

Saved by Grace

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone.

Good morning. So good to see you all out there.! Well, it may seem a long time ago, the summer holidays, especially with all the weather we've been having.

But we recently had a holiday in rural Dorset. And while we were there, we visited the county town of Dorchester. I don't know if any of you have been there.

It's once a thriving Roman garrison town. And while we were there, we visited the museum and came across, would you believe it, the man from Macedonia.

His name was Lucius Didius Bassus, believe it or not. And he was born in AD 20. He served 25 years in the Roman army, one of the legions who came and invaded Britain in about AD 43.

[1:19] And he'd retired in Dorchester, the story goes. And he was buried there in his tomb, you can see on the left there. Anyway, the image you see on the right is actually a hologram.

You young guys know what a hologram is. Yeah, Hamish does. Yeah, a hologram is just like an AI image that comes to life if the button's pressed.

And there's the button on there with the red button. And if you press the red button, you can ask him questions. And when you do, he comes to life and he answers those questions.

So there's questions like, you know, what was it like in the Roman army? What sort of food did you eat? You know, how did you feel coming over to this country? And things like that. But I had one question, particularly because he said he was a man from Macedonia.

That's where he was born. I wanted to ask him this. Did you know the Philippian jailer who Paul met in AD 50 or 51? Or more to the point, have you ever appeared in a biblical vision?

[2:28] I didn't dare actually ask him that, but I think that would be beyond the powers of AI.

Anyway, this morning we're looking at the true story of how the Apostle Paul, Paul, on his secondary missionary journey, had a vision of a man from Macedonia, pleading with him to come over to them to help them.

Verses 8 to 9 there. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia. Not a hologram, I hasten to say. Something similar, a vision. Standing and begging him, come over to Macedonia and help us.

And then all the extraordinary events that we've just read that follow from that. Well, recently we've been going through, if you've been here in the last few weeks, we've been going through the letters to the Ephesians.

And the first three chapters, packed with all the astonishing blessings. We looked at this in one of our community groups. Astonishing blessings that God showers on those who have put their trust in him.

In Jesus specifically, and made spiritually alive in him. So some of those blessings are that we've been chosen, then adopted into God's family.

[3:41] Having all our sins forgiven. Believe that, when you look back on your own life. Having all those sins forgiven. Experiencing the lavish love of a father who protects us, loves us, guides us.

And then being an even greater blessing, really. Give the Holy Spirit to live in us. God's Holy Spirit. As a guarantee of an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Isn't that wonderful? Those tremendous blessings. But, you might well say, well, I've never really experienced these things. I'd really like to know how I can have this kind of relationship with a God that I don't really know.

How on earth does it happen? In Ephesians 2.8 we read this. For it is by grace you have been saved. Through faith.

That's if you're a true believer. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not by works. Not by the things we do. Or the things we think we can earn.

[4:50] So that no one can boast. So you might say, well, how does that work? How does that work in my life? How can I experience God's grace that you keep talking about?

This love. This new life. If I can't earn it by being good. Doing all the right things. I thought it was pretty good, really.

On balance. But you're saying, I can't earn a relationship with God and get to heaven by being good. No, it's all by grace.

So what must I do to be saved? As the jailer asked. So the passage in Acts 16. It's a brilliant, really. A practical demonstration of how God works in reaching out to you and to me by his grace into your life to change you.

And we see how he worked in the lives of three very different people. Individuals. Turned their lives around and gave them an indescribable joy and sense of peace in their lives.

[5:59] And in their hearts. So we have a savvy businesswoman. A trader in upmarket fashion. A mystic Meg type. Fortune teller.

And an army veteran. So let's explore their stories and find out how God worked in their lives. The first thing I want to share with you is that God's saving grace is intentional.

God reaches out to us. He has an intention towards you. So Paul was on his second missionary journey with Silas through Asia Minor.

So here's a map, which I hope you can see there, of Asia Minor. They picked up Timothy en route in a place called Lystra and had planned to head off into the province of Asia.

To the west, towards Ephesus. You can see there. You see the red line. The first red line. They were trying to head up into the north of Turkey.

[7:04] And they wanted to go left into Asia. And spread the gospel there. And set up new churches. But the Holy Spirit said, no.

I don't want you going there. I'm not quite sure how he said that. But he did. He conveyed to them that. So they carried on a bit further. And they said, well, let's go into Bithynia. Bithynia. And it says the spirit of Jesus said, no.

I don't want you to go into Bithynia. You carry on. And you can imagine how Paul and Silas felt. They must have been very confused by all this. We're doing God's will.

We're doing what we think is right. Reaching out to others to share the good news about Jesus. Their faith must have been really tested at that point. No idea why, at this point, they weren't allowed to go into these places.

And perhaps you're experiencing that right now. You don't understand the things that you're going through. You don't understand, particularly if you're a Christian this morning, the way God is leading you to go to a certain place or to do a certain thing.

[8:09] It just seems you've got your own plans. But they seem to have been stopped. And you've been stopped dead in your tracks. And you've got to go on a different path. Well, the lesson here is clear. Hang on in there.

God has a better plan for you. And you've just got to wait patiently. And all will become clear. But it wasn't until they got to Troas, you can see, up on the coast there, that God revealed to Paul in a dream or in a vision the man from Macedonia.

And he was there. He was begging them to come over, to help them. And this was all part of God's bigger plan. His spirit was at work because there were many people in Macedonia.

That's that area, the sort of eastern part of Greece that is called Macedonia. So there's Philippi, the biggest town, there's Thessalonica, and there's Berea.

And he was intending to save and the timing was exactly right. Paul and Silas answered the call immediately. Jumped on the ferry from Troas to Neapolis.

[9:18] And they ended up in Philippi, this Roman colony. You can still see the ruins of it today. And you see the road going through. It's on a major trading route. And this is exactly what God intended them to do and where he intended them to be because of his plan.

Because that's where the three individuals were. Can you see what's happening here? Three people were looking at in Philippi. Had no idea what or who was coming their way.

But God was already at work and he was about to intervene in their three individual lives and those around them to bring them into a relationship with him. So you can see here that God's grace is

very intentional.

He's determined to save. So can I say this, you know, you may not realise it now, but God may be orchestrating things in your life rather the way that Morag described in her life.

Orchestrating events to bring you into an encounter with Jesus, perhaps through a friend, through going to a particular church at a particular time or seeing somebody who shared about Jesus with you.

[10:31] His offer of salvation is going to be there because God is planning it and you cannot ignore it.

So the second thing to notice here is that God's grace, his saving grace is very personal. Paul, Silas and Timothy find themselves in this place called Philippi and it's a Sabbath day.

But there's a problem when they get there. Normally what they would do on the Sabbath day, they go to the local Jewish temple or synagogue rather, not the temple, the synagogue.

But in Philippi, there was no synagogue to go to. So what do they do? But they'd heard on the grapevine that there's a group of women having an open air prayer meeting down by the river.

So, well, let's go and investigate. Let's see what's going on down there. Perhaps we can join in with them. So off they go. They go down there and they start chatting to the group of women.

[11:32] And here we come across Lydia. She's this successful businesswoman in Philippi selling top of the range purple cloth to the Roman aristocracy that lived there.

It's like a colony of Rome itself. And where was she from? And this is important to notice. Well, she was from Thyatira. Well, where's Thyatira?

Right bang smack in the middle of Asia. And, you know, coincidence, you might say. But if the missionaries, you can see, if they'd gone across to Asia, they'd have missed her altogether because she wasn't there.

She was in Philippi selling her cloth. But the Spirit of God knew exactly where she was and the time was right for her personally.

For Paul and Silas to meet with them and share the good news with them. So this was a divine appointment. It wasn't an accident. It was a divine appointment.

[12:32] A very personal appointment, which had involved Paul and Silas changing their travel plans so that they went to Philippi. And can I say that this is how the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, works.

He orchestrates, as I've said before, his circumstances so that we come face to face with the claims of Jesus. Lydia was an intelligent woman. She had some awareness of Israel's God, it seems.

So much so that she'd actually joined the prayer meeting and begun to worship this God of the Israelites. But it wasn't until Paul began to explain about that Jesus was the Son of God and came into our world to take upon himself the punishment of our sins by dying on the cross just 20 years before this incident to give her new life.

If she would only put her trust in him. She hadn't heard about Jesus before it seems. But now she did. And she had it all explained to her. For Lydia, personally, the light dawned.

But see how the Spirit of God works. In verse 14, it says, The Lord, what did the Lord do? The Lord opened her heart. He took the initiative. He opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

[13:56] I just love that. To see God opening your heart is a wonderful thing. Gently, persuasively, the Lord convinced Lydia that his offer of salvation is real.

And it's for her. For her personally. She knows she didn't deserve it. What she'd done to deserve this. But, so it didn't deserve his invitation.

But it had her name written all over it. And his Spirit gives her the power to respond. See God's Spirit at work here. And so she does.

We can't resist the Spirit of God. When he starts really working in us. It's God's grace at work. His saving grace at work in her heart. As the writers of the Hebrews explains.

He, Jesus, is able to save completely those who come to God through him. Because he always lives to intercede for them. Maybe you can identify with Lydia.

[15:00] You do believe in God. In a general sort of sense. You enjoy coming to church to pray. And sing worship songs.

It lifts your heart. But when you really look deeply into your own heart and life. You can't honestly say that Jesus has died for you. That your soul has been liberated.

It's been set free. I really pray this morning. If that's you. That the Lord will open your heart. Even this morning. Towards him.

And that you'll respond to this call. That he's making to you now. And entrust your life to him.

Experience this wonderful saving grace. That you can experience with all the blessings.

That flow from it. And the amazing thing is. That's all it takes. The gospel of Jesus. Is so simple. It's not just a kind of intellectual ascent.

[15 : 57] To a series of doctrines. Or teachings. Or so on. Although that's important. It's about a change of heart. You need your heart open. And all you need to do is humbly respond.

And confess. I believe. Isn't that simple? Isn't it wonderful? I know many of you here this morning have experienced that. The other thing I want to. The third thing I want to just.

Explain is that God's saving grace is transformational. And we've seen that. Not only in Morag's life. But in the life of the people that we've been looking at.

Verse 16 we meet someone at the other end of the social spectrum. We've got Lydia. A very intelligent. Active business woman. And here we have someone at the other end.

A slave woman. Owned by some unscrupulous businessman. Who exploited her demonic type fortune telling. She obviously had some interest in the occult.

[16 : 57] And in some respects was possessed. So Paul and Silas were one day on their way to the Riverside prayer meeting. To have fellowship with Lydia and her friends.

And then this mystic Meg type starts following them. And heckling them. And I always remember when we were in Germany many years ago. And it was many years ago.

Because our Thomas who's now 45 was only a little baby. And I was at the back. You know you parents know about it. You know your child's kicking off. And you go to the back of the church. And you sort of try and nod him off to sleep.

And that was a challenge with our Tom. But anyway. While I was at the back of the church there.

This woman comes in at the back. It's a place called Kapeln in North Germany.

If you're interested. But we. There we were. And this woman comes in the back. And she starts heckling the preacher. You know shouting these things out. She obviously didn't believe anything to do with Christianity.

[17 : 55] And was really letting them have it. It was very disturbing. I mean I was quite alarmed.

And then you know the preacher was sort of trying to keep going. But the deacons had to jump up. And gently escort her out.

This is the sort of thing that Paul was putting up with here I think. These men are the servants of the most high God. Who are telling you the way to be saved. It was sort of a mockery almost. She kept on following them around for days.

And mocking them. Until Paul decided enough was enough. And he turned around on her. In the name of Jesus Christ. I command you to come out of her. And at that moment.

The spirit left her. We read. Luke the writer here. He doesn't confirm that this slave girl became a believer. And joined the church there. But her life was clearly completely transformed.

When by the power of Jesus Christ. The spirit left her. Her spirit was set free. By the power of Jesus. So for me it seems impossible.

[18 : 57] And the commentators too actually. It's not just me. But the commentators too think. It's almost impossible to think that she wasn't saved. And believed in Jesus. For what he'd done for her.

So this is a bit. A little bit sensitive. But maybe you have suffered a life of abuse. In the past. At the hands of others. We hear that in the testimonies.

Don't we? Men or women who have exploited you. And when you're. Perhaps you're most vulnerable. Perhaps you've even suffered modern day slavery. My sister works for a charity.

That reaches out to these girls. That have been. Brought into this country. For dubious purposes. But the good news for you. If that's you this morning.

Is that you're not beyond the reach of God's power. As this story demonstrates. To save you. Give you a new life in Jesus. Far from it. In fact Jesus actually came to transform.

[19 : 55] People like you. The lives of the oppressed. He said at the start of his ministry. In Luke 4. The spirit of the Lord is on me. Because he has anointed me.

To proclaim the good news to the poor. So to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. And recovery of sight for the blind. And listen to this.

To set the oppressed free. So maybe you've been oppressed. For many years in your life. But God is here. Jesus is here. To set you free. He can replace these demons in your own heart. With his loving overwhelming grace. And that's how he does it. By overwhelming you. With his love. With his grace. And I'm sure many of you experience that. That whatever your background. Whatever your story. Jesus has the power to transform your life. And all you need to do. Is just accept. This transforming grace. Just hand your life over to Jesus.

[20:57] Who has the power to save. And believe. Well. God's saving grace.

Also requires a response. Now we come perhaps. Most of the famous incident. In Paul's ministry in Philippi. Why? Obviously the saved woman's owners. Were furious.

And they realised their money making scheme. Was over. Paul and Silas. Were dragged into the marketplace. It says. To face the Roman authorities. The magistrates.

And cleverly. His accusers. They used the kind of racial angle. By accusing them of being Jews. Who were introducing this foreign culture. Into their city. Which they didn't like.

So they stirred up a flash mob. That sounds familiar. Doesn't it? These days. Look at what's happening in Paris. So the magistrates came. Down on them like a ton of bricks.

[21:52] Ordered them to be stripped. And beaten with rods. And mercilessly chucked into prison. And here we meet our jailer. Now Philippi.

As we've seen. Is a Roman colony. Been established by legionnaires. From the Roman army. And they were encouraged. To settle there. And look after the city.

Our jailer obviously had a job. With a magistrate. To supplement his army pension. Which probably wasn't very much. And he was a practical.

Loyal. Midi-flash. Sort of a chap. Just got on with life. Life wasn't too bad really. And he managed the local nick.

And I imagine when he woke up. That fateful morning. He had absolutely no idea. What the day would bring. Or God's saving intentions. Towards him personally. He must have grown.

[22:49] When the riot took place. And he was given the job. Of guarding these wretched. Troublemakers. On pain of death. He decided to make sure. They couldn't escape. So he clapped them into the.

Notorious inner prison. It was. You can see these places. Even now I think. You go. Into the prison. But then there's a deeper one. Underground. Where it's. There's no light. No windows. Nothing. And he. Clapped them in there. And fastened their feet. In the docks. Settled down to this. Kind of unwelcome night. Of night duty really.

Night duty sleeping. Before dozing off. I imagine his. Curiosity. Must have been raised. By these two. Notorious prisoners.

Singing and praising. To their God. What was that all about? How could they do that? They're still recovering. From their wounds. Maybe.

[23:45] Perhaps your. Curiosity. This morning. Has been raised. By the way. Particularly if you haven't been here before. But the way Christians sing. Sing their hearts out. In worship and praise.

It has a bit of an impact. Anyway. He goes off to sleep. And we now come to the crunch. This massive earthquake.

Hits. Quite unexpectedly. Around about midnight. Probably seven or eight. On the Richter scale. This is God. The creators. We sung about that earlier.

Didn't he? The great creators. Dramatic. Intentional. Intervention. The foundations of the jail are shaken. The doors fly open. The prisoners chains are loosened.

And you know the rest. The jailer wakes up. Sees the doors wide open. Assumes all the prisoners have run off. And fled. And rather than face the death penalty. Losing his charges.

[24:40] Under Roman law. He draws his sword. To fall on it. Now Paul. Had somehow persuaded. The other prisoners. To stay put.

I don't quite know how he managed that. But he did. And as a Roman citizen himself. He would have known the law. The predicament. That the jailer was in. So stopped him. From harming himself.

Don't harm yourself. We're all here. Verse 28. And the jailer. Grabbed some lights. And rushes in. Questions racing through his mind.

Why do these men care about me? Why didn't they just escape? While they had the opportunity? Who were they singing and praying to? What kind of God could cause such an earthquake?

None of my Roman gods. Have that sort of power. And you get the sense. His conscience is smitten. He's probably done some pretty awful things. In his life.

[25 : 37] As a soldier. And as a jailer. What will become of him? Particularly when he's facing death. Himself. Where would he have finished up?

If he died? And then he asks the most. Life changing question. He could ever have asked. Sirs. What must I do.

To be saved? So let me ask you now. Have you ever asked that question yourself?

What must I do to be saved? It's the most important question. In all sincerity. That you could ever ask. And the answer Paul gives is simple. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you will be saved. Not you might be saved. You will be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And you will be saved. Let me impress that on you this morning.

[26 : 32] That is the gospel. That is the good news. Believe. On the Lord Jesus Christ. And you will be saved. You and your household. So the jailer believes. And he is saved.

It is by grace. But it is also through faith. There needs to be a response. Of faith. God's grace requires us response. And the Holy Spirit. Empowers us to make that response.

So in conclusion then. What can we deduce from these three very different cases? You might have come here this morning. Watched online.

Prompted by perhaps a close friend inviting you. Or a family. Your family persuading you to come. Just to understand more about what this Christianity is all about.

May have a general belief in God like Lydia did. But not have had a first hand experience of God's grace. Or understood your need to believe in Jesus. And surrender your life to him.

[27 : 32] The message for you this morning is you're not here by accident. You see how God works. He brings people together. He moves you around. You have the opportunity today to respond to the good news about Jesus as your Lord.

As the Lord opens your heart towards him. The question is will you respond? If that's you this morning. May have come having suffered abuse as we saw earlier.

At the hands of others. Been exploited. Like the slave woman. And you're cynical about believing in Jesus. If there was a God of love. And the talk about. Why did he let all these things happen to me? You might be that cynical. But that is no barrier to the power of Jesus. To change your heart. And your life. And your attitudes. So go to him.

Ask him to show you the extent of his grace and love towards you. This overwhelming sense of grace and love. To flood into your heart and life. And replace all the stuff going on there.

[28 : 33] You've never, ever. And I can say this from personal experience. He will not drive you away. Perhaps so like the jailer. Up till now you've led a life that has no interest in God or Christianity.

It doesn't mean anything to you. Quite content with your lot. But some, perhaps, metaphorical earthquake has happened in your life.

A major crisis. Something that's shaken you to the core of your being. And we all have those experiences from time to time. Something that's just unexpectedly hit you.

And it's made you think. Made you think about eternal things. You're desperate for answers. And a renewed purpose in living. So if that's you this morning.

Then just ask this most important question. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? What must I do to be saved? And the answer is simple and clear.

[29 : 28] Every one of us. Whoever we are. Wherever we're from. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And you will be saved. God's grace is available to all who believe.

And it's free. It's free. And if it's free, why not for me? Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans. If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord.

And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. You will be saved. And just in closing. I want to say the outcome is one of indescribable joy.

Look at verse 34. He the jailer was filled with joy. Filled with joy. Because. Why? Because he had come to believe in God. He and all his household.

And that's the impact of the saving grace of God. You will experience a deep seated joy. And in a sense of peace. That the world can never give you. All sorts of stuff going on around you.

[30 : 30] But inside here. You have joy. And you have peace. And the result is that you'll want to serve God and others as Lydia did. And the jailer.

Getting baptized immediately. Then offering hospitality to Paul and his friends. In fact Lydia started a house church in her home. Which Paul and Silas went to after they were released. So you can see the impact. Immediate impact on the lives of these people. Their minds changed. They became servants of Jesus. To do his bidding. And to serve others. Rather than themselves. This new church in Philippi. Was the first recorded church planted in Europe. And here we are now at Bethel. Nearly 2,000 years later. The ultimate beneficiaries of God's amazing grace. Starting with these three individuals. And their friends. Bringing people into a relationship with him. To love and serve him. [31 : 31] And bring the good news to others. And that is our task. Here this morning. To bring that good news to others. God's grace is truly amazing. Thanks for listening. Thanks.