not truly free for 'he is a slave to his sin', to his fleshly desires. And because he is a slave, he cannot liberate himself. That's man's condition. And so because that is man's condition, God must do the liberating. If there's to be a liberation, if there's

to be freedom, it must be God who delivers. And He does that through His *irresistible grace*. And that follows naturally from man's condition of Total Depravity, (or *Total Inability*).

So, before a person can believe, that person must have a mind that understands the Gospel, and understands it as true, (I don't mean, 'understands the words', but 'understands that this is true'), and a mind that desires it, that wants to believe in it. However, we cannot change our mind into that kind of a mind by our words, by the things we say, by our ability to reason, or our ability to debate—or our ability to raise our voice.

The first time I went to Europe, years ago, I was in college, and we were in a train station in Rome, and I was asking the person if there was someplace we could put our bags—and he just looked at me. I was speaking perfectly clear English to him, but he stared at me—so I raise my voice a little bit...and he just looked at me. And I began to raise a little more, when finally the guy who was with me said, "He doesn't know English." So raising my voice doesn't help a bit to communicate when someone can't understand because they don't know the language. They have to learn the language first.

That's the same with the natural man. To reason, argue, and raise our voice and pound the pulpit isn't going to change the heart. The physical eye that has been blinded cannot be restored to sight by any amount of light shining on it. And neither can any amount of spiritual light, spiritual truth, give spiritual sight. A surgeon, or a miracle, must first restore the eye to its normal condition, repair its parts, before it can function for sight.

And the soul must first be restored before it can function. And even if we allow for free will, (I don't allow for free will, but for the sake of the argument), even if we allow for free will, there could be no confidence in human ability. Before the fall, Adam was in a perfect state. He had a perfect mind; no flaw in him mentally or physically.

He lived in a perfect environment, had everything that he could want. But in that state of perfection...he failed, he sinned, he fell—and he brought us down with him.

Now why would anyone put confidence in man's ability now in this fallen condition? —Even if one wants to say he has 'free will', he's a fallen creature. Why should we think that, man in a fallen condition, would cooperate with God if he could, when man in a perfect condition was not willing to do that and would not do that?

You see, the problem it seems to me, not only here but in so many other things of theology, is the problem that people do not understand 'the sinfulness of sin'—they don't understand the destructiveness of sin and the enslaving power of sin. Sin in its greatness is not understood.

And that's certainly true in this situation: It is so strong and powerful and destructive that only a miracle can change it. And *irresistible grace* is that miracle; it is that divine surgery that repairs the soul...and without it we're lost.

That follows logically, as I have said, from *Total Depravity*. All of these five points follow logically from one another. Total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints, they all hold together. Because man cannot believe, because man cannot choose God for himself, then God must first choose man for Himself, if God is to have a people for Himself.

Why He chooses some and not all, I don't know that answer. Nobody does, not in full. We can give partial answer: 'Ultimately, it brings glory to Him.' But to get into the details of that, we don't know. We don't know, 'Why some and not all?' But what we do know is that *some* are chosen.

He chose a people for Himself, 'an innumerable multitude of people'. But to be His people, to finally possess them in reality, they must be saved. And so He sent His Son to die for them, and by His death to save them. And in His death, at the cross, He actually took away their sins. He actually satisfied God's justice for all for whom He died. He redeemed them, He ransomed them.



Now having bought them for Himself, He will surely bring them to Himself. Having purchased them for Himself, He's not going to leave them in an unbelieving state. He'll bring them to a saving knowledge of Himself. And God doesn't save people without first changing them. The idea of God electing a company of people and bringing them into heaven without any change is impossible. God doesn't make people citizens of heaven without making them new creatures, without giving them new hearts. He doesn't bring people to Himself without first giving them a desire to come to Him, and a love for Him and all that He offers. Now that's what He does in Irresistible Grace.

As I said, that's logical, but it is also biblical. Each point that is taught in this acrostic, this 'TULIP', each point is taught in Scripture. And there are a number of passages in both the Old and the New Testaments that teach Irresistible Grace—not with that expression, but with that idea.

In Ezekiel 36, in verse 26, it is described as 'a change of heart' produced by the Holy Spirit. 'God gives a new heart, a new spirit. He takes away a heart of stone, and He gives a heart of flesh'; That's the way God describes what He's going to do for Israel. That is a promise given to the nation, and it will happen in the future.

But in principle, that is what happens to every person who comes to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. Everyone who's placed in a right relationship with God is placed in that relationship because God's changed them fundamentally—by giving them 'a new heart.' So, when that change occurs, the individual is now governed by new affections and new abilities—and then, naturally, irresistibly, acts upon those new desires and according to those new abilities.

It is as natural for the person who has received a new heart, 'the heart of flesh', to believe as it was natural for that person to disbelieve in the former condition—the dead condition. It is a natural response to do that. But God does it. It's His work.

In John chapter 6, in verse 37 and verse 44, Jesus said that. He traces this to God. We read there, John 6, verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me. And the

one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Verse 44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Well Jesus says here that the Father has given Him a certain number of people—and every one of them will come to Him. There's no uncertainty about it. There's no contingency about it. There is no possibility of failure. The *given ones* will come:

"All...will come to me" He said. (vs37). But they will not come on their own. They cannot come of themselves. They come because God *draws* them *irresistibly, efficaciously*.

Verse 44, "No one can come, *unless* the Father draws him."

So, Christ has been given a number of people, 'a great multitude of people'. And all will come—but not in their own strength, because no one can come unless they're drawn. But God will draw all of them, because all will come.

Now that word, *draw*, is significant. It's the same word that's used later in John chapter 21, verse 6 and verse 11, of Peter *drawing* a net full of fish, or the disciples *drawing* a net full of fish into the shore. And then, it's the word that's used in John 18:10, of Peter *drawing* his sword to cut off Malchus' ear. In both cases, the fish and the sword are passive. The fish did not bring themselves to the shore. The sword did not draw itself. And all were successfully *drawn*. The sword did not resist Peter, and the fish did not fail to be brought. Now, they may have resisted, (fish do that within the net), but the point is, all were brought successfully to the shore. And it's the same for whom the Father *draws*. He brings them *effectively*. He brings them *certainly*. Now how could it possibly be otherwise as we consider who God is.

That perhaps, is another part of the problem in coming to understand these doctrinal truths. We have, 'Too small a view of God.' How could God fail to do anything that He sets out to do? That's what Isaiah asks in Isaiah 14:27, "For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate *it*? And as for His outstretched hand, who can turn it back?" He's not making an inquiry; it's a rhetorical question. And the point is, 'No one can do that. God cannot be frustrated in any of His plans.'

In Isaiah chapter 46, in verse 10, the LORD said, "My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure." Man cannot overturn that. And so, all the given ones will come because they will be brought by God Almighty.

In John chapter 10, we have the LORD saying the same point in a similar way; John 10, verse 16, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice: and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd." Jesus secures the salvation of His sheep, 'the given ones', and infallibly brings them.

It's the same work that the Father does in John chapter 6. But the drawing and the bringing we see, while it's the same, is not coercion on God's part—it's not forced. They are willingly drawn. The 'sheep' hear the voice of The Shepherd and they come, because the Son and the Father send the Holy Spirit to do a work in them, to give them ears to hear. He makes us willing, and draws us, as someone has said "With chords of love". Not with coercion, but lovingly draws us to Himself. It's all of God. Our Lord makes that clear in these texts in John.

But Paul does the same; and there are a number of passages that we could look at for this, and Titus is one. Titus chapter 3, in verses 5 and 6, Paul writes, "He saved us...", (Now that says it all right there! That's really the essence of everything we've been studying for the past few weeks.), "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."

Who saved us? God. How did He do it? According to our works? According to our foreseeing faith? According to any merit of our own? No! According to *His mercy*—that's the standard. It's a salvation that gives help to the helpless, and saves those who cannot save themselves. And He does it by regeneration, and the renewing by the Holy Spirit. That's the new birth.

And it is all of God. No one regenerates himself anymore that a person gives birth to himself. There is no self-made man, physically, or spiritually.

Just think of the whole scope of the Bible for a moment, or at least the first part of it. How did the universe come to exist? Did it will itself into existence? Obviously not. In the beginning God spoke and it came into being. It was passive. (It really wasn't even passive, it was non-existent.), He spoke everything into being out of nothing. Now I have never seen in the things that I've read, (the books and the passages that I've read on *irresistible grace*), Genesis 1:1 cited as a key text in all of this—but I think it is. It's very relevant to the whole subject.

What do we learn about God to begin with? "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We learn at least two things. First of all, God is. And secondly, He is a *creator*—He takes the initiative; He begins the work in every stage. He's a creator. How did Adam come to have life? Did Adam say, "I think, therefore I am?" No. When he was just dust from the ground, God breathed into him the breath of life, and he became alive.

And Lazarus. How did he come forth from the tomb? Well, not of himself, obviously. He'd been dead for four days when Jesus called, "Lazarus, come forth." And John writes, "The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings." (Jn 11:43-44). He could not resist coming forth. Death could not hold him in the tomb. The wrappings could not hold him back from coming forth from the tomb. He was brought to life and drawn out of the tomb affectively, effectually.

Now Lazarus, I don't think, was conscious at the time of any divine work in him. When he sat up and came out, the only power that he was aware of, that was working, was his own as he obeyed the command that he heard and moved. But after coming forth, he certainly realized that it was all of the power of God that caused him to live and to walk. God's power was primary. Lazarus' power was secondary.

And it's the same in the new birth with faith. We believe for salvation. We exercise our wills in coming to faith in Jesus Christ. We make a conscious decision to trust in Christ. We do so because we understand it, it makes sense to us, and we desire it—just like Lazarus, when he walked, he did it; he willed to do it—just like Adam when he breathed; he drew that air into his lungs. But he did so because God breathed into

him. And Lazarus walked because Christ commanded life to enter him, and then commanded him to walk—and he responded, inevitably, necessarily, to the command that was given. And we *believe* because God, the Holy Spirit, imparts spiritual life to us, and He calls us. He commands us to *come forth* spiritually. And in that way we're drawn to Him.

Now all of that happens through the Gospel. The effectual call of the Holy Spirit is occasioned by the general call, the giving of the Gospel by the evangelist. Whether it is a Gospel that's preached by an evangelist or simply the Gospel read in the Bible, the Gospel is the means by which God calls us, and quickens us.

1 Peter chapter 1, in verse 23 Peter writes, "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is* through the living and enduring word of God." As the Word of God is heard, some respond, some don't. To those who don't respond, it's foolishness, they turn away from it, they reject it.

But others respond. 'The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd' in the Gospel, and they come, they believe. The reason is because through the Word, through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit performs His work of effectual calling of *irresistible grace*. He uses the Gospel like a seed to awaken and enliven the dead heart. And gives life.

And so we preach the Gospel. That's God's means of calling people effectually; of drawing them and bringing them. It is done in connection with the preaching of the Word of God, and it should be done in the confidence that God blesses His work; and He will bring His people to faith. And so we preach it because this is how He does so.

We have clear examples of that in the Word of God; and I don't know of a better example, though, than that which is given to us in Acts chapter 16, in verse 14. The apostle Paul and his companions are on their second missionary journey, and it's a significant journey because this takes the Gospel into Europe. They cross over from Asia into Macedonia, and they go to the city of Philippi. And we read that on the Sabbath they had gone down to the riverside where a small group of women were meeting.

And sitting down, Paul began to speak to them; and Luke writes in verse 14, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

She responded because God acted on her heart. He opened it to receive the Gospel—which is a way of saying that, 'He took away her heart of stone and gave her a heart of flesh.' There was no resistance on her part. She didn't feel the Lord do His work; she didn't hear the Spirit of God say something to her. She heard what Paul was saying, and she responded. —She believed.

Later, she came to understand that she believed because of *Irresistible Grace*. At the time she had no sense of that; but that's what Luke is saying; and it is that way with all of us. We are not self-made people. —We are God-made people.

And Paul says, in Ephesians chapter 2, in verse 10, that "we are His workmanship." And we can trace that whole argument from the beginning of chapter 2 through verse 10; and we see the power of it—the fact that he's saying just what is being said tonight. Paul tells them that they were, "dead in their transgressions and sins". (vs1). "But God, being rich in mercy...made them alive." (vs4&5). "For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast." (vs8&9). You can't even boast in your faith, because it's a gift.

Well Pelagius didn't understand that; but Augustin did. He knew it very well. He was the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, and chose to follow the example of his father. He lived a bad life, a very immoral life, and a dark life. He became a follower of Manichaeism—a pagan religion. He devoted himself to philosophy, to Neoplatonism. And then he devoted himself to his career as a teacher of rhetoric.

But his mother never gave up praying for him. She followed him to the city of Milan, where he came under the influence of Ambrose, the great preacher of that day. And under the influence of the preaching of the Word he came under a conviction of sin. And then one day, while he was sitting in a garden, he heard a child singing a song, "Take

and read, take and read." He picked up his Bible, he turned it to Romans chapter 13, verse 13 and 14, (which is not a Gospel text), but he read it—and he believed it. He experienced peace in his soul, and he said to his friend, "I have been regenerated."

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, it's because God regenerated you. He opened your heart to respond to the Gospel. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to draw you—and He did it. We are not self-made men or self-made women; we are His workmanship.

But the work that He does always makes us active. It gives Life—and where there's Life, there's activity; and it makes us responsive. It makes us draw to God, to Jesus Christ in faith. There's no salvation apart from faith in Christ. And we are responsible to believe. That's the Gospel: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.'

And if there's anyone in the audience this evening who has not done that, who is without Christ, then 'Believe in Him.' If you sense your sin, if you sense your need of the Savior, if you desire forgiveness and Life—that's the work of the Holy Spirit. Don't resist Him. Submit to Him; believe in Christ; trust in Him. And then thank God for His grace that brought you to Him.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We thank You for Your great truth that while we could not save ourselves, You have saved us. You've saved us from eternity past to eternity future. It's all Your work. You chose us in the past. You sent Your Son to purchase us for Yourself. You've sent Your Spirit to bring us to a saving knowledge of Him—and You will keep us in that salvation. We thank You for that in Christ's name, Amen.

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