

# A FIRM FRIEND

## A SERMON

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“Therefore have I set my face like a flint.” Isaiah 1:7

THE dear Savior, when in this world, knew that all things which he was to do were settled and arranged in the deeps of eternity before time commenced its mysterious course. He therefore knew that in all he thought and said and did he had God the Father on his side, as he here says, “The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint.” He also knew that there was an infinity and an eternity of importance belonging to all that he should do. He knew, indeed, the weighty charge that he had taken in hand; he knew the tremendous responsibilities under which he stood; and therefore, with all the perfection of human love and all the perfection of his Godhead love combined in one, he took his stand in decision for the will of God, and thus set his face like a flint, that he might reach the glorious end that the counsel of God designed him to reach. Also, every Christian, in the subordinate sense of the word, must take up, or may take up, the same language. When a man is brought to feel his need of a free-grace salvation, and then brought to realize the sufficiency and certainty of the grace of God in saving him, and begins to have a good hope that he is saved, and sees and feels the emptiness and uncertainty of everything else, in comparison of this eternal destiny of his soul, that man will set his face like a flint for God’s truth. And whatever stands opposed to that truth, that man must stand opposed to also, even if it be unto death, as thousands have, and glory in doing, that he is counted worthy in any shape or form to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I will notice, then, our text under two chief parts. First, *the things about which the Savior was thus bold and decided*. Secondly and lastly, if time permit me to reach so far, *the beautiful allusions that are, in the Old Testament, made to that decision and stability indicated in our text*.

I notice then, first, *the things about which the Savior was thus bold and decided*. And they come, if we gather them, which we will, from this chapter, under these four. The first was, to obtain eternal redemption; the second was his boldness in the ministry of the word; the third was his becoming for ever and ever the servant of the Most High God; and the fourth was the general chalmgement of his adversaries; all of which four are included in our text, “Therefore have I set my face like a flint.” And then, as we go along this morning, you will be able to judge yourselves whether you are partakers of the same things. If so, you have the same spirit in kind, but not in

degree. The Spirit was given without measure unto him, but it is given to us in measure, for he gives to every man severally as he will. Nevertheless, though we have not the same spirit in degree, yet I hope most of you will be able to see that you have the same spirit in kind. And if there be any of you that have not spirit of Christ (and if we have not the spirit of Christ we are none of his), as I go along may the Lord make it a matter of concern to you to be taught by the spirit of Christ, that you may be plucked as a brand from everlasting burning, and come into that spirit without which you cannot be saved. Except a man be born again, and thus be a partaker of the Spirit of God, where God is, he can never come. First, then, that about which the Savior was so decided was to obtain eternal redemption. We find in this chapter the Savior asking a question or two upon this matter. He says, "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" The conduct of mere professors would seem to indicate this, that there is not a sufficiency in Christ's redemption, therefore they must bring in some creature-doing or another; that there is not a sufficiency in the salvation he has wrought, and therefore they must bring in some doing or another of the creature to help. Now all this is delusion; the bringing in of these doings is what the Lord calls transgression, and he will put all such persons away ultimately, banish them that live and die in that state. Hence he put the Old Testament church away; they apostatized, and he therefore put them away, that is, those of them that were not called by the grace of God out of that ultimately into that mediatorial work I will presently, in particular detail, try to set before you. Hence the Lord says, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have you sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away," that is, the false church. Now, lest we should read this in a Pharisaic, spirit, do not any one of you run away with a notion that for your transgressions you have, not sold yourself, and that for your iniquities you are not put away; do not you run away with that notion, because it would be delusive, for every son and daughter of Adam has for his and her transgression sold him and herself; every one for his iniquities is put away; that is our state by nature. Now when you look at Saul of Tarsus before he was called, he was not chargeable with any fault that we in common parlance should call immorality; and yet, when that man was awakened to a knowledge of what he was, that while he thought he was with God he was all the time without God and away from God, and had he died in that state he himself well knew afterwards he must have been lost; he sums up his condition like this, "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." That is the state of all of us by nature. And these very persons who were in that state, nevertheless, not knowing it, not seeing really the evil case they were in therefore it was they sought not the redemption of Jesus Christ but went away from God. And the Lord appeals to the people, and says, "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" You may depend upon it that the Lord, where he is the teacher, will so lead the sinner along that he shall find out that there is redemption nowhere else but in Jesus Christ; that there is salvation nowhere else; and that the redemption that is in Jesus Christ is an eternal redemption, and that the salvation that is in Jesus Christ stands like this, "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end." And the Lord says here, "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering," that is, he clothed the Jewish heavens, the Jewish dispensation, with blackness, and it remains in that blackness to this day, and will to eternity; and he has made sackcloth the covering of the Jewish heavens and the Jewish earth, and it remains in that desolate, widowed condition, and will do for ever. But the new covenant heavens, there is no sackcloth there, there is no blackness there, there is no night there, there is no cloud there, there is no curse there. But I will come to detail. Now, then, Jesus Christ, in obtaining eternal redemption, set his face towards our

sins; he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. And there were several things that emboldened him to bear our sins. One was, a perfect consciousness that not one of those sins was his own; that he was holy, undefiled, separate from sinners. If one sin had been his own, and he had been in the least degree a partaker of the property of sin, then he could not have made a sacrifice for sin; unless you hold that one sin can atone for another sin, that one sin can justify another sin; you would not hold anything so absurd as that. Now that is one thing that would embolden the Savior, namely, that he had no sin of his own, and therefore it is that he faced our sins, sins of a number that no man can number; he set his face like a flint towards these. And the next thing that emboldened him to face our sins was the love that he had to the people. Shall I say his love brought him to us? Many waters could not quench love, neither could the floods drown it. And then I need not refer to his power, and to the approbation of the blessed God, all of which were emboldening. Nor need I here refer to the joy which he now possesses, the joy that was set before him. He, therefore, looked at our sins, and was determined upon the destruction of every one of your sins. So that, when you are favored to receive Jesus Christ, you receive that which takes the force away from every one of your sins; takes away the guilt of them, and the power of them; takes them away altogether. And while you feel what poor creatures you are, and sometimes tremble at the threatening's of the Bible, yet Jesus Christ received thus, as having by his own blood obtained from all your sins eternal freedom, eternal redemption, for what is eternal redemption but eternal deliverance from all thralldom? you hereby receive that by which every one of your sins is destroyed. The thief on the cross entered heaven in this way; every infant enters heaven, that dies in infancy, in this way; and every soul that is saved enters heaven in this way. Again, he set his face like a flint to die that death which should atone for our sins; he was bold to this also. And one thing which emboldened him to die was a consciousness, as I have before said, that he had no sin of his own. God was, I was going to say, almightily angry with our sins; but he was not angry with his Son. God was never angry with Christ, never cursed Christ. He made him a curse, but he did not curse him; he laid wrath upon him, but he was not angry with him. Christ endured the anger, but God was not angry with him; Christ endured the disapprobation which God had to sin, but there was no disapprobation of Christ. There was not one stage of the Savior's progress in which the blessed God more approved of him than in that solemn hour. "Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." And thus, in taking our sins, our sins are gone, blotted out, forgiven, and forgotten. Oh, when you try to lay hold of this truth of eternal redemption by Jesus Christ, this atonement which he has made; and when you begin to meditate and think, Is it possible that the Lord will not behold iniquity in me? is it possible that he will not see perverseness in me? is it possible that those sins that are so much with me are, now that they are atoned for, with God just nothing? and that those sins that sink my mind down, harden my heart, and make me exclaim with the church of old, "Why have you hardened our hearts, and made us to err from your ways?" that these sins are with God nothing; that they are forgotten and put away? Yes; he has not a single thought against you; all is for you, whether life, or death, the world, Paul, Cephas, things present, things to come; God having brought you thus to receive his dear Son, hereby everything is for you. Here is the way in which you, as a Christian, are to set your face like a flint. Now, when we look at the state we are in by nature; when we look at the curse of the law; when we look at the hell which sin has lighted up; then see the Savior thus interposing, facing our sins, destroying the whole, dying to atone for those sins, because he knew that he was not only divinely appointed, but divinely approved, so that God infinitely delighted in the dear Savior in obtaining eternal redemption, and it was his very meat to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work;

now, I say, in receiving this glorious work which Christ has done, do we not receive that which is well worth contending for? Oh, it is very easy to make things appear very feasible to us, to make error appear very feasible. Hence it is, the Catholics, they make their own system appear to themselves very feasible; the Puseyite makes his system appear to himself feasible; and so, all those that are in fearful error make their systems appear feasible. But then their religion is merely a matter of opinion and of conscience, and not a matter of heart-work. I have often distinguished, though I will not stop to do so now largely, just throw out a hint that a mere conscience religion never took a man to heaven yet, and never will. Your religion must be something beyond conscience. Saul of Tarsus was conscientious in his opposition to the name of Christ, but then there was no heart-work in it. Now here, where eternal redemption is rightly received, a sinner feels that he is so depraved, and in such a condition, that nothing but the entire destruction of all his sins by Jesus Christ, independent of us, and nothing short of Jesus Christ having gone to the entire end of the curse, swallowed up death in victory, and brought life and immortality to light, can save the soul. These, then, were two of the things, or rather they are summed up in one, namely, that eternal redemption which he obtained. There was nothing could move him aside from this great object. Hence, he said, "I have set the Lord always before me." That was his whole concern from day to day, and the more we make it our concern to hold from day to day fellowship with him the better, "because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also shall rest in hope: for you will not leave," as I think it could read, "my life in the grave, nor suffer your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fulness of joy, and at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore." The redemption, then, which he has obtained, if we look at the nature of it, the design of it, the numbers that are redeemed, that from which they are redeemed, and that to which they shall be brought, look whichever way we may, we conclude that it was a work worthy of a God, a work well worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, he set his face like a flint. And if we are taught of God, we shall lay hold of what he has done, we shall hold it fast, and contend for it. Is there anything else that can bear you up? How uncertain is your standing as a creature in this world! A thousand uncertainties might easily be named: no certainty. But in that which is done, and cannot be undone, the redemption is ended, the salvation is wrought, the righteousness is brought in, the warfare is accomplished, the life is established; it is done; and our great privilege is, the Lord enabling us, to receive the same, and thereby enjoy the presence of the blessed God.

The second thing in which the Savior was bold and decided was the ministry of the word. I pass by his standing against the delusions of the day, and against the great men of the day, and mere professors; and I do this because my subject embraces so many things that I could not include the whole, even in a dozen sermons, much less in one. I must pass by many, therefore, and notice merely the essentials. The second thing in which the Savior set his face like a flint was the ministry of the word. Hence, "the Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." Here I come to a subject that I think a very great deal of, and I do not think you can think too much of it, a word in season. Is the woman gathering two sticks, that she and her son might eat and die, making sure they cannot live many hours longer; it is almost over? The holy prophet comes with a "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, and the cruse of oil shall not fail." Oh, what a word in season was that! I say, what a word in season was that! When you are troubled about providential matters, and know not how things may go, suppose a scripture like this comes, "Bread shall be given you, waters shall be sure; you shall dwell in the land, and truly you shall be fed," "for your heavenly Father knows that

you have need of all these things.” How well, then, Jesus knows how to speak a word in season! And if it be soul-trouble, yes, let it be whatever trouble it may; for the Lord does not sympathize with us in some of our troubles, and leave us to sympathize with ourselves in others; he sympathizes with us in all our troubles. When the prodigal was despised by a Pharisaic world, “There is that prodigal, he brought himself into the trouble, and there let him be.” Not so with our God. Oh, what a word in season to the poor prodigal, when he was so well received and kindly treated! When the man is fallen among thieves, of course the priest and the Levite pass by, and say, “Well, it is his own fault; he had no business to have gone that way; he has got himself into the trouble, and let him get out of it.” Not so the good Samaritan. Was there ever a more beautiful illustration of the freeness of the grace of God, of the mercy and goodness of God, the word in season, than when the good Samaritan came, poured in oil and wine, became responsible for the man, left with the host that which would supply his present need, and gave his own name as security for anything farther that might be needed? “What more you spend, set to my account.” What a word in season! And then, if I come to the dear Savior’s days, here is the poor leper; no doubt had tried every possible remedy; “Lord, if you will, you canst make me clean.” He said, “I will; be you clean.” What a word in season to the poor leper, weary of his leprosy! And here is the poor sinner, with nothing but blasphemous thoughts and feelings, depravity and wretchedness, his heart his burden and his grief too; cursing and swearing in his mind, perhaps, at God; hating his existence; would give a million worlds, if he had them to give, if he could but annihilate himself, and feels himself the vilest wretch under heaven. “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean” Jesus steps in, gives a word, lifts the soul out of it into the liberty of the gospel; he becomes washed in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. And now the Christian can look, the poor tried sinner can look, at those infidelities and blasphemous besetments, just as Samson could look at the lion after it was dead; roared against him while it lived, but when it was dead it yielded honey; and so these soul-trials shall end in sweetness to the soul, and in great glory to the blessed God. And I need not remind you of the poor woman that had tried many physicians, spent all her living, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. What a word in season was that! ah, what virtue was that, when she touched the hem of his garment, and the Savior said, “Your faith has made you whole!” And when, again, for time would fail me to bring forward one-tenth of the circumstances wherein we have this part of the word illustrated, a word in season, what shall we say to the poor palsied man? He perhaps brought himself into that palsied state by his profligacy, perhaps by excess of drink; that’s a thing that robs us of about sixty thousand lives in our own country every year, and aggravates, implants, and brings on this poor old fallen nature ten thousand diseases. It is very likely that this man had brought himself into that state. Mind, I am not saying that all whose misfortune it is to be thus afflicted, that there is any fault on their part. I would not say that; that would be wrong; because some are constitutionally liable, let them live how they may, there is a constitutional tendency, perhaps, to certain afflictions and calamities. So, we must be careful how we speak here, lest we should add sorrow to those whose afflictions are, as far as they are concerned, without any fault of their own. But I am assuming now, just for the sake of the idea, that this poor palsied man had brought himself into that state. And he had heard of Jesus, but he had no faith in him; he didn’t suppose that his case ever could be managed; he didn’t suppose that the Savior could look with approbation upon such a case as that; it was too bad for the Savior to manage. But then the four men that were with him, they had faith the man had none; they had faith, and so they took him up and brought him. And then, when they got there, you could almost hear this man saying, “Well, you had better take me back again, you see it is crowded, we can’t get in, we can’t see him, and no doubt an overruling Providence has so ordered it, knowing what a wretch

I am. You had better take me back again.” But these four men were determined to persevere. They knew that Jesus Christ never had yet met with a case that he could not manage, he had never yet turned one away; and he had wrought wonderful miracles. And therefore, they set to work to take the roof off. “There,” says the man, “you will get into trouble presently; you will have the constables after you, for pulling the man’s house down.” “Never mind, we must take you to him.” So, they got the roof off, or a part of it; they got the man up, and then they got the man down, and they got him to where the Savior was. And what was the first word of the Savior? I will take the first word; it means everything you can think of. “Son.” What does that mean? Why, that the man was loved with an everlasting love, and was a child of God in God’s counsel; it means that he was chosen, that he was a redeemed one, a saved one; it means, in a word, that he was an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. Then the next words would make the man rather suspicious; “your sins.” Now if the Savior had stopped there, why, this man would look up to these four men, and say, “I told you so; you see he is naming my sins; I wish you had not brought me here; I might as well have forgotten them until I had got into hell; you have done wrong altogether.” “Your sins;” that would come like a thunderclap to him. And then, “Your sins are,” “Ah, I know, yes, too great to be forgiven; that’s about it; and they never will be forgiven, they are of that kind they never will be forgiven; therefore your sins are too great to be forgiven.” How he would tremble thus far! Presently comes the mighty word, “forgiven.” Peace rolled into his soul; away went his guilt, away went his fear, away went all his trouble; eternity was thrown open to him; he felt and saw that his name was written on high; he recognized the tide of mercy that rose up above all the mountains of his sins, carried them eternally away, and found it to be a word in season indeed. And then some were offended at this. And now the Savior says, “I have healed your soul.” “Yes, Lord, you have, and I should like to go to heaven now.” “No, I want you to stay on earth, and therefore I will heal your body, and then you can run about and tell people a little of the mercy you have found.” I shouldn’t be surprised if he became a minister; those are the kind of men that make the best ministers, because they themselves can appreciate the mercy by which they are saved. And so, “Arise, take up your bed, and walk.” But time would fail; suffice it to say, then, that all the miracles, whether turning water into wine, feeding the five thousand, or when the disciples were despairing of getting to land, and a sentence thrown into the sea, “Peace, be still;” in all these cases what a word in season it was! And I have no doubt the apostle had something of this in view when he said, “Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together.” As though he should say, It’s not what the minister may say, but it is God’s own order for his people to assemble, and for his word publicly to be preached. And how many, many words are thus publicly spoken in season! You are in soul-trouble, temporal trouble, or some trial or another, and the minister comes to just where you are, perhaps tells you your very case, your very feelings, your very fears, and then points out the remedy; and when he points out the remedy, and the Lord attends it with his power, what does it do? Why, it ministers unto you a consolation that nothing else can, a strength that nothing else can; and such, that know something of this work of the Holy Spirit in enabling them thus to draw comfort from the word of God, may well say unto the world, “I have meat to eat that you know not of.” So, then Jesus knew how, and he knows how now, to speak a word in season; and he set his face like a flint to do this. He gave great offence in doing it, great offence. The same now; if a minister dares to preach a pure gospel, and cuts up duty-faith or free-will root and branch, or any of those systems, they sneer at that minister; and if one of their hearers happens to go where such a minister is, they say, Ah, you must go and have *Hyperism* undiluted, I find; you have become a *hyper*, I find; you have become one of those narrow-minded men, I find, with their unholy tempers, unholy lives, and unholy doctrines, of course, unholy, dreadfully bad; I am sorry you have become

one of them. This is the way that Pharisaic men, who have not the least idea that they are Pharisees, treat the truth and the people of God unto this day. And hence, when the Savior preached the gospel to the poor, why, it offended the great people; and when he said, "Blessed are the poor," and when he judged not by the sight of his eyes nor after the hearing of his ears, but judged with righteous judgment. Just the same now, these Pharisaic men, these duty-faith men, for they are Pharisaic, they will give us a straightforward sermon now and then, in the letter of it; that's the bait: the very next sermon they get the hook, to drag you out of the liberty of the gospel, and set you to the mill-grinding. Some may think me too severe upon these matters; but as the Lord lives, I would rather be ground to mincemeat, I would rather be put to death, as Laurentius was, upon a gridiron, I would rather suffer anything than give up the liberty I have in Christ, in whole or in part. There I stand free from sin, free from unrighteousness, free from everything; and whenever the Lord intends a word of mercy for me, that word comes not by what I am, but by what Jesus Christ is; and, therefore, not unto us, but unto his name be all the glory. Some of you that are sitting here now, perhaps, do not like the liberty of the gospel. If so, it is because you do not know the plague of your own hearts; it is because you do not know what it is for Satan to come in like a flood, and overwhelm all your supposed goodness; it is because you do not know what it is to loathe yourselves in your own sight, and to feel there is no standing but in that freedom that is in Christ Jesus, and in that promise that is by him yea and amen. But the Savior set his face like a flint; he would not move from the truth; no. I have two or three things I could name here which are self-evident. First, all that he healed he certainly healed them freely; you cannot deny that: second, that he healed them effectually, cannot deny that; and third, that he was reproached for so doing, you cannot deny that; even tried to prove that he had broken the sabbath because he opened the man's eyes on that day; but this did not move him. And so, we must set our faces like a flint; be not moved from the truth, stand out for it; never mind what men may think or say. These, then, are two of the things about which the Savior was so decided; the obtaining eternal redemption; second, a word in season to him that is weary.

The third point upon which the Savior was so bold and decided was, to become for ever and ever the servant of the most high God. Hence, he says here, "The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." You get an explanation of this in the Old Testament, as you are aware, when a Hebrew said plainly, "I love my master, my wife, and my children," and I am sure that Jesus Christ said this plainly, that he loved the church, that he loved God, that he loved the little ones, and then such an one was to be taken before the judges, his ear was to be opened, and he was to be the property of that man during the whole of his life; as we say, forever. So, Jesus Christ entered upon an everlasting service. He began at Bethlehem, when he was born, and he has been serving God from that day to this; he has never gone out of the service of God, and never will. And he says here, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting;" nothing could move him. He was thus, then, bold to enter upon this eternity of the service of God, and he will serve God to all eternity. And so, with us; we have entered into the service of God, and we have entered into it forever, to go out from it no more forever. The mere servant will go out, but the son abides in the house for ever. And the fourth thing about which he was so decided was the challengement of his enemies. "Who will contend with me? let us stand together; who is my adversary? let him come near to me; lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up." How true this was! Satan is the accuser of the brethren, and when he comes in and accuses you, you say to yourself, Well, I know I am faulty there, but Jesus Christ was not; I know I am angry with my brother

sometimes unjustly, but Jesus Christ was not; I know with my flesh I serve the law of sin, but Jesus Christ did not; I know that my best righteousness's, as regards my doings; are at the best but very, very defective; they are in the sight of God but as filthy rags, and I should not like to appear before God in them. And if my righteousness's be as filthy rags, what must my unrighteousness be? Well, but Jesus Christ was righteous, and that is your righteousness. The apostle says, "The life I live I live by the faith of the Son of God." So, then, I can never expect to cross the Jordan but by the perfection of Jesus Christ; I can never expect to have an abundant entrance into heaven but by the perfection of Jesus Christ; I can never expect to appear with acceptance before God but by the perfection of Jesus Christ. He therefore could challenge his enemies in a way you never can.

But I go to the last part, *the beautiful allusions that are in the Old Testament made to that decision and stability indicated in our text*. Our text conveys the idea of firmness. "Therefore have I set my face like a flint;" not easily impressed. Satan could make no impression upon Christ; the serpent upon the rock could not make any impression. There are, to my mind, very beautiful allusions made to the stability of the Lord Jesus Christ. I go, in the first place, to the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy: "Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions." You all know what that means, and if you do not, your humble servant does; he knows very well indeed; plenty of fiery serpents he has had at him; but it will be all right by-and-bye; and so it is right now. Well, now they were in great need, and the Lord brought them forth "water out of the rock of flint." If it were a soft, easy, boiled bread sort of rock, that might easily fall to pieces, or broken to pieces, or beaten to pieces; but "out of the rock of flint," to denote solidity, stability. And so, the dear Savior set his face like a flint, and therefore we are supplied in that way indicated: stability, certainty, eternity. "Out of the rock of flint;" it conveys a beautiful idea to my mind, to denote the firmness of Jesus Christ; he is the Rock of ages, never moves. And then I go to the 114th Psalm, and I find the same put before us again, to impress us with the idea of stability, sternness for the truth, immutability, firmness; where the psalmist beautifully describes the interposition of the Lord for his people: "What ailed you, O you sea, that you fled?" So do not mind if there be a sea of trouble before you; the Lord will throw in a word by-and-bye that will roll it away; if there is a Jordan before you, there is a God with you. "You Jordan, that you were driven back? Tremble, you earth," that is, enemies, earthly persons, "at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;" that is the secret of it.