Have We Lost Our Minds?

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Date: 22 October 2017

[0:00] Good morning. Praise God for your mission's involvement. You know, we live far away from here, but as you pray, you're right there with us.

So, stories I'll be telling today about the wonderful things God is doing, even though you live this far away, as you pray, you give, and sometimes go directly to the field, you're right there with those of us who are on the field.

We have now served in Southeast Asia, myself, and my family. We're in our 20th year. You know, and sometimes it's good to come back and get a checkup. Notice the title of today's sermon, Have We Lost Our Minds?

Have We Lost Our Minds? Maybe you've asked yourself that same question. 20 years ago, when we started going to the process of going overseas, we were asked, in fact, my wife was asked, you know, where are you feel led to go, and she said, anywhere but a Muslim country.

And, of course, that's where God sent us. And we had no idea how to reach those folks. In fact, for the early years, I was in seminary education, and also helping Baptist churches like yours open cell groups to reach their neighbors, and praise God, some came to faith.

But then, in late 2004, we were asked to engage a large, unreached Muslim people group. And so we went from knowing kind of what to do in the seminary and in a traditional church setting to not having any idea what to do.

And so we found people to pray, people like yourselves. And I personally began praying desperate prayers to the Lord for our people group. What seemed to be an impossible task.

God is doing amazing things. Tens of thousands of Muslims have come to faith in our people group, and are reaching others throughout our country of service and throughout Southeast Asia.

We didn't get any smarter. In fact, we went back to plan A, Acts. How was the gospel shared in Acts? And we began sharing the gospel a lot that way.

When people came to faith and were baptized, just like in Acts, they would go home and gather their friends and their families, believe the gospel, and become churches in those areas. We began calling this approach anyone, anywhere, anytime, any three.

[2:33] So we're no smarter than we were. We're simply trying to abide in Christ as the Lord taught us, and simply obey the Great Commission the way it was obeyed in Acts. And it's interesting that God's plan works a lot better than ours.

God truly is doing amazing things. Next slide, please. Has anyone ever been to Southeast Asia? Did you try this fruit while you were there?

We call it the durian. You tried it. So you can verify what I'm getting ready to say. If you watch programs about the world's worst food, this one's always on it.

Usually top five. Called the spiked fruit. Literal translation, durian, means spiked fruit because of these spikes, these goads that it has on it.

It's a heavy fruit, and sometimes it falls off a tree. And when it hits people, sometimes they die. This fruit has been known to kill people when it falls off and hits them in the head. It smells terrible.

[3:38] It smells that bad, good sign that it's not meant to be eaten. But somebody tried it and liked it, and the people that we serve really enjoy this fruit. In fact, they'll give a day's wage for it. Had some volunteers who came over, and they'd seen on one of these stations about how bad it was, and they said it couldn't be that bad.

So I found them one, and I opened it up and gave it to them, and their countenance immediately turned. Said it tastes like dirty socks. By the way, it smells like dirty socks.

Once again, my kids like this fruit, and the people we serve like it, which might be a good sign. You know, they might need some help, right? Might need some help. Of course I'm teasing. If you enjoy this fruit, good for you.

My kids do too. Today's sermon is about a time when Paul, the apostle, was standing before the king giving an account of why, even though he was persecuted tremendously, why did he keep on proclaiming the gospel?

Thirteen years after Paul came to faith, he went on three missionary journeys totaling nine years, including the time that he was back in Antioch.

[4:52] God did amazing things. His presence was there in real and very sweet ways, but it wasn't easy. Most of us had never gotten beaten up because we shared the gospel.

I've been threatened. I would have gotten beaten up. A guy had a baseball bat, or a version of one, but praise God, God delivered me from that situation. Paul said, I've been beaten times without number.

You've been beaten a lot if you can't count many times, how many times you've been beaten up. So I was in danger from my countrymen, friend from the Jews. He said, I was in danger from natural situations, rivers, he said, oceans.

I spent nights out at the sea. times without number, he could tell about the times where people tried to kill it. So God did great things through Paul as he proclaimed a simple message.

Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead. And whoever you are, if we will repent of our sin and surrender ourselves to Jesus, believing this great news, our sins are forgiven.

[5:59] The message changed Paul's life and he was commissioned to share it with others and he did that. So that now, he is before the king.

Nine years of missionary journeys and after nine years of missionary journeys, he was standing in the temple in Jerusalem. He proclaimed the great news of the gospel and he said, he spoke of a time when Jesus Christ revealed himself to Paul and he said, I'm sending you away, far away, to the Gentiles.

The Jews were God's chosen people and they said, salvation is for us. But when they considered that God might care enough about people who weren't Jews, the Gentiles, everybody else, to save them too, a riot broke out.

It led to a two-year imprisonment for Paul and now here's Paul once again. Before the king, defending the fact that he would at whatever cost proclaim the gospel.

And as he's before the king, he gives a testimony that we'll read in a moment, but just like when he was before in the temple, he made a similar statement. If you read verse 23, Acts 26, verse 23, he talked about Jesus saying that the Christ was to suffer and by reason of his resurrection from the dead, he would be the first that proclaimed light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

[7:30] There's that phrase again. God wants to save everybody who will receive his gospel. While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, Paul, you're out of your mind.

You're out of your mind. Your much learning is driving you mad. And Paul said, I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth for the king knows these matters and I speak to him with all confidence since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice for this has not been done in a corner.

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do. Agrippa replied to Paul in a short time will you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul said, I would wish to God that whether in a short or long time that not only you but all who hear me this day might become such as I am except for these chains.

So essentially, the accusation against Paul is you've lost your mind that having been beaten times without number, having been shipwrecked, having faced all these things and riots breaking out wherever you go because you proclaim this message, you've lost your mind and Paul said, I've not lost my mind.

Does it make sense? It does. And what Paul said is, why? What he was answering was, why does it make sense to obey the Great Commission at any cost?

[9:03] Let's pray. So Lord Jesus, we love you. We praise you because you've died for our sins and you're alive. You've changed our lives. We praise you for your presence, that you're always with us and you always will be.

And so Lord, now in these brief moments together, I pray that you'll open our hearts and our minds. Show us what you're calling us to sacrifice to be involved with you in your Great Commission.

And Lord, I pray that you'll use our witness so that many will come to know you, worship you, and be saved for all eternity. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. So Paul made his defense before the king. And here's how it starts if you read in Acts chapter 26. After saying that he was going to Damascus to persecute believers in verse 11 and verse 12, he says, Well, I was so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

At midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven brighter than the sun shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we'd all fall into the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Is it hard for you to kick against the goads? And I said, Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I'm Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet for this purpose I have appeared to you to appoint you as a minister and a witness not only to the things which you've seen but also to the things which I will appear to you, rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles to whom I'm sending you to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.

So King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first and also to Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea and even to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So having obtained help from God I stand to this day testifying both to small and to great stating nothing but what the prophets and Moses said was going to take place that the Christ was to suffer and by reason of his resurrection that he would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

That's when the governor Festus in the presence of the king made the accusation Paul you've lost your mind. But actually it made perfect sense Paul said first of all because of God's holiness when a person sees the holiness of God it makes perfect sense first of all to receive the gospel as a way to have our sins forgiven and then to proclaim the gospel to others.

For Paul that's what happened. Having received this vision he believed was baptized and immediately the scripture says began proclaiming the gospel to others. It wasn't long ago we had an eclipse and everybody had the warning don't look at the sun.

[12:20] Besides me who else took a look? Alright you still see spots. Praise God my spots only lasted a few hours. But that's what happens when you look at the sun and that was only impartial that was only impartial glory because it was covered up right?

Imagine looking intently to the sun for a long period of time. Paul got a in some ways not total you can't get a total glimpse but he got a full glimpse of the glory of God and it changed his life forever.

As I was looking I was watching the eclipse on CNN after I took a look there was a CNN reporter when he saw the glory of what was taking place he said oh my God look at that. Probably didn't believe in God but he couldn't escape the fact of God's glory the glory of God being revealed and whether or not God reveals himself to you like he did to Paul the heavens declare the glory of God.

God is holy and one day we will stand before a holy God. Not too long ago I was sitting with an imam what's an imam? Well it's a Muslim pastor so imagine Pastor Fred with a hat on you know little round hat that's the kind of person we're talking about here's what he said he said for more than 40 years five times a day I prayed to God show me the straight way in the Arabic language and I meant it I really wanted to know so every day I would just keep praying show me the straight way show me the straight way after more than 40 years he said I was standing on my back porch one day and it was cloudy outside a light from heaven came into me and I knew that was Jesus so I went and tried to find a Christian pastor and I found one and he was afraid of me he didn't want to talk to me he said here's a Bible that tells you about Jesus now go home so I began reading in the Bible Genesis Exodus Leviticus because of course those books were written a long time before Jesus came they tell clearly about Jesus but don't use his name but the man said we'll call him

Ahmad Ahmad said I didn't see Jesus name there so I was offended I thought I'd been lied to so I went and got firewood and kerosene I was going to burn the Bible but before I did he said a voice said to me put your finger in he said I did and opened to John chapter 14 verse 6 where Jesus cried he said I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father but through me when this man saw a glimpse of God's glory he knew the gospel was true he's one of hundreds of these imams who have now come to faith they've given their life to Jesus and they're reaching many others with the gospel tens of thousands of ordinary people who were simply following the way of their former religion in ignorance like many of us before we came to know Jesus have now turned to Jesus and are worshipping Jesus Christ as Lord but we understand God's holiness it makes perfect sense no matter what the cost that we'll proclaim the gospel to others so as Paul was talking about this vision of the Lord Jesus he had had at midday he saw a lot bright lighter than the sun perhaps the governor said Paul it was midday how do you know you saw a light no this is no ordinary light we all fell down and he probably could still show show the scars on his eyes from that encounter it makes sense when we understand the holiness of God to proclaim the gospel now people sometimes look at me and say that's easy for you Mike because you're an evangelist if you just knew how funny that was you just knew how funny that was

I laughed out loud the first time somebody said that as a young man being backward and shy introverted Christ changed my life and then he called me to proclaim the gospel to others and I would not do it for about a year until he spoke clearly to my heart saying Mike are you willing to be responsible when you haven't shared the gospel with people if they perish now I can't save them I know that I know that God draws people to salvation that's not our job but we have a glorious gift the great salvation of Jesus and if we're ashamed to share it there will be a responsibility involved my heart melted and I began proclaiming the gospel it was awkward it was tense but then the Lord taught me and now it's funny that he uses us to train people around the world to reach Muslims with the gospel but God's holiness made it make sense and Paul was as he continued to talk about this vision he had of the Lord Jesus he referred to the Gentiles helplessness the Lord said

Paul I'm sending you to the Gentiles by the way Gentiles are everyone who aren't Jews so that covers about all of us the Jews and the Gentiles so I'm sending you to open their eyes you see they're blind they're not dumb they're blind and when their eyes are open they're going to turn from darkness to light they're going to turn from the enemy of Satan to God they're going to have forgiveness of sins and now they're going to have an inheritance but for now they're helpless missing all of the above as we serve in the world's largest Muslim country 85% of all the population and far more than 99% of the people that we serve they're Muslims they worship in mosques like these now as we've learned how to share the gospel anyone anywhere anytime we simply get to know people and transition almost all religions are alike now by the way all religions are not alike but almost all of them are we're trying to please God and get our sins forgiven and we're all but we're all and we're all sinners and at that point we'll ask Muslims so what are you doing to get your sins forgiven what are you doing to get your sins forgiven and they'll say well we pray five times a day and sometimes if they're really good they'll add extra prayers in there we pray five times a day we give alms and we pay a tithe of sorts at the mosque we fast 30 days a year during Ramadan from the time the sun comes up to the time the sun goes down and the hope is that they will go on the pilgrimage to Mecca at some time in their life so we ask them what are you doing and many times they'll proudly tell us these things these are our acts of worship and then we simply ask them are your sins forgiven yet no not yet only God knows well when when will your sins be forgiven they say

I don't know well how about on judgment day will your sins be forgiven then and they say only God knows but if God wills it I hope so they're blind they're blind and many times though as we hear them say this out loud they hear themselves say that I'm here's all this stuff that I'm doing I have no assurance I do not know the gospel sounds really good so when we say what I believe is different I know my sins are forgiven not because I'm a good person although I try my sins are forgiven because God himself made a way for our sins to be forgiven now they listen the gospel sounds really good but they're living in darkness enslaved to the enemy even though they have these strong religious beliefs they're still afraid of the spirits they live with superstitions that control their lives we don't go out at night because we're afraid of the spirits there's a ravine behind our house where there's a tale of a spirit being a white tiger that lives back there they won't cross the bridge they'll go the long way around to avoid to avoid contact every feature of their lives controlled by their superstition because they're afraid of the spirit world by the way if you and I could see the spirit world and we didn't know

Jesus Christ as our savior we should be afraid to I could tell you stories real stories of how spiritual manifestations have taken place among the people we serve like a man he said I was sleeping I was sleeping one no he said I was in bed one night and I was raised out of my bed several feet and he said Michael wasn't dreaming I wasn't dreaming I was being choked but now this guy's a believer now and he said I called out to Jesus like you taught us you know submit yourself to God resist the devil call out to the savior and win the victory he said I went straight to the mattress I fell straight down now when they come to know Jesus things change for them but they're under the they're under the fear of the spirits and it causes them to be very superstitious doing everything possible to try to appease the spirits they have no forgiveness of sin and no assurance of eternal life the Gentiles are hopeless apart from Christ so Paul said it makes perfect sense when these folks are blind and we have the cure for their blindness so that they will be in the light instead of darkness so that they will be in the savior's domain instead of the domain of the enemy so they'll have forgiveness of sin and so they'll have eternal life pardon me king but it makes perfect sense for us to share the gospel with them it makes perfect sense and then Paul refers to the phrase where Jesus when he was revealing himself to him he said

I'm going to rescue you I'm going to rescue you both from the Jews and the Gentiles I told you earlier about the dangers that Paul faced beatings without number dangers from rivers and oceans and all those things angry Jews and angry Gentiles but God rescued him from all of those so here he is before the king so we're talking 24 years from his profession of faith saying God did that he rescued me from all these things sometimes we're in dangerous places and especially these new believers I'll tell you stories of the dangerous situations that they're in but let's go to the next slide God's help but God has helped us and he's helped them flying on some Asian airlines is good for your prayer life I can tell you stories I had a situation just the other day I was on a plane flying from Kuala Lumpur and the thing started shaking like I was on the inside of a washing machine it was just but by God's grace the Lord goes with us

I simply raised my hand and said Lord Jesus help us peace be still and it calmed down you say I would have calmed down anyway well you try that I'm going with the Lord Jesus he's helped us too many times along the way to take it for granted and it gave me a chance I've been praying for the Muslim lady next to me you know that's kind of awkward talking to a Muslim lady anyway but because of that situation I was able to share the gospel with her I've been praying for her during the trip Lord this is kind of awkward help me share the gospel I was able to do that because of that because of that experience but the Lord does rescue us now Paul said by the help of God by the help of God all these things have been accomplished and now I'm standing before you he's talking about all the things the Lord had done through the missionary journeys to bring the Gentiles to himself so they can believe and be saved the formation of churches multiplying and the great miracles of God by the help of God

I'm standing before you today is what Paul was saying I told you earlier about how we transitioned from seminary type work to reaching a large unreached Muslim people group as we sought the Lord in desperate prayer myself and my ministry partner in many churches like yourselves we had a plan but no believers mentioned that earlier and so we decided to share the gospel like Jesus did by the well but with the content they used in Acts it was kind of that's kind of the mixture very relational way meet somebody say hi share the gospel with them and then simply ask them do you believe what I've told you or not if they're angry or if they just simply back out they weren't angry much they just backed out they probably aren't open yet but we're looking for those signs of openness and then we'd simply follow up using sacrifice stories from the Old Testament Sunday school stories that many of you have already learned so we began this work in let's say late 2004 by August there were no believers but in August 2004 we met a man named Tom Eder shared the gospel with him he said this is great news

I've got lots of friends that need to hear this more than 50 10 days later he led his good friend Heidi to faith they began sharing the gospel wherever they went now some people were believing others were becoming angry at times they would get called to the police station Tom Eder was called to the police station and threatened for 15 years in jail if he kept proclaiming the gospel so he proclaimed the gospel in the police station and from that meeting two policemen were baptized Heidi had his electricity cut off for two months and for two months was having a house church meeting in his home but after a year 300 Muslims had come to faith and more than as 27 or so house churches began to form in 2006 a volunteer team from North Carolina came and worked with us they shared the gospel like we did people of like mind led a man to faith we'll call him Ali Ali came to faith our team baptized him and trained him and finally resulted in more than 100 churches now it wasn't easy for Ali when he came to faith his wife divorced him he lost his home because they were living in a home that their family owned but he stood firm in his faith and God honored him in 2007

Jibril Jibril this guy right here was reading a bible a very conservative Muslim he was reading a bible and coming to faith and during that time he met an Indonesian missionary who didn't share the gospel with him he said I met this guy and every time we met he just gave me a little bit of truth and a little more before long the relationship cut off and he never shared the gospel with me but praise God this movement was happening he heard the gospel was baptized and we cast vision for him the gospel for every person in a house church in every village which was our goal among the 8.5 million people of our people group the gospel for every person in a house church in every village he said I knew God was calling me to do this I had to lead somebody to faith that night I had to and so he led this guy to faith Sahil one of the village leaders 10 days later they led a jihadi to faith a jihad soldier someone who had gone to faith against the Christian religion somebody kind of like Paul somebody kind of like Paul he believed and was baptized within a half year they had led 200 or so you know

Muslim leaders community leaders to faith and people who are willing to die for their faith Jibril tells of a time when he and Sahil were out sharing the gospel and an angry fanatic had a knife to Jibril's throat and he said it wasn't just for a short time it was for a long time now these people are bold as a lion some of the boldest people I know finally Sahil said you know Jibril you might want to back off a little bit I think he's angry I think he's angry but Jibril said I wasn't finished yet so I just went ahead and shared the gospel with him and at the end I told him you know what I've told you is true and if you can kill me go ahead but see it's just one of those instances where God protected them while they're doing the work we do know of one man who was martyred you know for his faith in a movement that came off of this one but many who have been imprisoned but through it all the Lord has you know has shown his grace and has rescued them

[28:47] I think early in this movement when it started happening regularly Satan put out attempts on their lives I mentioned the jihadi soldier one day he said I was driving my motorcycle across a bridge and before I knew he said I was standing on on the edge and my motorcycle was down in the ravine I don't know how I ended up here but God protected it by the way his motorcycle still worked too you know so he just got on his motorcycle went about his business there are thousands of stories of God's miraculous deliverance I recently heard another story of another movement that's emerging in another part of our country a new believer was leading others to faith they were starting house churches he said one night I woke up in the middle of the night I had to go to the restroom and so he went outside of his house to the bathroom and he heard these two men or three talking about how they were going to tie him up in a sack and throw him in the ocean but you see God protected him woke him up he and his family moved to a neighboring city where they started churches there in that place see God helps us it would be insane to leave home go overseas to some place where you know considered dangerous with people who are generally considered to be violently opposed to the gospel it would be insane unless the Lord went with us but in the great commission

Jesus said remember this I'll be with you always to the end of the world and he proves it time after time after time as we go to what's considered some of the world's most dangerous places he goes with us we experience his presence we worship you'll never experience the presence of the Lord Jesus more closely than you will when you go out of your comfort zone to share the gospel with somebody else and the promise we always make to teams is what I promise is you'll experience the Lord's presence and every time every time we've had a team work they say we experienced the Lord's presence let me tell you what he did the Lord helps us that's why it makes sense God's help makes it make sense and finally Paul said the gospel's hope the gospel's hope makes it make perfect sense so as he's before the king he proclaims the gospel two times early in this chapter in verses 6 and 7 actually three times

Paul refers to the hope the hope of the gospel it was a motivating factor for him and before the king here he brings it to remembrance this little this little lighthouse outside of the island where we serve represents the hope of the gospel that's starting to take take root within our people group as tens of thousands have come to faith and thousands of multiplying house churches have been formed within the last month we've heard of a 20th generation house church which means this church reached somebody else who started a church and that would reach somebody else who started a church to 20 times 20 times so when you compare tens of thousands to eight and a half million that's not a whole lot but praise God it is a good start it is a good start and from this movement God is sending people to other areas and different places even different countries and they're having breakthroughs of the gospel and the gospel is changing people's lives see the little the guy here the guy here used to be an imam a Muslim pastor in fact he arranged the funerals for the entire area for Muslims who passed away but God changed his life and saved him now he's reached more than 100 people who started churches in their home now you don't live where we live so you can't see the faces of the people we serve let's go to the next let's go to the next slide here are a couple of older guys who God is using to change their communities a fellow on the left the first time

I ever met him he said hi he told me his name he said I used to gamble and steal but Christ changed my life since that time he's reached about 15 people or so who have started churches in their homes he has the wisdom of God he's kind of like he's one of these fellas that when you talk to him he always has the right answer even though he's never been to school even though he's never been to school just a joy and there's one of the friends that if I remember correctly that he himself had led to faith somebody also in his 80s there's a band of 80 something year old people now whose lives Christ has changed who are changing their world they have a smile on their face I think of another 80 something year old guy his wife got saved later she was really hard but now she got saved and she goes around singing all the time the Lord changed her life so young and old those are some pictures of some of the older folks who have come to faith let's go to the next slide pictures of a couple of children from our larger people group recently some of our friends teach at the Baptist Seminary and they were telling me one of our friends called one let me tell you an exciting story let me tell you what I just heard

I was talking to one of our students who's now at the Baptist Seminary and said we asked the student where did you go to church and the student said I've never been to a church like this but somebody shared the gospel with my dad at a park somewhere he came to faith he came hold and told us and my mom and my siblings we came to faith and we started a church at our house and since that time we've reached other people they've started churches in their homes now in the Indonesian schools pardon me in the school system of the country where we serve they study religion and it's almost always Islam but if by chance there is a community of Christians usually traditional Christians they've been there for a long long time if by chance that community is there they'll offer Christianity for those children anyway my friend said well this student here's what the student said I'm here at the seminary studying because I want to teach Christianity in our school you see there's so many kids who've come to faith in my community now they've got to offer

Christianity here as well praise God praise God just an example of the transforming power of the gospel to change people's lives whereas a few years ago they wouldn't have heard now tens of thousands of people are hearing the gospel many are believing and when they hear they proclaim the gospel to others see now the task becomes doable we didn't do anything heroic the Lord gave us a little more faith than we had and we simply decided that we're going to obey what Christ told us to do and I've shared briefly what he himself is doing based on a simple proclamation of the gospel and so it brings us down to this question notice the final slide what is God calling you to sacrifice to spread the gospel locally and around the world it makes sense it makes sense and Paul made his defense and God's calling us all to be involved for some of us it might simply mean don't be ashamed of the gospel simply start sharing it with others

God can use you to lead them to faith we all should be praying every day for God's kingdom for what he's doing around the world through the spread of the gospel so if that's not part of your daily schedule schedule it in I'm going to pray I'm going to pray for missions I'm going to pray for these unreached people groups and those who are proclaiming the gospel to them some of you are going to be called to go on short term trips and perhaps others are being called to leave home and go overseas like some of us have done you know to proclaim the gospel to others so what is God calling you to sacrifice to spread the gospel locally and around the world let's pray Lord as we've asked you to speak to us clearly we pray that you have and trust that you have what are you calling us to sacrifice what are you calling us to do all that we have is yours we ourselves belong to you and Lord Jesus we're proud of you we're not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it's the power of salvation to all who believe to the Jew first and also to the Greek in Jesus name we pray amen