

Jas22 – Slander James 4:11-12

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “Slander.” Really, Dave? You’re going to talk about slander? Isn’t that like a forbidden topic in the church? Yeah, that’s the problem. When we were in James, last message, we left on a hard note. We dealt with pride. “What To Do With Pride?” That was a hard message. How are we supposed to handle our pride? And then as a follow up message, kind of a transition message, we looked at a picture of humility. Because when we studied that pride section in James, we found out we needed to aggressively crucify our pride and take on the humility of Christ. And so we looked at a message called “Love in Humility” which was Jesus exemplifying humility, in John Chapter 13.

This message we pick up in that vein, we pick up that context on the heels of a very, very critical and powerful verse. James 4:6. This sets the stage for the message today.

James 4:6 (ESV)

6 . . . “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

God opposes the proud – it means literally, “*he is against them.*” ***God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.***

That’s critical, because *all slander comes from pride*. You realize if you’ve been here any amount of time at all, that we know the source of all sin is pride. The source of the sin that got Lucifer thrown out of heaven was pride; the source of all of our sin is pride, but even more so with slander.

We think so highly of ourselves that we think we can talk down about other people. That’s pride. It leads to slander and I’ll just tell you up front, God hates it. He just hates it. His words, not mine.

So, James 4:10 is the good news, if you’re looking at your Bibles, look down at verse 10. Because in verse 10 God says, “***If we will humble ourselves, then he will lift us up***” then he will ***exalt us***.

So the bad news is God opposes us in our pride. The good news is that if we will choose to humble ourselves then God will lift us up, he will exalt us. This is where we are going in this message. It’s a little tough, so let me just tell you. There is no getting out of this message. This message is for everyone, every person in the room. Every single person.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father we want your Word to be for us, Lord. We want to apply your Word. We want your Word to pierce our hearts. We want your Word to drain the poison of our pride and our self-focus and our self-centeredness out of our sinful hearts. We want the sins of self and the sins of our flesh, our nature, to be crucified and we want to live in you, Jesus. We want the new life, Lord. And so today, Lord, we give you the right to show us the sin of slander in our own lives. In our life, personally. Show us, Lord, that we can give you the right to root that sin out of us, that we can choose to crucify it, to cast it off, to be done with it. To be healed of that sin and to stop doing damage with it, Lord. God, it's a serious message the church needs to hear. We pray that our hearts would hear it today, in Jesus name, amen.*

Let's start with a summary of Webster's definition of slander. Webster's definition of slander was so big, I had to summarize it. This isn't verbatim; it's a summary of a number of definitions out of Webster's.

"Slander" is "a false charge or misrepresentation which damages a person by lessening them in the eyes or the opinion of another person."

I need you to get a good hold on it. That's what slander is. In the church, we have a tremendously casual opinion or concern about slander. Don't we? We have a very casual attitude about slander. And at the same time, I can tell you for absolute sure, after over 25 years in pastoral/elder leadership, I can tell you for sure that slander is one of the most damaging sins that exist in the church.

Is there a chance that the fact that we have such a casual attitude about slander is one of the reasons it's such a damaging sin in the church? Yes, it is. Why? Because we accept it. We approve of it. We allow people to slander children of God while we're sipping coffee and eating a donut right after church and we don't think anything about it. And so it continues, and continues and it grows like a virus in the church. It does so much damage because, honestly, we accept it in day to day conversations with other Christians.

However, Psalm 50:19-20 (write this verse in your margin – I can't even begin to give you all the verse references for slander and gossip. It is off the chart, it would take the rest of the day.) These verses characterize the wicked (in the New Testament that means the unsaved, or unbelievers) by slander and gossip. That is how the wicked are characterized. It should not be so known, so common in the church.

Here's Proverbs 6, write this down in your margin at James 4:11.

Proverbs 6:16–19 says (ESV)

16 There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him:

17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil,

19 a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Haughty eyes (that's pride. God hates it.)

19 a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

God hates it. Right there is the definition, in verse 19, that's the definition of slander. "A false witness that sows discord among the believers." A misrepresentation of somebody's reputation or their character or their intention or their motivation. It sows discord into the body. Devil loves it, God hates it. You get to choose sides.

I want to talk about two types of slander. But before I get to them, I just need you to know God hates both. He absolutely hates both. But I do want to break it down because I thought a lot about the different experiences of slander that I've been in, so I broke them into two categories. Do you know that there is so much written about slander and gossip just in the Book of Proverbs it would take the rest of this day to go through it? It is phenomenal how much Solomon wrote in Proverbs about the damage of slander and gossip. God hates it. The church embraces it. We even tend to put slanderers in our own mind, as spiritual people. "Oh, God revealed that to you. Oh you're very spiritual."

No, you're a slanderer. God hates what you're doing. It's not just Proverbs. All through the Bible the sins of slander and gossip, over and over and over again, God addresses slander and gossip in the Bible. Yet, we treat it casually, even assuming that someone slandering another believer, one who is made in the image of God, we see them somehow as more spiritual or we see them as mature spiritually. This is a problem. This is a real, real problem.

Here's what Proverbs 16 says, write this down there next to James 4:11 in your margin.

Proverbs 16:28-29 (NLT)

28 A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends.

29 Violent people (terrorists) mislead their companions (by slander), leading them down a harmful path. (More on that later)

I'm going to lay that out for you in just a minute, we're coming back to that idea. But what we need to know is that we in our own nature, our human nature, we thrive on

gossip and slander. We are drawn to it like cyanide. We love it. We love it. Proverbs 18:8 says:

Proverbs 18:8 (ESV)

8 The words of a whisperer (also slanderer/talebearer) are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body

The church thrives on gossip and slander and God hates it. That's just a fact. We thrive on it because of our sin nature. We are sinners. But God has given us new life and he desires, and in fact expects us, to live in that new life, crucifying the old life of slander and gossip. Proverbs 20:19 (write this down.)

Prov 20:19 says –

DO NOT even Associate with a Slanderer or Gossip - ***Cut them OUT of your LIFE !!***

It's very Christian. You just tell them they have a problem with slander and to give you a Facebook message when they are over it and then you'll get together again. Until then unfriend them. Proverbs 20:19 says cut them out of your life.

I could easily go on all day with these types of verses, both in the Old and New Testaments. I am going to mention a couple of other things. Let's read this, Matthew 15:18-20. Here's what Jesus says about slander.

In Matthew 15:18–20 (ESV)

18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

(right there with murder, adultery, sexual immorality)

20 These are what defile a person . . .

Misrepresenting someone else in order to do them harm in the eyes of another person, is listed right with murder, adultery and with sexual immorality. We see it as minor, God sees it the same as murder and adultery and sexual immorality. Jesus himself lists those sins with what we would call the "big sins." Jesus sees murder and slander as the same. It's right there.

So think about this. Wasn't it slander that got Jesus Christ crucified? Now some of you theologians would say, no, no, no, it was our sin that got him crucified. And you are so true from God's perspective; it was your sin and my sin that put Jesus Christ on the cross. But if you look at historically what got him that sentence, it was slander. Remember what

slander is? A false charge, a misrepresentation that lessens a person in the eyes of another. That's exactly what happened to Jesus. They charge him falsely, they misrepresented what he said his intentions were and it led to his death.

One more question. Who was the first slanderer in the Bible? Who misrepresented and made a false charge about another person lessening them in the eyes of another? It was the serpent in the garden, right? Satan was, let's say, the father of slander. He is the father of slander. Think about it. That when the serpent came up to Eve, what did he say? "Did God actually say...?" "You shall not surely die like God said..." "God knows when you eat of the fruit you will be like him..." Implying "You can't trust God..." That's slander.

Lucifer was the first slanderer. It might be a good idea to make absolutely sure that we are not acting like him as our father. Remember Jesus said to the Pharisees "***You are of your father, the devil...He is a liar and was a liar from the beginning.***"

We are God's children. Let's make sure we are not acting like the devil.

Let's get to our text. James 4:11. I had to do all that set up, because look at how James handles it. Remember James is kind of like the Proverbs of the New Testament.

James 4:11(a) (ESV)

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers . . .

James puts in his customary "brothers." The Greek word for "brothers" here means "*the fellowship of believers*." So you gals who are saying this isn't about you – believe me you are included in the fellowship of believers. The NIV addresses what this word for "brothers" means, and it also clarifies what it means to not speak evil against one another.

James 4:11 (NIV)

11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another . . .

Do not speak evil against one another. This sin is so engrained in our self-nature, and it's so easy to commit. Why? Because we always have the tool of this sin with us. All it is, is a prideful heart and a tongue that is uncontrolled. And we can exercise this sin at any moment. It's so engrained and so easy to commit that we have got to get serious about it. We have got to get radically serious about it.

Here's how serious God is about it. Romans Chapter 1, write this down. Listen Romans 1 is a famous chapter about the justly due wrath of God being poured out on the unrighteousness of mankind. Some of you know that Romans Chapter 1 is famous for certain sins being picked out by Christians and saying the wrath of God is coming upon

these sins. It's funny how we pick and choose which sins the wrath of God is coming upon, because look in verse 29 of Romans Chapter 1.

Romans 1:29-30

29 . . . They (those deserving God's Judgment) ***are full of envy . . . strife, deceit,*** (and) ***malice. They are gossips,*** (and) ***slanderers . . .***

There are some really heinous sins in Romans Chapter 1 that Paul says this is why the judgment of God is coming. And right there along with the heinous sins are the ones that we see every week in church. Envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip and slander. And speaking of those who habitually practice these sins, those whose lives are characterized by these sins, Romans 1 verse 32 says this:

Romans 1:32 says (ESV)

32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Whoa! What sins is he talking about? Those big media getting sins? No, he's talking about these sins that describe a normal Sunday at church. Envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander. They not only commit these sins but they approve of those who practice them. God hate's these sins. We approve of them. How do we approve of them? We approve of them by our silence. We approve of them by not addressing the sin when it occurs. God hates it, I think there's a chance that maybe we don't hate it enough.

Over and over we are called to put off these sins, to cast them off, to crucify them, to eliminate them from our lives. Not to accept them. Not to give them our approval. These are the sins committed with our mouth, with our words, with our tongue; these are the sins that by far do the most damage in the church and to the name of Christ. By far, by far, by far. Why? It's because we are all prone to these sins. We are all prone to this sin. *We are prone to this sin.* We need to get really serious about it.

Now I mentioned I want to talk about two types of slander so I better get to it. All pastors deal regularly with slander. It's really a common thing. So let me just get the common everyday slander out. This is what it sounds like, "That pastor doesn't care, he didn't even . . ." That's a misrepresentation and a false charge against a Pastor's character. That pastor cared, he might have been doing ten other things that were more urgent and life threatening than the one thing you wanted him to do. And it's slander when you say things like that.

The other one is this that we hear all the time, we never hear it from the people saying it, we hear it from the people they are saying it to. “Oh that pastor only thinks about him and himself, and what he wants. He wouldn’t even ...” It’s slander to say “That person is *this*. Their character is *this*. Because of *this*.” It’s slander. I’ve also dealt with much, much worse slander.

I’m kind of getting used to the common, every day slander. I’m starting to handle it a little better, you know. I just let it go. But I’ve dealt with some serious life and death slander. I’ve dealt with slander that has tremendously damaged me and my family and this church and the cause of Christ in this community. Serious, unbelievable slander.

Here’s the funny thing about the pain that my family and I have been through coming from slander. I have never had somebody outside the church, slander me. Never. I’ve never had somebody outside the church spread a false claim, a false charge or a misrepresentation about me. All of the pain, and there’s times when it’s like, “Lord I’m going to try to make it to 4 pm today but that’s all I can promise, because I don’t know if I can make it to dinner.” My family even more so. All of that pain has come from inside the church.

How about you? Have you ever experienced a false charge or a misrepresentation made about you from within the church? But I know most of you have. The Bible says it should not exist. *Shouldn’t exist*. And we should not accept it or approve of it.

So let’s talk about these two types of slanders, just purely personal experience to illustrate what I’m talking about. These two types of slanders that I’ve dealt with are the same two types of slanders that you have probably dealt with. Let me just make this really clear. Every single one of us is guilty of this sin. Every one of us, me included, are guilty of making a false charge or misrepresenting somebody to another person that lessens them in the eyes of that person. We are guilty. We are guilty. So, as I paint the picture of these two types of slanderers, let’s pick. Let’s pick which one we are. Let’s be honest, okay?

Here’ the first type of slanderer, we call this the “Terrorist Slanderer.” This is a good name. Isn’t it? Some of you are wondering if I’m talking about you. I’ll let you decide. Here’s how a terrorist slanderer works. They purposefully set up slander to cause harm. They feel it’s their obligation, their calling. Most of them attach God’s name to it. (Hey here’s a sin that God hates, and you’re saying God’s calling you to do this. Either you or God is wrong. You decide.)

Here's how this person acts. The terrorist slanderer most often acts just like a handler of a suicide bomber. A terrorist slanderer acts most like a handler, the person who is in charge of a suicide bomber. You realize that almost a hundred percent of the time; the suicide bomber is not the one who planned the attack, right? The guy who planned the attack is way too smart to strap a bomb to his chest. So what does he do? He finds an easily manipulated person and he convinces them to strap a bomb to their chest. And then he sends them in where he wants them to do damage. They blow up. They spiritually kill innocent people, and he is far enough from the action that he can claim his innocence. I hate to tell you this, but most of us have been manipulated at one time or another, or at least attempted to have been manipulated, by a terrorist slanderer. Someone who thinks that if they can feed this morsel of slander into this person, they will strap that bomb to their chest and walk in and kill some innocent people, at least spiritually kill them, getting you to do their dirty work so they can look innocent.

Here's an example. This could be real. A guy is going to church and leadership is pouring their life into him, doing all they can to help him grow and mature. And as often happens, something goes on that he disagrees with and so he gets mad at the leadership of the church (which is primarily how slander against the church starts, someone doesn't get their way and they get mad at the leadership.) And so, hypothetically, he leaves mad and just slandering up a storm.

Here's what makes him a terrorist slanderer. Not too long ago, hypothetically, a guy comes to this church and says to the pastor, "I'm a little nervous about being here." "I said how can you be nervous, I've known you for years?" He says, "Well, this person told me that God revealed to them that anyone who attends your church is subject to being under a curse from God."

I said, "Oh they told you that, huh?" "Yeah so I don't really know how to feel but I'm a little nervous being here." I said, "Listen, you know that's wrong, right?" "Well..." and the guy chuckled nervously. "Yeah, kind of. I wanted to talk to you about it."

Now this is a guy I've known for years, I've loved on him for years, I've helped for years spiritually, emotionally, relationally, financially. For some reason, he never came back. I don't know, I don't know why.

Because a terrorist slanderer got to him. And he got to him because he knew that he could strap that bomb of slander on to that guy and he would walk right into that church and kill dozens of innocents. This is a guy who knows a lot of you. That's a terrorist slanderer. Their desire is to cause harm.

Here's the other type. And I really struggled with this. Not everybody is like this Lord. That is just so intense. So dramatic. What are the other types of slanderers? Here's what I decided. There are people who have no desire, no pre-meditated desire to do harm. They aren't intentionally setting out to do harm. And so I lovingly decided to call these people "Ignorant Slanderers." Ignorant as in lacking knowledge. They are lovingly ignorant of the damage they are doing.

Here is the number one type of an ignorant slanderer. They are a gossip. Most gossipers don't have pre-meditated intent to do harm. They just love having information that everyone else doesn't have. And they love sharing the information that they have with someone else who doesn't have it. It makes them feel important. And so they are the ones that the terrorist slanderer is working on. Because they know if they can strap the bomb of slander to a gossip then the gossip will go in to the innocent crowd and do what they do best. Blow up with gossip and take a bunch of innocent people out.

I will tell you because it is far enough away that I can say it, that's exactly what happened in the early years of this church. Exactly what happened. There was this little old lady. And some of you know who I'm talking about, just act like you don't. And don't say her name. Sweet as pie. Just this sweet little old lady, and when I finally found out that she was enemy number one in the slander attack upon this church, at first I just said, "No way. No way is that little old lady at the point of what the enemy is doing to destroy this church."

Everybody loves her. In fact they love her enough that she is at their house, or they are at her house all the time having coffee and tea and spending time with her. Years later, I found out that she had been manipulated as a suicide bomber. And that a terrorist slanderer had strapped the bomb of terror to her. And as she was having coffee and tea and crumpets and whatever it is, (I guess in Nuevo it's more like Budweiser and beef jerky) I found out what she was doing was she was telling people she had found out that Pastor Dave was evil. That he was actually sent here by the devil. And that the church's responsibility was to remove him and replace him, coincidentally, with the person that God had revealed this information to. That was life and death. And it's only by the grace of God my family and I stood through that. She was an innocent suicide bomber. She didn't have any intention to do that damage. She just loved talking. Sharing information with people that they didn't have.

Guys, the sin of slander is speaking evil of someone, a false charge or a misrepresentation that lowers them in the eyes of another. It is very probably the most damaging sin in church and we accept it. There's one person in this church that confronted this group of

people (not the little old lady, but her cohorts.) One person in the church had the guts to confront them. Thank you, that person. Everyone else, said, “Really? Dave’s evil? God said so? God revealed it? Wow!” And the person that God revealed it to is the person that’s supposed to take over the church? We need to be smarter than Satan. And he’s got a lot of practice. And so we need the Holy Spirit, we need the wisdom of God to not be taken out by these things.

Let’s look at what else James has to say. James 4:11.

James 4:11(b) (2nd sentence) (ESV)

11 . . . The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law . . .

Now this is important. The one who speaks against a brother, slanders or judges, meaning sits in judgment against his brother, speaks evil and sits in judgment against the law or over God’s law.

Does this mean that we should not address sin? No. We are called to address sin. Does it mean that we should not judge as in decision making over someone’s actions? No. We can say, yeah, that action is wrong. That what you’re doing there is wrong, it’s a sin. We are actually called in love to address these things in love, in order to try to save the one who is in sin. Matthew 18 describes that, Galatians 6:1-2 describes that. There are a number of places that describe that. We’re called to address these things.

Here’s what we are not called to do. What we are forbidden to do is be judgmental. The Bible doesn’t prohibit us from judging as in making a decision, it prohibits from “judgmentalism,” which means “*sitting in judgment over another.*” The best picture I can paint is a Pharisee. The Pharisees were judgmental. They had the sin of “judgmentalism.” And so don’t let somebody say, “Hey, hey, hey. Don’t judge me man! Don’t say that my sin is a sin. That’s being judgmental.”

No, it’s not. That’s saying, hey the Bible says what you’re doing is a sin. So you know, I love you and all, but I just thought I would point that out! That’s good, in love. God forbid sitting in judgment over another, casting judgment upon them.

James says when we are slandering, (here’s the mind blowing part) or sitting in judgment over another, we are sitting in judgment over God’s law. Now this gets really, really serious. How are we sitting in judgment over God’s law? Well, tell me this. What two commands sum up the entire law of God? Love God, love your neighbor. The entire law

is summed up. In Matthew 22 Jesus sums it up. In Romans 13:8 Paul says he who loves another loves his neighbor. He has fulfilled the law.

The law is the law of love. Let me just tell you in so many ways, speaking slander, speaking evil, lessening someone in the eyes of another is not love. It is not love. *It is not love.* And if you understand the value that person has to the creator of the universe, you would understand it is not loving God, because that's the apple of God's eye. And you're bashing them and slandering them. So you're not loving them and you're not loving God. You are sitting in judgment over God's law. This is what's happening. You are saying "What I feel is more important than what God says. What I think is more important than what God thinks." You are judging God's law instead of following it. That's what the end of verse 11 says.

James 4:11(c) (ESV)

11. . . But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

You have placed yourself over God's law. You are sitting right now in a position of judge over God's law. "I know that's what God says, but here's what I say. I'm sitting as judge over God's law."

You're no longer a servant of God, you're in his place. He's no longer calling the shots, you're calling the shots. He's no longer the only judge in the universe, you are.

James 4:12(a) (ESV)

12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy . . .

One law giver alone. One judge alone. Here's the newsflash – you are not him. Why are you acting like it? Why are you sitting in judgment over another person that belongs to him? Can he not handle it? Did you see on Craigslist there was a vacancy in the Trinity and they needed your help? Why are you taking the place of God and sitting in judgment over another person? God's not waiting for your help, he doesn't need your help, he can handle it. And when you're sitting in judgment over that person, you are scooting him off the throne and saying, "Hey pal, you've been at it for awhile. You need a break. I'll take it from here." Not a good idea.

The commentator Douglas Moo, a very respected commentator, says right here: *At this point you put yourself OUTSIDE and ABOVE God's Law Viewing your OWN Opinion as Better than God's.*

We need to see ourselves in that place and just say, “God please, please. Don’t kill me until I can repent.” And then repent fast. Really, we need to have the fear of God, and say “Wait a minute. I’m acting like God. I’m sitting in judgment over this person. God how are you so merciful that you don’t just squish me like a bug.”

James 4:12(b) (ESV)

12 . . . But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Who died and made you God? That’s what he’s saying. Who do we think we are taking God’s place? Sitting in judgment over someone that belongs to God, that Jesus Christ gave his life for? God can handle that person. We don’t have the right. We don’t have the standard. We’re not the one to sit in judgment over another. When we slander and speak evil and lessen someone in the eyes of someone else, that’s what we’re doing. And we’re not only sitting in judgment over them, but we’re sitting in judgment over God’s law, because God’s law says: love God and love others. Only God passes judgment.

He gives you freedom to say, “You know what, I’m not God. Who am I to say? I don’t know? Let God deal with it.” Why can’t we say that? I’ll tell you why... it’s pride. Listen, this is a hard message. I told you up front it was hard. We have all been guilty of this. It is so engrained in the human nature because of our pride. Every one of us has been guilty of the sin of slander, speaking falsely or misrepresenting someone’s intentions or motivation or heart or person. We misrepresent them, we lessen them in the eyes of another person, we’re guilty of slander and we should be afraid.

Maybe we’ve been this terrorist slanderer. Maybe we’ve fed slander to innocent people to strap bombs on them to do damage. Maybe we’ve been that person, guilty of ignorant slander. “I didn’t mean to destroy the church, I was just trying to tell everybody what they didn’t know.” Tell it to God.

That critical spirit that causes us to sit in judgment over another person, God hates it. We are rejecting God’s law of love. We are taking God off the throne. We’re making ourselves judge in his place. And we need to be very clear in remembering Isaiah 14 verse 12 and following says that’s the exact reason that Lucifer got thrown out of heaven. Because he wanted God’s throne, he wanted to be the judge, he wanted to make the decisions and God said I’ll make you a special place where you can do that. We can learn a lot from remembering what got Lucifer thrown out of heaven.

My last words, lovingly, let's repent, man. Let's repent of this sin and just say, "God help me! Help me to never do this again! Don't let me be sucked into this sinful, destructive path."

Let's pray. God, we repent. We repent, Lord. We are sinners saved by grace, Lord. We choose to set aside our sin nature, but we realize it's like a coat of armor chasing us, looking to engulf us. And so we run the race, we walk in the Spirit, so that we won't satisfy the lusts of the flesh, the desire to sit in judgment and over another person. Lord right now we crucify in our lives, that critical spirit, that judgmental spirit that puts us over you, that causes us to say to you, "You're not doing it right, we'll do your job." God forgive us. And thank you, thank you, for not just wiping us out. We deserve your judgment Lord; we thank you for your grace. We thank you for your mercy. We right now surrender our lives to you Lord and pray that you would renew us by the power of your Spirit, that you would renew us. That we would have the supernatural ability to walk in the Spirit. To recognize the sin of slander and gossip in our own lives and other people's and to address it. And to address it with passion. We pray you give us the strength to do that, we commit right now to do that. In Jesus' name, amen.