

The Palace Beautiful

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could first of all just turn back to one verse I want us to think about this evening. Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18.

Matthew 16 and verse 18, where Jesus says to Peter, or even all the disciples, I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Now, as you know, this evening we're continuing our study in the Pilgrim's Progress.

And as we've walked with John Bunyan's Pilgrim, we've walked along the King's Highway, and we've walked from the City of Destruction, and we're going towards the Celestial City. And as we've walked with Christian, we've witnessed the change that has taken place in his life. We've witnessed, first of all, the change of his name. His name changed from graceless to Christian.

[1 : 07] Then his burden of sin was removed, and it rolled away into the tomb, never to be seen again. His clothing also was changed. He was transformed from rags to righteousness.

His heart was then filled with assurance instead of anxiety. Everything has changed in Christian's experience. He has become a new creation in Christ.

The old has passed away, and all has become new. And as we've walked with Christian along the road, we've walked in the Pilgrim's Progress, and along the way we've fled from the City of Destruction.

We've been delivered from the Slough of Despond. We've passed through the Wicked Gate. We've explored the Interpreter's House. We've stood at the cross with his burden rolled away.

And last week, we persevered up the hill called Difficulty. And we saw Christian, we saw him keep persevering after he had encountered seven characters.

[2 : 07] Seven characters, all of whom at one point were heading towards the Celestial City. But for one reason or another, they took a wrong turn, or they gave up altogether.

And these seven characters, you'll remember, the first three were Simple Sloth and Presumption. They were found asleep at the foot of the cross. Then there was Formalist and Hypocrisy.

They took a shortcut onto the king's highway. But it all ended for them when one took the way of danger and the other took the way of destruction. And then we also met Timorous and Mistrust.

They were found running. They were running back the way, heading back towards the City of Destruction. They were going in the opposite direction to the Celestial City. And these seven characters, which we met last Lord's Day, they were to be a reminder to Christian and to every Christian that we need to persevere to the end.

We need to persevere to the end because the road towards the Celestial City, it's filled with dangers, distractions and difficulties. So we need to persevere to the end.

[3 : 17] But, you know, it was after Christian had overcome the hazards and hypocrites and a hill, it was after that that he arrived at the palace beautiful.

And Bunyan, he writes, he says, Now, I want to say from the outset this evening that the palace beautiful, it's a description and a depiction of the church.

The palace beautiful is the church of Jesus Christ. Because, you know, for Bunyan, for Bunyan, the church was like a stately palace. The church was beautiful.

And, you know, in order to appreciate what Bunyan is expressing here, we have to remember that the church was precious to Bunyan because Bunyan was unable to attend church for 12 years.

You remember that for 12 years Bunyan was confined to the four walls of his prison cell. He was unable to gather with the body of Christ. He was unable to be with the body of believers.

[4 : 28] He was unable to gather together in the Lord's house with the Lord's people on the Lord's day. And, you know, in a small measure throughout this past year, and in a strange way, we've experienced what it would be like to be kept from gathering together in the Lord's house.

We've also tasted what it's like for those who are housebound, those who are confined to their homes, those who find their home like a prison all year round. And, you know, I hope and pray that this year, this year of 2020, that it's taught us and reminded us of how beautiful and how beneficial and how much of a blessing the church is in our lives.

My friend, you know, in the past, our church attendance on the Lord's day and midweek, it might have been half-hearted or even haphazard. But if this past year has taught us anything, it should have taught us that we are not to take these things for granted.

We're not to take these things for granted. And, you know, Bunyan is reminding us in this section that the church is a glorious body of people. It's a body of people from all nations, tribes and tongues.

And they've been called out of the darkness of sin and called into the marvellous light of salvation. The church is this beautiful entity that has been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

[5 : 59] The church, says Bunyan, is palace beautiful. The church is palace beautiful. And, you know, as Christian climbs up the hill called difficulty, he climbs up this hill and he reaches the palace beautiful and he wants to lodge there for the night.

In fact, Christian ends up lodging there for four nights. But it's while Christian is lodging at the palace beautiful that he discovers that it's a house of faith, a house of fellowship, a house of family and a house of fame.

So, first of all, a house of faith.

The palace beautiful is a house of faith. So, Bunyan writes, he says, So, I saw in my dream that Christian made haste and went forward, that if possible he might get lodging there.

Now, before he had gone far, he entered into a very narrow passage, which was about a furlong off the porter's lodge. And looking very narrowly before him, as he went, he espied two lions in the way.

[7 : 18] So, as Christian approached the gate to the stately grounds of the palace beautiful, he could see the porter who was on the inside of the gate.

And we're told in the passage that the name of the porter was called Watchful. And he lived at the porter's lodge next to the entrance.

And at the entrance to the grounds of palace beautiful, there was two large pillars that held this large gate. But in front of these two large pillars stood two lions.

And in order to enter into the grounds of palace beautiful, Christian had to walk past this narrow way between these two lions. But when Christian saw the lions, he realized, he realized straight away why Timorous and Mistrust had turned back in the opposite direction.

And the thing is, Christian thought about doing the same. Because when he looked at these lions, he was afraid and he thought that there was nothing but death before him, that these lions were just going to devour him.

[8 : 24] But as Christian stood there, halting between two opinions, whether to go forward or whether to go back, he was halted between two opinions. And it was then that Watchful shouted to him.

He shouted to him from inside the gate and said, Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained and are placed there for the trial of faith, where it is, and for the finding out of those that have none.

Keep in the midst of the path, he says, and no hurt shall come to thee. And you know what Bunyan is describing in this scene of Christian entering the gates of palace beautiful, what he's describing is Christian's experience of becoming a member in the church of Jesus Christ.

Christian is entering the household of faith to lodge there and he's confessing his faith. He's publicly professing his faith in Jesus Christ.

And you'll remember that this was similar to Bunyan's own experience. Because you remember that having received erection and discipleship from the godly Mr. Gifford, who's been portrayed as watchful in this scene, it was then that Bunyan joined the Bedford church in 1653 and he was baptised in the River Ouse near Bedford.

[9 : 53] And Bunyan, you could say, he entered the household of faith. He came forward confessing and professing that Jesus Christ is his Lord and Saviour.

But you know, my friend, how often is it the case that when a Christian wishes to become a member in the church and publicly confess and profess the name of Christ as their Saviour, how often is it the case that the devil is right there to try and stop you?

And like it was for Christian trying to enter through the gate of the palace beautiful, it was a trial of faith. Because the devil continued to go around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And even at the entrance gate to the palace beautiful, the devil is there. He's seeking to devour Christian with his doubts and disbelief. He's trying to deter Christian from going forward, telling him to go back.

And you know, my friend, that's how the devil works, isn't it? He dishonours the name of Christ. He discredits the Christian's faith. He fills us with doubts and disbelief.

[11 : 05] But you know what I love is the reminder that despite the devouring that the devil is determined to do, what I love is the fact that the devil is chained.

The devil is chained. He can only do so much and he can only go so far until the Lord says, as he did with Job, that's enough.

That's enough. Christian could have turned back, but he would have missed out on the blessings and the benefits of palace beautiful. So he listens to watchful.

He listens to the porter. And we're told that Christian, he went forward. He went forward trembling for fear of the lions, but taking good heed to the words of the porter.

He heard them roar, but they did him no harm. They were chained. And Christian passed by the roaring lions on either side of him.

[12 : 04] He passed by and he entered the gate into the grounds of palace beautiful. And it's there that Christian said to watchful, Sir, what house is this?

And may I lodge here tonight? And watchful, he gives this beautiful answer in order to describe the palace beautiful. He says, this house was built by the Lord of the hill and he built it for the relief and security of pilgrims.

But you know, what's remarkable is the location of palace beautiful. Because, as you know, it was located on the top of a hill. And on the one side of this hill, on the one side of palace beautiful was the hill difficulty, which Christian had just climbed up to.

But on the other side, you could say, on the other side of the palace beautiful was the valley of humiliation, where Christian would come face to face with Apollyon.

And God willing, we'll consider that next Lord's Day. But you know, the location of palace beautiful, it's right on the top, you could say, of a rock. The location of palace beautiful, it ought to remind us of that discussion which we read there in Matthew 16, where Jesus had this discussion with his disciples.

[13 : 31] And Jesus asked the question, who do you say that I am? And as we read, Peter, he stepped forward. He stepped forward confessing and professing his faith.

He said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And it was then that Jesus responded by saying, I tell you, you are Peter.

And on this rock, I will build my church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Now, we have to be clear.

The rock upon which Jesus was going to build his church, the rock wasn't the apostle Peter. Peter wasn't the rock. Peter wasn't the first pope, as the Roman Catholic Church claims.

The rock, my friend, was Peter's confession. The confession, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. The rock was Peter's confession.

[14 : 33] And Jesus affirms that it would be upon that rock, upon that confession of the Christian, that Jesus would build his church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

And you know, my friend, far better for us to stand on this rock, and to stand on the side of Christ, than to be overcome by the powers of hell.

Because as Christian was reminded, the palace beautiful, it was built by the Lord of the hill, for the relief and security of pilgrims.

But it was also built in enemy territory. It was built against the walls of hell itself. It was built just on the top of the valley of humiliation.

And it was built there. It has been built there upon the confession and the profession of the Christian. That's why as Christian entered the grounds of Palace Beautiful, he was asked by Watchful to give a confession of his faith.

[15 : 35] He was asked to give the confession of the Christian. And Christian says to Watchful, he says, Well, at first, my name was Graceless. But now my name is Christian.

I have come from the city of destruction. And I am going to Mount Zion. I am a pilgrim. I am going to the celestial city. And you know, with Christian's confession, Watchful the porter, he then rings the doorbell of the palace.

He rings the doorbell of Palace Beautiful. And he says, I will call out one of the women of this place who will, if she likes your talk, bring you in to the rest of the family according to the rules of the house.

And then we're told that the door is opened. And a young woman answers the door. And her name is Discretion. And as her name suggests, it would be at her discretion to allow Christian to enter into the palace, beautiful or not.

And so after a while of listening to Christian's confession of faith, Discretion then calls for three more members of her family. She calls for piety, prudence, and charity.

[16 : 48] And they were to welcome Christian into their family home of the palace, beautiful. And you know, as Christian then steps over the threshold of the door into the palace, beautiful, what he discovers is that the palace, beautiful, is a house of fellowship.

It's a house of fellowship. That's what we see secondly. So while lodging at the palace, beautiful, Christian discovered that it's a house of faith, but it's also a house of fellowship.

A house of fellowship. That's what we see secondly. So when Christian was welcomed into the palace, beautiful, we're told that he was then led into what would have been a living room.

And he was there, he was to sit there. He received a drink and he was to sit there with piety, prudence, and charity. And they were to talk with him while supper was being prepared.

And so piety is the first one who speaks to Christian. And she says, come good Christian, since we have been so loving to you to receive you into our house this night, let us, if perhaps, we may better ourselves thereby, talk with you of all the things that have happened to you in your pilgrimage.

[17 : 59] What moved you at first to betake yourself to a pilgrim's life? You know, when Christian entered the palace, beautiful, piety asked Christian to share his testimony.

She asked him to speak about his pilgrimage. She asked Christian to share his story of salvation. She asked Christian to give an answer for the reason, for the hope that was within him.

And that's because the palace, beautiful, was a house of fellowship. You know, this is something that's so important in the life and growth of the church, that Christians testify to their faith in Jesus Christ.

It's important that Christians are willing to come out on the side of the Lord. It's important that they're willing to speak about their pilgrimage. It's important that they're willing to nail their colours to the mast.

It's important that Christians are ready to give an answer for the reason, for the hope that is within them. Because, you know, my friend, testimonies are important in the life and growth of the church.

[19 : 10] Not only for those who are listening, but also for those who are testifying. Because, you know, testimonies are a means of encouraging and strengthening one another in the faith.

And testimonies, they remind us, they reassure us that although every story is different, we all go through the same struggles with sin, sickness, suffering, and sorrow.

And we're taught that we need to bring it all, we need to bring it all to the sovereign Saviour, Jesus Christ. You know, before I became a Christian, I used to attend the YM in Stornoway on a Sunday evening.

And every week I would hear the testimony of a Christian. I would hear a different story of salvation. And as I listened to all these testimonies, I could relate to some of their experiences.

I could relate to how they felt and what they went through and even their struggles when seeking the Lord. In fact, at one point I became jealous that they were Christians and that they had a story of salvation.

[20 : 23] But I didn't. You know, that was actually one of the ways in which the Lord used to draw me to himself because I wanted a story to tell.

I wanted to tell a story of how the Lord had worked in my life and changed my heart and transformed my experience. And you know, I'll never forget the night that I had to stand in the YM and tell my story of salvation and speak about how the Lord had worked in my life.

And you know, I was so thankful to the Lord for all he had done. But you know, my friend, that's why fellowship is so important in the life and growth of the church.

That's why Christians should always testify to their faith in Jesus Christ. That's why Christians should always nail their colours to the mast and share their story of salvation.

That's what fellowship is all about. In fact, that's what fellowship is. Fellowship is sharing. That's what the word fellowship means. It means sharing.

[21 : 26] This is actually something Paul reminded the church in Corinth. He said to the church in Corinth that they have been called out of friendship with the world and called into fellowship with Jesus Christ.

And Paul said that it's through our fellowship with Christ and other Christians that we'll grow in our faith. That's because, my friend, fellowship is fundamental to our faith.

Fellowship is fundamental to our faith. Yes, we're to read the Bible. Yes, we're to pray. But fellowship is fundamental to our faith. You know, that's why I can't understand why people in our own congregation aren't at testimony evenings or at the Bible study on a Wednesday night.

These things are there for our growth. And fellowship is fundamental to our faith. And it's not, you know, it's not just, these things are not just about discussing the final, finer points of theology or trying to answer the unanswerable questions of scripture.

Fellowship is all about faith. Fellowship is about sharing our faith. Fellowship is about sharing our Christian experience. Fellowship is about discussing the problems and pitfalls as well as the joys and sorrows of the Christian life.

[22 : 44] My friend, fellowship is about sharing what we're learning in order that it will be of benefit and maybe even a blessing to others. maybe even those who are younger in the faith.

Maybe they need to be encouraged and built up in their faith. My friend, fellowship is all about iron sharpening iron so that we'll be spurred on to faithful and godly living.

And that's what Christian experienced in the palace beautiful. He discovered it to be a house of fellowship because piety, she asked Christian about his pilgrimage.

She asked him about his journey. She asked him to share his testimony. She asked why he had left the city of destruction. She asked who he had met along the way. She asked what did you learn at the interpreter's house.

She asked what he received at the cross and how he persevered up the hill difficulty. She asked how did he get to the palace beautiful.

[23 : 43] My friend, when Christian had fellowship in the palace beautiful, piety asked him about the past. prudence asked him about the present.

Prudence asked, do you think sometimes of the country from whence you came? And Christian said, yes, but with much shame and detestation.

Truly, he says, if I had been mindful of that country from whence I came out, I might have had an opportunity to have returned. But now I desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.

And prudence goes on to ask, what makes you so desirous for Mount Zion? To which Christian gives this reason for his hope and confidence in the Lord.

He says, it is there I hope to see him alive that did hang dead on the cross. And there I hope to be rid of all these things that to this day are in me an annoyance to me.

[24 : 44] There, they say, there is no death. And there I shall dwell with such company as I like best. For to tell you the truth, I love him because I was by him eased of my burden and I am weary of my inward sickness.

I would fain be where I shall die no more and with the company that shall continually cry, holy, holy, holy. You know, it's a beautiful confession of faith.

In palace, beautiful. But then charity begins to speak to Christian and she reminds him that the palace beautiful is a house of family, which is what we see thirdly.

A house of family. So while lodging at the palace beautiful, Christian discovered that it's a house of faith, a house of fellowship and thirdly, a house of family.

A house of family. So Bunyan writes, he says, then said charity to Christian, have you a family? Are you a married man? And Christian said, I have a wife and four small children.

[25 : 52] Then she says, why did you not bring them along with you? But Christian wept and said, oh, how willingly I would have done it, but they were all of them utterly against my going on pilgrimage.

And Christian, he went on to explain to charity that he had pleaded with his family to begin the pilgrim's progress with him. But he said, his wife was too afraid of losing this world and his children were given over to the foolish delights of youth.

So even though Christian was welcomed into the palace beautiful as part of the family, even though he had gained a family of brothers and sisters in Christ, he still had a burden for his own flesh and blood.

Christian had a burden for his own wife who was a stranger to grace and to God. And he still had a burden and a concern for his children who were on the broad road leading to destruction.

And you know my friend, maybe that's what you've come to discover for yourself when you came to the palace beautiful. Because you may have lost your burden of sin, but is it not true that you've gained a burden of sorrow?

[27 : 05] Because the reality is you still care and you still have a compassion and you still have a concern for those whom you have left behind. And when you began the pilgrim's progress, when you left and fled from the city of destruction, you would have done anything to take your spouse and your children with you.

But you had to leave them. You had to leave them in the city of destruction. And to this day, it breaks your heart and it burdens your soul that they're still not with you.

they're still not saved. And maybe after all these years of praying and pleading for them to take up their cross and follow Jesus, still there's nothing.

There's no movement. You don't see anything happening in their life. You know, my Christian friend, I want to say to you this evening, don't give up. Don't give up.

whatever you do, don't stop pleading. And don't stop praying for your spouse. Don't stop pleading and praying for your siblings.

[28 : 12] Don't stop pleading and praying for your sons and daughters. Don't ever give up pleading and praying for their soul. And you know, do you know my unconverted friend?

Do you know as someone who may have a Christian spouse or a Christian sibling or a Christian son or daughter? Do you know, I want to tell you that just because they love Jesus doesn't mean they love you any less.

In fact, it means that they love you more because they can see you're lost and what they long for more than anything else is that you will come to Christ.

for salvation. They long for the day when you'll join them in the household of faith and you'll share in their fellowship and you'll be part of their family.

Like Christian, they long for the day when you'll come with them to the Lord's house on the Lord's day and sit with them at the Lord's table and partake of the Lord's supper. They long for the day when you'll have in common with them both your confession and conversion and even your conversation about the Christ.

[29 : 34] Because that's what Christian had in common with those in the Palace Beautiful. His confession, his conversion and even his conversation, it was all about the Lord of the hill.

It was all about the Lord of the hill. And we're told that they talked together until it was late at night. And after they had committed themselves to the Lord for protection, they provided Christian a large upper chamber called peace, where he slept until morning.

And it was in the morning that Christian discovered that the Palace Beautiful was also a house of fame, which is what I want us to consider lastly. A house of fame.

So while lodging at the Palace Beautiful, Christian discovered that it's a house of faith, a house of fellowship, a house of family, and a house of fame. A house of fame.

Bunyan writes, he says, in the morning they all got up, and after some were talking together, they told Christian that he should not depart, till they had shown him the rarities of that place.

[30 : 43] They first took Christian into the study where they showed him the history of the Lord of the hill. They then read to Christian some of the worthy acts that some of the Lord's servants had done in faith.

And we find all these acts in Hebrews 11, where all of the Lord's servants, they acted in faith, we're told when they conquered kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the

mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped from the edge of the sword, but of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight to the armies of the enemy. And then we're told, the next day they took Christian into the armory, where they showed him all manner of weapons, which the Lord had provided for pilgrims.

And according to Ephesians 6, the Lord provided the whole armour of God. He provided a helmet of salvation, a breastplate of righteousness, a shield of faith, shoes of gospel blessing, and he had a sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And what makes this remarkable is that there was enough armour in the armory to provide armour for all the servants of the Lord.

[31 : 59] So every pilgrim who came to Palace Beautiful, there was enough armour for them to fight the good fight of faith. But we're also told that they showed Christians some of the things which the Lord's servants used in their service to the Lord.

They showed him Moses' rod, which turned to a snake. They showed him the hammer and nail, which Jael used to kill Sisera. They showed Christian the pitchers, trumpets and lamps, which Gideon used to terrify the armies of Midian.

They showed him the ox's goad, which Shamgar used to kill 600 men. They showed him the jawbone, which Samson used to kill the Philistines. They showed him the sling, which David used to kill Goliath of Gath.

And they showed Christian the sword, which the Lord will kill the man of sin on the last day. They showed him all these excellent things, we're told.

And then it reads, Christian was delighted. He saw this house as a house of fame, and he was delighted. But you know, with all these biblical references that we read through in in these pages, we're being shown that Bunyan was a man who had a great knowledge of scripture.

[33 : 19] In fact, it was actually Spurgeon who said of John Bunyan, he said that he was a living Bible. Spurgeon said, prick Bunyan anywhere on his body, and his blood will flow be blind.

The very essence of the Bible, he says, flows out from his veins. Bunyan was a man, my friend, who was saturated in scripture. He knew his Bible, and he's a great example for us to imitate and emulate.

Bunyan was an example of a Christian who knew their Bible and lived their Bible. Bunyan was a living Bible. I wonder if the same could be said of me or of you, that we are living Bibles, that we are, as Paul says, living epistles seen and read of men.

But then on his final day at the palace, beautiful, Christian was given a glimpse of what lay ahead for him. And he was led up to the top of the palace, the palace that was on the top of this hill, and he was led up to the very top of the palace where he could see into the distance the delectable mountains.

And Christian was told that the name of that country where the delectable mountains were was called Emmanuel's Land. And he was told that when he reaches there, he will see the gate to the celestial city.

[34 : 47] But before Christian was allowed to continue his journey towards the celestial city, he was taken into the armory again, and he was dressed from head to toe in armour.

And when he was armed for assault, assault which comes in the Valley of Humiliation, Christian sets off down the hill. He leaves the palace beautiful and he continues his pilgrim's progress down the hill towards the Valley of Humiliation.

And God willing next week we'll see what happens to Christian in the Valley of Humiliation as he continues walking the pilgrim's progress. Well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray together. O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks for the church of Jesus Christ and we pray that it would continue to be built upon the confession of the Christian, that Jesus is the Christ, he is the Son of the living God, that we would all be able to say that I am crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[36 : 12] O Lord bless us we pray. We pray that thou wouldst enable us to increase our faith, that we would look ever more to Jesus, that we would increase our fellowship.

We pray Lord that we would learn from one another and listen to one another, that we might be built up as a spiritual house, holy and acceptable unto thee. we pray O Lord for our homes and our

families.

We pray for those in our home who are still strangers to grace and to God, husbands who are out of Christ, wives who are still on that broad road, children who have no thought of eternity.

O Father have mercy upon them, draw them to thyself with cords that cannot be broken, and help us Lord day by day to put on the whole armour of God, to be ready to stand firm against the wiles of the devil, and having done all to stand.

O Lord keep us we pray, even in the weak that lies before us, that whatever is in our cup, whatever providence comes our way, help us to be assured that thou art the one who is still with us, who will never leave us, and never forsake us.

[37 : 23] Go before us then we pray, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this evening, and we're going to sing the words of Psalm 17.

Psalm 17 in the Sing Psalms version, and we're going to sing from verse 6 down to the verse marked 8, and then the last verse, verse 15. Psalm 17 at verse 6.

I call on you O God, for you will answer me. O turn your ear towards my prayer, and hear my earnest plea. Display your steadfast love, and save with your right hand all those who flee for help to you, when foes against them stand.

In shadow of your wings, hide me in times of strife, and as the apple of your eye, preserve and guard my life. But I in righteousness your face will surely see, and with your likeness when I wake, I satisfied will be.

these verses of Psalm 17, to God's praise. song 17, to God's praise. I call on you O God, for you will answer me.

[38 : 42] O turn you here towards my prayer, and hear thy mercy. she's sounding like an river.

O time can stand In shadow of your ways I fear thy times of strife And as the apple of your life Reserve and hide my life But how in righteousness Your face will surely see And with your likeness when I bring I stand this one will be