HONORING GOD ABOVE THE CROWD



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Well, good morning. Welcome to June. Amazing we got here already and we are launching a brand new sermon series today called Honor Code. Excited to dig into you for a full month of what it looks like to live with honor in a culture sometimes it says sit down, be quiet or shout really loud to cancel somebody. How do we live honorable lives?

So let me ask you a few questions. Maybe a little bit uncomfortable kind of fun at the same time of how you would respond. If anything, they'll get us thinking first up. There is the money test. Let's say you're walking behind somebody and they drop what appears to be money and sure enough you come up on it and it's a hundred dollar bill. The person that dropped it by the way is filthy rich. They're on their way of walking to their yacht. What do you do? What's honestly your second thought though? Come on. Would they even notice? Because honor does the right thing even when your pocket says do something else.

How about this? Let's call this the AI shortcut test. You are running late on a project or an assignment and the rules are that you cannot use artificial intelligence to help you with it even though it would really shorten this thing up. And the one who is looking at that assignment or project doesn't even know what artificial intelligence is yet. So like you're going to get away with it. What do you do? Because honor does the right thing. Not just in the big heroic moments where things are seen, but in the quiet unseen moments.

Or how about let's call it the Netflix test of you've been borrowing your, why are you laughing? This is all stuff we would never do. You've been borrowing your son's or your sister's account for quite some time and the password changed. They didn't even honestly know that you were sharing their account. You just put it on their TV a year ago when you happened to show up and you needed it at that point. So what do you do? Do you call them and arrange and tell them what happened? Do you go have these on it or do you actually do the right thing and either pay for your own account or not steal? You're like, Zach, that's not stealing is it? I think it is actually because honor doesn't just show up and is tested in courtrooms. It's tested in living rooms with your favorite television show queued up.

One last test. We're going to dive into a little bit more detailed today. Let's call it the peer pressure test. If everyone around you is saying something that you know is wrong, can you stand up and say what you know is right? Because honor doesn't just follow the crowd. It follows our, your convictions.

The point is that living with honor is not always easy, but it is right. Living in a world that oftentimes says, do what's easy, do what's best for you. Hang out with people like yourself and if someone differs from you, just move on from them. Honor pulls us in the direction to do what's right, to do what's right when no one is watching, to do what's right when everyone is watching, to do what's right when it's

really easy and to do what's right even when it's the most challenging thing in the world to do and to not just do what's right for yourself, but to do right amongst and in the world as well.

So again, welcome to honor code. If you were to look up honor as a definition, you'll see it used as a noun and as a verb, but two words pop up commonly. Reputation. Everybody say reputation and respect. Come on. All campuses say respect, reputation and respect in a world that is quick to silence or to cancel. We're going to learn how to live with honor.

The working definition we'll have this month is pursuing a good reputation and showing proper respect for others. A good reputation and showing proper respect to others. It means living with a right reputation for the audience of one and showing proper respect to anyone else, even if they're younger, even if they're older, even if they're different, especially if they're different than you.

I think honor is a lost art in our nation today, but when you live with honor, you have a good reputation and I don't know that we care as much about our reputation today as we used to. I think today we're kind of taught to get ahead, to build our own influence and platform and do it no matter the cost. And rather than showing respect for one another, it seems like more of our time is spent tearing one another down.

Maybe it's our dog eat dog, American bravado, our focus on individualism and rights and the freedoms that we have, the importance of looking good. Or maybe it's just knowing that honestly, if I want to gain a platform or an audience, it actually works really well to go at others and at the expense of others, whatever the reason God calls us, you, me to live with honor.

And so this series will explore that greater. Today, I'll focus primarily on the reputation piece and primarily to about the reputation that matters most, your reputation with the audience of one God himself. And then in future weeks, we'll look at what then does it mean you who are living with a right reputation to now show respect to others.

Next week, we're going to look at how to honor authority. That's going to be a fun one. The week after that is father's day. How do we have honor in our homes? And then finally, really the Genesis of where this series started to come from is it doesn't feel like generations know how to honor one another well, but rather we know how to tear one another down.

Well, so we're going to look at how do we honor other generations, maybe the people that are different than us. But today, what does it look like to live with honor and especially to seek a right reputation with God himself? And we're going to look at one of, I think the most underrated characters in all of the Bible. His story is found in first Kings chapter 22. If you know your old Testament, we're timestamping him right around the time when Elijah and Elisha were prophets in Israel, but his name is Micaiah. Everybody say Micaiah.

I think Micaiah is a great name. I think it's a name that some of you, if you're naming babies, will choose after you hear this story. Micaiah, stand out. And I think it's a beautiful name and I'll tell you more about him today.

At this time, to give you the proper context, Israel was divided into two parts. There was the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, the King of Israel was known as Ahab and

Ahab was evil. The Southern King, King Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, was a good King. So Ahab, Israel, evil. Jehoshaphat, Judah, good.

And these two actually worked together, even though one was evil, one was good. And for three years, there'd actually been peace and no war. And that's the context of when first Kings 22 verse three starts.

Let's see verse three. The King of Israel, his name is what? Wow. I said it literally three times. I think the other campuses got that a lot better. So let me, let me ask it again. The King of Israel, his name is what? Ahab, said to his officials, don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we're doing nothing to retake it from the King of Aram. So he asked Jehoshaphat, also a pretty good baby name if you're in the, in the, uh, will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?

So again, fighting, there hadn't been fighting for three years, but Ahab, the evil one starting to get greedy. And he's saying, Hey, remember we used to own that. Why don't we go take back what once was ours? Jehoshaphat verse four replied to the King of Israel, whose name is what? Not with great confidence guys. Honestly, you have better be listening better than that. But anyway, he replied to Ahab, I am as you are my people as your people, my horses as your horses.

But Jehoshaphat also said to the King of Israel, first seek the counsel of the Lord. By the way, a really wise thing to do. If you're wondering, do I do this or not do this? If you've got an important question or decision to make, you can heed the advice of Jehoshaphat, which is to heed the advice of the Lord. And that's what they do.

So the King of Israel, Ahab, I'd set it for you there just to not put you on the spot again, brought together the prophets, about 400 men and asked them, shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain? Go, they answered for the Lord will give it into the King's hand. So Ahab brings these 400 men forward and what are they doing? They are kissing the robe. They are brown nosing and being the yes men that Ahab paid them and wanted them to be. Yes, King, go for it. You're the man.

It's similar to imagine asking a group of five year olds, should we do ice cream for dinner tonight? 100% approval. But is it wise? Maybe every now and then, it's not a terrible idea. I don't know. But what you don't know about this story yet is it's incredibly unwise. You'll see why in a moment.

Now up to this point, it shouldn't be hard to imagine for you a powerful person surrounding himself with hundreds of yes men on his payroll and their job is to puff him up, to tell him what he wants to hear. And so Ahab pretends to seek the counsel of the Lord and it's probably in his nonverbal communication. He's being very manipulative. He's telling them what they need to tell him back. And all 400 of them say, go to war. But that doesn't fool Jehoshaphat. Something fishy is going on here, Ahab.

So Jehoshaphat asks, is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of? And Ahab responds, and he says, yes. And I love his response in verse eight. The King of Israel answered Jehoshaphat. There's still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah, son of Imla.

And so fine, Jehoshaphat, if you need one more Micaiah, let me tell you, this guy is a drag and a killjoy. It's awful. So boring to be around. In other words, he's not a yes man. And he speaks truth. And sometimes truth is really, really hard to hear when you're living out your own personal agenda.

So in the middle of going to get Micaiah, the 400 prophets are just puffing Ahab up even more. Skip a verse for me. One of these prophets is named Zedekiah. And Zedekiah declares, this is what the Lord says. With these, the swords, you will gore the Arameans until they're destroyed.

So they're just doubling down on this. The next verse says, all the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. Attack Ramoth-Gilead and be victorious for the Lord will give it into the King's hand. They're coming up in unison, doubling down, brown nose, and even more telling him exactly what he wants to hear.

And at the same time, one of these prophets, the messenger of these prophets actually goes and summons Micaiah and actually tells Micaiah what Micaiah needs to say to Ahab. Here's what it says. Verse 13, the messenger who'd gone to summon Micaiah said to him, look, Micaiah, you've got a reputation about you. The other prophets without exception are predicting success for the King. Let your word agree with theirs and speak favorably.

Talk about loading the peer pressure on. All 400 of us are in unison. So don't be this weird 401st guy that comes in here and breaks up what we got because we're looking good in front of the King. Don't be the dude that's always negative that you're usually are.

But Micaiah is a person of honor and he knows that to be a person of honor first and foremost means that you will stand on the truth of God even when no one else does. So Micaiah boldly says, as surely as the Lord lives, I can tell Ahab only what the Lord tells me.

It's cool that you 400 are going that way, but I won't be bullied, pressured or manipulated. I will speak God's truth. And so when he arrived, the King asked him, Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead or not?

All the setup has happened. Micaiah, he said something big. He's going to be truthful. The question comes, but it's kind of a surprising response because Micaiah says, attack and be victorious for the Lord will give it into the King's hand.

What in the world is going on here? One of three things. Number one, maybe the prophets were right. Were they yes men? Yes. But maybe in this case, yes, was the right answer. And so Micaiah is like, yeah, okay, I'll go along with it.

The second thing that may have happened in this particular case is maybe Micaiah buckled under the pressure. I mean, you've said something bold, like you've said that, that when the time comes that you'll say the right thing and you'll do the right thing. But when the time came to do the right thing and say the right thing, you buckled under pressure.

Maybe Micaiah said a really cool thing, but buckled under the pressure. But number three, and this is my hunch knowing where the story goes, is maybe Micaiah said the right words, but all his non-verbals were screaming, don't go to war.

Because you know, the non-verbal communication is a big deal, right? Because the next verse, Ahab, the King said to him, how many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord? He saw right through what Micaiah said.

Now, depending, and this will help some of you in your relationships. If you've never heard this, I'm sure you've heard some version of this. Depending on what study you look at, they say that non-verbal communication is somewhere between 70 to 90% of communication. Wild.

University of Texas just last year came out with a, what they call 73855 rule. That in communication, 7% of the word of communication is the words that you actually speak. 38% is the tone that you use. And 55% is the body language, which you're like, what is this body language? I'm like, I don't know. Just showing you that body language matters. I don't know.

So here's how I picture Ahab asking Micaiah and he asked Micaiah, shall I go to war or not? And, and what Micaiah says is yes, King, you should absolutely go to war. Right? We've done this in our lives, right?

I remember probably in the younger years when I would say parenting was more like minute by minute, hour by hour than it is maybe for teenage years. It's just different types of parenting now, but in the younger years, I remember that after working a hard week, I would go and there was a time or two where I might've like asked Alison who'd been watching the kids primarily during the weeks.

And I'd say something like, Hey, Mark, Ryan and Jacob asked if I could play golf on Saturday morning. Is that cool? And out of the kindness and love of her heart, many times she'd be like, yeah, that's okay. But I'd always have to like press and rephrase.

And so I'd rephrase. And so hang on. I think you just said yes, but let me just clarify what I'm asking. I'm asking if I can go play a game on Saturday, a game, a game that takes me about a half hour to drive there. I want to practice this game for about an hour. Probably it's going to take about four and a half hours for this game, a game called golf, which Jerry Seinfeld says stands for get out, leave family.

And then after I play this game, I'm going to want some food and drink, and then I'm going to need to drive home a half hour. So maybe seven or eight hours later, I'll come rolling in, but I will be sun whipped and exhausted that I will probably need a shower and a nap. And that'll maybe just go right into bedtime.

So again, I ask, can I golf? And then it may be like, well, I'm actually not going to tell you. So if you think it's wise to play golf, then you should play golf. And I never was really good at kind of reading that body language and tone, but you get what I'm saying.

Shall I go to war? Yes. King Ahab, go to war. And so Ahab calls his bluff. And now we get the real answer. Then Micaiah answered. I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, these people have no master. Let each one go home in peace. You do this, Ahab. Israel will be without its leader. You will die.

And I find the next verse kind of funny. The King of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, see, didn't I tell you he never prophesied anything good about me, but only bad. What a buzzkill this guy is.

And then Micaiah loads on more context as if what he said already wasn't bad enough. Micaiah continued. Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, seated in heaven with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.

And the Lord said, who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there? One suggested this and another that, but finally a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, I will entice him.

By what means? The Lord asked. Well, I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets. He said, you will succeed in enticing him, said the Lord, go and do it.

So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you. So Micaiah not only says you're going to die, but also through your actions, the God of this world is so against you that he's putting deceiving spirits in prophets so that you won't know what's true and what's not.

And that may sound cruel to you, but what you maybe don't know about Ahab is he's again, evil, but one of the worst all time evil Kings that has ever lived. And if you don't think he's evil enough, his wife was Jezebel and Jezebel, let's just say she's mentioned all the way in the back of the book of revelation to describe deceit, manipulation, and corruption.

This duo may be the worst duo ever to live. So don't name anybody Ahab and Jezebel if you're doing baby names, I'm just saying.

And well, since you've already proven you're going to be against God and you'll never be for God, God is a God of justice and he's going to enact his justice in this way.

And so all of this has said, it's not good news. Micaiah stands up and speaks what's right in front of 400 officials. And again, at the root of living honorably is are you standing on truth and living honorably with a right reputation to the audience of one God himself, even when everybody else around you, officials, prophets, and others think you're crazy. Can you stand strong? Because that's how you build the most important reputation.

And I'll tell you this, expect that things won't work out well, if that's you. And so we start to see that. Verse 24, then Zedekiah son of Canaan went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. Good to see that we've always been practicing healthy conflict resolution, right?

And then Ahab speaks. The king of Israel ordered, take Micaiah and send him back to Ammon, the ruler of the city and to Joash, the king's son and say, this is what the king says, put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.

And Micaiah declared, if you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me. Then he added, mark my words, all you people.

Some of you have said that before, mark my words, when you make some bold declaration or prophecy. And that's a pretty good thing to say on your way out, because if you're a prophet, mark my words is really the best way to tell if you're a true prophet or not of did your words that you said actually come true or not.

If they did good profit, if they didn't bad profit, it's that simple. That's the test of a prophet. And that's the last we hear of and from Micaiah. He gets thrown into a prison, eating bread, drinking water. Maybe he got out later. Maybe he didn't. We don't know, but that's not the end of the story.

Because in the next few verses, Ahab and Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat was a good king, but good kings make bad choices. They decided to attack Ramoth Gilead, but because they knew that there was this one guy that prophesied you're going to die, Ahab like thought he'd trick, I guess, God and the opponent.

And so they dressed him up and disguised him into the battle. So nobody knew that that's the king of Israel. And the final couple of verses read, but someone's an Aramean drew his bow at random.

Now says at random, but we know it's not random. It was prophesied.

And what happened? It hit the king of Israel in between the sections of his armor. And the king told his chariot driver wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded all day long.

The battle raged and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans and the blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot.

And that evening he died. And the words of Micaiah were proven to be true.

He honored God and stood alone, even when it cost him. And I think we can learn a lot from Micaiah about how to live an honorable life.

But today I want to just focus on two takeaways from what we learned about Micaiah that will help us ensure that we have a right reputation with the one that's most important, God himself.

And so just two things today. Number one is as we're building out our honor code, I will listen to God before I listened to the crowd. Come on, let's say that together. I will listen to God before I listened to the crowd.

If you're going to stand up for truth, let alone speak for truth, you know what you first need to know the truth. And how do you know the truth? Well, God speaks to you. We have an always working, ever speaking God.

And so do you know God's voice well enough that in the midst of the 401 voices screaming at you, you know, that's the truth voice and the other 400 are false.

And the problem I believe is not that God isn't speaking. It's that we're not listening.

Even Jesus said it this way in John 10, 27, my sheep, they know my voice. They listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me implying what, that we have a relationship with God, that it's a give and take there's talking, listening, they're speaking, listening, that it's a real abiding relationship that we have with God.

And I've said before that if you want to for sure, for sure, for sure, know that it's the voice of God, like open up your Bible because that is the voice of God.

Sometimes you don't know if that's the burrito from last night talking, or is that God? I don't know all the time what to tell you in that case, but I can tell you if you want to know and want to hear the voice of God, it's found in scripture.

And so are you opening up your scripture? Are you opening up your Bible?

Barna says that 88% of Americans own a Bible. That's far more than even believe in Jesus. And the average number of Bibles per household in America is 4.4. Go home this week, count your Bibles, do a check mark.

I bet a lot of you are higher than national average. And we have this word of God in our homes. Gosh, we have it now on our phones and in our tablets.

YouVersion, the Holy Bible app in just a little while is going to celebrate their 1 billionth download. That's crazy. A billion people have it as an app on their phone. And if you don't have an app on your phone, you can get it on the internet. You can find it anywhere.

And despite all of this, nine to 10% of Americans read their Bible on a regular basis.

I'm just saying it's really hard to stand for truth. And it's really hard to speak truth. If you don't know the truth.

Do you know God's voice well enough to know that that's God and not some false deceiving spirit?

There's been research the last couple of years that talk about the power of four. And what that means is that those who read their Bible four times a week, that it literally changes their life. It transforms them.

Our mission at King of Kings is that lives would be transformed. And the first way we say that is by connection to God, by connecting to God, lives are transformed.

And so the American state of the Bible in 2024 gave us this data that not only talks about how important the Bible is just for your own spiritual life, but also look at the benefits that come from the power of four, that if you want to flourish in this life, that reading the Bible four times a week, and I'm not talking like hours at a time, I'm just talking about engaging with it to listen to God's voice and to spend time with him, that you experience more happiness and life satisfaction.

You have less stress, more hope, more purpose and meaning greater character and better relationships.

Does anybody want those things in your life? Come on, let me see hands, all campuses.

If you want those things in your life, if you didn't raise your hand, you're kind of super weird, really weird. Who wouldn't want that?

And I'm not saying don't do the other stuff that'll make you mentally and emotionally strong. Go to therapy. If you need therapy, gosh, go on a diet. If you need a diet to get physically healthy, do all of those things, eat as much kale as you want. I'm have my kale to actually do all those things.

But sometimes I think we over-complicate what sometimes can be really simple that if you want a life that flourishes, a life that flourishes as one that is in relationship with God, that is in communication with God and the way to hear God most clearly is through his word, his truth.

The Bible is not always something that you read. Some people say the Bible reads you like it does something to you.

Martin Luther, I like the way he says it.

The Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It has hands. It lays hold of me. It changes you from the inside out. And you need it to know what's truth in this world and what's not, because there are 401 voices screaming at you.

And do not think that the God of the Old Testament is not the same God of today, that if he did that in the past where he put false deceiving spirits in prophets' lives, that he would not do the same thing today.

We trust him in his sovereignty and his control. And there are people today that have false deceiving spirits, and some of them have a platform, and some of them are called prophets, and some of them are called pastors, and some of them will preach what is untrue but is popular that will gain them a crowd.

And you need to know what God's word is well enough to know, is that true? Or is that person saying something untrue that is deceiving me that might actually cause me more harm than good in the long run?

Does he just want me as a subscriber, as a follower, as an attender? Does he actually care about who I am and what God wants for me?

You need to know God's word well enough to know, is that true? And I've said before many times, and I'll say it again, you should not just take what I say as truth.

You should test everything that I'm saying to you today and any word that comes out of my mouth from this platform, because you need to know God's word for you.

Don't let me be the one that opens up God's word for you, and let that be the only time you get God's word, because I am a sinner, I have biases, I have prejudices, I am a manipulator, and I don't always get it right.

Cool. All right. Thank you, God. I think you got my point there.

And number two, I will do what's right even if I must stand alone. Come on, let's say that together. I will do what's right even if I must stand alone.

And this is what Micaiah did. He stood strong, he stood alone, and he spoke truth in front of a corrupt king and in front of false prophets, and he honored God.

And it did cost him, but it also made him unforgettable. And you might be like, I don't know how much he's remembered, because I've never heard of him, and nobody names their babies Micaiah. Well, maybe.

But here we are today, still talking about him 3,000 years later. So that's pretty good. That's pretty good. He's memorable.

And he's a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do. When Jesus would get whipped up into a frenzy of a crowd, where everybody's saying one thing, mocking him, spitting on him.

Even his friends and his disciples abandoned him. He literally was alone. Even God forsook him on the cross, God the Father.

And he said the thing that nobody else was saying, that I am the king of kings, and I will raise myself from the dead three days from now. And he did.

He stood alone, he spoke truth, and he changed the world.

And that's what people that stand on the truth of God do. They change the world.

Whether their name is Jesus and highly remembered, or whether their name is Micaiah and kind of somewhat known.

And even if, and it will have negative consequences in this world to stand on God's truth.

The good news is that God sees you, everything. And you will be rewarded. You will be rewarded, test this, with what the Bible says, a hundredfold investment in heaven in heaven forever.

You may lose everything in this world, but you will gain everything in the next.

And what's most important is your relationship, your right standing, your reputation with God.

And the beautiful news is that when we've failed, when we haven't lived up to the name that God put on us as a child of his, that because Jesus stood alone and went through what he did, is you and I have grace given to us to start over again and to stand for truth the next time.

I like how the apostle Paul says it, am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God?

If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

For whatever reason, being a servant of Christ comes with hard consequences.

For Micaiah, it was bread and water in prison, laying low in a position that is so dishonorable, is what this world would say.

But I would tell you that even in that dishonorable position, he still had more flourishing than most people have in high positions, because he is experiencing meaning and purpose.

He lived with great character, had hope.

There's so many people that have everything of this world that don't stand up for truth.

And yet they're burnt out, exhausted, they're stressed and have no hope.

And so who really is better in the end?

For Jesus, it had the consequence of the cross and the tomb.

For you, it may not be prison, bread and water.

It may not be cross and tomb.

It might be that you lose your friendship circle.

Might be that you get canceled.

Might be that others have bigger platforms than you, more followers than you.

But it's right.

It's right.

And God has made you right through his grace, and you're called to be right and do right.

And so that's how we begin to live with honor.

And so let's say these two phrases together.

I will listen to God before I listen to the crowd.

I will do what's right, I will do what's right even if I stand alone.

And when the church is done right, you don't need to stand alone because we'll stand with you. In fact, can we stand at all campuses? One of the beautiful things is that when we live right, we stand with one another. And that's really comforting to know that you're not alone. I'm not alone. We're not alone. Northwest Omaha, we're with you. Fremont, we're standing together with you. It's pretty awesome that we get to stand together as a family. And you need a family. And so I invite you, if not this family, get in a church family, please. And so God, we're going to live right. In the coming weeks, we're then going to look at how do we then show proper respect to others. Next week, we're going to look at how to honor authority, something no one in here struggles with, but everyone out there struggles with. That was a joke, by the way. See what you post. But we're going to look specifically not at how do we honor authority that acts like us and thinks like us and behaves like us and votes like us. We're going to look at how do we honor authority when they're different than us. And even when they're different from what God says, it's a really important message. You should invite a friend. God, we thank you for who you are. We thank you that you stood right so that we can stand right today. We stand right on the gift of your righteousness and grace right now in this moment.

But we're also, Lord, committing to follow you faithfully and to do what's right and to be the right person, to stand on truth and to stand for who you are.

We're committing God to open up our scripture and to hear your voice so that we know your voice, so that we know your truth, so that we can stand on your truth and so we can speak your truth in a world that so desperately needs more of you.

We honor you, God, with our lives and with our worship. And together, the church across all campuses says, amen.