

Jesus can make you clean

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[0 : 00] Well, Terry is going to be preaching this morning from Mark's Gospel, and we're going to turn to our Bibles now for our readings. And you might like to, first of all, look up Mark's Gospel, chapter 1, which you'll find, I think, on...

What page is that? Page 837, I think, if you have one of the church Bibles. Mark 1 at chapter 40. Put your finger in there, and then also turn up the Old Testament and the book of Leviticus, chapter 14.

Again, you'll find that on page 92, if you have one of our visitor's Bibles. Otherwise, it's near the beginning, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus.

And we're going to read some verses from Leviticus, chapter 14. Leviticus 14 at page 92, and then Mark chapter 1, page 837.

So Leviticus 14 at verse 1. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look.

[1 : 10] Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person, the priest shall command them to take for him, who is to be cleansed, two live, clean birds, and cedarwood, and scarlet yarn, and hyssop.

And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn, and hyssop, and dip them, and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water.

And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird go into the open field.

And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. And after that, he may come into the camp, but live outside his tent seven days.

And on the seventh day, he shall shave off all his hair from his head, his beard, his eyebrows. He shall shave off all his hair, and then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean.

[2 : 16] And on the eighth day, he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb, a year old, without blemish, and a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, and one log of oil.

And the priest who cleanses him shall set the man who is to be cleansed, and these things before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the priest shall take one of the male lambs, and offer it for a guilt offering along with the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord.

And he shall kill the lamb in the place where they kill the sin offering, and the burnt offering in the place of the sanctuary. For the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest that is most holy.

The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of him as to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.

Then the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it on the palm of his own left hand, and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the Lord.

[3 : 21] Some of the oil that remains in the hand of the priest shall be put on the lobe of the right ear of him as to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot,

on top of the blood of the guilt offering.

The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him as to be cleansed. And the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord. The priest shall offer the sin offering to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness, and afterward he shall kill the burnt offering.

And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean. I'll turn over to Mark's Gospel, chapter 1.

And after that long and laborious ritual, it just shows to us how difficult it is to have cleansing from uncleanness in the sight of God.

Here we read of the Lord Jesus meeting just such a person, a leper. At Mark 1, verse 40, A leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling, said to him, If you will, you can make me clean.

[4 : 32] Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, I will be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.

But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was in desolate places. And people were coming to him from every quarter.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. I invite you to take your Bibles, and to turn with me again to Mark chapter 1, which you will find in page 837 of the Pew Bible.

Mark chapter 1. And as you do so, a word of prayer. Make the book live to us, O Lord.

[5 : 49] Show us yourself within thy word. Show us ourselves, and show us our Savior. And make the book live to us. For Christ's sake.

Amen. My best friend told me a story. It was a true story, of a young man who was a drug addict. And he went into this Christian rehab in order to get clean from drugs.

Went into the Christian rehab to get clean from drugs. He got clean. And in his time there, he had become a Christian. And he was doing well. He was going on in his recovery. He was going on as a Christian. And he was a very popular young man.

All the staff liked him. So then you know, it's not me I'm talking about, ain't you? But one particular day, one member of the staff was going out and he took the young man with him.

And when they were out, the staff member called in on a family that he knew. And so he took the young fella in with him. And this particular family happened to have a dog. And this young drug addict, who was now a Christian, started praying for the dog.

[6 : 53] And nobody said anything, but they all just looked a wee bit bewildered. And when they left the house, the staff member said to him, what was all that about back there in the house? He says, what? He says, praying for the dog.

He says, why? What was wrong with that? He says, you were praying for a dog. He says, Jesus prayed for animals. He says, what? He says, I read it in the Bible. He says, Jesus prayed for the leopard. It's a true story.

Jesus didn't pray for a leopard, but Jesus did cleanse a leper. And I think it's to this passage in Mark's gospel that the young fella was referring to.

And the first thing I want us to see from this passage is in verse 40. A deadly condition. A deadly condition. Mark tells us nothing about this man, not his name, nothing about where he comes from. He tells us nothing except this man's condition. This man was now defined by his condition, which was a deadly condition as he was a leper. And this condition today is known as Hansen's disease.

[7 : 55] And it's curable today. But back in biblical times, it was incurable. And for this reason, leprosy was the most feared of diseases of the day. There are three main types of leprosy which Vincent Wake was very helpful and helped me to understand.

The first type was these nodules or ulcers that would appear all over the body. and disfigure the face, etc. The appearance of the face would be altered so that the sufferer would come to resemble a lion.

The ulcers would also grow in the vocal cords. So the leper spoke with a raspy voice. And these ulcers wept. The body was in a living state of decomposition.

Thus a terrible smell surrounded the leper constantly. The second type attacked the body's nervous system, compromising the body's ability to feel pain. It acted as a sort of an anesthetic, numbing the nerves in the body.

And therefore the leper might step in a stone or a thorn and injure his hand or his foot, but be totally unaware that there was a problem. Infection would set in and eventually the injured foot or hand might just fall off.

[9 : 07] The third type was a combination of the first two. And after living with this horrible sickness, the sufferer died a horrible death. But having leprosy was not just a sickness, it was also a sentence.

One of the worst aspects of leprosy was the social isolation that it brought. The Levitical law was very clear in its commands regarding lepers. In Leviticus 13, Moses writes, The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, Unclean!

Unclean! He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp or outside the city.

And by the time of Jesus, the rabbis had added many more restrictions to the law-governing lepers. When it was determined that a man had leprosy, they would banish him from the village.

He was no longer allowed to have communion with other people. He had to leave his family. He had to leave his friends. He couldn't touch his family. He could only see them from a distance. Many families brought food and clothing for a while.

[10 : 27] But after a time, most families had a funeral service and regarded the afflicted person as dead. It was against the law to greet a leper. In fact, it was unlawful for a leper to approach within 50 feet of a clean person.

It went up to 200 feet if it was a windy day. The leper had to tear his garments so people would recognize he was a leper. He was to dress as a mourner going to a funeral service his own.

And over his upper lip, he had to wear a cloth so he wouldn't spread the contamination. And every time he saw people coming, the leper was required to cry, unclean, unclean.

The leper's cries would warn people that a leper was nearby. And oftentimes, people would pick up stones and get ready to throw them to the leper if they dared come near them. Everybody knew he was a leper.

Now friends, these measures were not taken in order to be cruel, but in order to protect the people. Leprosy was the most feared and dreaded of diseases and was surrounded by terrible stigma as people didn't know how it was passed on, how you contracted it, and remember, it was incurable.

[11 : 43] I suppose the stigma was a wee bit like the outbreak of the AIDS virus back in the 1980s. Do you remember? We were all wondering, I wonder how you can contract this. Can you get it for touching hands, sharing a cup?

So terrible stigma surrounded leprosy. Well, that's great, Terry. You might be sitting saying to yourself, but what's that got to do with me? Nobody here has the deadly condition of leprosy, and if they do, I hope they're no sitting beside you.

But what the Bible says is this. This man is an illustration of the deadly condition that affects every one of us. Every man, woman, and child ever born is afflicted with the deadly condition of sin.

Now, what is sin? Well, sin essentially is a departure from God. We say to God, God, I'm willing to take your gifts. I'm willing to take family, friends, food, fashion, finance, and fitness.

But God, I don't want you as Father. So sin in itself is like a self-coronation. Man's declaration of independence from God refuses divine lordship and disobey God's will.

[12 : 51] Sin is an attitude that is essentially summed up in a song by Frank Sinatra, My Way. And Romans 3, 23 says, For all have sinned and fall short or lack the glory of God.

And this makes us all unclean, just like the leper. And this deadly condition also has deadly consequences. Again, from Romans chapter 6. For the wages of sin is death.

Physical death? Yes. But also under the judgment of God and under His terrible wrath, which will be eternal. Now, most of us don't even realize or think that sin is a problem in our lives.

As we think, we've found lots of ingenious ways of covering up our sin, covering up our uncleanness. we use comparison. I'm not as bad as him, not as bad as her.

We're reading the news or watch the telly. We focus on our good qualities, never on our lust or our pride. We listen to the opinion of friends who tell us that we're okay, you're a good guy or you're a

good woman.

[13:59] Or we use excuses. It's just the way I am. I can't help it. Or we use the oldest game in the world, older even than Monopoly, the blame game.

It's my background. It's the area I was brought up in. It was my mum and dad's fault. That's what Adam done, wasn't it, in the garden? When faced with his own sin, he used the blame game.

He said, God, it was the woman you gave me. Sort it out between yourselves. It was either your fault or the woman's fault. But no matter what we do or what we use to try and cover up our sin, the fact of the matter remains.

We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God and face God's judgment. Can you see that as you sit here this morning, you're not clean?

Do you recognize that you have a deadly condition? The leper knew he was unclean. He didn't try to cover it up. He didn't try to kill himself on.

[14:59] I'm not a leper. He wasn't in denial. He knew the deadly condition from which he suffered. And that is why he gave, verse 40, a desperate cry. He had a deadly condition, but he gave a desperate cry.

And Mark records how he came to Jesus, verse 40, imploring him, begging on his knees with his face to the ground. The leper broke all the rules in coming to Jesus.

Remember, lepers were to stay 50 feet away from clean people, but he didn't care. He wasn't interested in laws and rules and regulations. He knew the deadly condition from which he suffered, and he came begging on his knees.

He didn't care how he looked to other people or what they thought. He wasn't interested in saving face. He was only interested in saving his life. It was his life he was pleading for.

He was desperate. Wash me, Savior, or I die, as we sang earlier. And friends, this is a great lesson in how to approach the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:57] You know, some people come to church and they strut in like peacocks, thinking that they were doing God a favor just by being here. No idea of the deadly, desperate condition from which they suffer.

Others think to themselves, look, I know I'm no perfect. I know I've got a few changes to make, but you know, I'm going to get disciplined. I'm going to buy a few self-help books, maybe even attend a few self-help groups.

But Jesus, I don't need Jesus. And I certainly don't need to come begging to him to change me.

That's beneath my dignity. And friend, if that's you, you not only have a problem with sin, you have a problem with pride.

And you need humility more than you need anything else. This reminds me of a story from the Old Testament in 2 Kings chapter 5 of a man called Naaman. He was a Syrian general, a very important man.

But nonetheless, he contracted leprosy. And he had a wee Jewish slave girl that he'd probably took away from her home in one of his raids. And she said to him, you know, Master, there is a prophet, there is a prophet in Israel who could cleanse you, the prophet Elisha.

[17:08] So Naaman loaded up his camels with goods and all sorts of stuff and he came to Israel to meet the prophet Elisha. And the prophet Elisha said to him, Naaman, go and bathe in the Jordan River seven times and you will be cleansed.

And when this very important man who heard this, Elisha didn't even come out to see him. He just said, go and bathe in the river. This very important man heard that. He said, I'm not doing that.

There's no chance I'm doing that.

I've passed better rivers in the way here. The Jordan River is absolutely bogging. It's manky.

There's no way I'm bathing in the Jordan River. And he was getting ready to go home.

And one of his servants said to him, Master, see if the prophet had asked you to do something great, you would have done it. You see, friends, he had leprosy, but his proud heart needed healing even more.

The words that his servants spoke to him shattered his pride. He bathed in the Jordan seven times and he was cleansed of his leper's skin and his leper's heart. Are you too proud?

[18:16] Are you broken enough to want to be healed? Do you see your leprosy enough to want to be cleansed? Well, our leper does. He comes and he cries to Jesus. If you will, you can make me clean or you can make me clean if you're willing.

And this shows great faith, but it also shows great doubt. He'd obviously heard about Jesus. Maybe he'd seen Jesus' power change others. But Jesus' ability wasn't in doubt.

But what was in doubt in the leper's mind was if Jesus was willing to do it and to do it for him. Was Jesus interested in him? A leper? An outcast? He'd been a leper long enough to know that no one really cared.

Not really. Maybe you're the same. Maybe you've heard how Jesus has changed the lives of other people. Maybe you've seen it before your very eyes. But you just don't know if Jesus is willing to clean you up.

To clean you up from the sin that make you feel dirty and fill you with guilt and shame. Maybe it's sexual sin. Maybe from the past or maybe even the present.

[19 : 20] Maybe it's how you used and abused someone in order to feed an addiction. Maybe you were a bad parent. Or maybe you were bad to your parents. Or maybe a whole multitude of other things that you think Jesus isn't willing to clean you up from.

Well friends, take heart from the words of an old hymn. There is no secret what God can do. What He's done for us, He will do for you. And friends, take heart from our passage.

Look at the example we have here in the leper. If you cry to Jesus just like the leper and ask Him to make you clean, you will find from Jesus just like the leper divine compassion.

Verses 41-42. Divine compassion. A deadly condition. A desperate cry. And now thirdly, divine compassion. Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched Him and said to Him, I will be clean.

And immediately the leprosy left Him and He was made clean. Moved with pity or moved with compassion or what it literally means is this.

[20 : 27] Moved with anger. Now why was Jesus angry? Was He angry at the man for asking Him to cleanse Him? Well, no He wasn't. Jesus was moved with anger at what the ravages of sin had had in His creation.

Remember in Genesis, God said, let us make man in our image. Man is the crowning of God's creation made in God's image. But look at the pitiful sight man has become in what Jesus has before him in the leper and in us.

And so moved is Jesus. He shows the extent of His grace and mercy. I will be clean. Jesus here mirrors the words the leper spoke to Him. If you will, said the leper, I will, said Jesus.

You can make me clean, said the leper. Be clean, said Jesus. What great joy and relief and freedom these words of Jesus brought. Probably hardly anybody had spoken a word to the leper since the day the words of the priest had declared them unclean.

The rabbis had a saying that it was easier to raise the dead than to cleanse a leper. That God alone could cleanse leprosy. And Jesus shows that that is indeed who He is and that He has the power to cleanse and to heal.

[21 : 46] Friends, Jesus can make us clean. He can make you clean. We sang earlier, be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. He comes to cleanse and to heal, to minister His grace.

No work, no work too hard for Him. In faith, receive from Him. Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. Friends, Jesus can make you clean.

There's no work too hard for Him. There is more grace in Jesus Christ than there is sin in your life. But friend, you will never get clean just by coming to this church or any other church.

The only way you'll get clean is if you come to Jesus. The only one who can make you clean. Well, verse 42, and immediately the leprosy left Him and He was made clean.

If you have the authorised version of the Bible, you will see that it reads, as soon as He, that is Jesus, as soon as Jesus had spoken, immediately the leprosy left Him.

[22 : 54] Now, I've highlighted this. Why? Well, because the authorised version is making the point that it was Jesus' words that cleansed the leper. It was the power of His words that made Him whole. He speaks, and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive.

And that's what makes verse 41 all the more amazing. It gives us an insight into the very heart of God. Jesus stretched out His hand and touched Him.

Well, what's amazing about that, you may ask? What's amazing? Jesus touched Him. He was a leper. Nobody touched lepers, not even with a barge pole. The leper could have wrote the words from the song Nobody's Child.

No mother's arms to hold me or soothe me when I cry. Sometimes it gets so lonesome. I wish that I would die. Nobody touched Him. And touch is so part of what makes us human, isn't it?

It's part of our human growth. It's part of our human development. Touch. Now, I love to give my friends cuddles. Now, I know that's no very Presbyterian of me, but I think it's very human of me.

[23 : 58] But some of you have been deprived of touch. Maybe you had cold parents or you're married to a cold partner. Well, I'll be at the door this morning and if anybody on the way out, and I mean you's men as well, would like a hug on the way out the door, I'll be happy to oblige.

But more importantly, Jesus wants to touch you with the Word, His Word, and make you whole and give you new life. Nobody touched the leper since the day the priest pronounced him unclean.

Why? Well, to touch the leper who was unclean was to make you unclean. And that's why what Jesus does is so amazing. He doesn't just want to cleanse the leper from a distance with His Word. He wants to humanize him again. And what Jesus was really saying when He touched him was this, I am prepared to become by choice what you are by nature. That is, a man under the judgment of God.

In order that I might share with you what I have, freedom and life. Jesus showers the leper with divine compassion. And after doing so in verses 43 to 45, gives him a direct command.

[25 : 09] A direct command. And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once. And said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded for a proof to them.

But the leper went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places. And people were coming to Him from every quarter.

These words, See that you say nothing to anyone, would seem to go against all that we know about evangelism. But friends, these words were only meant to be taken in the first instance.

Only in the first instance wasn't the leper to say anything to anyone. Well, why was that? Well, I think for two reasons. Firstly, Jesus wanted him to go to the priest in order to fulfill the law and to offer the sacrifice that Moses had commanded in Leviticus 14.

Now, I'm not sure if any priest had ever carried out these sacrifices that Willie read from us from Leviticus 14 because there are only two accounts in the whole Old Testament of leprosy being cleansed.

[26 : 27] Naaman, who we spoke about earlier, and Miriam, Moses' sister. As I said before, it was believed that God alone could cleanse leprosy. And if the leper went to the priest and his cleansing was authenticated, then so must his cleanser be authenticated.

What were the Jewish religious establishment waiting for? Messiah. Who alone could cleanse leprosy? God. So if Jesus cleansed this fellow and God alone could cleanse leprosy, well, it would be a proof to them that the kingdom of God had broken in in the person of Jesus Christ.

That what they had before them in the person of Jesus Christ was none other than God himself. None other than God himself in the flesh. So it was to be a testimony or a proof to the religious establishment that God himself had shown up in the person of Jesus Christ.

The second reason is Jesus didn't want him to do what he did in verse 45. He began to talk freely about it and spread the news.

Now who could blame him? Instead of running about shouting unclean, unclean, he could now shout I'm clean, I'm clean. It's not that Jesus didn't want him to tell people. I mean, how could he hide it? But Jesus didn't want what followed in verse 45.

[27 : 49] And as a result, Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places. And people were coming to him from every quarter. Now why didn't Jesus want that?

People were coming to him from every quarter. He was being successful. Well, look at chapter 1, verse 14. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God. Chapter 1, verse 38. Jesus has been healing people all night and he's went off very early in the morning to take himself to a solitary place to pray. And all the disciples have come looking for him, wanting him to get back to town to heal more people.

And Jesus said to them, let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also. For that is why I came out. And in chapter 2, verse 17, Jesus says he has come to call sinners to repentance.

That his priority is not to heal people physically, but to heal people spiritually. And friends, we need to grasp this. This is the Lord Jesus Christ's priority.

[29 : 00] To heal people spiritually. Jesus came to save people, not from that which sends them to hospital, but in order to save them from that which sends them to hell.

But Jesus' priority of preaching the gospel has been hampered by the leper's disobedience. And friends, this shows us that the Lord's work needs to be done the Lord's way, according to the Lord's word.

But friends, I'm sure you can identify with me just like the leper. As soon as Jesus makes you clean, you go and disobey his direct commands.

And because of that, you hinder his ministry. I wonder if the leper ever came back to Jesus and asked him to make him clean again for his disobedience. Maybe that's you as we sit here this morning.

Maybe the Lord cleansed you some time ago, but you've disobeyed his direct commands and you've went out and just lived your life just the way you see fit. And maybe you think to yourselves, folks wouldn't even know I was a Christian.

[30 : 02] I've absolutely blown it. There's no way back for me. I mean, there's no way I could ever dare ask Jesus to clean me up again for the way I've disobeyed him and let him down.

Well, friend, what you need to hear this morning is this. He is willing. He is willing to make you clean. And that's a word for us all, isn't it? Those who blow it day by day, month by month, by disobeying his direct commands.

Well, all of this just leaves us a question, doesn't it? How is it that Jesus makes us clean? Well, fifthly, finally, and quickly, a dying Christ. A dying Christ.

How does Jesus make us clean? He does it by trading places with us. Can you see it in the passage? Look to verse 40. Remember the leper? He was an outcast.

He was to live outside the camp as Leviticus 13 had commanded. But look to verse 45. The leper has been accepted back into society, but Jesus has traded places with him.

[31 : 10] Jesus is now out in desolate places. He is now outside the camp. And friends, this is a pointer to Jesus' saving work. The cross here begins to cast its shadow over Jesus.

The writer to Hebrews writes, Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify, in order to make clean the people through his blood. And friends, all through Mark's gospel, Jesus comes into people, into contact with people who are unclean.

He comes into contact with the leper, the demon-possessed, Gentiles, dead people, the woman that was subject to bleeding. These people were all unclean according to the law.

And according to the law, if anyone came into contact with them, then they would become unclean. But when Jesus comes into contact with them, he doesn't become unclean.

They become clean. It's as if Jesus absorbs their unclean condition. And friends, when we begin to think this way, then the words of the prophet Isaiah begin to make sense.

[32 : 20] Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. By his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each to his own way.

And the Lord has laid in him the iniquity of us all. These verses in Isaiah speak of the Lord Jesus Christ in his role as the suffering servant of God who would become a saving substitute.

Can we see that from those verses that I read? A saving substitute. But where will all this take place? Where will all this happen? Well, friends, it happens on the cross.

That's what Jesus was accomplishing on the cross. A good friend once told me, Terry, in order for something to become clean, something else has to become unclean.

[33 : 28] When you wash your face in the morning with water, your face becomes clean, the water becomes dirty. There is a transfer that takes place. Well, friends, very simply, that's the gospel.

That's the glorious good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who was clean on the cross became unclean so that people like you and me who are unclean might by trusting him become clean.

Friend, if you're here this morning and you would like to be clean like the leper from your deadly condition, Jesus can make you clean. If you come like the leper and ask him to make you clean, then you will find that just as he did with the leper, he will reach out his hands and touch you with the grace of his forgiveness and he will say, I am willing.

Be clean. Let us pray together. To God be the glory, great things he has done.

So loved he the world that he gave us his son to the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

[34 : 50] Father, we thank you for a wonderful gospel such as this. In Jesus' name, Amen.