

The Power of the Cross

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Date: 30 August 2020

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[0 : 0 0] What I want to do at the moment is read God's Word, and I want to read in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And I want just to read a little portion of God's Word for us later in our service. I want to unpack a message of encouragement for us from it. But we read 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18. And it says, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discernment I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.

So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. So that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boasts in the Lord. And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God for you today, last week. Who he'll be for you this week.

[2 : 4 8] You know, sometimes when we hear words of testimony, all we ever hear about is the day in which a person became a Christian. And that's a wonderful thing. But in actual fact, who is Jesus for you today?

And in his grace, what kind of Christian is he making you moment by moment, day by day? And so it was great that Ron would share with us something of that ongoing journey. I think some of you know that To God Be The Glory is another song that means a great deal to me. And it's for a very profound reason. And what happened for myself was that I had been going along, I'd shown some interest in the things of Christ. I wasn't a Christian, but I began to show some interest in the things of Christ.

And I'd been going along to church. And I went along to a parish church in Knightswood in Glasgow. And it was a good church. As churches go, it was a strong church. It was a Bible-believing church.

There were some great people there who loved the Lord. There'd been some folks that had been great, made great investments in my life over many, many years. And I'd been going, I'd started to go along to this church. But I had a couple of views of that church. First of all, the hymns they sang and the music they played was dull. I mean, it was excruciatingly dull. The organist, you know, used to, you know, sort of dress up with a cloak and all that, and, you know, played the big organ.

And there was a choir. And I was never quite sure whether the choir were in tune. Not that I'm a judge, by the way, but I was never quite sure if they were in tune or out of tune. But at the end of the day, that's where they were. And the people, when they sang, you know, they didn't look as if some of the songs they were singing were songs of great joy, but their heart had forgot to tell their face, you know. And so they were kind of there, but, you know, they were singing it, and they were mouthing the words. But there was something missing.

[4 : 50] And in the course of one week, I got converted. I became a Christian. And I walked into that church, and I thought, something dramatic has happened in here. These words are good words. This is quite lively. You know, some of these people look quite... And to God be the glory was announced. And I sang, to God be the glory, like you have never heard that song before. You know, there I was belting it out.

So much was a belting... Now, nothing had really changed externally. What had happened was I had changed internally. The gospel had become real. A love of God had ignited my heart. And suddenly, everything took on a new meaning. Everything took on a fresh dimension. And there I, singing it out with all that I am. So much so, bless her heart, I still remember a wee old lady just behind me, tapped me on the shoulder. And she said, Oh, son, what's singing? Are you a trained singer?

That's the only compliment I've ever had in my life, right, for singing. But at the end of the day, you know, I had been transformed. And what had made the difference? It wasn't the church.

It wasn't the service. It wasn't the songs. It wasn't the people, even. It was the reality of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform a life. That's what had happened.

I had come under conviction about the reality of who God is, of who Christ is. I had come under conviction about the sin of my life, about my rebellion against God. I'd come under a deep conviction of sin, and I'd thrown myself entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And I had got saved. And the journey from that day is a journey where every day in life, and every week in life, and every month of the year, and every year, even on a year like this one, there's a testimony to share. There's a story to be told.

[7 : 05] There's a testimony to be given to the glory of God, and to who He is, and to what He's doing. And you know, the interesting thing is that at the present moment in time, you and I as the people of God might be restricted from doing some of the things that we normally always did. But it does not stop the gospel. And it does not stop you and I bearing testimony to the goodness of God, and the greatness of God, and the glory of God in the gospel amongst our family, amongst our friends, amongst our neighbors, amongst those that we dwell amongst. It should not stop that. What we've got to learn to do is just keep Jesus the main thing. Keep Jesus right at the center of all that we are doing. And the reality is, although, because let's be honest, sometimes we did certain things, but we were convinced that they were there in the Bible, weren't we? The services are 10.30 and 6.30, depending on which church you went to, because that's what the Bible says. Because the Bible doesn't say any of that, right? But at the end of the day, we kind of get that conviction about us, you know? And we kind of do things in certain days because we were convinced that's what it says. It doesn't say any of that.

But when we look at God's Word, what should happen is that our heart should ignite in the glory of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what I want to encourage us with as we get ready to start gathering together. Because the gathering together of the people of God should be for His glory, but it should also be that we might be equipped to do what? To enjoy our Christian life more?

No, that we might be equipped to proclaim and make Jesus known more. That's really why we gather as the people of God, that we might be fed and equipped and encouraged and enabled to go out and to share the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, to communicate Christ to others. And one of the things I love about Paul when he was writing to the church at Corinth, and my goodness, that was an interesting church, wasn't it? You know, he's writing to a church that's riddled with division, you know?

I serve Paul. I serve Apollos. And this is Paul saying, you know, who the hangs Paul? You know, he's speaking about himself. He said, what really matters is Christ. You know, he's writing to a church that's, you know, very divided. He's writing to a church that would often be kind of taken up by the intricate details of things and the wee diversions that we can often have. And he wanted to just pull them back to what really matters. Of course, Corinth at the time was one of the great intellectual centers of the world. It was one of the places where many, many people were philosophizing and debating and tickling their minds with all manner of fancies about what they think and who said and how he thinks and whatever else. And Paul goes into the midst of that. And what I love is that he turns around and he says that, you know, we didn't come to you with lofty speech or wisdom at the start of chapter 2 there.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

[10 : 43] Don't you love that? I love the humility of that. Because this is the Apostle Paul. This is the Apostle Paul who, you know, every time when we look at him in the Acts of the Apostles would go out and he'd first go to the synagogues. Remember, he'd go to the synagogue at Thessalonica and what would he do? He would reason with them from the Scriptures. And so to the Jew, he would start in the Old Testament Scriptures and he would reason with them from the Scriptures. By the way, even just in that for you and I, if you're going to say anything for God to anyone, share the Scriptures.

The Word of God is living and active. Your words and mine are not God's Word is, right? And so there he is, and he reasons with them from the Scriptures. And as he reasons with them from the Scriptures, and bear in mind, what he's reasoning with when he's there in Thessalonica in the synagogue is the Old Testament Scriptures. He's showing them Jesus from the Old Testament. He's starting, you know, he's not got, you know, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you know, to open up with at that time. He's not got the letters that under the Spirit of God he's going to write himself. He's reasoning with them from the Scriptures. You want to know something of what he said, you can probably read his letter to the Romans, right? Because there he was showing them how, you know, those who are truly children of Abraham are born again in Christ. And so the reality is he reasons with them from the Scriptures and shows them Jesus Christ crucified, raised from the dead, and how Jesus is the Messiah.

And if you and I are going to share anything of the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must always learn just to speak out the Scriptures. But the beauty of this, the beauty of this is that he says, I didn't come into Corinth where they were all full of intellectual big ideas, and they were all kind of trying to work out what wisdom is. I came with the simplicity and the foolish foolishness in the eyes of the world of the message of the cross.

Now, this is Paul. Now, you might look and think, you know, well, maybe Paul wasn't capable of the intellectual. Have you read Romans? You know, we know he was capable, right? You know, you look at under the, you know, Spirit of God, the way in which, you know, God used him in so many different places. You look at his approach in Acts chapter 17 with the people of Athens, how he started where they were and not where they were not. Again, it's a pointer for you and I, isn't it? Start where people are. But nothing would stop Paul from preaching and teaching the message of the cross.

And, you know, we live in a day and an age when it's very tempting to try and appeal to people with all manner of different things that might draw them in. But the question we've got to ask ourselves is, draw them into what? Because what we long to do is draw people into a reconciled relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And that means that the only way we can do that is if we hold out, if we speak out, if we extend to them the message of the cross, the message of the gospel. And I love the fact that he said, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Now, when Ron and I were traveling over in the car, he was talking about something he'd saw during the week where somebody had said that everyone coming from an atheistic worldview, in actual fact, should have no fear of COVID.

[14 : 53] Because the logical conclusion is that you've, you know, we live, we die, and that's the end of it. So why suddenly this big fear of death? What is exposed in people is the fear of their own mortality.

And what is the believer not afraid of? They're not afraid of their own mortality.

And why are we not afraid of our own mortality? Because the foolishness of the message of the cross, in actual fact, extinguishes any fear of death. It's not only the message of the cross, it's the message of the cross and the resurrection. And we know that because Christ has died and because Christ has risen, so also, we who are in Christ Jesus, you know, even though we die, what's the great testimony of the saint of God?

Yet shall we live. Yet shall we live. Yet shall we live. You see, that's the testimony of the believer.

So, my friends, God has you and I alive at a time when even a world that's got an atheistic worldview is afraid of its own mortality and is asking questions and is trying to avoid something which could take their life from them.

[16 : 34] And believers, you're already living in the fullness of the reality of the eternal life of Christ because the folly of the cross has removed life's greatest fear.

And you and I, we have this incredible message. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God.

And that's the case for you and I. You know, I was preaching this morning in Calderwood. I know some of you were perhaps caught that service. And the number of people that have come up to me and said, John, thank you for that little encouragement from Dane Ortlund's book, Gentle and Lowly.

I'd encourage you to get that book, right? Because they were just so captured by the simplicity of a message that says, there's only two things you need to do in the Christian life. One, go to Jesus, and the second one, see the first one.

You know, and it's the reality, isn't it, right? The Christian life is all about getting to that place where broken before God, we go to Christ.

[17 : 50] Come to me, all you who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. And when we've done that, when the Spirit of God has convicted us of our sins, when God has brought us to a place of repentance and faith, is it not true that the message of the cross has become the power of God in your life?

And he's not necessarily saying that you're going to be up here next week opening the Scriptures and expounding it. He's not saying that's what you have to do. He's not necessarily saying that he might give you the gift of song, and you're going to start writing songs about it, and you're going to communicate it in that way.

But he is saying, your testimony is true. Because of the power of the cross, you are saved. And the message of the cross is the power of God at work in your life.

And, you know, you've got family that don't know this yet. And many of them might have heard you speak the message of the cross.

But you know something, it's possible that some of them might never have heard you speak the message of the cross. Because we're kind of funny that way sometimes around our family, aren't we? But think of what it would look like if they heard from your lips the simplicity of the message of the cross and of its power in your life.

[19 : 27] Think of what it would look like if some of your friends or neighbors or work colleagues heard you speaking in the language of Paul, that the power of the message of the cross has utterly transformed you as a person.

How will the church of Jesus Christ grow? Yeah, I've got to be honest. I have grown so much to love Bells Hill and its people and this building.

I can't sit in this building without longing for a day when every seat is taken. I long for that.

But I know something. It's not going to be about technique. It's not going to be about, you know, the quality of the service. It's not going to be about, it's going to be about a faithful people sharing the message of the cross, the power of the resurrection, the simple reality of the gospel to change a life.

With friends, with family, with neighbors, even with enemies. And Paul's writing to the church at Corinth.

[20 : 51] And he says, God says, And he goes on to say something that I actually find.

It's quite staggering, right? Because we know the truth, right? There is no foolishness in God, right? But Paul, in order to make his point, says, For the foolishness of God is wiser.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. It's quite remarkable what he says there. And the weakness of God is stronger than man.

And so, God chooses to use everyday, ordinary people, who might consider themselves very weak in the eyes of the world, to turn the world upside down.

We are world changers. Now, this is not, you know, I know I've got the kind of fancy mic on, right? But this is not kind of one of these motivational sermons.

[22 : 25] You know, you see the motivational guys, they're all stamping up and doing, you know, your world beaters, your world changers, your world transformers. It's the truth of the gospel. If you know the reality of the message of Jesus in your heart, God can work through you to make you a world changer.

I said this morning to our children, one of my favorite little expressions of McShane, it's not so much great gifts that God uses, it's great likeness to Jesus.

The more you and I become Christlike, in obedience to the message of God in His Word, God uses ordinary people to turn the world upside down.

That was a testimony, by the way, in Thessalonica, wasn't it? You know, these men have turned the world upside down. These ordinary people. What if we truly believed in the power of the gospel?

Could we turn Bell's Hill upside down? A good place to start, wouldn't it, right? You know, I mean, today Bell's Hill, tomorrow the world, right? But it would be a great place to start, wouldn't it?

[23 : 51] If we truly believed in the message of the cross. If we truly believed in the power of the gospel. If we truly believed in the ability of God just to take and to transform everyone who comes to Him with a penitent heart.

You see, there is no foolishness in God. We know that. So if we're going to try and understand it, I suppose what we could say is we could say, God will choose that which is foolish in the world, you and I, to turn the world upside down.

And even in that, He's not being foolish. He knows what He's doing. It's incredible. It's incredible. It's incredible. You know, when I was itinerant in evangelism and Bible teaching, I used to get invited to go to a lot of the universities.

And I used to get invited to preach the gospel in the universities. And I used to get invited to private schools.

You know, the kind of, the big fee-paying schools. Gordonston and the like. In fact, Zara, Princess Ansdorfer, she's washed my car for me.

[25 : 16] Right? Some of the connections, right? Right. But, what do you call it? I used to get invited to do that. And I've got to be honest. I was a bit in fear and tremble.

I was a lot in fear and tremble. I'll tell you why. You see, this will amaze you. I didn't work at school. You're stunned, aren't you?

I made arrangements with teachers. That if I didn't turn up for the class, they could mark me as present. And it would be easier all round.

And they did that. I mean, I had teachers that used to mark me as present, knowing that I wasn't. Because it was just easier. It was less hassle for everybody. And I wasn't in classes.

Now, it'll not surprise you that when you're not in classes, and you've got to do a thing called exams, that you're not quite sure what the exam's about.

[26 : 13] And you're not quite sure that you've got anything to contribute. And when you go to exams, and you're not quite sure what they're about, and you've not got much to contribute, you fail them. I know that from experience, right?

That's what happens. And so when you leave school, and people say nothing much will come of him, right? Other than the fact that he'll talk his way into work. And you get a job right away.

In fact, you go off of two jobs, and you take one of them, right? And you start working as an apprentice printer, print finisher in the box making department in Glasgow. You've not set your sights very high.

You're not planning a university. I've been in every university in our land. Never as somebody who gained entry to sit in a qualified, you know, in a study there, right?

I've been in every university in our land, preaching the gospel, by the way. But I've never actually been in any university to actually take a course, right? And so the reality is, you know, when you get to a place where God saves you, and he says, I'm going to make you a preacher.

[27 : 19] And I'm going to, you know, put you into places that you would never normally be. And I would go in amongst all these kind of students of all manner of things, and they're all turning up at these meetings because I'm coming along to preach about the Christian faith.

And I'd be like, at a human level, terrified. But what would God say? Tell them what you do know. Tell them who you know.

Tell them who you're related to. You're a son of the living God. You're saved by grace. You know the message of the cross and the power of the cross to transform a life.

You know the power of the resurrection. The resurrection powers that work in you. I'll choose that which is foolish in the world to shame the wise. The story.

The true story. He uses ordinary everyday people. He uses ordinary everyday people to do incredible things in the power that He provides for His glory.

[28 : 32] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.

So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of Him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Here's a trio right there, isn't it? The righteousness of God in Christ dwelling in you. God by the Spirit of God making you more like Christ, sanctifying you, redeemed. The price is paid.

You belong to Him. Nothing can pluck you out of His hand. That's who I've made you. Go and tell the world that that's their greatest need. How can I?

Don't worry. God specializes in using very ordinary people to do extraordinary things. It's what He does.

[29 : 38] It's what He does. You know, I look forward to the day when, you know, in glory, I can maybe stand beside Paul and say, you and me, you know, simple people used of God.

He'll always be a brighter intellect than I'll ever be. But that's not the point. He knows the power of God at work in him to preach the foolishness of the cross to those that don't know.

That in the message of the cross, they might be convicted and become followers of Christ. You and I can do that. Was it George B. Duncan? It used to be, St. George's, drawn in Glasgow, used to talk about gossiping the gospel, didn't he?

You know, over a cup of tea, just gossip the gospel. Share it with friends. Don't hold back. Allow God to use you for His glory.

If you're going to boast, boast in the Lord. And it's Paul who says, I decided to know nothing amongst you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

[30 : 44] I can empathize with that. And my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your faith, that is your belief, might not rest in the wisdom of men, but it might rest in the wisdom of God.

God, we're the people who in our day and age will be willing to say, I don't consider myself to be overly wise, but the one piece of wisdom I have is priceless.

Is that not the pearl of great price? Is that not the treasure hidden in a field? I don't consider myself to be overly wise, but the one piece of wisdom I've got, oh, it's priceless.

It's this. that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is everything that your heart is longing for.

And to share the simplicity of the message of Jesus. Paul has so much more he was going to say to this church at Corinth, but he founded everything he was going to say on getting them in the solid rock of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 36] I was preaching a couple of weeks ago at Hamilton. I said to our folks this morning, some of you probably heard that, I've actually had, you know, you know how people talk about their bucket list, you know, things they'd like to do before glory, right?

Well, some folk used to have a bucket list, things they'd like to do before they die. I would actually, see when you're talking to somebody, by the way, that's not a believer and they've got a bucket list, this is a great in, right?

Ask them about their bucket list. Enthuse about their bucket list. See if they're not a believer, listen to all the things they want to do before they die and then say to them, can I add one more thing to your bucket list that you might become a believer in the good news of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and then you will never die?

Can I add one more thing to your bucket list, right? So when you hear somebody talking about a bucket list, give them a gift. Give them a gift that says, let me add one more thing to your bucket list that you might come to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

If you're a believer, you can still have one. You might fancy going to see something, you might fancy doing something, right? But as a believer, you know, I've always had this desire to preach at any opportunity I've got and recently I've got a chance to preach in two places at the same time.

[33 : 55] That's been phenomenal. The last two Sunday mornings I've been preaching in one church and preaching in another at the same time, right? And I don't have omnipresence, right? But the reality is I've been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ at Hamilton pre-recording it, you know, so I've been up there giving it loudly at the exact same time as I've been preaching in Kilmarnock or in Calderwood, right?

It's been an incredible wee achievement for somebody like myself to be able to do that. But, I was preaching a couple of weeks ago at Hamilton. I said this. I said, we live in a day and an age when we hear the mission of the church of Jesus Christ invariably described.

We hear people talking about, you know, when we do the good works that we do in the community, that's mission. No, that's good works. It's not mission. I'm not saying we shouldn't do them. We should.

You know, because when we're a saved person we do good stuff for the glory of God's name, right? But what they do is we do the good thing and we call it mission. No, it's not mission. It's a good thing. And sometimes we're engaged in all manner of different stuff and we like to call it the church's mission.

Biblically, the church's mission is always only defined as when the church proclaims the gospel. There are many things that we might do that might give us the right to proclaim the gospel, that might give us a platform proclaiming the gospel.

[35 : 19] I'm not knocking any of that, but what I'm saying is if we do all that stuff and don't proclaim the gospel, it's not mission. And the reality is that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is you and I, none of us that important in the eyes of the world, making known as children of the living God the message of salvation.

And what is that message of salvation? Our God is the righteous creator of all things. Mankind has offended Him, sinned against Him, has rebelled against Him, and stands under His judgment.

We are separated by God because of the sin of our lives. And yet, what is the truth? The truth is that God, that righteous creator, has moved towards man in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

and in Christ Jesus, our Savior, He has taken the sin of the world upon Himself and Calvary's cross. He, by His resurrection for the dead, has proven that He has power over sin and death and hell.

He is the all-conquering King of kings and Lord of lords. and He extends to all, whosoever would believe in the message of the Lord Jesus Christ that by repentance and faith, they can be reconciled to Him and they can live from that day on for His glory.

[36 : 50] And it happened with me. And it happened in such a way that to God be the glory took on a whole new dimension. And a wee guy from, you know, Springburn and Truth, that's where I was born, and then brought up in Knightswood, started singing like he was a professional singer because he discovered that the message of the cross which is folly to the world is the power of God for the salvation of people like me.

And he says, share that with others and share it with the whosoever. And I will empower you and enable you to do that. And He'll do that for you and me together.

And He calls us to do that and to share that. And that is the mission of the church. Is that we should testify to the greatness of our God and the salvation of our souls.

And that we should extend that salvation to all who by faith, repentance and faith, would put their trust in Him. And I want just to encourage us as we start to meet back together again.

As we dream dreams of what God might do in a COVID church world. Said to some of your leaders in making the preparations, I say, is that the moment, for the time being, we're in COVID church.

[38 : 04] We want to get to COVID-free church. We hope we never become the COVID-continuing church. If you know any of the history of Scottish churches, you'll know about that, right? But the reality is, we want to get to a COVID-free church, right?

But, right now, as COVID church, our mission is exactly the same as it always has been.

Make Jesus known. And so this week, your challenge, my challenge, before we gather again next week, is to make Jesus known to somebody.

Make Jesus known to somebody. Pray that God would give you a sensitive heart. God would give you a sensitive spirit.

God would open a door for the gospel. Even when Paul says, pray for me that the Lord might open a door for the gospel. Make that your prayer. That God would open a door for the gospel for you this week.

[39 : 04] and you'd make Jesus known. Well, let's pray together. Our gracious Father, we thank you for your word.

And we thank you, Lord, for the wonderful truth of your word. We thank you for the power of the gospel. We thank you that each one of us who are gathered here knowing you do so only because of your grace towards us and our Lord Jesus Christ.

we thank you that none of us are anything special. The only thing we have is the incredible news that we're loved by you, that we're special on your side, that we're precious to you, and that through our repentance and our faith and trust in you, we are your children.

And you call us as your children to take on the family resemblance, and you call us to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and you call us to be sensitive to lost and hurting souls, and you call us to pray to you that you might open a door for the gospel, and that we might be those who would boldly proclaim the power of the cross to others.

We pray, Lord, that you would make fruitful our conversations, that your name might be magnified and honored. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[40 : 34] Well, it's been good to be together. I'm going to invite Ron to sing. I actually wanted him to sing the song that he would close with this morning, and he's going to sing How Great Is Our God, which goes on just to declare how great our God is.

And then after that, it'll be a prayer of blessing, and our time together is over for this week. We're meeting again next week at 10.30, and young Carl should be with us next week.