

The conversion of Saul

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[0:00] Sovereign one, the verse 10 tells us, sovereign one who is all-powerful, almighty, reigning over all things.! And we've certainly seen that, haven't we, over these last six weeks.

How absolutely wonderful, majestic, powerful our sovereign God is. How He is more powerful and greater than we could possibly imagine.

As we read this morning, who is equal to Him? Who is like Him? There is none like Him. And yet verse 11 says this, He tends His flock like a shepherd.

He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart. He gently leads those that have young. He is more powerful and greater than we can imagine, but He is also more gentle and loving than we could possibly imagine.

He is like a tender, caring shepherd for His flock, gathering in His people, like gathering little lambs close to Him.

[1:20] He carries them and He leads them along. And these are words which are to comfort Israel. In Isaiah 40, they're spoken to a people in exile, suffering exile for their rebellion against Him.

And yet this is their God. Isaiah said, here is your God. He's almighty, He's all-powerful, and He's all-loving and all-gentle. What a wonderful thing then this evening to be meditating on what this almighty and all-compassionate God is like.

Our test for you. Can anyone remember? And you can call out. What have we looked at? What have been the titles over these last six weeks of our sermons?

What have we looked at?

So here we go. Uncreated, creatable things. Trinity, unchanging or immutable, holy and comparable. And these are all true things about God.

[3:01] We've looked at them in separate weeks, but none of them are against one another. They all sort of flow into each other because they are who He is. And let's remind ourselves a little bit about what we thought about when we were looking at God being the young, created creator.

And for this, there is a little bit of discussion to have in our groups. But first, let's turn to Revelation. Revelation chapter 4, verse 9 to 11.

Because that's where we were on that particular week. Revelation 4, verse 9 to 11. Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever.

They lay their crowns before the throne and they say, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things and by your will, they were created and have their being. Chat together in your groups for a few moments.

How, looking at these verses, how is God unlike us? And what does that mean we are? Hopefully that makes sense. Just for about five minutes or so, chat together in your groups.

[5:00] Thank you. How are we doing? Should we come back? I feel like the room feels really quiet.

What were people chatting about? Anyone want to grab the microphone and say a few things?

Absolutely not. That's fair enough. If you haven't got that, that's absolutely fine.

I've got plenty of things to say, but it's good to hear from one another. Well, we said that whenever, yeah, in verse 9 it says, he sits on the throne and he lives forever and ever.

So, obviously, not many of us sit on a throne and we don't live forever and ever. Yeah. So, God is eternal. We thought on that particular Sunday, God didn't have a birthday and will never have a day when he will die.

And when we're thinking about Jesus coming to earth, that things change. But it's true. God lives forever and ever. God is so unlike us. And he's on his throne forever and ever, which came up again this morning.

[6:31] Phil? Picking up on the idea of he receives glory and honor and power and he is worthy. Just taking that thought on a bit and into the beginning of Romans.

The fundamental sin of humankind is to not give God honor and glory. It says, doesn't it, that they didn't honor him nor give thanks.

And that's a really fundamental sin to fail to honor God as our creator. It's a deep insult to God and terribly irreverent.

So, I think that's just worth pointing out on that. Yeah. Yeah. Because he is worthy as our Lord and God, as our creator. Yeah.

Joram. You've already touched on it, but we were considering the whole idea of the kind of creator-creature distinction.

[7:40] Particularly in verse 11. For you created all things. And by your will they existed and were created.

And we were thinking about how other religions, pantheism, kind of collapses. That distinction. And the world itself, matter, the creation, is seen as the deity. And doesn't have that clear distinction between creator and creature.

And that leads to all kinds of problems. And how its ultimate conclusion is worship of self, I guess. And Bill was talking also about the independence of God.

The aseity of God. Which is a posh word, I think you said, Bill. Ase, independence. The self-existence of God that we get from these. Thanks, Joram.

[8:40] And that creator-creature distinction was why I wanted us to begin this series in this way. To remind us of who we are.

Our limited. Our creatureliness before our great creator. Yeah. Any other thoughts?

That's okay. Trying to work out where we are. Let's move on to the next thing.

Let's move on to Trinity. Trinity. So, I've had a lot to think about this week. I didn't preach this one.

So, Phil, if you at any point want to chip in with thoughts, please do. I think when we were looking at the Trinity, Phil took us back to where it tells us in the Old Testament.

[9:44] Here, O Israel, the Lord your God is one. He is the only one. There are no other gods beside him. All other gods, they are like 40 imitations.

And we as Christians, we don't believe in no gods. Atheists do. We don't believe in lots of gods. Other religions do.

We don't believe there are three gods. Rather, we see this one God in three persons or three persons in one.

And it's made much clearer to us in the New Testament. So, we could read perhaps Matthew 28. Matthew 28. It's not the only place to go, but one of the places we could go. Where we see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[10:55] From verse 18.

And then Jesus came to them and said, And then Jesus came to them and said, And all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Jesus, who is God, who is part of the Godhead, the Trinity, says, All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me, given to him by his Father.

And he says, Therefore, go make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Here's a place where we see the three persons come together.

I was looking back on some notes from when I was teaching on Trinity on a Sunday evening last year. And we spent a Sunday thinking about the Spirit being God.

[12:21] And a quote from somebody, If the Spirit is honored with the Father and the Son in baptism, then he must have an equal, inseparable role with the Father and the Son.

So it's just helpful for us to see the three persons of God together. And there's this interesting diagram I came across.

Hopefully you can see it's a bit dark. But to try and illustrate something that's really hard, if not impossible to illustrate, how the relationships in the Godhead work.

So it says here, Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father. They are distinct persons. But all of them, they are God.

They are one God. And you can read around the side. You have to slightly tilt your head. But the Son is eternally generated by the Father. He's eternally the Son.

[13:30] The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. So that's sort of helping us to see. Hopefully that's helpful in some way.

How the Godhead works. That's a big thing. We're not doing justice to it at all this evening. But does anyone have any comments or questions on the Trinity?

And does Phil want to add anything? Let's go to Phil first.

And then I think Ruth had a hand up. Instagram shows me lots of nonsense things. But one of the things that I saw on Instagram was somebody from an American church, a young lady saying, I've been brought up here in this church.

And one thing we're never allowed to do is question the Trinity. And I don't really understand why it's there. But I'm not allowed to ask. And what I wanted to do is to show us how the fact of the Trinity is revealed to us in Scripture.

[14:49] And as you're rightly saying, the Hebrew Scriptures emphasize the uniqueness of God. There is one God. There is one Lord.

And he is, as we were saying, incomparable. He's in a league of his own. He fills the space that is describing the Creator.

He fills it. So there's no room for anybody else in that space. And then suddenly and remarkably, Christians start talking about a three-in-one God.

And it isn't as though this gradually dawns on them through the course of the New Testament. So early in the New Testament, they're not too sure. But later on, it's clear.

It sort of explodes onto the scene before the New Testament is written. All the New Testament documents are Trinitarian. So what is it that has made this difference? And I think it's pretty clear that the thing or the event or the person that makes this difference is Jesus.

[15:51] And you see in the Gospels people grappling with who he is. Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?

Depart from me. I am a sinful man. His authority. And I think even during his life, the disciples struggle to get it all into place.

But when in the resurrection and on the day of Pentecost, it becomes totally clear. You could put it in the words, Jesus is Lord.

So he is in that space of total lordship. He is the son of God making himself equal with God. And I try to isolate, pick on some events that produce the evidence for this.

So at his baptism, you have the father speaking, the spirit descending, the son. This is my son with whom I am well pleased. You have the events around the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on the water, which Jesus sort of presents to them without a lot of explanation.

[17:05] But he asked them, did you get the point of this? Are you so dull? Have you understood about the loaves? And it seems pretty clear there to understand that Jesus is exactly doing what Yahweh in the Old Testament does.

The Yahweh-ness of Jesus, if you can put it like that. And then Jesus tells us about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I suppose John's gospel is the gospel that most profoundly explores these themes. And like you're saying on the screen there, if we've seen the son, we've seen the father because he exactly describes the father.

And when Jesus describes the coming of the spirit, he says, if the spirit comes, the father and the son come, we will come to the person who receives the spirit. The spirit so exactly expresses the

father and the son.

He's not one tiny little bit less than, but a total expression or description. You always get lost for words, don't you?

[18:19] And so this is the trinity. The word isn't used, but the idea is fully there in the New Testament.

And I think I might have remarked on the fact that in the Old Testament it says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and one God.

In the New Testament, Christians saying there is one God, the Father. There is one Lord, Jesus. And in other places they will say there is one spirit. So that rallying cry of Israel, which describes monotheism, becomes the rallying cry of Christians to describe the trinity.

And, you know, totally wonderful. Amazing. Yeah. And I think also the fact that as believers we are drawn into this because we receive the spirit we call God Father, which is an amazing thing.

Steve's going to. I thought Ruth had a hand up, so. Yeah. Just quickly, because I guess it's one of these things that really perplexed me because I've, so different doctrines that can be quite hard to kind of struggle with, can't get my hair around.

[19:43] I've always really seen it very clearly as a trinity in scripture, so I've not had a problem. But I've met quite a few people who really kind of push against it.

And some professing Christians. So there's one person I know who's just really stuck on this in terms of, even regarding baptism.

Maybe come across to where it's kind of, you mentioned the kind of Matthew 28 in the kind of go baptizing the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And then in Acts 2, there's the exhortation, to go baptize the name of Jesus. And then there's this confusion that this friend of mine is really stuck with.

It's like, oh, which is it? And surely this kind of puts into question trinity. I'm like, I don't understand. So I guess a question is just, how do we respond to what kinds of challenges, maybe any typical challenges to Trinity, to the doctrine of Trinity?

[20:55] And yeah, some of the ways we respond to them, if that's not being a neat question. And Phil had his hand.

Do you want to answer that? I have a thought as well, but go for it. I think if we're looking at the roots of why we believe it, which I think is what you're asking, isn't it?

I think it comes down to what you think about Jesus. And you can come at that in a number of ways. So Jesus pours out the Spirit. That has to be divinity.

It would be blasphemous for a creature to pour out the Spirit. Jesus is worshipped. That would be blasphemy if Jesus is not divine.

He is Lord. That would be blasphemy if he were not divine. So there's some very solid lines of reasoning.

[21:55] And once you've said Jesus is divine, then you have to listen to what he says about the Holy Spirit, which admittedly is less front and center in the Gospels.

But I think it's still inescapable. Yeah. I will pass it to Steve in a sec, if that's okay. This is quite a live issue for me at the moment.

I had a Jehovah's Witness turn up to the door a few weeks ago, and I was trying to show her from the Scriptures that Jesus is God. She's since written a letter and wants her and her husband to meet up with me at some point.

And so I've been trying to think about this, and I think Phil might have mentioned this just earlier.

But at the end of John 8 is one couple of verses I've been thinking about, and again, about what we see true of Jesus.

John 8, verse 58. I'll give you a moment if you want to turn there. Where it says, Very truly I tell you, Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am.

[23:12] He's claiming to be older than Abraham. And I think he's claiming that to be eternal. And this clearly offended those Jewish people because they picked up stones to stone him.

But Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. And it offended them because he was claiming to be God. Yeah. That's my addition to it.

Steve. I think it sometimes gives the impression that the Trinity was a New Testament invention. And that's not really the case.

I mean, the Trinitarian ideas are there in the Old Testament. I mean, right back in Genesis 1, verse 2, it says, The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, let there be light. Right. In Proverbs chapter 8, you read a wisdom being brought forth before the creation and the companion of God in creation.

[24:18] And in a sense, John 1 brings these ideas together. Yeah. It says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He's bringing the idea of Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8 together, I think, in saying that.

Definitely. Thanks, Steve. And I was just thinking, as you were saying that, like, David in Psalm 51 that we looked at a little bit last week, says, Do you not take your spirit from me? And in King Saul, we see the spirit departing from him. So, yeah, see. See it in the Old Testament. It's made so much clearer to us than in you, but we do see it in the Old Testament. Any other thoughts or questions on this? This is turning into quite a hot topic.

I need to mention something a little different, is that there is something very relational in the Trinity. [25:24] Apart from that diagram, it's the beautiful interaction between three persons who, and there are many other scriptures that point to how one, they all love to honor the other.

They love to do, you know, the Spirit loves to bring honor to the Son and the Father. And so it's worth pausing just to see the wonder of that beautiful relationship, because, of course, God didn't make us because he was lonely.

Yeah. He was perfectly happy. Yeah. In himself. And yet we're made in his image. And although we know so much about how marred we are, you know, there is something about him sharing this, you know, we ought to be getting better and better at these good relationships and honoring one another.

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks, David. Jerome? On a practical basis as well, I think there are some aspects of the Trinity that, you know, just in terms of the Christian life, prayer, we come to the Father through the Son by the Spirit, things like that.

And just the way we do worship, it's just woven into the fabric of who we are and what we do as church. Yeah. Just, it's good to think about that as well.

[26:48] I mean, yeah. I was struck as well about, I was reading in my own quiet time yesterday, I think it's somewhere in Mark, I can't remember exactly where now, but they worship Jesus.

Didn't say, don't worship me. Thanks, Jerome. Shall we pause there and sing something? And then think about one or two other things. Next thing we looked at was God being sovereign. God ruling over all things.

Think of his sovereign will, which is completely unchanging. It is independent.

He has planned all things since eternity past. He doesn't have plan A and plan B for us and our lives, but rather his good and unchanging plan is being worked out.

[27:54] And as I was meditating on this just a little bit, I thought of three big words, which I think are related when we think about God's sovereignty.

So his omnipotence, God is all-powerful. His omnipresence, God is everywhere. Presence simultaneously with his old being.

And omniscience, God is all-knowing. And just before we throw it open to discussion, we just wanted to turn you briefly to 1 Samuel chapter 2.

Some of us may remember looking at 1 Samuel in the not-too-distant past. Before I read it, just by way of context, this is Hannah's prayer to God.

And yet, she has spent a long time suffering and in agony because she wasn't having a child.

[29:14] She wasn't having a son. And yet, her husband's other wife, Penina, her husband, Elkanah, was married to Penina and Hannah.

And she kept saying to Hannah, look at all my children.

And you have none. And it seemed that God had closed her womb. And so she prayed and wept bitterly. But then the Lord in his goodness, in his sovereignty, in his omniscience, knowing all about Hannah's situation, God in his omnipotence, as all-powerful God, provided her with a son, Samuel. And so in response, Hannah prayed this prayer, Hannah, in 1 Samuel 2. Then Hannah prayed and said, My heart rejoices in the Lord.

In the Lord, my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the Lord.

[30:34] There is no one beside you. There is no rock like our God. Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance. For the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.

He is all-knowing. The bones of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who are hungry are hungry no more.

She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. The Lord brings death and makes alive.

He brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth. He humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts them needy from the ash heap.

He seats them with princes and makes them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's. On them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.

[31:43] It is not by strength that one prevails. Those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The most high will thunder from heaven. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.

He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointings. And I was particularly interested in reading verses 6 to 8 and thinking God is sovereign.

He brings death. He makes alive. He's sovereign over our lives and our births, our deaths. By his will we were created. He brings down to the grave and he raises up.

He's sovereign over our situations, over our poverty and our wealth. He humbles people, he exalts people. He raises the poor from the dust, lifts the needy from the ash heap, seats them with princes.

And makes them inherit a throne of honor. Just interesting reading that thinking God is sovereign, God is omnipotent, God is omnipresent, God is omniscient.

[32:47] I'm not sure that Phil particularly said any of that in your sermon. But Phil, you preached on this subject. Is there any more on God's sovereignty that you wanted to add to our thoughts?

You'll need a microphone, I think. I suppose the bottom line is, as Christians, having a clear and almost intuitive trust, trust in God's sovereignty is so very basic to living the Christian life.

So, as you read for Hannah, her particular stress was not having a child. And God was able to change that for her.

And she sees that as, in a sense, the tip of the iceberg, that underneath here is a God who not just enables her to have a baby, but unseats princes, lifts people up, guides the nations, and so on.

And, I mean, a very precious verse that I think we can live by as Christians is he works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

[34:11] So, that covers everything, doesn't it? Our ethnicity, our gender, where we were born, where God's put us, what God has given us, what he's withheld from us.

None of these things are a mistake. And so, we need to learn a deep, intuitive trust. It's okay. God's got this.

And he will work good purposes through it. So, I think that, you know, bottom line, that's really, really, you know, however you theologize it, whatever words you put it into, that's just fundamental to our peace, isn't it?

I know who holds the future and he'll guide me with his hand. With God, things don't just happen. Everything by him is planned. So, as I face tomorrow, whether it's problems large or small, I'll trust the God of miracles.

Give to him my all. The way I tried to unpack it, I think, was to say God is sovereign over things. So, in our sort of scientific worldview, we would say, oh, the sun shines because of nuclear reactions and it rises because of Newton's laws of motion.

[35:31] And those things are all true at one level, but underneath it, he makes the sun shine. He causes the grass to grow. He sends the rain.

So, there's sovereignty over things and there's sovereignty over people. God rules the nations, but we're not to think that he makes the nations into robots who have no free agency, no responsibility. And we took the example of the Assyrians that God sent to do his will, but the Assyrian had no idea that that's what he was doing. He thought he was going to plunder.

So, it's important to keep God's sovereignty alongside the fact that, although God plans everything, if somebody does something, they're to blame for it. If somebody does something good, they can be praised for it.

And then we also looked at God's sovereignty and saving us, which is another big subject. But just sort of trying to put it in a sentence.

[36:35] We're Christians because God planned it long ago and arranged the circumstances by which we'd hear the gospel, changed our hearts. And he is so determined to do that, that he's tasked Jesus with bringing us safe to heaven.

And Jesus won't let us go because his hands are sovereign hands. I think that's absolutely wonderful, isn't it? Yeah. Despite our sin, despite the pressures and circumstances, he won't let us go.

He'll bring us safe to heaven. Amazing. Any thoughts or questions on this particular subject?

Shikondi. I think touching on the specific verses, the Lord kills and brings to life. He brings down and he raises up.

He makes, the Lord makes poor and makes rich. He brings low and he exalts. I think it, one, gives the comfort that he is sovereign over all.

[37:48] But it helps to think through things and think through counsel that people might give of the Lord is far away because, you know, this situation is evidence that the Lord is far or this has happened because you're not faithful enough.

Or even just the general notion that because you're a believer and because you're faithful, so bad situations or bad things shouldn't happen.

And then just to tie it in with all things work for the good of those that love the Lord, but also that all things work for his glory. And so, yeah.

Yeah. As you were saying, that reminded by, I think it says in Isaiah somewhere, his thoughts aren't our thoughts and his ways aren't our ways.

And they, we may go through, through things under his sovereignty that we wouldn't necessarily choose or one. He is sovereign over that and he is good and we can trust him in that.

[38:54] Yeah. Shall we move on? There are two more things.

I'm not going to spend any time actually, well, about a minute on this because I'd love to get to God being holy before we end. So we thought about God being unchanging or immutable, like he doesn't mutate and change.

We looked at a few different passages on that, particularly Psalm 102 and James 117. You can go away and enjoy remembering those this week and maybe even meditate on how is it good news for us that God is unchanging.

Because it is really good news. We can really trust him. He's our unchanging rock. We're resting in his unchanging love.

But I really want us to think about this. I knew it was a big subject but didn't realize how big a subject it was until Phil and Jerem and I were chatting it through a little bit last week.

[40:13] It's absolutely massive. I mean, every bit of this is. But it's been quite exciting to think about. Just a few thoughts from me and then you can open it up to Phil and other people.

So we won't turn here but in Exodus 3 we'll remember well that Moses came to see that strange sight, that burning bush.

And he went over intrigued and then became afraid because the bush speaks. It is God. The God of his ancestors speaking.

And he would know that sinful mortals cannot look upon a holy God and live. And so Moses hid his face.

And after a little bit, we revealed who God is, his name. I am who I am.

[41:16] I am the great I am set apart from the worlds. Other gods might be defined by what they have power to do.

The God of the sun, the God of rain. We ourselves are sort of, we define ourselves by what we are, what we do. Our jobs, our positions in life.

We're sons, we're daughters, we're husbands, wives, brothers, sisters. Doctors, teachers, retired people, students.

But God exists independently. He's eternal, independent of everything else. He just is I am. Nothing defines him.

He is simply God. And then later in Exodus, in Exodus 33, Moses asked to see his glory. But God said, well, you can see my back, but you're going to have to hide under this cleft of the rock to protect you.

[42:21] And God showing himself to be kind of self-excellent. Think of Israel. Israel was dependent on God for growth and holiness.

They're dependent on God to be called a holy nation. But God isn't dependent on anyone for moral excellency, for holiness.

He is holy, completely holy in and of himself. And then where I want us to just turn to briefly, Isaiah 6.

I think it's my favorite Old Testament passage. Come to Isaiah 6. And we read in verse 1 that the king is dead.

In the year that King Uzziah died. He had a long and pretty good reign all in all. In that year, Isaiah saw the king of kings.

[43:28] I saw the Lord high and lifted, high and exalted, seated on a throne. And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings.

With two, they covered their faces. And remind ourselves, Moses covered his face at the burning bush. And with two, they covered their feet. And with two, they were flying.

And they were calling out to one another, holy, holy, holy is the Lord almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory.

Apparently, that's known as the trisagion. The strongest form of the superlative in Hebrew. This might not be a very good example.

But we might say something like, something is good or really good or most good. Sort of what it's saying. Holy, holy, holy.

[44:27] To show us so strongly that God is holy like no other. There is no one holy like him. Complete holiness. Absolute and other.

Total purity. And we see that in Isaiah's reaction to all of this. Verse 4. At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook.

And the temple was filled with smoke. It was absolutely awesome. Because the holy, holy, holy God was there. And so Isaiah cried, woe to me. I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips.

And I live among a people of unclean lips. And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord almighty. Woe to me. I've come and seen absolute holiness.

But he also experiences holy love. We love things because we see good in them. I love pizza because I know it tastes and looks wonderful.

[45:34] But God, the incredible, holy God, shows love to Isaiah who is unclean. Whose righteousness is as filthy rags, Isaiah says elsewhere.

A man who says, I'm not worthy, I am ruined. But look at this. Look at this wonderful, holy love that is shown to him. Verse 6. Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

With it, he touched my mouth and said, see, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for. He experiences holy love from a holy God.

And Phil, last week, it's probably one of the most fresh sermons in our mind on this, helped us to think about holiness, helped us to think about its relevance, roots, rollout.

It's hugely relevant because this is who our God is. And we've experienced his holy love in our lives, in the Lord Jesus.

[46:47] In the Lord Jesus, our guilt is taken away and our sin is atoned for. And now dependent on him, we can grow in holiness.

We can seek to follow that command, be holy as he is holy. It's a big thing. It's a wonderful thing. I've been getting excited about it.

Anything anyone wants to add or ask about this? Phil, go for it.

Thank you. Dan, you really explained those things really well. I think this topic of God's holiness is vital in preaching the gospel.

The gospel tends to be reduced to God loves you. And you think, oh, that's great. Well, I quite love myself anyway. I think I'm pretty good.

[47:54] And God says, yes, that's right. That completely omits the idea of God's holiness, doesn't it? That we are, when we come near to God, like Moses, like Isaiah, if we genuinely come near to God, we become embarrassingly and shamefully aware of our own moral failure in contrast to his holiness.

And as you're rightly saying, that that's where God's love comes in, that he provides a costly redemption so that we can come near a holy God.

And like it says in Hebrews, which I think is an astounding thing. Therefore, does it say, let us draw near to the most holy place through the blood of Jesus by a new and living way, which is astounding, isn't it?

That we can come into the holiest place of all. I think the other aspect of it is that struck me was be holy for I am holy.

So the call to us to be holy, I mean, that's a big subject in itself, isn't it? It's sanctification. We're not saved by trying harder.

[49:09] We're not saved by making ourselves better. But there is a sense in which having come to the Lord Jesus, he does change us. He starts off with the heart and the deepest part of us and then works that through into, you know, our practical daily living, the sort of people we're becoming.

It's a life's work. But he does say that, be holy for I am holy. If you go back to the sovereignty, he chose us in him to be holy and blameless before him. And, you know, there's a deep miracle there, isn't it?

The Holy Spirit is, Trinitarianly, is the one who's given to us, who makes us holy. So, yeah, there's a lot going on there. It's amazing.

Amazing. Final chance if you have another thought or question. Steve. Final words for Steve, shall we?

Some people talk about the holiness of God as being sort of restrictive, that, you know, that it means you have the things you don't do.

[50:20] Which is because it does mean there are things you don't do if you want to be like God. But it's actually liberating. Because we're not like Zeus or Aphrodite, you know, contingent.

Or God isn't. We are, but God isn't. And we're not reduced to being what the latest guru says we have to be, which is what's happening more and more nowadays.

You have to conform to a particular ideology or you're cancelled. It's actually liberating. We can say, no, we can be free to be what we should really be. And I think it's worth, that's the counterpoint to what Phil was saying, you know, that we need to emphasize the holiness of God.

Not because it's restricting, but because it's liberating. Yeah. Praise God. Thanks, Steve. Hopefully we have seen that this is really true, that God really is incomparable.

Just a final thing before we sing to close. It's massive. We could spend more and more weeks thinking about the doctrine of God.

[51:32] If you want to, can I suggest this? There's this book quoted from a few weeks ago by Nick Tucker over in Hove, 12 Things God Can't Do.

If anybody would be interested in getting together, reading it, a book club kind of thing, be very happy to.

I've definitely got availability either on a Tuesday or maybe a Thursday during the daytime.

Apologies if daytime doesn't work for you, but love to do that.

And if there's a bunch of you that want to read it through together in the evening, then go ahead, do that, organize it and enjoy. But just to help us to continue to think about our great God.

Let me know if that's of interest to you and we'll get something organized. The other thank you is to Aaron, who has prepared a sermon on this passage.

[52:35] And we hope that it won't go to waste. We'll work out how Aaron can share from that at some point in the near future. But God is good and God speaks through his word and his word is very clearly given to us.

He's also good in that looking at the passage this week and reminding myself of it, reminding myself of some Bible study notes I wrote on it not so long ago.

So maybe by his grace, he has something to share with us this morning. So have Acts chapter 9 open in front of you.

And as we come to it, let me ask, can someone be too bad for God? Could somebody be sort of too far gone into sin, lost in sin and darkness, and be too far away from knowing his grace?

Maybe you're here this morning and you know, you picture somebody who you know, maybe love a lot, but you just think they are so far away, they'll never become a Christian.

[54:01] I know that I can think of one or two. Maybe even you're here this morning and you are thinking as you're with us, I am too far away.

I am too sinful. How could God ever love me? Well, this morning, as we look at this passage and some other verses in the Bible, I think we see the answers to these questions.

We're going to think about Saul latterly and most familiarly, I can't say that word, known to us as Paul.

And we're going to see his two lives, his old life and his new life. Now, we've seen this character Saul in the book of Acts already.

Have a look at Acts chapter 7, at the end of that chapter, from verse 57.

[55:08] We saw just a little while ago when we were in the book of Acts, Stephen's amazing speech, absolutely brilliant, before those who wanted to persecute him, before those who were about to stone him to death.

And look at what their reaction to the speech was, Acts chapter 7, verse 57. At this, they covered their ears, yelling at the top of their voices. They all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

How awful. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of their killing him. This is Saul.

[56:26] He was involved that day as Stephen was stoned to death. And he was standing there and nodding and saying, yes, good job, guys. And we read some more of Saul, beginning of chapter 8.

On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. And all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Godly men buried Stephen, mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

This is Saul. He's a persecutor. He approves of people stoning Christians to death. And then he's out and he's destroying the church.

That's what he wants to do. He wants to destroy God's work. Destroy those who are following this Jesus. He hated him.

[57:36] He hated these people. Was he too far gone? Well, he was persecuting.

He was trying to destroy the church. But you know what? He was also a really good religious man.

Can we turn to Galatians chapter 1, verse 13?

Galatians chapter 1, verse 13. This is Paul, as he's now known, speaking of his previous way of life.

Verse 13, for you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how I intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

Yes, Paul, we have heard this. Yes, we have heard this. We've read it. Verse 14. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

[58:52] Okay, he was destroying the church. Okay, he was destroying the church, but he was a good Jewish man. He tells us that he was advancing in Judaism beyond anybody around him.

He was zealous for the traditions of his fathers. He was zealous to keep the law of God. He was a persecutor, but a really religious man.

Was he okay? Well, let's have a look. Let's join the story in Acts chapter 9. Acts chapter 9 from verse 1.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He still had it.

Wanting to destroy the church. And so he went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus.

[60:10] So that if he found any who belonged to the way, that is, the Lord Jesus, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

He was heading on a journey. He was on this road, on this road to Damascus. And he had a plan. If he found anybody on his journey who was following Jesus, he would take them and put them in prison in Jerusalem.

He had a plan. He knew the way that he was going. Now, sometimes I think I know what I'm doing. I might head to the shop for something. And I arrive at the shop and my plan fails because suddenly I've forgotten what I was going to get.

Or I would arrive at the shop and the thing isn't there. And I would get frustrated. And as Paul is on this journey to Damascus, as he has this plan to catch anybody who is following Jesus, his plans get frustrated.

[61:30] Verse 3. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. That was unexpected.

You can't plan for a light from heaven to flash around you, can you? And how did this affect him? Did he just keep going? Do you think, oh, just ignore this random light that I see?

Well, no. Verse 4. Look at it. It changes things. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

This is dramatic. This stops him in his tracks. He had a plan, but this plan is going wrong, Saul. It's dramatic. It's amazing. A flash of light. Light surrounding him. This is an ordinary. So who is it?

[62:39] Verse 5. Who are you, Lord, Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. This light is no ordinary light.

It's not a street light. It didn't have street lights. It's the incredible light of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus who himself said, I am the light of the world.

This is a brilliant light. This is the light of God. And so no wonder, verse 4 says, he fell to the ground.

Can we just have a look back in the Old Testament? You may like to turn there or just listen.

A couple of verses from Ezekiel chapter 1. Ezekiel chapter 1. Another example of someone seeing the glory of God.

[63:39] Ezekiel chapter 1, verse 27. Ezekiel 1 is an incredible passage.

It's an amazing vision that Ezekiel has of God. And there's all sorts of amazing things going on as Ezekiel is trying to describe the glory of God.

Trying to describe the indescribable. And look at what verse 27 says. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like glowing metal as if full of fire.

And that from there down, he looked like fire and brilliant light surrounded him. Ezekiel sees this brilliant light.

Verse 28. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. It was bright. It was majestic. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

[64:51] When I saw it, I fell face down. And I heard the voice of one speaking. Just another example in the Bible of someone seeing the light, the glory of God.

And they fall to the ground. Sinners seeing the light, the holiness, the majesticness of God. We've been thinking over these last few Sundays how wonderful God is. Thinking of the doctrine of God. What does the Bible tell us?

Who God is? What is he like? He is brilliant. He is awesome light. Awesome perfection. Purity. And we are sinners. And so we fall down and we see how marvelous this is.

We see our unworthiness before him as we're confronted with the glory of God. And that is so true of Paul here. Verse 4, he fell to the ground.

[66:04] And as we've also read, we've read as Saul asked, who is this? Who are you? What's going on? I am Jesus. And then here's the kick in the teeth for Paul.

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. He's persecuting Christians, but really he's persecuting Jesus. As Paul would later write, the church is the body of Christ.

He is persecuting Jesus as he's persecuting the church. And so as Jesus reveals himself to Saul, is he going to say, and you are condemned.

You are heading to hell because you persecuted my church. You don't deserve to know me and my grace. Or is he going to say, I have seen how you are a brilliant Jew, how you keep all the laws.

And so you're safe. Don't worry about all that murderous stuff you tried to do. Well, no, we're going to see something even more astonishing than that.

[67:20] Verse 6. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. And verse 7, I love reading this bit.

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. What's going on with Saul here? They heard the sound, but they didn't see anyone.

They were utterly speechless, those that saw this. And so Saul, verse 8, got up from the ground. But when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing.

He was blinded. He couldn't see a thing. His world, his life had changed.

And this was a picture of what he was like spiritually before the Lord. He was blind. He didn't see Jesus as God.

[68:23] Jesus as someone to be worshipped and honoured. He didn't see these Christians as someone who God had genuinely worked salvation in. He was blind to the truth.

And this blindness is showing to Saul the reality of his spiritual life. He thought he was a brilliant Jew, but before God, he was a sinner who needed salvation from Jesus, who he was persecuting. And this blindness, it lasted for three whole days. Verse 9, for three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything.

spiritual life, how he is blind. Days of reflection. And whilst this was going on, God was preparing someone to come and visit him. Have a look, verse 10. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias, and the Lord called to him in a vision. Ananias, yes, Lord, he said.

The Lord told him to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sights. That is a wonderful vision. God is arranging things by, in his sovereignty, in his grace, to send Ananias to Saul. Saul's been prepared for this. He's seen Ananias in a dream.

[70:45] So what does Ananias make of it? Verse 13. Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priest to arrest all who call on your name. Ananias is saying to the Lord, I have heard of Saul, yes, I've heard of him. Isn't he that guy who is persecuting Christians?

And you're calling me to go to him? Think about all the harm he's done to your people. He's come here, isn't he, to arrest people like me.

And so, I don't know what you would do if you were in Ananias' shoes and called to go to the persecutor, the murderer of your people. God, what are you doing? This seems strange.

But the Lord said, verse 15, go. The Lord has his purposes in this, Ananias. Go. This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. Ananias, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Ananias, I have plans for him. I have good plans.

[72:34] Yes, this man was persecuting my people. But I'm saving him. I'm raising him up for a purpose. Ananias. And so, go.

Go, Ananias. Go in obedience to me. Trust me. Trust me with my plans. And so, verse 17, we see that Ananias was obedient to the Lord's plans.

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Isn't that remarkable? Ananias goes and he says, The Lord Jesus came to you. He spoke to you. He said, I am persecuting you. Well, I am here to show you that Jesus is going to open your eyes. That Jesus has sent me so that your life can be transformed by him. as his Holy Spirit will come and live within you.

[74:03] This is remarkable grace. This is Jesus saying to someone who was persecuting him, his people, his precious people who he bought with his own blood.

This is Jesus saying, I am saving you. I am opening your eyes to see me as your Savior. It is astonishing.

And so look, verse 18. The blindness goes immediately. Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again.

God takes away his blindness darkness. And Saul's life is completely transformed. He got up, he was baptized and he started eating again and regained his strength.

God was good to him. God was working in him by his grace. God and so if God can do that for a persecutor, if he can bring new life to this one who was blind and did not see the reality of his sin, if he can do that for Paul, can he not do that for you and for those that we may think are too far away from God, can he not do that for them because his grace is more powerful than our sin.

[75:56] Our sin which holds us, which enslaves us, which blinds us to the reality that Jesus is God, Jesus can be our saviour.

And so we see here Saul's new life and in Saul's new life as it's been transformed by God's grace, he has given a purpose it's revealed to Ananias here, verse 15, go this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

God was using Saul as part of his mission to the worlds and it's been a while since we've been in Acts, can we remind ourselves of the scope of God's mission?

Acts chapter 1 verse 8 which I've been saying is the key verse in the book of Acts. But you will receive, this is Jesus speaking to his disciples, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, it starts in Jerusalem with God's people there and then it spreads out to Judea and Samaria and we've seen that in Acts chapter 8 and to the ends of the earth.

The gospel, the good news of salvation is going out to the ends of the earth and God in his wisdom was choosing a persecutor of his people to transform his life and to send him out to proclaim the name of Jesus to people that hadn't heard it before, to the nations, to the Gentiles and to the people of Israel.

[78:17] God was going to use Paul greatly for his salvation purposes. And God as he works in our lives by his grace, as he's opened our eyes to see Jesus as saviour, he gives us a new purpose.

He gives us the purpose to be involved in this mission work too, using your gifts and abilities for his glory.

Can we just turn briefly to what Paul writes in Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 2. Definitely a few places we could turn to to hear Paul writing of grace, but Ephesians chapter 2, I'm going to read verses 1 to 10, and then we'll be heading to the close.

Ephesians chapter 2, Paul writes, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

[80:01] And as Paul writes that, we can remember what we've seen of Paul, what he was like, how he was deserving of wrath. But, Paul writes, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Paul hadn't done anything to deserve God's grace. He was a persecutor, he deserved God's judgment, didn't he? But God saved him, it's a gift of grace, not because of what he's done, but because of what God's done for him in Jesus.

And that's true of all of us, none of us are deserving of God's grace. And yeah, that's why we call it grace, it's God's undeserved gift to sinful people who deserve his wrath.

[81:31] God's and maybe this morning as you're hearing this, you're thinking about yourself and your own sin.

Am I too bad for God? Well, no, God is gracious. And then Paul writes in verse nine, it's not by work so that no one can boast, but we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And Paul had been given, given that mission to go to the Gentiles, proclaim Jesus, and God by his grace gives us good works to do.

He's prepared them for us. He gives us a new purpose as he changes our lives by his grace. And so as we come to the end, let me just read to you this story.

I've told you it before, but I'll tell you it again. A story about a man called John. John was seven years old when his mum died.

[82:46] His dad sent him to go all on his own to work on a boat when he was 11 years old. Apparently John did some very naughty things.

He invented swear words. He would make fun at people who were in charge on the ships. A bit like if a child made fun of their head teacher.

He ended up, John ended up being a slave in Africa. Then after he was freed, he ended up working as captain of his own slave ship.

ship. He had a reputation for a bad language and a bad temper as he was in command of that ship. But one day he ended up being punished for his behaviour and nobody wanted him as the captain of the ship.

He ended up being caught in a storm on a boat. The waves pounded, the ship was filled with water and he thought he was about to die.

[83:57] He remembered things from being a child. He remembered that his mum would pray. He sang hymns at church and heard the Bible read but he had ignored God.

And so in desperation he called out to God to save him from the storm. And the next day the ship found safety. he knew that God was at work answering those prayers of his in his desperation.

And so he repented to God of his sin. He said sorry to God for his sin. That slave trader, that man with a bad temper and bad language was saved by God's amazing grace.

grace. And he went on to pen the words of our next hymn. Amazing grace, how sweet the sounds, that saved a wretch like me.

Once I was lost and now I am found, was blind, but now I see. That's a good description of John. That's a good description of Paul who we've seen this morning.

[85:15] So we'll sing us hymn and then Mark will please in prayer.