

Jesus' Family Tree

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of December 2001.

The preacher is Andrew Prideaux. His sermon is entitled Jesus' Family Tree and is based on Matthew 1.1-17.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to worship you, to hear from your word. Please speak into our hearts this day so that we might respond with faith and obedience.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. As Ali was saying before, thank you on our behalf and on behalf of Ness and myself and Lucy, we work at Monash for your partnership with us and the Gospel with the Christian Union.

Without your prayers and financial support, the work wouldn't go ahead and we value your partnership. It may seem strange that some of your link missionaries never leave the country to work, but let me assure you that it's a very strategic ministry.

[1 : 22] There are about 30,000 students at Monash, for example, many of whom come from countries all around the world just to study there. There are great evangelistic opportunities.

And of course, to train up and envision students for the future who are at a key point in their lives in terms of working out what they're on about and what their priorities are.

So be, rest assured, it is a strategic and important work and we value your prayers. Next year, Ness and I will be moving to Melbourne University to work with the team there in a very similar role.

And if you want to talk to me, and I'm sure Ali or any of us about the work afterwards, that would be a great thing. But we're thinking about Christmas, aren't we? The Christmas tree, the little angel there reminds me yet again that it's Christmas and it's meant to be the season, isn't it, where we celebrate Jesus' first coming and look forward to his coming again in glory.

And yet, for the most part, I think most people in this country see it as the season of warm, fuzzy feelings. One time of the year where you have to be most nice to people, where you eat too much.

[2 : 34] I do anyway, and spend lots of money hoping that your friends and family will return the favour. It's also the time of year, I guess, along with weddings and funerals and baptisms and maybe Easter, that the church seems to serve a useful function in the wider community, when often it's seen not to.

Because after all, we all need a bit of theatre and pantomime, don't we? Especially in the festive season. So Christmas in Melbourne wouldn't be the same without the Maya windows and the Bourke Street Mall, a little bit of eggnog, Frank Sinatra CDs, and of course the good old carol service down the road at Holy Trinity.

But the rest of the year, the church and what Christians get up to, whatever that is, is basically irrelevant, isn't it? And they don't need a top-notch image consultant to tell them why, it's obvious. They're boring and irrelevant because they spend so much time listening to, reading, studying, trying to live out a boring and irrelevant and ancient book, the Bible.

I wonder if that's what your friends think. I know when I try and explain to my friends who aren't Christians what I do, you know, teaching the Bible, helping people to know who Jesus is and things like that, they don't understand it.

[3 : 57] You know, Andy, you've read the Bible once, surely you could move on to the Lord of the Rings or something. You know what happens at the end of the story. And yet you keep going, how can you Christians keep going back over and over this book?

And we're not unaware of the image problem ourselves, aren't we? That's why at Christmas we rarely start the Christmas story where it really begins, with the genealogy. We sat through it this morning, but most of us think, I think, that the Christmas story begins in verse 18 of Matthew 1.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way, and on we go with the story of Mary and Joseph. Well, what are we to make of this image problem?

What are we to make of this great list of names that starts off the New Testament? Picture the scene. You've bought a Bible for one of your friends to introduce them to Christianity.

You give it to them, maybe for Christmas. They open up first page of the New Testament. What do they strike? But a great list of names that they find it very difficult to pronounce.

[5 : 07] Well, what do we do? We can't deny it's there. In fact, you could say that it sets the scene not only for the Gospel of Matthew, but for the whole of the New Testament.

In fact, it's what connects the Old with the New Testament, isn't it? It's like the hinge between them. I would even say that we don't really understand who Jesus is, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, without it.

So we need to look at it. We need to understand it. We need to remember that God never speaks just for the sake of it. It's there for a reason. I want to suggest that as we take a closer look at it this morning, that far from being irrelevant, this little genealogy will actually provide us with the meaning of life, because it teaches us that God has a plan for human history and individual human lives that he is passionately concerned to bring to fulfilment.

And the key to that history, this plan, in fact, to life, the universe and everything, is his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know if that sounds outrageous to you, but I think that's what the genealogy has to say to us.

Let's have a look at it. It's actually on page 783 of the Bibles in your pews, your black Bibles. First page of the New Testament, so it's pretty easy to find.

[6 : 30] You might want to have that open, have a look at what's going on here. Of course, the great miracle of Christmas, it's always a miracle, but we remember Christmas is the incarnation.

That is, God became man while remaining God and lived among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And I don't know if you've ever found this a hard idea to grapple with.

Many modern theologians have tried to get rid of it, and yet the Bible affirms it again and again. It's a hard thing to understand, for sure, but these verses at least show us that it shouldn't surprise us in some ways.

Have a look at these verses. They're full of people, real people, who lived and died in history, who did good things sometimes, and really stupid things at other times.

Nevertheless, God chooses to use these real people in history to bring about his purpose, his plan. We'll focus in on a few of them in a moment, but my first point is that for God to actually become a man to achieve his purpose isn't that odd when you look at the way that God has worked consistently all along.

[7 : 49] Well, what is God's purpose? What's the story of the Bible? It's basically the story of a rescue plan, isn't it? The world has rejected God or simply ignores God in sin.

It's suffering the consequences. The Bible is the story of the God who speaks and acts to save this world, to bring people back to himself, to make them his children.

And the way this rescue plan starts is with a family, a family of Abraham and David, represented here in the genealogy in Matthew chapter 1.

One family that became a nation for the sake of the nations. We need to have a little bit of a look at the structure of the genealogy to understand it.

First thing to say about it is that it's not exhaustive, it's highly selective, as are the genealogies, I think, in Genesis and other parts of the Old Testament. It has a teaching purpose, a theological purpose.

[8 : 50] This particular genealogy follows the legal line of descent rather than the natural line of descent that we see in Luke. That's why there are slight differences. If you read the one in Luke chapter 3, I think it is.

And the structure actually helps us to know how to understand what at first glance seems like just a complicated list of names.

And the great thing about it is that Matthew gets to the point straight away in verse 1 and then at the end he summarises all the detail in between and makes the point again in verse 17.

They're like the bookends. Let me read them to you again. Verse 1, An account of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And then verse 17, So all the generations from Abraham to David are 14 generations and from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, 14 generations.

[9 : 52] Key turning points there from Abraham to David to the exile or the deportation to the Messiah. We need to keep those turning points in mind.

But before we look at those, the simple thing to say about it at the start is that of course this is all about Jesus. Isn't it? Just as, well, the whole of the Bible is and certainly Matthew's Gospel is, this genealogy is all about Jesus.

And the first thing that we learn about Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is that he didn't arrive in a vacuum like some wandering healer or a magician or false messiah or great teacher.

He didn't sort of just arrive in the middle of nowhere. He's put firmly here in the context of God's saving purpose that's being worked out in history. He is the culmination and the fulfilment of that.

And if Matthew's Gospel was first addressed to primarily Jewish readers, that of course would have been very important to them, perhaps a little bit more important than it is to us at first to put Jesus in the context of being the son of Abraham, the son of David, the inheritor, the fulfiller of these promises.

[11 : 02] But what's so special about these guys? Maybe you haven't heard about Abraham or David before. Maybe you have. Well, Abraham, who was he?

We had a reading. Ian read to us from Genesis 17 before. He was a man who God spoke to. He made promises to. He covenanted with. That means he entered into a special relationship that was secured and shaped by God's choosing of him and by making promises to him.

But these promises weren't just so that his family would be blessed. He was caught up, again, in God's great rescue plan that I was just talking about.

And the promises that God made with these people were so important, so far-reaching, that they're seen as the turning point, again, of this genealogy. Again, verse 17 there, Abraham, David, and then the exile.

The promises of a land, of descendants, of blessing, and that through this family that would be a blessing to the world, a world that had rejected the blessing of God.

[12 : 14] If we open up from Genesis 1 onwards, we see God creates and blesses the world and people who live in it, and yet we choose curse rather than the blessing.

The answer to this problem of people persistently turning away from their God are these promises made to Abraham in chapter 12 and reiterated again to him and to his descendants, to Isaac and Jacob and in turn his sons, who get a mention in our genealogy, verse 2 and following.

It's frustrating, isn't it, when the plans we make for our lives don't seem to work out the way we'd want them to. We pray about it, but God seems to be doing his own thing.

It's a bit like that with Abraham. You see, God promised him a son, but he had to wait years and years before it happened. And when you read through the stories of Abraham in Genesis 12 and following, you see that God did this, not because he was a spoil sport, but because he wanted to teach Abraham and show him and his people that what God has for us is far greater than what we think we want or need.

See, it's far better to have your life caught up in what God is doing in the world than going it alone and trying to be God's ourselves. This is the great thing about God.

[13 : 33] You see, not only does he keep his promises, but he fulfills them beyond our wildest expectations. That's the pattern in Scripture. So if you keep reading the Old Testament, you see it's almost as if God keeps bettering himself, if that were possible.

So the answer to Abraham's prayers and the fulfillment of God's promise is not just Isaac, but eventually the transformation of a semi-nomadic family into a great kingdom of world influence and power.

There's our second turning point again. I'm speaking of David, of course, described there as the son of Abraham, a recipient of the same promises that God made to his father, but promises that were built on.

Let me read to you from 2 Samuel 7, which speaks of this. 2 Samuel 7 and verse 9. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they will live in their own place and be disturbed no more. And evildoers shall afflict them no more as formerly. Here's the

new bit, I guess.

[14:41] Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. An eternal kingdom in the line of David.

Well, let's go back to verse 1 about genealogy. So we see now with that background that calling Jesus the Messiah, the son of David and the son of Abraham is not just a fancy way of beginning your book.

Sounds the son of Abraham as if it was just a sort of a rhetorical flourish. No, to say these things about Jesus is making huge claims about him right from the outset of this gospel.

Blessing to the nations. An eternal kingdom. You see, what this genealogy says is that all these things ultimately are brought about in Jesus Christ, who is the culmination of this line of blessing, if you like.

He's the last name there, isn't he? In verse 17, the Messiah. But this genealogy is not just referring back to high points in Israel's history, if you like.

[15:50] The great promises, the great kingdom of David when it was united, that high point, and then under Solomon. No, it's also drawn, interestingly, to low points.

Let me read to you from Psalm 89, firstly, which talks about this prophecy of David and his descendants. It has some other things to say.

It says, I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him, and my covenant with him will stand firm. I will establish his line forever, and his throne as long as the heavens endure.

However, if his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances, if they violate my statutes, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges.

Yes, God keeps his promise of blessing, but God also keeps his promise of judging. If God's people forsake the Lord, what happens?

[16:57] They're punished, and that's exactly what they did, time and time again. So what happens? What's this deportation to Babylon that we hear about in the genealogy? Well, the land, the kingdom, the blessing are taken.

Everything was taken away from them under the righteous judgment of God through the agency of the Babylonian armies who took them into exile in around 587 BC.

What of the promises? What of the kingdom? What of the family of promise? Is there any hope? Has humanity gone too far? These were the questions being asked during the exile.

Lamentations and Jeremiah, they're asking that question again and again. Well, with the first king back in Jerusalem after exile, there is hope.

Zerubbabel, we learn about him in Haggai chapter 2 where God says, I have chosen you. He gets a mention in our genealogy verses 12 and following. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

[17:59] I have chosen you to be my signet ring, he says, to represent God among the nations in Jerusalem.

Only a stump left after the exile as Isaiah prophesied, but out of that stump the promised king, the king of kings, great David's greatest son, as we sing in the carol, is born.

Again, that's what the genealogy, that's what it's all about. Again, the summary, verse 17. So all the generations from Abraham to David are 14 generations and from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, 14 generations.

God's purpose in history is fulfilled. It is complete. What's all this repetition of these numbers?

It's interesting. You see, if Matthew was selective and if this is highly structured, then perhaps the repetition of these 14s points to something.

[19:04] There are a number of theories. One is that, well, the Hebrew alphabet has, each letter has a numerical value, each consonant, and David's name apparently adds up to 14.

So perhaps here is the one greater than David, yet in his line. Here is Jesus, the Messiah. That's possible. Another theory is that because seven was the number of perfection, you may have read Revelation and seen that as an important number.

Jesus as the seventh seven. There are six sevens in the three 14s. He's the seventh seven. Points to him being the ultimate fulfillment, perhaps, the Messiah. But whatever the case, whatever that pattern means, the point is clear, isn't it?

Jesus is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He is the one who in his person accomplishes God's great rescue plan, which this genealogy, really, the Old Testament, anticipates.

It's great news, isn't it? History does have a point. It's not just a random flowing of events. God has a plan and he is faithful in carrying out, even when his own people are unfaithful to him again and again, as we saw with the exile.

[20 : 21] Another way to see the genealogy is that it tells us about the Old Testament that the Old Testament tells us the story that Jesus completes. But is that it?

How is this relevant to me? I'm not in this list. I'm not on the page. Where do I fit into this story? What about my story? We need to look at the black sheep of the family to answer that question. You see, every family has black sheep in it, don't they? And believe it or not, that includes the Messiah's family. And we know what usually happens to black sheep. They're locked in the family closet where they become skeletons.

It's like when my mum's showing a visitor through one of our family albums and she gets towards my embarrassing hippie phase or something like that and she says, oh, what's that? Oh, don't worry about that.

That's Andy's degenerate period. We'll move on from there. She's embarrassed by it. And we all are, aren't we? When you try to impress people with your family pedigree, you want all the impressive bits, don't you?

[21 : 23] You want great uncle Tom who invented Vegemite or Aunt Jemima who won the gold medal in skydiving in 1928.

You don't want the sordid stuff. And if, like Matthew, you were making selections to get your three sets of 14, surely you'd only have the most respectable family members.

Well, not here. Family has this family, warts and all. The first thing to notice is that the time in which he was writing you'd expect women not to appear.

That might seem strange to you but it was a father to son thing. The father, the son. It went on like that. But here we've got women appearing and Gentile women no less, foreigners outside originally of God's covenant people.

What's going on? Not only Gentiles but shall we say Gentiles of questionable character. But see, there's a twist to these women. In the end they serve to highlight not their own sin but the sin of God's own people.

[22 : 27] Let's look at some examples such as Tamar in verse 3. Well, we'll start with Judah actually to understand who Tamar is.

Judah was the one of whom it was said that kings would descend of him in Genesis 49. He sired Perez and Zerah in verses 2 and 3 of our genealogy via an incestuous union with his Canaanite daughter-in-law Tamar, the first of the women mentioned here in verse 3.

You see, what Judah had done was deny her the right to marry his younger son when the older one died as was the custom and so he left her as a widow without children.

This is a great catastrophe in this culture and out of her desperation to carry on the family name she slept with him but only because he thought that she was a prostitute.

So this makes days of our lives look like boring. You think the Bible's boring or turn off days of our lives and start having a look at some of this stuff. So you see, in a roundabout way, Tamar brought about the fulfilment of God's promise to Judah for descendants which Judah was trying to deny.

[23 : 44] What about Rahab? A prostitute, Gentile. She hid the Israelite spies in Canaan. We read about her in Joshua 2 and Joshua 6. She hid the spies from their enemies which helped to enable the successful taking of the promised land.

Again, furthering the fulfilment of God's promises. What about Ruth mentioned there? A Gentile who became faithful to God and eventually became the great-grandmother of King David himself. But nevertheless, she was a Moabite, a race with its origins and incest who were banned from Israel's assembly. We read about that in Deuteronomy 23, verse 3.

Finally, in this list of interesting women, verse 6, Bathsheba. Her name's not mentioned there but Uriah's wife who David took as a wife.

How did he take her as a wife? He actually had Uriah killed basically so that he could sleep with Bathsheba. And the rest of these kings from her child onwards, Solomon onwards, were a mixed bunch, weren't they?

[24 : 53] Many of them leading Israel into serious sin and as we've already seen eventually into exile. Let me pick up one example from verse 10, Manasseh, who we read about in Two Kings.

You'll read about all these kings in the Book of Kings, surprise, surprise, if you want to go back and have a read about who some of them were. But this is Two Kings 21, Manasseh, who was 12 years old when he began to reign.

He reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hezabar. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Following the abominable practices of the nations, the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

For he rebuilt the high places, pagan altars, that his father Hezekiah had destroyed. He erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole as King Ahab of Israel had done, worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them.

He built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, in Jerusalem I'll put my name. He made his sons pass through fire. He practiced soothsaying and augury.

[25 : 58] He dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. What on earth are these people doing in the family tree of the Messiah?

Well, they're showing, Matthew's readers, they're showing us what kind of Messiah we have, a Messiah who is not ashamed to have Gentile women in his genealogy, all people guilty of real sin, people like you and me.

See, in accordance with the promises made to Abraham, Jesus would bring blessing to all the nations of the earth, even Moabites, even Australians. It's amazing.

Reminded them that they were sinners who needed to be saved. See, Israel should have learned this right from the jump with David and his great sin. He was the best of a bad bunch in many ways. Any hope for the future lay not in human rulers or powers or politicians or intelligent people, but the only hope lay in the mercy and the sovereignty of God who persisted in working through these people he had chosen to bring about his saving plan.

[27 : 16] And I think that's a lesson that we need to learn as in vain we search for human solutions and human heroes. Now, I'm going to have to embarrass him again, but I think that Paul Barker is, you couldn't have a better vicar in many ways.

I'm sure many of you would agree with that. A faithful and good teacher a faithful and godly man who seeks to encourage us to imitate Christ in our lives, who's not ashamed of the gospel.

But, Paul would be the first to say that the future of Holy Trinity Doncaster does not rest on his shoulders, that the future of God's kingdom does not depend upon him or any other vicar this church has had or any archbishop that we might hope might be appointed.

Ultimately, our only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ who works and uses weak clay vessels that we all are. Some of you will know that I'm a closet fan of Queen Elizabeth II, our sovereign lady.

I have a portrait of her in my study. It's true. Unfortunately, a couple of years ago when Prince Edward got married, I had to watch the wedding on TV. Somehow, the invitation got lost in the mail.

[28 : 31] Can't understand it, but I wasn't able to be there in person anyway. It was a tremendous occasion. But even I have to admit that he, nor anyone else in the royal family, they're not the future of this country, are they?

Many of you are nodding their heads. Of course they're not. It's England. It's got nothing to do with us. But neither is a republic. Neither is Liberal, Labor, whatever. Even Winston Churchill, that great defender of democracy, said that democracy is a good compromise.

But the reality is in the end, what we're doing is voting in, well, sinful people, a majority of sinful people, are voting in a sinful person to rule imperfectly.

That's what we're doing. Our hope is not ultimately with human plans or solutions. Our hope lies ultimately with the God who keeps his promises. And that's what the genealogy is about.

It's not the celebration of the great heroes of the faith. It speaks of God's relentless saving plan that finds its fulfillment, the yes to all of God's promises in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the one who is not ashamed to have these unlikely characters, sinners and outsiders, in his family tree.

[29 : 48] Just as he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but took the very nature of a servant becoming like us so that he could die the death we deserve for our sin so that we could become members of God's family.

Members of God's family. our hope lies with one who comes from this family, but there's one other thing we need to see about this one.

He's at the same time from this family, truly the son of David, and yet apart from this family, because he's not even touched by the chief family trait that has nothing to do with the shape of his nose or the colour of his eyes.

The chief family trait is actually sin, but he's not touched by this trait. He alone is perfect. That's hinted at in verse 16, where Matthew's tightly structured genealogy suddenly changes.

In the middle of a father-to-son pattern, we read, Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Messiah. the legal son of Joseph, yes, but not of natural birth through the union of a man and his wife, but as will be made explicit in verse 18, born of Mary through the Holy Spirit, a virgin birth, or should I say the virgin birth.

[31 : 12] Yes, Jesus is an outsider. He is one of us. It's right to call him our brother, as the right to the Hebrews does, but he is also an outsider. He is with us as a man, but also forever apart from us, the man who is God.

And this brings together the great tension of the Old Testament where the prophets look forward to the coming one who will restore God's people and ultimately creation through dealing with sin once and for all, through bringing justice and mercy.

Sometimes it looks like it'll be the descendant of David, ruling on the throne, will do this. Sometimes it's the Lord himself. How can this be? Well, man and God obviously come together in Jesus who is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of David, but is also the Son of God.

So the Old Testament tells the story of God's great rescue plan, one nation for the nations. But it points forward, it's unfinished, isn't it? It points forward as the genealogy shows us to its culmination, its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus who is Christ the Lord, one man for the world.

Matthew's gospel starts with more than a hint that Jesus is this saviour of a people, ultimately of a world gone wrong. Finally now through him God's kingdom and so blessing for the nations, those promises made to Abraham can be realised.

[32 : 44] And at the end of this gospel we see Jesus the King, don't we? And he is victorious, he is a victorious king, he has won salvation through his death and his resurrection and he is commanding his followers to go and make followers, disciples of all the nations.

And here we are 2,000 years later studying what in worldly terms is an obscure little genealogy. That's not all it is, is it? We know that it's more than that.

This is the story of our rescue. This is the story of the rescue of anyone who would listen and see who Jesus is this Christmas to see the God who has kept his promises.

And I say to you today that the temptation at Christmas time is to do what happens with the mire windows. I mentioned them before, I recommend going and seeing them, they're great this year, Wind in the Willows, good stuff.

And of course at the end the most boring window, the static window, the obligatory Christian window is there. A little bit more jazzy this year than in past years but still the quiet static window.

[33 : 52] And in that window this year is a baby in a manger just lying there behind glass. And I heard people walk past saying, isn't that nice? Isn't that a lovely baby? Look at the lovely baby, boys, you know, girls, whatever it was.

And then they walked off. But that's often how we treat Jesus, isn't it? It's safe behind glass, he can't touch me, I don't have to get too near to him. Like some great work of art, you know, those exhibitions, they roll them out once every 20 years, people walk past and who and are, they roll back again and gather dust.

That's not why Jesus came to dwell amongst us. Remember the genealogy is a story of God involved in real lives, catching them up into his plan.

Abraham and Sarah's real problem of needing a child, that desire somehow caught up into God's great saving plan. The challenge of Christmas is to see that our lives are caught up into God's plan, that our story can be caught up into God's story of blessing, one who actually does keep his promises, one who actually does ensure a future when so often the future looks so bleak.

It's what this genealogy is about, it's what Christmas is about. It's not just about remembering a baby, but remembering the one who came to die for us, who was raised to reign and who will return as the king.

[35 : 15] And that's who's coming, we're preparing for. And as Christians, we do that through sharing the gospel, don't we? Through inviting people, in other words, to get caught up in what God is doing in the world and what he could do in their lives, to experience the real joy of knowing the God who in Christ has kept his promises of forgiveness and of life beyond our wildest expectations.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you are not like us.

You are perfect and loving and you keep your promises and yet you became like one of us to save us. Lord, we marvel at this miraculous act of your great mercy and love that in the person of your Son you should deny everything that is yours by rights so that you could raise us up from our hells to your heaven.

Father, we thank you that you are merciful and faithful and powerful to save and we thank you that we're reminded of that at Christmas time when we hear the stories about Jesus yet again.

Lord, please help us not to keep you at a distance. Please help us to take you seriously to persevere in trusting in you and to encourage others to do the same that we might bring glory to your name and know the great joy of being forgiven and included in your family and we pray this for Jesus' sake.

[36 : 49] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.