Forces of Woe: The Earth Beast

Revelation 13:11-18

Introduction:

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Today our study is about the second ally of the Dragon, the Beast rising out of the Earth. Revelation chapters 12-13, while intimidating and unsettling in their contents, and in the depictions of these great enemies of the saints, serve nonetheless as excellent warnings to the Christian soldier. Throughout the New Testament we are warned of the dangers of apostasy, false religion, and allegiance to man-made kingdoms and powers. In the Old Testament, we read about the origin of these things. We also read numerous stories of men and women of God who fell prey to the lies of these two beasts, serving men rather than God. The message of scripture is clear that the power, philosophy, and religion of man are wicked and are to be avoided. This truth is presented in these profound, though terrifying, depictions of the Dragon and the Beasts. I wanted to remind us of a few key details from Revelation 12 and then we will read the first half of Revelation 13 again to begin our study.

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Revelation 12:12 - …Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

This is our first warning of what is to come in chapter 13. This is a foreshadowing of what we read in Revelation 12:17 where the Devil, realizing his failure to destroy the Man-Child and his failure to destroy the Woman, turns his full attention to the rest of the saints. He cannot destroy the Church, he cannot destroy Christ, he knows that he has lost and is almost out of time so he intends to take as many of God’s people down with him as he can. I would like to read again the first half of Revelation 13, but start reading from Revelation 12:17 and we will read Revelation 13:1 from the American Standard Version:

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Revelation 12:17 - …the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 13:1 (ASV) - and he (the Dragon) stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy.

Revelation 13:2-10 - Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

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And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.

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Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

I think it’s important for us to include the last verse of chapter 12 and to see the better translation of Revelation 13:1 as it more clearly presents the situation. There’s a war going on and we are given the full measure of our enemies. These beasts are described in detail so that we do not underestimate their power, nor will we be unable to identify them when they come in various manifestations. We learned last week how the first beast represented, in John’s time, the Roman Empire. More generally, this beast represents corrupt earthly governments who oppress the people of God. It’s important that we remember: The beast did not simply die with Rome. The beast is a composite of the four beasts of Daniel’s vision possessing traits of each and having seven heads, which are the total number of heads possessed by all four beasts in Daniel’s vision. Of this description G. K. Beale says in his commentary:

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“The combination does not signify just the extreme power of first-century Rome but also the temporal transcendence of the oppressive beast portrayed here.” - G. K. Beale

Note what he says about temporal transcendence. That means that the beast is beyond time limitations. The beast exists so long as oppressive governments of man exist to combat and attack the people of God and the same is true of the beast from the earth who serves the beast from the sea. This is not to say that these beasts are eternal, a claim easily disproven by their being called forth by the Dragon in this chapter, implying they were created or had a beginning. This is also not to say that they are immortal as we will learn about their ultimate destruction later in the book of Revelation. Instead, we need to realize that these beasts have been around for a long time, since the creation of the first kingdom of man in Babel which became Babylon. The beasts still live today, and they will continue until the end of time where they will face their ultimate destruction. So, we must be on our guard. With this in mind, we will read Revelation 13:11-18:

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Revelation 13:11-18 - Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

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He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

This chapter is the only place in which the beast from the earth is referred to as a beast, later he is referred to as the False Prophet while the first beast continues to be called “The Beast” throughout the book. The term False Prophet is all too fitting when we consider the description, mission, and methods of this beast. From what we read in chapter 12, it seems as if the False Prophet was born out of the flood which Satan the Dragon spewed out of his mouth. You’ll recall that in chapter 12 it says that the earth swallowed up this flood. This seems especially significant in that this beast from the earth speaks as the Dragon speaks. The flood of false doctrine and blasphemy coming from the Dragon was willingly accepted by the earth. It will be helpful here to mention a very general definition of what the earth and sea of this chapter symbolize. Homer Hailey, in his commentary, identifies the earth as “the world of unregenerate people” while identifying the sea as “the mass of society”. We learned that the first beast represents man-made systems such as civil governments and powers. The second beast is to be identified with groups of people who worship the state and attempt to lead others to do the same. It is sometimes difficult to assign definite identities to the False Prophet, which when you consider his mission and his methods, makes sense. Before we look more at his identity, I want to make a few comparisons between this False Prophet and true prophets which he mimics.

First, the description of his power and abilities rings out as an ironic echo of the acts of Moses when he faced the Egyptian magicians. The False Prophet is far more like the magicians of Egypt so far as the genuineness of his miracles go, but he claims to have prophetic authority as validated by “great signs” like Moses. His supposed ability to make fire come down out of heaven reminds us of Elijah and his prophetic demonstration of the one true God in 1 Kings 18:38-39 and 2 Kings 1:10-14. This beast poses as a prophet of truth and a teacher of good things, but he is a liar and a deceiver:

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Revelation 13:14 - he deceives those who dwell on the earth—by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast

The miracles and powers of this beast are about as genuine as those of Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian charlatans who challenged Moses. Only God can empower someone to perform miracles and He only does so with good purpose. God used miracles, as we mentioned, to validate His chosen spokesman. God would not allow the enemy of the saints to perform true miracles in order to deceive, lead away, and destroy His people. God is not the author of confusion, and such would be beyond confusion. If the beast were able to perform true miracles, then we would be led to believe that he is a true prophet. John tells us plainly that these miracles are performed in order to deceive the hearer rather than validate the speaker. The False Prophet also in many ways attempts to imitate Christ. In his description we are told that he takes on the appearance of a lamb, yet his speech betrays him for it is the speech of his father the Dragon. He has authority given to him like that of Christ:

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Revelation 13:12 - And he exercises all the authority of the first beast (who received his authority from the Dragon) in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Matthew 28:18-20 - And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations… teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you…”

The beast of the earth has a mission to lead all that he can to worship the first beast and by extension worship the Dragon. He wants to make disciples of the beast from the sea, who will in turn take part in his mission. He does this through deceptive false miracles and especially by false teaching. He is a master level false teacher, having gained his skill from ingesting the great flood from the mouth of the Dragon. He wants to lead you to become a part of the first beast’s kingdom and to submit yourself to the dominion of the Devil:

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Revelation 13:16 - He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads

To be marked on the right hand and on the forehead is symbolic of what you believe and what you practice. Those who have these marks believe the false gospel of the beast and willfully engage in worshipping the sea beast. In other words, the False Prophet is preaching a false kingdom message. He wants you to join yourself to the kingdoms of the world rather than the kingdom of Heaven. Compare Revelation 13:16 to what we read about the kingdom of God in:

Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Again, compare the mark of the ungodly to the faithful of God with His name on their foreheads:

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Revelation 9:4 - They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Revelation 14:1 - Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.

*See also: Revelation 3:12, Revelation 7:3, Revelation 22:4.*

This beast does his best to make everything *look* like the things of God. That’s one trait which makes him so dangerous. He has enough things right to make his offer seem wonderful and valuable but the end of it is death and destruction. Unfortunately, the False Prophet does his job all too well. Beale notes in his commentary that:

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“By the end of the first century A.D. all the cities addressed in the Apocalypse’s letters had temples dedicated to the deity of Caesar, the first established in Pergamum in 29 B.C.” - G. K. Beale

He also says this of the second beast:

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“Whereas the first beast speaks loudly and defiantly against God, the second beast makes the first beast’s claims sound plausible and persuasive. False teachers in the church are encouraging compromise with culture’s idolatrous institutions… Therefore it takes a discerning Christian to detect the evil inherent in the second beast.” - G. K. Beale

The False Prophet is exceedingly dangerous. He appears as harmless in some ways, doing his best to seem like something good and worthy of your attention, but his speech betrays him: He speaks like a dragon. It’s no wonder that we find so many warnings in the New Testament about false prophets and devils in disguise. The Bible says in:

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Matthew 7:15 - Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 24:24 - For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

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2 Corinthians 11:14-15 - And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 - The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

In John’s day, the earth beast primarily manifested itself as the Caesar cult. These were the enforcers of state religion, which in this case was Emperor worship. Now, it can be hard to nail down a specific entity in identifying this beast in any given era, because he isn’t picky about *how* he gets you to worship the sea beast. Beale put it this way:

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“This beast may take many forms and may at times even be equated with the state, as well as with false prophets in the church.” - G. K. Beale

I also thought the heading Beale used for his comments on Revelation 13:11-17 was informative and worth noting. He titles the second half of Revelation 13 as:

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“The State Authorizes Its Political, Religious, and Economic Allies as Its Agents to Persecute the Church and to Deceive the Ungodly.” - G. K. Beale

Homer Hailey in his commentary agrees in identifying the earth beast with the pagan practice of emperor worship, one of paganism’s most repulsive forms. He further adds:

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“A representation of this form of paganism probably does not exhaust its significance, for its spirit is reflected in all forms of false worship” - Homer Hailey

Many of the commentators stress the religious nature of the earth beast which is apparent also in his identity as the False Prophet. However, it is easy to hear the word “religion” and think we are only talking about false Christianity of some sort. Religion, in its most general sense, simply means:

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A particular system of faith and worship.

A pursuit or interest to which someone ascribes supreme importance.

That second definition is important and is part of what makes this beast so dangerous. It is also the reason that commentators such as Beal feel comfortable in saying this beast represents not only religious allies, but also political and economic allies. To this we should also be aware that this beast manifests itself in cultural trends, social movements, and man’s philosophy. We must be exceedingly careful when dealing with any of these forces. Your pursuit or interest in these things that surpasses your faithfulness and allegiance to God is failure on your part and a resounding success for the earth beast. Far too many people are drawn away from the Church and from the Lord by the seductive allure and attraction of these things, but they are deceit, they are lies, and they do not bring you anything but spiritual death and destruction.

Unfortunately, this beast’s power does not end with his ability to deceive. As we’ve seen in Revelation 12-13, he has two exceedingly powerful allies, which for the Christian means there are consequences for resistance. Christians in the first century knew these consequences all too well. Hailey in his commentary says:

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“…No one could enter the field of trade or earn a living without it. The view advanced in interpreting the opening of the third seal, that the rider of the black horse signified scarcity through discrimination, seems to be confirmed here. The saints who refused the mark even at the risk of death, were boycotted by the world, being discriminated against even to the point of hunger or possible starvation.” - Homer Hailey

In the first century it wasn’t only your faith on the line, but also your reputation, livelihood, and life itself. Only a few years ago it would be hard for us to imagine this sort of opposition from the world around us but as we see time and time again today opposition to those who obey God is ever increasing. We can find numerous examples of men and women who have their reputation and livelihood threatened by enemies of God. Is it so far-fetched to imagine anymore that the day could soon come when our lives might be threatened? Pray that those days do not come, but don’t press on in doubting ignorance that they’ve come upon the people of God at various times in the past and they very well could come again. We cannot compromise with the beast. To do so is to deny the faith and to turn against the Lord. Nothing he can do to us in this world is worth forfeiting our heavenly reward for a fleeting moment of peace in this world.

There are two very controversial or at least confusing details mentioned in this chapter which we wouldn’t have time to cover in depth and for different reasons, I don’t plan on diving too deep into. The first is the concept of the deadly wound which was healed, a detail given about the first beast. There are many ideas and theories proposed about the significance and meaning of this wound. However, time would not allow us to give an in-depth examination of these. Many of them can be dismissed due to their wild nature, requiring many logical leaps to uphold. Yet even the more likely explanations have their difficulties. To be honest, I don’t know that I have a good answer for the meaning of this healed, deadly wound. So, I will briefly give you the two most likely theories and leave it at that.

The first theory is that this deadly wound healed refers to the work of the second beast. Specifically, it claims that the deadly wound represents the decline of emperor worship after Nero’s death and even has reference to Nero’s death itself. The healing of this wound would refer to the revival of emperor worship as well as the renewal of Christian persecution under Domitian’s reign. If you investigate this theory, you’ll find a lot of speculation and reference to Nero resurrection myths, either Nero literally coming back or figuratively returning in the person of Domitian.

The second theory relates this wound to the Messianic prophetic statements of God in Genesis 3:15. This theory proposes that the wound is the same as the serpent’s bruised head. This connects the deadly would with the resurrection of Christ. I don’t know that there is much explanation about the healing of this wound, aside from the theory saying that the beast only continued to live for a short time and eventually succumbed to its wound. While each theory has merits and issues, I don’t know that I can say for sure which is right, if either. At the least, the imagery shows the resilience of this beast. He is not easily killed, and such deadly wounds do not stop his persecution of the people of God. He is still very dangerous and well able to harm faithful Christians if they are not on their guard.

The second concept I won’t spend anywhere near as much time on as you could is that of the number or name of the beast. This is one of the most favored subjects of the book of Revelation and you would think, with so many minds focused on it, that we would be able to find the answer with ease. Maybe that’s the key to the problem: It could be simpler than you think. Many people overthink the number 666. They apply the field of study known as gematria, which is simply the attempt to translate letters and names into numbers and then through mathematics, come up with the number 666. I don’t plan on covering the subject of this number in detail, as I would most likely be giving an inferior version of brother George Battey’s presentation on it. If you would like to know more about how people come to the wrong conclusions as well as more on how to understand the number, I highly recommend you listen to his presentation. Instead, we will simply look at Revelation 13:18 and find our answer there considering what we’ve studied today and last week:

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Revelation 13:18 - Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666.

Seven, when used as a symbol in Revelation, refers to perfection and holy things of God. The number six, in contrast, is the number of mankind. There are many reasons why the number six refers symbolically to man, which you might investigate more on your own. We’ve noticed, with both the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, that they have their origin from mankind itself. They are not beyond mankind, but they are of man. The sea beast is man’s government. The earth beast are parties, composed of men and women, who lead others to worship the sea beast. Both are composed of humans and so their power, or nature cannot exceed that of humanity. This is not to say they are not dangerous, as we have seen they both receive power and authority from the Dragon. However, their power cannot exceed its physical limitations. Six is a mortal number, being the number of men. They can only harm you physically. They can take your possessions or take your life, but they cannot take your salvation. This can only be lost if you willingly surrender it by giving allegiance to the Dragon and his allies.

As to why there are three sixes when it seems as though one would suffice for the point, there is a Jewish idiom that could explain the repetition. Jews often emphasized something through repetition. Often in the Bible you will read something, such as a name, repeated twice. This was done in order to really grab the hearer’s attention. Beyond this, the Jews would very seldom repeat something three times in a row, but if they did, this was to show the utmost emphasis on what they were saying. You might think of Isaiah 6:3 or Revelation 4:8 where God is called “Holy, Holy, Holy”. This sort of repetition means that God is as holy as holy can be. Nothing surpasses Him in holiness. That’s how the Jews used this sort of repetition. Now, I am not positive that this is what is going on with the triple repetition of the number six, but it seems reasonably enough. The beast may share the number of mankind, but he is not to be underestimated. He possesses the full power that mankind can muster, as well as being given authority, power, and dominion from the Dragon himself.

Conclusion:

As we finish our study of Revelation 13, I want to summarize its overall message by returning for just a moment to something we discussed earlier. The subversive, seductive nature of the beast from the earth should not be underestimated and unfortunately today I think many people in the Church fail to take the threat as seriously as they should. The False Prophet does not simply represent false doctrine, false teaching, or innovation in religion. He has far more tools at this disposal and he uses them well. He can attack through economics, politics, social movements, and philosophies of man just as easily as he can through false religion. His one goal is to lead you to worship the state, the first beast, and to break your allegiance to Christ. He doesn’t care how he accomplishes that goal so long as you’ve joined his side. Let me offer a few ways the beast succeeds in deceiving the children of God:

1. Through the allure of riches. He can use the vast economic wealth of the state to deceive you into thinking you have all you need in this world. You can be lost through the love and pursuit of money, forsaking your faith.

2. Through the lie that there is something good which God is withholding. Social movements and philosophies of man have long been making the claim that there is something more than what Christ offers. The world can be fixed, but it needs you to get involved. These movements and ideologies are devices of the beast designed only to devour and waste your time and energy. You cannot strive to fix the world through the means of man. God holds all truth and is all that is good. Man has nothing to offer that God does not give His people through His word. We have the means by which to make better men and women and it’s the Gospel.

3. Through lust for power. The beast makes the same offers to the saints of God as the Devil used to tempt Jesus. He offers you a seat at the table, a place of prominence in the kingdoms of men. Get involved with the government, you can facilitate the change you want to see in society. Yet, that’s just not how it works. That’s not our mission in this world. Study again Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the Great Image. The stone cut out of the mountain, which is the church, was to break in pieces the governments of man, not assimilate and make them better. It has never been part of God’s plan for us to become involved with earthly governments but rather that we overcome them by the power of the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. Through wolves in sheep’s clothing. False teachers come and go. They each have their own motives for changing the doctrine of Christ. Some are deceived and some are deceivers. Sadly, many of them fall prey to one of the previously mentioned lies of the beast and become a spokesman in the Church for others to follow suit. G. K. Beale says:

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“When purported Christian teachers take their primary cues from the surrounding culture instead of from God’s word, they corrupt the covenant community spiritually by encouraging it to live by norms and a faith that ultimately oppose the reign of God and Christ.” - G. K. Beale

We need to be very careful about how we engage with these beasts. We need to be cautious about how these things influence our lives and monitor the impact they have on our work for Christ in the kingdom. Are we being distracted by things of the world? Are you more interested in politics, money, or improving our culture than you are in spreading the word of God? The way we spend our time and talents will broadcast our allegiance regardless of what we say. Perhaps you don’t agree that some of these areas are as dangerous as they are. Maybe you think I’m being an alarmist or that I just don’t care about politics or the bizarre spectrum of cultural issues being discussed today. Beware: The False Prophet’s most deadly trait is his subtlety. He appears harmless as a lamb but is as deadly and dangerous as the Great Red Dragon. Last, I want to turn back to Revelation 12 and re-read one of the verses we read earlier:

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Revelation 12:17 - …the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

It may not seem that serious at times when life is easy. We let our guard down and begin to flirt with the world and its offers, but we cannot forget:

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We Are at War. These forces at work in the world are tools of the Devil and his allies. They are merely distractions from our mission to save lost souls. The Dragon and the Beasts are hard at work damning as many people as they can to an eternity in the lake of fire and if you allow them to distract you from your mission, you could very well be lost along with all the people who needed you to be busy working for the Lord. Revelation 13 contains a heavy warning and terrifying truths for us to come to terms with, yet I can’t fully express how much I appreciate its message. It truly is a wake-up call that I believe many in the Church need to hear. Whether you struggle in any of these areas or not we certainly need to be informed about our enemies and keep our guard up, staying active and busy in the faith.

As we draw our study to a close, there may be someone here who needs to make their life right with the Lord. Whether that be by obeying the Gospel call and being baptized for the remission of your sins and being added to the Church or in repenting and confessing your sins to God, renewing your walk with Him, we want to give you the opportunity to do so now. If we can assist you, come forward as we sing.