

# The Sweet-Bitter Scroll

*Last Things*

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**Bible Text:** Revelation 10:8-11; Psalm 19  
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Our Scripture lesson today is taken from Revelation 10, and you'll find this on page 1,924. Revelation 10, beginning at verse 8.

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: 'Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.' So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, 'Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.' I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. 11 Then I was told, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.'

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

May we pray.

*Lord, please help me to be succinct, clear, thoroughly biblical, not losing people, Lord, and to preach from the Bible, because Lord, all other words are worthless. Grant, O God, this through the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of your holy child Jesus. Amen.*

Now, I have been trying to present various views of the book of Revelation as I preach through it and there are four basic views. One is Preterism, and if you want proof of Preterism, I encourage you to read the transcript from two weeks ago because in it, I document from eyewitness accounts of what happened to Jerusalem in those years between AD 66 and 70 when the temple of God was destroyed. And you will discover that the things that are

prophesied, both by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, that those things that are prophesied there, and in this book, did occur in the first century. And if you want proof of that, I encourage you to read the transcript (<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/102923172124960.pdf>).

I spend hours on those transcripts because when I'm preaching, I don't want to bog you down in details because people get lost. So I don't read long quotes, but afterwards I put those quotes in there, and that one, I probably worked on the longest of any of the transcripts two weeks ago. It's well worth reading. That's not commending myself; it's commending the quotations that are there and the literal fulfillment. So that's Preterism. Preterism means that much, not all, much of the book of Revelation was fulfilled around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Then there's Historicism. We looked at Historicism last week with those extensive quotations from people like Matthew Henry and the person he depended on very much, Joseph Mede, who was a Puritan scholar in the early days of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and he saw the book of Revelation as an unfolding of history from the time of Christ until the time of Christ's second coming.

And if you look at last week's sermon, you'll see those quotations there as I focused on the question: Is Muhammad mentioned in the book of Revelation? (<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/115231513376164.pdf>) Because Muhammad is seen by the Historicist, and that was the dominant view until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Historicist saw that Revelation 9 was a prophecy about the two comings of Muhammad. The first coming of Muhammad is Muhammad himself, and the lightning race by his followers across, not only Saudi Arabia after his death, but throughout the Middle East and going across North Africa, crossing the Straits of Gibraltar, taking Spain and Portugal, and only being stopped within 100 years after the death of Muhammad (AD 672) at the Battle of Tours in France (AD 732). So Muhammad's armies, within 100 years after his death, conquered much of Christendom. That's the first coming of Muhammad.

The second coming of Muhammad, if you want to put it that way, that's a play on words, is the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans were Turks. They came out of the northern regions. They correspond in many ways to

Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38-39). And so they come, the hordes out of north central Asia, come down, cross the Euphrates River with a massive army. They conquer the previous Muslim nation, adopting Islam as their religion, and then they set about to conquer once again Christendom. And so in the year 1453, the second Rome fell.

Remember the first Rome fell in AD 476 and what happened is that the Bishop of Rome replaced the Roman Emperor and even took titles of the Roman Emperor like *Pontifex Maximus*, Supreme Priest. And so in the West—and we are conditioned to think in a Western way—you find that the Vatican, replaces the Roman emperors and rules Europe. But in the East, that was not the case.

In the East, four-fifths of the church remained loyal to Christ under the rule of the civil ruler, who was the emperor of Constantinople. And so you had, in the beginning, when Christianity became a recognized religion in the fourth century, you had five patriarchs: you had Jerusalem, you had Antioch, where people were first called Christians, you had Alexandria, Egypt, where learning was profound, you had Constantinople, which was the leading city of the Roman Empire, and then you had Rome. But once the Western Empire fell and was replaced with the Vatican, with the Pope, the Pope set about to destroy the other four patriarchs and that was accomplished particularly in the Crusades.

And so we look at those things, and we wonder. And so as you read the Historicist accounts, you see that they understood the book of Revelation to be history written ahead of time and unfolding throughout history.

And then there is the Futurist view. Now, no one can read the book of Revelation and fail to realize that there is much that is still in the future. Christ has not yet returned. And even though his coming in judgment on Jerusalem is a foreshadowing of that Second Coming, we look forward to Christ.

So the church has confessed: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

And all true Christians believe in the future coming of Christ. A person who denies that, and we call that view Full or Heretical Preterism, is not a

Christian. And when I say that, remember that there are a lot of non-Christians who will end up in heaven.

“What did he mean by that?”

What I mean by that is just because somebody’s not fully orthodox, just because somebody’s doctrine is not 100% biblical, doesn’t mean that he is not going to end up in heaven. In other words, people can have a defective view of even some primary biblical doctrines and still be true Christians who will be in heaven, but what they believe is not Christianity.

So we look at Preterism, primarily fulfilled in the first century. We look at Historicism, beginning at the time of the coming of Christ and going on until the time of his Second Coming. We look at Futurism, which focuses on future things, but tends to view the book primarily as all future. And then there’s the Idealist view, which is that there’s been a conflict between the Lord and Satan from the time humanity fell into sin, and the book of Revelation portrays that.

Now, with that extensive introduction, we want to notice something else, and that is that these revelations in the Revelation seem to be parallel one to another.

I remember one day when the youth group at the church I served for 40 years in Alexandria, Louisiana, asked me to teach on the book of Revelation. Everybody’s always curious about it until they start getting into it. And so I prayed and I looked, “Lord, what is there?” And I realized there were seven churches, there were seven seals, there were seven trumpets, there were seven bowls of wrath, and so on, and I realized a basic view is, and here’s the technical term, Progressive Parallelism.

What do we mean by “Parallelism”? We mean that each of these visions is paralleled by an earlier vision. And what do we mean by “Progressive”? That the later revelation takes it a bit further. So the seven churches, which are obviously written to those churches in Asia Minor, Turkey, prepare us for the throne room, prepare us for the opening of the seven sealed book, and then the seven sealed book leads to the seven trumpets. And you’ll notice one other thing.

You say, “Boy, you really are taking a long time.”

And we will have this transcription, God willing, for you sometime Monday.

The other thing is that there are gaps. For example, what we have, if you look at the end of Revelation 9, you discover that there are events there in verse 13, that's page 1923, "The sixth angel sounded his trumpet." Now, he sounds a trumpet, but we don't have the sounding of the seventh trumpet until you get over to page 1,925, Revelation 11:15, "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet."

So you have this as a kind of interlude, if you will. And you remember the quote, I'll put it again in the transcript, from the Oxford professor who said, rather than trying to view the book of Revelation chronologically or merely symbolically, you should view it more like a symphony, and we'll see that symphony again this morning as we look at this sweet-bitter scroll.

The unity of John's book, then, is neither chronological nor arithmetical, but artistic, like that of a musical theme with variations, each variation adding something new to the significance of the whole composition. This is the only view which does adequate justice to the double fact that each new series of visions both recapitulates and develops the themes already stated in what has gone before. (G. B. Caird (1966), *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Black), p. 106)

And if you look back at Revelation 6 and verse 12, "I watched as he opened the sixth seal," and you have that and then you have this interlude that follows that goes on until you get to Revelation 8:1. So again, this section of seven seals has within it a kind of an interlude, what's going on behind the scenes, and that's in the opening of the seventh seal and you see that now in Revelation 10.

So with that out of the way, we want to look at this section, and he says there in Revelation 10 and verse 8, "Take the scroll that lies in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and the land." So he gives him a book. Now this is one of those themes like a variation on a theme from Pachelbel, Pachelbel's Canon.

This is a variation on a theme taken back from the book of Ezekiel. So you can hold your hand there—we'll be gone for a while, and we'll turn to the left to chapter 2 of the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 2 and here's what we read, and that is page 1,287. Ezekiel 2 and beginning at verse 1.

He said to me, "Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you." As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me," (Ezekiel 2:1-3, and he goes on, talks about how obstinate they are).

Now look at verse 9: "Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe."

Look at the next chapter, verse 1.

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. (Ezekiel 3:1-3)

Do you see Pachelbel's Overture here, Pachelbel's Canon here, and how that theme is woven again in the book of Revelation? The book of Revelation is the great symphony that sums up all these things.

And by the way, why I'm presenting these various views is that I think there's a biblical basis for each of those views, and I think that's important to remember. But notice here again, thinking of the symphony, Pachelbel's Canon, the theme here is of a sweet, a precious sweet scroll. It's sweeter than honey, and we'll look at a parallel to that in a moment in the Psalms. And now look and see what happens. Verse 10:

And he said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says,' (in Hebrew, This is what Lord Yahweh

says, אָזְלֵנִי יְהוָה), whether they listen or fail to listen.” Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a loud rumbling sound—May the glory of the LORD be praised in his dwelling place!—the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them, a loud rumbling sound. The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went **in bitterness and in the anger** of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD upon me. (Ezekiel 3:10-14)

I want you to see something here, it is the ecstasy and the agony of preaching, it is the ecstasy and the agony of reading the Bible too, as we’ll see in a moment. I want you to see that this sweet scroll that is handed to Ezekiel to eat, which is sweet as honey in the honeycomb, also causes him great bitterness, great anger, anger at the people who name the name of God but whose hearts are far from him. And he says, if you look here, going back to verse 4, Ezekiel 3:4.

He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel—not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate. But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house.” (Ezekiel 3:4-9)

And those words to Ezekiel parallel very much the words given to Jeremiah, and as I was reading those words of Jeremiah back in 1966, in the fall of ‘66, I experienced a sense of call to the ministry (Jeremiah 1:17-19). I thought, “Oh my, they’ll fight against you, but they won’t win.” The agony and ecstasy, or the ecstasy and agony of preaching, which is the same as the ecstasy and the agony of reading the Bible.

Turn with me, if you will, back to Psalm 19. Psalm 19. In Psalm 19, we are looking at two books. Psalm 19, the very first part, we’re looking at the book

of nature, and let's turn there to page 858. And if you look at verse 1, he says.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4)

Do you know what this is saying to us? Only a condemned to hell fool can deny the existence of God. Have you ever thought about our public education in the wake of *Schempp v. Abington Township*? I worked in Abington Township in Pennsylvania. Abington Township had Bible reading in their public schools but as a result of *Schempp v. Abington Township* in 1962, the Supreme Court outlawed the reading of the Scriptures in public schools (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)).

You know, it's amazing. My mother was a first-grade teacher, and she also taught obstetrical nursing at Vanderbilt, but anyhow, she adjusted herself to whatever was going on in her children's lives, and in my mother's first-grade class, they memorized the Christmas story in the fall, in the first grade. And then in the second semester, they memorized the story of Easter. They memorized it in the public schools.

I first learned about salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, not from my church, which really did not articulate the gospel very well, but I learned it from my sixth-grade teacher who taught that all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). And so America once recognized God and recognized the Creator and recognized and acknowledged him by the Bible being read, but *Schempp v. Abington Township* in 1962 outlawed it. It took a decade for it finally to work through, but it did.

And of course, the following year (I mistakenly reversed the two cases), they outlawed the Regents' Prayer of New York State (*Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962)), which was a good prayer to outlaw because it was, under the influence of other people than Christians, a Christless prayer. And God does hear Christless prayers, but he doesn't promise to hear Christless prayers. I think that's important to say. God does hear Christless prayers under certain



circumstances, but he doesn't promise to hear Christless prayers. And so what can we say? We can say in light of Psalm 19, the evidence of God, the Creator, is all around us. Only a fool can look at creation and deny the existence of God.

Verse 4, "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." And then he goes on and he celebrates the sun and all of that.

Now I want you to see that in those first six verses, he's talking about the book of nature. He's talking about what we might call Natural Revelation. God has a book of nature.

Natural revelation tells us a lot of things, it tells us that there is a God, and because of the remnant of the image of God inside each and every human being on this earth, we know that that God is the true God, because we are still in his image, though it's a shattered and marred image, and you can read the last half of Romans 1 to verify that (Romans 1:18-32). So we have the book of nature here, Natural Law. In Natural Law, again referring to Romans 2, we know right from wrong (Romans 2:14-15).

Every single human being ever born on this planet knows there is a God, the true God, and because he has the remnant of God's nature in him, though a marred image, he knows right from wrong. He knows murder's wrong, but people harden their hearts, not only individually, but culturally. And he knows adultery's wrong, and people know that not only individually, but what happens is in the course of time as they suppress that, eventually enough people suppress it, the whole culture begins to embrace it. And guess where we are today? That's where we are. That's why the fool has said in his heart, there is no God.

But now notice something else. We go to verse 7 at page 858. "The law of the LORD is perfect."

Now we switch from the Book of Nature, Natural Law, Natural Revelation to Special Revelation, God's written word. And he says it's perfect. What does God's word do? It revives the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy. Makes wise the simple. Are you a simple person? I think about grandchildren that I pray for, some of whom are very simple, very foolish. How can a foolish, ignorant person become wise? And here's where it is. It makes wise the simple. Look at verse 8.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. (Psalm 19:8-9)

And so we look at God's word, the Bible, and we think of all those means that God uses to reveal himself supernaturally, and fundamentally they center in one book, and that book is the Bible. Everything is based on the Bible and all the things that grow out of it.

And so now notice we go here in verse 10.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

And you see here Pachelbel's Canon again taking that musical theme. Sweeter than honey. God's word is sweeter than honey. That theme is repeated in the longest chapter of the whole Bible, which is in the middle of the Bible, it's Psalm 119 (Psalm 119:103), which is an acrostic poem where each of the eight stanzas is headed by a particular Hebrew word, Hebrew letter.

The first eight with the letter Aleph (א), and then the letter Bet (ב), and then the letter Gimel (ג), and then Daleth (ד), and He (ה), and Vav (ו), and Chet (ז), and Tet (ח), and so on. So that's the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and right slap dab in the middle of it, God's word is sweeter than honey, the honeycomb.

Do you have bitterness in your heart today? Pick and read. Pick and read. Lift it up as Augustine heard the children singing across the wall, "*Tolle lege*. Pick it up and read it." And he did, and he opened it up and he found those words from Paul to the Romans, "But make no provision for the flesh, for the lust thereof, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 13:13-14) And that day, Augustine put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This book will sweeten your life. This book will give you joy. Are you down? Are you depressed? Are you discouraged? Turn off the idiot box in the morning. It won't do you any good. All it'll do is make you mad because after all, all of the mainline media are owned by a handful of corporations, and they all tell you what they want you to hear. Instead of the lies from the

television box, get something that's true and something that will sweeten your life, that will make your life sweet. What's the secret of happiness? The secret of happiness is when you wake up in the morning, "Praise the Lord!" When you go to bed at night, "Praise the Lord! Thank you, Lord. Thank you for another day of life." And go to bed at night, "Lord, thank you for another day where you were in our lives and guiding and directing us." Stick with the book.

So he says they're more precious than gold, than much fine gold, sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. But now remember, in the book of Revelation when the Apostle John takes that scroll and eats it, he has midnight reflux. You ever had midnight reflux? I had it last night. I had to wake poor Sandy up, and I said, "Where are your papaya pills?" Because I knew I could never find them. And she went and got them. I held my hand out in the dark, and I ate some and sat up for a bit. I didn't get up, but I elevated my head. Why? A sour stomach, there's nothing good about it. I mean, it's bad news, and you have to elevate yourself, and papaya does it. It's a natural thing, and it works pretty well. But so now, here you go.

Let's start in verse 11. The sour stomach, the midnight reflux, that's sweeter than honey, ends up not always sweeter than honey. In your stomach, it's bitter, that is, it's a sour, sour stomach. And he says in verse 11,

By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.  
(Psalm 19:11-13)

And what is this really saying? It's saying that this sweet and precious book will also give you midnight reflux. What do I mean? I mean that as you begin to eat the book, as you begin to absorb it, when it's so sweet and precious, it's delicious and delightful. What happens as you begin to digest it? Sometimes things begin to turn sour. And what is it about this book? What is it about preaching?

It is this: it points out our sins. And the first thing that it does is it convicts us of sin, and I want to say, I don't like being convicted of sin.

Recently I had to confront a minister for some terrible thing he said in a sermon. It was not easy to talk to him. I went up to him and I said, “Do you realize what you said and the effect of what you said and how you had no biblical basis to say that?”

And at first his reaction was highly defensive. See, it was still a sweet word. But when those words sank in, and he began to realize what he had done, he had midnight reflux. He was deeply troubled. He’s been troubled much of the week, deeply troubled for having said some outrageous thing that had nothing to do with the Bible.

Wow, have I ever done that? Oh, yes. I can identify with that dear brother because I’ve had things like that. I remember one sermon that I preached, and I went back to my office afterwards and I got down on my knees and I said, “Lord, I really told them. Am I a good and faithful servant?” Sandy came into my office, and I said, “What did you think?” And this is why I always ask her what she thinks afterwards because I learned I can’t trust myself. She said, “You came across as an arrogant and pompous young man.”

What? That’s midnight reflux. That’s a sweet word that turns into something bitter inside yourself. How do you get relief? Is there something better than Di-Gel and Maalox and papaya pills? Oh, yes. What’s better than that is to deal with it. The sooner you deal with it, the more quickly the relief comes.

And so you see here he says, verse 12, we can’t know our own hearts. Have you ever thought about, have you ever found yourself just as proud as a peacock and just thinking, “Mmm, mmm, mmm,” and only to discover the emperor has no clothes, and you see yourself as you really are? And that’s what God’s Word is designed to do: It’s designed to show us our hidden faults. And then it’s also designed in verse 13 to keep us from willful sins, may they not rule over me.

What’s the difference in a secret sin and a willful sin?

Here it is, secret sins are the sins you and I commit every day. Have you ever been praying and in the middle of your prayer you suddenly had resentment towards the person you’re praying for? That’s an amazing place. You’re on your face before God, “Lord, please have mercy,” and in the course of it, suddenly you remember something happened 13 and a half

years ago, and you're praying for the person, and suddenly you're just wallowing in it, you're reveling in it, and you've gone from sweet intercessions for someone in great need to bitterness in your heart as, like midnight reflux, it vomits itself up into your memory, that memory from 13 and a half years ago, and instead of wanting to pray, "Lord, bless him or bless her—Lord get him, get him, make them fall down." But you know, some people do pray those kinds of prayers. Now, it's legitimate to pray an imprecatory prayer against people who are standing against Christ, but you always pray those prayers, "Lord, please change their hearts first."

So, the secret sin is the sin that you can't see.

That dear brother who was so full of himself, didn't realize the damage he was doing—secret sin.

But now, what does he talk about in the next verse, verse 13? "Keep your servant also from willful sins."

What's a willful sin? "Lord, I know you don't approve of this, but I'm gonna do it anyhow." You ever done one of those? I have.

I promised God one time I wouldn't go into debt again, and I saw something, and I wanted it, and under the pressure and manipulation, I remembered to stay away from places that offer you an opportunity to buy something on impulse by signing on the dotted line. And then afterwards, the sweetness of riding off on that motorcycle—It was a Harley Davidson Electra Glide Ultra Classic—Suddenly became bitter.

Do you know that I actually got physically sick the next day and was not able to go to my presbytery meeting because I was physically sick? I did something deep down inside. What do I mean deep down inside? You know what deep down inside is. It's like conscience saying, "Now now—hush, hush." Those are willful sins, and willful sins are very, very destructive.

What happens when you yield to a willful sin, a deliberate sin? You know better. You will always regret it. Always, in the providence of God, the very thing that you just had to do, had to have, will always end up biting you like a serpent. "May they not rule over me" (Psalm 19:13). Where is power to change? We go back to it, the power to change is in the book. In the book.

And so I close with these thoughts, and the thoughts are the ecstasy and agony of preaching. What do I mean by the ecstasy and agony of preaching?

I mean preaching for me is a joy. I love coming here. You always express to me your gratitude. The trip is something, 400 miles round trip, but I have to tell you, I count it the greatest privilege to be able to preach. It's the meaning of my life. If I couldn't preach, I'd rather be dead. Very seriously: I'd rather be dead because that's what I was designed to be and to do.

It's a joyful thing to preach, but there's also sadness, because this is the trouble, and this is what Ezekiel sees, it's what Jeremiah saw, it's what John the Revelator experienced—the bitterness, because you realize that God's word is a two-edged sword, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, beginning at verse 13 (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

It's a two-edged sword. It draws the elect, and it's a sword that drives out the reprobate. Wow. Wow.

God's word that softens the heart that's repentant and strengthens it, also hardens the heart of those who say, "I don't want to hear that."

I know how to be a successful preacher, you only preach the honey, you never preach the things of judgment that cause people to experience midnight reflux.

Pray for me that I may always be willing to give you the sweeter than honey in the honeycomb word, but also willing for you to hate me because in the course of time, if you're one of God's own, while you may hate me now, you will come to love me because you've heard the Word of God from my mouth, and that Word is the word that you will cherish in eternity.

May we pray.

*Lord, would you bless this message as we look at this—in many ways—obscure book, and yet if we look at its themes that are themes taken from the whole Bible, Lord, it opens to us much practical information that helps us to have a steady walk with you. Oh, grant it be so this day, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*