

Sitting in the Big Chair

Hebrews

By Dr. Liam Goligher

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Bible Text: Hebrews 1:13-14; Psalm 110
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Tenth Presbyterian Church
1701 Delancey Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-6714

Website: www.tenth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tenth

Let's turn in our Bibles and I want you to turn to page 509 which is Psalm 110, and page 1,001 which is Hebrews 1. So two things for you to do. Go on, try it. We'll read the Hebrews passage first of all. We've only two verses to read so I'm not stretching you too much this morning. Then we'll read that passage in Psalm 110.

What's happening in Hebrews 1 is that we're being introduced to God and we're being introduced to God in relation to the Son, one who is the Son, and it's the Son that's in view in verse 13,

13 And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14 Are they not [the angels] all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Now you'll notice there's a quotation there. That quotation comes from Psalm 110 and that's on page 509.

1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." 2 The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.

So we'll stop there.

Psalm 110 is one of the most quoted Psalms in the New Testament. It's referenced at least 14 times and the book of Hebrews has been described by some scholars as a kind of extended exposition of verses 1 and 4 of Psalm 110, and our interest in it this morning is that at the end of this great catalog of Bible verses, if you're glancing at Hebrews 1, at the end of this great catalog of Bible verses, we should be brought to this quotation from Psalm 110, a Psalm that begins, as you will notice if you still have your finger in the space, with these words, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" And the issue, of course, is trying to understand

what David, who wrote the Psalm, is talking about, and in understanding what he's talking about, you and I might begin this morning to get our heads around what we are talking about when we talk about the Christian message.

So I want to pause at the beginning this morning and ask the question: how do we get to understand what is going on in this Psalm? And like the little boy in Sunday school who has been taught a Sunday school lesson and his Sunday school teacher said, "What is small, furry, with a great furry tail that jumps around the trees?" The little boy put his hand up and said, "Please, miss, Jesus." "No, no," said the teacher, "No, in fact, there was a squirrel." The little boy said, "I thought that too but I thought the answer had to be Jesus."

So in order for us to understand what's going on here, it's important to see it in its context and if we go back to Mark's Gospel, chapter 12, there you find Jesus. He's a good person to go to and ask him how does he understand, how did he read Psalm 110. Every Bible scholar should ask themselves, first of all, "If Jesus handled a text, that's probably the way I should handle it too." So when we go to Mark 12, we find the Lord Jesus is increasingly under pressure by the authorities. They are out to get him. They have been using every means they possibly can to trip him up in this or that and they have come to the conclusion that the best way to find him out, the best way to find an accusation against him, is to trip him up on his words.

There was one occasion in which Jesus gets in before them and you can read about it in Mark 12. As he's teaching in the temple we read in Mark 12:35, he said to them, he takes the initiative, "How can the scribes," that is the people who read the law and write it down and teach it to others, "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David when David himself, in the Holy Spirit," that is speaking by means of the Holy Spirit, declared," and he quotes Psalm 110 that David wrote, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. How can that be? If you're saying to me that David is the most important figure in the history of Israel and that David in that Psalm is only talking about himself or about some of his descendants, natural descendants, another Davidic king in the Davidic line, how can he call that king his Lord?" In other words, Jesus is presenting the scholars with a puzzle, a kind of interpretive conundrum for them to solve, the kind of thing scholars like doing. He's giving them that task and in giving them the task, he reminds them of some pertinent information. When David said those words, Jesus says, David was speaking by means of the Holy Spirit. He was in the Holy Spirit. In other words, he was speaking as a prophet and prophets in Bible language are those who are carried along by the Holy Spirit like a ship carried along by the current. In other words, they are not necessarily in control of everything that's going on, they're given a vision, they find themselves being given words that they haven't devised themselves and although the words themselves may be theirs, nonetheless the message of those words is coming from outside of themselves and David is speaking, says Jesus, as a prophet. And as a prophet, therefore, under the grip of the Spirit, David is talking about things in God time rather than our time and things in God time can take place long before or long after the point at which the prophet himself is doing the talking or the writing, and that in God time, this particular prophecy looks back

to the beginning of our time and forward to the time of Jesus and to the end of time, that is, the end of our time in God time. Okay?

So what does the Psalm teach? And Jesus is pointing them by he's already introduced himself really without using the words, as the Messiah, and he's saying, "This Psalm of David is about the Messiah but listen very carefully to what it says about the Messiah. It's teaching us," he says, "first of all, that we have a divine Messiah." That's the lesson the writer to the Hebrews is wanting to draw out in the context as we'll see in a moment. "The LORD said to my Lord." He uses two words there, both of them are used of the God of Israel. There is the word "Jehovah" and there's the word "Adonai." I'm using the word "Jehovah" in order to be respectful to Jews who feel uncomfortable using the divine name as you find it in the Hebrew text, and we translate that divine name by using uppercase letters, "The LORD." And one mistranslation of the past was this word "Jehovah," so I'm using the word "Jehovah" intentionally and not because I don't understand that that's not how you pronounce the letters, okay?

So the first word is "Jehovah," the second word is "Adonai." Adonai was the usual word that Jews used to avoid using the first word. That was their normal everyday word for the "Lord," rather than use the forbidden unpronounceable first name, God's covenant name. And yet in the Psalm, you can see, here are two names regularly used for the God of Israel and yet they are being used as if a conversation is taking place, "The LORD says to my Lord." Both have divine names and yet there is communication going on. They are distinguishable from one another.

Now, that leaves us with a big conundrum because when you look at the Bible as one big whole, you discover that for about 2,000 years from Abraham's time to Jesus' time, God has been dealing with these people, the Jews, one way or another he's been dealing with Israel, he's been teaching them over and over again this one principle that he has been hammering into their skulls in a whole variety of ways and it's this: the Lord our God is one. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD your God, the LORD is one."

There are not many gods but only one God and Israel learned this the hard way. When they were in Egypt, they had begun to play around with the Egyptian gods and Moses comes along and he brings down judgment upon the Egyptian gods, demonstrating that the Lord and the Lord alone is God. That's what all those plagues were about, systematically going through the major gods of the Egyptians. He destroyed them as he went along. Then in the desert, in the desert when their hearts regularly started as a default setting to go back again and again and again to idolatry, he sends judgment on them. He wipes out vast numbers of them. At one point while the law has been given on Sinai and Moses is up in the cloud in Sinai, they are down below partying and they're creating a golden calf because they want the calf to represent the God of Israel and worship it instead or worship the God of Israel using the calf instead. And God is through that whole period drumming it into their heads through the prophets again and again and again, "There is only one God." One God. And yet even in that same revelation, there is something uncomfortable like this thing that we are seeing here. "The LORD says to my Lord."

And you notice that the theme of chapter 1 of Hebrews is about God coming and speaking to us by one who is Son, and it's the Son that is in the mind of the author. He mentions him in verse 8. Everything else hangs on that. Of the Son, he says, hangs on that but where did he get that? In Psalm 110. Simon G. who teaches at Cambridge University points out that verse 3 of Psalm 110 in the Greek translation reads like this, "With you is the sovereign authority on the day of your power, in the midst of the bright splendors of the holy ones, from the womb, before the dawn bearing morning star appeared, I, the Lord, begot you, the Lord." In other words, the Greek translation favored by Jesus and the early church for its accuracy says that before the dawn of time, before creation itself, the Son was begotten, not created, of the Father, and that even his human arrival from the womb would take place in an unusual fashion. In fact, we would learn from Isaiah that he would be born from the womb of a virgin.

So what you have then in this is this statement that this one, this second Lord, is begotten of the first Lord. And we go back to chapter 2 of the Psalms where it says there that in the past, in eternity, God says to his Son, "Today I have begotten you." The Son is begotten, not made. He's not a creature but he's always been the Son of the Father. God has always been the Father, the Son has always been the Son, and that from eternity, and both together with the Spirit form the identity of the one God of Israel. That's what we've been learning and it's really hard to get your head around it, but it's at least good to know that that's what you are to say if you're asked the question.

But Jesus himself takes this language up there in Mark 12 and then later at the end of Mark, he uses the language again and he combines the second Lord of Psalm 110 with another figure that we discover in Daniel 7, a figure who is called the Son of Man, that is, a human figure, who comes to the Ancient of Days, the divine figure, and to him is given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away. Jesus brings those two passages together when he's on trial for his life and the high priest asks him the question, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power coming with the clouds of heaven." There he brings together Psalm 110, Daniel 7, and he makes clear that he is claiming to be Israel's Lord and Israel's Messiah, the heavenly Son of Man, and the exalted Son of God. And in doing so, he expresses his own real pre-existence. David in that revelation is given an insight into what is going on within the eternal purposes of God.

We have a divine Messiah and he's been spelling this out in these references. In fact, if you look at the passage, you'll see in Hebrews 1 these various quotations. "You are my Son. Today I have begotten you." Verse 6, "Let all the angels worship him." In verse 10, "You, Lord, laid the foundations of the earth. Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." We have a divine Messiah. But the second thing we learn is that we have a kingly Messiah, a royal Messiah. Jesus goes on to indicate that he read this Psalm as applying to himself and as describing the most high God and himself as divine persons having a conversation, say at some time before the dawn of time, in

God time, within the drama of redemption, and God the Father says to God the Son, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Now this was an amazing thing and it raises a number of questions and we'll look at those in a moment but look at the way in which this language is actually worked out in the church. To sit at God's right hand was an honor higher than that afforded to angels or men. Coming at this from the understanding of the Old Testament, it was unthinkable even by metaphor to describe a mortal sitting on God's throne at his right hand as his equal. And yet Peter on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit comes, after the resurrection, says that these very words are appropriate not for David, not for David or any earthly king who had come from David's loins, but only of the Messiah and he begins to talk about this Jesus. "This Jesus, God raised up. Of that we are all witnesses," he says. "Being exalted at the right hand of God, having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing because David did not ascend to heaven but David himself says," quoting, "The LORD said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" And then Peter wraps up his sermon like this, "Let all the house of Israel know therefore for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." God has made this Jesus both Lord and Messiah. This Jesus whom you have crucified.

When Jesus sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, what is he doing? He's exercising rule over the universe. In Christian thought we talk about his resurrection from the dead, then his ascension up into the heavenly realm, as opposed to the creaturely realm, the heavenly realm. We talk about his session, that is, his sitting down on the throne of God and from there reigning and ruling history and the world and the church. That's why we said in the creed earlier that he sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Jim Packer says this about Jesus' present role in glory. He says, "The New Testament pictures Jesus' heavenly activity as sitting on the right hand of his Father not to rest but to rule. The picture is not of inactivity but of authority. In Psalm 110, God sets his Messiah at his right hand as King, as King to see all his enemies under his feet." He goes on to say this, that in Scripture we discover that Christ rules over all the spheres of authority that exist. In God, among the angels, among human beings, his kingdom in a direct sense is the church of which he is the head and the rightful King. He governs by his word and by his Spirit and he rules the world for the sake of his church. Everything he does has the one who has been exalted to the Father's right hand, he does for the sake of the church. He raises up Presidents and casts them down. He raises up kings and casts them down. He raises up nations and empires and he casts them down. He moves things around in order for the sake of his church. He rules history. That's what the book of Revelation teaches, that he's ruling everything, history and the nations, for the good of his church and Christ is going to do that until his enemies are put under his feet. We have a royal Messiah.

Now here in the text there is a little problem. I like to find these little problems in the text and it's very obvious if you look at Hebrews 1 and I want you to contrast verse 8 with

verse 13. You look at verse 8, we looked at this earlier, it's another one of those places where there is a conversation, this time from a Psalm in which you have God being spoken to about what God has done. "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of your uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom, therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." Now we saw that that reference has reference to Jesus' reign and rule and monarchy as God, as God, the Son of God, has always shared the throne of God because he's God. There aren't bits of God, there aren't greater bits and lesser bits, there is only God. He is one being with one will, one mind, one power, one rule, one authority, and he is Father, Son and Spirit. That's the only distinguishing mark: one is the Father, one is the Son and one is called the Holy Spirit but there is only one God who reigns over all.

And that's what that is referring to. "Your throne, O God," Jesus is included in the "O God," and if that isn't clear enough, verse 10 quotes a Psalm talking about the creation of the world addressed to the Lord and says that is Jesus that is in view. As God the Lord, Father, Son and Spirit act as one in the creation of the world and in the redemption of the world.

So why then if Jesus as the Son of God has always had, as he tells us at the end of Matthew's Gospel, all authority in heaven and earth, in heaven, that's God's place, and earth, that's our place, why does it say in this Psalm that, "The LORD says to our Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I've made your enemies a footstool under your feet'"? What's going on there? Well, I can leave the question and then go home and leave somebody else to say amen, but I guess you're expecting me to help us work out the conundrum so let me just refer for a moment to Isaiah. You all remember Isaiah. Some of you wish you didn't but we were looking at that some time ago. And in Isaiah, the holy prophet prophesies about the coming of a future figure. He's called various things: a righteous branch because he's from the line of David; the son, to us a son is born, to us a child is born, a son is given; he is called the servant; he is called the Christ, the anointed one. And he's going to come in the latter days and when he comes, Isaiah 40 says he's going to bring comfort and joy, he's going to bring the forgiveness of sins, he's going to pardon iniquity. His way is going to be prepared by a figure who will cry out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the LORD," that's the Jehovah word. "Make straight a highway for our Elohim, our God. And when he comes, the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed."

So there is one coming, the Lord is coming. The Lord is going to break into history. God is going to come and visit with his people and when he comes, he will be the righteous branch, that is, he's going to be descended from David. How does that work out? How does that figure? And he's going to bring righteousness because he is righteous. He will judge with righteousness. He will impute righteousness to other people. And he will bring peace to those people. That's what he will do when he comes.

And as you read from Isaiah 40, suddenly it transitions from the Lord is coming to the servant is coming. And as you begin to read Isaiah 40 to the end and read it very carefully, you find that there are conversations going back and forth referring to the Lord and referring to the servant and then the servant speaks and it breaks into the Lord

speaking and back to the servant, and sometimes you don't know whether it's the servant or the Lord because they are saying the same things and there is this real fusing going on between the servant who is the human being who is coming as the Christ, and the Lord who has created everything and who says, "There is no God besides me and I won't give my glory to anybody else. But when this one comes, my glory will come."

And that stuff is going on over and over and over again. In Isaiah 45, it's the servant who says, "There is no God besides me, a righteous God and Savior. There is none besides me." And he goes on to say as if talking about someone else, "In Jehovah all the offspring of Israel shall be justified in glory." In Isaiah 52 we have a statement very like this one here where God says, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool." We're told there the servant will be lifted high and shall be exalted, and if you've read Isaiah, you know that you've seen those words before and you go back to where you saw them, back in chapter 6, and in chapter 6 Isaiah had a vision. He saw the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of Hosts, and he tells us this, "I saw the Lord high and lifted up and exalted," the very same language.

So who did Isaiah see? John tells us in John 12: Isaiah saw Jesus' glory. Because one of the things the New Testament tells you is this: that when you read the Old Testament and you see the word "God" or "Lord," it's talking about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It's talking about one God who in the New Testament is introduced to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And all that you can say about one, you say about the others, and you say of them together. There is only one God, not three Gods. They're all God together. One God, they are each God. The Son is God. The Father is God. The Spirit is God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not Gods, they're God, one God. That's the math of salvation.

John 12 says that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory so why does it say then in chapter 52 that he will be made high and exalted and lifted up? Just as here in Hebrews 1, why does it say his throne is forever and ever and then say that God will give him a throne and sit him at his right hand and put his enemies under his feet? What has happened between these two points? And the answer, the answer is that before the second exaltation, something very dramatic has happened. The Lord God of Isaiah who is coming, according to John the Baptist, has humbled himself and become the servant of the Lord. In Philippians 2, the one who is by very nature God and equal with God, humbles himself by taking the form of a servant and being found in fashion as a man.

Here in Hebrews 1, each one of these Bible references that are given supports the thesis statement right at the very beginning of this chapter. What has happened? God has spoken in these last days by one who is the Son. Look at verse 5: you are my Son. Today I have begotten you. I will be to him a Father, he shall be to me a Son. He is the firstborn. He is by very nature God. He is the heir of all things, it says. He is the heir of all things, that means that everything in God and everything in relation to God belong to him.

So God is worshiped, verse 6, "Let all the angels worship him." God reigns over all, so of the Son, it says in verse 8, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." God made the

universe so it says in verse 10, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning." He is heir of everything. Everything that God is, everything in relation to God, belongs to him and belongs to him alone. The heir of all things through whom he created the world.

And because is identified, he's the heir of everything, God is, you can say this in verse 3, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," and what you can say of God, you can say of him. Therefore it says in verse 10, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth." Is God the Maker? He's the Maker. Is God immortal? He is immortal. They will perish, you remain. Is God unchanging? He is unchanging, you are the same. Is God eternal? He's eternal, your years will have no end.

What has happened, then, before we get to verse 13? Look at thesis statement. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Why does the LORD say to the Lord, "Sit"? Because the Lord to whom the LORD is speaking is the Lord who for us and our salvation humbled himself, took on our humanity, got under our skin, came into our world, for our salvation. Isaiah spells it out for us. The one whom Isaiah saw in the temple, the Lord God Almighty, has humbled himself to become a servant and as a servant is despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all and he will justify many. Or Zechariah 13, pierced through for our transgressions. In other words, Psalm 110 is giving us an insight into that eternal covenant by which the Trinity agrees in a plan of salvation and disperses the missions involved in carrying out that plan between the Son who will become Incarnate by the virgin Mary, in order that in his human flesh he may be the Savior we need, and the Holy Spirit who will make himself available to cast the highlight, the searchlight upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

What happens? In other words, between verse 8 and verse 13, is that the eternal Son becomes the earthly Christ. The Word who was with God becomes flesh. The rich becomes poor. God becomes the God-man, the man Christ Jesus. And you can see that in the word "enemies" there, the word "enemies" in verse 13. Though there is resistance to God's rule in the world and God's reign over the world, you need to understand that God as God feels no resistance. People may, in their little way, feel as if they are resisting him, casting off restraint. In the language of Psalm 2, the nations of the world plan together and devise schemes together against the Lord and against his anointed, that is, his Messiah. They strive to thumb their little nose at God but in the end God feels no resistance. God is not affected. He is without body parts or passions.

He is not affected by what we choose to do in our little world, in our creaturely existence. He reigns over all of that. He is immutable and unchangeable. But when God takes on our human flesh, he is exposed to the enmity of the world. In our humanity, God-man Christ Jesus, he feels the enmity of humanity. He comes to his own place and his own people did not receive him. He comes into his own world that he has made and he is the object of their hostility. That's what Psalm 2 predicted. The nations conspire together against the Lord and against his anointed, that is, his Christ, saying, "Let us cast off their bands and the chains."

That is precisely the very heart of that essential, fundamental, basic, human instinct that when it comes to this man, Christ Jesus, we think of him differently than we think about Mohammed or Aristotle or Confucius or the Buddha or any other philosopher or figure in the world. We think differently of this man Christ Jesus. We have within our nature an hostility and a resistance to the man Christ Jesus. His name becomes a swear word because we, frankly, don't want anything to do with this man Christ Jesus. In his humanity, he feels the enmity of the world against him. He feels the hostility even of his own law that he gave, his own law given to direct us into a way of life that would bring us joy and happiness and peace. He comes under the law and he has to obey the law as law and where that law slays us, he obeyed that law in our place and for us.

We struggle with not only the law being against us, condemning us, we struggle with sin in our own nature and sin in our own nature is not only a distance between us and God but a hostility to God. And there is the devil, Satan, who is a liar, a dispenser of wrong ideas, wrong philosophies, wrong religions, constantly trying to play with our minds. Our minds because we are fallen by the way are not a clean slate. Our reason is not unaffected by the fall. The way we think, even, is affected by the fall and Satan plays upon that. He is a liar and he is the adversary of God's people. He will get you against yourself. He will get others against you. He will turn the world against you. Every lie, every misrepresentation, every bit of political scheming and skulduggery aimed at the church of God comes from the father of lies.

The world, the organized spirit of antichrist, just a mass of humanity together, they generate. What do they generate? They generate temptation. The world is a place of temptation for the believer, for everybody. It's against us. Sometimes it manifests itself more directly in terms of persecution but all the time it is a place of temptation and danger for the child of God. It was for the Lord Jesus. And then the enemy of death itself, the last enemy to be overcome.

And in his humiliation, in his humanity, our Lord Jesus lived under the law, he lived among sinners, he was assaulted by Satan, the world ganged together against him to put him to death and he died and yet he emerged triumphant. Why? Because the Lord God had said to him, "My Son, when you have done all that, you will raise with you this humanity that you are taking and you will sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." In other words, this leads us into the whole business of what Jesus Christ came into the world to do. In chapter 2, the writer will take us deeper into that mystery in which the one who was above the angels makes himself a little lower than the angels for a short time in order that he might be crowned with glory and honor for his obedience. That's the route that our Savior took. He did this for you and me. That's the great big story of salvation and the one who made the world, the one who wrote the story, writes himself into the story and appears in the play and he plays the man and he does the work necessary to bring us to God.

Now it should be the most enormous encouragement to us this morning that all our enemies who are also our Mediator, Christ's enemies, are one day going to be put under

his feet. They will all be crushed in the end. The language is reminiscent of the promise made to Eve back there in Genesis when God promises her that she will have a seed, a male seed, and that he will crush the serpent under his feet. The same words are used of Christians in Romans 16, God will soon crush Satan under your feet shortly. All our enemies whether they come from the law that sways us, sin that still remains within us, Satan who is our enemy around us, the world organized as the spirit of antichrist, and death itself, none of these enemies will undo you. None of these enemies will destroy you because you are in Christ Jesus, your great God and Savior.

Let's pray together.

We pray this morning, Lord, that you would so blow our minds by your grace, so bow our spirits before you by your sheer power, so bless our hearts by your word, that we would go into the world and go out tomorrow morning to work wherever place of life or work may be, strengthened to know that the things that are going to bombard us and attack us and come at us from different quarters this week, in the end these things will be crushed under Jesus' feet and our feet. We pray that you would give us the strength to persevere and to follow him whom you have highly exalted, in his humanity, that he has taken that humanity with him into the throne of God and that the man Christ Jesus rules everything now from a human perspective as well as a divine perspective. We pray that we would understand what that means for us that he sympathizes with us, that he knows us, and that he loves us, and that he is our great destination towards which we move. We pray you would comfort our hearts with your word, we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.