

Easter: Hope!

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[0 : 0 0] Hey, if you're visiting here for the first time, again, my name is Tobin, and we are glad that you're here for this special Easter celebration. I've been told that I cannot speak as long as I normally do, because we have 60 gallons of ice cream, and it will melt.

And so my staff told me that if I go overtime, they're going to start showing a picture behind me of an ice cream cone melting. It'll just get worse and worse, and so that will tell me, you know. So right afterwards, we're going to all go to the podium, which is a great grassy area right near here, right across from Starbucks.

And we're going to have ice cream sundaes, so just please come join us and eat. If you want to gather, we buy food sometimes here and hang out as families, often after church, and it's just a great celebration.

And then we're going to have an Easter egg hunt. We have, I think, over 700 Easter eggs. So a couple of the community groups are going to be doing Easter egg hunt for the kids, and it is one of my highlights. So please come to that, because you don't want to miss that.

You know, I love this season. I love Easter. However, as a pastor, you have to come in, and you're talking about the greatest story and message, and the eight words that are probably the most powerful words in history.

[1 : 0 6] And you have to talk about them, and some people feel like, oh, you know, it has to be awesome and incredible, and they're waiting to be wowed. You know, I grew up in a family where we didn't celebrate Easter.

My family is full of CEOs, Christmas and Easter only people. And so we went to Christmas, and we went to Easter, and that was about it. But there was always something about Easter that was encouraging and exciting to me.

I always remember we got new suits or a new set of clothes. It was just a tradition. My parents carried on. I don't understand where they got it from. We got great food and candy, and we went to church, whether we wanted to or not.

We had to be in church. And I just remember sitting there and just hearing these stories going through my head, but it was inconsistently, it wasn't lived out in my family. My parents never talked about it. So it was really confusing to me.

And so I realized, even as we spend 10 minutes to talk about this amazing, the thing that changes everything, that it might be confusing to you also. And if it is, just grab me in an appropriate place.

[2 : 0 7] Grab me, and we'll talk about that. I get in trouble when I say that sometimes. Because we want to talk about these things, because it is the story. And it's the highlight for me as a pastor.

I have to say, these last three weeks have been terrible for us as a family. So Christina's mom suddenly died, and so we rush back to America. Her dad is fighting a debilitating disease that we do the ice bucket challenge about.

And so now he's by himself, and we're at home, and we're in Dallas, and we're seeing this funeral, and we're watching Mimi's memories, and hearing these amazing testimonies of her.

And we're seeing the tomb where she's going to be laid. And you feel this finality of things, right? You feel this. We flew back, I think, Thursday night, because we wanted to be here with our family, you guys.

And we're seeing the same. And we're seeing the same. So you can pray for Christina. She's still there, helping her dad. But, you know, you feel this finality when you look at the grave. And we heard all these stories, and it was amazing, her testimony.

[3 : 12] It was fun. But we also felt the pain. We felt the loneliness. We felt sadness. And sometimes we just felt hopelessness. But that's not what Easter is about.

But that's what's happening in this story. Right? And so what I want to do just in the short time that's allotted to me, I want to look at actually just one verse.

I want to look at two words, and I want to talk about what these mean to all of us in here, whoever you are in here. I want to talk about these things. Because I learned when I was going on my spiritual journey that it wasn't so much how good the pastor was in communicating.

I used to judge things like that. As long as he preached God's word, that was what he was called to do. But I realized what the issue was was my heart. Was my heart ready to hear God's word?

Was my heart ready to meet God? Was my heart ready to be changed by God and be different? And so that's maybe the question we have to ask ourselves as we begin is, are our hearts ready to meet the creator of all things?

[4 : 15] And are we open to his spirit changing us? If you've been here for any amount of time, we've been going through this series called God's Story and Our Story, and we began in creation, and we've been following it for thousands of years, not thousands of years here.

We've been following it for 12 Sundays. Somebody got that. I think it was Jason Mann. Anyway, but all along we've seen this common thread throughout these 12 Sundays.

We've seen this idea of God creating, and we've seen this idea of God pursuing. He creates us, and he pursues us. He wants to have this covenant relationship with us. He's doing everything he can.

And what we've been seeing in these stories is that people like us, like you and me, especially me, we struggle. We struggle with our brokenness. We struggle with our selfishness. We struggle with our self-sufficiency.

We struggle with our desires to do things the way we want to do them. We want to do them the way we want to do them. And you see that in little kids. And we struggle with that. And what we've been seeing throughout all this series is that men, you and I, and throughout history, we've made some really bad choices.

[5 : 21] I mean, we've made some really poor choices, and yet throughout all these stories, God just continues to be true to his word and true to his covenant, and he pursues us.

Do you know that God is aggressive with his love? That right now God is aggressively pursuing you, and you see this throughout Scripture, and it doesn't make any sense.

And throughout the Scripture, God just continually makes a way for Tobin and you and me, he continually makes a way for Noah and Moses, all these guys, he continually makes a way for them to come back to God. Because he's pursuing them aggressively.

And what we see today, and what we saw last Sunday in this series, is that the ultimate solution to the problem, the ultimate thing that all these stories are pointing to in the Bible, the center of all the stories we've been reading, this whole journey we've been on, is Jesus.

And God has sent Jesus to be the final solution. I mean, he's the one that makes all the stories come together. He's the one that ultimately fulfills all the things that we need. He's the one who's come to bring us back to God.

[6 : 29] He hasn't made a way for us to come back to God, because if he's done that, then we have to do something. But he's come to bring us back to God. And as Christians, if you've never heard that, that's what we call the gospel. The gospel is that God has come in the form of Jesus Christ, his son, and he has done everything necessary to bring you and I back to God.

He's done it all. And we've seen that in his story. And then last Sunday, we got to Palm Sunday, and Jesus entered into Jerusalem. If you were here, you remembered it. And the kids just taught you it. They taught you it much better than I could ever teach you it.

So go back and listen to their story. But we're told it on Palm Sunday that Jesus rode in on a donkey. It was a symbol of being a ruler and a king and not a warrior.

A warrior rode in on a big white stallion. And we're told that there was 20,000 people, and Eric talked about this last week, 20,000 people coming in with him. It's like a rock concert, right? And they're all waving these branches, palm branches, and they're yelling, Hosanna.

And the palm branch is really significant. Don't have time to talk about it now. We'll talk about it later. But Hosanna means save us, save us, save us now. And Jerusalem during the Passover was an amazing place.

[7 : 35] Do you realize this? I mean, it usually held maybe 40,000 people. But during the Passover, the city just expanded to like 3 million people. There were 3 million people living in this one area for this Passover.

And Palm Sunday is also a really important day. It was the day you chose your lamb. I mean, according to the book of Exodus, all the families would go, and they would pick a lamb, a perfect lamb.

And every household would go, and they'd pick this perfect lamb, and they would care for this perfect lamb for a week. They would care for this perfect lamb and feed him and take care of him and love him and nurture him.

And then on the Passover, the day of atonement, at the same time, in Hebrew, it's at twilight between the hours, between the days. At the same time, everybody, they would kill their lamb, and the blood would splatter everywhere and would roll down the streets into the Kidron Valley, and there would be blood shed.

And it was terrible. And people, they realized how bad sin is. They realized how corrupt our nature is. They realized when corruption comes into our life, it separates us from each other, and it separates us from a holy God.

[8 : 44] So this is what's happening as Jesus walks in there. So on this Palm Sunday, all the shepherds would bring their sheep into Jerusalem, and some historians like Josephus would say that there were 350,000 lambs brought into this place.

350,000 sheep were all around Jerusalem, and they had these little stalls, and people would cry out. They would cry out, hey, hey, take my sheep. My sheep are good. Take my sheep. My sheep can save you. My sheep are pure.

My sheep will atone you. They're going to help you. They're going to make you right with God. They're going to save you. And Jesus walks into this, the Lamb of God.

And you know the story because the kids told the story is that things don't go as people wanted. Jesus isn't the Messiah that people wanted. He's a different type of Messiah, and the people turn on him. They get angry. And he's tried in this illegal trial.

It's so corrupt. Even within Roman government, they could never do it. And he's beaten, and he's condemned, and he's humiliated. He's hung on a cross on Good Friday.

[9 : 46] And at the exact same time that the high priest went into the temple to kill the lamb, to pour the blood over the mercy seat, the Bema seat, the places where the Ark of the Covenant was, at that exact same time, Jesus is hanging on a cross.

And all the gospels say that he yelled out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Because at that moment, God turned his back on him.

Because all of my sins and all of my brokenness and all of your sins and all of your brokenness were placed upon an unbroken, un-sinful God-man, and he took all of our debt, and he paid it.

The kids told the story. You know it. And he dies, and he's placed in this tomb, this fresh tomb in this garden, and it's freshly cut, and it's amazing. And the stone is rolled across, and it's into Friday night.

Right? You ever thought what it would be like to be there Friday night or Saturday? You ever thought what the stories people were saying?

[11 : 00] I mean, I've thought about this. Maybe I'm weird, but I kind of try to think about what it would be like being there and listening to what they were saying about Jesus. Do you remember when he said this, this, and this, this? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that.

And do you remember when he did this, this, and this? Oh, yeah, yeah, I know. It's amazing. You know, but all his disciples, they're scattered. They're afraid. They think they're next. And it's not good.

You know, last week, we were telling stories about Christina's mom. And there were times I walked into the house, and I thought I heard her speaking to me because she'd always give me instructions, as good mother-in-laws would always do.

I know I give a hard time to mother-in-laws, but, you know, I actually, I really love Karen. And so I, we told stories about her, and we told stories that were funny and how she dressed.

And this is a Karen tie. Kip and I went out for the funeral, and we picked her favorite colors. Her favorite colors were purple, green, and just these wild colors that you wear. I guess you can wear when you're 70 years old because no one cares what you dress like, right?

[11 : 59] And so this is kind of like her dresses would look like. And you're like, oh, wow. And so we told these Karen stories, but in the midst of the happiness and all these things, we still felt sad. We felt disappointed.

We felt lonely. We felt hopeless. But something happens in this story. Something different happens. And what we see is something happens, and it changes everything.

I mean, it changes what the disciples do. It changes how the disciples act. The disciples, all of them, die because of their faith now. They're not hiding anymore. They're not running around. They're killed or martyred throughout their life.

It changes the culture in Jerusalem at that time. It changes Judaism. It changes the Roman culture and empire. The Roman empires change, and historians will tell you, in a way that is unlike any other way because it didn't happen by violence.

It didn't happen by sword. It didn't happen by army. But it happened by love. And the Christians just loved well, and the Christians had compassion.

[13 : 03] And we're told by historians that the Christians actually died well because they were persecuted. And when it came time for them to die, they just go, well, praise the Lord. I'm with God in heaven, and heaven is so much greater than here, and it's going to be for eternity, so let's do it.

And this attitude changed them, and it changed their culture. It changed history. It changed the story. And it changes our story, right? And it changes Christina's mom's story, Karen's story.

We tell it differently now. Because if this didn't happen, her story would be sad and disappointed. But now her story is full of life and hope and meaning and truth.

So Psalm Matthew 28, 1 through 20, we've read. You have your bulletin. Just look at it. And it's in the Sunday morning, and the women are going to the tomb. They're going to prepare Jesus' body.

And there's two of them. There's Mary and another Mary. There might be up to six, but Matthew only records two. And in verse 2, there's this massive earthquake. I mean, it's this huge earthquake. So you wonder how the soldiers were sleeping when the disciples came to steal the body.

[14 : 08] There's this massive earthquake, and there's this angel there. So they had some really good sleep medicine or something like that. But this earthquake happens, and this angel is sitting on top of this boulder, and this stone is rolled away.

And this angel is white, and he's sitting there, and it's amazing. And the Roman guards, who are the trained killers of their time, I mean, they are tough. We're told they're standing there, and they're paralyzed.

They're in fear, and something that's incredible is happening to them. And then the angel speaks to this woman, and he says the same thing that all angels say. He says the same thing that an angel would say to you if he came to you tonight.

He would say, don't fear. Because there's something about angels that really freak people out. And then he gives this message, and he gives this message, and these are these eight words. And these eight words change history.

They change stories. They change meaning. They change our future. They change who we are, what we hope in, what we grab onto. These eight words, and you look at them in verse 6.

[15 : 06] He is not here, for he is risen. He is not here, for he is risen. Can you repeat that for me?

He is not here, for he is risen. He's not here, for he is risen. And then the angel goes on, and the angel shares with these ladies four imperatives in the Aramaic.

Four things they must do. Four things they have to do. Four things they need to be about doing. And I only want to talk about two of them. And they're still in verse 6. He says, he is not here, for he is risen.

Just as he said, come. And the word come in Greek actually means come here. Sit down. Watch it. Look at this. Be here. And you don't realize that when they're coming into this garden tomb, and you're going to see it with us when you go to Israel next year, because we go to this place.

And you go into this garden tomb, and you don't realize that what the women saw when they came there was something they didn't expect. I mean, no one thought Jesus was going to resurrect. No one thought it was possible.

[16 : 15] I mean, none of the disciples are there. None of them, I mean, the only people who really believed that he might do it were the Sanhedrin, because they sent the guards to make sure that he didn't do it. But no one else was there. And so these women walk in the middle of this chaos, and there's this earthquake, and things are shaking, and there's this boulder moving, and there's this angel sitting on top of this boulder.

And there's this light coming out of them, and the guards are sitting there, and they're kind of frozen. And actually, the words actually mean they're quaking, just like the earthquake. They're shaking, and some of them are laying on the ground. And these women are sitting there going, okay, what are we going to do?

This is like a crime scene. And as women, we're not even supposed to be here. The seal's been broken. If anybody's around this area, it's a death penalty. And the angel says, okay, come. Come.

And the women are looking at this thing, and they say, it's impossible. I mean, it's not probable. But they were beckoned to come to the tomb. And you know, I think as I prayed about this and went to this funeral, that I think many of us face the same kind of invitation today.

I think God is saying for many of us, come. But we have doubts. We have fears.

[17 : 28] We don't think it's possible. We don't know if it can work. We just don't know. I mean, some of us, even after we've come to the faith as Christians, we're still afraid to look into the tomb and really understand what it means because it means that we might have to surrender things or give up things.

And we have to ask these questions. Can we accept this? Is it possible? I don't know what it is about being a pastor, guys.

But, you know, sometimes as a pastor, when I go to a party or a wedding or a funeral, people either get angry at me and yell at me about things God's doing in their life. And I usually say, well, you have to talk to God.

He's my employer. I can't do anything about that. Or they just tell me these incredible stories. And these last two weeks in Dallas, I've had these incredible stories. And in the midst of all these ceremonies and things going on, this guy came up to me and he looked at these things talking about an Easter and the funeral and the resurrection.

He just said, I just don't know if it's real. I just don't know if it's possible. I mean, it just seems too out of control. It's just too weird.

[18 : 43] And I said, you know, I feel that same way sometimes. I did before I became a Christian. And even now, when I read these stories, I just think the only way this can be possible is if God really exists.

And if God really exists, and the same God who creates life, he can create resurrection life. And so if God really exists, he can do all these things, is what I told this guy.

And the question is, are we going to trust him? Are you going to trust him? Will you trust him with your life?

Will you trust him with your job? Will you trust him with your family? The God who creates life can create resurrection life. And he's true.

And he invites us to come and to look at the tomb and to follow him. The second word that sticks out to me is the second imperative. It's just the word see.

[19 : 49] In Greek, it means to ponder. It's a very rich word. It means to examine. It means to theorize. We get the word theorize from it. It means to take in all the things that you're seeing and think about it.

What's going on here? What's being said? What just happened? It means pay attention to it. And so they come in there, and he says, I want you to see. I want you to look into this empty tomb.

I want you to examine the facts and understand what this empty tomb means for you. This is something that's blown me away my whole life.

Because when you read scripture and you read this passage and you read Matthew, you realize really closely that Christianity and history are intertwined. There's no other faith, no other theory, no other belief intertwines itself with historical data like Christianity does.

And so what you realize really quickly when you study theology or even if you just read your Bible, you realize that Christianity is really easy to disprove. I mean, I can't disapprove you had a dream last night and an angel came to you and all these other things.

[20 : 57] I mean, that's, I don't know. I wasn't there. But if you want to disprove Christianity, you can do that. Because there's all these historical facts and ideas and things, and all you have to do is look at them.

And if you disprove one of the facts, then you've disproved all of Christianity. I mean, if you disprove the resurrection, then the first Corinthians passage I have in the back of your bulletin says that we're stupid. I can't use the word stupid in our family.

My kids are here. Don't say the word stupid. We're foolish, as Paul would say. But, you know, it's foolish because all you need to do is disprove Christianity. If you're here right now and you're thinking about these things, you're not a Christian yet, you know, there's an easy way to disprove Christianity.

All you need is look at the historical data and say, you know, that didn't happen and here's the evidence. And if you're a lawyer, there's a lot of great lawyers throughout history who have tried to do that. And a lot of great lawyers throughout history have been changed because of that.

I think that's why Matthew gives us so many details. He tells us the time. He tells us the empty tomb. He tells us the eyewitness accounts. He tells us the soldiers. He tells us the soldiers were bribed. He tells us this veil was split in the temple.

[21 : 58] How did he know the veil was split in the temple? The only person who could go into the temple was a high priest. Well, the only way he knew that is on Acts 6, the next book, you see this massive conversion of priests and people in Jerusalem as Peter preaches his first sermon.

And so all this information he's getting about what happened in the temple and what happened around, they're from all these eyewitness accounts. And these people were still alive. And 40 years later, 45 years later, Paul is talking to these people and Luke is talking to these people.

And if you were alive back then, you could have talked to those people and you could have asked them, did Jesus really do this? I mean, he said this. Did that really happen? You could have verified all those things. And the craziest thing out of all these things is that the women were the eyewitnesses to this.

Now, I love women and I love my wife and my girls. But, you know, if I wanted to write a story that everybody would believe, I would never write it the way the gospel did. Because in Jewish culture, women were worthless.

Just like Chinese culture, right? You had a son, a horse, or a woman. Which one did you give up? You gave up your wife first and then you gave up your horse and then maybe you had to give up your son. But the wife was always the first thing you gave up because they were not valued.

[23 : 13] And you have to realize that until Jesus came, until Christianity started, women were never valued in any culture. But Jesus made women the same as men.

And you look at that in Genesis. They're equal. They're co-heirs. And so if you wanted to write a story that you could disprove, the biggest thing you could disprove was the women because no one would listen to women.

And so when you read that, you go, well, it has to be true or there has to be something going on there. And so the word see means to look at these things and to examine these things and to think, is it true?

Is it true? Is it true? One of the conversations I had this last week, a guy was at the funeral and he was watching these things happen.

And we're talking afterwards and he goes, wow. Christianity really worked for her, didn't it? It really worked for her.

[24 : 11] I said, what do you mean by that? He goes, well, her life, it really worked for her, but I just don't think it can work for me. I don't know if I can be good enough. I don't know if I can do all the right things.

I don't know if I cannot do the things I shouldn't be doing. I don't know if it will work for me. So I asked the guy, what works for you? He says, myself.

I rely on myself. Now, I normally would not say anything, but I just, in the moment, I just felt so overwhelmed for this person.

I said, well, how does that work when you're looking at a casket? Does relying on yourself help you when you look at a dead person?

Or when you think about your death? This person didn't say anything. They just walked away.

[25 : 14] You know, Christianity beckons us to come see, to ponder, to realize Christianity is true.

Please don't leave here and say, I'm going to become a Christian because it works for me. Because, you know, one day it might not work for you. One day in your world, you might not get married to the person you want to get married to.

You might not have the type of kids you want to have. You might not get that Rolex that all the other pastors promise you when you become a Christian. And your job might happen the way it happens. Or you might lose somebody that you love in incredible ways.

And if you're only a Christian because it works for you, at that moment, you're going to realize, it doesn't work for me. The passage says we come to Christ because he's true.

He's in control. He knows what's best for you. He's going to give you the best thing in your life. And the question is, are you going to trust him? Are you going to allow him to do that? We're Christians because it's true, not because it works for us all the time.

[26 : 28] So think about it. There's this empty tomb and Jesus is walking around. And this empty tomb and Jesus walking around changes everything. Because if there was an empty tomb and no Jesus, then you wouldn't know what happened to his body. You didn't know where he was.

If there was a closed tomb and there was a Jesus, you'd be thinking, well, this isn't the real Jesus or it was a fake Jesus or somebody. And it's amazing to me during Easter and Christmas how many books and magazines and TV articles come out about who the real Jesus is and what he's doing.

And I think there's probably about 25 of them in America. I looked at the bookstore when I left. This is who Jesus was. This is really who he really is. This is what he's doing now. This is what he's not doing now. And it's just amazing how we try to argue these things and figure out what these things are.

But the passage says that an open tomb and Jesus walking around validates everything that he said. Because he said that he would come back to life. He said that he was God. And his actions demonstrate the truth of his words.

And the resurrection changes everything. And it changes what we hope in. It changes who we are. It changes what we believe in. It changes what we think even when we see pain. Does that make any sense?

[27 : 32] I'm sure I'm jet lagging. Maybe I'm just talking to myself. But the resurrection changes everything. So come and see and hope one final thing.

And then we'll go eat ice cream. I think our world today is a lot like Jerusalem during the Passover. I think there are all these sheep and goats that have been brought in.

And they're calling out to us, hey, buy me. And they're tempting us to buy them. And they're saying, invest your life in me. And I'll take care of you. To believe in me. Sacrifice your kids and your life and your health for me.

And if you do these things, I'm going to take care of you. And we do these things as people because we want to find meaning in our life. We want to find love. We want to find happiness. We want to find significance.

We want to find forgiveness. We want to find security. We want to find hope. And sometimes we even do it because we hope that it will bring us back to God. And so my question for you as you leave here to eat ice cream and pray and think about this Easter day.

[28 : 45] What lamb are you clinging to? What have you bought into in your life? It says, if I have this, I'll be happy.

If I own this, I'll be significant. If I carry this throughout my whole life, I'm going to be great. What is that lamb that you're holding on to? And my question for us is, is it true? Is it real?

Are you just fooling yourself? It's amazing to me how often I can fool myself even when I know the truth. But this story is truth.

And the question is, are we going to allow it to change us and affect us? Are we just going to ignore it and say no? No. The message of Easter is that Jesus is God and he's come to forgive our past.

He's the God of second chances. The message of Easter is that Jesus is God and he's come to secure our future. And to give us hope and meaning and significance and love and identity.

[29 : 56] The message of Easter is that Christ has come to give our lives here and now ultimate meaning and truth.

Something that we can grab onto no matter how hard things get. And the question is, will we accept it? Will we come? Will we see?

And more importantly, will we trust God with our life? Because the Bible says that he's 100% trustworthy. Because he's done everything he said he would.

And you can trust him. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your goodness and your mercy in our life. Thank you for the story of the resurrection. We thank you for Easter and the hope that is found in the empty tomb.

I don't know where we are in this room spiritually. I know that some of us are facing incredible trials in our lives.

[31 : 06] Suck. I know that some of us are doing pretty good. And we feel like, well, we're doing pretty good. So God must be happy with us. But that's not what your word says. So what I pray for us.

I pray that if there's somebody in here who's wondering, is it true and real? I pray if there's somebody in here who's wondering, should they come and see that you would open their eyes and that they would take a step of faith.

They would ask me, they would ask the person who brought them, they would come ask some of the elders, the staff, what does this really mean? What does Easter really mean? What does resurrection really mean? And how does it change your life? I pray they would ask these questions of us.

I pray that our kids would ask these questions of us today so that we can give this truth to them. So that we can raise up future generations that are based in truth and reality.

And not in a lie. And Father, I pray for those of us who've been on this journey with you for a while. And sometimes we just forget to go back to the tomb. We forget to look in. We forget to see the empty grave.

[32 : 09] We forget to realize and think about what that means in our work. Because the next two imperatives is come and see. And the next two ones are go and tell.

But until you've come and see, you don't even know what to go and tell about. But I pray for those of us who have come and seen and have entrusted our lives to you. That we would be faithful to go and tell those around us at work and in our family.

And around the grave. Lord, I pray for our church here. I pray that we wouldn't be just a church that meets just to make ourselves happy and feel good about each other. But we'd be a church that realizes and remembers what it was like before we knew you.

How we walked in darkness and how we walked in hopelessness. And how our lives, we kept trying for the next new thing to make our lives meaningful and good and happy.

And the next new thing just failed us. We looked for the next new thing. Help us to be a church that always remembers what that was like. Help us to go to the people around us and to show them an empty tomb.

[33 : 15] And then a life that is changed by the truth of your word. Lord, we love you. And we need you.

We pray these things in your son Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.