

No Excuses Moses!

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- [0 : 0 0] The Lord's help and the Lord's enabling. If we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Exodus. Exodus chapter 4.
- Exodus chapter 4. And if we just read again at verse 1. Exodus chapter 4 and verse 1.
- Then Moses answered, answering the Lord. He said, But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice.
- But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice. For they will say, the Lord did not appear to you. But particularly the word that Moses begins with.
- But. But. But. If you remember your childhood. Which for those who are children here this morning.
- [1 : 0 2] It will be very easy for them. But for some of us. Well, our childhood it wasn't yesterday. But I'm sure that. If you remember your childhood. You remember what you were told as a child.
- Mainly in relation to getting a telling off. When I was a child I got told off quite a bit. We won't mention any more about that. But when you got a row. Or when you were reprimanded.
- Or when you were rebuked. And maybe now as a parent. Or as a grandparent. You find yourself repeating the things you were told as a child. And you're repeating them to your children.
- Or even to your grandchildren. Simple things like. Well, behave yourself. Or stop fighting. I say that quite often. Stop talking. Sit still. Sit down. Do as you're told.
- Do as I say. Not as I do. Don't speak back. Don't talk with your mouth full. Don't lie. Don't grab. Don't be late. And one I was told often was.
- [1 : 5 8] Don't answer a question with a question. But as you know from your own experience as a child. Or with your own children or grandchildren. When children get a little bit older.
- They can become reluctant. And they can refuse to do what they're asked. Even if it's a repeated request. Like make your bed. Tidy your room.
- And take down your washing. It's often met with reluctance. Sometimes refusal. Which is then often countered by the parent. I want no ifs, ands or buts.
- Just do as you're told. Maybe you've said that before. I want no ifs, ands or buts. Just do as you're told. And you know in many ways.
- That's what the Lord is saying to Moses in this passage. I want no ifs, ands or buts. Just do as you're told. And I say that because in this chapter.
- [2 : 5 9] The Lord is still speaking to Moses. He's speaking to him. Still at the burning bush. Where the Lord has called. Commanded and commissioned Moses. To go and rescue and redeem the Israelites.
- From slavery and bondage in Egypt. But what we see from the opening verse of this chapter. Is that Moses responds. And he reacts to the Lord. With reluctance.

And refusal. He says. First word in verse one. But. But, but, but. The Israelites will not believe me. Or listen to me.

And then the Lord responds. And reacts like a parent speaking to a child. The Lord says to Moses. Stop with the excuses. No excuses, Moses.

I want no ifs, ands or buts. Just do as you're told. And yet in this passage. What we see is that Moses, he comes up with three excuses.

[3 : 59] Three excuses as to why he couldn't fulfill the call, commission, or command of the Lord. And the three excuses were signs, speaking, and skin.

Signs, speaking, and skin. They were the three excuses that Moses used. Signs, speaking, and skin. So the first excuse. The excuse of skin.

Signs. The excuse of signs. He says in verse one. But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice. For they will say, the Lord did not appear to you. The Lord said to him, what is in your hand?

He said, a staff. And he said, throw it on the ground. So he threw it on the ground. And it became a serpent. And Moses ran from it. But the Lord said to Moses, put out your hand and catch it by the tail.

So he put out his hand and caught it. And it became a staff in his hand. That they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

[5 : 03] Now, when we were considering the previous chapter, chapter three, we saw that the burning bush is an emblem. As you can see, it's an emblem of many Presbyterian churches, not only in Lewis, but also throughout the world.

And it's the emblem of our church here in Barvis, where on the front of the pulpit, there is the emblem of the burning bush with the Latin motto underneath it, nec tammen consumeator, it was not consumed.

And as we said before, this emblem and its motto on the front of the pulpit, it's there so that every time you come into church, you are reminded and reassured about God's call, God's character, and God's commitment.

Because as Christians, God has called us. He has called us to salvation. And He has called us to service. We are saved to serve. We're to serve God because God's character is holy.

God's character is holy. But this emblem of the burning bush and the Latin motto, as you can see there, nec tammen consumerbator, it not only reminds us about God's call and God's character, it also reminds us about God's commitment.

[6 : 19] That God is committed to our unconverted friends, whether here or watching at home. He's committed to them because He's not willing that any should perish, but that they will seek the Lord and be saved.

And so, my friend, every time you come to church, every time you come to church and you see this emblem of the burning bush on the front and its Latin motto, nec tammen consumeator, it was not consumed.

I want you to always remember, and I want you to always be assured about God's call. He's calling you to salvation. God's character, God is holy, and God's commitment that He wants you to be saved.

But for Moses, as he stood before the burning bush, he discovered that he was a nothing and a nobody in the sight of a holy God.

As D.L. Moody said, we've repeated his phrase quite often, Moses spent his first 40 years thinking he was a somebody. He spent the next 40 years realizing that he was a nobody.

- [7 : 27] And then he spent the last 40 years of his life realizing what God can do with anybody. And now at the age of 80 years old, Moses meets God face to face at the burning bush.
- And what Moses discovers is that he is a nothing and a nobody in the sight of a holy God. And yet that holy God calls Moses and commands Moses and commissions Moses to go and rescue and redeem the Israelites from slavery and bondage in Egypt.
- But as we saw from chapter 3, Moses responds and says, he says, who am I? Who am I? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?
- And the Lord says to Moses, it doesn't matter who you are. Tell them who I am. Tell them that I am who I am.
- Tell them that I am the great I am and that the I am has sent you. And with that, the Lord gave Moses all these personal and powerful promises.
- [8 : 34] He says, you go and I will. You go and I will make sure that the elders listen to your voice. You go and I will do wonders and signs in Egypt.
- You go and I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt. You go and I will. But then after being given all these personal and powerful promises, Moses once again responds and reacts in verse 1 of chapter 4 with reluctance and refusal.
- Moses responds and reacts to the call, the commission, and the command of the Lord with reluctance and refusal.
- He says, but Lord, but, but, but the Israelites will not believe me. They will not listen to me. And then the Lord speaks to Moses like a parent to a child.
- And he says to Moses, stop with the excuses. No excuses, Moses. I want no ifs, ands, or buts. Just do as you're told.
- [9 : 48] No excuses, Moses. And you know, my friends, sometimes, sometimes it's good for us to get a telling off. Of course, a telling off should always be done in love and out of love.
- But sometimes it's good for us to be told straight. No more excuses. No ifs, ands, or buts. Just get on with it. And you know, that's how the Lord spoke to Moses.
- And sometimes that's how the Lord needs to speak to us too. Especially when we are reluctant, or refusing, or resisting the call, the commission, or the command of the Lord.
- Whether that is, whether it involves seeking the Lord, or serving the Lord. Whether it's in our worship, or our witness, or our work.
- Sometimes we need to be told straight. No more excuses. No ifs. No ands. No buts. Just get on with it.
- [10 : 52] And you know, that's what the Lord said to Moses. But he did so using three signs. You listening, children? Three signs. The first sign was a snake.
- The Lord said to him in verse 2, What is in your hand? He said, a staff. And he said, throw it on the ground. So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent. And Moses ran from it. But the Lord said to Moses, put out your hand, and catch it by the tail.
- So he put out his hand and caught it. And it became a staff in his hand. So Moses was to catch this snake by its tail. Which as you know, boys and girls, that's something you should never do.
- The most dangerous way to pick up a snake is by its tail. Because it'll just swing round and bite you. But for Moses, he didn't need to worry. Because as soon as he grabbed the snake by the tail, it became a staff again.
- It returned to his staff. And yet the sign of the staff turning to the snake was also that, verse 5, that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

- [12 : 06] Then the second sign shown to Moses is in verse 6. The Lord said to him, put out your hand, put your hand inside your cloak. And he put his hand inside, just inside his jacket. Put his hand inside his cloak. And when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. So he had a skin disease. Then the Lord said, put your hand back inside your cloak.
- So he put his hand back inside his cloak. And when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. If they will not believe you, God said, or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign.
- And the Lord makes clear that if the Israelites will not believe the first two signs, they will definitely believe the third. As he says in verse 9, If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile, pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.
- And this is interesting because the river Nile was considered to be sacred. Because from the river Nile, that's where people took all their water. And that was, in many ways, the river Nile was viewed as a lifeline to the people of Egypt.
- [13 : 26] And so to turn the water from the Nile into blood, it was symbolic of the Lord's ability to take life from Egypt.
- Which actually is what happens as we'll go through the story. As we go into the new year, we'll see that the plagues, when all of the river Nile, it's changed into blood.
- And then another plague where all of the firstborn in Egypt are put to death. But you know, it seems that these three signs, they're not only given to confirm to the Israelites that Moses is the man who has been called, commissioned, and commanded to rescue and redeem these people from slavery.
- It seems that these three signs were also given to confirm to Moses. It's Moses that needs convincing that he is the one whom the Lord has called, commissioned, and commanded to redeem and rescue the Israelites from slavery and bondage in Egypt.
- But he comes up with all these excuses. And you know, the excuse of signs, it's nothing new, is it? The excuse of signs is nothing new.
- [14 : 38] Because even in Jesus' day, the Pharisees, they demanded a sign. They demanded a sign to prove that Jesus was the Son of God.
- And Jesus responds to them and says, This generation seeks a sign. But no sign shall be given. No sign shall be given.
- And when Paul preached to the Corinthians, he said that the Jews, well, they demand signs. The Greeks, they seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified.
- And you know, my unconverted friend, the excuse of signs, it isn't confined to the generation of Moses or the generation of Jesus or the generation of Paul, is it? It's part of every generation.
- Because this generation, our generation, this generation continues to use the excuse of signs. You know, so many people say to me, I will not believe unless I see a sign.
- [15 : 44] Yeah, I get your point. I understand what you're saying, Mardo, but I will not believe unless I see a sign. And then I go back to what Jesus said.
- No sign shall be given. No sign shall be given. And you know, it reminds us that no voice, you will not hear a voice from heaven to convince you.
- You will not have a flash of lightning in the sky. There will be no vision of an angel appearing at the bottom of your bed. You will not have a dream about Jesus. You are not even guaranteed a text of Scripture to jump out at you, to convince you that God is speaking to you.

No sign shall be given, says Jesus. Why? Because, my friend, God has given you more than enough through His world, through His Word, and through His witnesses.

No sign shall be given, because God has already given you more than enough through His world, His Word, and His witnesses.

[16 : 56] His world, it speaks to you every day. The heavens declare the glory of God. This morning is declaring to you the glory of our great God.

The skies are proclaiming a message to you. The sun rises and the sun sets on the west side of the Isle of Lewis. They preach and proclaim to us day after day of His handiwork.

So, He's speaking to you. He speaks to you not only through His world, but also through His Word. The Bible is the full and final revelation of God.

The Bible contains the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. God is speaking to you through His Word, but He also speaks to you through His witnesses, who are the Lord's people, Christians in your congregation, Christians in your home, and in your family, and in your community.

They evidence and they express the transforming power of the gospel. And so, Jesus is very clear. No sign shall be given, because God has given you more than enough through His world, through His Word, and through His witnesses.

[18 : 13] And so, my unconverted friend, I want to say to you this morning, is it not about time that you stopped hiding behind all your excuses of why you are not yet a Christian?

And just take that step of faith and commit your life to Jesus Christ. Because as the Lord said to Moses, stop with the excuses.

I want no ifs, ands, or buts. No excuses. No excuses, Moses. And that's what the Lord is saying to you. No more excuses.

But you know, Moses, he not only used the excuse of signs, he also used the excuse of speaking, which is what we see secondly.

The excuse of speaking. Look at verse 10. Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.

[19 : 22] Then the Lord said to him, Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.

You know, as we've considered the book of Exodus or the first chapters of the book of Exodus, we've often thought that Moses is the superhero of the story because he's the one who has been called to rescue and redeem the Israelites from slavery and bondage in Egypt.

But as we go through the story of Moses, we quickly realize that he isn't really superhero material because by his own admission and by his own acknowledgement, Moses, he confesses that he's anxious and apprehensive.

He's reserved and reticent. He's stammering and stuttering. He's this shaking and shuddering servant at the thought of what the Lord has called him to do. He isn't really superhero material.

Of course, that's because the real superhero in the story isn't the servant, but the Savior. Moses was the means by which the Lord promised to work.

[20 : 34] But it was the Lord who was the superhero. It's the Lord who's the Savior in the story of the Exodus. But you know, when we look at and listen to the excuses of Moses, when you read this chapter, and you see that he's the man who has been called to go and confront Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and he has to go and confront him about his soul and slavery.

And you know, well, I think that we would all come up with and confess the same excuses as Moses if we had been called to do the same task.

Because if we're honest, if we're honest, when it comes to speaking to people about their soul and slavery to sin, when it comes to speaking about Jesus or sharing the gospel with our family, our friends, our neighbors, and our work colleagues, we're all like Moses.

We're all anxious. We're all apprehensive. We're all reserved. We're all reticent. We're all stammering and stuttering. We're all shaking and shuddering about what we're going to say. And more often than not, we miss or even misuse the opportunities the Lord gives us because we're afraid and we're apprehensive to speak.

We're afraid and apprehensive of entering into a discussion or a debate about the Bible or evolution or science. And we're afraid and apprehensive because like Moses confesses, he says, I can't think quickly on my feet.

[22 : 03] I don't have the eloquence. I'm not equipped to speak. I'm not endowed with these great gifts. I haven't been enabled to speak to people about their soul or their slavery to sin.

And you know, my friend, when I say this, I'm with you on this because I feel no different to you. Yes, I'm a minister, but that doesn't take away feelings of being anxious and apprehensive, of being reserved and reticent, of stammering and stuttering and shaking and shuddering about what to say.

And you know, I'd love, having looked at this passage this past week, I would love to look into ways that would encourage us and equip us to share the gospel with those around us, those whom we come into contact with.

Because when I look at Moses, I think that if the Lord can use him, if the Lord can use this man, then the Lord can use me and the Lord can use you.

That's the wonder of who God is. And that's what the Lord said to Moses. He said, Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind?

[23 : 11] Is it not I, the Lord? Now, therefore, he says, Go, and I will be with your mouth, and I will teach you what you shall speak. And you listen to what God said to Moses.

And then you hear what Jesus said to his own disciples. When he sent them out, he said, Don't be anxious about what you're to speak or what you're to say, because it will be given to you in that hour.

And was it not Jesus who said in the Great Commission, he said to his disciples, Go, go and make more disciples. Go and make disciples of all nations, and I will be with you.

Do you know, my Christian friend, this passage is reminding and reaffirming to us this morning that we are called, commissioned, and commanded to pray for obstacles to be removed and opportunities to be given.

We're to pray for obstacles to be removed and opportunities to be given. We're not called, commissioned, or commanded to convict or convert sinners.

[24 : 19] That's not our job. Because like Moses, we are only servants. The Lord is the superhero. He's the saviour in the story of our lives. Salvation is of the Lord. It's His work.

But we have a role and we have a responsibility. We have been called, commissioned, and commanded to speak to people about their soul and their slavery to sin.

We're to speak about Jesus and share the gospel with our family, our friends, our neighbours, and our work colleagues. And that's very hard.

No one is denying that. But we're called, commissioned, and commanded to do it. And you know, thinking about it, well, whenever we get into a discussion or a debate with someone about Christianity or the Bible or evolution or these things, don't argue with them.

Don't get angry with them. Never be aggressive towards them. That's not winsome. And it will never win them. Instead, just be faithful.

[25 : 26] Be faithful to God's Word and be faithful as a Christian witness. And speak the Word in season when the opportunity arises. And you know, when a discussion arises, it doesn't mean that you have to know the answer straight away.

You know, it's good to actually say to someone, I don't know, but I'll find out for you. I'll ask about. I'll look it up. And by saying that, and if they agree, okay, that's fine, you immediately have another opportunity and another opening to resume that discussion at a later date and carry on the conversation.

And you know, when it comes to speaking and sharing the gospel, you know, people, they often quote St. Francis of Assisi. He said, preach, or he didn't say actually, preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary.

You might have heard that quote. Preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary. Which means live your life as a faithful Christian witness.

And if you have to, share the gospel with them. And you might have heard that quote, but it's not true. It's often attributed to this man, St. Francis of Assisi.

[26 : 46] But the quote isn't true. He never actually said that. He never said, preach the gospel at all times and use the words if necessary. In fact, St. Francis of Assisi said the opposite because he was someone who was passionate and a powerful preacher who emphasized the need to show your witness and speak with words.

And so to quote or to misquote St. Francis of Assisi, preach the word, preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary. You know, that's just an excuse.

That's an excuse for not speaking and not sharing the gospel. And as we see with Moses, when he tried to pass the buck, when he tried to come up with his excuses, it angered the Lord.

We read in verse 13, but he said, O my Lord, please send someone else. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses.

You know, my friend, when the Lord called, commissioned and commanded Moses to speak, Moses said, here am I. But use someone else. Here am I, but send someone else.

[28 : 02] There's my brother, my brother Aaron. He's good at speaking. He can do it better than I can. But that angered the Lord. And it angered the Lord because the Lord had called, commissioned, and commanded Moses, not Aaron.

The Lord had prepared Moses for 40 years in Midian. He had prepared him to be the leader of God's people, not Aaron. The Lord had placed Moses where he was to serve him and to speak for him, not Aaron.

And you know, my Christian friend, the same is true for you and I. The Lord has placed us in our home. He has given us our family.

He has put us in this community and this congregation and in whatever workplace we have. And the Lord has placed us there and he providentially puts people in our path in any given day to speak and share for him.

The Lord has placed us providentially where we are. It's not an accident. It's not at random. It's not by chance. He has providentially put us in that particular place to speak and share for him.

[29 : 27] And so, a phone call that happens in a day or someone you bump into in the shop or someone that comes into your workplace, it's not an accident. The Lord has put them in your path.

And we should be praying for the obstacles to be removed and opportunities to be given. Pray for the obstacles to be removed and the opportunities to be given.

But what we go on to read is that Moses, he nearly blows the whole mission with the excuse of skin. And we see this lastly and very, very briefly. So he came up with three excuses.

Signs, speaking, and skin. The excuse of skin. Look at verse 24 of the chapter. It says, Now these verses, they are very interesting to say the least.

It was my late professor, John L. Mackay, when I was in college. He writes in his commentary on Exodus 4, he says, These verses are probably the most puzzling in Exodus.

[31 : 01] And puzzling they are. And they're puzzling not only because of the fact that the Lord was angry at Moses because of more excuses and more empty-mindedness, but also because Moses' Midianite wife, Zipporah, she had taken things into her own hands in order to protect and preserve her husband.

And it seems that when you read just those few verses, it seems that Gershom, who was the older son, they had two sons, Gershom and Eleazar. So the older son, Gershom, who was Moses' firstborn, he had been circumcised.

He had received the covenant sign of circumcision that was given to Abraham. It seems that Zipporah was so disgusted and so dismayed with what circumcision was because she wasn't an Israelite, she was from Midian.

She'd never seen it. It seems that she resisted and she even refused to let Moses do it to their second son, Eleazar. And like Adam before him with Eve, Moses listened to his wife.

And when Moses put the command of the Lord or the command of his wife before the command of the Lord, that's what displeased the Lord. That's what made him angry.

[32 : 24] That's what made him want, as it says there, the Lord wanted to put him to death. When Moses put the command of his wife before the command of the Lord, it displeased the Lord.

Because if Moses wasn't going to put the Lord first, then he wasn't fit to be the servant of the Lord. That's what we see in those verses.

If Moses wasn't going to put the Lord first, then he wasn't fit to be a servant of the Lord. And the application of this interesting and puzzling verses is that it ought to teach us and challenge us as office bearers, as deacons, as elders, as a minister, and their wives.

Because what we're taught and told in this passage and in relation to the New Testament is that as office bearers in the church of Jesus Christ, Paul says we must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

And then he says, and he must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

[34 : 01] Challenging verses. And you know, it was actually Moses' wife, when you read the passage, it was Moses' wife who surrendered. It was Moses' wife who submitted her will and her wants all to the Lord when she went and circumcised their son, Eliezer.

And you know, that's all we need to do in our service to the Lord. We all need to surrender and submit our will and our wants to the Lord.

We need to surrender and submit our will and our wants to the Lord. Is that not our prayer? We pray with the children every Lord's day, Thy will be done.

And that's what we're confessing. We are confessing that we are surrendering and submitting our will and our wants to the Lord. Because like Moses, we need to be told no more excuses.

You know, like Moses, sometimes we need to be told it straight. Stop with the excuses. No ifs, ands, or buts. Just do as you're told. Do as you're told.

[35 : 09] Surrender and submit your will and your wants. to the Lord. The challenging passage. But it should remind us that the Lord must be first.

That's what Moses had to be taught. That's what we need to be taught. The Lord must be first because we must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And then all other things will be added unto us. Well, the time has gone. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy goodness to us.

We thank Thee, Lord, for Thy word. That Thy word not only comes to us with comfort and consolation, but it also comes with confrontation and with challenge.

And Lord, we give thanks to Thee for being so direct with us, for speaking to us as a parent to children and reminding us, Lord, that we need to be taught.

[36 : 12] We need to be shaped. We need to be moulded and formed and fashioned to be more and more like Jesus. And Lord, we do pray that we would surrender and submit our will and our wants to serve the Lord, to give Him our best because time is short and eternity is long.

O Lord, bless us, we pray. Help us in all that we say and do, that we would do it for the furtherance of Thy kingdom and the glory of Thy name. Bless us then, we pray.

Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing words of Psalm 66.

Psalm 66 is on page 300 in the Blue Psalm book. It's in the Scottish Psalter. We're singing from verse 16 down to the end of the psalm.

Psalm 66 and verse 16. All that fear God, come here, I'll tell what He did for my soul. I with my mouth unto Him cried, my tongue did Him extol.

[37 : 25] If in my heart I sin regard, the Lord me will not hear, but surely God may heard unto my prayer's voice give ear. and we'll sing the last verse as well, verses 16 to 20 of Psalm 66 to God's praise.

verse 16. Oh, that fear God, come here, I'll tell what He did for my soul.

I with my mouth unto Him guide, my tongue did hear me extol.

If in my heart I sin regard, the Lord me will not hear, but surely God but surely God be heard unto my failure choice give ear.

O let the Lord O let the Lord our gracious God forever blessed be, who turn and clothe my prayer for me.

[39 : 28] O let the Lord nor yet His grace for me. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and remain with you all now and forevermore.

Amen. Now, if I could just ask the children, were you listening? Were you?

Were you all listening? Yeah. Okay, what did God say to Moses? No more no, no more excuses.

Yeah, no more excuses. No excuses, Moses. No ifs, ands, or buts. What three signs did God do? There was a snake, leprosy, and blood.

Yep, changing the water into blood. Well done. What did Moses say he wasn't good at? Talking, yeah. He wasn't good at speaking to people about their sin.

[40 : 42] So, well done. So, you get your sweets at the door. Okay? Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.