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## Summer Family Reunion

### Part 9 – Marks of Gospel Teamwork

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This morning, we are going to have a chance to talk about finding your place on the wall at Woodland Hills Family Church. I want to go to a passage which I believe helps us a lot. We are going to get there in just a minute, but the thing I want to talk to you about today is the power of teamwork, the power of community and how that is used all throughout the scripture. We're going to talk about the power of working together to accomplish a really significant task. I love the stories that are out there about things that were done because of incredible teams. There are some stories in history, as you go back through them, and you look at how teamwork was used. We could talk about stories like Dunkirk and others, but I love the stories about Appollo 11. That's an incredible story because there were over 400,000 people that helped us get to the moon on July 30, 1969. Most of you were not alive then, but some of you were and you watched that, and you can think back, and you actually remember it. I can remember it crystal clear, it was such an amazing time.

Maybe one of my favorite stories about teamwork is actually on D-day, June 6, 1944. I'm going to guess that a lot of you knew the date of D-day before I even shared that date because that actually involved over a million people, and they basically had to keep it a secret. I mean that's team work, right? It's incredible because as you talk about the fact that we had all of these troops, it was incredible because by the end of June, we had more than 850,000 troops in France. There were over 148,000 vehicles. You think about how to just to get them there, that's incredible. There were 570,000 tons of supplies. It's an absolutely amazing feat. And we know that while the end of the war was not yet there, we practically won the war on D-day. We'll come back at the very end and talk a little bit more about that.

So, teamwork is a powerful thing. We're going to look at teamwork from the Book of Nehemiah which I think tells us more about teamwork maybe than actually any other book in the Bible outside of the gospel. So, if you have a Bible, I want you to turn to Nehemiah. Now, if you can't find Nehemiah, don't be embarrassed. I've pastored for 43 years, I still can't find Nehemiah. Find Psalm – the big one in the middle – and then go backward before Psalms and there is Job, before Job is Esther, before Esther, you'll find Nehemiah. We're going to walk through, and we are going to talk about... this might make you nervous, but hang in there. We're going to talk about the 9 marks of gospel teamwork. I know you think *9 points, how is that possible?* We're going to go through some of them very quickly, but trust me, we will get through all nine.

Let's start off in Chapter 1. First of all, just a brief context here. Nehemiah is a great story of going back to build up the walls Of Jerusalem and the gates because they had all been absolutely wiped out. That's because in 586, Jerusalem was thriving, they thought everything was fine, but then the Babylonians

come and they wipe out Jerusalem, they burn down the gates, they tear down the walls, and then they take the Jews into captivity, so they are in exile. Then in 516 B.C., the Persians come, and they wipe out those folks actually in Babylon, so now the Persians are in charge. God moves the heart of the Persian King, and he says, "I want to send a group back because they need to rebuild the temple, the gates, and the walls. So, he sends back a guy named Zerubbabel... If you have a child this year, I encourage you, that's a great name. So, he sends back Zerubbabel, and they get a lot of work done and they get the temple rebuilt so that's a really good start, but they work on the gates and on the walls and they just can't get it done.

So, after decades and decades of trying to get it done and it can't happen, they think they need to send back the pastor. So, Ezra goes back, and he leads another group and Ezra works to rebuild the walls and get all these things done. Ezra gets some things accomplished, but he doesn't get the walls rebuilt, so the people are still very discouraged. Finally, they say, "Okay, Nehemiah, why don't you go back." Nehemiah is a lay person. He's the cupbearer to the most powerful king in the entire world. He lives in this palace in Suza, which is on the Persian gulf. He has a very cushy life, he gets to eat the best food, drink the best wine, he's in this incredible place, but his heart is in Jerusalem, his heart is a thousand miles away.

He gets reports about the fact that things are not going well, so he begins to take action. So, we begin to go through these nine points. The first one is right there in Chapter 1.

**1. Prayer and the corporate confession of sin.** Chapter 1: 4 - ***4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. 5 Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees, and laws you gave your servant Moses.***

Wow. He's clearly powerfully motivated here because at the very start it says "You know what, God, you're great. That's God's position. God you are awesome. That's God's power. You keep your covenant of love. That's God's promises. Nehemiah is a doer. He's going to get the job done, and the thing that makes this such an amazing story is he teaches us lessons about management and teamwork because what has failed, decade after decade after decade, he will accomplish in 52 days. In 52 days, they are going to get the gates up and the walls completely rebuilt, but don't miss this. Nine times in the story about Nehemiah, we read that Nehemiah stops and he spends time praying. So, we know that he is a man of prayer.

I love the fact that he prays and confesses sin. Now, here's a key point. Nehemiah is confessing the sin that brought the wall down. The wall has been down for over a hundred years. These things have been going on and on and on for all these decades after decades and yet, he confesses these sins. The way that he confesses it is so very powerful because he says, "Lord, I confess the sins that we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed your commands. When confesses sin, he says, "We" He wasn't even

alive when these sins were committed, but he understands that as a Jew, this is a part of his legacy. So, he corporately confesses these things. I think that so often in the church, we have lost the power of corporate confession. It's good to confess our sins. It's the right thing to do. We should confess our sins, but we should also corporately confess our sins. Do you ever spend time in prayer and say, "God, I pray for the sins of this church, that you would be gracious and forgive us. Father, I confess the sins of Branson, I confess the sins of Missouri. I confess the sins of the USA. I confess the sins of the American church. Father, we have not followed you as we should. I pray that you would be gracious to us."

Do ever do corporate confession? That is such a huge part of it. And you see there is a picture here of "Lord, I want to confess these things, but I also want to claim your promises." We need to be able to claim the promises of God. It's interesting because I'll speak with Christians and I will hear them say, "I'm trying to walk with the Lord, but to be completely honest, I'm a little bit angry right now towards God." And I'll ask them, "Help me understand what you're angry about." "Well, my mom passed away and she was in a lot of pain before she passed away." "My son had a car accident, and it was a terrible car accident. "I'm being attacked on social media, and I just feel like that should not be happening." "I have cancer." "I just feel like if God was with me, that would not be happening."

Listen, don't hold God in contempt for promises that he never made. God never promised any of those things. God didn't promise that there wouldn't be tragedy in life. He didn't promise that there wouldn't be cancer. He didn't promise that your kids would all love Jesus. He didn't promise that your spouse would love Jesus. He didn't promise that you would not have times in life of unemployment. He didn't promise those things. So don't be angry with God for not keeping promises that he never made.

God has made us promises in scripture. How many promises in scripture? There are 7,464. That's how many promises there are in scripture. God promised, *I will never leave you, I will never forsake you*. God promises when you go through the deepest darkest valley of life, *I will be with you*. Claim promises that God has given us.

As we talk about Nehemiah, don't be confused in this because if you're inspired by Nehemiah, great, but if you are over inspired, it can be a problem because Nehemiah is a sign post pointing ultimately to Jesus. Because Jesus left his kingdom, he left his place with God the Father and he came to earth, not at the risk of his life like Nehemiah, he came at the cost of his life. So, understand that everything that we'll talk about this morning, as we'll see at the end, it ultimately points us to Jesus.

**2. It's awesome to be a part of a community.** I love the fact that if you go through Chapter 3, which a lot of people skip over Chapter 3 because it's one of those chapters that is a lot of these names and you're thinking, *okay, I've tried to go through and read everything in the Bible and I came to Nehemiah 3 and I thought, all these names I can't pronounce, I'm just going to skip over them*. But there are these names that are listed to remind us that it is so awesome to be a part of a community. We absolutely need that because, again, Nehemiah is a brilliant manager. So this project has failed for all of these years, and he says, "We're going to do this in a very different way. We're one big team, but we're also going to break up into 41 teams." The walls are like 8 to 10 feet thick, they are about 2 ½ miles around Jerusalem and he says, "We're going to split up into 41 different teams. And we are going to create some ownership." "So, you're going to work on a part of the wall that's not that far away from where you live." "And we are going to create some teams that are like this team is going to be a bunch of dads

and daughters. And this team is going to be a bunch of the metal workers.” “And this team is going to be the perfume makers.” It’s incredible how he creates these teams because it’s awesome to be a part of a team in a community. You were created for community. You were not created for isolation.

Here’s something we all need to hear. Social media does not count as community. Your friends on TikTok and Thread and Twitter and Instagram and Facebook and on and on, those aren’t your friends. That’s not your community. So don’t say, “I’ve got community. It’s my social media community.” Social media is where community goes to die. It’s not a real community. We need people, we need friends that can reach out, touch us, hold our hands, walk with us, be there for us. “ But it’s so great that we are called to be a part of a family and we are absolutely called to be a part of the team.

**3. No job is beneath servant leaders.** I love this passage in Chapter 3: 1 - *Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.* How many high priests are there? There is one high priest. This is like the spiritual leader of all of the Jews. Now, if you were the spiritual leader of all of the Jews, don’t you think that your job should be to walk around and just encourage the others? That’s not what he does. The high priest rolls up his sleeves and he gets to work. Do you know what that means? No matter who you are, no matter what role you have, you still need to be able to do work. I love the fact that Ted and the pastors at this church will roll up their sleeves and they will work. They are not just saying, “I want you all to do this work.” They are going to do the work as well. There is humility in that. They are saying, “No matter where God has called me, I realize that God wants me to work.” Such a powerful passage.

**4. Nobody has the right to be an antagonist.** This passage is truly one of my favorite passages in all of scripture. You’re going to think I’m exaggerating, that that is an overstatement, but it’s absolutely true because I love this passage. Verse 3:5-6 - *5 The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.* And then the verse that might be my favorite verse in scripture. *6 The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place.*

Wow! Is that not incredible? I love that verse. That verse speaks to me. I love it. Why? I love that verse because of what it doesn’t say. Because Verse 5 said that there was this team of men of Tekoa, but their nobles, a certain part of the team, just said, “We don’t want to do this. We’re not going to work. We’re not going to be involved in this.” I love the fact that Verse 6 does not say so, there was this little group of people that were discontent, so Nehemiah shut down the entire project. And he formed a special committee to investigate why these people were so upset and did they not like the brick color. Did they not like the way it was being built? So everything shut down because they wanted to make sure everybody was happy.” That’s not what it says. It’s almost like he says, “You’re an antagonist, you’re not going to dictate the agenda for this project. I’ve got 40 and a half teams that are excited about this project. I’ve got half of a team that is not excited. That half a team is not going to set the agenda. God does not want antagonists to set the agenda for the local church.

If I could preach one message to pastors around the country, that’s it. Don’t let the antagonists set the agenda for your church. You know antagonists, right? You walk into church and there might be some... It’s like they have this little tube and they just stick it on you and they just suck the joy right out of you. It’s like, Oh my gosh! Every time I see that person, it’s just terrible. If I’m convinced there is an

antagonist, I'm convinced that they know the Lord, but for some reason, they are just unhappy. I pray a very consistent prayer, "Lord, take them home." You might think that's cruel. That's not cruel. They'll be happier, right? I'll be happier. Probably their spouse will be happier. Their neighbors... It's win/win all the way around.

Here's what you need to hear. No amount of money that you give this church buys the right to be an antagonist. No amount of time that you volunteer to this church has earned you the right to be an antagonist. You might be saying, I'm not even sure if I am an antagonist. Maybe that's me." The antagonists are always waving the red flag. They never give anybody just the basic benefit of the doubt. They are angry, they are loud, they always have an agenda, they're always argumentative. If that's you, stop it. Don't be the antagonist. Understand what God is doing and say, "I want to be a part of what you're doing. I don't want to be the one who is trying to scream out there.

Now, I also talk to people often times who say, "I don't think I used to be an antagonist. I think I've become more and more like an antagonist lately." The thing I hear from them, and it's just such a common thread. I think that we have raised up a large generation of people in the church who have been functionally disciplined by cable news. If you are being functionally disciplined by cable news, you're going to naturally become an antagonist because you think, I'm going to come here and I want to be very involved in this church, I want to be involved in a small group, and I want to give some time every week. So, I might be here at the church for six, eight hours a week. I want to be very committed here. But you go home, and you watch cable news for 25 hours a week, and that's going to functionally, practically disciple you. Maybe you need to back off of that and find other ways to spend your time. Don't be an antagonist. That's not the role God has for you in this church.

**5. Leadership is not dictated by the prestige of the job.** There are 10 gates all the way around the city. You've got the sheep gate, which is right there at the very top. It's right by the big temple. It's very prestigious. And then you go around and you have the valley gate, the fish gate, the horse gate, the water gate. Then you go all the way around and you come to the very south of the city and you have the dung gate. I love this passage. Verse 3: 14 - ***14 The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Rekab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place.***

Beth Hakkerem is very important because it's the highest point in all of Jerusalem, which means if there is a battle, that's where you are going to fight from. Very strategic. So, Malkijah, his dad is like the mayor of this district. I love the fact that he does not say. "Dung gate? I don't think so. Do you know who my father is? My family is kind of a big deal. I want the horse gate, I want the valley gate, I want the fish gate, I want the east gate, I want something else. I'm not going to do the dung gate." That's not what he says. I love the fact that he says, "Okay, if this is what I'm assigned, this is my job."

Every church has a lot of different jobs. Some jobs might be sheep gate jobs, some jobs might be Dung Gate jobs. We need to be willing to do whatever God calls us to do, wherever God calls us. You might think, *I want to be a teacher, but they want me to be a parking lot attendant.* Serve with all your heart as a parking lot attendant. There are people right now in the nursery caring for little kids. It is literally a Dung Gate job, right? Maybe that's what God has called you to. But no matter where God has called you, be willing to serve.

I love the fact that Malkijah... I can't wait to meet this guy one day. Even though he was called to work on the Dung Gate he was like, I want to do it. Every church, every team needs people willing to do the Dung Gate jobs.

**6. In all you do, serve with zeal.** I love this passage in Chapter 3: 20 - ***20 Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest.*** So, you give up Nehemiah and he walks around and writes down these names. He writes down 80 names just in Chapter 3. Bill is doing this work on the wall next to Steve. Steve is doing work next to Carl. Carl is working next to Mary and Mary is working next to Baruch who is zealously working. He's the only name that has a qualifier like that. Of all the names in Chapter 3, there is only one name that has a qualifier and it's "he zealously worked." Now, what is Baruch doing to get Nehemiah to notice that he works with zeal. I don't know. I can't wait to find out one day. Is he singing? Is he humming? Does he just have a big smile on his face? I don't know what, but there is something he's doing that says *Even though this is menial labor, I'm going to work at it with my whole heart. Even though I'm just putting stone and bricks and some wood in place, I want to do this with my whole heart, with zeal.*

Now, this might bring the whole service down this morning, but I need to say that in three weeks, it's going to be about time to go back to school. I'm sorry. It's going to happen eventually. I've got five kids, so I've had a lot of first days of school. I've had a lot of days where you go and there are 1500 sheets to sign up. If you want to do this over here for a teacher appreciation, and if you want to be in charge of this party... And then here are all the forms as far as field trips.

I remember years ago that I was going through the field trip forms and I saw that there was a field trip to watch them build the Grand Prix car up in Kansas City. I'm like, "Put my name on that list. That's my kind of field trip. That will be awesome." So, I took all the kids, and we watched them build the Grand Prix car from start to finish. I mean the mold of the metal and then everything as they begin to drop in all the components, and they drop in the seats, and they drop in the engine. I mean it's just incredible. It's this line that goes over a mile and you just walk this line and you watch them build a car from start to finish. I absolutely loved it. The kids might have gotten a little bored after a while because you're just watching them put it together. But we came to the guy that puts the little Grand Prix logo on the right front of the car. He has this giant machine and he's got these grips, and this is exactly what happens. The car comes by, and he has this big machine and he attaches the logo. Then he yells at the top of his lungs, "Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah!!" I just looked around like, "What just happened?"

I walked over to the guy that was next to him and I go, "That was just for the kids, right?" He said, "Oh, I wish it was just for the kids. Every car, every day." So, we just stood there and watched him and as the cars came through, he did the same thing over and over again. So, at the end of the day, I talked with the kids, "Hey, kids, let's go through the whole day. Did anybody stand out to you?" Of course somebody stood out. The guy who put the logo on the car. Why? Because he was so zealous about his job. He did it with zeal. There was so much passion and excitement. That's Baruch. He says, "I've been called by God to do this job and I want to do this job with everything I have. I want to put my whole self into it." I love that.

**7. Opposition and Pain does not mean that God is not in the project.** Because at the end of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, 5, and 6, there are going to be three guys – Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah, that are going to come and make tremendous trouble. They are going to threaten Nehemiah, they are going to threaten the whole project. They are going to threaten to bring everything down. The fact that God is in this, the fact that God is right there should just remind us that at times we can be in the middle of God's will and there are going to be some difficulties in life. Because if your mindset is *Things are going really well, that must mean I'm walking with the Lord. If things are not going well, that must mean I'm in the middle of some awful disobedience.* That's not truly good theology. We could go through so many passages. We could have a series that could go for months and months of people that were right in the middle of God's will and went through tremendous difficulty. You could go through things like Jacob who finally obeys God, finally submits to God, and what does God do. He literally beats him up and cripples him for life. Jesus feeds 5,000 and sends his 12 disciples into the middle of the storm. He says, "Go over to the other side of the lake." Jesus knows there is a storm there. So, you have the 12 in a boat, rowing, hungry, exhausted, probably angry with each other. They're thinking, *why don't we just turn around, we're in the middle of the storm.* They are right in the middle of God's will. That was obedience.

Disobedience would have been they are home, around a warm fire, bellies full, swapping stories about the feeding of the 5,000. Sometimes to be right in the middle of difficulties and trouble is right where God wants you to be. But I think we have this mindset and it's the craziest mindset of, *"I want things to go kind of easy in life and kind of smooth because that means I'm in God's will.* There is a name for that. I'll tell you what the name is here in just a moment.

Let me say that I am always uncomfortable if I'm in a small group of people and they say, "Let's just get to know each other. Let's go around and let's share our name and our favorite movie." I hear that and I go, *Oh boy, oh boy." I don't know if I should be honest or not.* There are certain answers that are just the right answers for guys, like one of the Marvel movies or Gladiator, or the Matrix, or Braveheart. Those are guy answers, right? However, if I'm honest, my favorite movie is The sound of Music. I just lost all the guys, but the women love me now. It's a tradeoff; I'll take it. It's a great story, it's incredible. The music, the dancing... Anyway, just the story of the Captain and Maria and will they or won't they. Then there's the final scene in which they finally declare their love for each other and they embrace, they kiss, they realize *okay we do love each other.*

Then , if I'm watching it and my wife is there, she'll say, "Just leave the room because I don't want to hear your rant because when they finally declare... There's that big scene. Maria sings the worst song ever written in the history of the world. It's so bad. Maria sings this song. "Perhaps I had a wicked childhood, perhaps I had a miserable youth, but somewhere in my wicked, miserable past, there must have been a moment of truth, for here you are, standing there loving me, whether or not you should, so somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good. That's The Sound of Music theology. Something great is happening in my life, that means I've done something good to deserve this. Something bad is happening in my life, that means I'm obviously not in the middle of God's will. That is Sound of Music theology; it's craziness.

You might be in the midst of pain right now, you might be in the midst of heartache, you might be in the midst of attack on social media, you might be in the eyes of so many people that are trying to take you

down, life might be incredibly painful right now and you could be right in the middle of God's will. And you could be living on easy street right now and your job is going well and you're making money and you feel like everybody loves you and you could be out of God's will. Don't ever equate the way your life goes with yes, that means that I'm in the midst of God's will. Those things are not equated. That's Sound of Musci theology. That's a theology that says, "Well, I must have done something good because finally, things are going great in my life." "Oh, I found a parking place right next to the grocery store. Thank God I had my quiet time this morning." That's not the way God works. That's not the way God thinks, that's not the way God works.

This week, I spent some time in a powerful psalm, Psalm 116, which talks about tears and affliction and stumbling and distress and anguish. That psalm teaches us so clearly. Christianity teaches that God comes out of heaven and into your pain. We do not come to God on the other side of our pain, God comes to us in our pain. He's right there. God understands our pain and he's right there for us.

**8. Leaders watch each other's backs.** 26 times in Chapter 3 there is a little word that's used in the Hebrew and the word is translated "next to." This team is working next to this team. This person is working next to this person. We see it 26 times. We are going to learn as we go on that they are starting to work on the project with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other hand. Why? Because there are threats against the project. There are these antagonists that are trying to bring the project down and so each person's role is *we're not going to just build the wall, you're going to watch the back of the person next to you. You're going to make sure that they are not attacked from the blind side, and you are going to have sword to make sure that we are all safe. We are next to each other, we are guarding each other's back.*

We need to guard each other's back as a true community of Christ. Watch your pastor's back. Watch the staff's back. Make sure there aren't antagonists out there trying to bring everybody down. They are always out there. Protect one another. Just have that mindset of don't go after people in my community because I've got their back. Nehemiah makes that very clear. We are next to each other.

**9. Be motivated by the gospel.** This one is so powerful. Everything in Chapter 3. We could go on and on about this. Everything in Chapter 3 ultimately points us to Jesus. Jesus is our high priest. Jesus is the ultimate high priest. Jesus acted in humility. He washed the feet of his disciples. He was always willing to work. Jesus was despised and rejected by the antagonists we are told in Isaiah 53. Jesus was crucified on the Dung Hill – John 19. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this. Our righteousness and justification came about because of the zeal of the Lord God Almighty. Jesus is watching our backs. He is closer than a brother. Jesus is the rebuilder of broken walls and broken dreams.

It's interesting at the very start we talked about D-day. I'm sure that a lot of you knew June 6, 1944, right? Now I'm going to ask you a question and I'm going to ask you to be honest. If you know the answer, don't scream it out, just raise your hand. How many of you know the date of VE-day? I see two hands. How many of you know the date of VJ-day. One. Why? The war officially ended in Europe on VE-day. That's the day we officially won the war. We won the war in Japan on VJ-day. Why don't we know those dates? VE-day is May 8, 1945. VJ-day is August 15, 1945. Why don't we know those dates. Those are the dates we won the war. Because practically, we won the war on D-day. It was practically won on D-day, it was formally, officially won on VE-day and VJ-day.



The cross of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus, that's our V-day. One day, when Jesus comes back, that would be our VE-day. That's our victory day. We haven't officially, finally won. But we practically won on the cross of Jesus Christ and the resurrection. We live in this amazing period where there are still going to be some battles, there are still going to be some hard things in life, but the battle was won at the cross of Jesus Christ and victory of the resurrection. That should give everybody here hope and confidence for what lies ahead in your life because the victory is ours. Everything in Nehemiah 3 points to Jesus. And Jesus reminds us that you can have hope this day because of the cross, because of the resurrection, because of what He has accomplished for you.

Heavenly Father, we are so encouraged by the fact that our D-day was the cross and the resurrection. That's our D-day. We know that there are still some hard things in this life. There is still sin, there are still things we have to overcome, but Father, we thank you that the victory and the great hope that we can have was accomplished on that day.

May we live in that hope this day, this week, this year. Father, we thank you that the Word of God is absolutely true. We thank you that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We thank you that the Red Sea really did part, the sun really did stand still, the Axe head really did float, manna really did rain down, the walls really were built in only 52 days, and Jesus Christ did rise up from the grave, and overcoming death.

May we live in these promises that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. May we hold onto that. And may there be encouragement and hope in our heart as we go forth with your blessing.

We thank you for these things in Jesus' name. Amen.