

SERIES: The Good News, as Reported by Matthew  
SERMON: Salvation and Abundant Life Through Cross-Bearing  
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:21-28  
SPEAKER: Josh Black  
DATE: March 16, 2008

If you've looked at the bulletin you'll notice that I will not be preaching from a traditional Palm Sunday text this morning and Mike won't be preaching from a traditional Easter text next week. We will instead be staying with our series in Matthew. However, I was amazed at how well the passages in Matthew for the next two weeks complement the traditional Palm Sunday and Easter passages. So I would like to begin this morning by reading a section from Mark's account of the Triumphal Entry. Please direct your attention to the screen.

*And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"*<sup>1</sup>

What caused all this excitement and such a joyous welcome? What was it about Jesus that caused these people to throw their clothes down on the ground, to chop off tree branches and to shout, "Hosanna!"?

All of my life I have never known what the word Hosanna means. For some reason the Bible translators don't define the word for us and I have always been too embarrassed to ask what it means. So for all of us who have been singing "Hosanna" since we were kids and still don't know what it means I did a little research. Hosanna is an interesting word. It comes from the Hebrew phrase *Hoshiya na*. This phrase is found only once in the Old Testament, in Psalm 118:25, where the Psalmist cries out, "*Hoshiya na*," or "Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!" Hosanna means, "Save us, please." As I looked at the word *Hoshiya* I noticed a resemblance to my own name Joshua. Joshua, or *Yehoshua*, is the Hebrew word for Jesus and it means something like, "The Lord saves." So "the Lord saves" is a promise: *Yehoshua*, and "Save us, please" is a prayer: Hosanna.

The Jews believed that the Lord would send someone to save them from their political and social oppression that they were experiencing at the hands of the Romans. They believed that God would send them a Joshua of sorts, or a Jesus – a King and a Savior. Because they believed in the promise, "The Lord saves", the people of God could confidently pray, "Hosanna, save us!" So when the crowds of people in Jerusalem see Jesus, the Lord who saves, coming, they cry out, "Hosanna! Save us, please, salvation is coming, salvation has come."<sup>2</sup>

In each of us I believe there is a desire to live life to the fullest. We want the most out of life. We want to be free and to feel secure. We desire happiness and adventure. And we all long for relationships that are dynamic and meaningful. But we live in a messed up world and often our desire to live an abundant life is met with frustration and so we cry out, "save us, please. This world is not right, deliver me! I want more, Hosanna!"

The Jews were excited because they, like all of us, wanted a better life. And they believed Jesus, the Messiah, would give them a better life. And they were right concerning God's promise of salvation and they were right about *who* God had sent to save them. But they were very wrong about *how* God wanted to save them and *what* God wanted to save them from. Their idea of a successful king and God's way of successfully accomplishing his purposes were very different. I think it's fair to say that they were

disappointed in Jesus. For Jesus, whom they welcomed with shouts of “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday, they killed with shouts of “crucify him!” just five days later.

If you would please turn with me in your bible to Matthew 16:21-28 I think you will see how our text for this morning fits perfectly with Palm Sunday.

You see, Peter and the disciples were also anticipating the arrival of the Messiah. And if you remember Mike’s sermon last week it was Peter specifically who first acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, the one they had been waiting for. But Peter like the crowds had a wrong understanding of how God would provide salvation to his people. Jesus had to show his disciples what the Messiah must do to bring salvation and to give life to his people.

I will be reading from the English Standard Version. You can follow along in your Bibles or you can follow on the screen as we read verses 21-23:

*From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

This whole announcement must have been a shock to the disciples on multiple levels. First of all suffering, in Jerusalem, would have seemed to be a contradiction to the purpose of the Messiah. The Messiah was supposed to come to Jerusalem, as King, to end suffering for the chosen people of God, not to *suffer* at the hands of the people of God. The Messiah was to be successful, not a failure.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, I don’t think the disciples would have had any idea as to why the Messiah would have to be put to death in order to bring salvation. We as Christians understand that Jesus had to die in order to save us from our sins, but the Jews weren’t expecting that. Their expectation was for a mighty king to come and lead a mighty army against their social and political oppressors, the Romans.

The word Messiah means, “The Anointed One.” In the Old Testament kings were anointed. And so it was a king that these Jews were expecting – only on a larger scale. But in the Old Testament priests were also anointed. And it was priests who offered sacrifice for sin. It is truly incredible that when Jesus, the Messiah comes, he comes not just as an anointed king or an anointed priest, but rather he comes as *the* Anointed One; both the perfect King who will rule over all of his creation, and the perfect Priest who offers a perfect sacrifice for our sins.<sup>4</sup> For God, salvation was bigger than his people expected.

We want abundant life and we want to be saved, but a lot of times we don’t understand what we really need to be saved from so that we can experience abundant life. God knew that his people wanted deliverance from Rome, but what they really needed was deliverance from their sin. And so when the text tells us that he began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and be raised he is explaining to them that this is the only way that they will be saved and gain the kind of life they really need and want.

### **I. Jesus explains that eternal life comes *only* through His cross-bearing and resurrection. (21-23)**

God knows that it doesn’t matter how good or bad our life is here on earth if our souls are dead. He knows that we will never experience an abundant life here or in eternity without the sacrifice offered for our sin through Jesus’ death on a cross.

And that is why he *must* go to Jerusalem to suffer. Jesus knew full well that he was the Messiah. Peter and the disciples knew this too. And Jesus knows that a Messiah's job is to save. Jesus is saying here, "I *must* go to suffer and die and be raised; if I don't do these things you will have no salvation, and no life." But Jesus is saying something else here with the word *must*. He is saying, "This plan is the Father's *will* for my life and I fully intend to follow it. This is the Father's *way* of saving his people. There is no other way." Jesus is fully surrendered to the will of his Father and he will not be tripped up by any obstacles to accomplishing God's plan of salvation.

Peter, however, had other ideas. God's plan of salvation by means of suffering and death seemed off to Peter. And he was so startled by Jesus' announcement that he *must* go to Jerusalem and die that that he missed the most important part of the announcement: Jesus would rise from the dead and conquer death forever. Jesus would not be a failure as a Messiah and simply be led away to die. He would be raised on the third day, successful and triumphant!

#### **A. Peter rebukes Jesus. (22)**

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."*

This is a sharp and forceful rebuke from Peter. It is obvious that the primary reason for this rebuke is due to Peter's misunderstanding of what a Messiah would do, but there is more. Peter couldn't bear the thought of Jesus, who was so dear to him, having to suffer. All of this was more than Peter could take. But Peter's rebuke is too strong. Especially for the guy whom Jesus just called the rock in verse 18. But Peter was only doing what so many of us do with God. We want God in our lives and we want salvation, but we want it on our own terms. When God does things that are outside of our comfort zone or the box we've put Him in, we often rebuke Him with our attitude or our lack of response to his leading. But Jesus shows Peter that the plan God has for salvation is bigger than Peter's worry or expectations.

#### **Jesus rebukes Peter. (23)**

*He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Peter's rebuke of Jesus was strong, but Jesus' rebuke of Peter is even stronger. Peter rebukes Jesus because he didn't like his plan. Jesus rebukes Peter because he is getting in the way of God's plan; and this is a serious mistake. Jesus will not allow anyone or anything to get in the way of God's plan for his life.

Early on in Jesus' ministry He was tempted by Satan to abandon God's plan and God's way of bringing salvation to his creation. At that time Jesus rebuked Satan and told Satan to go away. Satan is the enemy of God and will do anything he can to mess up God's plan. Peter, however, was not the enemy of God or of Jesus, he was a man of faith and a devoted follower of Jesus, but Jesus is showing us here that even Rocks can quickly become stumbling blocks.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Rocks can quickly become stumbling blocks.**

Even the people who are on Jesus' side can act as an enemy to the will of God through their behavior. And anyone or anything is a hindrance to God's plan of salvation is of Satan. And Satan's way says there is no success without human greatness.

## **Satan's way: no success without human greatness.**

Peter was promoting Satan's way of success by rebuking God's way of humble sacrifice. So Jesus rebukes Peter and his rebuke is strong, but it is very appropriate because God's plan is of utmost importance and God's way of successfully accomplishing his plan is equally important.

God's way is to save his creation through sending his one and only Son to die on a cross for our sin, be raised from the dead on the third day and to declare eternal victory over the most ruthless enemy that has ever oppressed us – death and separation from God. This is not just a good plan, this is the only plan that works, this is God's plan; let us not get in the way. For God's way says there is no salvation without a cross.

### **1. God's way: no salvation without a cross.**

When Jesus says to Peter, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man"* he is saying, just like he did to Satan, "get out of my way, I will accomplish the work God has given me to do. I will submit to the Father's will and nothing will stand in my way."

But there's something else here that I don't want you to miss: Jesus tells Peter to get behind him, but he doesn't tell him to go away, like he did Satan. Jesus is putting Peter in his place. He reminds Peter that he is a follower and that his place is behind Jesus. And this is the place where all disciples belong. If we are to be Jesus' disciples we have to follow Jesus and if we're going to follow Jesus we too have to get behind him and surrender our will to him, in the same way that He surrendered his will to the Father.

The first part of our passage shows us clearly that Jesus would accomplish the will of the Father and provide eternal life for us by bearing a cross and rising from the dead. Let's turn now to the second part of the passage to see how God intends to give us abundant life, beginning in verse 24:

*Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."*

The way God intends for us to experience abundant living in this life is not much different from his way of providing us eternal life – both come through a cross. Eternal life comes only from the cross that Jesus bore for all of us. Abundant life comes only through our own cross that we must bear.

## **II. Jesus explains that abundant life comes only through our own cross-bearing. (24-27)**

The goal of discipleship is to become just like Jesus – this is why Jesus tells Peter to get behind him. And that is why this text tells us that if we want to come after Jesus we have to do what he did – deny ourselves, submit to the will of God and pick up our cross.

### **A. Disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross. (24)**

We've all heard this phrase, deny yourself and take up your cross, many times, but I wonder if we really understand what it means. Maybe if we look at what cross-bearing represented during the time Jesus spoke these words we'll be able to understand better what it really means to deny ourselves and pick up

our cross, today. A cross, as you probably know, was an instrument of capital punishment used by the Romans. They would “crucify” criminals by nailing them to a cross. But before crucifixion would take place the one who was sentenced would have to carry their cross to the place where they would be crucified. The Romans intended for crucifixion to be a public event.

### **1. A cross is public**

This publicizing of the crime and punishment of the criminal would serve to curb rebellion and crime against the Roman government and the Roman way of life. There was also an element of shame that would have inevitably come with public crucifixion. People would jeer at the man bearing his cross, and mock the foolishness of his life that was now receiving its due punishment.

A cross is also fatal.

### **2. A cross is fatal**

A cross wasn't a slap on the hand, it meant sure death. If you were carrying a cross, you were as good as dead; you were on a one way trip. This is why the public nature of the cross-bearing was so powerful.

Now the cross Jesus bore was both public and fatal. But it was not imposed on Jesus like it was on criminals. You see Jesus wasn't a criminal; he wasn't guilty. He was perfect in every way. And he was also perfectly capable of avoiding the cross. Let it never be said that Jesus was a victim. He was not a victim, he was a volunteer. He could have stopped the whole deal at any time. But the Bible tells us that “for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame.” Jesus' lived his whole life as if he were a dead man – dead to his own will, in tune with the Father's will and obedient to the point of death. He was not a victim he was a volunteer. He willingly suffered a public death so that the world would know that he died for our sins. He wasn't killed against his will, he denied his human will, submitted to the Father's will, and made a choice to take up a cross. A Roman cross was public and it was fatal, but only a Christian cross is a choice.

### **A cross is a daily choice.**

For the text tells us that *whoever* would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. The phrase *whoever would* is clearly not God forcing his will on us; he is inviting us to join him in his way of voluntary surrender. In Luke's parallel text to this passage, Jesus commands us to take up our cross daily.<sup>6</sup> We have a choice, and so Jesus reminds us that this decision will have to be made on a daily basis.

There a lot of people who don't believe a cross is a choice, but something that happens to them, making them a victim. When you hear people say, “This is my cross to bear” a lot of times they are talking about their health, or their spouse, or their children, or some kind of circumstance that is a burden to them. These things may be legitimate challenges in a Christian's life, but they are not crosses. Circumstances may be painful like a cross and they may be a burden like a cross, but they themselves are not crosses, for a cross is something that is to be picked up willingly. A cross is something that requires us to deny our way of doing things and to choose God's way of doing things. It is saying no to our stubborn will and surrendering to God's sovereign will. Tough circumstances provide plenty of opportunities to pick up our cross, but the circumstance itself is not a cross, it's only an opportunity to choose one.

Opportunities to deny ourselves and pick up our cross will present themselves in many ways. I'm sure it has been a delight for many of you, to see Curt Romig respond to God's call in his life to go to Central Asia. And many of you know the Tompkins, who will fly out of Florida on Tuesday to become medical

missionaries in Zambia. Both of these are examples of very talented people who could have had very “successful” careers here in the states, but they chose to deny themselves and obey the will of God in their lives. However, I think we focus too much on examples like this when the reality is that most people will never receive a call to vocational ministry. Many have been given calls just as important though. Like the call to be generous with resources, whether great or small. And many in this body have responded to that call for years when they could have spent their money or their time on themselves. And all of us have received the simple call to daily spend time with Jesus in prayer and Bible reading.

Regardless of what God calls us to the fact remains that he will provide daily opportunities to deny our will and to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. It may be something like choosing to wake up a little early and pray for your loved ones instead of sleeping in. It may mean choosing to reach out to your next door neighbor instead of going into your house through the garage hoping they won’t see you. It may mean that you get involved in taking care of the poor, the sick and the widows in our church and in our community. God could be calling you to share your faith with those you work with or to be more of a servant to your spouse. Whatever it is that God is laying on your heart today, you have the choice as to whether or not you will pick up that cross and endure it for the joy set before you.

But why is it that so many do not choose to pick up their cross? I think there are a lot of us in the church who listen to sermons week after week and agree with most everything the pastor teaches, intellectually, but if we then live a life on Monday that is contrary to what is taught on Sunday we prove that we believe something different than what Scripture says. We are communicating with our lives that our way is better than God’s way. If this describes you, Jesus tells us that we really need to count the cost of discipleship so that we can see that cross-bearing really will result in a better life on a daily basis.

## **B. Disciples must count the cost. (25-26)**

Jesus tells us that *whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*. Or in other words, whoever continues trying to gain abundant life according their own strength and their own way will actually end up miserable, but whoever picks up their cross daily and follows Jesus will experience life to the fullest; a quality of life that you’ve never known. Abundant life here on earth and eternal life are one in the same thing – there is no better quality of life than God’s quality of life. Losing your life in order to find it is a better kind of life, because it is the kind of life God intended for us to live when he created us. It doesn’t necessarily feel better physically and it is definitely not an easier way of life, but abundant life is life with purpose and confidence because it is in line with the kind of life God wants us to live.

The world tells us that abundant life is getting what you want when you want it and having the money and the looks and the friends to pull it off. But when you think about the lives of the people you know who are the happiest and the most joy-filled, they tend to live lives that are contrary to the world’s definition of abundance. They live lives of generosity and service and devotion to God; they give their life away, and by losing their life they seem to have found it.

The world says that the abundant life is free of health challenges and suffering. But think again of those you know who are the most fulfilled. Their lives aren’t free of suffering, actually a lot of these people have endured much suffering and that is part of the reason we know they live a life of abundance; because they pick up their cross in their suffering with peace and patience and hope. These people, who live fulfilled lives, have had the truth they know in their head travel the long 18” down to their heart. And they really believe that only God can satisfy them; their life is proof.

On the other hand those who are driven by ambition to accumulate as much money as they can for the sake of “security”, those who are driven by looking good at all costs and pursuing pleasure to the fullest extent the law will allow, these people are often times so visibly unhappy, overwhelmed, anxious, and

bitter. Look at Hollywood. These people have it all, but they are miserable. Jesus tells us in this passage that the kind of living that seeks to save itself from discomfort and to provide itself with uninhibited pleasure will actually produce pain and misery. Because, as Jesus tells us, we can gain the whole world and everything that it has to offer us, but it won't give us life. There is no price that can be paid, using the world's currency that will buy the quality of life that is offered by our Heavenly Father.

I will say one other thing about worldly pleasure. I think Christians have told us partial truths about worldly pleasure. We have been told that fooling around with drinking, sex, and ambition won't please us. But that is not true. All of those things *will* please us for a little while. I have experienced pleasure in all of these areas, but none of these things will please us fully. And, if we pursue them in ways that are contrary to the will of God, they will actually end up robbing us of life in the long haul. C.S. Lewis says it best when he says, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."<sup>7</sup> God has so much more to offer us than the world.

I think a lot of people in the church are some of the most miserable people on the planet because they have one foot in the world, and their own way of satisfaction, and another foot in the church. But the result is that they are experiencing none of the temporary benefits of sin and none of the long term benefits of cross-bearing. So some go about life wishing that they could throw off the whole life of religion and indulge the flesh, but their conscience won't allow it.

Or they go about life never diving fully into the life of surrender because they don't fully believe that God can satisfy them. And so people end up perpetually frustrated and unsatisfied. Jesus is challenging us here to count the cost and to throw off our way and get in line with God's way of cross-bearing. He promises us that it *will* result in abundant life; not the way the world offers it, but joyful and lasting.

We're not being asked to give up *the good things* life has to offer for something lousy! We're being asked to give up that which is worthless for that which is priceless. I pray that God will show each of you this morning what you need to *put off* and how you can practically *put on* the cross this week!

Jesus is not done giving us perspective though, he has two more words of encouragement for us. The Book of Hebrews tells us that for the "joy set before Jesus, he endured the cross." Disciples too must begin with the end in mind if we are to be able to endure the life of cross-bearing with joy and experience life to the fullest.

### **Disciples must begin with the end in mind. (27)**

*For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*

Dallas Willard has said that cross-bearing means that we live each day of our life with the last day of our life in focus.<sup>8</sup> At last year's graduation banquet I challenged our graduating seniors with these words, "There will be many milestones in your life – graduation, college, marriage, kids, getting your first promotion, *buying* your first home, then retiring and moving *into* "the home;" there will be many important milestones, but you will only have one tombstone. What are you living for, is it going to last? Are you living for the next milestone or eternity?" Jesus makes us a promise here: he is coming back. What is your life going to count for? The point is this: this life won't last forever. Jesus is coming. And when he comes he's going to Judge. The good news is that Christians can have confidence in the Judgment because of Jesus bearing a cross for our sins.

## **1. Confidence in the Judgment comes from Jesus' cross-bearing.**

Eternal life is through grace alone; it is only the work of Jesus that will save you. He bore a cross for your sin so that you wouldn't have to. But the Bible does mention rewards in heaven for what we do on earth. I don't understand how it all works, but it seems to me that we can have confidence in the Judgment because of Jesus' cross-bearing, but that our rewards in the judgment will come from our own cross-bearing.

## **2. Rewards in the Judgment come from our own cross-bearing.**

Now this is not to say that Salvation is by grace and Sanctification is by works. I don't believe that at all. Even our growth as Christians is by the grace of God. He gives us the grace we need to pick up our cross, but we still have to make the choice to choose our cross and God's way. His grace will then also produce the abundant life we desire. The main point though is this: we need to quit fooling around with that which doesn't matter and get behind Jesus – there is a lot of life to be lived for the sake of his Kingdom, but there isn't much time.

In closing let's look at verse 28:

*Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

This is a tough verse and there has been much debate over its interpretation. Therefore I'm going to let Mike handle some of it next week, but there is something that is clear to me from this verse that ties together this whole passage. Jesus promises that salvation and abundant life are a sure thing for disciples.

## **III. Jesus promises that salvation and abundant life are a sure thing for disciples. (28)**

Faith is hard because we don't see immediate results, but Jesus is promising his cross-bearing followers that they will see God working in their lifetime. The richness of life that God offers is eternal, but we don't have to wait until we go to heaven to experience it. If we follow in God's way he assures us that we will experience abundant life both now and forever.

And so we should pray "Hosanna" this morning. "Save us, please" and this prayer can be prayed in confidence because of a promise. And the promise is spelled out in the meaning of my name, Joshua, "The Lord saves." Joshua and Jesus mean the same thing: It's the Lord who saves, now and forever.

I keep a painting of Jonah on my desk. I do this because I need to be reminded daily of how much I'm like Jonah. God calls me daily to follow him and to do his will. But my tendency is to run in the opposite direction of God and to try to save myself and fix my own problems. And my tendency is to try to find satisfaction on my own. The painting reminds me of two things: One, God can use anyone, and two, that life is best when it's daily in line with God's will.

Two weeks ago we took 50 of our middle school students to Westminster Woods for a retreat. I had the privilege of being their speaker that weekend and I trust the Lord really met a lot of our students on the trip and their lives will never be the same. But the Lord also met me that weekend.

While on the retreat I work up very early on Saturday morning, about 4:30. And as I began praying for the day a phrase kept running through my head over and over again, "you are not Bar Jonah, you are Joshua, you are not Bar Jonah, you are Joshua." This went on for a long time. I couldn't get the thought out of my head, "you are not Bar Jonah, you are Joshua." As I began journaling that morning I began to

understand what God was saying to me. Bar Jonah simply means the son of Jonah. God was saying to me, “You are not the son of Jonah – you will not be a man who runs away from my will – you will not be a man who seeks satisfaction away from me. You are Joshua – the Lord will save you, the Lord will satisfy you! I am enough for you, I love you, follow me.”

Where are you seeking salvation? Where are you seeking abundant life and satisfaction? Is it in Jesus, is it in the cross? Are you running from God because you don’t believe he can satisfy you or are you trusting in him? There is no salvation without a cross. There is no abundant life without a cross. Jesus wants to give each of you a better life. All you have to do to receive abundant life is *surrender* your will to him, *believe* that his cross and resurrection were enough for you and commit to *follow him* for life. He doesn’t want to rob you of life – he wants to give you the life you’ve never known.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 11:7-10

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Piper’s sermon, *Hosanna*, March 27, 1983

<sup>3</sup> “God’s Christ comes, does he not, to end suffering, not endure it; he comes, surely to win, not lose?” Bruner, p. 139

<sup>4</sup> My thinking here was inspired by Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp. 256-257

<sup>5</sup> Bruner, p. 145

<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:23

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 2

<sup>8</sup> I heard this in a lecture that I no longer have and can’t find.