

Matthew 11:29

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[0 : 00] We shall turn now to the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 11 and verse 29.

Matthew chapter 11 and verse 29. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Amen. If I'm not mistaken, I think that some months ago, I pitched on the same text in this congregation.

On that occasion, we focused primarily upon what was meant by becoming a Christian, the whole emphasis of the Lord on coming to him and taking his yoke upon him.

We tried to explore the meaning of this initial commitment to ask ourselves what exactly it was that faith meant and that faith implied.

[1 : 33] But there are many other layers of teaching in this context that we might very well reflect on.

We have an emphasis, for example, a few verses earlier on, on the sovereignty of God in verse 26. Even so, Father, for so it's in good in thy sight.

Even more important, we have the glorious testimony born in those verses to Christ himself. As the one who alone knows the Father, the one who is so glorious that only the Father can possibly know him.

But what I want to draw your attention to this morning is something different. That is the meaning of the promise which the Lord makes in verse 29.

In other words, suppose that people do become Christians.

[2 : 40] Suppose they do come to Christ. Suppose they submit their minds to this great prophet, bring their sins to this great priest.

Suppose they place their lives under the control of this great Lord and King. Then what can they expect?

What offer, what promise does God in Christ make to us? What privileges, what advantages become ours the moment we do come to Christ?

What blessings are there which are the direct and immediate consequence of our exercising faith in the Savior?

I want to focus particularly upon that question. Christ commands us to come. We have seen what that means.

[3 : 46] That Christ also promises us something. And I want to ask what it is that Christ is promising. What do we get when we become Christians?

Well, the first answer to that surely is that in that very moment we receive the forgiveness of all our sins. All of us are lives which are indefensible.

Lives which our consciences condemn. Lives which none of us would dare to take before God. And have our destiny suspended upon are determined by the quality of our own behavior.

All of us know that in so many of our actions we have given offense to God. We know that so often in our words, our ambitions, our aspirations, again we offend God.

We know that we have found so many of our own relationships. Brought in hate and suspicion, distrust, disappointment, where there ought to be love and there ought to be confidence.

[5 : 15] We know that even so far as our emotions and feelings go, so often in our area too, there has been sin.

We know that nothing can be said in defense of what we have done, in defense of what we have felt, in defense of what we are.

And the moment that we face our own lives realistically, that moment we face the possibility of despair, shall all great Neptune's oceans wash this blood clean from my hands?

Is there any possibility of this past being forgotten? And it is one of the foremost promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that the very moment we come to him, come to him with our sins, in that moment our past is forgiven.

In that moment we are loosed from it. In that moment, use another New Testament word, in that moment it is dismissed. There is a great severance that takes place in the Christian gospel between a man and his past, between a man and his reputation.

[6 : 54] In Psalm 51, we see the marvelous emphasis on the intense individuality, on the personalness of our own sin. There is what David calls, my sin, my transgression, my iniquity, the most personal thing that there is.

It is something which between humans is utterly non-transferable. And yet God is saying within his gospel that there is a possibility that the past can be forgotten.

It is that past, that sin, which has strained and marred our relationship with God. That past which makes it difficult for us to pray, difficult for us to face death, difficult for some even to sleep.

But the moment we come to Christ, we find the objective rest of peace with God. Remember Paul's great word in Romans 8, there is there for now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

No condemnation. There is absolutely none. And the only condition is that a man be in Christ. And the moment we come to be in Christ, that very moment, there is no condemnation.

[8 : 32] That moment there is total forgiveness. Again in South 51, David exclaims, Yea, wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than the snow.

And that is the fundamental promise of God's gospel. A promise that brings relief to those who know conviction of sin. To those who know what the fear of God born of that conviction is.

The promise that in Christ all is covered, all is forgiven. That the one great factor determining your acceptance with God is that Jesus died, Christ bore our sins.

That we are forgiven not because we have made amends, not because we have sorted ourselves out, not because we have made recompense by the depth of our own religion, the quality of our own repentance, our own love for Christ, our own love for the cause of Christ.

But that marvelous possibility that even when we know that we are ungodly men, even at that same point we know that we are forgiven men.

[9 : 55] That marvelous paradox, that tension, where we are simultaneously sinners and forgiven.

We are simultaneously sinners and justified. When you come back to Luther's even bolder word, we can't sin boldly.

We can't sin, we can know that we are sinners, have been sinners, and that we are still sinners.

And yet, even as we know our own sinnership, even at that moment we know our own forgiveness, we have the boldness and confidence of our own justification.

salvation. And I know that to many that is something of no consequence, those who never face sin, those to whom their relationship with God is a matter of no consequence, for them that gospel is irrelevant.

But if it matters to us how things stand with us in God, if our relationship on that play, if the whole possibility, probability, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of no condemnation, if that matters, then here is good news.

[11 : 19] If we know with Luther, the evil of a condemning conscience, if we know with John banging the fear of a lost eternity, if we know with the apostle Paul what it is for the Lord to revive and kill us and condemn us, then we find the glory of this great good news.

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath this flood lose all their guilty states.

The possibility that the whole of the past can be forgotten. And when each of us ponders the glory of that, when we realize what that past has been, what my past has been, realize its utter indefensibility, then surely here is something of enormous importance.

The moment we come to Christ, the whole of that past is forgiven. But then there is something else. The moment we come to Christ, we become sons of God.

We become members of the family of God. In some respects, it is the answer to the terrible problem of identity.

[12 : 47] What are we? Who are we? There is a level at which every human being is asking quite fundamentally, what is my name? Where do I belong?

God. And there are so many who have no name. You don't, in the last analysis, feel that they belong anywhere in this cosmos.

There is no group, there is no nation, there is no family, there is no name they can bear. But in Christ, we have God's name placed upon our foreheads.

presence. In Christ, we have the grace of adoption, whereby we become members of the family of God. We bear his name, we enjoy his resources, and in that very moment, we have the right of access to God.

I mean, the right to go and talk to God, the right to go and discuss things with God, the right to talk things over with God, the right, if I may dare say, to complain to God, the right to sigh before God, the right to pour out bitterness before God, to express our frustrations before God, to talk over our hopes, our aspirations with God, as one does with human parents and human friends, the right to know God as Father, the right to know God as Friend, the right to know Christ as Brother, that one can go to and talk to anytime, when things are unbearable, when things are unintelligible, when things are marvelous, when things are glorious, that then we go and we talk to God because we belong.

[14:39] We are no longer drifting anonymously, but we are part of the family of God. We have the rest of adoption. you know yourselves in today's society that there are many children who have this terrible experience of moving from place to place, residence to residence, who belong nowhere.

We have in the world today millions of refugees, they belong nowhere. You have that marvelous allusion in 1 Peter chapter 1 to those who were strangers, scattered.

they were people who belonged nowhere. And very often when we ourselves look at life, our own life, look at its rudiments, at its foundations, at its enormous essence, that's what we are.

Aliens, strangers, scattered, spiritually nomadic, spiritually nameless, spiritually nowhere. But we come into God's family by Christ, or in Christ.

We have the right to talk to God. We have the right to expect God to look after us because he's our father. He will provide for us, he will provide daily bread and meet all our needs according to his own riches and glory by Christ Jesus.

[16:04] We have the right to expect God to educate us, God to teach us because there is so much that we don't know. and when we become Christians, we sometimes may be mentioned, well, we're taking this tremendous step and we sometimes forget that we are only spiritual babes, spiritual infants, there's so much to learn.

And education is a parental responsibility. and that is especially so as we are members of God's family, that he will educate, he will teach, he will discipline according to our needs.

So when we come to Christ, there is forgiveness and when we come to Christ, there is membership of the family of God, there is this great sense of belonging, this great sense of arriving, this great sense of stability and security that goes along with being members of the family of God.

Then there's a third thing, the moment we come to Christ, we receive the spirit of Christ. And that is one of the most glorious elements of God's gospel.

And I'm emphasizing that it happens the moment we become Christians. I'm not talking of some subsequent experience. I'm not talking of something we earn.

[17:30] by renouncing all known sin. Or by living victorious lives. Or by going through some six or seven prescribed steps and getting the Holy Spirit.

But I believe that a man or a woman is complete in Christ. And at the very moment we become Christians, God's spirit comes and God's spirit abides and God's spirit baptizes and God's spirit fills us.

I believe that in that very moment a man becomes a temple of the spirit of God. That God lives in him.

God dwells in him. God fills him. Fills him in every aspect of his being. In his intellect, in his emotions, in his will, in his decisions, in his affections, his aspirations.

In all these, God lives. And it seems to me one of the most neglected aspects of New Testament teaching, the extraordinariness of a mere Christian.

[18:53] I don't mean of special Christians, but of a mere Christian. And one of the saddest things in the church today is the way that many of God's people, I mean God's ordinary people, God's mere children, God's mere Christians, are made to feel second rate, or feel themselves second rate.

We ought instead to stand before the glorious reality of a universal baptism in the spirit of God and to rise from that to the tremendous assurance that we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Even the assurance that we can do all things in Christ. It seems to me sometimes that people who are pondering the challenge and the cleanse of Christ, that they hesitate because they feel that they'll make such a mess of discipleship.

They don't feel up to the strains and demands and to the stresses of this particular lifestyle. They don't want to make fools of themselves.

They don't want to disgrace themselves. They don't want to start and find that they cannot sustain it. And the answer surely is to come back to this, this marvelous promise that the moment we come to Christ, the moment we become penitent, the moment we turn in conversion, we receive the gift of the Spirit of God.

[20 : 38] Not only forgiveness, changing our relationship with God, not only adoption, changing our own personal status, but this tremendous influx, this incursion, this eruption, this infusion of the power of God into our own lives.

So that we can bear any burden, we can endure any suffering, we can climb any mountain. I'm not saying we always do because sometimes our faith fails us, but that is the possibility, a possibility based upon the reality of the promise of God, that the moment we turn to Christ, we are not asked to sustain discipleship out of our own resources, but in that very moment we are filled with the spirit, filled with power, filled with the strength of God.

And I may turn that otherwise and say this, that if today, as Christians, if today's believers may be of considerable maturity in terms of years, if we find that we are failing, and find that we are lapsing, and finding that the glorious God, finding that all of a sudden this life, this discipleship has become terribly ordinary, terribly dull, terribly mundane, then let's say to ourselves, we have no need to be like this.

I'm not saying only that we have no right to be like this, but that we have no need to be like this.

With all those glorious resources, why is God's will so uncertain?

Why are we so often failing to measure up to the challenges of God's providence? Why are we defeated? I believe that there is no reason that a child of God should ever be defeated by any temptation.

[22 : 51] By any suffering, by any burden, we can meet, by the grace of God, every obligation. We can endure every degree of pain and sorrow because of the glory of our resources.

And to those who are struggling, trying to understand, trying not to collapse, trying not to break down in the face of successive adversities, then I'm saying, look, the moment that we come to Christ, there is new power, there is new potential, there are those glorious new resources and they belong to a man, not as a distinguished man of God, but they belong to a man and woman as a mere Christian, as an ordinary believer, that man has access to the infinite resources of almighty God.

And so this man who comes to Christ has forgiveness, this man has adoption and finds rest there, this man has tremendous resources.

forgiveness, but then the Lord is emphasizing something else, he's emphasizing what I may for a moment I hope call the tremendous subjective inward emotional change in the life of this person who has come to Christ.

Let me put it this way, forgiveness is something objective, it's out there, it's a great reality, it's external to ourselves, adoption is the same thing, it's utterly objective, it is unassailable, unalterable, unchallengeable, it stands there as a great fact, a Christian is a child of God.

[24 : 57] And Holy Spirit baptism is again something objective, it's something out there, it's something real, but it's something external, something outside of ourselves. But Christ is saying this to us, you will find rest for your souls, you will find peace for your souls, you will find relief.

He is talking specifically of our own souls, of our own psyche, and saying that the moment we come to him, there is rest, there is relief for our own psyche.

He is talking of something psychological, of something that is a matter of our own personal emotions, and saying to us that not only is a great objective change and transformation, but there is great subjective change.

Conversion to Christ changes a man's whole relationship with God, a man's whole potential, a man's whole standing, but the Lord is saying to us that in normal circumstances it will also change a

man subjectively, it will change the way that a man feels, it will change his whole psychological condition, it brings that man rest and peace and relief of an intensely inward and subjective kind. Let me go into that for a moment. It means, for example, that God gives his children the assurance of his own love.

[26 : 50] They will find the tremendous rest and relief of the assurance that God loves them, God is in love with them. God cares.

And that is something that is for a man completely revolutionary. I take you back to the story of the fall in Genesis chapter three. When man hears God in the garden after his fall, a man hides because man is afraid.

Man afraid. Afraid servilely. of God trembling. Remember how Calvin reminded us at one point that no matter how indifferent we are to religion, there are times when every man is dragged by his conscience before the divine tribunal.

Conscience making cowers love us of us all. But when we come to Christ, there is Christ's promise that we shall have assurance of God's love for us.

We shall find rest in our assurance of God's care. No, I'm not saying that absolutely every Christian has it or that everyone gets at the very moment of his conversion.

[28 : 27] But I am saying this, that it is highly unusual for a Christian, highly unusual for him not to know that God loves him.

It is highly unusual, I mean, in the light of the New Testament. I can't find any in the New Testament who is a Christian and who lacks this assurance.

we find rest in the assurance of God's love. Let me take it in terms of its very obvious human analogy.

It would be very, very strange if any of our children didn't know that we were their father. If our children had a lack of assurance there, and I'll put it to you furthermore, that it would create serious problems for them if they lacked that assurance.

And I'm utterly confident that it also creates problems for us when we lack assurance at the spiritual level. And I'm saying, therefore, that one of God's promises, and it's a promise that I think too often in the past we rejected, it's a promise of restful souls in the glorious assurance that God loves us.

[29 : 51] The assurance that God has forgiven us. The assurance of the members of his family.

The assurance that we matter to. Matter infinitely.

Matter utterly. You bear in mind that the love that we have for our own children is but a poor shadow of God's love for his.

Bear in mind that the confidence we can repose in our parents is but a poor shadow of the confidence that we can repose in God.

And I say again as in our status as known entities, we float on the troubled and uncharted sea of human history in the terribleness of our own anonymity.

It is a glorious thing when there is this assurance in our hearts. I am poor and needy but the Lord thinks of me.

[30 : 59] I am a nothing. I am a nobody. But the Lord thinks of me. my name is engraven on the palm of his hand.

My name is in his book of life. He so loved me that he gave himself for me. I don't think it ever makes the Lord's people arrogant or ever makes them careless.

But I think there is a resting point for the soul there. A resting point that means that even in the most appalling hurricane to which life can expose us, there is peace and quiet at its center.

The terrible thing that I can imagine is being a Christian and lacking the assurance because then one has the storms to which believers are subjected and yet does not have the peace that ought ordinarily to lie at the storm center.

And for myself, I know that I am constantly accused of being a troubled spirit because of which that is what lies on the surface of one's personality, like buzzing, like a gadfly around the church of Christ.

[32 : 35] And yet the whole thing becomes possible and sustainable because at the center of the storm there is always this. Poor and needy, but the Lord thinks you will find rest for your soul in the assurance of the love of God.

That's part of the rest. And besides assurance, I think that the rest also means contentment because our discontent so often is a product of our own covetousness and it's a product of our own

frustrations.

We haven't found what we wanted. And surely the covetousness, the cupidity that characterizes our own Western society is a product of restlessness.

Restlessness because people haven't found a place to stop of which they can say this is my rest. I have found what I'm looking for.

Now it seems to me that in our most radical and fundamental sense as a Christian, one has found what one is looking for. one has found something that cannot be excelled, that doesn't require improvement, doesn't require supplementation.

[34 : 16] I found a treasure. One thing I have all desire, this one thing I do, and I have found it, this pearl of great price.

I have found this Christ in whom there is seed, all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge. I have found this Christ in whom a man is complete.

I have found the love of God. I have found God. And I think the moment that one has found that in a marvelous way, one's search is over.

It is often said of men that it is better to have traveled than to arrive. And I think that at the human level, at the humanist level, that is all there is, always searching and never finding.

And in self-defense they say, ah, but the quest is glorious. But I think that's whistling in the dark. If the quest is destined to inevitable failure, then there is no fulfillment in it.

[35 : 35] It is futile. It is absurd. But in Christ we have traveled and in Christ we have arrived.

In Christ there is this great Eureka I have found, found the peril, found a resting place for our soul. God is a refuge under strength. A very present earth, in time of trouble. Lord, there has been our dwelling place long, long ago in the moment of conversion we arrived.

And in that moment surely, all the restless covetousness found its death death. Now, I am not naive enough yet to preach that all of us Christians are free of covetousness.

But I am saying that in principle it has found its death. death. That the moment we have Christ, there is all the logic and all the foundation for absolute contentment of soul.

[36 : 49] I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I have Christ. And then honestly becomes a matter of complete indifference.

Where one is, what one is, what one has. it is a question simply of knowing where God wants. And maybe if there is discontent, it is discontent born of uncertainty as to Christ's will, or with frustration at being unable to get into Christ's will.

But if it is true that for us today, we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, that our primary concern is to know the love of Christ that passes all knowledge, then their covetousness has found its death blow.

Because all in all, in him I find. We found it there. We found it in Christ. And therefore, the quest is over.

And that's why for the Christian, life cannot be a fitful fever. why it must not be a fitful fever.

[38 : 06] Why we have found our Sabbath. We have found our promised land. We have found our treasure in the moment of our finding the Savior.

And there, the covetousness has gone. In its place, there is contentment. You will find rest for your soul's inward subjective, the assurance of God's love, contentment in and with the will of God.

But I think too, we have found relief. I'm talking about factor psychological, subjective, inward. We have found assurance.

We have found contentment. We have found relief. relief. And it is that relief especially that the Lord is highlighting. The word means in fact, not simple repose and indolence, but it means relief.

And I think primarily it means relief from fear and relief from anxiety. anxiety. And that is God's promise, which I'm sure today becomes in a manner to me and to you, not only God's promise, but God's challenge and God's demand because it's asking us, have we in fact lived it out, this relief from anxiety and this relief from fear?

[39 : 30] A relief from what fear? A relief from the servile, cringing fear of God that the devils have that I sometimes fear some Christians have too.

We are not hiding behind trees, are we, in case God should see us? Have we got rid of that conception of God which turns them into some kind of Neronian tribal demon?

There seems to me to be sometimes a fear in the hearts of men and women. That they'll get punished for every pleasure they've had, punished for every joy they've had.

And surely one of the greatest discoveries made by Christians is not that God chastens us and corrects us and disciplines us, but that so often when we deserved it and when we expect it, it didn't come.

there must be relief from that cringing servile fear of God.

[40 : 45] I want all the reverence in the world and more, but I do not want cringing fear. There is relief from the cringing fear of God.

there is relief from the fear of our environment. I've been over this ground, I'm sure, repeatedly in recent weeks, that in Christ our universe has been de-demonized.

It is not a satanic one. It's not one which is malicious or malevolent or full of dark holes and full of dark secrets. it's not one that threatens our survival and threatens our comfort and our happiness. In the garden of Eden, in the fall of man, there is de-arrangement between man and his environment. There is the implanting of the fear of that environment in the heart of man.

And we see it reflected today in our own sometimes pietistic fear of science and our morbid fear of progressive technology.

[42 : 02] But when I see that this world is my father's world, that this world was manufactured, created, conceived by my eldest brother and is maintained in being by my eldest brother, I feel at home in it because it's God's word, it's Christ's word.

I have rest for my soul. I have relief from fear, relief from the cringing fear of God, relief from the fear of my own environment, relief from the fear of loneliness and the fear of others.

I can't develop this except to say that the moment we come to Christ, we come also to the people of God.

And we expect, the Lord expects his people to rejoice with them in every prodigal's return. love. And I believe profoundly that no believer should be lonely, even as I also believe that today sadly many of them are unutterably lonely.

[43 : 30] And I'm saying it again, partly promise, partly challenge. Christ has broken down the middle walls of partition. I don't understand why so often Christians assume that that middle wall of partition is a partition between God and man because it most evidently is not.

It's a partition between man and man, between black and white, between rich and poor, between the learned and the unlearned, between the old and the young. The barriers of matter are immensely in that sad world outside the church where it's important what kind of car you have and what income you have and what school your children go to.

All these things matter. But in Christ they are irrelevant. In Christ there has been a breaking down of barriers so that one is not afraid of those from different upper superior contexts and backgrounds deliverance from the fear of loneliness.

Christ chose 12 to be with them. And I ask you well maybe some of us have been scarred and some of us have been scalded by our own friendships and our own relationships.

And maybe we feel very humble and very modest and very wise when you say that's the end of it I'm going to go my own way be my own man my own woman and live a recluse live in isolation.

[45 : 10] And I say just one word upon it God forbids it. It is not an option open to us. We are part of an organism and that organism owes me sustenance and I owe that organism my own commitment.

I must live my life in the fellowship of the church. I'm delivered from the cringing fear of God. I'm delivered from the fear of my environment.

I'm delivered from the fear of loneliness. I'm delivered from the fear of death. God in Christ redeemed those who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

No, I'm not asking for recklessness. And there are things that on a subjective level one may be forced to admit to.

The fear of pain. The fear of immobility. the fear of inarticulateness. The fear of being half dead.

[46 : 27] These are things to be overcome by the grace of God. But in Christ the fear of death has been in principle destroyed.

died. Because death, says Christ, cannot separate us from the love of God. It's a far journey.

It's a journey into a strange country from which no traveler has ever returned. The tremendous thing is you're going to meet someone there, someone you know.

And those who travel know what a difference that can make, the monumental difference, between traveling into a country where there isn't a soul that you know, and traveling to a country which may

be many, many miles away, but you're met at the airport by someone you know.

Now there is that precise picture given to us in John's Gospel. I will come again and receive you to myself. I'll receive you.

[47 : 37] I'll be at the door waiting at the threshold to welcome. And it isn't that one is fearless of death or should be because of physical courage and because of the hope of dying under anesthetic or under sedation at least, but the hope that in that journey there is this tremendous purposefulness that to be with Christ is far better.

Paul speaks of it so powerlessly in 2 Timothy 4, the time of my departure is at hand. A beautiful metaphor of which he says the time has come for me to slip my moorings.

That's what it was. He was slipping his moorings, he was going to Christ. He was going to that place where he would see him as he is.

It all depends on the strength of my faith in Christ, on the depth of my love for Christ. But granted that strength of faith and the ardour of that love, then that death has lost its fear.

The fear of death is the greatest human neurosis. It is dealt with in coming to Christ. Christ. It was John Wesley's great boast, and it was a great boast, however justified.

[49 : 00] Our people, he said to the Methodists, our people die well. God's will, let it be so, that our people, our Christian people, they should die well because the fear is gone.

The cringing fear of God, the fear of our own environment, the fear of loneliness, the fear of death, the fear of the future.

Whatever that future may hold, I believe that God's will is my future, God's love is my future.

Sometimes I have trouble in identifying that will, but that will itself, in all its glory, my future is as secure and as lovely as the love of God himself.

I've got to go out and find God's love in the way, those great things that God has prepared for them that love him. Why, why, why do we speak of the future with dread?

Why are you so morbid? You're all frightened, aren't you? What a day or an hour may bring, because that's what the phrase means in a free church liturgy.

[50 : 18] A day or an hour may bring some calamity. but a day or an hour may also bring a great blessing.

It will, in my view, inevitably be a great blessing. And that's what our perspective should be. We don't know what marvelous privilege I have learned, if I may bear a personal testimony, that most of my fears have been disappointed, and that many of my hopes have been excelled in God's fulfillment.

I have prayed in hopelessness, and prayed for the impossible, and God has done it. That's what a day or an hour may bring forth.

Well, I haven't got through very much of this material, but I'll just come back again to the starting point. Come. Come.

That is a promise. you will find rest. But you'll only find it if you come. If you move from where you are today to where Christ is, I want you to make that move so that you'll find rest.

[51 : 40] Let us pray. Lord, we ask thee in thy grace to draw near to us, to give us the power and the strength to comply with thy known invitation to us to come.

We pray, Lord, that there may be not only a commanding and inviting, but may there be also a drawing, that we may be drawn to thyself by the cords of thy love and of thy care.

Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.