

# The Essence of All That's Wrong

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let me now invite Kelly to read to us from Genesis chapter 3, verses 1 to 7. Thanks, Kelly. Neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Kelly read for us from the very famous story of the Garden of Eden when we read here about a talking serpent. And in the New Testament, in the book of Revelation, John the Apostle tells us that this serpent is Satan who came to deceive humanity in the very beginning.

Now, this is a very famous story, and for Christianity, for Christians, we believe it's the explanation of everything that's wrong in the world today. It comes from right here.

[ 1 : 37 ] And sometimes people will come to the Garden of Eden story, and they will see a talking serpent and a garden and two trees. And that the world was broken by eating fruit from a tree.

And they'll say, as modern people, what? A talking animal? These trees, this feels arbitrary. This feels like a legend. It feels like a myth. And so I just want to say, hold on on that and press pause and come back next week.

Because next week I will talk about the serpent and the garden and the two trees a little bit more and why you can trust this. So come back next week for that. Today, I want to begin this series for a month in Genesis 3 by focusing on the main point of Genesis 3, 1-7.

And that's to tell us what happened to us, what's wrong with us, why we as human beings are broken. And that's really the big idea here.

So let's think about that this week. Edgar Allan Poe wrote a series of detective stories in the 19th century about a detective called Detective Dupont, a Parisian, French detective.

[ 2 : 47 ] And in one of the stories, there's a letter stolen from the queen's bedroom. And the police think they know who did it. And they go to the man's house.

And they ransack his house. And they cannot find the letter anywhere. And so they bring in famous Detective Dupont. And as soon as he walks in the room, he sees at the entryway a rack of cards where the man kept his mail.

And right there at the very front of the rack of cards, on the top of the mail stack, is the queen's letter. And he turns and he says to them, it was hidden from you in plain sight.

That's where we get that famous phrase. And when it comes to the world, Simon was just praying about this, we look around and we say, what is the reason, what is the cause for why we cannot fix our society?

Why can we not stop the next war from starting? Why can we not stop the string of abuses that we're always discovering? Why can we not stop the corruption in governments and businesses and corporate entities?

[ 3 : 54 ] Why can we not fix our relationships and our families? And we're always asking questions like that. And I think the answer is hidden in plain sight.

And you can look today and say, it's me. It's my heart. That's why we can't fix it. It's us. It's humanity. It's hidden in plain sight. It's always been visible that no matter how good our technology becomes, no matter how much education we give to people, we can't stop these basic problems.

And it's right here. It's in the human heart. And this is what Christians call sin. And so people today will say, they'll look at sin, a word like that, and some people will be romantic about the concept of sin.

You know, they'll say sin is just that nice little indulgence, the idea in the modern world that sometimes it's good to be a little bad. And most people on the flip side, I think, in a modern city, in our city like Edinburgh, will say this concept of sin, the Christian concept, it's puritanical, intolerant, narrow position of traditionalism.

Right? And actually, all the Bible means by it is that this is the word that just describes the fact that we are not who we're supposed to be, that we're broken from the inside out, that we're not the people God made us to be.

[ 5 : 13 ] That's all it means. We miss the mark. We have self-centeredness instead of Godwardness. And so that's what this chapter is about. What broke the world?

And the first answer we're given is, it's us. It's us. And so let's think about that this morning. And here's my thesis for you. I think it's fair to say, according to the Bible, that you cannot really know yourself, and you cannot really understand what's going on in the world, what's wrong with the world, until you've captured this, that the problem is here.

In each one of our hearts. And so, here's what happens. How did the world break in four movements it broke? With an attitude, a manipulation, a temptation, and an exchange.

All right, so let's think about those four movements. First, an attitude. If you look at verse 1, you'll see the serpent's more crafty, the King James says subtle, either word, subtle, than any other beast of the field.

And so he says to the woman, did God actually say, or did God really say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? So let me say that in a slightly different way.

[ 6 : 23 ] You could read it like this. The serpent is asking, did God really say that you cannot eat of all the trees? And so the serpent is not telling a lie here. He's telling the truth.

Did God really say that you can't eat of all the trees? And the answer is yes. He did say you cannot eat of all the trees. There is one tree you cannot eat of. And so he's not saying a lie at first, not at all.

What he's doing is he's telling the truth, but he's repositioning. And what I mean by that is he's making the truth seem ridiculous. So he adds one little word.

Did he really say you can't eat of all the trees? Did he really say that there's one tree you're not allowed to eat from? And you see the subtlety of the beginning of what's wrong with the world. The subtlety is it's attitude. It's an attitude. It's snarkiness. Did God really, did he really do that? And it's the same way that you might sit around the water cooler at work and your boss comes to a group of people and maybe the team didn't quite get the job done exactly right.

[ 7 : 30 ] And the boss says, can you guys go and fix this? Can you guys go and take care of the business that you were supposed to take care of? And the boss comes and he has every power and every right to do that if he does it with respect, right?

But as soon as he walks away, somebody in the group inevitably does what? Did he really just come and say that to us? You know, immediately it's snark. It's an attitude.

And what has happened in that, you see what the sin is? It's repositioning. And here's the reposition. Is that when, as soon as Satan takes Eve's heart and gets her to snark at God like he does, she has placed herself as the judge over God.

God is the one who gave the rules, but now, did he really say that? Now, I'm now the judge over the person who said it to me. The person who said it to me was seeking to tell me what to do, but now, if I snark at them, I've become the power.

I've become the judge in the situation. I've inverted that pyramid. And in other words, he's trying to get her through this word, actually, really, to say, did the creator of the universe actually just tell me what to do?

[ 8 : 41 ] Did he really just do that? Richard Dawkins, a very famous atheist of our lifetime, in one of his books, he writes this, The unhealthy preoccupation of early Christian theologians with sin.

That's the headline. They could have devoted their pages and their sermons to extolling the sky splashed with stars or mountains and green forest seas and the dawn choruses.

These are occasionally mentioned, but the Christian focus seems to overwhelmingly be sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin. What a nasty little preoccupation to have always dominating your life.

Now, the irony of what Dawkins writes here is he says, the one immoral thing, the one sin that must never exist is to actually believe in sin. So he believes in sin in order to condemn sin.

He thinks there is something immoral, and that's you actually believing in sin. Right? But you see, if you read this paragraph, if you read his books, one of the things you realize is these are not arguments. These are not arguments against God.

[ 9 : 47 ] This is not, here's the ten reasons the cosmological argument doesn't work. No, not at all. What is this? It's attitude. It's snark. And, you know, I don't want to point out Dawkins here, though it's very apparent with him, but it's in all of us.

The attitude is in all of us. Our problem is not arguments. Our problem is our attitude. Snark at God. Did God really say? And most of the time we see that come out in our relationships, in the way we treat other people, in the way that we say to other people in our lives, probably the people we love most, did you really just say that to me?

Snark. Attitude. It's the beginning of all that's wrong with the world. And so what's happening here is a pyramid. If you think of a pyramid, you know, traditional pyramid, triangle, God, the maker, the creator is at the top, and all of us creatures are at the bottom.

But as soon as Satan says, did he really? What has happened? Eve's heart, Adam's heart, who was right there with her, has started to invert the pyramid and put ourselves, put me at the top and put God at the bottom like a creature.

I am now, I have now become his judge. Now, sometimes the theologians, they'll say this, the commentators, they'll say, what is this posture? What is this attitude in one word? And I think in one word you could say it like this, it is ingratitude.

[ 11 : 09 ] So it's the attitude that begins to say, God the maker is not actually good. God the maker, he's, you know, did he really, he's withholding something from me.

What is he withholding? That's the beginning of all sin, an attitude. Now, secondly, and we can do the next two very quickly, because they're really just the development of the attitude.

And secondly, it's manipulation. So if you look down at verse three, you can see what happens. Verse two and three, the woman says to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die.

Now, what's happening here is we see very subtly, and you've got to pay close attention to see this, but the snark, the attitude is starting to grip hold of Eve's heart. And the way you know that is because of a very common practice maybe you've experienced.

I've never experienced this. You'll know why I'm joking in a second, but have you ever been in the kitchen, in an argument with your beloved, or your friend, or your sibling, your partner of any kind, and you know that you have an argument.

[ 12 : 21 ] But what you do is you add one or two clauses to the argument, one or two words, just to twist the truth slightly to guarantee victory in this argument, right?

You say, you know, you don't just say, you did this, you say, you always do this, right? I don't know if you've had that experience, but Eve here does exactly that.

We know that something's going on because if you notice closely, what does she say? She said, yeah, he did give us a command. And he said, you may not eat of it, but she adds a little clause in verse three.

And the little clause is, you may not touch it. And if you go back to chapter two, you will find that nowhere did God ever say that. And so what she's doing is she's manipulating the truth.

And Adam is right there alongside her, letting it happen all the way. And she's twisting it. And you see that something has gotten a hold of the heart. And she's starting to manipulate the truth a little bit.

[ 13 : 22 ] And the attitude of ingratitude has become a twisting of what God actually said. And two great mistakes here happen at the same time. One, the beginning of world history, the beginning, the first moment in all of world history where people tend to start thinking the real God is a God of rules, rules, rules, rules, rules starts in that moment.

That God is not a God of love. That God does not love me. That God is not out for my good. God is just out to tell me what to do and to control me and to keep me away from things.

And he's withholding something from me. And there it is, the twist, the turn, the manipulation of language. He always does this. Doesn't he always tell me just to control, to take away my

freedoms?

And you see it happening right here. And it's Satan saying to her, God is a, you know, he's saying, he's implanting a seed in the lives of the first humans that said God is a cosmic killjoy.

And you need to know that. You need to believe that. And that is exactly what's taking place here. In J.R.R. Tolkien's series, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Middle Earth*, one of the great characters, the most important character maybe, is the ring, right?

[14:31] And what is the ring? What happens, the ring of power in his stories, the ring of power, when it's placed upon the finger, we're told by Tolkien in the books that it takes over the heart and slowly corrupts.

And one of the interesting things in the books is that Frodo, the lead character, the protagonist, he is able, unlike almost everyone, in a surprising way, to stand against the corrupting power of the ring for longer, though it will get him eventually.

And you see, the snark, the attitude, did he really just say that? Was the first moment in human history where Satan slid that ring on the finger of humanity. And then the twisting of the language, the manipulation of what God actually said, is the unfolding of the corrupting power.

That now the heart is beginning to corrupt. It's changing. There's a transformation taking place. And we see that even in the subtlety of her language. And so that leads, thirdly, to the objective temptation.

So if you look down at verse four and five, but the serpent turns and he says to her, you will not surely die. God had said, if you disobey, you'll choose death, not life.

[15:39] But he says, you won't actually die. God knows that if you eat of it, your eyes will be open and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil. So here, an objective external temptation comes in through his words.

You will be like God, knowing good and evil. Now, the essence of the fall, let me bring it to a head and say, here's the essence of all that's wrong, our title today. The essence of all that's wrong is the belief in the heart that I, we cannot trust God.

That he is not good and that he does not want our good. That's really what took place here in this moment. And again, it's not an argument. It's not, what's wrong with our hearts, it's not that we've been convinced that the problem of evil and the cosmological argument doesn't work and that all the arguments out there intellectually don't work and so we don't believe in God.

The issue, that is not the issue. The issue with all of us, disbelief in God, our unbelief, the issue is attitude that says, I cannot trust him. That's the real issue at the heart.

And so what Satan does is he says to her, he says to her, it's not just that, it's not just that you will be like God. He says, you will be like God, but it's not just that you'll be like God knowing good and evil.

[16:53] What is he tempting her with? What is he asking her to believe? And this is it. He is saying to her, it's not just that you will be like God, but you will be God-like. You know, when Satan said, look, if you disobey, if you reach out and you take and you eat, what should Eve have said in that moment to him when he said, you will be like God, she could have said, I already am like God.

God made me in his image. He gave me harmony and peace in a garden and a home and a life of joy and righteousness and glory. I'm like God as much as I can be. But what he's saying is not, you will be like God, but if you eat, you will become God-like.

And so he says, there is one thing God does not want you to know, and that's that if you will just reach out, you will eat. You will be like him knowing good and evil. And so this language of knowing good and evil is tricky for us as modern people, but this is actually just a Hebrew euphemism, and it's a Hebrew euphemism for wisdom.

So we say, like God, knowing good and evil, what exactly does that mean? It just simply means you will have the wisdom, the status of God. You'll have the mind of God. You'll have the divinity of God. You will be like God and being able to know as much as God knows. In other words, he's saying the very secret that he's holding from you is that he doesn't want you to know that if you eat, you will be equal to or greater than him.

[18:11] You will be God. You will be able to define yourself, your own life, your own way. You'll be able to say, it's my choice who I'm going to be. It's expressive individualism of the ancient world.

That was the real temptation.

And Adam, Eve, both in this moment begin to believe God is not a giver of gifts. He is hiding the truth from me. He is power hungry. I've got to take things into my own hands. I've got to define who I'm going to be with my own life. And so the exchange. In verse 6, Eve, fourthly the exchange. She saw that the tree, notice the sight verbs, she sees the tree is good for food.

She sees that it's a delight, a delight to her eyes, that the tree was desired to make one wise, to achieve this goal of divinity, of divine status. So she takes and she eats and she gives some to Adam as well who was with her all the way.

Now, when it says that she saw that it was good, you've heard that language before if you've read the Bible so far. In Genesis 1, seven times, it says that God made something and then what? [19:14] He saw that it was good. And now she looks out at the tree and she saw that it was good. What's happening? Moses, the writer, is taking the language of creation and trying to show you Eve in this moment believes that she's becoming a creator.

She saw that it was good just like God saw that His creation was good. She sees this really can make me my own person. I can be a creator. I can be like God. I can take divinity into my life. And so this great reversal takes place. We could call it an exchange takes place where in this moment, Adam and Eve choose not to be creatures. They seek to be the creator.

And in that moment, the total undoing of all of humanity takes place. Everything is broken. You might look at this today and say, what in the world is wrong with picking fruit from a tree?

It feels incredibly arbitrary. Why would God say, don't eat of a tree or you're going to break the whole world? And I'll say a little bit more about this next week. Let me just say this now.

[20:17] These two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, this tree of wisdom, they're there as a choice. We might call them with a little lowercase s like sacraments, signs, symbols, true historical realities, physical entities pointing to something bigger and greater beyond themselves.

And what is that that they're signaling? What are they signing? And it's simply this. Look, you come to a passage like this and you read through it and you say, there is so much mystery here. There's so much I don't know. There's so much I don't understand. Yes, you've got to just take what you're given.

And when you take what you're given, what are you being asked in the tree? Not don't eat of the tree. What are they being asked? In the infancy of humanity, in the youth of humanity, the earliest days, they're simply being asked to say, I trust you.

I don't know exactly what the trees are all about and we still don't. There's a lot of mystery here. But what they're simply being asked is to say, I believe God made me and I believe he's good and I trust him.

And instead, they chose to be the creator instead of the creature. And they exchanged all that's good with all that's wrong. And in this moment, they broke the world. And so we could say that the fall, the fall, that's what we call this moment, is pride that leads to ingratitude, that leads to an exchange of creator-creature relations where we said, I don't want to be the image of God, I want to be God.

[21:43] I want to be God. Friedrich Nietzsche, famous atheist of the 19th century, he wrote a book called Thus Spoke Zarathustra. And in it, one of the characters, Zarathustra, who it's about, he has, boy, a compelling moment.

He says this, But to reveal my heart to you, friends, if there is a God, how could I stand not to be God? Therefore, there is no God.

You see, it's not argument, it's attitude. Did you hear, he says this, But to reveal my heart to you, my friends, Zarathustra says, if there is a God, how in the world could I stand not to be?

Therefore, there is no God. And all the arguments, I think, that are out there are from a place where we actually all believe in God, but our attitude is preventing us from seeing it.

The snark. It's at the bottom of who we are. And when we say, I don't know that God exists, I think science has replaced God. That's not an argument, it's an attitude.

[22:51] It's a position. It begins with an attitude. When we say, every time we say, the pleasure of giving in to all my lust is okay, what's going on in that moment?

It's an attitude of unbelief. It says, I don't think that God's way can actually fulfill me, and so I'm going to take it into my own hands. Every time, boy, this one, I heard somebody say this one

recently, it came close to me.

Every time we struggle with anxiety and worry and we constantly think things aren't going well, what if things don't go well, what are we doing? We're saying, boy, every time I say, I've got a plan for success in this local church here, St. Columba's, and it's not going exactly the way I've mapped out, what am I saying?

I'm saying, I don't know that God is going to get this right. As I heard a pastor say recently, you know, I better take it into my hands, and that is the attitude of the garden, the snark.

I do not trust him. I'm not willing to believe, to trust that God has my best interests at heart. And so there's an exchange of truth for who we are, made to be created, dependent, trusting the good God for saying, I want to define who I am, I want to be my own God.

[ 24 : 08 ] Boy, let me reveal my heart to you. Zarathustra said, is this you? He said, my heart is, if there is a God, then that means I'm not him, and boy, that means there is no God.

What can we do? The solution. We've got three more weeks to really dig into the depth of what this means, the consequences, the hope that's going to come later in Genesis chapter 3.

And to think really deeply about it, but let me finish today with this. What can be done? What is the solution? Is there hope? For this situation, Adam and Eve in the garden exchanged the harmony, the peace, the home that we were made for for something far lesser.

For this broken world that we now live in, for self-centeredness as a pattern of life, for the fact that because we all have this attitude deep down in our hearts against God, we all pretend we're all gods, and so we're in a constant state of anger and discord and war and argument with people all the time all around us.

This is the exchange that took place in the beginning of human history. Can we fix it? Can we fix it? And people have come along and said, here's what we can do.

[ 25 : 22 ] In the 18th century, we said, if we can just create better societies fraternity, brotherhood and sisterhood, if we can give better measures of equality in every way across the board, if our educational work increases and we really educate people, then we can reach a society where we see these problems of self-centeredness and brokenness and corruption, they'll all go away.

And so Karl Marx came along and said, you know, if we get rid of classes, if we have a classless society, then that will finally be the thing that will turn it around. And just before him, a guy named Rousseau, he said that, you know, the issue is adults, not children.

And he said, so if we could just return everybody to a state of a wild infancy, you know, if we get rid of buildings and societies and we go back to the woods and we all live in the woods together and we live in a childlike, animalistic state, then that will fix the problem.

Every single proposal that has been tried led to World War I and World War II. Every single proposal leads to where we are today. The world is still broken and bent and bruised and we still struggle with the same exact issues.

And that means that what we need today, what we all need today, is an ability to answer this question, how can you be realistic about the state of the world and yet not become hopeless?

[ 26 : 45 ] Right, so people come at this in two ways. They start off young and they say, I'm romantic about the world. I don't really think it's that bad. I don't really think I'm that bad. I think I'm generally a good person. And then life comes along and the truth about the self, what we're capable of, comes out and the suffering comes in and a lot of times romanticism gives way to hopelessness.

And the question that we really have before us today is, is there a way to look out at the world and ourselves and be realistic about the truth of what's wrong with this world and yet not hopeless, not cynical, not so broken by it that either we snark about everything or we end up in utter hopelessness.

And the answer that Christianity gives is to say this, the world is broken. I am the problem. But because of the love of God, it will not be that way forever.

And so, at the beginning of human history, there's an exchange between what should have been and what actually is. And in the middle of human history, there is a better exchange.

There's a better exchange that came along. And, you know, we as creatures, we put ourselves in the place of the Creator. So what did God do? The Creator put Himself in the place of the creature.

[ 28 : 02 ] In the middle of history, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the Maker of the world, became the image of God. We were made to be the image of God. We rejected that and so Jesus became the image of God.

We tried to trade places with God, so what did God do? God traded places with us. We tried to take His divinity so He took on our humanity. We wanted Him to die.

We wanted Him to die and so He came and died. We went to Him with pride and the knife and He came and He put the knife to His own throat in the middle of human history.

And you see, the good news of Christianity is not rules, rules, rules, rules, rules because of your sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin as Dawkins thought. Instead, let me say it like this as we close.

If you could just put yourself for a moment in the first century, the day Jesus was crucified, into the court setting that Pontius Pilate, Pontius Pilate, he gathered all the people in Jerusalem and he brought Jesus out and he brought Barabbas out and there were two prisoners and he said, I will give you Jesus back.

[ 29 : 10 ] You can choose here. You can have whichever one of these two people you want. And in that moment, what did the crowd do? The crowd snarked. The crowd mocked. The crowd jeered.

And I was reading this week an editorial from a book review by David Denby who wrote a book called Snark. And Tim Keller pointed me to this in one of his books and this is what the review said. Snark, jeering and mocking, aims not just at refuting somebody's position but also at destroying their cool, erasing their effectiveness, trying to get control of and sully the person's image in the public.

Opposing views are never treated with respect but instead with snarling disdain and ad hominem mockery. The internet has put snark on steroids. He says, David Denby says, snark is the attitude in the heart that seeks to erase someone, to destroy them, that seeks to erase and destroy a person.

In the middle of human history, Peter says that every single one of us snarked, sneered, mocked, and jeered at Jesus Christ that day.

[ 30 : 23 ] That we were the ones who yelled, crucify him. That we were the ones that said, if he can save himself, let him. If he says, if he really is God, let him show it. The attitude of the beginning of all of human history that broke the world is the very attitude that put Christ on the cross and it was me.

It was you. It was all of us. That's what the Bible says. And you've got to see that in the beginning, humanity, we fell from grace. Jesus Christ walked down the steps.

Jesus Christ came and chose. You see, we began with mockery, with jeering, with snark. He chose to be mocked. He chose to be jeered. He chose to be snarked at. In the middle of human history.

He who knew no sin became sin for us. He took our blows. He took our jeers. He took our mockery. He became the chastisement that would bring us shalom, peace, the peace of the garden.

And so, in the beginning, in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ruined the garden city that God made as our home.

[ 31 : 26 ] Jesus Christ was murdered by our hands and he was buried in a garden so that at the moment of resurrection, the garden could become our home again. In the beginning of human history, Adam and Eve took of the tree and cursed the world.

Jesus Christ, in the middle of human history, hung upon that cursed tree in order to heal the world. You see, the gospel is the great reversal of Genesis 3. Everything that we did wrong, Jesus came and took our place to make right, to heal the land.

And I just want to ask you this morning, if you will, for a moment, look at the truth about yourself, about your self-centeredness, about your struggle with the snark, the jeer, the attitude that begins maybe in your experience with other people but extends all the way directed at God himself.

And then you'll turn and you'll look at the cross. You can realize this. My heart every day says, my heart every day says to my brain, God does not love you.

God does not have your best interests at heart. God is not good. And then I have to lift my eyes and look at the cross and see that Jesus Christ, God loves me to the point of death for me.

[ 32 : 36 ] Every day, I've got to look at my heart, the truth, and then I've got to look up and look at the cross and say, heart, look at the truth again. God is good and he loves you.

And he's going to heal the land. And so I'll finish with a quote from John Newton. John Newton was the captain of a slave ship that traded slaves off the coast of West Africa.

And he found God's grace. God's grace radically came into his life and showed him how big of a sinner he was and how broken he was. But it's not very well known that John Newton did not stop in the slave trade industry for a number of years.

until after he came to faith. And he was a very broken man. And later on in life, he wrote a hymn that we now sing.

We're not singing it this morning. I should have put it in. But you'll recognize it. He wrote later, thinking about his ongoing involvement in such atrocity. He said, Our sins are many, but his mercy is more.

[ 33 : 39 ] Our sins are great, but his righteousness is greater. We are weak, but he is power. Let's pray. Father, we confess our sins.

There are many. Your mercy is so much greater than what we've given you. And so, we confess this morning our snark and our attitude that broke the world.

And we look for hope today and we thank you for forgiveness. And so right now, as we sing, we pray that the Holy Spirit would turn our eyes and our hearts to the power of the cross.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.