

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER – Part 1 (John 15:18-16:6 May 1, 2005)

I want you to put yourself in the shoes of the Apostle John near the end of his life.

It was sixty years since the Lord Jesus had sat with His men in the upper room and passed *His* consuming passion – *Glorifying God* – as a sacred legacy to the church to continue.

He is now an old man, imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. The Emperor Domitian is waging war on the churches. Many of his beloved churches are suffering horrible persecutions.

Over the years, John had known incredible tragedy. The Jews had persecuted the church and then the Romans had persecuted the church.

Fifty years earlier his beloved brother had been beheaded by Herod Agrippa. Since then, John had seen every single one of his fellow disciples – his friends – his brothers – imprisoned and then killed for their faith until only he was left.

So what kept John going? What kept John faithful and persevering and witnessing?

What is it that will enable you and I to remain faithful and persevering and witnessing through the tough times?

This morning and in the weeks ahead, we will look at what it is that empowered John to remain faithful.

Remember what we have seen so far. On the last night of His life, Jesus gave a great task – declaring the glory of God – to the church.

We are to **display** Christ in our lives and **declare** Christ with our lips.

But, Jesus knew that in our own strength we can't do this. Without Him we can do nothing.

Humanly speaking it is impossible for us to love each other with the love of Christ.

We can't generate the faith that sustains us.

We can't develop Christlike character or a desire to proclaim Christ.

So through the Holy Spirit – Jesus Himself comes to abide in us and empower us to bear much fruit.

To this end Jesus gave the church a number of blessings. We have looked at the first six of them:

1. **Love (for others)** – *Your testimony to declare God's Glory*

13:34-35

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| 2. Life – Your opportunity to declare God’s Glory | 13:36-38 |
| 3. Faith – Your foundation to declare God’s Glory | 14:1-12 |
| 4. Prayer – Your lifeline to declare God’s Glory | 14:13-14 |
| 5. Love (for Christ) – Your motivation to declare God’s Glory | 14:15 |
| 6. Abiding – Your power to declare God’s Glory | 14:16-15:17 |

This morning we come to the seventh blessing Jesus promised to the church:

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| 7. Knowledge – Your encouragement to declare God’s Glory | 15:18-16:32 |
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On that last night of His life Jesus told the disciples and you and I what why His death and the coming of the Holy Spirit was so significant.

To encourage you in your task – Jesus reveals these truths:

The Problem – The impotence of men 15:18-16:6

If you look down to verse 27 – Jesus is sending the disciples into the world as His witnesses.

But, this is a tough task.

The world hates the truth 15:18-16:4

Because the world is fallen and in darkness – it hates the truth and it hates those who proclaim the truth.

And:

The men cannot grasp the truth 16:5-6

The truth we take to the world – the gospel – the reality that God Himself died to save us – is so incredible that no one can grasp this through their own strength.

But, once He has given the problem, Jesus then goes on to give:

The Solution – The power of the Enabler 16:7-32

When Jesus dies and returns to the Father – He sends the Holy Spirit who will overcome what is humanly impossible. He comes:

<i>To convict the world</i>	16:7-11
<i>To transform men</i>	16:12-32

Jesus wants us to know what lies ahead for those who are faithful to witness to the truth of the gospel.

There will be *persecution* – but there will also be the *power* of the Enabler.

I hope this sounds familiar to you. Again and again in Scripture we are told that all who live godly in Christ will face persecution. Again and again we are encouraged to look to the power of the Spirit.

These are dominant themes in the book of Revelation.

But in His last days, this was a theme Jesus spoke of several times. Just days before His death Jesus addressed His men in what we now call the Olivet Discourse.

Just listen to these verses.

There will be **persecution** of the saints— Mark 13:9:

But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.

There will be **power** of the Spirit— Mark 13:10-11:

The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.

So in a sense, this is John's version of the Olivet Discourse.

Why did Jesus begin this section by telling us that:

The world hates the truth 15:18-16:4

And:

The men cannot grasp the truth 16:5-6

There are several reasons. First, we have to know that the One who reaches the hearts of men and empowers us is God – so that He gets the glory.

But as well, Jesus wants us to know the trials and the triumphs – in advance – so that when they come we are not surprised. So that we can turn to Him and ask Him to empower us to do what we cannot.

When Adoniram Judson, the famous missionary to Burma asked for the hand of Nancy Hasseltine in marriage, he wrote to her father. This is what he said:

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the

fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death.¹

No one could say that Nancy was not warned. When it got tough – and it did – she knew – and she turned to God for strength.

What is the *knowledge* that will encourage us to declare God's glory?

First – we need to know:

The Problem – The impotence of men 15:18-16:6

We look first at the world.

The world hates the truth 15:18-16:4

Look with me at John 15:18-19:

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

Just pause for a moment.

Jesus came to this world. God became man so that He might declare the glory of God to the world and tell men how they might know God and escape judgment and He came to die that we might be saved.

He taught, He healed, He loved.

He committed no sin. He raised no army. He sought no wealth. He taught men to love God and others.

You would think the world would love Jesus. But the world hated Him. His life was one of persecution and ultimately death.

So why did the world hate Him?

Earlier in John Jesus told us why the world hated Him. In John 7:7 Jesus said:

The world ... hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.

If Jesus had come as a King to unite Israel in political victory – like Mohammed – He would have died of natural causes like Mohammed.

If Jesus had come as a prophet to point Israel to heaven – like Buddha – He would have died of natural causes like Buddha.

¹ Cited in William J. Petersen, *25 Surprising Marriages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), p. 449.

But that is **not** what Jesus did. He came and said – you are sinners and you will die in your sins – John 8:21, 24.

And when He said this to the Jews they went nuts. In John 8:33 they cried:

We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone.

How dare you call us sinners. We are the chosen people. We are the descendant's of Abraham. How can sin enslave us?

It was traditional Jewish teaching that the Gentiles were enslaved by sin – but as children of Abraham – **they** were free – God had forgiven their sin under the terms of the Old Covenant.

But their statement shows their ignorance of the reality.

They need only read the Old Testament to see that even though they were the people of God – they were still sinners.

It was God who had repeatedly allowed them to be dominated by the nations – why? Because of their sin.

God kept calling for His people to repent, to put away their idols, to turn to Him – and when they did not – when sin ran rampant and unchecked in the nation – He sent oppressors like the Babylonians to chastise His people and bring them to their knees that they may repent and turn to Him.

They need only read the Old Testament to see that even the greatest men were enslaved by sin.

Abraham lied about Sarah – not just once but twice.

Moses disobeyed God and struck the rock instead of speaking to it – he never entered the Promised Land.

David committed adultery and murder – bringing judgment on his family. He also numbered the people – putting his trust in his own might – not God – and God sent judgment on the whole nation.

They need only read the Old Testament to see that the Law and sacrifices did **not** free the Jews from sin. The fact that day after day, year after year the sacrifices continued showed sin still needed to be dealt with. The whole Law and the priesthood and the sacrifices and the feasts and the Tabernacle all pointed to the One who must come to deal with sin. The book of Hebrews deals with this.

The Old Testament showed one thing – they were no different to all men – enslaved to sin and they needed a Saviour.

So what folly to say – we are *not* enslaved to sin!

And what was the result? Verse 37:

You seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

When they thought Jesus had come as a leader – they wanted to make Him King by force.

When Jesus said – no I have come to tell you that you are sinners and in desperate need of a Saviour – they set their faces to kill Him.

But now, Jesus is returning to heaven. It won't be Him who tells the world they are sinners in need of a Saviour – it will be us.

And Jesus wants us to know that the full hatred of the world will turn towards us.

And so it has been since that day. The disciples went forth and declared to the world that they were dead in their trespasses and sins – and the world persecuted and killed them.

Martin Luther said that:

The **first** duty of the Gospel preacher is to declare God's law and show the nature of sin.

And the world responded by persecuting Luther. They sought to kill him and silence Him.

They were happy earning their way to heaven with indulgences and sacraments. Who was he to call them sinners?

Jon Bunyan declared this:

The man who does not know the nature of the law **cannot** know the nature of sin, and he who does not know the nature of sin **cannot** know the nature of the Saviour.

And the world responded by persecuting Bunyan. They sought to silence him by persecuting and imprisoning him.

Brothers and sisters, *nothing* has changed today.

If I stand up and say – the Muslims and Jews and Buddhists are my brothers and sisters. We are all on paths that lead to heaven – I will be awarded the Nobel Peace prize.

But if I stand up and say – Jesus Christ is **the** way, **the** truth, **the** life – no one who fails to trust entirely in Him can possibly come to God – I will be slapped with a law suit for religious vilification.

If I declare that Muslims are dead in their sins, Jews are dead in their sins, Buddhists are dead in their sins, faithless so called Christians are dead in their sins – then I will be labelled discriminatory, intolerant and a public menace.

The world wants desperately to say that all paths lead to heaven. They want to say that even the worst of us might find a way to glory.

How bad is it?

I trust that you saw in the news this week that one of Victoria's most notorious sex offenders is suing to stop evangelism in the state's prisons because he says Christianity discriminates against his rights as a witch.

Robin Fletcher, a self-proclaimed bisexual witch, is serving a 10-year sentence for drugging, enslaving, sexually assaulting and prostituting two 15-year-old girls.

But because evangelism says – that witchcraft can't save and that witches are dead in their sins – Fletcher doesn't like this.

So he is using Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act to sue those who would dare call him a sinner.

In his complaint, he says that Christian evangelism makes negative remarks about witches, astrologers and occultists and poses a danger to his health and safety.

And his case is being heard right now by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Here is a man who met his teenage victims while he was a counsellor. He drugged them and told them their transformation into "dark priestesses of the dark covenant" relied on them having perverted sex. But the world still doesn't like us calling him a sinner in need of a Saviour.

John 3:19-20:

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Jesus says, I chose you. In verse 16 – He says I chose you to bear much fruit.

In verse 27 He says – I chose you to bear witness.

And here in verse 19 He says – because I chose you to bear witness – to tell the world they need a Saviour – they will hate you too.

If you said – the world is fine – they would love you – but tell them My gospel and they will hate you.

Earlier I quoted John 7:7 where Jesus said that the world hated Him because He testified that its deeds were evil.

But let me quote the whole verse. At that time He said:

The world *cannot* hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.

At that time, it was *not* the task of the disciples to testify to the world that they were sinners. Since they were not making them aware of their sin – the world could not hate them. But when Jesus leaves – the task of testifying to the sin of the world falls to us – and now Jesus says – join the club – they will hate you too.

Verse 20:

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

All throughout this Gospel, we have seen that the coming of Jesus divided the world into two.

Most of the world ignored the word Jesus spoke and persecuted Him. But some, a few, those the Spirit of God empowered to believe – they listened to the truth.

It will be the same with us.

We will head into the world crying – Repent of your sins. Turn to Jesus – the one way of salvation. And most of the world will take deep objection to our gospel. And they will persecute us.

But God has his people. And the seed of our gospel will fall on some ears and the Spirit of God will make that seed live and they will have their spiritual eyes opened and they will turn to Christ. Some will repent and live.

Verse 21:

But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

If any had truly known God – they would have heeded the gospel. But since they don't truly know God – they persecute those who share the gospel for the sake of Jesus' name.

Verses 22-24:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well.

What is the root of sin?

Some have said that it is pride. Some have said that it is idolatry.

But when you pare all sin back to its root – what do you find?

The root of all sin is the *rejection of God*. God created us to worship Him and obey Him and give Him glory.

All sin finally gets back to us rejecting God and His Lordship over us.

What Jesus is saying is *not* that until He came the Jews were properly worshipping, obeying and giving glory to God – far from it.

What He is saying is that there was no obvious *outward* rejection of God. The Jews would have claimed to love God and worship Him. They were looking forward to the coming of Messiah. They would have said that they were pious lovers of God.

But the coming of Jesus displayed the true state of their hearts for all to see.

Jesus is God. Jesus came performing miracles which declared that He was God.

He came with the truth and they flat out rejected Him. To reject Him is to reject God.

To reject Him leaves them without excuse.

As you hammer the nails into Jesus' arms and legs – you can't claim that you love God. You don't murder the One you love.

Since Jesus is God, to hate Jesus is to hate God.

This is what the gospel does. It exposes the true heart of men – and they don't like this.

Our world is filled with men and women who think they have a relationship with God that can get them to heaven. They would *never* think of themselves as in rebellion against God.

Ask them and they would claim to be pious, God-fearing and devout.

But then we come along saying – the truth is that you are sinners – and without Jesus – there is no way for you to get to heaven.

And they become angry at us and at Jesus. They are content to stay on a Christless path.

And this rejection shows they are lost in their sins and without excuse.

A Muslim would consider himself a pious, God-fearing man. He would reject vehemently that he hates God.

But he denies just as vehemently that Jesus is God and the one way to heaven. You cannot reject Jesus without rejecting God.

When we share the gospel with him, he rejects us, he rejects what we say about Jesus – and thus he rejects the true God.

No wonder the world hates us. We unveil their sin. We tell them their cherished beliefs are wrong. We tell them we have the only truth that can save.

But this is what the truth does – it divides the world.

Verse 25:

But they have done this to fulfil the word that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'

Could God have saved every man, woman and child ever born – yes!

Could God have caused every man, woman and child who hears the gospel to repent – yes!

Could God have caused every man, woman and child in Israel to welcome Jesus as God – yes!

Why didn't He? I have thoughts and suggestions. No cross means no salvation – but ultimately only God knows why this side of the cross He only chooses some.

In His sovereign will and for the purposes of His glory – God chose to only open the eyes of a few – narrow is the gate that leads to eternal life.

He knew that most would hate Him without cause. But this is all a part of His sovereign plan.

David speaks not just of himself but of God's greater Son Jesus – when he says – They hated Me without a cause.

The point is this. The rejection of Jesus did not take God by surprise.

It is not as if God sent Jesus expecting the Jews to welcome Him and His message that they were sinners. God knew they would reject Jesus.

But, then in verses 26 through to 16:4 – Jesus makes it crystal clear that the task of being His witnesses in this world – of declaring the gospel that men are lost and need saving – falls to us.

And just as only a few responded to Jesus – so only a few will respond to us.

And just as most hated Jesus – so most will hate us.

Look at what Jesus says. In verses 26 and 27 – He tells us that the task of declaring the gospel is now ours.

When the Enabler comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

Jesus has already told us that when He dies and rises again – He will send the Holy Spirit, the Enabler – the One who will empower us to bear much fruit.

He will witness of Jesus – but He will do it through us.

God could write the gospel in the sky.

He could declare it on the lips of the archangels.

He could tattoo it on the hide of every newborn child.

But He chose to witness to the world through us. The Spirit of God will speak through us.

The disciples had been with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry. They had seen the miracles that declared Jesus was God. They had heard the teachings and seen His sinless life. They would witness of Him.

They wrote down this testimony and handed it to us – and in this age – the task falls to us.

But what will give them and us the faith and empower them to declare these truths to the world – is the coming of the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters. These words are no motivational speech out of the *How to Win Friends and Influence People* Handbook.

Jesus said – the world will hate you and persecute you. Though you go to try and save them - they will hate you without cause and try and kill you. Not the greatest encouragement to be witnesses.

Some of the disciples might have been sitting there saying – Andrew is a really good evangelist – he is the one always bringing people to Jesus. Me – I'm not so good. I'm a much better pastor or teacher. Or maybe I should go back to fishing and earn money to support Andrew in his evangelistic work.

And Jesus says – when the Enabler comes – you **will** bear witness. If you are in Christ – you will be His witness. You will display Christ in your life and you will declare Him with your lips.

Pastors, fishermen, lawyers, librarians – if we are in Christ we are His witnesses.

There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian – because He is at work in us.

There is no such thing as a Christian who fails to witness of Him – because He is at work in us.

You may not lead many to Christ – but you *will* witness of Him.

But then Jesus says this. John 16:1-4:

These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Hang on a minute! Fruit, joy, peace – that might encourage me not to stumble.

But persecution, hatred, outcasts, trying to kill me – how is this supposed to keep me from stumbling?

That is enough to make me run for the hills.

But Jesus wants us to know – that this persecution is a part of His plan.

Why? Only He knows the full reason. Persecution makes us pure – it drives out the dross. Persecution is part of the process of pruning.

When the persecuted church witnesses in the face of persecution – God is glorified.

So Jesus warns us. Persecution comes with salvation.

Francis Bacon lived 400 years ago. He made a famous statement – *Knowledge is Power*.

He meant this in a secular sense. He meant knowledge of science – enlightenment – this would give us power over the world in which we live.

He meant – *Knowledge (apart from God) is Power*. In fact he called leaning on the knowledge that comes from God – an idol – to be renounced.

But Jesus tells us – *Knowledge (from God) is Power*.

In verse 25 we find that the rejection of Jesus did not take God by surprise.

It was all a part of the sovereign plan of God.

Here Jesus says – when they persecute you – make you outcasts, try and kill you – and do all of this in the name of God – know that it is all a part of the sovereign plan of God.

My word divides. My word raises strong opposition.

Those who don't know Me, don't know God and will react to your witness.

But this is all in My control. I tell you in advance – so when it happens – you won't stumble – you will turn to Me and seek My help to persevere.

Brothers and sisters – we have been left in this world as witnesses. We are to testify that all men are sinners, that Jesus is God and Jesus is the only way for sinners to be reconciled to God.

And I tell you now – if you are faithful – the world won't like it.

No Jew, no Muslim, no Mormon, no atheist – will hear our gospel – you are a lost sinner in need of a Saviour – with dispassion.

We tell those who have religion – their religion is wrong.

We tell those without religion – there is a God and you stand condemned.

In terms of salvation, we make no apology for being totally intolerant of every other teaching – because Jesus is **the** only way.

And the world doesn't like it.

They seek to silence us – through force, through legal means, through ridicule, through argument.

The religious attack us in the name of God.

The atheist attacks us in the name of humanity.

Being a Christian marks us. We are a constant reminder to the world of the reality of sin, righteousness and judgment.

And as we have seen again and again – humanly speaking no one will ever listen to our message.

Jesus adds that He didn't tell them this from the beginning. During His ministry – **He** declared the gospel and **He** received the flack.

But now the baton passes to us – so we have to be ready.

We will declare the gospel and **we** will receive the flack.

Let me sum this up. It is as if Jesus is saying this:

Your mission, which you cannot refuse, is to take an unpopular message into a world where most cannot hear it. In fact, they will hate the message and the messenger and thus it will lead to your persecution and quite possibly an untimely death.

So where is the encouragement?

It is here. I am with you. This is all part of the plan. I am God and this persecution doesn't take Me by surprise – don't let it take you by surprise.

Before I move on, I want to make a comment. If we know that witnessing leads to persecution, why would anyone ever be motivated to go and make disciples of the nations?

Let me remind you that men are motivated to perform many dangerous feats.

My son tells me his great goal in life is to be the first man on Pluto. Pluto is a long, long, cold trip. I asked him why he would want to do this? He said, "Because then everyone would know my name."

In 1900, when Sir Ernest Shackleton was putting together his team to reach the South Pole, he placed an advertisement in the London newspapers looking for volunteers. The advertisement read:

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success. – Ernest Shackleton.

Shackleton wrote about the response to this call for volunteers. "It seemed as though all the men in Great Britain were determined to accompany me, the response was so overwhelming."

Why did men clamour to sign up? It was cold, dangerous and hard.

Honour and recognition in case of success.

Who wouldn't want to be a part of the first expedition to the South Pole? Men everywhere would know your name.

I am told that some of those who missed out on selection for the Apollo space program wept.

Men will face death and privation for honour and recognition.

But I tell you, the motivation for us is far greater. John 14:15 – our motivation is our love for Christ and our longing to see the Father glorified in the Son.

Men everywhere will know **His** name.

So even though – the world hates the truth – for the glory of God we go forth and proclaim His truth.

But, this is not the only problem related to the impotence of man. Not only does:

The world hate the truth 15:18-16:4

But:

The men cannot grasp the truth 16:5-6

Look at chapter 16 verse 5:

But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?'

At first glance you wonder how Jesus could say this.

In John 13:36 – Simon Peter asked Him where He was going.

In John 14:5 – Thomas said that they didn't know where Jesus was going.

So how can Jesus say none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?'

Jesus' point is that when Peter and Thomas asked – where are you going? – they meant – why are you leaving **us**? What will happen to **us** – when you leave?

They weren't asking – what does your leaving mean for the task of displaying the glory of God in this world?

If I tell Peter – Petey next Saturday morning I will take you to Toys R'US to buy a new Bionicle – but then just before we leave, someone in the church gets sick and I tell him that I have to leave.

When he says, "Daddy where are you going?" He doesn't mean – "Oh Dad, tell me what has happened that you have to go – let me know so I can pray for you and for the person from the church."

He means – "Dad, why are you leaving? What about the Bionicle? What about me?"

That is what the disciples were asking. They were saying – "How can you leave us?" We know this from verse 6:

But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

They were sad that Jesus was going because of what it meant for *them*.

Here is the point of these verses. Jesus said – you will be My witnesses.

The disciples say:

What do you mean you are leaving us? What do you mean that we will be your witnesses to the world? What about us? You can't leave us.

In their own power – these men – no men – would ever witness to the world.

Because the Holy Spirit can not been given, even these disciples *cannot* grasp the truth. Philip and Thomas grappled with faith in who Jesus is in chapter 14.

Later in this chapter we will see the disciples grapple with what Jesus means when He says that in a little while they won't see Him and then in a little while they will see Him.

Humanly speaking – how can anyone come to grips with the reality that Jesus is God and His death and resurrection are the only way to life?

But Jesus not only gives the problem – He encourages us with the solution – the ***Power of the Enabler***.

What we cannot do – He will do.

Brothers and sisters. We have been given a great task. To magnify the name of Christ in this world.

Yes, we will face opposition. Yes, we are mere humans. But Jesus will send His Spirit to convict the world and empower us.

And because of what He has done – we are on the side of victory. We get to see His name glorified. We get the privilege of seeing the world repent. We get the privilege of Him dwelling in us. And we get to spend all eternity praising the name of Christ.

Not bad is it?