

Comfort In The Courtroom

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Preacher: Rev John Brand

[0 : 0 0] Good morning all. If you're familiar with the opening words of Genesis chapter 1 and you're familiar with the opening words of John chapter 1 then you'll hear echoes in what we're about to read this morning in the first letter of John chapter 1 reading into the second verse of chapter 2.

This is John speaking here. That which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life the life that was made manifest and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ and we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus' Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[2 : 1 2] If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. My little children I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin but if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. May God be praised.

Amen. Good morning friends.

Great to be back with you at Bell's Hill. It's after many years. That's my fault not yours. It's okay. Good to be with you. Caroline sent her greetings. She couldn't come this morning.

[3 : 2 0] I apologize for my cold. My ever generous two year old granddaughter decided she loved me so much she'd pass on her runny nose to me last weekend. But we're here and the Lord is good.

If I tell you as we begin that I once found myself in the crown court in Liverpool I hope that won't immediately say I don't want to listen to this guy. But I just want to set a scene for you this morning.

Many years ago when I was pastoring a church in Liverpool I had the opportunity to engage with a young Filipino seaman who was caught up with the Colombian mafia had a two million contract on his head at this particular time we're going back just over 30 years and then got into more trouble because having taken on a skip load of drugs on his boat he then got converted and now he's got a real problem because the mafia are looking for him and the Lord's already found him and he's got this price tag on his head so anyway he ended up in court in Liverpool and I was a character witness for him I had the privilege of pastoring him while he was in prison and I still keep in contact with him today so here I was in the crown court in Liverpool but I was there as a witness I just want to stress that very quickly as we get going this morning but the reason I mention that is this I was sat in before the trial started I was sat in one of the waiting areas of the court and all these very official looking people are going around with big bags of bundles of paper under their arms and official robes and wigs and all the rest and I was feeling scared stiff and I was only there as a witness

I was very glad I wasn't there in the dock as it were and I want to I make that analogy this morning because the passage we're looking at this morning takes us to a very unusual place to give us comfort it takes us to court in order to comfort us when we realize that we are sinners we're going to look at particularly the first two verses of chapter two this morning that David read for us a few moments ago but I want to just take a minute to set the scene of this whole chapter I think the chapter division here is unfortunate I think chapter one should really go to the end of verse two of chapter two and there's three things in this whole chapter I just want to stress these as we open this up first of all this is all about our fellowship with God this letter is written he tells in chapter five verse thirteen so that we may know that we have eternal life that we may have assurance that we are genuinely saved that's the whole purpose of this letter and he begins with three thoughts in chapter one first of all in the first four verses we have the certainty of our fellowship with God

John the apostle the eyewitness says I was there I saw Jesus I touched him I spoke with him I spent time with him he was a real flesh and blood man but he was also God so you can be certain of the historical reality of Jesus who came into this world as a man and died on a cross to save sinners the certainty of our fellowship it's not a pipe dream it's not a legend it's not a myth it's a fact we can be certain about that and then he talks about in verses five to ten the character of our fellowship with God it's a theme that weaves its way through this letter in a number of different regards and he says the character of God is that God is light and therefore if we're going to fellowship with God we need to walk in the light we need to be honest about our sin if we say we don't sin then we're kidding ourselves and we're calling God a liar for example so to be a true Christian to fellowship with God we need to be concerned about our sin confessing our sin not careless about our sin we need to take it seriously and then in the first two verses of what we have as chapter two

[7:10] John speaks about the comfort of our fellowship with God and here's the problem you see and this is why these two verses really should be at the end of chapter one here's the problem we have an obligation to walk in the light because God is light but we don't have the ability John is a perfectionist but he's also a realist you see it could be very depressing couldn't if we read verses five to ten for example we know only too well that we don't always walk in the light we wish we could we wish we did but we know we don't and we know we can't does that therefore mean does that rule me out as a believer does that mean I can't genuinely be saved have I failed the test so John wants to reassure us that he gives them comfort so he began that look at verse nine for example in chapter one and if you don't know this verse I want to encourage you to memorize it and learn it off my heart and claim it before God it's a wonderful verse if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness what a wonderful promise of God but now he builds on that in the first two verses of chapter two my little children

I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin that's my desire for you but if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world now one little thing we need to stress before we look at the wonderful promises in verses one and two who is John writing to at this point because we can't claim promises that don't apply to us be very clear about this my friends he begins verse one my little children I'm writing these things to you that's John's way of writing to those he knows are genuinely converted these are not professing Christians these are Christians who possess eternal life in Jesus Christ so almost everything I'm going to say this morning applies only to those who are genuinely born again through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross but that doesn't mean there's nothing for anyone here this morning who's not yet become a Christian because there's a warning here for you as much as a comfort for us so let's look at this verse we're going to court this morning and we know that because John describes

Jesus as our advocate because an advocate is a lawyer a solicitor a barrister whatever you want to call him so let's go to court but this is a court like you've never been in before and you've never heard about the likes of and there are four main players in any court and there are four main players in this court this morning first of all there's the accused well that's us that's us we're called to walk in the light but we failed if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father the Greek is actually very strong there it really means when anyone does sin John's not saying in the unlikely event that as a believer you sin he's not saying that he's saying in the very likely event that you sin when you sin we're brought to court as it were to answer charges we fail to walk in the light we sin and if you're a believer here this morning if you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you need to I'm quite sure put your hand up without any hesitation this morning saying yeah that's me

I failed I've sinned so there's the accused then secondly in this court there's the prosecution now he's not actually mentioned here but he's implied and of course the accuser is Satan the accuser of the brethren as Revelation calls him the accuser of our brothers who accuses them day and night before our God the very name Satan means the accuser sometimes of course it's our own conscience that condemns us isn't it John says that later in his letter in chapter 3 and in verse 30 verse 20 so we've got the accused we've got the prosecution now we've got the judge and the judge is God but here's the strange thing or the first of several strange things the judge is our father remember this is for believers of course that would be utterly unacceptable in a human court there's something of a conflict of interest there if the judge in the court is your father the trial would be suspended a new judge would have to be brought in but the judge in this human court is our father look at verse 1 if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father someone who will plead our case with the judge our father but fourthly we need a lawyer and we need a really good lawyer we know our hearts and we know we're guilty as charged and we know something of the judge we need the best lawyer there is so we have an advocate who is the advocate is Jesus Christ now here's the other unique thing about this court our lawyer is related to the judge the lawyer is the son of the judge more than that because again this is written to true believers the lawyer is our brother you see

I told you there's a court scene like you've never been in before the judge is our father the lawyer is the son of the judge and our brother and one other thing to notice here everybody in this courtroom knows that we are guilty as charged the judge knows it the accuser knows it the lawyer knows it and we know it if we say we have not sinned we deceive ourselves we wish we had not sinned but we have so what do we do well we come to court charged by God charged by Satan accusing us to God of our sin and all the focus in these two verses is on the person of Jesus Christ and John tells us three things about Jesus that are precious to us as believers this morning maybe you've come this morning and you feel a miserable failure as a Christian you don't doubt perhaps that you are a Christian you just think what a wretched failure

[13 : 42] I am as a Christian well these verses are for you my friend this morning and it's all about Jesus first of all he is our advocate you see that word again I keep stressing this verse here in verse 1 we have an advocate with the Father interestingly the word here in the Greek is the word paraclete though we're perhaps more familiar with with the work of the Holy Spirit and it simply means one who comes alongside it's actually a word in the Bible unique to John it comes four times in his gospel usually translated as comforter or helper but here he comes as the advocate our Lord Jesus Christ and of course the context is of a legal defender he is our advocate if we sin as a believer and we will we need the best lawyer there is because we're up against an all-knowing all-powerful judge we can't pull the wool over his eyes we can't kid him we have such a lawyer says John we have a the best defense attorney there is before the Father

Jesus Christ and let me tell you two fascinating things about this advocate first of all he has never lost a case he's never lost a case and secondly he only ever represents self-confessed guilty people if you pretend you're innocent he won't take your case when I was pastoring that church in Liverpool I mentioned we had a a guy in the church who was a very well-known solicitor in Liverpool he was partly well-known because his name was and I'm not joking his name was John F. Kennedy and that was good that gave him good profile and acceptability and quite a lot of money I think as well but I used to have a conversation with John because he used to represent some of the scum of the earth quite frankly in court and I said John how can you do this you know this guy you know this guy's absolutely guilty as charged how can you stand up and argue his case and John never quite satisfied me with his answer I have to be honest and it just proves that I could

I guess never be a lawyer but Jesus Christ as our advocate only ever represents those who not only he knows are guilty as charged but those who admit themselves that they are guilty as charged he refuses to take on the case of anybody who refuses to accept their guilt so my friend if you're here this morning and you're still somewhat kidding yourself that you're not really a rebel against God and a breaker of every law in the book of God and that somehow you can sort this out for yourself let me put it bluntly Jesus isn't going to stand in your case he's not going to take you on and there are still people who think like that when I was pastoring a church in London I remember having a conversation with a guy sitting in his home after a number of conversations I had with him and he said to me John he said just let's get one thing straight I'm not a sinner I said tell me more he said listen I have a few character defects but I'm not a sinner I said my friend you can call them what you like God says you're a sinner all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God so here's the first thing about Jesus he is our advocate secondly says John he is righteous isn't this a wonderful title we have an advocate with the father

Jesus Christ the righteous that means he never does anything that's wrong that means in his very character in all his behavior in all his attitudes he always does that which is right and just even when he's representing those he knows are guilty as charged now that introduces a thought that we mustn't miss as we look at these verses see the thought might be well if the judge is my father and the advocate is his son and my brother maybe he'll just bend the rules a little bit maybe he'll just show a little bit of leniency maybe he'll just cut corners here and there I want to tell you this morning my friends no that is not possible because God is a holy and entirely holy God who demands that justice is satisfied the penalty is paid and Jesus who is our advocate is righteous and righteousness loving there's no way we're going to pull the wool over his eyes no way he's going to break the rules just because we're his brother so he's our advocate and he's righteous and thirdly and most importantly in the context of what John's message is to us this morning in the sense of comfort for us who are believers he is our look at this word in verse 2 he is our propitiation for our sins now there's not a word we use in everyday English and it's unfortunate some Bible translations some pretty good

Bible translations opt to find a different word than this word but this is a word we need to learn this is a word we need to be familiar with as believers because this goes to the very heart of the gospel Jesus is our propitiation what does that word mean well the basic meaning of that word is appeasement and satisfaction it's used in the Old Testament quite a lot to speak of the sin offering for example that was offered in the tabernacle in the temple that's why a number of translations prefer atoning sacrifice rather than the word appreciation and it's not a bad translation but it's not good enough it softens the idea of propitiation because here's the idea when Jesus died on the cross as we're celebrating just very recently when he dies on the cross as our perfect sacrifice he does two things first of all he saves us from our sin his death and his blood is the means by which we are forgiven and the slate is wiped clean that record that we held before God of our sin of our rebellion of our debt is wiped clean as if it never existed in the first place but that act of sacrifice does something else it satisfies

[19 : 55] God's holy justice see it's not just enough for the slate to be wiped clean God has said the soul of the sins shall die so he can't just pretend it hasn't happened he can't sweep it under the carpet he can't say okay I'll let you off the hook let's pretend it's never happened God's justice has to be satisfied somebody's got to die and when Jesus dies on the cross by dying in our place as our substitute he forgives our sin and he forgives our sin by turning away by deflecting the holy righteous wrath of God friends that's what the heart of propitiation is all about it's deflecting the wrath of God that was aimed at me deservedly and Jesus deflects it and takes it on himself who didn't deserve it he died as if he'd sinned he died as if he was my sin and so

God could pour out the full wrath of his righteous fury and anger on Jesus and he can look at me and I'm scot free that's the gospel my friends that's why we need to cherish this word and this truth propitiation in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon with his blood God the father looked at Jesus hanging on the cross and he saw John Brand and he opened all the big guns of his holy wrath and he let them loose on Jesus and then he turned as it were and he looked at John Brand and he saw Jesus and he said you're guiltless you're innocent that's the work of propitiation Jesus satisfies the wrath of God by turning away the wrath of God and taking it on himself that's what propitiation is but why is it needed well the answer is and this isn't popular or even universally accepted even among professing

Christians but it's a thoroughly biblical truth friends that God is a holy righteous just God he's a God whose anger burns fiercely against all sin any sin he's a God who much as he loves us can't just pretend it hasn't happened he's a God whose justice must be satisfied he's a God of wrath well friends I know that's not popular all people say God is a God of love listen you will never understand you will never appreciate what it is for God to be a God of love if you don't understand that it's the love of a God who is by nature a God of wrath what is so astonishing about the fact that God loves me is that God is a holy righteous just God who ought to damn me to hell but having dealt with that in Christ he can now love me unconditionally listen let me remind you it's a repeated truth in scripture

John 3 36 whoever does not obey the son shall not see life the wrath of God remains on him Romans 1 18 the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man Ephesians 5 verse 6 because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience how anybody can say as sadly many will in pulpits up and down the land today that God is not a God of wrath they're reading a different Bible from mine they're worshipping a different God from mine friends this isn't palatable it's not popular but you can't deal with the problem unless you diagnose what the problem is we are by nature the objects of literally in the sights of God's unspeakable and holy world God can't just look the other way he can't pretend nothing has happened his justice had to be satisfied so that's what propitiation is that's why it's needed how does it work well

God says the soul the sins must die that's all of us but from the very earliest days of the New Testament God set a pattern in place that there are ways in which sin could be dealt with without the sinner dying it's the principle of substitution so God says okay I will accept a perfect substitute in the place of sinners that's why all the way through the Old Testament millions of lambs and bulls and goats were sacrificed but here's the problem Hebrews 10 verse 4 says it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin and if sin is not taken away God's wrath remains on us so all through the Old Testament we need to be very clear about sin was not fully dealt with it was simply set on one side because the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin it was set on one side until

[25 : 12] Jesus came it's not a very nice picture but I sort of think of it like this it's a bit like when all those sacrifices were made there was this great big sort of virtual warehouse and all the sin from Adam onwards was piled in that warehouse it was out of the way so people could have a relationship with God but it was still there it was still a stinking nasty mess waiting for Jesus to come the perfect substitute the lamb slain before the foundation of the world the lamb who's not a morally neutral animal but flesh and blood like us that's why God had to become man and he who was perfect and sinless took on himself all our sin he owned our sin as if it was his sin he who knew no sin became sin says Paul he put himself in the firing line of God's wrath by offering himself as a sacrifice on the cross and he takes it away he doesn't just set it on one side he doesn't just add it to that centuries long warehouse of sin he removes it says the scripture from us as far as the east is from the west and he took it away and himself experienced the unspeakable wrath of a holy

God and friend please note what the text says look very closely at what we're told in verse 2 he is the propitiation some of the most important words in the Bible are the smallest words it doesn't say Jesus offered a propitiation it says he is the propitiation he's not like the Old Testament priest who offered a sacrifice he is the sacrifice he himself is the priest offering himself on the altar of the cross that's why Jesus had to die now let's go back to that court scene the accused has admitted their guilt the judge is about to deliver the only verdict possible yep guilty as charged and sin is deserving of death and then as it were the advocate speaks the lawyer speaks and he turns to the judge and you maybe as it were standing by his side and the advocate says to the father father

I've already paid the price for this man I've already paid the price for this woman this child of God on that cross of Calvary I took their guilt I died in their place and here's the proof and he holds up his hands which still even today in his glorified body bear the marks of his crucifixion he shows the wound in his side and now and let me say this reverently and carefully the judge can only do one thing he can only do one thing because he's a just God he's a righteous judge he says case dismissed case dismissed the accused is innocent of all charges and he turns to you and he turns to me the accused believer and he says you're justified you're free to go and I say he has no other option and the reason I say that is this because the penalty for the offence has already been paid paid 2,000 years ago and it would be unjust unrighteous unfair immoral unholy for God to demand payment twice

I cannot be punished for my sin because Jesus has already been punished for my sin that lie I told that impure thought I had that unkind word I spoke that whatever else in my life that's already been dealt with on Calvary and if God was to punish me now oh he disciplines me but he doesn't condemn me he doesn't judge me in that sense he can't do that because he's already punished Jesus he's punished Jesus for every sin I've ever committed he's punished Jesus for every sin I'm ever going to commit there's no greater message than that in the world so he has to let me go the price is paid do you remember do you remember back in verse 9 if we say we have no sins sorry verse 9 if we confess our sins what he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins justice demands forgiveness if I can put it as bluntly as that there's one more thing we need to briefly think about in the light of all of this it's the last part of verse 2 and actually gives people a lot of problems he says he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world here's something my students are always saying to me every time I say this now they laugh it's going to be written on my gravestone probably context determines meaning so we have to every passage of scripture has to be understood as context does Jesus does John mean in verse 2 that Jesus when he died on the cross is the propitiation for every sin ever committed by every sinner in the world is that what he's saying well he can't be saying that he can't be saying that now we need to think very carefully and biblically about this we're all going to end up in error

John cannot mean that when Jesus died on the cross he removed the deserved and just wrath of God from every human being who lived that would result in at least three great and serious errors first of all it would mean that every human being would be saved it's actually a form of universalism it would mean Hitler would be saved it would mean Osama bin Laden would be saved it would mean Judas Iscariot was saved the bible says he's the son of perdition it would mean that every other sinner great or small would be saved and hell would be completely empty and redundant it's the only logical conclusion if Jesus died for every sinner of every person in the world hell's empty second it would mean that God was unjust and unfair that's why I stressed that previous point because when God punishes unrepentant when God punishes unrepentant sinners he would then be demanding justice twice if Jesus died for everybody and yet God punishes those who don't believe in him he's punishing them twice that's unfair it's unholy thirdly it would mean that God's will and purpose could be thwarted by human will

[32 : 39] God wouldn't get his way and let me tell you this God always gets his way one writer I read this week an old Puritan said Christ did not merely purchase salvation and then leave the application of that salvation to man's free will for then Christ might have suffered and died for nothing see if Jesus died for everybody supposing nobody repented and nobody believed everybody would end up in hell and Jesus would have wasted his time in his life unthinkable let me tell you what John is saying this is the way John uses the word that he uses here he died for the sins of the whole world that's John's way of saying anybody anybody John uses that word quite often in his gospel and in his writing and it simply means wherever you come from in the world whatever ethnic group you belong to whatever social class you belong to you're in this God so loved the world he loved everybody and anybody but only those who believe in him get saved so let me put out this what Jesus did on the cross the propitiation of Jesus

Christ is sufficient for all but it's effective only for those who believe so here's the comfort if you're a child of God this morning if you're a Christian because you know that some day some time in the past you trusted Christ for salvation you admitted your need of salvation you believe that Jesus death on the cross is the only hope you've got before a holy God and you said Lord have mercy on me a sinner that very moment in time you became a child of God you became a Christian you became a younger brother or sister of the Lord Jesus Christ and from that moment onwards God is invested in you to make you more and more like Jesus so one day you'll spend eternity with Jesus in glory and it's all possible because of the cross and when Jesus died on the cross he died to forgive all your sin as a child of God past, present and future that is wonderfully assuring isn't it you know people Christians sometimes have this problem they say to me John listen I prayed this morning first thing this morning I prayed I asked God to forgive all my sins what happens if before I next have a chance to pray to God for forgiveness for my sins during this day what happens if I get knocked down by the number 36 bus and die don't worry about it

I say my friend when Jesus died for you on the cross he died for all your sins even the ones you've not yet committed so if you're here this morning as a Christian and you're carrying a load of guilt some what you think is sin that not even God could forgive let me tell you this morning it's dealt with it's dealt with here's the promise here's the comfort of the gospel you have permanently standing at the right hand side of God the father Jesus Christ the righteous your advocate pleading for you to a father who will always grant what his son asks him friends as we leave this courtroom this morning I need to remind you there's another courtroom that one day all of us will stand in all of us without exception and it's the most terrifying courtroom in the world if I was nervous in the crown court in

Liverpool let me tell you this the next courtroom is going to be terrifying beyond all description because the Bible says we must all appear before the judgment seat of God in fact it says the judgment seat of Christ because God has delegated all judgment and authority to his son and when we get to that courtroom at the end of time there's no more chance to repent no more chance to realize we've made a mistake as we die we enter the judgment throne and this isn't like a human court where the evidence will be weighed up the pros and the cons and the jury will make a decision the judgment has already been made the decision has already been written down all we're waiting for is to discover our reward if we're Christians or our judgment if we're non-Christians and Jesus

Christ will be there but he will not be the advocate for everybody he will only be the advocate at least for the defense for those who are truly Christians and my friend if you die if you pass from this life into the next life and Jesus Christ is not your personal Lord and Savior let me tell you this morning he will not be your advocate on that terrible day he will be your adversary and he never loses a case and he will say to you depart from me I never knew you now if anything going to keep you awake at night my friends that should be it if you're not a Christian the thought that you might take your last breath and suddenly wake up and hear Jesus the righteous advocate saying get away from me I don't know who you are but that's what will await those who die without Christ but if you're

[38 : 15] Christian you've nothing to fear there's now no condemnation now or in the future for those who are in Christ Jesus my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole has been nailed to his cross and I bear it no more praise the Lord praise the Lord oh my soul the sky not the grave is our goal do you have that certainty this morning my friend if you're a Christian you should have that certainty some people think it's presumptuous to say I'm certain I'm a Christian I'm definitely saved that's not presumption that's assurance and it's the birthright of a child of God and one John is a whole letter written for that very purpose to give you assurance so don't live a defective faith don't go day by day wondering if you're saved be sure that you're saved but only be sure that you're saved if you're saved if you're not saved forget your

Sunday lunch forget your bank balance forget everything else in life it's irrelevant compared to this you need to get saved because the consequences of not being saved are too terrible let's pray oh God our Father we thank you this morning for the gospel the good news and there's no greater news that can fall on human ear than this that God so loved the world that he gave his own son and that while we're yet sinners before we had any desire after God in our hearts Christ died for us he took our sin he became our sin he is the propitiation he is that means by which your righteous anger is turned away from us that that anger that should condemn us to hell for all eternity it's no longer trained on me because it was trained on Jesus and now when God sees me or any

Christian here this morning he sees Jesus he sees us clothed in his righteousness in his beauty yes for all our all our faults and defects and we were the first to admit it were miserable failures as Christians when God the Father looks at us he looks at us with unconditional love because we are his blood bought children hallelujah for that but Father it would be a strange Sunday morning congregation here if there were not one or two at least this morning who may know much about you and may know much about the things of God but have never actually trusted for salvation never actually admitted Lord have mercy on me I'm a sin loving Christ hating hell deserving rebel oh that this morning you would take the scales from off their eyes oh this morning you would take that fleshly heart and heart of stone really and give them a new heart that beats for you this morning in this place they might be saved so that on that great day they will know salvation full and free so help us we pray may we be not only hearers of your word not only agreeers with your word but above all doers of it we pray for our good and your glory we ask it for

Jesus sake amen friends we're going to sing our closing hymn which is our great hymn that reflects some of these truths we were thinking of this morning in Christ alone my hope is found let's stand and sing oking let's go