

Acts 13 (Part 1) :1-3 • The calling of Paul and Barnabas

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Acts 13. As we continue our Sunday morning study through the Bible. We're going to read the first 3 verses so follow along with me as I read. It goes like this.

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we get into these, just these 3 verses, there's so much here, Lord, to think about, so much here to talk about. So we pray that You'd help us to make sense of it, and to understand what is being said, and how we can apply these things to our lives.

We ask You to guide and direct us through this study, and we ask it in the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen. Amen.

The reason I've only taken 3 verses here as we start chapter 13 is just because there is so much that we need to unpack in these verses. You'll notice that Luke begins this chapter by explaining to us that what is happening, is happening at the church in Antioch.

And I want to remind you, we've mentioned this in the past study, that because of the persecution that was going on in Jerusalem, the believers began to head northward to escape that persecution. And of course they took the Gospel with them, and they came up through Samaria, and eventually made their way up to this area called Antioch.

Just to remind you where things are located, here's a map up on the screen. We'll circle first of all, Jerusalem there at the bottom of the screen.



And then you'll notice that straight north, we will circle Antioch for you.



And that is now where the center of Christian activity is taking place in the first century. It has moved away from Jerusalem. The apostles are still there for the most part, but the real hub of Christian activity is taking place in Antioch.

And by the way, this is, Antioch today is in the southern tip of Turkey. Turkey extends all the way down that far. In fact, if you go there now, you will find a city by the name of Antakya, which is actually named after Antioch. It's not on the exact site of ancient Antioch, but it's very close.

And at the time that Luke wrote this, Antioch was an incredibly busy Roman city. It was very an important city. And for the church, it was the place where the fellowship was growing by leaps and bounds.

And you'll notice that Luke begins telling us about what made up the church. He says, “...*there were in the church (verse 1) at Antioch prophets and teachers...*” And Luke is referring here to spiritual gifts within the body of Christ. The two he mentions are, prophets and teachers, but these are actually just two of the five ministry giftings that are given to the body of Christ.

Paul lists actually five of them in Ephesians chapter 4. Let me show you this on the screen. It says,

Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)

...he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

...he (and that's referring to Jesus) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (that's the same Greek word as pastor) and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

So you can see there that Paul says that there are five ministry giftings that the that Jesus has given to the church for the purpose of building up the body. Luke mentions five of them. We'll put them in bulleted form here for you.

FIVE MINISTRY GIFTINGS

- Apostle
- Prophet
- Evangelist
- Shepherd (Pastor)
- Teacher

Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd (Pastor), Teacher. I believe that the last 2, Pastor, Teacher, really have to go together, for the simple reason that any

shepherd who is shepherding the flock must also know how to feed the flock, as we've said many times before, or he's going to end up with a dead flock.

But of these five giftings that Paul mentions in Ephesians, Luke says that two of them were prominently displayed at the church in Antioch, and those two were prophets and teachers. We're going to talk about prophets and teachers for just a moment. Let's start with a definition of prophet, shall we? A prophet. What is a prophet?

DEFINITION of a PROPHET...

Someone who possesses the spiritual gift whereby they are enabled, by the Spirit, to speak a message directly from God.

A prophet is someone who possesses the spiritual gift whereby they are enabled by the Spirit, to speak a message directly from God.

That's very simple. The prophet always has their back to God and their face to the people. They're speaking to the people, but they're hearing from God, and they're sharing the message that God has given to the people.

And this goes along very much with what Peter wrote about prophets and prophecy in his second letter on the screen. It says,

2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)

...no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

...no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, (at least not true prophecies) but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

I like that definition. That's why I quoted it there for you because it just to hear those words, they're “*carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” That speaks of that Biblical inspiration whereby they are speaking and so forth.

There you have a definition and some Biblical insights as it relates to prophets. And they were there in the church at Antioch, but also there were teachers. You'll notice that. When you think about a good description for teachers, what would you come up with? Well, actually, the best description I've ever found is in the Old Testament.

It's in the Book of Nehemiah. On the screen, it says,

Nehemiah 8:8 (NIV84)

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

I just think that's a really excellent explanation, especially that phrase, “*making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people*” can understand what's being said there in the Scriptures. It's just a perfect description of what a teacher is gifted by the Lord to do. And again, these two giftings: prophet and teacher, were in the church at Antioch.

But before we move on, I want to put all 5 of these up on the screen again for you so you can see them again. These are the ministry giftings Paul outlines in Ephesians.

FIVE MINISTRY GIFTINGS

- Apostle
- Prophet
- Evangelist
- Shepherd (Pastor)
- Teacher

They're Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, the Shepherd, or Pastor, and Teacher.

But, as we look at these five giftings, we have to say to ourselves, which ones do I really see operating in the church for the most part today? Well, really there's only three of them that we see really, truly, operating in the same Biblical way that they operated.

And so essentially what we're talking about is we see the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher operating in the church, but we don't so much see the activity of apostle, prophet. There are people that like to go by those names. We see this in other countries. Men love to use the word apostle but they're not using it in a biblical way. It's not the biblical definition of an apostle and so forth. And people like to use the word, prophet today as well.

But, the fact that we're not seeing these primarily in the church brings up a rather glaring question. I'll put it up on the screen and that is,

DO PROPHETS AND APOSTLES EXIST TODAY?

Do prophets and apostles exist today? That's an important question and I'm going to answer it as I believe the Scripture gives insight. But I want you to be careful as you listen to me not to jump to conclusions, because what I'm going to tell you needs a little qualification.

As far as the Biblical definition, the Biblical function that we see in the Bible of apostle and prophet, I do not see these specific and unique gifts operating today.

And what I mean is, I don't see them operating in the same way that we saw them or see them operating in the Scripture in the early church. And the reason we don't see them operating as they did then, is because their function has primarily been completed. And I'm going to show you a scripture to back that up. It's in Ephesians chapter 2, on the screen. Paul writes,

Ephesians 2:19-21 (ESV)

...you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...

...you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (look at this underline) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...

What's Paul saying here? He's saying that the establishment of the New Testament church, the foundation of that, was built on the apostles and prophets. Jesus, the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets did the building, put it together through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but now that foundation has been established. It's done. It's completed. And those unique roles for apostle and prophet, I believe, are no longer functioning in the church.

But, just wait a second. Before you jump to conclusions, just because I believe that we're no longer calling people prophets, or apostles in the same way that the Bible shows them, doesn't mean that I don't believe in the gift of prophecy because I do. And the reason I believe in the gift of prophecy, is because it is listed by the apostle Paul as part of the gifts of the Spirit that are given to the church. Let me show you this from 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (ESV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, (remember that) and to another the utterance of knowledge (remember that) according to the same Spirit, (then he goes on to say) to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Now, you might've noticed that, as we looked at those passages there in 1 Corinthians, Paul makes reference to these utterance gifts. He says the gift of prophecy has been given to the church. He mentions 2 other utterance gifts that are specifically tied to that, and that is from the first slide that we saw. It was the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge. These two are given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, just like prophecy.

These are the gifts that are given to the body of Christ. And we believe that they are still functional and that it is possible for someone to speak prophetically, even though we don't call them after the office of a prophet, as it existed in the New Testament church.

Again, the reason we're not dealing with the office of a prophet is because the foundation of the church has been built and it's done. But prophecy, just speaking forth a message from God, is still very much functional in the body of Christ. All right, let's go back. Let's read verse 1 again and we'll continue on.

It says, “*Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, (at then it names them) Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*” Who of course we're going to know as the apostle Paul.

And the next thing Luke tells us here is that, “*2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit...*” spoke to the assembled believers. And we'll talk about what He said in just a moment. But I want to bring out just a few things from this verse.

And the very first one is very simply acknowledging that the early church was a worshiping church, and the early church was a praying church. And those are very important things to see and we can see that they were serious about praying because they were fasting. And we know that fasting is an element of prayer that expresses devotion in the intercession and even sometimes urgency. And so we see that these things went on.

I wish I could have seen how the early church worship, that would have been fun. I'm sure it's very different from the way we do. The things that we use to guide our worship. I think a lot of people think that worship is, musicians, and songs, and keyboards, and guitars, and drums, and things like that. But that's not worship. Those are just things we use for worship. Those are some physical elements that enhance our worship.

But we're told in the Scripture that real worship comes from the heart. And it is the heart of the worshiper that is expressed to God in self-sacrifice. Paul says, in view of God's mercy, therefore, offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1) Right?

There is a spiritual act of worship that begins with self-sacrifice. Coming to the Lord and saying, Lord, I'm Yours. I belong to You. I give myself to You. If during worship, all you did was sing songs, you missed the point. Those, all those songs and all those lyrics are meant to draw our hearts heavenward so that we will say to the Lord, in essence, I belong to You. I'm Yours. I give myself to You. I sacrifice myself. You sacrificed Yourself for me. Now I sacrifice myself for You. I give my life to You. I give my heart to You and so forth. That is worship.

And it doesn't require keyboards and guitars and drums and vocals or anything at all. Those things, again, they can enhance worship, but those are not worship. The heart is where we worship. You can worship all alone. You can worship in

your bedroom, in your car, while you're at work, you can worship the Lord. It doesn't take a worship team or something like that.

Now, next Luke says that, "*the Holy Spirit said,*" and it's interesting that he uses those words, "*the Holy Spirit said.*" Here they are meeting, they're worshiping, they're praying, and fasting, and suddenly the Holy Spirit speaks. Now we have to ask ourselves the question, does that mean they heard a voice? Like it was like over an intercom? Is that what happened? Was there this voice from heaven like a thundering voice or something? No. That's not what happened at all.

That's why Luke took the time to tell us in verse 1, now there were prophets and teachers at the church in Antioch. What do prophets do? They speak for the Lord. When it says the Holy Spirit spoke, he's talking about that someone with a prophetic gifting stood up in the meeting and said, I have a message from the Lord. And they all began to listen.

And so this person who was so gifted, began to speak. And what did he say? He said, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" Notice that this message is in the first person. This is the Lord speaking through someone with a prophetic gifting, but it's spoken in the first person: I. Right?

And that's interesting too. I want you to notice the possessive emphasis that is given in that statement. He says, "*Set apart for me.*" Now we know that Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, so we might have thought that perhaps the Holy Spirit would have said, set apart for the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas, for the work to which I've called them. No, that's not what He said.

Because you see, people who are called into the ministry are not set apart for people, they're set apart for the Lord. They are given to the Lord for His service. Right? And that is so important that we understand that.

The next thing we see about this, is we see that the Lord saying through this prophet, "*for the work to which, for which I have called them.*" Did you catch that people?

Who called Paul and Barnabas into the ministry? The Holy Spirit, God Himself, right? "*Set apart ... Paul and Barnabas for the work which I (I) have called them*" to. Why am I emphasizing that?

Well, because it's so important to understand, to get a proper perspective of those who are called into this sort of ministry. They are not called by people. They're called by God. This is something that Paul used to emphasize when you open up some of his letters, like, for example, his letter to the churches in Galatia. Let me show you this on the screen. He writes,

Galatians 1:1-2 (ESV)

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, (in other words, through the agency of men) but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...

What is Paul emphasizing here is he opens up his letter. I am an apostle, he said, but you didn't call me. And I wasn't called for you, I was called for Him. He called me. I'm in the ministry because God called me.

This is a concept that's almost been totally lost within modern Christendom, unfortunately. We use the word calling today when we talk about people who are brought into the ministry and stuff, but honestly, it bears little resemblance to what we're reading here in Acts chapter 13. It really does.

Because what we've done, you guys, and we have to fess up, we have to own up to this. What we've done is that we have substituted the voice of the Holy Spirit and the divine calling of God, for things like a ministerial degree. Where did you go to seminary and did you come away with a degree? Because we just want you to know, we won't let anyone come in here and minister who doesn't have a Masters of Divinity. Really? I guess the original apostles would have been out.

They were just fishermen who hung around with Jesus and that was all the degree that God seemed to think that they needed. But yet, see, somehow we've gotten away from all of that. We've gotten away from hearing from God. We've gotten away from hearing the voice of God saying, set apart for me so and so for the ministry to which I have called them. And it's sad.

Because we've turned the church into more of a business practice. You want to be a pastor? Here, submit your resume. We'll look over your resume, and we'll see if maybe you fit the mold of what we're looking for. Hey, listen that's something that you do in business, and we may do that for positions in the

church that aren't ministerial, but we're not going to do it for a pastor or someone who's involved in ministry.

I got a note from a young assistant pastor just about two weeks ago, and he wrote to me about something that he was kind of troubled about that was happening in his church. Let me read his note for you. I'm not going to put this on the screen.

But he wrote me and he said, "Recently our executive pastor, (I don't even know what that is) has been implementing a few new procedures for the staff and for the church in general." He said, "I don't disagree with anything he's doing in particular, but he keeps saying, 'at the bottom line, men, we need to remember the church is a business.' And from this, he brings practical things into our church that businessmen will do in the business world. We also have quite a few businessmen on our elder board who like to apply those same business practices in the church. And although I agreed wholeheartedly at first, I'm beginning to feel like it's a wrong view to have of the church."

And he wrote to ask my thoughts. I simply wrote him a simple response, and I said, "if I heard someone say the church is a business, I would ask them really, exactly what is that business?" Because, if you're going to call it a business, then I suppose we better answer the second question. What business is it? Because I don't see in the Bible where the church is a business, or should be treated like a business, or run like a business.

The church is a living entity, with a living Savior at the head. And, I don't know, call me crazy, but I think when we're raising up leaders, we ought to hear from Him. And not put our emphasis on someone's accumulated college credits, Or how nicely their resume reads.

But there's another reason why it's so important for men and women today to hear from God, as to their calling and that is because ministry is hard. I can tell you after being in the ministry for about 40 years, sometimes the ministry gets so hard you feel like quitting. And I have felt like quitting in my 40 years of ministry, several times.

But, when you've heard from God as it relates to your calling and you know that you didn't put yourself in this position, but He did, it changes your entire perspective on those hard times. You go through a hard time and you have the ability to say, well, Lord, this was your idea, not mine. Serious, yeah, I didn't pick this. I never would have picked this. This was not a career option. This was

a calling and you called me. And so I'm going to assume that these hard times didn't take You by surprise.

And since You knew all along that I was going to go through these hard times, I'm just going to assume on you that you're going to give me the grace to get through it, amen? That's what you hear. And it's one of the reasons I am so thankful that when I was a young man in my 20s at a church in Montana, that the elders of our church called me forward, and Sue one day at church, and they had us kneel down and they laid hands on us and prophetic words were spoken over us. And the Holy Spirit confirmed that calling. And I am so glad that happened because there's been it... Had that not happened, I would have wondered, was this my idea. Because if it's my idea, I think I'll go to church or something else.

Do you know how many ministers get into the ministry and then quit and go do something in the secular world because the ministry got too hard? I don't know the exact numbers, but I've heard that it's big. And I believe that a lot of the reason for this is that we've gotten away from the understanding of divine calling and we've turned it into a career and a business that you attain to through accumulated credits and a fancy resume. Well, okay, I'm going to get off my soapbox now. Anyway.

Finally, you'll notice that he goes on in verse 3, look with me in your Bible and it says, *"Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."*

I want you to notice a couple of things about this last verse. And the first thing I want you to notice is that it wasn't enough for them to hear prophetically: set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, but they continued to pray and fast after they heard that prophetic word. Why? Why?

Because you don't just listen to a prophetic word and accept it at face value. You test it. And you test it through prayer and the Word of God. You know why? There's a lot of yahoos out there saying, I got a word from the Lord for you and it isn't. And that's the apostle Paul wrote this to the church in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV84)

<i>Test everything. Hold on to the good.</i>
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Test everything. (and) Hold on to the good.

You know what that assumes? That assumes that for what is bad, you kick it to the curb. Because like I said, I've had people come up to me in years past and say, I have a word from the Lord, and it wasn't a word from the Lord. And I know that only because it's some 40 years later and it never came to pass. It doesn't mean that person is necessarily a false prophet. I mean, we're not going to take them out in the parking lot and stone them to death. Okay.

Because sometimes what you're dealing with is, you're dealing with somebody who just hasn't learned yet to really truly hear from God. And there's an immaturity, and there's a naivete, and we just accept that as a fact from time to time.

Now, there are such thing as false prophets. We were told in the scriptures, watch out for false prophets, they come to you, as sheep, but they're actually wolves. (Matthew 7:15) And so be careful. And we know that Jesus warned us there would be false prophets.

But people, just because we know that there are false prophets and there are misdirected prophecies from time to time, we don't throw out the baby with the bath water. We don't say, well, there's no such thing as prophecy, doesn't exist just because there's weird people out there doing dumb things. There's always been weird people out there doing dumb things, and there always will be. But we're not going to throw away the good just because there exists something of the bad.

Good grief people, there's something bad in every part of life so you can't throw away things just because there are bad elements to it. Here's what John said in his letter. 1 John chapter 4, he said,

1 John 4:1 (ESV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits (this talks about the spirit by which someone is speaking, he says, but test the spirits) to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

And so there you go. What are we supposed to do? We're supposed to test. He doesn't say, ignore all prophecy. He says, test, test to see if it's from God. But that means you got to know your Bible and you got to be willing to press in on the Lord in prayer.

If somebody comes to you and they say, I have a word from the Lord. Don't reject it. Say, okay, what's that word? Let him give it. And then say, thank you. I'll pray about that and see if that's really from God. And if they get offended, then you know what you're dealing with, right? And if they say, good for you, pray about it, you know, you're dealing with a person of integrity, and honesty, and maturity, who understands the Word of God.

The last thing I want you to take note of from verse 3, this last verse that we're looking at here, is that the simple statement that is given to us here that says that they, *"after fasting and praying they (the church) laid their hands on them and sent them off."*

People, this is the biblical pattern for sending people out, but it is also the acknowledging of what the Holy Spirit said. Remember the Holy Spirit said through someone who had a prophetic gifting, set apart for me, Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them.

Cool. They continue to pray. They came to the conclusion that this is a genuine word of the Lord. And then, so what did they do? They lay hands on them as a way of acknowledging that this is in fact, the word of the Lord. And then they send them out.

And the reason I emphasize this, and because it's one of my pet peeves. One of the things we've seen today in the body of Christ is people just simply going out and doing ministry, and then coming to the church, which they have no relationship with, and asking for support. And we get this, you quite a bit.

People will write to us or stop or whatever. Hey, I've got a ministry to such and such, would you support me on a monthly basis or something like that? Because God has called me to do this ministry. And my first question is always the same to those people who sent you? Who sent you? Who recognized and acknowledged your calling. Who gave you the understanding through the gifting of the Holy Spirit that God had given you this calling? And who laid hands and then sent you out? And if they, if there is such a place, why are they not supporting you if they sent you out?

You see, again, we've ignored the Word of God and we've just started doing things backwards. The Bible says, from the life of the church, the Holy Spirit spoke during a time of worship and fasting, set apart for me, Barnabas and Saul. Cool. Let's confirm that. It's confirmed. Let's lay hands on these guys.

Lord, be with them. Strengthen them. Anoint them. Send them out. That's the pattern that we're given in the Word of God.

It's a good pattern, and the church should stand behind those who come from their own numbers, whom they then send out. The church should stand behind those people. These are our people. We raised them up. We laid hands on them. We sent them out and now we're going to support them with prayer and whatever else we can do. And it's a good thing.

We see a beautiful blueprint here in this passage in Acts, chapter 13. We see the church alive, praying, worshiping, fasting, seeking the face of God.

We see the Holy Spirit speaking in the life of the church, confirming His calling upon people.

We see the church testing that confirmation, acknowledging that confirmation, sending people out into the ministry so that the work of God might be accomplished.

It's a beautiful picture. It's a lovely picture. It's a picture we need to take seriously. It's a picture we need to apply today, amen? Well, that was weak, guys. That was weak. Amen? Amen.

Okay, see, that's what you're able to do. Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer. I thought maybe I caught you guys snoozing or something. I didn't know.

Anyway, we're going to have some folks up front here to pray with you if you have a prayer need that's pressing on your heart today so let's close in prayer.

Father God, we thank You so much for the wisdom and the insight that we get from the Scriptures and the patterns that You've shown us, Lord, that we have to confess we've gotten away from.

We've gotten away from calling. We've turned things into careers, and we've moved away from the Scripture. We've moved away, Lord, from the simple act of hearing Your voice, hearing from You.

And Father God, I pray in Jesus name that You would help us to get back where we need to be. To listen for Your voice, to seek out Your wisdom, Your grace, Your calling on people's lives, that we can lay hands on them and send them out

to do the work that You've called them to do Lord. Equipped and encouraged, strengthened in the Lord.

Father, we thank You so much for the good things you're doing in our midst, and we ask God that You would strengthen us each and every day to serve You with a whole heart, and we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you.

Have a good rest of your Sunday.