

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE WITNESSES

A SERMON

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“They stood upon their feet.” Revelation 11:11

WE have, after what we have said upon the witnesses referred to in our text, to notice this morning *their death and the resurrection*. But before I enter upon the subject of their death and resurrection, it will be well for us clearly to understand what is meant by their death. We must understand, therefore, that they were slain officially; that is to say, slain in the office which they bare as witnesses, and were put to silence; and as they were thus slain officially, or in the offices they bare as witnesses; then when they were raised from that state, they were no longer silent; this is the sense in which we must understand it. And then their dead bodies will mean that they were officially dead: not allowed to preach, not allowed to prophesy; and not allowed publicly, for it will include all the people of God, to make a profession of the truth as it is in Christ. Still, while I speak in this way, and the account given of them answers entirely to this idea of their being slain officially and raised up again from the dead officially; still it by no means excludes the idea that thousands have been slain literally; and then in that case they have not risen again in their own persons, but they have risen again and their successors. So that if we take the slaying of them literally, even then we get the resurrection; because if some be slain, there are sure to be others raised up in their place; the Lord never did and never will leave himself without witnesses, I think, therefore, this morning our subject is of a very sympathetic kind, and of an encouraging kind; it will point out to us as we go along, the troubles the people of God have gone through, and at the same time will point out the goodness of the Lord in appearing for them, in turning their captivity. Job may be circumstantially slain: but although he be thus slain, and is no longer able to be eyes to the blind nor feet to the lame; is no longer able to bring the stranger to his house, to cause the widows heart to sing for joy; Job in this sense is slain; yet he still holds fast the truth, and the time will come when he will again rise, the spirit of the living God shall enter in, and shall change the scene of things; and he shall raise into more than his formal former glory, and shall have twice as much at the end as he had in the beginning. And so, these witnesses, we shall see that they were more glorious after their tribulation, and after the resurrection, then they were before. And I must here again remind you that this is just as it is in the experience of the Christian. The Christian gains by all his slayings; every time you are slain in your feelings, and the mouth the prayer seems stopped, everything spiritual seems put to a stop to, you go to and fro to the house of God, and seem to get nothing; you use that figure, I am like a door on its hinges, going to and fro; but then

recollect that the hinges of the doors of the temple were *golden* hinges; and so if you go to and fro like a door on its hinges, you can come with the desire to get something, if you come because you love the truth, and hold fast the truth, then you are certainly, shall I say, a door in Solomon's temple, if you like to compare yourself to that; and the hinges were golden hinges; so you have nothing else, you have some good motives; and yet you are dead, the Bible gives you nothing, and the minister seems to have nothing for you all seems dead. They were lying in the great city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt as dead. What does it mean? Why, that you could not join with an ungodly world; although you seem so dead that you could not get fellowship with God, you could not go on in the things of God, you cannot go on in that which is contrary to the truth of God; and while ministers are telling you to come and to take the promise, you learn the truth of John's words in the third chapter of John, where he says, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." What, John, not receive anything except it be given from heaven? We have the Bible in our hands, and in that Bible all the promises; but unless the promise be given to me by the Holy Spirit, and sealed home by that spirit with power, then, if I take them, I take only paper and ink, that is all I take; and you may depend upon it that my taking the promise will stand by me in a dying hour and at the last day just as much as paper and ink could stand by me; it is all a mere paper and ink concern together. To fasten on a promise and call it mine without the power of God, without realizing in any measure its sweetness and power, is taking that which I have no right to take.

And just notice these witnesses: and there they lay all the time that God permitted them to lie there. How did they rise? Why, the preceding part of the verse tells us, "After three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet." Is it not just so now? When the mystic three days and a half shall terminate, then the Holy Spirit will come as a Spirit of life, and again raise you up into all the fellowship that the Lord has for you. And as these witnesses were more glorious after their resurrection than before, just so now you will gain by their experiences; and some of us know that before we knew much of the slaying times, of these castings down times, comparatively little gospel did for us then. And the reason that some good people now can hear a gospel that is not much more than a halfway gospel, a gospel which is said and then unsaid, something like yea and nay; the reason is because they have not yet had their slaying times; when the slaying times shall come, then these halfway gospels will cease to be any use to them; they will run away after these high doctrine men; they will then run out away after that free grace gospel, that simple gospel that contains everything. And so, these witnesses, we shall have to enlarge upon that another day, they heard a great voice from heaven saying, Come up hither; they ascended up into the lofty heights of the everlasting gospel; and had more of Christ, more of the Spirit, and more of God, and more of eternity, than they had ever had before. They thus gained by their troubles.

But I observed to you last Lord's day morning, and it is essential that I should repeat it, that this book of Revelation bears a threefold aspect and this is true of the book all through. Hence the Lord said to John in the first chapter, "Write the things which you have seen;" there is the past. Some people read the book of Revelation as though all spoken of in it was future. No, my hearer, it has a reflective reference as well as a prospective reference. "Write the things that you have seen;" here is the past: "and the things that are;" there is the present: "and the things which shall be here after;" there is the future. Just so we shall handle the subject this morning of the death and resurrection of the witnesses.

First. First, *the past*. Now take Joseph for instance; that will help us. There was a slaying time; but that slaying time stood inseparably connected with the resurrection time. He told his dream; those dreams expressive of what the Lord would do; and they were gospel dreams to; but then at that time his brothers were blind, and they were enemies to the truth, and they could not endure the truth; when Joseph told them of the 11 sheaves that bowed down to him, and the sun, and moon, and stars bowing to him, they knew not even the literal reference at the time of these visions. But when we take them spiritually, and carry them on to the anti-type, how magnificent they are; but that I must not stop to do this morning. Now Joseph, because he bore testimony of the truth, they killed him, not actually; they would have done so actually, but they could slay him only officially. But they could not slay him even officially, in his official capacity as a witness, they could not slay him even thus far until he had finished his testimony. Ah, said Satan, I can almost at least imagine Satan saying, Ah, you fools; why have you not stopped Joseph halfway through his dream, not let him finish his testimony? You have let him tell you all the dream; and then you have let him tell the second dream; you let him preach twice; why, you should not have let him finish his testimony; he has finished his testimony: oh you silly things; why, he has lighted the lamp, and I am afraid I shall never be able to put it out: he has planted the tree of truth, and I am afraid I shall never be able to pluck it up: he has laid the foundation, and I am afraid I shall never be able to undermined it: he has pointed out the spring that will rise and rise, and go rolling on, and satiate many, and I am afraid I shall never be able to stop it: you fools, you certainly ought to have stopped him before he had told out half. Ah, but we could not do it, because we did not know what he was going to say: we would if we had but known. Ah, the Lord did not mean you should know. And so, you have something in the New Testament that corresponds nicely with this; Stephen stood before the counselors, and instead of slaying him at the beginning of his speech they let him go on, and he went on and went on, and finished his testimony; and his face shone as an angel; and when he had finished his testimony, then they killed him, but they could not slay him before. So, my hearer, before death ever takes you, and before the enemy can slay you, you shall finish your testimony; you shall come into the completeness of the gospel; you shall know the completeness that is in Christ, the completeness of his sworn covenant, the completeness of his salvation; and when you know that, then you will be prepared to undergo anything, when you get a complete testimony. I cannot keep away, I do not wish to keep away, from personal present experience.

Now this prepared the witnesses for the trouble they had to encounter, this finishing of their testimony. And as soon ever a man is brought into the completeness of Christ's work, and the completeness of God's sworn covenant, "Ah, (he says) I am complete in Christ;" and in connection with that completeness here is the sworn covenant, that covenant spoken of in a variety of forms, an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David; that man is prepared now. Says the Lord, I will try you; and you shall be slain; you shall get into trouble; darkness shall come over you, many afflictions and many evils; in your heart many blasphemies, many abominations, that you are ignorant of, shall rise; and what for? Why, to make you more than ever anxious to enter into the interior and vital departments of that completeness that is in Christ, and to enter more extensively into the advantages of that covenant that is ordered in all things and sure. Well, Joseph was slain officially, and these three days and a half were a very long three days and a half. Ah, but, say you, it does not say three days and a half. Well, I showed last Sunday morning that this Scripture can be extended or contracted chronologically to any extent whatever; you may make it measure out millions of years for that matter; but I shall not stop to explain that now, you must

read my sermon of last Sunday morning. I take our Sunday morning sermon that is printed to be a kind of tract society; so that people ask, "have you a tract society at your chapel?" "Yes sir." "And who writes the tracks?" "Why, the reporter, he writes them." "And who speaks them?" "The minister." And so, you ought to be tract distributors, every one of you that can afford it ought to take six or seven every week, and send them into the country, or somewhere or another. So, I say if you want to get the proof then of our text being capable of this chronological extension or contraction, read my last Sunday morning sermon, and if you are too stingy to buy it, it is but a penny, or too lazy to read it, then you want to remain in your ignorance. Now Joseph's three days and a half then, was 22 years, literally 22 years; still it does not extend beyond the mystic time, and at the end of 22 years; it is a long time, Jacob had given him up; a long time. Ah, Joseph is no more. How many times have you said that in your soul, tried believer? Ah, you have said, I shall hope no more, rejoice no more in the Lord in the land of the living; I think I have been deceived altogether; my religion is rent in pieces, it will never be anything anymore. But by-and-by circumstances come around, the Spirit of God enters into Joseph, and he shows a little sign of life by interpreting rightly the dreams of the Butler and the Baker. But still here is two years more yet, and by and by the time comes; look at it, now, what I am going to say, friends, look at it spiritually, look at it temporarily. We do need the Lord as a God of providence as well as a God of grace. See the circumstance; Pharaoh has dreams, and Joseph is the only man that can interpret them, and the Lord used the circumstance to bring Joseph out of his bondage, out of his poverty, out of his degradation; for of course he was put there under the accusation of Potiphar's wife, and no doubt it was generally reported that it was true, and that he ought to be there; but the circumstance takes place which turns his captivity, and they hasten him out of the prison; the margin says, they made him run: Joseph look sharp, and come out as fast as you can. So here is the spirit of life, here is the resurrection circumstantially and temporarily. Ah, it is a good thing to look to the Lord in providence. You may be tried, hemmed in on every side, everything seemed to go against you, but if you have the truth with you, and Joseph had, for he never gave up his dreams, he never gave up the testimony of God, and God was with him, and made him prosper in Potiphar's house, and even in prison Joseph prospered, the Lord was with him, and by-and-by the captivity is terminated, the slaying time is done. So, if you take it circumstantially, how sweet and interesting it is. And so, if you take it spiritually as well, by-and-by the Lord will turn matters around in such a way and give you to understand matters more clearly than ever. Ah, say you, now I see the meaning of the sheaves; I thought I saw something of the meaning of the stars, when the visions were granted him; but by-and-by when Joseph is raised up, his brothers come down to Egypt for corn, then he remembers his dreams. All, here are the sheaves; what a mercy, my brothers are good men; what a change of character they have now undergone; which I must not now stop to enlarge upon, having many more things to say. But see the change; they hated Joseph, they sold him, they despised their father, And I may say persecuted him, and so all of us by nature are enemies to God; but now the famine has set in, their sympathies were awakened, they bowed at Joseph's feet; and here Joseph saw the fulfillment of his dreams, his brother and were good men now: they were sheaves, they were corn, they were stars now, according to the Lord's own declaration to Abraham; he took him abroad to behold the stars; "So shall your seed be:" notice, these are good characters, and Joseph rejoices in the hand of the Lord. Here then is a slaying time, and here is the resurrection time. No doubt when these visions were granted to Joseph he thought, Well now, I have nothing before me but what is desirable. Little did he think to be cast into the pit, to be publicly exposed in such a slave market, and sold like a beast; little did he think that he would be accused by Potiphar's wife, and cast into public disgrace into a prison; little did he think that these were the steps by which he

should reach the glory and honor that God had for him. Ah, so, my hearer, think it not strange whatever befalls you, whatever trial may overtake you, it is after all mysterious, as you may think it; and that is a wise clause of the poet,

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform,”

and yet all these things are only as so many steps towards that honor and glory, that exultation, that safety and blessedness which the Lord has for you. Here then Joseph was officially slain, but not essentially slain, and there he remained in Egypt until the time came for the Lord to turn his captivity. Now, my hearer, you must abide by the truth: if in your affliction and trouble you give up God’s truth, I cannot say you will ever come back, I cannot say God will appear for you, because I cannot then say you are a Christian; but, if you are enabled in your trouble to hold fast God’s truth, to stand out for that, just so sure as you abide firmly by that, if it be your character, just so sure as you hold fast the testimony of God, you will, by-and-by, realize all that testimony contains. David, when he was an old man, came into battle, and he was weak, and a giant thought to kill him, but the Lord strengthen the arm of Abishai, and he stepped in and killed the giant and preserved David. As though the Lord should say to him, when you were young, you killed the giant for me, and now you are old I will kill one for you: you have abode by my truth, and I see you are in trouble, and I will deliver you. All we want, is confidence in the Lord our God: The Lord’s eyes are upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with him. Thus then, Joseph had his slaying time, and his resurrection time. But what caused the slaying time? Apostacy! “They have forsaken your covenant.” As soon as ever professors forsake God’s covenant, they had forsaken the national covenant; and in our day the Christian world is gone away from the Christian covenant, they have forsaken it, “they have dug down your alters;” your alters are too high for them: and then the result is, “They have slain your prophets, and I am left alone, and they seek my life.” It is a slaying time! But still, they could not slay them until they had finished their testimony. I have often looked at these three ideas; forsaken your covenant; as soon as ever you do that, get away from the covenant of grace, down goes the mediation of Christ directly. Christ is the Surety of the better covenant, the Mediator of the better covenant, and carrying out the everlasting covenant rests with Christ as the great executor of that covenant; and as soon as ever a man gets away from that covenant, down goes the mediation of Christ directly in that man’s gospel, it becomes then and offered salvation, a general salvation, a conditional salvation.

And then what follows next? The slaying’s prophets: down with these high doctrine men, is the language of thousands in the day in which we live. It was a slaying time in the days of Elijah: bless the Lord it is not so now, literally, beyond that of the tongue. And some people pity me, I know ministers, and I hope good men, pity me because I do not enjoy the liberty they do. Well, I do confess that I do not enjoy the liberty that some ministers do. They can be quite at home with ministers of the duty faith cast, whose ministry is yea and nay. The Lord knows I have no antipathy to such personally, but I cannot feel that liberty to unite with them, for two reasons: first I feel no union of soul whatever to them; secondly, I believe their system to be unscriptural, and I have no desire to be cursed of God, for “if an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, let him be accursed.” So that without any personal antipathy, I do not enjoy the liberty that some of my brothers enjoy; they can go and “Dear brother” them on the platform, shake hands with them, congratulate them, pray for them, give out their hymns for them, be quite at home with them. Now

I am that poor narrowminded creature that where the gospel is not welcome I do not feel at home, and where I meet with yea and nay, I cannot make it sort with yes and amen, where I meet with the people that have even in part forsaken God's covenant, and thrown a great deal of uncertainty into the gospel, and make the grace of God the author of a man's damnation; I cannot feel at home with such men, and never will, if the whole of you leave me; I do not enjoy that liberty, I would rather be kept in captivity to God's love, that is the liberty I like; I would rather be kept in captivity to his truth, that is the liberty I like: I would rather be yoked so close to Jesus Christ as never to be without him: for I have learned from experience that without him I can do nothing. I judge not my brothers that enjoy that liberty, but I cannot think how in the world they can; I have no desire to have it. What! Tell people that they are damned to all eternity because they would not have God's grace: so, if God's grace had not come, people would not have been damned: blaming the damnation of souls upon the grace of God, blaming the damnation of souls upon the suffering of Christ, blaming the damnation of souls upon the promises of the gospel. These that can unite with such as that, they are welcome to do so, God sparing me, I am not speaking violently nor passionately, God sparing me and strengthening me, I would rather lose the last drop of my blood than I would knowingly, in any shape or form whatever for a moment give sanction to any such system, I will not blame the grace of God. Well, say you, nor do they either. Yes, they do they tell us that men are damned for not being what God never intended they should be; they tell us that men are damned for not savingly receiving Jesus Christ, when at the same time they are not Christ's sheep, they are goats, his sheep hear his voice, and he will give them eternal life. So, then it was the forsaking of the covenant that brought about the slaying time. And just in proportion as you forsake the new covenant, and in the same proportion down goes the mediation of Christ. Christ came into the world to do the covenant will of God, the testament will of God, and God entrusted his whole testament will with Christ, and Christ has carried out in his mediation that covenant, and he is brought again from the dead, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Now then, in Elijah's day there came through this general apostacy, a slaying time; and this very principal will account for all the slaying times that have ever occurred since that. Ah, but there was nevertheless, a resurrection time. Yes, Elijah shall be raised up, he shall come forth, and he knew how he could prevail with God, he knew there was but one way, and that was by sacrifice, he knew it, no uncertainty about it. What a lovely circumstance is that! Fire came down from heaven upon the sacrifice, and when the people saw that instead of the fire coming upon them, which it justly might have done, it descended upon a substitute, and they had escaped; ah, they fell on their faces, and said, "The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God." Bless the Lord then, there are these resurrection times. And perhaps after my time the Lord will raise up ministers that will bring about real revival in the church of God. I have never seen in my day of a real revival of the church of God. There has not been a real revival now in the church of God for more than 50 years. The greatest revivalist in the church of God that ever existed in England, was the great Huntington. And as to the noise made in our day about revivals, why, my hearers, that revival that will not bear the test of God's truth is not God's revival. I am to try everything by God's new covenant, and that which will not stand the test of that new covenant is not of God; I am to try everything by the completeness of the Savior's work, by the Divine truth that brings the sinner to a real knowledge of himself unto God; and the revival that will not bear these tests is not of God.

Now then, the witnesses were slain in those days; but where they exterminated? They might have been slain literally, as they were, but then they rose again in their successors. Again, the day of Ezekiel was a slaying time. When Nebuchadnezzar, as far as he could, killed the witnesses, that

was a slaying time; but he could not slay them until they had finished their testimony. Here, cast these three men into the fiery furnace; no, they shall complete their testimony first: not but what they have testimony to bear again afterwards. If you do not fall down and worship this golden image that everybody warships: how dare you to be singular, how dare you to be controversial; how dare you to call in question the wisdom of such a multitude of people? Why, you ought to be awed into submission by all this magnificence. Well, we are not careful to answer you in this matter: we know you are a mighty king, and we are poor things; but you may have a fiery furnace, or the devil if you like, we do not care what you have: we tell you this, that we will not bow down: our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us, and if he is determined that we should be burned to death, we can bear it, because he will sustain us, but whether we are burned to death or not, we will not worship your God's, nor the image which you have set up. So, he commanded them to be cast into the furnace; and the mighty men that cast them in were slain, they were cast into the furnace, but they took the truth with them, Jesus Christ's truth was there, he descended there: a Divine Person came and walked in the furnace; not a hair of their heads was singed. Now there is a very short three days and a half. I said just now these words could contract themselves into a very narrow space of time. The God of truth took care of them: they walked loose in the fire, uninjured. That is the reason Jonah got back again out of the sea, because he had the truth with him in the love of it; and the reason Saul could not slay David, because he had the truth with him; that is the reason Haman could not hang Mordecai, because Mordecai had the truth with him. Now this Babylon captivity, then, was a slaying time. Ah, but, Daniel, you shall go into the lion's den you have not been tried yet, you had better run away. No, I will still abide by the truth, and let everybody see I abide by it; I will throw my window open towards the mercy seat, toward the sacrifice, toward the presence of God, toward the promised land, and pray openly three times a day. Well, but there is the law going out, the law of the Medes and Persians, which alters not, that if any man ask a petition for 30 days of anybody except Darius he shall be cast into the lion's den. Well, I will complete my testimony. And he was cast into the lion's den, but he took the truth with him, and that truth shut the lions' mouths, and so Daniel said, the Lord has sent his angel, the messenger of the covenant, and shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me.

Well, Ezekiel, you have seen a slaying time; just go into the valley, and look at the bones, very many and very dry. So, they are officially slain, not allowed now to bear witness to God, officially slain, and all they can say, is, "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we are cut off from our parts." All, there is the resurrection time; "Come from the four winds of breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." Thus you see the enemy has not been able to exterminate the church: there have always been the dead bodies, that is, officially dead, but not vitally dead. There is a mighty difference between the two; the Christian died as to his feelings, but not died vitally. You pick up a grain of wheat; why, say you, that is a dead grain, see no sign of life in it; you take care of it, look at it in six months' time, just the same. But put that grain of wheat into a position required by its nature, and it will pretty soon show it has some life in it. Just so the Christian, he gets into a dry place, and there he looks dead; but let him be sown afresh, as it were, in the promised land, and he will begin to germinate, and begin to bear fruit, some 30, some 60, some a hundredfold. Just so sure as there is a slaying time, there shall be a resurrection time. And I am sure the apostles age was a slaying time; they killed the Lord of life and glory. Oh, say you, but it says in that chapter that they would not suffer their bodies to be put in graves, and Christ's body was laying in the grave. But not the malefactor's grave. Now what caused it to be a slaying time in Christ's day? The apostacy of the people from God's covenant; human tradition was the

watchword of the day, they were all in a state of apostacy, and therefore God's truth was offensive. How shall I find words to set forth the difference between the characters of that day?

Take, for instance, good old Simon; now was not Simon to all intents and purposes a free grace man? Is it not said that it was revealed to him by the Spirit, and the Spirit gives unto every man severally as he will, not revealed to Simon by his holiness or righteousness: I am not going to say that Simon's religion was illogical: Simon reform, and be holy and righteous, and infer from that, infer from his own goodness, that all would be right with him? That is the religion of the present day. Why, the great Dr. Campbell¹ tells us, and he is a very pious man, for he says Mr. Huntington was a foul mouth (Antinomian): I wonder such pious creatures can use such words: but the great Dr. tells us that we are first to get people to believe, and afterwards tell them they are born of God. What is this but mere logic? That is, I am to believe the letter of the word, make a little to do about religion, and then infer from that, that all is right. Not so with Simon, though it was so with the multitude of professors in that day. We are the children of Abraham literally, therefore it is right with us: we keep the traditions of the elders, and therefore it is right: we have one Father, Even God: and so, they inferred from what they were after the flesh, and from their conformity to the traditions of the elders, and the mere letter of the word, they inferred that all was right. Not so with Simon: it was revealed unto him that he should not see death until he should see the Lord's Christ. He came into the temple, recognized Immanuel, took the child in his arms, and "Now, Lord, let you your servant depart in peace; for my eyes have seen your salvation." Thus, you see his religion was a Divine religion; but the people generally were in a state of apostacy, and that made it a slaying time: and so it so they slew the Lord of life and glory. But after three days he shall rise again. They killed the apostles; and shall that stop the gospel? No, no; for though the apostles be literally slain, and did not rise again in their own persons, yet they shall in their successors. Oh! Dear, say you, we are their successors? Well, you must ask how they became apostles? There were two things that made apostles of them: the one was that they were each personally called by the grace of God to a knowledge of their state as sinners, and of God's salvation; the other was that the Holy Spirit rested mightily upon them, and they went forth and preached the gospel, the Lord working with them; and all that are thus made like them are their successors.

But the idea of an Act of Parliament constituting as successor of the apostles! Only think of it: there is something so monstrous about it. What are you going to do? We are going to make a successor of the apostles. How are you going to make him? By an Act of Parliament, an Act of Convocation, and a certain ceremony. All, you blind Pharisee, you poor deluded man, you servant of the devil, you blind guide, you had better have nothing to do with that just man, Christ Jesus.

Now then, the sum of what I have spoken is this, that the Lord brings his people to be witnesses for him, to bear witness of the completeness of the Savior's work, and of the certainty of his truth; makes them willing to suffer for that truth, and whatever their difficulties or trials are: just so sure as there are troublous times, there shall be triumphant times; just so sure as there are castings down, there shall be liftings up; just so sure as there are slaying times, there shall be resurrection times: and, bless the Lord, as at the resurrection on the last day, the body shall rise to die no more; so the troubles must have a full end, when these witnesses shall, in the ultimate tense, ascend unto the heights of Zion, there to dwell forever and ever.

¹ Wells may be referring to John Campbell, D.D., an English Congregational minister, who was born at Kirriemuir, Scotland, in 1795 though I am not certain of this.