

The Command for Mission

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to God's Word now and to our Bibles and to Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 5. You'll find that on page 810, if you have one of the church visitors' Bibles.

And we're continuing our studies here on the Sermon on the Mount. We're looking particularly this morning at verses 17 to 20 of Matthew 5.

We've been in this little section, verses 11 to 20, for the last couple of weeks. And once again this morning we're reading from Matthew 5, verse 11 to verse 20.

Jesus says, Blessed are you when others revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

[1 : 04] It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill can't be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Do not think I have come to abolish the law of the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, unless heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law of God until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

[2 : 10] May God bless to us his word and give us light and understanding that it might teach us and change us. Well, turn with me, if you would, to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, the passage we read there, page 810 in the church's Bibles.

This rebel heart by love subdued and by your spirit make it new. Well, those lines, I think, encapsulate something of what Jesus is teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount.

And in this passage this morning, we're looking very specifically at the commands for mission that Jesus gives. I make no apology for spending a third week on this little bridge section in Matthew 5, 11 to 20 between the Beatitudes and the main bulk of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

I make no apology for spending time on it because it's vitally important that we really understand and get a complete clarity about what Jesus himself means when he is talking about discipleship, following him, what it means to be a real Christian, somebody living under his kingly rule.

Now, we've seen already that the call of Jesus is supremely a call to mission. We're called to be ambassadors of the king's rule in this world.

[3 : 41] And we're to take the news of that kingly rule to the very ends of this world. And that's our great purpose in these last days, these days in which gospel-saving grace is going out to all the nations of this earth.

It's always been the call of God's chosen people to shine his light among the pagan nations, to be ambassadors of his. But now, in this gospel age, when at last Christ's kingly rule has been made known in person on the earth through his saving work, through his death and resurrection and ascension, now that calling upon God's people is reaching its fulfillment through the church and through the worldwide mission that the church of Jesus Christ has.

So we have a great calling and it's to world mission. But to do that, as we've seen, we must have a true culture of mission. Our presence in the world has got to be seen conspicuously, just as the

Bible class are being seen conspicuously in a rather embarrassed way walking in this morning. Well, we're not to be embarrassed. We're delighted to see you. But we're to be conspicuous. What a great example. Seen, standing out, visible as the church of Jesus Christ.

Not just slipping along in the world with nobody noticing. We were looking at that, weren't we, last Sunday evening as well as Paul was teaching us from Titus. What was it he said?

[5 : 12] We're to be distinct from the world. Titus 2 verse 10, showing all good faith so that in everything we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

Or as Jesus puts it here in verses 13 to 16, as we looked at, we are to be as distinct and noticeable as salt and light in the world. To both preserve the world from its own self-destructive tendencies and to bring light to a world that is in darkness, that is in bondage to sin and to Satan.

to enlighten this world's confusion and darkness and lead it to the source of true light in our Savior. So that at every level in life, as we live and speak the gospel of Jesus, heads will be turned and hearts will be changed and people will come to the knowledge of the truth that is in Jesus and will bow to his lordship and through bowing in the name of Jesus Christ will give glory to our Father in heaven.

And the church, you see, is to be so suffused by this heavenly culture, the culture of true mission, that we are God's message to this world.

That his word is made flesh in us visibly and audibly and conspicuously, communicating the gospel to this world and to the people of this world. Now that's quite a thought, isn't it?

[6 : 43] And it's, in a sense, it's quite hard to believe, especially when so often the church has just not been like that in the world. When each of us as Christians know that we personally are not always seen behaving like that and speaking like that in this world.

So often the church just doesn't seem to exhibit this powerful witness at all. The salt seems to have actually lost a great deal of its flavor. The light does seem to have been hidden or put away.

And the question is, why is that? Why is that? Well, Christian people will give a lot of different reasons, a lot of different answers.

Christian bookshops are full of books that will purport to give all sorts of solutions to that problem. We need this new strategy, this new kind of service to have, or this new kind of preaching, or this new kind of singing, or new kind of something else.

or we need this special but perhaps elusive spiritual blessing. If only we could have it. It might come from Toronto in the past. That was one of the places it was supposed to come to, wasn't it?

[7 : 51] Or Lakeland, Florida, or some other place where this mysterious blessing could somehow transform the church. Or we need this great idea, or that great idea, or whatever it is, this new thing that's the latest thing that will make the church relevant to our world.

In fact, if we actually listen to the Lord Jesus Christ, we'll find he's just a lot more basic, a lot more straightforward, a lot more simple, and yet a lot, lot more challenging and demanding.

So often we fail and we are not what we ought to be because as Christians and as the Christian church as a whole, we don't take nearly seriously enough the demands and the commands of the Lord Jesus for our holiness.

His demand for our obedience to him as the sole ruler and master of our lives and of the church's life. We don't take nearly seriously enough God's commands for our mission in this world.

But Jesus himself right here tells us are vital if the church is going to exhibit that kind of culture of mission that will enable it to fulfill its great calling in this world.

[9 : 11] Because see, what Jesus tells us here is that the power we have as God's missionary ambassadors in this world that it comes to us in no small measure through our radical obedience to the rule of Jesus who is our king and master.

His countercultural lives lived in real submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's that alone that will make a countercultural witness. Real spiritual power isn't some kind of mystical thing that you need to search for, find through some spiritual blessing, some special anointing, something you receive like magic.

Nonsense. No, real power according to Jesus is the power of living in radical obedience to him. The one who submitted himself completely to obey the will of his father in heaven, who took up his own cross and who bids every true disciple of his to take up their cross also, to live under his yoke and to live in submission to God, not to the rule of their own life and will and purpose and desire.

Real power for mission lies in the church and every true Christian living out with joy the missionary commands of God.

[10 : 46] Look at the lives of Christians, look at the lives of any churches who've done great things for God and you'll always find the same thing, that they put obedience to Jesus Christ and his commands in first place in their life.

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, once said that the greatness of a man's power lies in the measure of his surrender. Surrender, that is, to God's commands for people's lives, God's commands for radical holiness.

wholeness. Look here at Matthew 5, verse 17, again. Jesus says, don't think for a moment that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets and the weighty responsibility that the scriptures give to his people from the very beginning to shine the radical holiness of heaven in this earth in total contrast to the pagan darkness all around the people of God.

That is what God called Israel to do right at the very beginning. That is why he called them out of bondage in Egypt and constituted them as a people and put them in a holy land to shine his holiness to the world.

Exodus 19, I bore you, says the Lord, on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

[12 : 20] You see, salt and light among all the nations of the world, a city on a hill. But we mustn't ever think that because where Israel failed and Jesus came as the perfect human being, as the true Adam, as the true Israel and fulfilled the law and fulfilled that law for us so that God accepts us as holy and righteous in his sight because of Jesus' obedience and righteousness.

And he does do that. He did do that. By the obedience of one, many will be made righteous. Hallelujah. But we mustn't ever think that because Jesus did that for us, somehow there's no need any longer for us to be holy.

How could that possibly be so? Quite the reverse. Jesus came to do all of that for us to forgive our sins, to make us holy, to make us what we couldn't be.

Remember what the great promise of the new covenant was as Jeremiah tells us in Jeremiah 31. I'll put my law, I'll put my commands within them in that day, says the Lord.

I will write it on their hearts and they shall be my people at long last, truly. It'll be an everlasting covenant. And his people at last, says the Lord, will be a praise and glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them.

[13 : 57] Jesus came, you see, as the light of the world. He came as the perfect, wonderful, attractive, beautiful, Son of God. And he came so that in the wonder of his triumph on the cross and resurrection and his ascension to glory, having worked salvation for his own, and he would send upon them the spirit of his own perfect holiness, the spirit of holiness, so that we should be renewed from within, made like him, that we would become a true, holy, missionary people, at last carrying his light to the whole world, to the ends of the earth, at last fulfilling the great missionary purpose of his people Israel from the very beginning, the great missionary purpose of his law of holiness from the very beginning.

And that's why Jesus says here in verse 18, do you see, he says the commands that mark out his holiness within and among his true people, his missionary ambassadors, he says they'll last forever, and they will accomplish without question that mission.

truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. And we're living, you see, today as the Christian church, we're living in the days of the climax of that missionary vision.

The gospel is going out, isn't it, to all nations. The promise to Abraham made thousands of years ago, it's being fulfilled now, today, all over the world.

I mean, we even see that in this room this morning and in this church. I don't know how many nations there are represented here this morning, but quite a few. I guess by the time we've finished all our meetings here today, probably dozens of different nationalities have been in one place, praising the Father in heaven through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 55] We're living in the days of the fulfillment of God's great plan of salvation. This is the climax of everything that the law and the prophets has been about since the very beginning.

So, it couldn't possibly be the age for less obedience to God, could it? The age for less holiness, the age of less righteousness.

Of course not. How could that possibly, possibly ever be so? No, the age of the eternal fulfillment of God's purposes has begun.

Go home and read later on. Here's an exercise for you. Go and read right through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. That's what that letter is all about. Ephesians chapter 1 tells us that the church has been chosen by God from before the foundation of the world.

Why? That we should be holy and blameless before him. Ephesians 2.10 says, we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[17:05] That's why he saved us. Chapter 3, he tells us that it's God's great plan and purpose and goal that through the church, through the church of Jesus Christ, shining the holiness of God to the whole cosmos, that earth and the farthest reaches of heavens should come to know the manifold wisdom of God.

That's God's plan for the universe. And so because that's the calling of the church now revealed in Jesus Christ in Ephesians 4, Paul says, walk in a manner worthy of the calling that you've received. Walk no longer as the pagans do in darkness. Be imitators of God, he says, as beloved children of God. Walk in love. Walk in the light as children of light.

Because as you know from that wonderful passage in Ephesians 5, Christ loved the church. He gave himself up for her. Why? That he might make her holy without blemish, in splendor, without spot or wrinkle.

That is our calling as Christ's people. Do you see? And so this age that we have the privilege of living in, this is the age for deeper, more radical obedience than ever before in the history of the world.

[18:29] This is the age for submission to our Lord and King who now at last has come in person to the earth, not only through mediators, through Moses and the prophets, but with his own voice has instructed us how to live in the way of his kingdom, how to live in the way of fulfillment of his promises of old.

He has come to teach us with supreme, with unique authority from heaven. And that's what Jesus is saying here. Look at verse 19, do you see?

Therefore, whoever elects one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. This is not a time for loosening up on God's demands for obedience, for distinctive holiness, not at all.

Well, there are, aren't there? Plenty of voices in the church today who want to say exactly that.

Well, if you want to be relevant in our modern age, if you want to be relevant in our culture today, you have to stop being fixated on some of these commandments in the Bible, especially about marriage and sex and things like that.

Marriage and being permanent between a man and a woman for life. No, no, no, no. We can't have that. Sex is just about an exclusive thing within marriage.

[19:49] No, no, no, no. You want to be relevant. Get rid of that for a start. There's a whole host of other things too. Well, read verse 19 again.

That's the attitude, says Jesus, that relegates you to the very bottom in his estimation. This is the time when the world needs to see more than ever before.

the household of God, the church of Jesus Christ gladly doing the will of the king right here on earth in the face of all the nations.

The world needs to see the church cherishing the way of God and teaching others to cherish these words of God and these ways of God because we know that these are the ways that we find blessing and health and life in this world.

And the life that God wants people to have through his glorious kingdom in Christ. That's true greatness according to Jesus teaching his commands. Again, second half of verse 19.

[20:56] Whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. You see, not abandoning God's commands for holiness. Nor teaching those commands to others and just actually ignoring them ourselves.

Like the Pharisees. That's what Jesus said of them, wasn't it? They sit in Moses' seat. They teach what Moses taught. They don't do what they're teaching. They're hypocrites. Not that.

What does Jesus say? Doing and teaching. Doing that is obeying the king radically in ways that surpass all that's gone before. And teaching to all in the kingdom of heaven.

Not just any longer those in the land of Israel privileged to have God's word. But those all over the earth who through the gospel are entering the kingdom of God. Entering the family of Christ.

See, mission is all about obedience to God through Jesus Christ. Obedience to God in Christ among the ambassadors of that kingdom who in turn are going all over the world to call others to that same obedience of the one who is king over the whole earth, the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

[22 : 12] All about obedience to Jesus' words and his commands. And that's why all through the Sermon on the Mount, as we'll see, we hear Jesus saying unashamedly, I say to you, this is how it is.

Here's God himself in the person of his Son on earth commanding human beings with absolute and ultimate authority. That's why at the end of the sermon in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus says very plainly, not everyone who says, oh Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

And the one who does the will of the Father, says Jesus, is the one who hears these words of mine and does them. Those are the ones whose life will not collapse on the great day of judgment, but who have built their lives upon the rock, the true and living God.

These are the true disciples of the kingdom. These are the true ambassadors who will bear fruit for the Lord Jesus, he says. And that's how you recognize them. They teach and they do my words. And the fruit is the mission of the kingdom to the glory of God, which is teaching obedience to Jesus among all the nations of this earth.

[23 : 32] That's the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel, Matthew 28. Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.

That's what it means to come to saving faith. It means to obey, to bow down and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the earth, for him to be your ruler. That's why Paul calls his great mission to the whole Gentile world in Romans chapter 1.

It's about, he says, to bring obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of Christ's name.

His entire ministry describes in Romans 15 as being fixated on bringing Gentiles to obedience. obedience. And that is the great fulfillment, he says, right at the very end of the letter to the Romans. The great fulfillment of the command of the eternal God, which was made known in all the prophetic writings in the Old Testament, to bring about among the nations the obedience of faith.

So you see, how natural, how inevitable that this great mission to bring people of all nations to obedience to Jesus as King and Lord, that that mission will be empowered by the radical obedience of the King's missionary ambassadors, his people.

[24 : 59] And by their faithfulness and by their joyful obedience, by their glad submission to him as their King and Lord and their ruler and director. And by their witness that his rule is not burdensome and dark and heavy.

But that in his service is where perfect freedom is found in this life. Can't be any other way, can it? You can't call people of all nations to obedience to Jesus if you yourself are avoiding that and disobeying him and resisting him.

That would just be hollow. That would be utterly hypocritical. Any church with a mission like that is just going to be utterly powerless, isn't it? But joyful obedience to Jesus the King, visible, tangible, seen in amongst us, showing that he is the King, but he's the King of love, who shepherds us because he loves us, who warns us and commands us in order to protect us, in order to help us, in order to nurture us.

Whose rule in our lives liberates us with joy and makes us want to tell the world of his bountiful righteousness. That's real missionary righteousness, isn't it?

That will have a powerful message in this world. That's what far exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, verse 20.

[26 : 32] The scribes, you see, were very zealous at teaching the law and the Pharisees were very zealous at doing the law in the terms of the minutiae of their commands. They took the Ten Commandments and were told that they had made 248 specific commands that you had to keep and 365 specific prohibitions just to keep the Ten Commandments.

And you might say, how can we possibly exceed that kind of zeal? But Jesus says, no, no, no, no. It's really quite simple. You see something that they are completely blind to.

You get to the heart of the whole purpose of God's law. It's a missionary purpose. You grasp that it's always been about God showing the beauty of his wonder, of his grace, of his goodness, of his wholesome holiness.

That's what holiness means. Showing that to this world that they might see him and come to know him and love him, know him as Savior. That's what it's about. And you see that.

See, if the real purpose of God's law has always been to serve his missionary purpose to all this world, to bring nations and peoples under his gracious rule, then people who grasp that purpose, they're the ones who really understand God, who really understand God's commands, who've penetrated the very heart of the law of God, who've penetrated the very heart of God himself.

[28 : 05] In other words, those people are going to be real missionary people for this world. It's they who will exhibit this righteousness that far exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

Of those who may be very proper, very moral, very religious, but totally miss the purpose of what God is doing. Because there'll be people who understand God's lavish grace in the face of their own dire spiritual poverty.

But they've experienced God's great mercy. And that issue's in love and in gratitude in their heart to God. They hunger and thirst for God's true righteousness, for his desires.

They joyfully live for him, even though it means persecution and hardship and slander. They rejoice because they want the joy and the light and the glory of Christ that they have found in their Savior King.

They want it to be seen in this world. They want their lives to point the way to others. And so bring glory to the Father that they love and whose commands they cherish in their lives because they know he's good and wonderful.

[29 : 29] See, that is the true heart righteousness that Jesus is speaking of. And that is the power of all true Christian mission. The greatness of a man's power lies in the measure of his surrender to the glorious, saving righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

And that's possible only in those that God has transformed by the grace in the gospel of Christ. And we'll see as we go on in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is simply expounding and explaining what all that surrender to God in Christ means in the nitty-gritty of ordinary, everyday life.

And Jesus penetrates always to the very heart of God's commands for holiness. And he shows that it must be lived out from within, from within hearts that have been changed by the grace that is in Jesus.

But do you see, do you see that real purpose of God and his commands for our holiness? That by us obeying, by us gladly surrendering sovereignty of our life into God's hands and by us living radically for Jesus Christ, that we will shine the light of his glory so that his life is seen through us, you and me, in our lives here on this earth so that men and women and boys and girls will see something and hear things and want to be drawn to know more about the Lord Jesus Christ, to find his light, to find the life that he longs to give.

That's what our obedience to God in this world is really all about. That's our mission. And that's the test of real righteousness, of real heart righteousness that displays that heart love to God through Jesus.

[31 : 27] The Apostle John says, whoever keeps his commands abides in him and he in them. It's a test, isn't it, of really understanding the gospel with all its demands, with all its commands upon our lives.

When we see those things not as a burden, not something to be resisted, not something to be done grudgingly, but as an expression of our joy, of our love to God as children of our Heavenly Father. John says, by this we know that we are children of God when we love God and obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome.

No, no, they're beautiful to us because they bring glory to God and because they bring blessing to this world by showing this world His marvelous light.

I wonder how you react to the commands of God when you hear them in the Scriptures. The demands of Jesus, even here in the things you might read in the Sermon on the Mount.

[32 : 34] Some people are willfully resistant, irreligious, you might say. They just say, who cares? Who cares? Why should I listen to what Jesus says? Who cares? And they reject Jesus altogether.

They're open in their animosity. But there are some, perhaps many, very religious people, moral people, good people, and they set about to obey God's commandments, at least outwardly,

because they assume they will win approval with God that way.

God will have to favor me because I've lived a good life, I've done better than most, and God must owe me whatever there is if there is a God. God. But friends, Jesus shows us all through his teaching that that is to totally misunderstand God and his gospel.

In fact, in practice, people who think like that are doing exactly what the scribes and the Pharisees were doing. They were domesticating God's law by reducing it to just a number of boxes to be ticked that were tickable.

and really, at the same time, avoiding the real demand, the total demand of ownership from God upon their lives.

[33 : 53] They used God's law and God's commands so that they could be in control of God, not so that God could be in control of them. That stuff totally lost the plot for all their kind of obedience of that nature to God's commands.

They'd be very zealous. They hadn't grasped at all the very heart of the missionary purpose of God's commands for his people's holiness.

That we should obey joyfully. That our lives should shine brightly for Jesus. That we should show forth the wonders of his grace and mercy that has called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

But you see, somebody who really knows Jesus, somebody who loves him, who knows his wonderful grace and forgiveness of their sins. They obey Jesus because they love him with all of their heart.

And they long for others to know him and love him too and for others to see him. And they love the very thought that their obedience to Jesus and his rule of their life, that somehow that would help point others to the Lord Jesus.

[35 : 05] not alone is enough to spur them on day by day to love and good deeds. Their love to Jesus, you see, and above all, his love for them is what makes obedience to Jesus a sweet joy as well as a bounden duty.

Not a heavy burden, but a delight. as the hymn says, his commandments become their happy choice. But you know, even many Christians can get so confused and mixed up and so wrong about God's commands for their lives.

Find God's commands a burden and not a delight. Living as if it was all a pain and a great sacrifice to obey God. Not a joy, not a delight, not a liberating thing, but a constricting thing.

Holiness. I mean, even as a word, it's so often regarded as a negative thing, isn't it? As a dirty word. Let's not talk about holiness. That will really put people off.

Well, if we're thinking of a perverted understanding of holiness, of the scribes and the Pharisees, of the moralist, of the sanctimonious person, well, maybe that's understandable.

[36 : 26] But no, that's not the wholesomeness that Jesus is speaking of. The marks of a real disciple, of a real ambassador of Jesus the King is that they rejoice in the commands of God.

They delight in the yoke of Jesus because they know that the power of Christ's mission to this world through them is the radical obedience of his people in the world to the King and Lord.

They know that mission and holiness are inseparable things. What Jesus has taught us here in Matthew chapter 5 is that the true disciple looks to Jesus, looks to his demands, looks to God's law and grasps that they are indeed spiritually poor, that they are abject and completely inadequate.

And yet they have heard the words, blessed are the poor in spirit and have grasped the wonder of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ so that they know the kingdom that God is giving them is not theirs by right but by sheer grace and mercy.

And now they hunger and thirst for the goodness and the righteousness of their Savior King. They want to be more like him.

[37 : 53] They long to be more like him and they want the world to see him in them and to hear him in them. And so when Jesus commands a true disciple and demands everything of them they rejoice don't they?

they love to obey because Jesus' spirit is now enlivening them within and Jesus' own desires are becoming their desires.

They are written on their hearts. And obedience to the king drives the mission of the king in their life.

The mission of the gospel of Christ to bring people to glorify the father by bowing to Jesus the son. that's a big challenge isn't it?

For all of us for you and me as Christian disciples for all of us as a Christian church to know that the way of the king lived out publicly and conspicuously by us as the people of the king that that is what empowers the mission that our king has given into our hands in this world.

[39 : 08] what's the mission of the church that we've seen in these verses? What's the purpose of true Christianity and the Christian church in this world? It's a calling to mission kingdom mission to the whole world and so we must live out and exhibit a culture of mission before the world but that'll only be so won't it?

Only be so if we submit to the commands for mission if we submit everything to the glad control and to obedience to Jesus the king therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven for I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven the greatness of a man's power and indeed any church's power lies in the measure of its surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ Amen let's pray together Almighty and everlasting God give unto us the increase of faith hope and love and that we may obtain that which thou dost promise make us to love that which thou dost command through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen Amen