

The Disciple's Identity - Part 1: You in Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome again, everyone, and so glad to have you here together with us. We are going to be beginning a brand new series over the next eight weeks or so, and we will be talking about abiding in Christ.

What does it mean to abide in Christ, to follow Christ, to be in Christ? And I believe we're going to be looking at Christianity and maybe some misconceptions about Christianity.

And what does it really mean to follow Jesus? And Christianity really is not, Jesus did not design it for self-consumption, meaning we're, oh, we're so excited about what we're going to hear and what we're going to learn, and we're going to be in the gospel of Matthew 11 this morning.

So if you have your Bibles and would like to begin turning there, Matthew 11, verses 28 and 30, where we're going to be spending most of our time. And the goal is not really to look at this and to walk away and say, I'm so glad I learned what I learned and just to be able to know more, but actually to be able to use what we've learned and to replicate it into the lives of others, to be able to share with others, to teach others what God's Word has to say, and to be equipped to teach others what it means to abide in Christ.

So we shouldn't simply be receivers, we are to be reproducers. And as we begin, let's look in God's Word at Matthew chapter 11.

[1 : 38] And to get a little bit of a feel about the context, we're going to begin with verse number 25. Jesus has been teaching, he has been dealing with truths of who he is and what he has come to accomplish, and he has not had very many who have accepted who he was and accepted his message.

And so he was really pronouncing woe against those cities that had not received him, and he said, it's going to be better for, it's going to be worse for you than for others who, who have been the recipients of God's wrath.

And what he is saying is, you need to understand what I am saying. And in verse 25, he begins, he says, At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and had revealed them to babes.

About the gospel being that we simply trust Jesus Christ as our Savior. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to die on the cross in our place so that we can spend the rest of eternity with him.

So he says, Then we see in verse 28, 29, and 30, really what we're going to be seeing today.

[3 : 21] Come to me, Jesus says, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Let's pray. Father, this morning, I pray that you would open up our minds to the truth of your word. Help us to find rest for our souls, and to be able to rest in you, knowing that you have provided everything that we need to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father, and that everything that we do for you, if it's done in your power and by your grace, Father, that you are pleased with us, because when you see us, you see what Jesus Christ has done in our place.

We thank you, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I am assured, I really believe that verses 28, 29, and 30 give one of the clearest, one of the most powerful, most compelling, beautiful pictures of Christianity, of what it means to be a follower of Christ, to simply be able to rest in him.

And at the same time, I believe these verses also give one of the clearest, most powerful, most forceful rebukes of what many have created Christianity to be, and what we are seeing even today in contemporary Christianity.

And I want us to see two life-changing truths that I'm convinced that we have a dangerous tendency today, and there was a dangerous tendency in Jesus' day to miss and to completely miss out on the meaning of Christianity.

[5 : 13] We see in verse 30, Jesus said, For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

And he is talking about a yoke that he wants to give to us. And the first truth that we see is this, is that what Christianity, Christianity explained really is, the bottom line is this, we give up all we have to Jesus.

When we come to Christ, we get to the end of ourselves and realize, I can do nothing to please God. No matter how much I try, no matter what good works, no matter what I offer him, it is all utterly worthless in getting to God.

The Bible tells us that all of our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. And everything that we can muster up, all the energy, all of the strength, all of the works that we can muster up, literally, the Apostle Paul said, are like dung.

He says they are worthless because God expects perfection. And since none of us are perfect, we cannot get to God on our own.

[6 : 34] So really the bottom line of Christianity is we come to him empty with all of our sin, with everything that we have, and we just give it all up to Jesus.

And that is what I believe Jesus was referring to when he's talking about taking his yoke, giving up our yoke that we've been burdened with, and allowing him to give us his yoke.

And so the context we have here is the imagery that dominates this passage is the image of a yoke. And in the first century, the people that Jesus was talking to would have understood exactly what a yoke was.

It was a heavy bar of wood, and sometimes it was one ox that would be placed under the yoke, would be either pulling a cart or pulling a plow or something of that nature.

But there also might have been multiple oxen upon which the yoke would have been placed, placed around their neck, and it would have been used for them to pull. So you'd have one oxen on one side, one oxen on the other side, and there would be, one might be a stronger, one might be stronger, one might have been weaker, one might have known the commands of the master a little bit better.

[7 : 54] And so the two would have been able to get way more accomplished than the two individually. The two together, because the stronger would pick up the, pull the weight, if you will, of the weaker ox, but then they would be able to get more accomplished.

So the reason Jesus is using this imagery of the yoke is the people to whom he was speaking, and the religious climate of the times was the religious system that Jesus came into, the people were living under a very strict religious system.

And so you have a people who were dominated by all these things that they were supposed to do. The teachers of the law had taken the Old Testament, and they had said, you've got to do this, you've got to do this, and you've got to do this.

And then they took some 600 plus more rules and regulations that the Bible never gave, and then placed those upon the people and say, in order, please God, you've got to do all of these things.

And God's people were living under the heavy yoke of this religious burden. And they were feeling, I can't measure up. This is hard. This is difficult.

[9 : 16] This is not a life that's easy. And it's not a life that's fulfilling. And that's the religious system that Jesus comes into, and he talks about this yoke and this burden that had been placed upon God's people that God never intended.

So let's look in Matthew 23, and let's look at this burden that has been given to them. Verse 23, excuse me, chapter 23, Matthew, verses 1 through 4, Then Jesus spoke to the multitude and to his disciples.

He says, The scribes and the Pharisees, these were the religious leaders, sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, meaning the law is God's law, is my law.

Do my law. But, he says, But do not do according to their works, for they say and do not do. For this is what the religious leaders were doing.

He says, And so, So what Jesus is saying here is, he's saying, Take my yoke upon you.

[10 : 49] This heavy burden that these religious leaders have placed upon the people. He says, Fulfill my law. Do my law. Do what I tell you to do. But he says, They have added so much more upon you.

All of these heavy burdens. And Jesus comes on the scene and says, Take my yoke upon you, because my burden is easy, and my yoke is light.

So what he's offering to the people is to take off the heavy yoke and the burden that the religious system had put upon them, and to get in yoke with Jesus.

And he says, My yoke, my burden is easy. My yoke is light. And so he's offering them something better, something refreshing.

We're going to see in the next few minutes how that what Jesus does, we give him all of our sin, all of the wickedness that we have, and we can't measure up to him, and he gives us something so much better in return.

[11 : 53] And so he says, This is my yoke. Now what does this mean? We give up all that we have to Jesus. And what does it mean to come under his yoke?

Well, first thing I believe it means is we give him the full weight of our sin. We give him the full weight of our sin.

Because think about this. You're in the first century, and you've got all these laws and extra regulations and rules that had been codified and had been given to the people and said, In order to please God, you've got to do all these things.

Well, what were the people walking around with every day? Guilt. I can't measure up. I mean, there's no way that I can do all of this.

Because I can't measure up. Now think about, let's back up just a moment. Why did God give the law? Well, there are multiple reasons why God gave his law. But one of the reasons, or one of the goals of God giving the law was to prove to mankind that man could not measure up, could not live up to his law.

[13 : 07] So people were walking around with guilt. And sometimes we do the same thing in modern Christianity. What we do is, and matter of fact, there have been studies, people have actually gone around, you know, the on the street kind of, people have a microphone.

And one of the things was, when you think of the word guilt, what is the first word that comes to your mind? And predominantly, the first word that comes to people's mind was church.

Well, in many ways, God's word does do that. It teaches us that we are sinners. But, when Jesus came on the scene, what did he do?

He didn't say, I want to give you more guilt. He says, I want to take the guilt away and give you something so much better. And so what we've done in the modern church, I think, is we have shown people is, in order to be pleasing to God, you know, you've got to do this and you've got to do that and you've got to pray and you've got to read your Bible and, you know, you can't watch dirty movies and you can't do this and you can't do that and you've got to do this and you've got to do that and you've got to get up at 4.30 in the morning and, you know, read 56 chapters and, you know, be on your knees and pray for two hours without stopping and that's how you're a good Christian, you know, and you've got to come to church on Sunday morning and Sunday school and Sunday night and Wednesday night and when the youth show up and we overburden followers of Jesus with all the things that we're supposed to, what, do.

and people feel guilty because, well, you know what, you know, I need to spend time with my family and Jesus said, take that yoke off of you and take me and just follow me and he says, then people will come and say, you know what, I don't have to feel guilty because Jesus offers me forgiveness and grace and the power to please God and so what we're, I think what we're seeing is Jesus is coming on the scene and says, I want to give you something that you could never do on your own and I'm going to provide you something so much better.

[15 : 25] Jesus Christ bore all of our sin on the cross and he took the full weight of our sin when he was there on Calvary. When Jesus hung on the cross, think about it.

When Jesus hung on the cross, the Bible says, he who knew no sin became what? Became sin for us. He took the heavy burden of our sin and our sin debt and he took it upon himself.

He bore that burden and he paid our sin debt forever and so when God looks upon us, he sees Jesus Christ and this is what also the Bible says about what Jesus is going to do when the psalmist spoke but what Jesus has done for us.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Isn't that good news? For those who might be feeling guilty, walking around feeling guilty because you know what?

I can't measure up and I can't be like those super Christians over there and Jesus says, don't worry about it because they're not pleasing me by their actions either and so he's saying because I bore the burden and I am taking the full weight of your sin, I can take your sin and remove it as far as the east is from the west.

[16 : 49] Isaiah 43, 25, I, God says, even I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins.

He says, I will not remember your sins. This is what it means to come under the yoke. We give Jesus the full weight of our sin but this is really not where Christianity ends, it is where Christianity begins because let's look at the next thing.

You see, we give all we have to Jesus, we give him the full weight of our sin but what we also do is we give him, we give to Jesus our complete and utter inability to obey God.

We give that to him because think about this, now I know that complete, utter, you know, mean the same thing. We could have added total, we could have added absolute, all these extra words just to say this, that on our own, apart from Jesus, we cannot please God, we cannot obey God.

That is why God has given us the Holy Spirit, his power to obey. We cannot obey God on our own.

[18 : 14] We'll never be able to please God with what we do. You see, some Christians are trying to do that and if you remember the guy on TV, those of you who are a little bit older will remember this, it was done on the Ed Sullivan show.

This guy would come on stage and there was all these sticks that were like six feet long and stacks of plates on the table. He would come and he would take one plate, he would put it on the stick and he would spin it and this plate would just spin on the pole and he would take another plate and he would go to another pole and he would spin it and then he would go to another and he would spin it.

By the time he would get to six or seven plates, the first one was starting to slow down and wobble. So he would run over there and he would speed that one up and spin it and he ended up getting bunches of plates but what did he look like?

He looked like a madman racing all over the stage just to keep all the plates spinning and that's the way so many Christians live their Christian life, thinking they have to do and do and do and do and do and even as churches we inflict this upon people because you know you get probably ten percent of a congregation that are actually actively engaged in the life of the church and doing things teaching and what happens is people feel guilty because things aren't being done and if it needs to be done well somebody's got to do it and I'll go ahead and do it and then we get people who accumulate all kinds of responsibilities and we think it rests upon us for it to get done and we become like that plate spinner and in order to be successful or in order to please God we've got to keep all these plates spinning in the air at the same time and then you add to that family and then you add kids and ball games and you add this and you add that and you add work and you add vacation and all these things and we are burdened and sometimes frustrated and just simply tired anybody ever been there that's not the life that Jesus offers he offers us to come and to take his yoke and to allow him to do the work but does it mean that we just disengage and let God do everything no of course not that's not at all what he means listen to those words by a fellow by the name of Ian Thomas this is what he says he says

I am talking about some Sunday school teachers I am talking about some pastor in his pulpit I am talking about some missionary on the field I am talking about many ordinary earnest Christians they are wonderful people you would love to meet them they talk all the language of salvation and they mean every word they say they are not hypocrites but they are tired many of them desperately tired they are overwhelmed inwardly with a sense of defeat and frustration and futility and barrenness story after story could be told of these men and women who bravely doggedly out of a sense of duty love and devotion go on and on and on yet deep down in their hearts they are tired again and again they have got down by their bedside and cried out to God with tears in their eyes God you know how barren I am you know how empty I am and you know how stale I am and you know it and yet they do not know the answer this is the curse of Christendom this is what paralyzes the activity of the church of

[21 : 41] Jesus Christ on earth today in defiance of God's word God's mind God's will and God's judgment men and women everywhere are prepared to dedicate to God what God condemns the energy of the flesh there is nothing quite so nauseating or pathetic as the flesh trying to be holy and that's what Jesus comes and says stop trying to do it on your own stop trying to do it in your own energy and your own strength come and take what I am going to accomplish for you and together we're going to be able to accomplish so much more than you could ever accomplish on your own come unto me all you who are weary and heavy burdened or heavy laden I will give you rest because you see it's not about what we bring to the table it's about what he Jesus brings to the table you see we have to give all up to him we can't do it so the first reality is when we come to Christ

Christianity means we give up all we have to Jesus and we give to him our utter inability to obey God and to please God because we can't do it and that brings us to the second truth and the second truth I believe is this that Jesus is teaching in Matthew 11 28 to 30 is Jesus gives up all he has to us Jesus gives up all he has to us because we say when God looks at us when we've trusted Christ as our Savior when we are in Christ who does God see really he sees the righteousness of Christ he sees Jesus and so what Jesus does and we look at all the references in the Bible about what Jesus provides us one of the analogies or one of the imagery that we see is that of an accountant and a bank book and we have our bank book that says overdraft empty zero and when we trust

Christ as our Savior Bible says his righteousness is applied to our account and all of a sudden this empty bank account all of a sudden has all the money in the world in it the righteousness of Jesus Christ in terms of God's economy God looks upon us and he sees Jesus and Jesus has given all he has to us let's look at Matthew 11 29 again where Jesus is saying take my yoke upon you and he says learn from me he says for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls we replace the yoke of the law the yoke of trying to measure up to God in our or under our own steam and we then take up the yoke of Jesus Christ so number one really goes back to the full weight of our sin what does

Jesus give us remember we've given him the full weight of our sin Jesus I'm a sinner and I'm trusting you to pay the full penalty of my sin which the Bible says is death so we give the full weight of our sin to him so what does he give to us in return he gives us full pardon for our sin he pardons us he says I paid for it I've paid the debt God satisfied and he will no longer hold you responsible for this because the Bible says therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creation all things are passed away behold all things become new Romans chapter 5 tells us that no condemnation because Jesus Christ pardons us now think about this when Jesus came in the first century was talking to these people and he says these religious leaders have placed this burden upon you that you can't bear take my yoke for it's easy and it's light now here's the thing now don't miss this

Jesus was not saying the law was not important Jesus was not saying that it's okay to forget the law no why is that because God gave his law for a purpose and as a matter of fact remember what Jesus said in the sermon on the mount he has come to do what with the law he's come to fulfill the law and so what Jesus does is Jesus comes he fulfills the law he is the only one that could have ever kept every single law and ordinance that God gave so Jesus lived it he obeyed God and he kept the entire law and so Jesus says I've come to fulfill it meaning the ultimate goal and the purpose of the law was to show us how sinful we really were Jesus says I've come I've fulfilled it I've kept it so now

[27 : 13] I can give to you a brand new life and allow you to keep the law we're going to get to that in in just a moment but he gives us full pardon for our sin think about this the religious leaders put the law of God on this pedestal and some might have said well Jesus you're taking the actually giving a higher standard because what did the religious leaders say they were saying you have to keep the law and you've got to do this you've got to do that what Jesus said is no you've got to be perfect because the Bible says God's standard is perfection so Jesus didn't come and give an easier route he actually says it's got to be perfect so Jesus came on the scene with a higher standard than the religious leaders had but he says look at verse

Matthew 5 48 look at what Jesus has said therefore you shall be what perfect just as your father in heaven is perfect God's standard is perfection no one person will ever enter the gates of heaven who has not lived up to that standard but since we're in yoke with Jesus we get in based upon what upon his standard of perfection we get in on his standard of perfection he gives us full pardon for our sin and that leads us to what the world is looking for today it results in when God when Jesus gives what he has to us when Jesus gives us full pardon of our sin what it does is it results in peace with God now we have peace with God we can stop trying to work to appease him and to please him and now we can rest because we know now we have peace with him and that peace with

God is not based upon our fleshly activity just pick yourself up by your boot straps and just whether you feel like it or not just go out there and do it and God will bless you for doing it not what the Bible says God says rest in me give your all to me take your burden and roll it on to me Jesus says my yoke is easy my burden is light what's interesting is Jesus used that word rest twice in this particular paragraph the first time he uses it in verse 28 he says come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest what does Jesus promise to give in return for getting in the yoke with him that first time he uses the word rest I believe it refers to relief it's like this is so much better and

I have taken this heavy weight of trying to live by the law in order to be pleasing to God and then Jesus comes and I come and yoke with Jesus and this feels so much better because I'm not having to work for it anymore I have received a new life I have received forgiveness I have received full pardon for my sin and I no longer have to work to please God he's already pleased with me because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross for me it's the same picture in Romans chapter five verse one and two Bible tells us therefore having been justified by what faith not works not works having been justified by faith that's how we're made right with God we have what peace with God by faith we have been justified been made right with God by Jesus we have peace with

God through through Jesus through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God but here's the thing we still have our inability to follow the law of God we still have our inability to obey the law so what does Jesus do he gives us the power to obey this is where it gets really awesome let's he says Matthew 11 29 take my yoke upon you and he says learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls that word learn there in Matthew 11 29 he says take my yoke upon you and he says learn from me that word learn is the same Greek word that's translated disciple in

[32 : 32] Matthew 28 in the great commission he says and make disciples that same word disciple is Jesus saying learn from me take my yoke upon you and learn from me so basically it's take my yoke upon you and learn from me learn to be my disciple then he says I am gentle I am humble I am lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls and here's the beauty Jesus can give us rest because he's not just simply giving us the rules giving us the laws and says okay now go obey them what he's doing is he's saying here's the law of God here's what I expect of you and he's not giving us just another religion it's Christ living through us Christ living a life that pleases God through us following the law and then enabling us to please

God by obeying him and here's what Jesus gives us remember we gave him our complete utter total inability to obey God and to please God by any of our activity excuse me and so what he does is he gives us the complete power to obey him see he's not given us the freedom to disobey the law he's given us the freedom to obey the law the power to obey what God demands of us so it doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing see we're learning to rest from the work of trying to please God and letting Jesus do it through us see the second time he uses the word rest he says you will find rest for your souls and so what we find is it results in the peace of God it results in the peace of God the second time he uses that word rest

I think it's found within the picture of the word the Jewish word the Hebrew word shalom it's more of an existential peace you know that complete peace the peace that passes all understanding that comes when we rest in Jesus alone when we say God I can't do it I can't measure up and I throw myself upon your mercy and upon your grace and then God takes peace and he gives us the ability to please him and that peace that we find in Jesus by being yoked together with him is a peace that surpasses all human comprehension all human understanding and that comes when we let go of ourselves that comes when we let Christ do exactly or excuse me only what he can do through us and one of the things that we have come to in

Christianity in modern Christianity is the notion that even though we know that salvation is by grace through faith alone even though we know that we can't do anything to please God we still tend to believe it might be subconsciously but to believe that God is pleased with our efforts let's take two scenarios let's say scenario number one you wake up your alarm clock goes off early in the morning and you say got a lot to do today you get up and you say I know I need to spend time alone with God so you open your Bible read God's word you pray and you just sense God's presence in your life you get ready you go into the office or you get started with your day and you just feel like this presence of God is with you all during the day you're praying throughout the day and then on your way home you have the opportunity to share the gospel with someone okay that's scenario number one scenario number two your alarm clock goes off in the morning and you reach over and hit snooze and it goes off again snooze snooze snooze snooze then you get up so late there's no way that you have time to do your quiet time and so you say

I'll do it later and you get up you're harried and you're you're you're rushed and you get in to the office or whatever appointment you have for that day and and you go for your day you're so busy and and you're so rushed and you don't have time to think about God all day long and you are just going about your responsibilities and then on the way home you have the opportunity to share the gospel with someone okay question is which scenario do you believe God is more inclined to bless in the sharing the gospel with that other individual think about it modern Christianity or or the way normally we tend to have we we tend to think is well God will bless scenario number one because you know we we got up early and we we studied we prayed we had quiet time with God and we just had this sense of satisfaction all day long and so

[38 : 28] God's going to bless that right but he really won't bless as much if you know we're rushed and we're in a hurry and you know we just feel guilty because we don't have the time what has God promised to bless his word he's promised to bless his word now what I'm saying is it doesn't mean that what scenario number one involved was necessarily bad no it was good and it doesn't mean that we necessarily condone scenario number two meaning it's okay to get up rushed and forget about God but what I'm saying is think about it God's blessing does not rest upon our human effort because God's blessing is based upon his mercy and his grace and Jesus Christ and so when we live and so what

I'm saying is the same thing Jesus was saying to the people of the first century take off this yoke of guilt because you can't measure up and take my yoke because my yoke is easy my burden is light you can't do it on your own let me do it let me give you the power to do it my blessing is not based upon your human effort my blessing is based on because I love you and when I look upon you I see Jesus you know I don't see all this effort and all this work and now God does promise to bless obedience now don't forget that God promises to bless obedience but don't get so fried and frustrated because you have so many things to do today that God won't bless you because you didn't spend enough time in his word or enough time praying remember that God knows the heart and it doesn't mean

God blesses just because we check off the checklist God blesses the thoughts and intents of our hearts and he wants us to spend time with him he wants this but he gives us the power to do it and let's look as we close at Matthew 11 28 and 29 let's close this off with again this these three verses Jesus says come to me all you who labor what's he talking about laboring to be pleasing to God laboring to have to laboring for God to bless for God to bless you and are heavy laden laden by all the expectations of religion all these expectations of living up to a particular standard he says come to me all you are labor and heavy laden he says I'll give you rest take take my yoke upon you and learn from me be my disciple learn to be my disciple he says for I am gentle

I won't rule over you like those religious leaders are ruling over you but they won't even lift the burden with their little finger he says for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls do you want that give them the full weight of your sin stop trying to be good enough stop trying to be good enough to measure up to God's standard because we can't do it let Jesus do that give him your utter inability to be pleasing to God and let him give you what you do not have and that is his righteousness which he made possible on the cross of Calvary and then we'll be on our way to experiencing what it means to be in Christ let's have our rest through him coming back to that yoke illustration that Jesus gave think about this let's put yourself in the place of that weaker ox and if we're in yoke with

Jesus guess what who's pulling the load Jesus is pulling the load but we by the power of God's Holy Spirit and by his grace we are using the gifts and the abilities he's given us to accomplish his work on earth but Jesus Christ is pulling the load we're just letting him do it through us and that's the beauty of being yoked with Jesus his yoke is easy his burden is easy his yoke is light let's pray father this morning we're so thankful that that you offer us not another religion you don't offer us a bunch of rules and regulations that that we can't keep but you offer us the power the ability to obey you to be pleasing to you and you offer us full pardon for our sin full pardon of our sin through the blood that was shed by our

[43 : 45] Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and you want to give us rest for our soul by simply resting in Jesus and allow him to give us what we could never accomplish for ourselves or on our own and since Jesus fulfilled the perfect requirements of the law by being in yoke with him by being in Christ by learning to be a disciple of Jesus we're allowing him to fulfill the law in our place and we're allowing him to do the work through us be with us today Lord if there's anyone here this morning that does not know Jesus does not know full pardon of their sin that this morning you would be drawing them and they would come to know that you offer a brand new life full pardon for sin by simply trusting in

Jesus alone and casting our full weight of our sin upon him allowing him to forgive us to wash us clean to baptize us to place us into the body of Christ into the family of God father I pray that we would be able to experience that rest today we pray this father in Jesus name amen