

The Power of the Small Things

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[0 : 0 0] Tonight's Bible reading is from Exodus chapter 2, which can be found on page 58 of the church Bibles. That's page 58, Exodus chapter 2, beginning at verse 1.

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying and she felt sorry for him.

This is one of the Hebrew babies, she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you? Yes, go, she answered.

So the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you. So the woman took the baby and nursed him.

When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, I drew him out of the water.

[1 : 5 0] One day after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?

The man said, Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian? Then Moses was afraid and thought, What I did must have become known. When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away. But Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Rael, their father, he asked them, Why have you returned so early today? They answered, An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock. And where is he? Rael asked his daughters.

Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat? Moses agreed to stay with the man who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershon, saying, I have become a foreigner in a foreign land. During that long period, the king of Egypt died.

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Thanks, Peter Gals. Thanks very much. Good evening. My name is Darren, and we're going to be looking at this next chapter in the book of Exodus, chapter 2. There's a few outlines in the notice sheet if you'd like to follow along, and that's the points we'll go through tonight as we look at this. But yeah, we are picking up in this series, Exodus, which obviously follows on from Genesis, if you know your Bible at all, which ends with Abraham's grandson and Jacob leading a large family down into Egypt where they live for 400 years in peace, in security. As far as we know, especially when we leave Joseph, he's at a high-ranking place in Egypt's system. And chapter 1 tells us, which we heard last week, that during this time, the people of God have been fruitful and multiplied and filled the land, which is a deliberate echo back to the blessing that God gave the people in Genesis chapter 1. And it reminds us of the biblical story so far, that humanity had forfeited God's blessing through sin and rebellion, so God chooses Abraham and his family to be a vehicle through which he will bless the whole world. But Pharaoh, as we'll come to see in all the weeks going ahead, and the different Pharaohs we will see, does not see the people of God as a blessing. In fact, he sees this growing Israelite immigrant group within his nation as a threat to his power. So just as in Genesis, this theme comes through again, that humanity, this time in the form of

[5 : 54] Pharaoh, rebels against God's blessing. And Pharaoh tries to destroy the source of God's blessing, the very people of God themselves in chapter 1. He brutally enslaves them, and he enforces them into labor. And in chapter 1, you see he asks the midwives to start killing all the Hebrew boys.

Now, Pharaoh, he is like potentially short of Satan. He is the worst character we've seen in the Bible so far. His kingdom epitomizes humanity's rebellion against God. Pharaoh has so redefined good and evil in his own eyes and his own interests that even the murder of innocent children are seen as good to him. It's a dark place the people of God find themselves in. And after the hope and growth and security of the previous years of where they found themselves, they are now in a position where a statewide sanctioned genocide is being ordered. But in chapter 2, what we're going to look at tonight, you will see God start a new movement that will not only turn Pharaoh's evil upside down, but will set in motion a plan that will rescue the entire people, lead them to freedom, and they will become a pivotal moment, not just in the people of God for the Jewish people's understanding of who God is, but for us as we sit here tonight seeking to be followers of Jesus.

So as we get into the rest of Exodus 2, I'm going to pray and we'll think through the passage. Father, I pray that as we look at your word tonight, as we look at these stories of how you worked from generations ago, you'd help us to see that you're the same God today.

Would you raise our eyes and help us fix our minds and hearts on you? I ask that in Jesus' name. Amen. So, this is kind of in chapter 1 and 2, where you kind of see these narrative texts where in some respects, you could just read it yourself, see what it says, maybe you could all go home.

And that's what happens in the narrative text, you just have a story of who God is and what He's up to. One of the things that's quite interesting in chapter 1 and 2 is God is very much in the background.

[8 : 11] It's not really until we get to the end of this chapter where we'll start to see God be more coming into the foreground of the story. And sometimes that's the way we can experience life, that we can go through daily activities, sometimes looking at the world around about us. Some of it feels dark, some of it feels boring, some of it feels like you just get on with it. And the trust that God is in the present in all of that can be a challenge for all of us. And in verses 1 to 10, we start to see these small beginnings of something new happen with the basket in chapter 1, verses 1 to 10.

So, in the previous chapter, as I said earlier, the king of Egypt had ordered all the Egyptian midwives to kill any babies when they see the boy was a Hebrew. But because the midwives feared God, they didn't do it. So, Pharaoh escalates things in this chapter, and he gives the order to all his people that any Hebrew boy should be born, should be thrown into the Nile. Now, just as a short historical aside, this is not some strange compassion Pharaoh has on baby girls. The killing of innocent children in the ancient world was not an abnormal idea. But it was almost, from what we know, female babies. It was such a low sense of worth on young female girls that that was almost seen as normal to do. And it probably wasn't until the Greco-Roman world became Christian and we started to bring in the value of humanity that that practice became to be seen for it was as a foreign.

However, in this case, it's the boys they are trying to kill. But why is Pharaoh doing this? Well, again, it's a continuation from chapter 1. It's because it would be easier to assimilate all the women into the fabric of the Egyptian people and to dilute the sense of the people of God. What he's trying to do here through physical death is also an attempt to annihilate the people of God's sense of identity, to kill, dilute, and disperse through the threat of violence, the threat of death, and then the threat to then fit in. And you have to imagine the anxiety and fear at work here. We start with the birth of a new baby and the desire to hide the child. It's like trying to hide a child in general, let alone when you're a slave, while there's lots of probably Egyptian soldiers now on the lookout for these boys. I don't know if you read Anne Frank's diaries when you were in school, but we'd have had something of that fear and anxiety of what it meant to be hiding because you had a statewide attempt of murder of your life. And so what you see the women, particularly his mother and his sister do in this passage in verses 1 to 10, is incredibly risky, but it's an absolute demonstration and act of what it means to pursue goodness and faith because of their fear of God.

So first, what she does is she puts her son into the Nile in a reed basket. Now, the Nile is not like the Clyde. The Nile is the second biggest river in the world with a huge charging force that goes into the Mediterranean, and into that she puts a three-month baby, which is in and of itself a pretty risky maneuver. But not only are the chances of the baby's survival particularly pretty highly risky, what if the wrong person actually discovers the child? And in verse 5, all the people we discover discovers the baby, which is Moses, is one of Pharaoh's daughters who discovers the basket among the reeds in verse 5. Now, the risk of the Pharaoh's daughter being like her father could have been pretty high. Maybe she was just like her dad. She could have seen, and she notices, we're told, she notices as a Hebrew boy. And her reaction, though, is different. It is different from that. It is one of compassion. She takes pity on the baby, we're told, in verse 6. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. This is one of the Hebrew babies, we're told. Moses' sister, Miriam, just happens to be on hand when the princess, who recognizes the boy is Hebrew, and she suggests finding a wet nurse for the child, and she suggests Moses' own mother.

Then Pharaoh's daughter, they go through this essentially, the plan where Moses is given back to his own mother to be raised by his mother. And then Pharaoh's daughter says, and he will become my son in verse 10. She says, when the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, I drew him out of the water. So Pharaoh's daughter publicly states, he will be my son. So you have this little baby who's in the Nile, who then is met with compassion, and is able to grow up in the household of his mother, and then be given the protection and the status of Pharaoh's daughter. It's an absolute beautiful picture of in all the small ways, the risk of people's faith into something far bigger than themselves is moved and awarded. So this painting, thanks for taking that phrase, I wasn't ready for that, but we'll go for it, is, how many of you have seen this painting? I only saw it last week. I'm not an art historian, so if there's any art historians out there, feel free to critique what I'm going to say here.

[13 : 33] This is Checkmate by Friedrich Moritz August Rischisch. I don't know if that's how you say his second name, but that's what Google told me. And actually somebody brought this passage up to me when I was chatting about speaking on Exodus 2. And the painting, according to legend, this is, as far as I can tell, is true. So the painting shows these two chess players. One is the apparition of Satan, who appears arrogantly confident on the left. The other player is a man who just represents humanity, and you can tell by his face, he's like, oh my goodness, I'm losing. And I don't know much about chess, but there's more black pieces on the board than white. And he appears in a situation of despair. Now apparently when this painting was first done in the mid-1800s, it was understood to be a reflection of man's struggle in the daily reality of life. And the legend goes that in 1852, the grand chess player, Paul Morphy, saw the painting hanging in the Louvre Museum.

And it said, after studying the painting, he observed that contrary to the appearance, the game was not actually lost. Morphy noticed that the young man actually had one final move to actually win the entire game. And he said of this painting, what you miss in this scene where you think the enemy is winning is the king has actually one final move which will win the game.

And apparently that's what made people re-understand and re-interpret. Actually, this was not a painting of despair, but if you know what's going on, if you know the game, the king has a final move which is far more powerful than the arrogance of the power on the left. If there was one group of people where Pharaoh would have given absolutely zero care or even consideration to a threat about him, it would have been a group of Hebrew women trying to rescue a baby. But here they are driven, driven by compassion and driven by the fear of God to risk highly. And it will result in a bold and clever plan that will be the beginning of the end of the suffering of God's people. Right under Pharaoh's nose, God uses this group of women who act in courage, who will then be equipped and protected by Pharaoh himself. And another, if you actually notice at the bottom of your Bibles, it says in your little note for verse 3, the Hebrew for the basket can also mean ark, which is the Hebrew word *teva*. If you know the Bible story, this is a deliberate echo of Genesis 6 and 7 of Noah and the ark. So this basket, which is actually a little ark, would shout out to the original readers when they were hearing this story. The story of Moses starts with a very deliberate reference to the flood that nearly destroys the whole of humanity as God brings newness to save people. Here, Pharaoh threatens to destroy the people of God by drowning every male baby. And so just as God used an ark to rescue and protect and build a new people for himself, there in this small ark holds a baby who will lead one day the enslaved people to freedom.

It is the very thing Pharaoh was trying to use to kill and destroy, the Nile, actually out of it and draws out, God draws out a child to rescue. You have to love, I mean, this is a tragic, dark story, but in it, the irony of how God is at work here, it's a beautiful picture, for me anyway, of hope and power in the most unlikely of places. The faith and compassion of this group of women in the face of death, fighting to save a small child embodies gospel power. Something that appears weak, yet in line with God, can and will change the world for good. You see here God's sovereign hand at work. The odds of this child surviving are astronomical, yet the schemes of man when set on evil, even when they think they are working, God is using them to accomplish his will and his flourishing and his justice in the world. So we then follow Moses into verse 11 as we now encounter him as an adult. So this is the prince, how not to use power. So this unique situation gives Moses both the context and opportunity to learn. He gets this like unheard of position where he'll be raised with the education and the input into his life from the Egyptian system that no Hebrew boy could ever hope for, yet he has been raised by his own family where he'd have learned the ways of God. He'd have learned his identity as a child of the people of God. He has this unique combination of two big things that will influence the man God is making him into. So in Acts chapter 7 verse 22 to 23 we're told this by the apostle Stephen of the life of Moses.

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. And when Moses was 40 years old he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. So we know from Stephen that Moses is 40 at this point. So in verse 11 we encounter this guy and he says, the text tells us, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. And he saw an Egyptian beating one of his own people. And you get the emphasis already in these verses, he goes to his people. He sees his own people. You're starting to see already that Moses, despite his upbringing in the palaces of Pharaoh, his heart is with the people of God. Now one of the principles, from what I've read, of the brutal Egyptian regimes would have been, Moses would have been taught that slaves back then were considered less than human. From what I've read they were considered the equivalent of donkeys or like zombies, the living dead. So he would have been grown up being taught, this is a slave, ignore this person. In fact this is not even a person, it's less than a person. Yet he sees and recognizes not the way his culture tells him to see this person, but the way he knows his God tells him to see this person. So we see Moses here walk out of the palace, look upon his people, and through his action rejects the edicts of the empire that has raised him. This is courage. This is a glimpse of the man he is becoming. This is an incredible picture of faith here. As far as we know, God has not come to

[20 : 07] Moses yet and given him any sort of charge. God is purely in the background at this point, yet Moses is chosen to identify not with power and position of Egypt, but with his own people. Hebrews 11 24 tells us this, by faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

And he could have absolutely used that as a card to get pretty much wherever he wanted in society. He chooses not to do that and chooses instead to identify with his people. He sees this injustice of the people and he decides to act. Yet, I think one of the things you see in this passage, which you will continue to see in the life of Moses, is in all his learning and his desire for justice, Tim Keller says Moses launches the most dumbest attempt at freeing his people. He goes out, he sees a taskmaster, which is like the equivalent of like a low-level site manager from a particularly working-class background, beating up a Hebrew slave, and Moses kills the guy. He sees this injustice. We're not told what Moses is feeling here, but he kills the Egyptian attacker. Now, we know that Moses probably knows he shouldn't do this because verse 12 tells us, looking this way and that way and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid the sand. Generally, if you're doing something and you look one way and look the other and then hide what you've done, it's usually an indicator that what you're doing is probably not the thing you should be doing. So, it doesn't directly tell us he shouldn't have done it, but I think it's pretty much evident that Moses himself knows he should not have done what he has done. And then the next day, he then goes out and intervenes when he sees two of his brothers fighting. And he says, why did you strike your brother? In verse 13, to which they reply, essentially, who put you in charge? Now, actually, at this point, the answer to this question is, well, nobody had. He will become the leader. This is the trajectory of Moses' life, and we're already starting to see his character and his calling play out. But that actually hasn't happened yet. That will happen next week. His motivation is good. His heart for who he's becoming is there. But how he executes that is poor and misguided at best. Positioning himself as some sort of judging king, he murders an Egyptian. This murder then becomes known as news is clearly spread. He hasn't got away with it. And as a result, by verse 15, Pharaoh wants to kill him. And taking matters into his own hands, not only does he alienate himself from the household of Pharaoh, he antagonizes the people of God as well.

Now, Acts 7, verse 25, again, this is part of Stephen's explanation of who Moses is, says about Moses that Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. So, I think this is a bit complex, as again, it suggests the problem isn't that Moses misassumed something about his position. In fact, he seems to understand that God wants to use him to rescue them, according to Stephen. But regardless, we are witnessing Moses at a crossroads of his identities. He has been raised with the identities he's been raised with and how he's going to pursue a way forward. He chooses his Hebrew identity. I think one of the things you see happening in there is he is functioning like an Egyptian. So, he is choosing, I think I've got these, this is my calling, this is my people, and here's what I'm becoming. But maybe, as the power of the Egyptians, he kills first. That's his first move. In some ways, he has the heart of a follower of God, yet has the habits and thought and action that leads him to kill someone.

And when he realizes that the Israelites have rejected him, his use of power in this situation won't win over their hearts. He has a choice in front of him of what he's going to do. He could have easily gone back to the Egyptian culture and to Pharaoh and made up a story of like, well, that slave just didn't ignore them anyway. Remember, I'm the Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son. But here's this conflict in front of him, a conflict you'll see kind of work out throughout the rest of this chapter. Does he trust God in how to do things? And this is him learning, and he's learning the hard way of how to follow God and how to do things.

Or does he continue to take charge for himself? So Moses now is at a point where he is going to be chased or flee into the desert, which we'll come on to in a second. But when we talk about this idea of taking matters into our own hands, he's trying to follow through in his convictions in a world that is different from the culture of God's people. And that's a choice we all have to make, that as we live out the convictions of who God has called us to be, what it means to be God's people, how we do that in a way that is trusting him. And so you could look into later, if you want, I'll have to chat to you after about what's going on in this passage. But he's working out what it means to be following God. And in that, he gets rejected by both cultures. He gets rejected by the people of God because they misunderstand what's happening on one level. And he gets rejected by Egypt himself. And that leaves him on the run, or he flees anyway, in verse 15. So verse 14, it says, when we're looking at, yeah, who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the

[25 : 44] Egyptians? There's a fear there, are you going to kill us too? Then Moses was afraid and thought, what I did must have become known. And so when Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and he went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

So Moses now finds himself with a choice in front of him, and he goes to the desert in verse 15. So in verse 15, we are told, in the desert in Midian, he sits down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. So again, you see Moses' heart for justice. He's out there, he sat down by the well, and he sees these women, and some shepherds come and harass them. And Moses, as one guy, decides to take them all on. We're not told what he does, but you see his heart for justice and protecting people again. And so he stands up to these shepherds. He then draws water, and he waters the flock, which apparently would have been considered women's work back in the day. And they go home and tell their father about this. And the father's like, who is this guy? Bring him home. We need to get to know this guy. This guy sounds like a bit of a keeper, but he is also somebody who's defended my daughter, so bring him home. Let's get him into our house. And again, you see the reference to Moses' dual identity in verse 19. He is referenced as being noticed to be an Egyptian, yet he still identifies with the people of God. And at this point in the story, I don't know if you're entirely following the narrative of hope and God doing something new, you have Moses, this highly educated elite at the age of 40, is now living in the desert as a shepherd. And we know from later chapters, he is here for like nearly another 40 years, up to the age of 80. And if you're reading at this point, if this was your experience, it might seem like all this training and all the best years of your life had been wasted.

Down the drain, his career has gone nowhere. He isn't a leader of anything. He spends most of his time in the desert with sheep. And for a lot of people, if this has happened to them, this might be the final word on who they know themselves to be, wasted potential. But God has drawn Moses into the desert into the wilderness for a reason. And if you ever study wilderness in the Scriptures, you will realize this is a place where God draws people to meet with them. The wilderness, if you ever have the time to go and do a little study of what God achieves in the wilderness, is God actually achieves a lot with his people in the wilderness. A verse for me that encapsulates that is Hosea chapter 2.

Therefore, I am now going to allure her, that's his people. I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me my husband. You will no longer call me my master. It is often in the wilderness that we shift from seeing God as someone who makes rules and the boss to He loves me, He's for me, He gives Himself for me, so I love Him back.

That can create a pretty big problem for those of us who have you ever been taught that any sort of desert experience or wilderness or difficulty is simply something to be fixed or happens because of a lack of faith. In these difficult places, we often learn the compassion and care of God.

[29 : 35] The desert is where, as Jesus demonstrated, where we learn to trust and rely on God. It doesn't mean it's an easy place, but it's a place where God draws His people often to teach them who He is. And to embrace the desert, to be formed by God there, needs encouragement and engagement.

If you ever find yourself in, or ever hear Christians use language like a desert-type experience, a kind of hard time where they feel a bit exiled, actually that's the time to come alongside each other. And if you find yourself in those places, good questions to ask yourself are, where are you trying to be God versus where are you trusting God? There are always good questions to actually ask each other and regularly remind ourselves of the different places we can experience that in life. Because there's this constant pull in us wanting to be our own God, where we are most prone to do that will turn up in the most surprising of places. If that question feels too big and too wide, as in I don't really know the answer to that, I find an easy starting place for me is ask yourself, where are you most easily prone to anger or fear? And that'll get at some of the places where the trust of God is a hard thing to exercise. It is in the desert though, God's grace to Moses is shown.

He finds a home, he finds a wife, he finds a son, and he finds a family. This kindness of God in the desert is stunning. And there's a lot more to come for this old man, which we'll figure out, we'll see in chapter 3 next week. And then we end in verses 23 and 24.

During that period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. So up until this point, as I said, God has been more evident in the kind of background. But here we're told the king is dead of Egypt, and we start to see God move fully into the foreground. And we immediately have these significant verbs in reference to God.

He hears, he remembers, which has a kind of force of like he takes to heart. He sees, and he knows. Even though everything around them looks dark and chaotic, God is good and not panicked. He is drawing Moses out, which is what his name actually means, as the beginning of drawing his people out of slavery.

[32 : 13] And this is done in the midst of their cries. Faith is not the absence of crying out to God. Faith is sometimes the clinging to the reality that God is at work in the mess as we cry out to him.

And the last of these terms of the narrative of chapters 1 and 2 come to an end is a slightly mystifying at best sometimes maybe. It just went up to God, and God knew. God knows and remembers his covenant. He knows all of it. He knows the suffering of his people. He knows the oppression of Egypt. He knows the commitment to his covenant. He knows his plan to liberate his people. He knows all these things. Because God's plan is always the same, despite of what we see around us.

The plan that sin and death and brokenness that plagues humanity when sin entered the world would be redeemed and made new. God is revealing to us through this historical moment something that is still true about us today and is true about God. That me and you find ourselves regularly in these impossible situations that we can't get ourselves out of. Moses as a child couldn't tackle the Nile. He can't take on Pharaoh by himself, but he is drawn out into safety. The story paints a picture for all of us of what it means for God to draw us out, not just the threat of Pharaoh or an Irel of slavery, but as the Scriptures tell us of a deeper power of slavery and sin and ultimately death. Because this living king is not a king who's bound by history. It's a king that could make his move and has made his move.

Moses as a helpless child is saved and drawn out of the waters by someone who has a heart of compassion. Not when Moses was strong or showed God how worthy he was, but as a helpless infant in the Nile, under the sentence of Pharaoh's death warrant, God saves him. Jesus, the infant who had to flee because another king came along, fueled by anger and fear, and decided that all the young children should die. Jesus too is exiled by all his people. And Jesus is literally drawn out to the point of death so that me and you could be drawn in. It invites us, invites me and you tonight and all of the rest of our lives into a new relationship with God where he sees, he hears you, remembers you, sees you, and knows you in everything you experience. It's a relationship that stops us sliding into taking things into our own hands and accept Jesus as the living king today, knowing he is in charge in a way thankfully we never could be. God draws us out so that he can draw us in to something new, which is the story of Exodus, which we'll carry on in a very profound way next week in chapter three.

So I'm going to pray and then I'll hand over to the band. Father, we thank you that we don't read these stories as nice little anecdotes to help us feel better about life. We read them because we see the heart and power of who you are as a sovereign God.

[35 : 40] Not one that is absent, but one who's at work, often when we least expect it. And so would you help us to know what it means for us to trust that fully in our day-to-day lives?

That's that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There we go. If you want to stand with us. There we go. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.