

Thomas, the Big Believer

Dealing with Doubt

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Would you take your Bibles and let's turn to the New Testament Gospel of John. John's Gospel 20 and we're going to begin reading at verse 19 and read through the end of verse 31. John's Gospel chapter 20, beginning at verse 19,

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." 24 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is God's word. Let me pray.

Father, would you help us to see this morning the length of what you have gone to that *we might believe in your Son Jesus Christ? Lord, there will be many things that will*

attempt to hinder us this morning, things that will attempt to hinder me, to hinder hearers, to distract, and I ask you, Lord, to come by your Spirit today, come and help me and come and help each one of us this morning. There is so much at stake here. We need to hear from heaven but we need to obey that which we hear from heaven. Help us today, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today I want to conclude the brief series we have been in entitled "Dealing with Doubt." I want to conclude by considering "Thomas, the Big Believer." Thomas, the big believer, and I doubt many of you would want to recognize Thomas as a big believer because my years of being in the church, I have heard nothing but "doubting Thomas, doubting Thomas." I mean, you mess up one time and there you go, you get labeled "doubting Thomas." I want to speak to you this morning about big believing Thomas. Yeah, he doubted. He did. In fact, Jesus told him, "Stop doubting." That's the literal translation. It says here, "Stop disbelieving and stop doubting. Stop doubting and believe." That's pretty strong. It is, "Stop doubting and believe once and for all. Let's get this settled." That's what he's saying. And Thomas did. He did stop. He stopped doubting and he believed and he made what many say is the greatest profession of faith recorded in all of Scriptures, "My Lord and my God!"

Well, to be able to say that. To be able to say that in a world that is so unhinged, I'll tell you what, just about every conversation I have with people, people bring up, "Boy, what a mess this country is in." What a mess. You've got all the agitation going on in North Korea, of course the Middle East is always in a fervor, and in our own country we've got all kinds of protesting and resistant going on. Boy, don't you want to be able to say in the midst of it all, "My Lord and my God!" Don't you want to be able to do that? Don't you want to be able whether it's standing at the bedside of a loved one or whether you're in the bed, be able to say, "My Lord and my God!" Don't you want to be able to speak with a firm conviction when you're standing at the graveside of a loved one that has gone on in Christ to be able to say, "I'm grieving but, My Lord and my God!" You probably do, don't you? I want to.

You see, Thomas did and the question is this morning: how can one lay aside all their doubt and come to faith in Christ? How can one stop doubting and embrace Christ fully? Or another question: how can one who has already come to faith, many of you this morning who have already come to faith in Christ, how can you see your faith strengthened? Because you see, you notice the doors were locked, we read the disciples were behind locked doors and they were afraid, you see, the truth is we may say we trust Jesus, we may say we trust Jesus but the truth is we can easily become fearful. We can easily become fearful and begin to shift our trust from that which we cannot see which is my Lord and my God, and shift it to things that we can see and we can better get a handle on. So the question is: how can those of us who have put our faith and trust in Christ, how can we have our faith strengthened?

So with those two questions in mind, I'll think we'll answer those during the process of this this morning but before we do that, I want you to understand how important this text is. Did you notice in verse 30, this is a fascinating verse, I don't know, we just kind of

look over it. It says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book." Now what is that saying? John is telling us that he had so much, so many details about Jesus, so many things that he did, he had so much to choose from that he had to select. This is in. This is out. This is in. This is out. And so John himself as a person, as a writer, he had to choose. There was so much to choose from, such an abundance of what Christ has done and not all of it is here, keeping in mind that he wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God so we can also say primarily that God is orchestrating, he's saying, "This is in and this is out," but what we need to see is in that verse this has been left in. So that ought to say to us this morning, "This must be really important because it was included and it was written that you might believe." And I'm not talking about the wooden sign in the craft shop that says "Just Believe." I'm not talking about that. It says, "that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name," meaning if you don't do that, you don't have life. That's how important this is, you see. That's how epic it is.

So this is important. You see, Jesus one week earlier than verse 24, he showed up, the resurrected Christ. He showed up, the doors were locked but he showed up. He didn't need a locksmith. He showed himself as the resurrected Christ but Thomas wasn't there and it was later, days later, that Thomas was with the disciples and they said, "Thomas, we've seen the Lord," which is to say, by the way, "he is risen." You know, that's the heartbeat of that statement. "We've seen the Lord. He is risen." And Thomas says, "No. No, I'm not going to believe that unless..." And that's why Thomas has gotten a hard time ever since. He says, "I'm not going to believe this." In fact, notice he said, "I will never believe." Pretty strong.

This is why Thomas has gotten such a hard time from us, but you notice it doesn't say that he didn't want this to be true. It didn't say, he doesn't say, "I don't want him to be risen." He doesn't say that. He says, "I'm just not going to believe this until I see certain things." Then when Jesus shows up, he says, "Thomas, look, stop doubting and believe. Stop your doubting and believe." Once and for all. Decisive moment.

I was just looking at this this week and I thought a couple of questions I have, at least, maybe you have the same ones. Question 1: are we supposed to believe every spiritual claim that we hear? Are we supposed to believe everything that we hear out there, everything that blows through the church? I use that phrase a lot of times, blows through the church, because usually when something blows through the church it needs to blow on through. It doesn't need to stay. Blow right on through.

Years ago, a little over 20 years ago, some of you I know will remember the phenomenon that was reported that there were some worship services where gold flakes were falling down, gold dust was falling down. The worship was so mighty and intense that gold flakes were falling down and were falling down on people's arms and then come of course, when it hit their arms it disappeared. Kind of hard to validate that, right? They went on to claim that people's teeth, that silver fillings had turned to gold. I remember when all that was blowing through the church back in the early 1990s and I remember being around believers who were like, "Wow, did you hear this?" I said, "I don't believe

it. I don't believe it." And boy, it was like, "You apostate, you! How dare you not believe these things! We're supposed to believe this stuff!" Are we supposed to believe everything that comes down the pike, everything that blows through the church? My answer would be an emphatic no. Paul wrote to the Galatians and said, "If you hear another Gospel, even if an angel brings another Gospel, don't believe it." Time and time again we read in the New Testament: test the spirits. That's another way of saying, "Don't believe everything that comes down the pike."

So I thought about this this week and, you see, Jesus is not telling Thomas to never question anything. When he says, "Stop doubting and believe," he's not saying, "Don't you ever question anything." No, he's talking about something more specific here and we need to see what it is. So what specifically is Thomas to stop doubting and believe? That's the question. And it is this: the authoritative witness of the apostles. The authoritative witness of the apostles, the apostles that said, "Hey Thomas, we have seen the Lord. He has risen." And that's why Jesus says, "Thomas, you need to stop doubting and believe. Believe what they have told you."

Second question: why does Jesus accommodate Thomas and give him what he says he doesn't need? Jesus said in verse 29, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." In other words, "You didn't really have to see me because there are going to be other people who don't see me and believe and blessed are they." Why does Thomas get to see? It's because Jesus wanted Thomas to be one of the apostles.

Now why is that a big deal? You see, we hear today in the church there is Apostle So-and-so and Apostle So-and-so. Let's be clear here: no matter what their title is today, they are not a biblical apostle, okay? A biblical apostle is one who has seen the risen Lord; one who has actually seen the risen Lord. You see, Jesus showed himself to his disciples to the degree that they were overwhelmed. They were overwhelmed with evidence and then having shown them, having revealed himself to them, he was ready now to send them out, you see? That's what he said back in verse 21, "even so I am sending you." An apostle, literally the word means, "one who is sent." So what we need to see here is this: we are told in the Bible that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles. The church is not built on the foundation of gold dust coming down out of the heavens or whatever. It's not built on these fanciful claims that we hear time and time again. We need to be clear on this. The church is not even built on Jesus showing up here and showing us his hands. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles' eyewitness of the risen Christ. You see, what they heard and saw regarding Jesus they recorded it and that is why John said in verse 31, he says, "but these things are written that you might believe."

You see, this is the point in verse 29. You've got to see this in order for you to understand this. Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Now stop there for a minute and think about that. That includes you and I. If you have believed, you haven't had the benefit of standing there seeing the hands and the torn side, you haven't had the benefit of that, and

Jesus said you are blessed. You are blessed though you have not seen yet you believed. How did you come to believe? How did you come to believe? It was the witness of the apostles who did see him. You see, the point is this: Jesus is signaling right here in verse 29 a transition that takes place from this: faith based upon seeing the actual Christ to faith based upon believing the apostles' authoritative testimony of Christ. You've got to see that. You see, that is how you and I have come to believe. It's been passed down. It's been passed down. You and I haven't had the benefit of seeing the physical Jesus and Jesus is making clear here, transition, "Your faith is not going to be based upon actually seeing the physical Christ, it's going to be based upon the authoritative witness of the apostles." So that's why Jesus says to Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe what the apostles have told you." In other words, you can trust the witness of the apostles recorded in the Scriptures. You can really trust it. That's what Jesus is saying. You can really trust that, okay?

So, here's what we're ready to ask now: after this interaction between Jesus and Thomas, Thomas says in verse 28, "My Lord and my God!" No evidence that he put his finger, no evidence that he put his hand, nothing there. Upon seeing Jesus, he said, "My Lord and my God!" He stopped doubting and he believed. Question: how can you if you're here today, how can you lay aside your doubt and come to faith in Christ? Or if you're here today and you have already professed faith in Christ, how can you and I have our faith strengthened? Because again, so often we get fearful, we get closed up in our lives just like the disciples were, they were closed up there and they needed something to happen in their lives that would thrust them outward, you see, and to be able to live boldly and courageously for Christ in a fallen world. So what will it take? What will it take?

Well, I have a list of a few things. The first one is this. How can we lay aside our doubt and come to faith in Christ, how can we who have put our faith in Christ, how can we have our faith strengthened? 1. Listen to the apostles. We already mentioned that but I want to go back to it. Listen to the apostles. Look at verse 25, "So the other disciples told him." Now you see, you're going to have a hard time if you're not looking at that. If you're staring at the wall or you're asleep already, boy, if I could just come out and slap you. Really, I mean it. I don't know what I've got to do. Stand on my head? Do somersault? I don't know what I've got to do. I don't know. Don't get in the bad habit of not opening the Scriptures, okay? Just don't do that.

So you're looking at verse 25 and you don't see this in the English, okay, so let me help you here, "So the other disciples kept on telling him." The other disciples kept on telling him. That's a huge difference than "they told him," right? One says they told him one time. Thomas walks in, "Hey, we've seen the risen Christ. We've seen the Lord." And that's it. That's it. Close the book. No, it says they kept on telling him. Thomas said, "I'm not going to believe this." "Thomas, we've seen him. We seen the Lord." "I'm not going to believe it." "Thomas, we've seen the Lord." Each one of them chiming in. It says the disciples, each one of them were chiming in, "I've seen him, Thomas. You know me. I'm not given to delusion. I've seen the Lord."

You see, one of the dangers that you and I face is the battle of Jesus becoming a mere abstraction to us. We come to church and we sing the songs and we say, "My, my, Jesus is everything to me. Jesus is Lord and he is wonderful." And Thomas said in verse 28, "My Lord and my God!" but when I read that I thought about the time where Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I tell you?" You see, if you're struggling with what "Lord" means, it means your Lord is the one you answer to, the Master. So Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord but you do not do what I tell you?" And do you know the answer why? Do you want to know why? It's because Jesus is a mere abstraction. He's not real. Oh, we talk about him and we love to think about Jesus and the risen Christ, we think about it but Jesus can become a mere abstraction to us rather than being real and then what happens is we can call him Lord, Lord but we can go on about our lives and do what we want to do, not what he wants us to do.

Now, how do you fix that? How do you fix that? Well, in order for Jesus to become real, for Jesus to truly be Lord, we must listen to the apostles' authoritative eyewitness testimony of Jesus that is recorded in Scripture and the only way of seeing that is we read our Bibles. We meditate on Scripture. We love Scripture. We study Scripture. You know, it's part of the fabric of our lives, you see? And when we do so, we are listening. We are listening to what the authoritative apostles have told us. That is how we lay aside our doubt and come to faith in Christ or we can have faith in Christ that is already there strengthened as we listen to the apostles.

How do I know this? Well, I would glean this from when Jesus was walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus and he came alongside of them and he began to open the Scriptures to them, he began to give them a Bible lesson, you might say, and show that all in the Old Testament Scriptures you see Jesus. "They speak of me," he said. "These words speak of me. It's all about me." Then after it was over they said this, "Did not our hearts burn within us when he opened the Scriptures to us?" Which is to say they had an uncontrollable desire for Jesus. That's what it means for our hearts to burn within us, it means that you have an uncontrollable desire for Jesus. "I want Jesus. I want him." You see, what happened to those guys on Emmaus was Jesus was not a mere abstraction to them, he was real. How did that happen? By the authoritative witness of the word of God.

How do we have our faith strengthened? How do we lay aside doubt and come to faith in Christ? First we have to listen to the apostles, but the second thing is we need to see how patient the Lord has been with us. You see, after Thomas reacts the way he reacts in verse 25 and says, "I will never believe. I'm not going to believe," you'd think that Jesus would write him off. You'd think that Jesus would say, "This is not the kind of guy I want representing me. I want somebody who is willing. I want somebody who is willing to buy in. I don't want some doubting person. I don't want somebody who is wavering. I want a certain type of person. Thomas, you're not it." But he didn't write him off. In verse 27, verse 27 kind of reveals to us that Jesus already knew how Thomas felt in what he had said without even being there. Hint, hint: Jesus knows what we're thinking. He knows what we're thinking. He knows our doubts. You see, this wasn't Thomas's best moment. It wasn't. It wasn't Thomas's best moment but still Jesus was patient with Thomas and when I see that I think about this: Jesus knows all of your broken promises. He knows all your

doubts. He knows your worst moments. He knows all your fits and starts. But if you are his, he has been patient with you, hasn't he? He's been patient and, you see, doesn't that melt your heart? Doesn't it melt your heart when you think about your failures? When you think about the fits and starts? Your times of doubt and he has steadfast love on you that will not let you go? Doesn't that patience melt your heart? It should. It did for Thomas. Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" His heart is melted by the patience of the Lord.

Well, how do we lay aside doubt and come to faith in Christ? How do we have faith that is already in Christ strengthened? Thirdly, we look at his wounds. Look at his wounds. You see, Thomas said that he is not going to believe unless Jesus shows up. I had this question the other day and it's a good question: do you know what, if God wants us to believe, if God wants people to believe around the world, why doesn't he show himself? What does he remain so hidden? Why doesn't God come out on Monday and just write in the sky, "I'm here really." You know? Why doesn't he come in a demonstrative way that would cause people to go, "Yeah! Yeah!" That's a good question. That's a good question.

But you know, you might think about it this way. Let's say that you're in your room and you decide, "I'm going to clean my room." That's for some of you younger folks. "I'm going to get up and clean my room. Parents would be pleased with me. I think they would all pat me on the back. I'm going to clean my room." So you get up and you're just getting invigorated and getting ready to clean the room and all of a sudden your mom walks in and says, "Clean up this room! It is a mess!" And all of a sudden you think, you might not say it but you might think, "Well, I was going to clean my room but you're not going to tell me what to do." I'm going to ask a question: what is that? What is that? What has moved you from this willingness, this wonderful idea, "I'm going to clean up my room. I'm going to do it now." And you get up and you get ready and your mom comes in and says, "Clean up this room!" And you say, "I'll clean it if I want to but I'm not going to have anybody tell me what to do."

So let's think about it this way now. What if, you see, some say if God would just show up, I'd believe. If he would just show up, I'd believe. I really will. I'll believe. I'll count myself in. So let's say God shows up and he says to you, you know, you look in your rearview mirror and God shows up and he says, "Clean up your life. Clean up your life!" What are you going to do? Can I answer that for you? You're going to say, "I'll do it if I want to but I'm not going to have anybody tell me what to do."

Now how do we know that? It's because the Bible again and again and again tells us that there is something in the fallen heart that resists God, that actually hates God, that we are at war with God. Now I know some people will hear that and they'll go, "I don't believe that." Let me tell you something: you get to doing what you want to do, following your desires and your lusts and it's just all about you and God shows up and says, "Hey, clean up your life," that's when the hate will come out. That's when it will come out.

You see, the demons already believe that there is a God and they tremble. They already believe that and so the question is: is that the kind of belief that God is looking for? Is

that what God is looking for so he would just show up and write in the sky, "Here I am. Everybody believe." The demons believe. Is that the kind of belief that God is looking for? No, let's say you are driving down the road and you do, you look in your rearview mirror and you see a policeman and everything changes, doesn't it? It really does. I know for me, the first thing I look at is my speedometer, am I doing the limit. Then I drop her down, you know, just in case it's not working right, the limit is 60, let's bring it down to 55 just to be safe. Then I start using the turn signal that I sometimes don't use and I start stopping fully at a stop sign when I sometimes don't do that. Now, is it because that all of a sudden I've had a change of a love for the law? Is it because I love coming to a full stop at a stop sign? You know it's not. You know it's not. It's because a policeman is in the rearview mirror. You see, nothing about me has changed in the internal heart. I've adjusted my behavior because the policeman is in the rearview mirror, you see. You say, "I just want God to show up. I just want him to show up and then I'll believe." God could show up and you could change your internal behavior and all that kind of stuff but what about your heart? What about the real core of you, you see?

God knows that and that's why we need more – listen – we need more than a rearview mirror God. We need a wounded God. We need a wounded God. There is no evidence – I'll say this again – no evidence that Thomas said, "Okay, I'll put my finger in. I said I'd never believe unless I put my finger in your wounds." No evidence that he did that. No, when he saw the wounded Savior, he said, "My Lord and my God!" You see, Thomas saw the wounded Savior who was wounded for his transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities. I'll ask you to just meditate on that for just a minute. If you want to take some little something home with you today to meditate on, meditate on this: he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Iniquities, the Hebrew word is "twisting." You see, there are some of us in this room, maybe many of us, we have twisted in a lot of different ways but one would be this: we have twisted God's good design for sex into our own selfish ways. God's good design for sex. Here it is and we've said, "Nope. Nope, I don't like that. I want it this way." So we twist it. That's iniquity.

He was bruised for our transgressions, wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. What's that saying? It's saying that even those kinds of sins, even the ugliest things, even at our worst moments, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. You see, that's not just for our forgiveness, it's also to set us free from the slavery of our sinful passions and to have his transforming presence in our lives right now. You see, Paul would say later, "I am compelled by the love of Jesus." In other words, "I am driven. I continue to follow Christ. I continue to do for Christ. I do these things, I am compelled by his love for me." Not by a rearview mirror God. A rearview mirror God will never compel us. It will take seeing the wounds of the risen Savior, of a Savior who has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That is what will strengthen our faith. That is what will cause a person and as many in this room have done, they have stepped aside, laid aside their doubt and they have come fully to Christ, the wounded, risen Savior. That's why the hymn writer said,

"Crown Him with many crowns!
Behold His hands and side—

Rich wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified."

Look at the wounds.

Finally one last thing, how do you lay aside doubt? You come to faith in Christ as thousands have done. How do we have faith in Christ already, how do we have it strengthened to where we can live courageously? The final answer would be we have to drop our conditions. I've heard this before and perhaps you have and sometimes it's not verbalized, it's more internal, a person would say, "Well, I'll believe the Lord, I'll believe in you if you'll do this for me. Here is my condition, Lord. I'll believe in you, I'll do what you want me to do if you will do this for me." Or it may sound like this, one who is a professing believer may say it this way, "Lord, I'll fully commit my life to you," and we start looking around, "Lord, I'll do this. I might consider doing this if you will do this for me." So let's be clear: if you think that way, you have conditions. You just laid out conditions to the sovereign God of the universe and you said, "Well, I'll do this. I'll believe. I'll do this. I'll fully commit. I'm all in if you do this for me." And friend, do you see what you're doing? Do you see what you're doing? You see, if you say, "God, I'll do this for you if you will do X for me," X is what you're really after. If you come to God with your condition and say, "God, I will do this for you, I will believe in you, I will follow you, I will commit my life to you forever if you will do X for me," X is what you're really after. You're not really after God, you're only after God to the degree that he can help you get what you really want, you see? In other words you have your conditions.

And if that's you, if that's you today, if that's how you're going to navigate the Christian life, if that's the way you thought it through then listen: Jesus is saying to you, he is saying to you today, "Stop wavering. Stop wavering. Stop trying to keep one foot over here in the world and one foot in the kingdom of God. Stop." That's what he's saying to Thomas, "Stop doubting and once and for all nail it down. Believe." And can I say it this way? I'm going to anyway: Jesus is not saying, "It's okay if you don't." Jesus commands belief. He is commanding belief and therefore if we do not obey the command to believe, then we leave ourselves incredibly vulnerable for now and for all eternity. It is essential that we believe. "These things were written that you might believe." You see, the same thing that Jesus is saying to Thomas here, "Stop doubting and believe," he says to us. Jesus commands, "Stop doubting and believe the apostles' authoritative testimony of my life, death and resurrection."

You see, I know, I know, I know that there is all kinds of crazy stuff that can happen in life. You can hang out at a church and you can come up with all kinds of reasons over years accumulating of reasons why, "Well, you know, they this and this person that and this and this," and you can just accumulate all kinds of stuff that leave you questioning and doubting and Jesus says to you, "Stop doubting what the apostles say. Stop doubting their authoritative testimony of me. They saw me, I'm alive, so stop letting all this filtered in stuff of this world, the failures of people..." Christ will never fail you. Stop doubting and believe in the Lord Jesus because – and I'll say this and we're done – if you say

anything less than "My Lord and my God!" you are not a Christian. We are not Christian without the reality that Christ is both Lord and our God.

Is that real for you? Do you see? Do you see the depth of what God has gone to that you would believe? He's not asking you to climb the highest mountain, swim the deepest sea. Don't be naming, "I'll do some great thing. I'll do some great thing and then God will give me..." No, he's not asking you to do something, he's done the great thing. He says to you and I, "Believe." There are some of us here today that need to walk away from doubt, walk away from all excuses and come to Christ, believe today. There are others here that, you know, we waiver and we need our faith strengthened and so for both we need to listen to the apostles. Oh, we need to see the patience that the Lord has shown to us. We need to look at the wounds. When we sing, "Jesus, he loves me," it needs to be more than just words and to see how he loved us, how he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and then we need to just lay down all of our conditions and say, "Lord, I don't want X, I want you. I want you more than I want anything in this world." Oh, that we would be able to say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" because anything less is not Christian.

Let's bow our heads.