

## **John 37 – The Bread of Christ**

11/17/2024

### **Scripture 1: (Jn. 6:44-59 ESV)**

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.'<sup>1</sup> Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-- not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

### **Scripture 2: (1 Cor. 11:23-34 ESV)**

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another-- if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home-- so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

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<sup>1</sup> All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children. (Isa. 54:13 ESV)

## Sermon:

As Jesus began to conclude this occasion of teaching in Capernaum, He:

- Accused many of those following Him of following Him for the wrong reason, for following Him only because they “*ate their fill*” (6:26).
- After He had fed them for a day, He authoritatively declared that He is “*the bread of life*” (6:35), claiming that by believing Him and by trusting in Him, they will receive eternal life and have hope for a “*resurrection unto life*” (5:29) on the last day.
- Then, He explained to them that all those who rightly and sincerely follow Him do so only because God the Father is first drawing them to God the Son (6:37-40). Inversely and oppositely, Jesus also clearly explained that “*unless the Father...draws [them]*” then “*No one can come to [Christ]...*”.
  - So, the fact is that since a person can only “Choose Jesus” because the Father draws them, but also that a person cannot “Choose Jesus” at all (because they are not capable of it) if the Father does not draw them.
  - Since some people are chosen by the LORD and drawn, therefore, all the rest are chosen to not be drawn.
    - Again, this is what we mean by “double predestination”.

Jesus now concludes with a “new teaching”, yet one that is really an old Scriptural truth. He said, “*It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.'*”, referring back to the prophet Isaiah, who wrote “*All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.*” (Isa. 54:13 ESV), and the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote “*I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*” (Jer. 31:33 ESV). These prophets were describing the “New Covenant”, wherein the LORD will inscribe His *Torah* into His chosen people, who shall then keep it.

This “New Covenant” is the covenant that Jesus **initiated** during His last supper, when He altered the Passover remembrance; **inaugurated** with His atoning death on the cross; **established** with His resurrection on the third day; and **confirmed** on Pentecost when His Holy Spirit was poured out into all believers. This covenant is the ultimate fulfillment of the LORD's promise that was given to Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17:

- that his descendants would be numbered like the stars (Genesis 15:5; 17:4-6); and,
- that they would possess “*the land of their sojournings*” as an “*everlasting possession, and [the LORD] will be their God.*” (Gen. 17:8 ESV).

We also know this “New Covenant” as the “Covenant of Grace”, because God has given us this gracious benefit on account of His love and mercy, rather than any deservedness on our part. This covenant is different from the “Covenant of Works” {also called a “covenant of life” (WSC #12); but this covenant is not the “Old Covenant”} which the LORD made with {imposed upon} Adam: whereby God promised him life upon the contingent of perfect obedience “*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'*” (Gen. 2:16-17 ESV).

When Jesus connected the fact that the Elect are sovereignly drawn to Him by the Father with the prophesied and promised “New Covenant”, he was establishing and proclaiming Himself as the mediator of that covenant,

in the same way that Moses was the mediator of the “Old Covenant” given by the LORD at Mount Sinai. {Although the covenant of grace became necessary after Adam's failure to keep the covenant of works and because it was also announced after the covenant of works, thereby making it a “newer” covenant, we understand it take have been in place (but not yet in effect) “*before the foundation of the world*” (Ephesians 1:3-14). These terms of “Old Covenant” and “New Covenant” are better understood as the 'old dispensation of the covenant of grace' and the 'new dispensation of the covenant of grace'. We understand that because both dispensations were established and ratified through a death: the old by animal sacrifice at Mount Sinai, and the new by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus; these expressions of the Greek *diatheke* utilize our understanding of them being a “testament” or like a legal “will”, which only takes effect upon the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:15-20): “*For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.*” (Heb. 9:16-17 ESV) leading us to divide our Bible into the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament”.} Jesus was explaining how all those whom the Father has given Him through the Father's drawing are being united with Him as the members and beneficiaries of this “New Covenant”.

Drawing further upon the Prophets and their understanding of the “New Covenant”, Jesus continued to explain how we may know that we are covered by this covenant, saying “*Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me...*”. His evidence is the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration and cardiac transformation along with His indwelling and our possession of the “*mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Therefore, since the Spirit is the one who will remind and teach us all things (John 14:26), **if** we believe and trust in Christ for our salvation, **then** we may know that we are regenerate because the Holy Spirit has enabled us to believe and trust Jesus, since the Father is drawing us to Christ.

Whereas, if a person does not come to Christ, then clearly they have not learned from the Father because they are not regenerate. This is why no person can be brought to faith by rational argument or human persuasion.

- Remember, we cannot be convinced to believe in and trust Jesus Christ, except that the Father first draws us, and that the Holy Spirit teaches and persuades us.

Then, concluding His argument concerning the bread, Jesus declared, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*”. He contrasts *pisteuo* in Him with the Jews reliance upon Moses, particularly their “oral Torah” or “traditions” (Mark 7:4; Galatians 1:14).

- Jesus implied that even someone who trusts and obeys Moses fully: although they may live a good, decent, and moral life; will still die and be condemned if their own righteousness is their source of confidence, because no one is perfect and no one can perfectly keep the Law, except for the Son of Man.
- Whereas, if the Jews would follow and trust Jesus, and rely upon the righteousness of Christ as their confidence, then not only will they live good lives well, but they shall also enjoy the eternal life to come.

An important key to remember, is that Jesus is speaking plainly in allegory. He is using metaphors and other figures of speech. Even while using allegory, Jesus is still speaking literally because while the plain, literal meaning is also true, it is only true because of the greater, figurative, and spiritual meaning that it supports.

- Both the ancient Israelites and the First Century Jews had the “*manna in the wilderness*”. This “manna” was the words and teaching of Moses: a spiritual food given to guide and sustain their souls; however, this manna still lacked something essential. The Jews possessed a framework, a facsimile or copy, but

lacked the essence, or true substance, of the divine teaching. They had been given enough to sustain them for a time, but they lacked the fullness which Christ brought and revealed.

- Meanwhile, the teaching of Jesus is the “*true bread*” (6:32). It is the substance of which Moses' “*manna*” was a shadow. Jesus brought the fullness and He fills everyone drawn to Him with the Holy Spirit and the understanding of truth. Jesus gives us the reality because He is *ego eimi*, the “I AM”; because He is “the Real”, possessing the aspect of Being in Himself as the ultimate Author and Creator: the Word of God; the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*.

Therefore, eating the “*manna*” means to obey and trust Moses: to participate in the grace that Moses mediated. Whereas, to eat the “*bread of Christ*” means to obey and trust Jesus: to participate in the grace that Jesus mediates. We must remember, however, that while Moses' “*manna*” did not itself save, it was ultimately made effective by Christ on the cross, as the real completed the shadow.

The crux which precisely defines what this “*bread*” is, is when Jesus says, “*And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*”. The “*bread*” which the Elect, everyone drawn to Christ by the Father, shall eat, enjoy, and benefit from is the entirety of Jesus:

- the righteousness and righteous obedience of Christ, for the sinfulness and rebellion of humanity;
- the life of His body, His *sarx*, given for the spiritual life of the world, the *kosmos*;
- the resurrection of His body and His glorification, ascension, and enthronement over all creation.

His original Jewish audience immediately heard and understood Him to be using the language of sacrifice, “*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.*” (Lev. 17:11 ESV). This prompted them to dispute “*...among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*”, because they were seriously questioning whether Jesus was suggesting a combination of human sacrifice and cannibalism to them. They took Him literally, when clearly He was speaking figuratively. Through this allegory of bread, Jesus was plainly talking about a sacrifice of “*substitutionary atonement*”, whereby He offers the One: Himself; as the replacement for the many: the Elect.

So, since Jesus clearly spoke both literally and figuratively, and since the Gospel writers and other New Testament authors often understood the Old Testament prophecies both literally and figuratively as types and antetypes {e.g. Matthew 2:15; the relationship of John the Baptist to Elijah; or Paul's comparison of Sarah and Hagar as typifying two covenants (Galatians 4:21-31)}, it is important that we do likewise. The distinctions between literal and figurative understandings in Scripture are a significant challenge for Biblical Interpretation because we believe the Bible is inerrant (free from error) and infallible (unfailing), but that can only be the case if it is also clearly understood (perspicuity):

- We must accept the Bible as being literally true:
  - literally true, as the inspired, authoritative Word of God;
  - literally true, in both its recording of history's scope and in the particular details;
  - literally true, in all of its implications and meaning; and,
  - literally true, in all of its definitive statements, declarations, and decrees.

- We must also accept that the Bible uses different written genres to convey its literal truth, like:
  - historical narratives;
  - legislative decrees;
  - exposition and explanation of divine oracles;
  - metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech;
  - divine revelations, prophecies, and representative symbols; and
  - allegory and parables.

Therefore, when Jesus spoke literally by saying, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*, He spoke literally through the use of allegory and metaphor. Meaning that:

- Jesus did not insinuate that He is literally bread, or that bread is literally Him.
  - Bread remains bread and His body remains His body, even as the two are figuratively related.
- Jesus did not suggest that He must be practically eaten, or even that a physical act of eating must occur.
  - Eating is eating, but what is the figurative consequence of eating? There is a unification between the eater and the eaten: a union of substance and essence that preserves life; something we understand in both a literal and a figurative sense, even in regards to your lunch and dinner.

But once again, these Jews demonstrate that they just did not “get it”. They missed the point that Jesus was making.

- It is not food that truly matters, but the sustaining and preservation of life that eating symbolizes.
- It is not the thing itself which is substantively important, but what the thing represents.

This is the critical understanding concerning the literal and figurative nature of our two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper; between the thing and the thing symbolized. Baptism, the washing with water {that we just witnessed with Silas this morning}, whether by “sprinkling” or by “full immersion”, figuratively symbolizes both the washing of our sins away (Acts 22:16) and our burial with Jesus as we become dead to our sin (Romans 6:4), thereby signifying and sealing our union into and with Christ to partake in all the benefits of His covenant of grace (WSC 94) and, it is literally a physical and visible sign of our professed membership in the Church, the Body of Christ.

- Christians do not believe that bathing someone with water is what actually washes their sin away, instead we believe that it is the righteous value of the Holy Spirit's application of Jesus' shed blood to us: the imputation of His righteousness to us, and His taking of our sin onto Himself.
- Christians do not believe that a person must be physically killed, or buried, in order to no longer be accountable for their sin; but, through our union with Jesus Christ, because of His death, burial and resurrection: dying in relation to sin; counts as our also having died to sin.

Therefore, baptism and its spiritual effect is both literal and figurative. Meanwhile, what Jesus says next closely relates to the Lord's Supper and how we understand it. *“So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless*

*you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”*

While Baptism is the sign and seal that shows forth our having been brought into the covenant of grace: the “New Covenant” which Jesus has been talking about; this figurative “meal” He describes relates to an important element of covenant-making rites in the ancient Near East: a sacrifice and a concluding, celebratory meal.

There are several elements identified as universally being present whenever a covenant was made:

- A preamble and historical prologue identifying what the covenant maker (or superior party) has done for the beneficiary.
- An identification of the parties involved, often including some permanent sign to identify participating members, like the rite of circumcision to identify Israelites (Genesis 17; Joshua 5:1-8).
- A list of stipulations, rules, or commands.
- A list of consequences, namely: blessings and benefits for obedience and fidelity and, curses or penalties for disobedience and rebellion.
- A confirming oath made before witnesses {typically invoking the deities of each respective party}.
- A ritual sacrifice and meal {the Passover was adopted and commanded as a covenant memorial meal for the Israelites (Deuteronomy 16:1-8)}.

Each of these elements are identifiable within the Mosaic covenant (the Old Testament dispensation of the covenant of grace), given at Mount Sinai:

- Preamble and Historical Prologue, including party identification: the LORD and Israel – Exodus 20:2;
- Stipulations – Exodus 20:3-17;
- Consequences – Exodus 20:5b-6, 7b, 12b; 23:20-33;
- Sacrifice – Exodus 24:5-8;
- Oath – Exodus 20:22; 24:3, 7-8;
- Meal – Exodus 24:9-11;

and, they may also be identified within this passage, where:

- The Preamble - “*I am the bread of life.*” (Jn. 6:48 ESV) parallels “*I am the LORD your God...*” (Exod. 20:2a ESV);
- The Historical Prologue - “*Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.*” (Jn. 6:49 ESV) parallels “*...who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” (Exod. 20:2b ESV);
- The Oath - “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven.*” (Jn. 6:51 ESV) parallels “*And the LORD said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I*

*have talked with you from heaven.*” (Exod. 20:22 ESV), effectively swearing by “heaven as my witness”;

- Stipulations - “*If anyone eats of this bread...*” (Jn. 6:51 ESV), where “eating” represents believing, thereby paralleling the whole of the Moral Law: the Ten Commandments;
- Consequences - “*...he will live forever.*” (Jn. 6:51 ESV) parallels both the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant, by declaring that “*If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.*” (Jn. 6:51 ESV) with its implied inverse, that “*If anyone does not eat of this bread, he will perish.*”;
- Sacrifice and Meal - “*And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*” (Jn. 6:51 ESV) parallels “*And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.*” (Exod. 24:5 ESV) and “*...they beheld God, and ate and drank.*” (Exod. 24:11 ESV);

So yes, these Jews were partially correct when they took Jesus “literally” because He was talking about a literal human sacrifice: His willing sacrifice of Himself as our substitute; but when He spoke about the meal, He was referencing the figurative and spiritual means of our participation and unification into this covenant.

When Moses ratified the LORD's covenant with Israel, after the “*young men*” offered their sacrifices, “*And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."* (Exod. 24:6-8 ESV).

- The altar was washed in half of the blood, symbolizing the LORD's participating in this covenant.; and,
- The people were washed in half of the blood, symbolizing their participation, and their heirs, in this covenant.; and
- The blood from the sacrifice was used because it represented the ultimate consequence of covenant faithlessness, transgression, and breaking: death. Consumption of the sacrifice, by eating it together and through the application of the blood, identified both parties with the sacrificed.
  - If the people failed to keep their covenant obligation of faithful obedience, then they would die like the sacrifice.; and,
  - If the LORD failed to keep His covenant obligation, namely keeping all of His gracious promises, then He would “die”; then He would not and could not be God.

So, Jesus declaration of, “*...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*” described something comparable to the Israelites being bathed in the “blood of the covenant” by Moses.

If we eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, then we are united together with Christ in a figurative, and therefore spiritual, sense. This also means that we are literally united with Christ in the “New Covenant”: His covenant of grace, made with our Father in heaven, to redeem and rescue a people for Himself as His treasured possession.

This same understanding of the covenant is found expressed in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 22:14-23) and in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:23-34) where Luke and Paul describe Jesus' final Passover meal {a covenant memorial meal; reminding Israel of God's grace and their resulting obligation to Him} with His disciples.

The Apostle Paul writes, *“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

- Jesus's breaking of the bread and saying, *“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”* symbolized the breaking of His body: the suffering of His tortuous and agonizing death when He sacrificed His life in our place as an atonement sacrifice (Leviticus 17:11); and our eating identifies us and unites us spiritually with Jesus' death and His expiation of our sin.
- Jesus' giving of the cup and saying, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* symbolized the shedding of His blood as part of the covenant making process; and our drinking identifies us with and unites us into the covering of His righteousness through this covenant.

So, throughout this teaching, Jesus was never speaking about some literal bread that could preserve human life forever, nor any other kind of literal food. Everything He said was concerned with the literal and spiritual substance of our sustenance, not the physical elements, and that substance is faith in Jesus Christ and the willing power of God to save.

- Paul understood what Jesus taught here, as he explained this to the Corinthians, *“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”*
- Paul communicated the same connection between the Lord's Supper and Jesus' death as was between the Israelites and Moses' sacrifice at the foot of Mount Sinai. Through our claim of participation in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, if we fail to obey our obligation under the covenant of grace: believing (earnestly having *pisteuo*) in Jesus Christ; then we shall justly suffer the fullness of the penalty and curse of death and condemnation that we deserve for our sin (our cosmic treason).
- Paul taught our literal identification and union with Christ and His “New Covenant” via spiritual means, through this figurative act. That is why he warns us that those who eat and drink *“in an unworthy manner”*: which are those who do not believe or trust in Christ, or those who willfully live in unrepentant sin and therefore, have no fear of God; are *“...guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.”* They shall rightly bring judgment upon themselves by their participation because, by partaking of it wrongly, they still identify themselves with the covenant and are liable to the fullness of its curse (Hebrews 10:26-31).

Although this teaching of Jesus, as recorded by John, is related and connected to the Lord's Supper, the Supper is not what it is principally about. Communion is just one example of the full implication of Jesus' teaching.

If the LORD draws us to Christ, and if we believe and trust in Him because the Father has given us to the Son and the Holy Spirit has regenerated us, then we have been brought into Christ's New Covenant of grace as full beneficiaries.



Therefore, as beneficiaries of this covenant, not only do we receive “...assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.” (WSC #36), but we also get to enjoy our fellowship in the LORD with Jesus Christ, along with our fellow believers.

We enjoy this fellowship through the exercise of the “ordinary means of grace”: the sacraments, the Word and prayer (WSC #88).

- Through baptism we show forth our commitment to Christ and are reaffirmed of His commitment to us.
- Through the Lord's Supper we “... *proclaim the Lord's death until he comes...*” by remembering what He did for us on the cross. We also remember our union with Him when we discern His presence spiritually in the elements being consumed.
- Through the reading, hearing, and preaching of Scripture, God's authoritative Word is communicated to us:
  - His authoritative voice is heard;
  - His will for our lives is made known to us;
  - His plan of salvation is explained, so that our hope is confidently increased and assured; and
  - His promises are reminded to us, so that we may be comforted.
- Through prayer we speak to God:
  - not to change His mind, but because we know He loves us and He wants to hear from us;
  - not to ask Him for what we want, but to receive what we truly need; and,
  - not to tell Him our thoughts, but so that our thoughts would become more like His.

Ultimately, what it means for us to “[*feed*] on [*His*] *flesh* and [*drink His*] *blood*”, is that we are in communion and fellowship with God (1 John 1:6-7): with the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; that we are united with Jesus, both now and forevermore and, that we shall reign with Him and eternally enjoy dominion in the blessed realm under His loving authority, with peace and justice.

Surely you will all agree, that this is wonderfully Good News!

So, once again we are asked: Why are you seeking Jesus? Is it to just enjoy some of the good things in this life: the temporal benefits of Christian fellowship; or, is it because of Who Jesus really is: the Mediator of a better (the best) covenant, the Guarantor of your salvation, the Hope of life in the world to come, and your Brother, King, and the Sovereign LORD?

**AMEN**