

Stay Awake!

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you could, this morning with the Lord's help, the Lord's enabling, could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the gospel according to Mark chapter 13.

Mark chapter 13, and if we read again at verse 32. Mark 13 at verse 32. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the sun, but only the Father.

Be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Therefore stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, or when the cock crows or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake. Stay awake. Andrew Bonar was a free church minister during the 19th century.

[1 : 2 2] And one evening after preaching, he came down the steps of his pulpit, and he was met by three of his elders waiting at the bottom. And whilst the congregation was dispersing and leaving the church, Andrew Bonar turned to the elder closest to him, and he asked the question, Do you think the Lord will come tonight?

And the elder replied, I think not. And so Andrew Bonar, he turned to the second elder who was waiting at the bottom of his pulpit, and he said to him, Do you think the Lord will come tonight?

And he replied the same as the first, I think not. And so Andrew Bonar, he turned to the third elder and asked him the same question, Do you think the Lord will come tonight?

And like the others, he said, I think not. And as Andrew Bonar looked at his elders, he said to them, quoting the words of Matthew 24, verse 44, And this is the warning which Jesus is giving to us in this chapter.

Because he says, the end is coming. The end is coming. The end of the temple is coming. And the end of the world is coming.

[2 : 4 6] And last time we were looking at the first half of this chapter, and Jesus was expressing his future fears for the disciples. Because he spoke about the future destruction of the temple.

He spoke about the future deception of the people. And then he spoke about the future desolation of the city of Jerusalem. And these words of Jesus in the first half of the chapter, they were fulfilled in AD 70, when the temple was destroyed by the Romans and the city of Jerusalem was left in ruins.

But now in the second half of this chapter, from verse 24 onwards, Jesus speaks about a subject which is relevant to all of us.

Because he affirms to us that the end of the world will take place when he returns. And the language which Jesus uses in this chapter is often what we call apocalyptic language.

It's language which unveils what will happen in the future. It's language which reveals the events that are going to take place. And Jesus says, you can't prevent what's going to happen in the future.

[4 : 00] You can't prevent the end of the temple coming. And you can't prevent the end of the world coming either. Therefore, the only precaution that we can take and the only preparations we can make for his second coming, says Jesus, is stay awake.

Stay awake. And those words are words to that effect. They are repeated throughout this entire chapter. Because Jesus says again and again, he says, take heed, be on guard, keep watch, watch and pray, watch, stay awake.

And Jesus gives to us this warning because he says the end is coming. The end is coming. And Jesus says, what I say to you, I say to all.

Stay awake. Stay awake. Because at an hour when you think not, the Son of Man will come.

And Jesus draws our attention to three things in this passage which are related to his coming. And they're set out in the three different sections.

[5 : 10] And the three things are the consequence of his coming, the confidence in his coming, and the command at his coming. The consequence of his coming.

The confidence in his coming. And the command at his coming. So we'll look first of all at the consequence of his coming. The consequence of his coming.

Look at verse 24. He says, But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

And it was one commentator who said, Tribulation, suffering, evil, and death, they are not the full stop to the sentence of history.

[6 : 15] The return of Jesus Christ is. And Jesus says here that after the tribulation, the end will come. After all the wars, and the rumours of wars, and kingdom rising against kingdom, nation against nation, and famines, and earthquakes, and the fall of the temple, Jesus says, Then the end will come.

And he uses the words, In those days. And that's an expression which was often used in the Old Testament to describe the end times, or the day of judgment.

The Old Testament prophets, they often spoke about the future day of God's judgment. And they referred to that day as the day of the Lord. They called it the day of the Lord.

And the visions and the prophecies which the prophets gave were of these terrifying images of darkness and destruction. Because Amos said, The day of the Lord is darkness and not light.

Zephaniah prophesied saying, The great day of the Lord is near. It's near and it's hastening greatly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wastiness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

[7 : 39] And the prophet Isaiah, he declared, How? Cry out, he says, for the day of the Lord is at hand. It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

And at this point, Jesus is actually quoting words from the prophet Isaiah in chapter 13. Because Isaiah prophesied just what Jesus says here.

That the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in its going forth. And the moon will not cause its light to shine. And the Lord affirms to us that, On that great day, he says, I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity.

I will cause the arrogant and the proud to cease. And as we said before, Jesus is using apocalyptic language. It's language of the apocalypse.

It's language which reveals what will take place at the end of time and the destruction of the world. It's apocalyptic language. But what we need to ask is, why does the world have to be destroyed?

[8 : 53] Why is this world going to be destroyed? Why does all this have to take place? Well, it's because the history of this world is bound up in the history of mankind.

When Adam and Eve fell and sinned at the beginning of history, the impact of their fall was not only upon the entire human race, but the consequences of their sin.

It had this ripple effect throughout the world, and it had a catastrophic effect upon the whole of creation. And the Bible reminds us that the creation, it is eagerly waiting to be delivered from the bondage of sin.

The creation, Paul says, is groaning, and it's longing for the freedom it will receive at the end of the world. The creation is groaning from sin because that's not the way it was created.

We are not the way we were created. And that's why the world is in turmoil today. Because everywhere we look, whether it's in our homes or in our communities or on the news, all we see is heartache and sorrow.

[10 : 11] All we see is pain and illness. There is chaos. There is wars. There is unrest. There is disaster, whether it's man-made or natural. Israel, this world is in turmoil.

It's groaning under the weight of sin. And one day it will be set free. One day it will come to an end with the return of Jesus Christ.

As the commentator put it, tribulation, suffering, evil, and death, they are not the full stop to the history of this world. But the return of Jesus Christ is.

And you know, my friend, if God is gracious and loving, which He is, then He can't let this world continue in turmoil forever.

He can't let this world of pain and sorrow go on without end. It has to come to an end. And if God is righteous, and if God acts with justice, then He must bring this world and all the evil in it, He must bring it to account.

[11 : 21] He must judge the world. The perfect creation which He has made that has been marred and corrupted by sin, it has to be brought to its end.

It has to be brought to its completion. And that's the description which Jesus is giving here. He's giving us a description of the undoing of creation.

Where the stars which were placed into the night sky and held there and named all by God, He named every single one of them, He says they will fall from their position.

And the moon, He says, the moon which was ordained by God to be the lesser light to rule the night, He says, at the coming of Jesus, it will not give its light.

But what's astonishing is that Jesus affirms the words of all the prophets that at His coming, the sun will be darkened. And what Jesus is describing for us is the undoing, the undoing of creation right back to the first day of creation when God first of all spoke into the darkness and into the void and said, let there be light.

[12 : 40] Which means at the coming of Jesus, darkness will once again envelop everything just like it did before the creation.

And of course in the Bible, darkness, it's symbolic of God's judgment and wrath. Light is symbolic of God's blessing and salvation.

And the gospel affirms to us that light has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus says Himself, I am the light of the world.

He who believes in Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. But the only way for that promise to be fulfilled, the only way for salvation to be accomplished was for that light, the light of Jesus, to experience the power of darkness.

And that's what Mark will be telling us when we come to chapter 15. Mark will gather us around the cross of Jesus and He'll gather us there to gaze at the beauty of this Saviour who has been mocked and spat upon.

[13 : 56] And Mark will tell us that when Jesus bears our sin and stands condemned in our place, wounded for our transgressions, he says the cross of Calvary will be shrouded in darkness where light has been undone because God's judgment is falling upon the sinless Saviour.

But we need to understand that it had to fall upon Him. It had to fall upon Jesus. darkness had to enter into the experience of purest light.

Not just to demonstrate what would happen at the last day when the whole of the created order would be undone, but so that the last day could take place.

Because, my friend, were it not for the darkness of Calvary, there would be no hope for this world. Were it not for the darkness of Calvary, there would be no promise of light and there would be no blessing of salvation.

Were it not for the darkness of Calvary, you could say that the end couldn't come. Because, it's because of the darkness of Calvary and the display of God's judgment upon His own beloved Son and the promise of undoing creation, that's the reason the end must come.

[15 : 19] That's the reason the old heavens and the old earth must pass away and be burned up with a fervent heat. The old heavens and the old earth, they must pass away in order for the promise of the new heavens and the new earth to be fulfilled.

And that's the promise which comes out of the darkness of Calvary. That at the return of Jesus Christ, there will be a re-creation.

There will be a new birth and a new beginning for God's people. And is that not what we're given at the end of our Bibles in Revelation 20 where John says, I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them and he shall be their people.

God himself will be with them and he shall be their God. And it says, of that new heavens and that new earth, God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there shall be no more death.

There shall be no more sorrow nor crying. There shall be no more pain. for the former things have passed away. My friend, if you're a Christian today, the second coming of Jesus Christ is something you should look forward to because the consequence of his coming is that on that great day when Jesus comes in the cloud with his glory and power, we're told that he will gather, he'll send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of earth to the ends of heaven.

[17 : 20] He'll gather all his people past and present and they will dwell with him and he shall be their God and they shall be his people.

it's a wonderful prospect, the second coming of Jesus Christ. But what we see as we move on is that closely connected to the consequence of his coming is the confidence in his coming.

The confidence in his coming. If you look at verse 28, he says, from the fig tree learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near.

So also when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near at the very gates. And in these words, Jesus addresses the question, how can we be sure that Jesus will return?

How can we know for certain that Jesus will come back the second time to judge the world? Well, we've already said that if God is loving, he can't let the world continue in this state forever.

[18 : 35] And if God is just, well, he must bring every evil work into judgment. And he must bring the world to its conclusion because there is the promise of the new heavens and the new earth.

But Jesus gives another reason here as to why we can have confidence in his coming. And he does so by giving this illustration of a fig tree. Because the thing about a fig tree is that they display their leaves when there is a change in the season.

The fig tree sheds its leaves in the winter, like many trees. But it's only in the late spring, just when the summer is coming. When the winter is past, the temperature is getting warmer, it's then that the branches on the fig tree, they grow tender and there are little buds of leaves that appear.

And Jesus says, when you see these things happen, you know then that the summer is near. And what Jesus means by these things, these things, you know that these things are coming.

so also when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. And what Jesus means by these things is what he just said in verse 8.

[19 : 56] He said about the escalating chaos in the world, where nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, there will be earthquakes, there will be famines.

And Jesus says, these are only the beginning of the birth pains. These are only the beginning of the end. Because the full stop to the sentence of history only takes place when the Son of Man returns in his power and glory.

Therefore, what Jesus is saying is that whatever nation will rise against nation, whether Germany, Russia, North Korea, or America, they are only the beginning of the end.

Whatever kingdom is going to be against kingdom, whether it's the kingdom of ISIS, or Putin, or May, or Trump, or Clinton, they are only the beginning of the end.

Whatever conflicts in this world, whether natural, scientific, political, or religious, they are only signs of the times and seasons of this world that are changing and they're becoming progressively worse.

[21 : 04] Which means that the end is near. It's right at the door, he says. But as the commentator put it, tribulation, suffering, evil, and death, they are not the full stop to the sentence of history.

The return of Jesus Christ is. And when that will happen, no one knows but the Father. But we ought to have confidence in the coming of Jesus, not only because of what Jesus says will happen in the future, but also because of what Jesus has said would happen, and it has been fulfilled already.

And what I mean by that is that when you look at Mark's Gospel, there are three separate occasions, chapters 8, 9, and 10, where Jesus prophesied the same thing.

He said to the disciples, we are going up to Jerusalem, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles.

They will mock him and scourge him and spit on him and kill him and on the third day he will rise again. And as we know, those words were fulfilled. Then at the beginning of this chapter, chapter 13, Jesus prophesied about the destruction of the temple.

[22 : 28] He said to the disciples, do you see these great buildings? They will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. And as we said before, these words of Jesus were fulfilled in 70 AD.

But more than that, Jesus says in verse 30, truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things will take place.

Now we have to understand that when Jesus uses the word generation, he's not talking about those who were living in the first century. Because the word generation can also be translated race or people.

Which means that Jesus isn't referring to the generation of the first century, he's referring to the Jews as God's chosen people. Which makes sense of the verse when you read it in that light because it says, truly I say to you, this people, the Jews, they will not pass away until all these things take place.

and those words of Jesus, they have also been fulfilled. We've seen that in our own history. We will remember that this coming week on the 11th and on Remembering Sunday, we will remember the world wars which were fought because of the hatred of Hitler and Nazi Germany towards the Jews.

[23 : 54] Where countless millions, they were murdered and raped as Hitler attempted to exterminate an entire race because they were the Jews. And yet the words of Jesus are being fulfilled.

The Jews will not pass away until all these things take place. The Jews, although they too must see that Jesus is the Messiah, they will not be exterminated.

They will remain until the end of time. But Jesus says that there's also one more thing that will remain. And he says in verse 31, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The words of Jesus, which are written down for us in the Bible, he says, will by no means pass away. And there have been leaders, there have been empires, there have been kingdoms, there have been nations and armies, they have risen to places of prominence and power at one time or another and they have all fallen.

They've all at some point in their experience passed away, each one of them, whether it was the Romans, the Greeks, the Celts, the Germans, whoever they were, they all passed away.

[25 : 15] They have, and they have been added to the pages of our history books. Jesus says, there is one book written about one king and one kingdom which remains the most read book in the world and that is, of course, the Bible.

But the Bible has not been without its opposition. It has been questioned by science and philosophy, it has been undermined by atheism and secularism, it has been distorted by Roman Catholicism and other cults and attempts have been made to disprove its authority by other religions and yet, and yet, the words of Jesus contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, they have by no means passed away.

They have stood the test of time and they will continue to stand the test of time. And you know what's interesting? is that even in our scientific age and our atheistic age, the Bible remains the number one best seller in the world.

And why is that? Because everything else will pass away. Everything else will pass away.

Heaven and earth will pass away. family, friends, people, places, political realities, they will all pass away, says Jesus. But the one constant in our lives, which will by no means pass away, is the words of Jesus Christ.

[27 : 03] Because the words of Jesus Christ, they are like himself, unchanging. They are the same today, yesterday, today, and forever.

They are unchanging, and they will continue to speak into our ever-changing lives. My friend, that's why we ought to trust this Jesus with our life.

And that's why we ought to trust this Jesus with our death. Because our confidence can only come from his word, which lives and abides forever.

And so we should have confidence in the second coming of Jesus, that it will take place, because of what he has said. What he has said has already happened.

Therefore, we must follow the command which has been given also, in the preparation of his coming. That's what we see in this next section. The command that is coming.

[28 : 03] We've considered the consequence of his coming, the confidence in his coming, but lastly, we see the command, at his coming. The command at his coming.

He says in verse 32, But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven or the sun, but only the Father.

Be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come. It's like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

And when I say to you, I say to all, stay awake. these words, they were the last words which Jesus preached in public.

[29 : 08] And as one commentator put it, the grand finale of the gospel preached by Jesus is that there is a sure hope for the future. It's a hope which is grounded not in history or logic or intuition, but in the word of Jesus.

that's the hope. And the words which Jesus issues here are the words stay awake. Stay awake.

And as we've looked at this passage, we know that the second coming of Jesus, it will not be like the first. Because at his first coming, Jesus, as we know, came in weakness.

He came in submission. He was born as an infant, born unnoticed, born unhonored, born pretty much unknown. But as we've read, he will come the second time in the clouds with great power and glory.

He will come as the king of heaven with the armies of heaven to sit upon the throne of glory. And he will be known and recognized and feared by everyone. He came the first time to be despised and rejected by men, to be wounded for our transgressions, to be bruised for our iniquities, to bear our sin, to take our punishment, to endure our darkness, to enter into our hell, to die our death.

[30 : 37] But he will come the second time to reign. He will reign as king. And some will howl in terror at his arrival. Others will rejoice at his arrival.

Some will cry for the rocks to fall on them at his arrival. Others will stand praising at his arrival. But as we read, he will call the elect from all the corners, from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

He will call them to himself. And he will put his enemies under his feet. He will summon everyone to appear at the bar of his judgment, to give an account.

And whoever we are, and whatever our spiritual condition, at the appearing of Jesus, we will all know who he is. We will all recognize the identity of Jesus.

No one will question who this person is. And that is appearing. The Bible says that every knee will bow, whether in heaven or on earth or in hell.

[31 : 49] And every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. My friend, the second coming of Jesus Christ will be completely different to the first.

And what we see here is that Jesus is commanding us that we need to be prepared for his coming. We need to be ready. For at an hour when we think not, the Son of Man will come.

No one knows the day, no one knows the hour. Many have tried to predict the second coming. They have taken guesses. They have made calculations in order to try and predict when the end will come.

But no one can predict the day of the Lord either by science or even by scripture. Because Jesus has said concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

therefore what's needed is not calculation, but preparation. We need to be prepared.

[32 : 59] And the only preparation we can make for the second coming of Jesus is to stay awake. To stay awake. And as we said before, those words, the words to that effect, they are repeated throughout the entire chapter.

Jesus says, take heed, be on guard, keep watch, watch and pray, stay awake. And that's what he says here in verse 33.

He says, be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come. You do not know when the time will come. My friend, we are to live our lives as if Jesus could come any moment.

If you ever want to question whether something is right or wrong, all these grey areas in life, ask yourself, if Jesus came just now and he found me doing what I'm doing, do you think he'd be happy?

My friend, we need to live our lives as if Jesus could come at any moment. We need to be on guard against spiritual apathy and spiritual deadness.

[34 : 08] We need to seek the Lord, he says. We need to pray. We are to pray as we've been taught, that thy kingdom would come, thy will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But we're also to work, to work while it's day, before the night comes, before the sun is darkened.

We are to work while it's day. And that's what Jesus says. It's like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and he commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

We are to watch, we are to pray, we are to work. My friend, Jesus is commanding us to prepare for his coming. He's coming and he's commanding us to watchfulness and faithfulness because Jesus knows that we can become so short-sighted.

We can be so short-sighted where we spend our lives clinging to that which is temporal and momentary while we neglect the things that are eternal.

[35 : 18] And we can become distracted by other things and preoccupied with other things and immersed in other things and these things, they may not be inherently sinful or wrong, but they are the very things which distract us from being ready at the coming of Jesus.

And, you know, we not only have to be ready as Christians, we also have to be urging others to be ready at the coming of Jesus.

Because there's one thing Jesus doesn't want to find at his coming and that is people who are asleep. People who are asleep.

That's why he says in verse 35, therefore stay awake. You do not know when the master of house will come in the evening or at midnight or when the cock crows or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

And when I say to you, I say to all, stay awake, stay awake, stay awake. And Jesus says to those who fall asleep, those who fall asleep, even under the sound of the gospel, he says wake up.

[36 : 40] He says to those who drift in and out of consciousness and awareness of his coming, Jesus says awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ will give thee light.

Jesus says don't fall asleep, don't be distracted by this world, don't succumb to the temptation to think that I'm not coming, don't ignore the command to stay awake, because at an hour when you least expect, the Son of Man will come.

And you know there were many people during the days of the early church who questioned if Jesus would come back at all. But it was Peter who said, know this, scoffers will come in the last days walking according to their own lusts.

And they will say, where is the promise of his coming? And they'll say nothing has changed, the world is still the same, the times and seasons are still the same.

But Peter went on to say, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

[38 : 01] The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, but is long-suffering towards him. And he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

And Peter says, because the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. My friend, I cannot stress to you enough the urgency of this message.

This is an urgent message, and we need to do something about our spiritual condition now. You need to do it now, because you need to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus.

You need to be ready for his appearing. You need to be found in Christ. You need to be walking in the light. You need to be watching, and you need to be waiting for his appearing.

You need to heed the command at his coming to stay awake. To stay awake. My friend, he will come without warning, like a thief in the night.

[39 : 12] And Satan will tell you that, well, there's plenty of time. Not today. Satan will tell you that plenty more opportunities. Satan will tell you that the Lord won't come yet.

Not now. Not in my generation. Not in my time. Not today. And you know, maybe he's right.

Maybe the Lord won't come today. Maybe today isn't the day of his return. time. But that doesn't mean he won't come for you or me today.

It doesn't mean that he won't call you or me out of the scene of time into eternity. God's love. Are you prepared for that?

Are you prepared to meet your God? Are you prepared to stand before your creator? are you prepared to bow before your king?

[40 : 34] the command that is coming is stay awake. Stay awake.

Be ready. For at an hour when you think not, the Son of Man will come.

stay awake. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, we bless thee and we praise thee of the return of Jesus Christ.

And that Lord, that we might pray as the apostle of old who said, Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus, that thou wouldest come and bring an end to all this pain and suffering, all the turmoil and sadness in this world.

But help us, Lord, to be ready, to be walking in the light as children of the light, to work while it is day because the night is coming. And O Lord, we pray that thou wouldest prepare us, prepare us for we know that at an hour when we think not, the Son of Man will come.

[41 : 57] O Lord, bless us then we pray, help us to be ready and to be waiting, to have oil in our lamps, to know, Lord, that he will come and that he will take his own home to be with himself.

Do us good then we pray thee, bless us in this day, the Lord's day, help us to enjoy it and to glorify thee forever. Do us good for Jesus' sake.

Amen. I shall conclude by singing in Psalm 98 Psalm 98 in the Scottish Psalter, page 360 Psalm 98 singing from verse 4 down to the end of the psalm Psalm 98 from verse 4 let all the earth unto the Lord send forth a joyful noise lift up your voice aloud to him sing praises and rejoice down to the end of the psalm before the Lord because he comes to judge the earth comes he he'll judge the world with righteousness his folk with equity these verses of Psalm 98 to God's praise let all the earth unto the Lord send forth a joyful noise lift up your voice aloud to him sing praises and rejoice with harp, with harp and voice of sound unto Jehovah sing with trumpets, horns, gladly sound before the Lord the King let the world and dwellers there let God's love hands and let the hills let the hills together joy declare before the Lord because he comes before the Lord because he comes to judge the earth comes he he'll judge the world with righteousness he spoke with equity the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all both now and forevermore

Amen Amen Amen