

A prayerful lament

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] Let's turn this one off. It'll go click again. We'll just use this mic. We've been looking at Psalms. It's a long time since I really expounded any Psalms.

So I'm coming to this a little bit fresh and trying to learn something as I do so. We've looked at two Psalms so far. The first one was Psalm 1. It was a Psalm of blessing. See if you remember, the man who delights in the word of the Lord and meditates in the word is like a tree planted by streams of water. Beautiful promise.

Last we looked at Psalm 2, which is very different. It's about Messiah. What do the kings and nations do? They plot in vain.

Yes, why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? So they're all up against the Lord and his Messiah. And God's answer is to install the Messiah, the anointed one. Where does he put the Messiah?

On Zion. Yes, which is? God's holy hill. Yes. And what does Messiah have in his hand? An iron rod, an iron scepter, that he can smash the nations into pieces. That's what it says.

[1 : 20] But before he smashes them into pieces, there is this invitation to come and make friends with Messiah, to take refuge in him, to kiss the sun, lest he be angry.

But we're going to look at Psalm 6 today, which Rosemary kindly read to us. And it is one of another class of Psalms, Psalms of Lamentation.

There are a number of different types of Psalms, three main types. But this is a representative of the type which is usually referred to as Psalms of Lament or Lamentation.

So what I'd like to do this morning, it's not a long Psalm, but I want to give you an introduction. I want to say about the anguish he feels, the argument he uses, the answer he exclaims.

And I want to say, let's just go back over that and say, who is the he that we've been referring to?

[2 : 40] And I want to, I think there's a key to the Psalms, and I want to turn the key in the lock and see where that gets us right at the end.

So that's what we're going to do. I'm going to introduce it, those three things with A, and then try and turn the key at the end. So let's do some introductory stuff.

So number one, this is poetry. That is a significant thing. Poetry is different from prose. Prose just describes something.

But poetry colors it. So you can see the poetry, as I explained the other week. Hebrew poetry works different to English-type poetry. It uses repetition.

So it will say A, B, C, and then it will say something like A, something like B, something like C. And you get it right at the beginning. Oh, Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger.

[3 : 42] And then the next thing, nor discipline me in your wrath. So rebuke is like discipline and anger is like wrath. And there's lots of that here.

And poetry intensifies the emotional color. The statement here is somebody is sad. The poetry makes you feel how sad they are.

And Rosemary was just saying earlier that when she read this through last night, it brought tears to her eyes just to read it. Because it is a sad psalm. And the poetry makes us feel that.

That's what it's meant to do. It's also meant to be musical. If you just look underneath where it says Psalm 6, there are a number of terms. I don't think anybody exactly knows what they mean.

But the translation here is for the director of music. The music boss. With stringed instruments. So there's a suggestion that it was meant to be accompanied.

[4 : 44] According to Shemineth. I have no idea what Shemineth is. It might mean keep the rhythm. Or it might mean not too loud. Or it might mean, I don't know, it could mean all sorts of things.

And it's a psalm of David. And he was the king, of course. But also we know that he was a musician. So it's got musical headings in Italian.

I would say sort of allegro, andante, al fresco, al dente. Musical instructions for how to sing. And I think we can draw something from this too. That it was, God has given us this. With the idea that not only David would say this was something to put in my private diary.

About that time I felt awful. But something for the people of God. For us to sing too. It gives us instructions. It says, you guys can and should sing this.

[5 : 49] It's for you. People are meant to sing this. We're meant to sing this. God's given us this. So that we can enter into this as we sing it.

And of course singing is different from saying, isn't it? Because singing engages the emotions. That's what it's meant to do. And if we sing a sad song, it's meant to, the singing is meant to convey, yeah, that really is sad.

If we sing a triumphant song, it enables us to say, this is triumphant. So we begin by noting that there is a lot here which is meant to connect with us at the level of emotion.

It's not just a dispassionate description. It is human experience that God has given for us to enter into in his holy word.

So that's some other bits of introduction. It is sad. It is in the category of lamentation. There are other psalms of lamentation.

[7 : 01] We had part of one read to us. In fact, there's one that begins, Who said that psalm?

There's a very famous example of that psalm being quoted. Jesus on the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The cross is a place of tears as the song that we sang expressed. Come and weep. Come and see. So I'm still getting my head around this, But I'm told that there are three big types of psalms.

The hymn, which gives steady truth. The laments and thanksgivings. I'll update you on that when I studied and found out a bit more. Let me just say that not all the psalms are lamentation.

There are some happy psalms and some exuberant psalms. But there is room for lamentation. And the Bible scholar John Calvin said of the psalms, You find in the psalms an anatomy of the human soul, Meaning all the different emotions that human beings have Are expressed somewhere in the psalms.

[8 : 34] And we notice that sadness is one of these. It is not forbidden for Christians to feel sad. Sadness is a genuine part of the Christian life.

We just only have to think of our Lord Jesus, Who at the grave of Lazarus wept. The Apostle Paul says this about his, Is the mixture of his experiences.

He says, I am definitely a Christian. I definitely have the Holy Spirit. But I'm also human. He says, we have this treasure in jars of clay. Jars of clay meaning our bodies and our makeup.

To show that this all surpassing power is from God. And not from us. We, says Paul, are hard pressed on every side. But we are not crushed.

We are perplexed. But not in total despair. We are persecuted. But we are not abandoned. We are struck down.

[9 : 48] But we are not destroyed. And he derives this from the experience of Jesus. He says, we always carry around in our body. The death of Jesus.

So that the life of Jesus. May also be revealed in our body. Though we have this mysterious combination of experiences and emotions.

As Christians. So let me just say, sadness, therefore, is a genuine part of the Christian life. And sadness is a genuine part of church life. And the Apostle Paul, when he's describing community life of the church, he says, rejoice with those who rejoice.

And weep with those who weep. So that's an important thing for us to be able to do. So if you've got something happy and you share it, we rejoice together.

That's great. If there's something sad, and you share that, we all weep. Because we live and breathe together, as it were.

[10 : 52] We feel sorrow together. And that's an important thing for the church to be able to do. Now, as Rosemary said as she read it, she felt tears coming.

Sometimes I go home and cry sometimes. But I'm not in that place today. So I can't say, I know this has brought me to tears as such.

But it's, so I hope we're not all immediately going to burst out in tears as we go on through. But maybe some people are feeling like that.

And that's okay. And I want to say, as a church, it's all right to be sad. Let me just say on a personal note, I'm sad for Chris. I'm sad that he's, for the illness that's come upon him.

I'm sad for his life being cut short above what one might normally expect. And I'm sad for him. And I'm sad for his family. I'm not grieving as those who have no hope.

[11 : 57] But Chris has been remarkably positive. And we thank God for that. But it's a sad thing too, isn't it? And I think as a church, we're allowed to say, we're allowed to shed a tear.

We're allowed to say, this is not what we've been hoping for. This is not what we asked for. And I think we're allowed to shed a tear for that. We won't be going around weeping all the time. That wouldn't be right. But we are allowed to shed a tear. So let's go to the psalm. Psalm 6. Let's look at the anguish that he feels.

Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger. Or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, Lord. For I am faint.

O Lord, heal me. For my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?

[13 : 01] And here's David. Let's look at the anguish that he feels here. He feels he's under God's anger. Do not rebuke me in your anger.

Or discipline me in your wrath. So there's a deep spiritual concern about how God is dealing with him.

And then he feels pain. He says, I am faint. I don't think he just means, oh, I feel a little bit. Let me just, that's better. I think he feels, I really feel the stuffing's being knocked out of me. I really feel bruised and battered. And then he says, my bones are in agony.

My soul is in anguish. And if I remember correctly, he twice uses a word there which means to be troubled. To be deeply, deeply troubled.

[14 : 03] Deeply in pain and distress and discomfort. And I think he uses it once. And then he uses it again with the word much after it. I'm troubled. I'm troubled a lot.

But my, and he says, bones and soul. Perhaps meaning in every part of his makeup. You know, it affects him physically.

And it affects him in his soul, mentally too. And if we add into that, verse 6. Poor man.

I'm worn out from groaning, he says. And it talks about his tears. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.

And I don't think I've ever personally had occasion to be weeping all night long. But some people have. And maybe you have. And he says, I just couldn't stop crying.

[15 : 05] I couldn't sleep. I just couldn't stop crying. And when I woke up in the morning, all my bedclothes were wet. Because I had wet so much. It's a very powerful, rather moving thought, isn't it?

This poor man, that's how upset he's been. And he refers also to verse 7, my enemies.

And he refers to them again, doesn't he, in verse 10. So it's difficult to know exactly what the writer, let's go with this as being King David.

What exactly is the situation? Is it a military situation that his enemies are just getting at him and lining up on the border?

Is it something like a problem within his cabinet that people are scheming against him, trying to bring him down, make his life miserable? Or, you know, some sort of interpersonal, heartbreaking conflict?

[16 : 11] Is he actually ill? because he says, heal me. He talks about his bones. Or is it a combination of all these things together? I feel sorry for Mrs. May.

Who does she turn to? I hope that she prays. But I could imagine her, I mean, she's a strong woman, isn't she? But I could imagine her sort of identifying somewhat with this psalm and saying, you know, it's so difficult.

Everything's against me. And I just weep and weep. Even Mrs. Thatcher shed a tear, didn't she, when she lost her premiership. Maybe it's something like that.

I don't know. It's, I think, deliberately rather ambiguous so that many people in many situations can say, actually, I've had that experience.

Or something like it. You know, I've wept and wept. I felt so uncomfortable, so distressed. And it's affected me physically. It's affected, you know, all sorts of things go wrong with us, don't we, when

we're stressed and anxious.

[17 : 20] Our digestion doesn't work right. Sometimes our heart rate goes funny. We can't sleep. We get headaches. All sorts of things like that. And David says, I had all of that. And here's the anguish that he feels then.

Let me just take it to pieces a little bit. This business of God's anger. I think it's an extreme thing. Sometimes Christians even get to the point of saying, maybe God wants to get even with me for something I've done in the past. I mean, it's never true.

Because all the wrath was borne by Jesus. But I can imagine Christians getting to such an extreme point that they even begin to wonder, is this because God is actually genuinely angry with me? And that's what David says, please don't let that be the case. Do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Now, in the new covenant, we have a lot more clarity about that.

[18 : 35] That there can be no sense of undealt with wrath against the Christian because Christ has taken that all for us. But I suppose it does point out how precious it is to know even in difficult times, God never brings us into difficult times because he hates us.

God never brings us into difficult times because he's got an anger with us that has not been taken by Jesus. There's no such thing.

The preciousness of forgiveness in the new covenant. And he says that, he talks about it being faint and in trouble. So there's physical pain, perhaps physical inability, perhaps he's confined to bed. And we're talking about days before there were antibiotics and days before there were anesthetics, days before paracetamol. You know, he would be at the mercy of all sorts of physical troubles. And you add that emotionally, and this is all mixing in together, fear, alarm, anxiety, stress, I suppose is a modern word for it.

[19 : 50] And as he says, I'm suffering all those things, I suppose it makes us appreciate, doesn't it, the preciousness of reasonably good health, doesn't it?

It makes us appreciate the blessing of a mind reasonably at peace. These are all good gifts of God's grace.

Those of us who have had bad backs from time to time, you guys who've never had a bad back, you don't appreciate what a great gift it is not to have a problem with your back.

Because when it goes, every single thing that you try and do is affected anyway. This poor man has got at in all sides. Let's be grateful for the times that we're not got at in all sides.

Let's be grateful for normal days. Thank you, Lord. Give us this day our daily bread, and the Lord gives us our daily bread. Thank you for an ordinary day.

[20 : 46] Thank you for a day when I could breathe the air, walk out of my house, see some blue sky, see something green growing, see some buds coming on the trees.

Thank you, Lord. And the thing that he flags up in this anguish is time. And he says, verse 3, how long, oh Lord, how long?

So this is the question of delay, isn't it? He's asking God for his mercy, and it just doesn't seem to come. And this is about time.

It isn't that God isn't going to answer this prayer. He is. But how quickly will he do it? And this flags up the Christian virtue of patience.

It's a childish thing, isn't it, to say, I want it now.

[21 : 46] So I remember going to Four Fars Cafe in Shoreham with the kids a long time ago, and we waited for our order to come.

And I think the kids and I took our knives and forks and said, when's our dinner coming? And the waitress was right behind me. I was so embarrassed. But by nature, we're in this position, we ask God, when he hears us, but he doesn't necessarily give us the answer immediately.

And part of faith is to trust him during that delay period. How long, O Lord, just hang on in there.

Hang on in there. So that was the anguish that he feels.

And there's something there that links into each of our experiences. Perhaps not necessarily today, but someday. David's been there.

Let's look now at the argument he uses. Now, it is very important to notice that this is a psalm addressed to the Lord. It begins, O Lord.

[23 : 07] It is a prayer, isn't it? Now, this is very significant because it is quite possible for human beings under stress and pain to turn away from the Lord.

But this stress and pain, David, does the specifically spiritual thing of turning to the Lord.

And I want to commend to you when you are stressed at an end of yourself, tearful and everything, don't turn away from the Lord, turn to the Lord.

That's the very reason he's given you that experience, to turn you to him. And I would also say, if you can manage it, be with God's people.

Now, I know sometimes that's a difficult thing. You might just feel like I just want to be on my own. And maybe sometimes you can't get out.

[24 : 13] Maybe you're sort of stuck at home and it's physically impossible to be with God's people. But I do want to say, God's people should be ready to weep with those who weep.

So if you come into the assembly of God's people and you're weeping, then please, everybody else, be ready with your handkerchiefs to weep too.

There should be a place for the weeping soul amongst the people of God. Anyway, he prays to the Lord. And he says, please, please, don't rebuke me, don't discipline me in your wrath.

Please don't let it be that. And he prays these prayers, be merciful to me, be gracious to me. And he prays, heal me.

And he says, turn, that's in verse 4, turn and deliver me. And verse 4, he says, save me. Now, these are prayers, arguments, but they are also arguments, because they are requests, but they are requests with an argument.

[25 : 29] I don't mean an argument, meaning to be difficult and contrary, I mean, that's a reasoned thing. Heal me because, heal me for, save me because.

So let's look at the case that he's making, because there is emotion here, and there is reason. reason. Okay, I'll just say that again, there's emotion, but it's not just driven by emotion, it's not a psalm with ten verses of ah, oh, there's actual words, and thoughts, and reason.

So let's look at some of the reasoning that he uses. Verse 4, save me because of your unfailing love. Save me because of your unfailing love.

There's a very special word there which is one of my favorites, and it's very difficult to stop me telling you what it is in Hebrew because it's this word hesed, which means promised love, stickable love, the love which says I promised, therefore I will do what I promised, and this is God's unfailing love.

And I want to commend this unfailing love to you. There's different sorts of love. Love has different flavors, if you like.

[26 : 58] When I was in Sri Lanka, they were asking me, should you marry for love? And I said, well, what sort of love do you mean? Because experience teaches that the love of a boy and a girl when they first meet and they think each other is wonderful, has to gradually change into a love which is a promised love, a steady love, a love that doesn't sort of go up and down in that sense, but it's a stickable.

It has to turn into hesed love. And that hesed love is the real thing that keeps a marriage going. I'll give you an example.

And this example is not one to be followed, but it is an example. This is Abraham and Sarah. So you remember Abraham, he married to Sarah, who was a very good looking lady. They had to go to Egypt because there was no food.

And Abraham was worried that Sarah would be pinched from him by the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and Abraham would be got rid of in order to separate husband and wife.

And Abraham said, you know, this is a real danger. I'm in a bit of a pickle with this. Please will you show me hesed and tell them that you're my sister?

[28 : 32] Now, this is why there's an example not to be followed, because he was saying tell a lie. But he was saying, look, I'm in a real pickle here. And I need somebody I can count on.

And I don't ask you to do this because you think I'm terribly good looking or because of my abs. I want you to do this because you're my wife.

I want you to show me hesed and bail me out of this trouble. people. So, that's an example not to be followed and not to lie for your spouse. But God is a God who bails people out just because he's promised.

Lord, I'm in a hole. I can't see how I get out of it. What can I appeal to? The Lord says, well, I'm actually very good at hesed. And so he appeals to the hesed.

God is, this is one of God's, let me just try and get the right word. He is an expert. God is an expert in hesed.

[29 : 38] And there's two words actually, hesed and emeth, meaning steadfast love and dependability. But God is absolutely the expert, the number one at those things.

I abound in hesed. Abounding in steadfast love and dependability. So first of all, his argument is because of your unfailing love. Secondly, his argument in verse five, no one remembers you when he is dead.

Who praises you from his grave? So this is an argument that says the earth ought to have people who are saying God is great and ought to be full of people saying thanks be to God and if you don't help me Lord, if you just let me disappear and become extinct, then there'll be one less person to do that.

I won't be around to do that. I know you could say, oh well, in the New Testament we know that people will rise from the dead on the last day, yes, and we know that they go to be with the Lord, and we know all that, but just looking at it from the sort of user's point of view, here on earth there ought to be people praising you, and if I become extinct, there won't be me.

And he says, so please will you save me, will you heal me, so that I can say thank you to you, please will you do that.

[31 : 12] And this is the identity of God's people. It says, we are a kingdom of priests to declare the praises of him who brought us from darkness to light.

It's one of our pieces of identity. What do you guys do? What do you guys do, you Christians? And one of the answers are, we declare the praises of God.

We say God is great. Sometimes we come together and do it like this, and we would be extremely disappointed if we hadn't said or almost certainly sung something which says, thank you Lord, God is great, because we do that.

And in our daily lives, when we get the opportunity, that's what we would say, how come you're out of hospital? I'm out of hospital by God's grace, because he helped me.

Thanks be to God. We are people who give thanks to God. And there's a third reason here, which is verse 6, I'm worn out with groaning, all night long I flood my bed with tears, drench my couch with tears, my eyes grow weak with sorrow, they fail because of my foes.

[32 : 28] And I think this is an argument, and the argument is because it hurts. Because the situation in hurts, it is so unpleasant, it is so painful.

Now there have been, and you can think of this yourself, horrible doctors in horrible war situations who have made it their business to take vulnerable people and experiment on them as if they were beetles or I'm distracted, I'm going to have to stop.

Who's, do we know? Nobody. Oh, it's over there, is it right? I'll just try and get my train of thought back again. Yeah, who would take vulnerable people and say, well, let's see what happens if we stick pins into them, or let's see what happens to them if we cut this bit of them off, and let's see what happens if we put them in this horrible situation.

And that's a cruel, inhuman experimentation, isn't it? Terrible thing to do to people. I would say God is not like that. He doesn't expose his people to pain just to see what pain looks like, just to perform a cruel experiment on them.

He doesn't do that, does he? That's not his nature. We're told that he knows our frame, this is Psalm 103, he knows our frame that we are as dust.

[34 : 04] Christ. And as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. A compassion word is a very important word. It says that God cares about people.

And if he, in his providence, brings us into a situation of pain, it's not because he enjoys it, there is a good reason for it. And it is possible to say to him, Heavenly Father, this is so painful, please can you bring it to an end?

There's a recorded prayer of the Victorian preacher Spurgeon, who suffered from gout, and I believe my memory is correct in saying that was one of the prayers he prayed. Heavenly Father, an earthly father would not let his child suffer on and on.

please can you bring to an end this pain that I'm going through. And it doesn't, no guarantee that God will just take that pain away straight away, but it is a proper appeal.

You care about your children. You don't just inflict pain on them for no reason. Save me, O Lord. Turn and deliver me. Heal me. Be merciful to me.

[35 : 22] Let's look now at the answer he exclaims. And in verse 8 he gets to the answer, Away from me all you do evil.

Another translation of this. Oops, we're going to send them away. There we are. Another translation, Depart from me you workers of iniquity.

And those of you who know your Bible is just beginning to think of something here, but that's an alternative translation. Same original words, different way of translating. And the answer he exclaimed, Depart from me you workers of iniquity.

Get away from me. And he says, Yeah, the Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my cry for mercy.

The Lord has received, accepted, taken up my prayer. You notice the repetition there is three times, isn't it? He says the same thing three times, so I'm assuming that means something quite emphatic.

[36 : 32] Yes, the Lord has heard my prayer. He's answered my prayer, and the situation has changed, and these workers of iniquity, these enemies, are going to depart from me.

And concerning the enemies, all my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed.

They will turn back in sudden disgrace. So you notice there's two turnings. The Lord turns to him, and the enemies turn back.

And there is this idea of trouble or agony, which he had used about himself, is used here, and I'm just trying to see which words it was.

I can't work it out. Maybe it's the word dismayed. They'll get the trouble that they were inflicting on me.

[37 : 31] They will be ashamed. The shame is used twice, and the troubled is used twice as well. And they shall turn, he says, they shall turn suddenly.

There's a sudden intervention by God. It reminds me of the suddenness. He is coming quickly. And sometimes the Lord can intervene quickly here on earth, but we're told that one day we'll intervene and change the whole situation suddenly.

I come quickly, suddenly. God hears prayer and changes the situation, and he does so in this case very suddenly. Sometimes God answers prayers gradually.

So Chris was telling us about revival in Scotland. There's other stories of revival. There's one in the USA, and I can't remember where, and it says that they prayed for 30 years and God answered their prayers.

So sometimes God answers the prayers slowly, sometimes he answers them quickly, but let's keep on praying the prayers. I would say that our meeting here together is a result of prayers that have been prayed over 20, 30, 40 years, perhaps more.

[38 : 52] So that's the answer he exclaims. Those are the headings. I want to just offer you a key and turn it in the lock.

And the key, and I might tune this up at a later stage, but the key at this point is that the Psalms are sung to, with, and about Jesus.

The Psalms are sung to Jesus, with Jesus, and about Jesus. let's put that key into the lock and see where it gets us.

So let me ask you this question. Where it says, depart from me, you workers of iniquity, does anybody know who said that and where? Jesus said it.

Did you say Revelation? It wasn't Revelation, but Jesus did say it. In Matthew, yeah? Is it? I think.

[39 : 57] Let's go with Matthew. Do you know where in Matthew you're thinking? It's Matthew chapter 7.

It's the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. Do you want to find it? If you're a Bible person, you might as well look up and put your mind to rest. Matthew 7.

It's verse 23. 23. So the bit begins where Ben said, verse 21, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. That is a quote from Psalm 6. It's the exact wording. Interesting, isn't it? Jesus takes the words of Psalm 6 as belonging to him.

[41 : 04] And he is the singer of at least that part of it. And then you think, well, perhaps he takes all the other words as well. And I can ask you this question.

Who is the one supremely who was under God's wrath, whose bones were in agony, and who called on God for justice?

Who is the one who commended himself to God who judges justly and didn't insult the people who were insulting him? Who was this? This was Jesus.

This was Jesus on the cross, wasn't it? Yeah. Who was surrounded by enemies, getting at him from all sides, including men, and devils, and sin, and death, and who, I don't know whether I'm, this is Jesus too, isn't it?

This is what happened on the cross. And whose prayer did the Lord hear, who delivered him from all his enemies, including the last enemy, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

[42 : 22] Yeah, the Lord Jesus. So, this prayer fits Jesus actually. And, I started off saying it fits our human experience, which it does.

But it fits Jesus' experience. And I would like to say that Jesus in a sense sings this psalm, and invites us to sing it with him.

And the Christian sings this psalm with the Savior. He's been through this. His sufferings come into our life.

We carry around with us in our body the death of Jesus. But so too, his assurances come into our life. We sing in faith.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The Lord didn't forsake him in the end. He took him up. And we can sing this psalm because our sufferings and our tears, if we belong to Jesus Christ, are not despairing tears, abandoned tears.

[43 : 33] They're tears within the purposes of God. He keeps all our tears in a bottle, he says. We don't cry them, but they're something precious to the Lord.

God, and he gave us songs to sing like this, so we can sing them too. Let's close with a song. We're going to sing 879.