

The Living Hope of God's People

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the first letter of Peter. And tonight we're looking at verse 3.

1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable and defiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And especially the words of verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

As we saw in the last couple of studies, Peter begins the letter with what is really a key to the whole of the epistle, or the letter, in the first couple of verses. Where he began having introduced himself as the apostle Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ, he then defines them as to who they are in their spiritual state and in their present circumstances.

They are the chosen people of God, but they're scattered throughout all of these regions, yet they are indeed one people in God and Christ. And their circumstances then are so important to him as he writes this letter, because it's a letter addressed really to them in these difficult circumstances, and giving them guidance and encouragement and direction.

[1 : 51] And that's why he emphasizes at the beginning, as we saw, who exactly they are. And they must never lose sight of that. Whatever things happen, however things change in their circumstances, whatever difficulties further they may have, in addition to the ones they presently have, they must never take their eye off the fact that they are God's chosen people.

And that because they are God's chosen people, everything that God has said concerning his people is their property. It belongs to them, and that's not going to change.

And then he begins to unpack what he has there in the first couple of verses, and that really takes the rest of the letter to do that. But he begins by taking out of the package, if you like, this wonderful topic of hope.

That's the first great truth that he has to say to them. Blessed be this God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has caused us to be born, or begotten us again, to a living hope.

And that, of course, is so important in the circumstances they are in. What is more meaningful? What is more precious to them? What is more necessary for them to know than as the chosen people of God, they have been born to a living hope, a hope that takes them way beyond anything they have in their present circumstances.

[3 : 16] And, in fact, it's difficult, really, to just choose one topic out of this series of things Peter is now saying in these verses, from verse 3 really down as far as verse 12, because in the Greek original text of the New Testament, that's actually one sentence.

It's divided up by the translators, understandably, just so that we can pause at places, but it's really just one great long dynamic sentence, and that really tells you, for one thing, that Peter was really animated when he was writing this to these chosen people of God, exiles, strangers, sojourners in this world.

He was moved, he was really fired up, if you like, by the need to write them this letter, and by the desire to bring to them the things that he wanted to emphasize for them in their situation and for their help.

He's really caught up in the truths that he's going to set out, but the fact that this one long sentence shows not just that Peter is animated about all this, but that he packs so many things, so many precious things together.

It's just packed with truths all the way through there to verse 12 in this introduction, really, to the letter. And that combination is really pretty stunning in itself.

[4 : 40] I saw just recently, last week, I think it was, a program about the Ganges, the River Ganges in India, and among many things that were distasteful and not very easy to look at, there was this man who was on a very basic loom in a backwards kind of room near his house, in his house, and he was busy weaving on this loom, very slowly, but meticulously and carefully, a wonderful fabric made out of silk.

And as some of the finished articles were then held up, they were just absolutely magnificent to look at the patterns, the brightness, the colors, the closeness of the weaving, everything.

Now, as you looked at that man working his loom, and because it's so intricate and the thread is so fine, it takes a long time to really get through any particular length of cloth.

I don't know, I can't remember just how much he does in a day, but it doesn't amount to very much. But as you look at all the threads around him and all the wonderful colors on these threads around him as they're on the reels, you see, well, these are beautiful threads, they're such wonderful colors, but then when you find them all brought together in the final tapestry or cloth and the pattern and the stunning finished product, you see, that is absolutely beautiful, far more than just seeing the individual threads themselves.

Well, that's how it is with this passage of Peter. Indeed, throughout the epistle, this is one thing that strikes you. He had all these wonderful threads of truth, beautiful in themselves, but brought together in this magnificent long sentence and packed together with all of these truths, you really have to say after it, what a thing of beauty God's salvation is.

[6 : 40] It just is magnificent, stunning, indescribably beautiful. And he begins with the beauty of hope.

Praise to God the Father. That's the first point. And then praise to God the Father for what he has done. He has begotten us to a living hope.

Well, you see, first of all, praise or blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this is really an Old Testament form in a sense. Blessed be God.

It's there frequently in the Old Testament. You find it in the Psalms. We sing it when we sing the Psalms. Psalm 72, for example, near the end of Psalm 72, verses 17 to 19. Now, blessed be his holy name.

Blessed be the God of Israel. And really, it's picking up that form of attributing praise to God. And Peter is using that here in this New Testament context.

[7 : 43] And this word, as he uses it, this form of it, is only used in respect of God. Blessed be God. And it really means, essentially, let God be praised.

Let God be so well spoken of. Let God be honored because of this. There is praise, but it's praise in which honor is given to God, is ascribed to God.

And that reminds us that praise is not an introduction to our Christian life, and praise is not an introduction really to Peter's emphasis here on hope, either.

Praise is what the Christian life is all about. It's not an adjunct. It's not something tacked on. It's not something you do now and again when you come to church.

It's not even just something you do at home when you praise God yourself by yourselves, or in your family worship, or whatever it is, in that sort of way. Praise is an essential ingredient of a Christian life as it's lived out.

[8 : 53] Indeed, that's what he goes on to speak about in chapter 2, where he comes there in verse 9, you are a chosen race, a holy nation, a people, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you.

That you may really literally speak out or show forth the praises, the attributes of God that give him praise. And that's tonight so important for us.

Whatever people say of our lives as Christians, if we're God's people tonight, they ought to be able to say our life is a life of praising God. A life that honors God, that seeks to set forth God as one to be praised and to be well spoken of.

And that, of course, makes us all reflect on where we are with that in our lives from day to day and in the secrecy of our hearts too. That we be sincere there, as we mentioned in prayer, that we have the sincerity of heart that God requires as we come to think of what we must be in this world for him.

Well, he begins there, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's interesting, we haven't really got time to go into the theology of that itself, otherwise we'd take a long, long time going through the epistle.

[10 : 13] But blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that, it brings actually before us the uniqueness of Jesus for one thing. The fact that there is no other person anywhere else in all existence like this Jesus.

Because when he says he is blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it really means what it says he is the God of Jesus Christ and he's the Father of Jesus Christ.

Now that means the God of Jesus Christ in terms of Christ in his human nature, Christ as shown in this world as the servant of the Father, well, he praised the Father, he worshipped the Father in terms of his incarnate experiences and his position.

He ascribed praise to God the Father and that itself is a remarkable thing. The Son of God in our nature, in human nature, is one who praised the God the Father who sent him into the world.

and when he's the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, well, Jesus himself made it very clear that that meant he was equal to him. They share together the glory of the God that each of them have, the glory that belongs to God.

[11 : 30] You remember John 17, for example, where Jesus prayed there shortly before he went out to suffer and before he was crucified and first of all tried, well, he says, Father, now glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the world was.

Now that shows you this is no mere human being, though it is indeed a human being, but he's more than that. He is God himself in the nature of human beings in this world, having taken our nature to himself.

Well, he's the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so that's where Peter begins thinking of this living hope that these people have.

Where's it come from? What's happened to bring this about? He says, it's all due to God the Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has caused us to be born again. So he's now praising God the Father for what he has done. I think perhaps that the older translation is somewhat better in this instance which, as you remember, has blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who begot us or begat us or has begotten us.

[12 : 49] It really has the idea of fathering rather than simply giving birth to something. And what he's saying is that God has fathered, the Father, God the Father has fathered the hope of God's people.

He's responsible for bringing about, he's created it, he's brought it into being, he's situated in our hearts, this hope that Peter goes on to speak about.

But you see, it's according to his great mercy, he's building up his argument towards speaking about this living hope, and that's the main thing that he really wants to get to and to describe, but he's careful to attribute the cause of that hope to God in such a careful and detailed way.

Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who's done this. And it's according to his great mercy that he has done this. You remember back in Exodus chapter 34 where God passed by in the presence of Moses.

Moses said, Lord, I beseech you, show me your glory. And the Lord said, I will make my goodness pass before you. And God was true to his word.

[14 : 12] And when God came and passed before Moses, God actually spoke out to Moses, the Lord, the Lord God, gracious, merciful, keeping covenant.

And for Peter, that would have been hugely important to describe him as the God who is according to his great mercy.

Because our hope has come from our covenant God, our promise keeping God, the God that Moses knew, the God Abraham knew, the God David knew, the God here that Peter knew, the same God that you and I know, the dependable God, the God of mercy.

And it's great mercy. It reminds us tonight that not a single person who was ever saved has the right to that salvation. Not a single person who was ever saved can say, well, God was obliged to save me.

He had no option but to save me. Yes, he did. Because it's in mercy that we are saved. And mercy is not obligatory to God. It's an act of his will.

[15 : 29] He chooses to be merciful. He exercises mercy despite what we are and towards us in our sinfulness in order that we be saved.

It's according to his great mercy that he has caused us to be born again. Our new birth, our life, our hope has come from mercy, from the mercy of God.

And tonight we wouldn't have hope if God was not merciful, if God had not chosen to be gracious and merciful toward us. We would have been no point in being here tonight because there would be no salvation, there would be no forgiveness of sin, there would be no hope.

And that's why you plead when you come before God in prayer, that's why you plead and are able to plead and have a delight in pleading the mercy of God as you come to ask him to forgive your sins.

as David in Psalm 51, one of the best known examples of that prayer of repentance that seeks forgiveness and cleansing, where does he begin it?

[16 : 38] Be merciful to me, O God, according to your loving kindness. Be merciful. You've used that in prayer, haven't you?

the catechism reminds us that in repentance there is a recognition on the part of the penitent, the person coming repentantly to confess their sin.

There is what the catechism calls an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. What a wonderful phrase. An apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.

God is a sinner. How does that make your soul thrill and jump up in excitement when you think of what you are as a sinner, of God's condemnation justly toward us, yet through the gospel and through the work of God's spirit in your heart, you have an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.

When you're saying to God in sincerity, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, that's what you're really apprehending, that's what you really have a knowledge of and an awareness of, that God is merciful.

[17 : 54] How thankful you and I are tonight that we don't come to God without really knowing whether or not He's merciful. That you come with your burden, the burden of your sin, to meet with mercy.

This mercy, the mercy of this God, this covenant God, according to His great mercy, then He comes to say He has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

In other words, God has fathered us. The father, you know how that fits with fathering hope? It's God the Father who has come to cause us to be born again.

It doesn't just say He begat or He brought about hope in our hearts. He changed ourselves. He caused us to be born again. He begat us.

He brought us through to a spiritual change. In new birth, He brought us alive. You see, hope is not something that is the product of human psychology.

[19 : 00] Some people will present that to you as an alternative to the Christian message and to the gospel message. That is something that you can actually produce and it's something, if you like, of positive thinking on the part of human beings that you come ultimately to have hope or maybe it's from the help that other people are able to give you in difficult circumstances that you end up having a hope.

That's not what Peter is saying at all, however beneficial it might be as we trust we will have support and give support to people in their need. No, he says this hope is something that God brought about creatively through a new birth, through a rebirth, through causing us to be born again.

It's the product of new birth. You see, that's why Ephesians 2 reminded to the Ephesians that when they were without Christ, before they had come to know of this hope, they were as a people dead in trespasses and sins, and he went on to say in the chapter without hope, without God and having no hope in the world.

And you can see from this how different this hope, this Christian hope, this living hope is from anything else that goes by the name of hope that's short of the product of a new birth that comes about by the power of God.

What is your hope tonight based on? What is your hope towards eternity based on? have you asked yourself seriously what kind of hope you have?

[20 : 44] Is it just hoping for the best, that somehow things will work out someday? Is it just hoping that sometime God will see fit to remember you and be merciful to you?

Is it just hoping that God will take you to heaven and will not leave you with those who will be lost? well that's not a living hope.

That's just like a worldly hope. It's not based on anything solid except your own desire that that should be how it would work out. What Peter is saying is we have a living hope.

It's part of the life that God has created in our new birth through being born again. As the Lord reminded Nicodemus, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, cannot see the kingdom of God.

Don't base your hopes on anything less than God's work in your heart, God's work in your life. Appeal to God. Go to the mercy of God if you haven't already done so and done so sincerely and earnestly.

[21 : 55] Appeal to the mercy of God to be merciful to you, to create in you this hope that belongs to God's people. Because it's a hope that will never be put to shame.

It is anchored, as we'll see, in the resurrection of Christ. Nothing less than that. He says here a living hope. Now, just in passing, I want to mention verse 23, because he mentions something else that's very important there, where he comes to think about this hope as well, where, in terms of that hope, they were born again, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through or by the living and abiding word of God.

So, in other words, he's saying that this hope has come about by God's work in our hearts through us being, he's caused us to be born again to have this living hope, but it's also involved his word.

It's so important that you and I are here tonight, and that we are in a position where the word of God is actually not only available to us, but proclaimed and hopefully explained and pronounced and expounded and preached in your midst.

That's really what we're about, because we're absolutely convinced that it is through this word that God brings about rebirth. When he blesses this word, when he blesses his word to you, when he blesses his word to people who need to be born again, what happens?

[23 : 34] He brings them to new birth. He actually works by his spirit in blessing his word to them. Now, there's a mystery about that. It's not something that we, any of us, can pick and choose as to who next will be converted, who next will be born again.

That's entirely God's work, God's prerogative. But we are convinced of the importance of the word towards that. Why do you think so much effort is expended by the powers of unbelief, by Satan himself, and by all who seek to oppose the gospel under his leadership?

worship? Why do you suppose that the word of God is so prominent in what they're seeking to do? Why is the word of God they're seeking to displace from human life?

Because of its importance as a word that God blesses to bring us to life, to bring us to be born again.

Never neglect your Bible. Be at your Bible as often as you can be. Never neglect coming to church to hear the gospel pronounced.

[24 : 56] Because it is through that, Peter says, through the living and abiding word of God, you have come to be born again, without which we cannot enter, the kingdom of God without which we will not have.

This living hope. Well, he describes it as a living hope. Let's just move on quickly. It's a living. Peter loves this word living. You find it used a number of times. And he also has a significant place for hope in his epistle.

In verse 13, you find him using the word there to, therefore, prepare your minds, set your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you. And in verse 21, it's mentioned there as well, you are believers in God through him, through Jesus, through, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that your faith and hope are or might be in God.

And then on to chapter 3, and you find verse 5, this is how holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, and verse 15 of that same chapter 3 as well, another instance of it there, but this is important because it's to do with our witness to Jesus, in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

He's almost describing the whole tenor of the Christian life there to be described by hope. And you are given an account of, or an explanation, as far as you're able, of the hope that is in you.

[26 : 34] Well, this hope is important to Peter, and it's integral also to the Christian life. And it relates to them in their circumstances just now so importantly and so significantly.

What better emphasis to bring to them than that they have been caused, that he has caused them again to be born to a living hope. A living hope, a hope that has life in it, that looks forward to life eternal, that enjoys life in Christ now, that lives upon the promises of God, that feed our hope from day to day.

This is not an invention that people make up just to make people feel better. This is a living hope, something that cannot be brought about but by God's creative power.

But having brought it about, what a precious, precious thing it is. And you know, it's precious especially when your circumstances are circumstances of sorrow or stress or trial.

Tonight, maybe that's how you are as well, feeling somewhat like these Christians, beleaguered, facing all kinds of opposition, slandered, bad-mouthed, misrepresented.

[27 : 54] But then your hope is hope founded in the resurrection of Christ. Hope that brings you above, to look above, to hope above, to live above, if you like, the outward circumstances of life.

I quoted from a Christian songwriter last week, Ellie Holcomb. I'm going to quote again from her twice, in fact, this evening. And I'm not on commission, nothing like that. It's just that her songs are really full of this kind of thing that hope is.

And one of the songs is called We've Got Hope. And this is how it goes. We've got this hope. We've got a future. We've got the power of the resurrection living within.

We've got this hope. We've got a promise that we are held up and protected in the palm of his hand. And even when our hearts are breaking, even when our souls are shaken, we've got this hope.

Even when the tears are falling, even when the night is calling, we've got this hope. He has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

[29 : 07] But how? What else is there in the passage that's connected to this hope and its production and where it's actually anchored? Well, he says, by the resurrection or through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Now think about Peter. Think about this man after Christ had been tried and then crucified and buried. He's disconsolate.

We don't find much described about him since he went out and wept bitterly after denying the Lord three times. But we know how the disciples felt, these two disciples on the way to Emmaus, that unknown to them, had come into the company of Jesus, they didn't recognize him.

And you can feel their sense of disconsolation and almost despair when they say, about this Jesus and about all that happened in Jerusalem, we thought that this was he who should have redeemed Israel.

You see, without the knowledge that Christ has risen from the dead, not just the knowledge, without the fact that Christ has risen from the dead, you can't have hope. Hope does not have an anchor point other than in the resurrection of Christ.

[30 : 24] It's begotten by God. It's fathered by God. He produces it in the new birth and gives us that living hope. But it's a hope that then goes right back to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and that's really its foundation.

Because without that resurrection, we can't actually have hope. And you see, once Mary Magdalene, and she ran to Peter and told her that what she had seen when she went to the tomb, and then you find in John 20, all is described, there's a wonderful sense of excitement in that passage.

Then you find Peter and John running towards the sepulchre. And John was a bit faster. He reached there first, but didn't go in. Peter was slower, but he was bolder.

In he went. He saw the grave clothes lying as they had been on the body of Christ, and as they had just dropped, as he rose out of them, and they believed.

It's a staggering revelation. The Lord was alive. Jesus was not dead. He had risen from the dead.

[31 : 36] Nothing else could explain what they saw short of that. And you see, he's a new man, he's a different man, he has a living hope. Because the resurrection of Christ is now something that his life has come to be anchored in.

And that's why when you find him preaching on the day of Pentecost, as we read in Acts chapter 2, and all through these early chapters of the book of Acts, what do you find Peter and the other apostles preaching, especially Peter when these great passages are brought before us?

He preached Jesus and the resurrection. He preached the resurrection because that's the basis of our hope. Where would you be tonight? Where would you be and what would you think and how would you feel if Jesus was not risen from the dead?

How much would it matter to you? How much does it matter to you now that he is risen from the dead? Well, it matters hugely because if he isn't risen from the dead, there's no such thing as this living hope.

There can't be. It's based as a living hope on a living Christ, on a Jesus that rose from the dead. You remember that great passage in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul is dealing with the subject of the resurrection of the dead and where he sets out step by step towards the implications of there being no resurrection and then if there be no resurrection then Christ can't have been raised from the dead and Christ is not risen and if Christ is not risen then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

[33 : 27] There's no hope. You're doomed. You're sealed forever in condemnation. There's nothing positive about life without the resurrection of Christ.

The world is plunged into gloom and there's no rescue from it if Jesus is still dead. But then of course as Paul goes on to say there and as Peter here shows Christ is not dead and has risen from the dead your hope is anchored there.

Your hope is nothing less than a living hope upon a living Savior grounded in him receiving all of its positive life from him.

That's the foundation of your Christian hope. Anchored in Christ's resurrection but it isn't just looking back to say well that's where my hope is founded, that's where it's grounded, that's where it's anchored.

You look at hope as it is presently as you exercise that hope. What is that hope founded upon presently as you exercise it? It's on the living Jesus. The Jesus who rose and is now at the right hand of God, that's where your hope is now located as it were in connection with him.

[34 : 50] It isn't just that he rose from the dead, it's that he goes on living as the living Savior and your hope is anchored there.

And not only that but your hope looks forward as it looks back and as it is exercised in the presence. It also looks forward, looks forward to what you find there in verse 5.

You're being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Of course Peter means by that as he shows elsewhere in the letter the return of Christ.

what is it you're most hoping for? What is it you're most hoping for tonight?

What is it that your hope more than anything else yearns for and yearns towards? Well you might say, well it's heaven of course for myself that I will be saved.

[35 : 51] My hope is based upon the resurrection of Christ and therefore as a positive living hope it looks forward and anticipation to my being saved to being with him. Yes of course.

But even above that your hope yearns forward expectantly to his own return, to his coming again, to that revelation of this salvation in its final form and in its entirety in the last time at the return of Jesus.

As you look at your hope tonight, is that the main feature of what you hope for? The return of Christ? Or are you afraid of that?

Rather than look forward to it. if your hope tonight is anchored in Christ, then your hope looks forward to its fulfillment in his return, to its completion at his coming again.

And for beleaguered Christians, what a great prospect that was for them. They might spend the whole of their life in this world beleaguered and embattled and facing the difficulties and the trials of their circumstances in this world.

[37 : 21] They may continue to be scattered abroad and facing all of the things that they're facing and maybe even worse. But Peter is saying, praise to God the Father, who has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

Hope that's not anchored in this world. Hope that goes beyond the things of this present life. Hope that looks forward to the return of Christ. Hope that's so, so relevant in all our temptations and trials and testings and turnings of events.

As Ellie Holcomb once again, in a song that is entitled, Everything's Changed, Changed, where she sings of the resurrection of Jesus and the difference that that makes.

When you rolled away the stone, when you walked out of the grave, you were standing in the light of day, everything changed. You said, do not be afraid, you were scarred to heal the pain, you defeated death and shame, and everything's changed, changed, everything's changed, and when I mess it up, you say your love's enough, you say you'll never leave or forsake me, and when I come undone, you are the only one to say, you will hold me now and forever.

Can you say tonight, everything's changed, because of him. Let's pray. Almighty God, we do give you thanks and praise your name for the way in which you bring about that living hope in the heart of your people to be exercised by them as they travel through this wilderness journey.

[39 : 29] We thank you, Lord, that through all the difficulties and the trials that do come our way, that you maintain that hope within your people. You promise that you will never leave them or forsake them, and that hope lives upon that promise and every other promise you have given them.

We pray that these may be ours too, that we may claim them by faith, that we may live upon them by hope, and that we may love you for all that you have provided for us in that wonderful salvation.

So receive our thanks again, we pray, and give honour and glory to your name, and enable us to live constantly for you to that end. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Now we're singing a conclusion this evening, conclusion, Psalm 16, Psalm number 16, it's from St. Psalms on page 17, a psalm that we saw quoted by Peter when he spoke there in Acts chapter 2, and tonight we're singing verses 5 to 9, O Lord, you are to me my cup and portion sure, the share that is assigned to me you guard and keep secure, the land allotted me is in a pleasant place, a sight, and surely my inheritance to me is a delight.

To verse 9, therefore my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering. Verses 5 to 9 to God's praise.

[41 : 10] O Lord, you are to me my cup and portion sure, the share that is assigned to me, you guard, I keep secure.

The land our Lord did me, is in a pleasant sight, and surely my inheritance to me is a delight.

I'll praise the Lord my God, whose counsel guides my choice, and even in the night my heart, bring all instructions voice.

Before me constantly, I set the Lord, I will be Lord alone, because He is at my right hand, I'll not be overthrown.

Therefore my heart is glad, my tongue with joy will sing, my body too will rest secure, in hope on with the ring.

[43 : 34] I'll go to the main door this evening after the benediction. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.