

What is a 'reformed' church?

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Date: 21 November 2021

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Thanks very much indeed Mark. Good morning to you all. My name is Philip Wells. I work full time for the church as pastor elder for one more week.!

And then we've also looked at why, where we get the gospel from, from the Bible. So we're a Bible based church. And then we're going to look at the fact that we're a reformed church.

Before we do that, I'd like to pray for Steve, because when we prayed for health, we didn't pray for Steve. Steve suffers from a range of things that make life very, very painful and uncomfortable a lot of the time.

So please can I pray for you just now. Let me come. Yeah. Lord, I pray for my brother Steve here, because I know that he is often in pain. And pray that you will alleviate that, Lord. If it might please you to heal him and cure him and to take all that away, we ask you to do so in your mighty power. But if not, Lord, please at least give him enough grace each day to manage, to manage with cheerfulness and to have peace. Protect him, Lord. Keep him. Bless him. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

[1:33] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. churches and we ask the question, are they much all the same? Does it really matter? And the answer I try to persuade you of is that the main thing is, if you went and listened to their message, would you hear the gospel? The gospel being the good news of Jesus Christ. Now, that has implications about what really a Christian is. We'll come to that later. But as I'm saying, gospel in English, good spell, meaning good news. In the original Greek, evangel, meaning good news.

So, we are Calvary Evangelical Church, and the evangelical bit means gospel. So, gospel, that's what we've been talking about. And my clicking didn't work quite right. Let's just see that. What is the gospel? I'm going to go back because that still didn't click right. Click, click, click. What is the gospel? And we looked a few weeks back at what the Apostle Paul says the gospel is. I'm quoting this. He says, by this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to what you have believed. And this is what he says, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. And then he goes on to say a lot of people have seen him. But this is boiled down to the basic good news of Jesus Christ. And I was saying you could enlarge on that, and you need to enlarge on that. But there it is in its very basic form. And it's a message. So, the Christian religion is about a message, and a message to be believed.

[3:55] And in the bit that we were reading earlier, Mark read to us, there was a lot about believing, faith. It's a message about Jesus Christ, centered not on institutions and rules, but on a person.

And in particular, his death and resurrection, the things that he did. He died on the cross, he rose from the dead. And this is what is according to the Scriptures. So, the Bible is centrally important. His death was for our sin. And the good news of Jesus Christ deals fundamentally with the matter of sin, the need we all have for forgiveness, the problem of guilt and how that can be removed, the problem of shame and how that can be wiped clean. And if you are a person who doesn't think that sin and guilt and shame are a problem for you, you don't know yourself very well. And you certainly don't understand the world that God's put you in, and you don't understand what the position you're in before God who made you. And this is urgent and important because by this you are saved.

That's what he says, right? By this gospel you are saved. This is the only way to be saved. If you're not saved by this, you're not saved. By this gospel you are saved. So, this is the important core central things of Christianity. Now, as we go on from that, I ask the question, how does anybody ever come to this position? How does anybody ever come to have faith that saves? Now, that's the question I'd like us to be thinking about this morning. So, I notice that what saves, according to the Bible, is faith. By this gospel you are saved if you believe it. So, Christianity is not about formality, you know, doing the church's rituals of perhaps being baptized as a baby or going to church a certain number of times a year or being blessed with holy water or something like that. That's not what Christianity is about. It's about faith. And faith is needed, but not everybody has faith, do they? Now, how come? How does that? How is it that some people have faith and other people don't? And the people who do have faith, how do they get it? Now, why some people have faith? So, most people here, I guess, are people of faith. I know many of you, and I know you're people of faith. How come you have faith? Is it because of all people in our city, you are particularly clever? So, I can see some shaking heads. It's it of all people in our city, you are sort of spiritual.

[6:49] And I don't think that's the answer. I think some of us would say we're actually not very spiritual at all, but we just look to Jesus. Or is this matter of faith? Something is not actually located in us, but the reason for it lies somewhere else. In the Bible, it says faith is a gift.

And I want to explore that, this idea that faith, which we exercise, but the origin of it comes outside of us, a gift. And we're to look for the answer to this question, how is it that some people have faith? Rather than looking inside the person and saying, oh, this person was rather different, this person was rather different, this person was rather clever, this person got it, and other people didn't, because they were cleverer or something. But to say, actually, this is rather mysterious, and the answer to this lies in God, in the depths of the mystery of the purposes of God.

And I think it would be an authentic thing. And many of you, I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but I think many of you would say this. This is how I became a Christian. I was a blind, self-centered, lost sinner. And I would never have believed in God unless he had pursued me, and spoken to me, and whispered to me, and changed me, and opened my eyes, and opened my heart. And he did that. And when I think about coming to faith, I don't congratulate myself. I thank God that he did this for me. And it was not, although there was a choosing that went on in me, the bottom line isn't that I chose God, but that he chose me. Anybody would say that sort of thing?

So let's just, I want to drill down into that, and I'll come to a Bible text in a minute, but just drill down into these ideas. So we've talked about sin, and I'm going to ask a question, we've agreed that people are sinners, and Christ died for our sin. How bad is sin?

[9:08] Is it a sort of percentage thing that in everybody there's a spark of goodness? And is this the case that, you know, we're not actually so bad at all? Actually, people are basically good.

So that's how they have faith, because they're good. Or is it the other way around, that sin is so bad, so powerful, and that the human heart, even if people are very nice and kind people, but the human heart down at the bottom is fundamentally anti-God, and the person is incapable of choosing God? Is that how bad sin is? And I want to try and persuade us of that.

And I want to try and persuade us of this matter. If it is God's choice and action to open the heart, how much does He choose? Is it a sort of half and half thing or a 75% thing? Or is there something quite total about this and quite absolute and unconditional about this that He chose? Full stop.

And then I want to think about Christ's death for sin. Is it that His death sort of touched the matter of sin and didn't actually achieve very much? Or was it that when He died for sin, as we're told, it was a gesture, incomplete and somewhat ineffective? Or did He so definitely pay for sin that there was, when He had done that, there was a zero chance that I would have to bear my own sins, because He'd borne it so completely? And at the end of the day, at the end of the world, He took my sin and I will never have to bear it. And that is a settled matter and it was settled on the cross. And the effect of God's choice, if He chooses, and then we talk about a mystery of His will, if He chooses somebody, does that mean that He might be successful, His choice might win through?

Or is there a sense in which when, if He is chosen, that's it, that person will definitely be saved? I'm talking about the depths of the mystery of God's will. There's all sorts of things as we go up to the surface of things, but at the bottom depth, if He is chosen, will that person be saved? And I'm saying this idea is that if He's chosen, that's it. And about the future, if God chooses to save me and

Christ died for my sin in the final purposes of God, what are the chances that I will get to heaven? [11:56] And is it a 50-50 thing, you know, maybe? Or is it that if God's chosen me, if Christ died for my sin, there is no way I will be lost? So that's what, that's the, I'm drilling down into this on sin, God, Christ, death, the effect of God's choice in the future. And I'm just going to say that same thing again using some theological language. And I'm going to use this acronym, it's an acronym, isn't it? T-U-L-I-P, tulip, it's a flower. It happens to be some useful words, T-U-L-I-P. I don't think they're ever so ancient. I think this was invented sort of 19, I looked on Wikipedia, 1905, 1932, 1963. It doesn't go back to the original people who thought about this, but it's reasonable, it's a sort of slogan of this understanding of salvation, which is the reformed understanding of salvation. And this is, I'm introducing that word reform now, aren't I? So about sin, the T, total depravity, which means sin makes people incapable of choosing God. In other words, sin affects every part of the human makeup, including the will. That bit isn't free to choose as, you know, arbitrarily. That bit too is bound by sin and rebellion. And then the choosing, so the U stands for unconditional election, which means God just chose. That's it, didn't put any conditions, it wasn't subject to terms and conditions, he just chose unconditional election. And the L, I'm not going to use the L, I'm going to say particular redemption, which means that when Christ died on the cross, he particularly saved his people. He particularly redeemed his people, and he did it so that their salvation was, it was impossible that they should not be saved.

And I, I'm going to say for grace, that grace is God's kindness in action. There's various forms of grace, God gives us grace when he gives us our food, and he gives us grace when he gives us a nice sunny day.

But there is a particular form of grace, a particular action of God on the sinner that guarantees that they will be saved. That is an act of his power and his will, and it's, he saves. God saves people that guarantees that it will accomplish what it's set out to do. And the P is the preservation or perseverance of the saints, which simply means that if God has truly saved somebody, the chances that person will be lost in the end are zero. Now, that's the bottom line. I'm not saying that people don't have to fight, and I'm not saying people don't have to believe, and I'm not saying it's wrong to say to people, watch your step, and all sorts of warnings and things like that. The, the, the mark of the elect is that they believe the promises and heed the warnings. But bottom line, and really bottom line, God can keep his people and bring them right through to the end. And that's a bit of a comfort, isn't it? That he, he, he will hold me fast. So there's T-U-L-I-P. So my, my,

I've explained the ideas, and I, you will have gathered what I think about this, but what I want to do now is say, is that right? Is that what the Bible teaches? And in order to do that, God chooses, or before we do that, this, here's an objection, because you might be thinking, hang on, I know what he's doing. He hasn't used the word Calvinism, but that's where he's going with this. Calvinism is wrong, because if you're a Calvinist, you can't preach the free offer of the gospel. I'm just going to stop on that objection and say, there is no real objection. This is, this is what somebody might say. If God chooses people, then logically, there's no point in trying to persuade them. They will come if he's chosen them, and we don't need to do anything, and we can't persuade people. And I'm saying that's not true. That's not right. That's not, we're told to go into the world and preach the gospel. We're told to go and tell people. We're told to go and try and persuade people and reason with people and bring people to Christ in that sort of way. And what I had said previously about [16:31] God's choice is not, I suppose if you were tied by human logic, you might say, I can't see how it fits, but we're not talking about human logic, are we? We're talking about the depths of God's purposes.

And God has chosen people, he's also chosen the method by which they will come. And the method is human beings speaking to fellow human beings. And he's, he's, he's decreed that, and we are to do what he says in this regard. So I'll just mention that objection, that's going to come up again in a moment. God chooses, God ordains preaching to the lost. Is it true? Is that what the Bible says?

Is it right? Is it what Paul said? Or is it just human people like Augustine and Calvin and the Puritans and John Piper and Tim Keller? So I'd like to ask this question, is it what Jesus said?

Because that ought to decide it, shouldn't it? Even if we find it hard to get our head around, if Jesus said it, that's it. Okay, so let's look at what Jesus said on the subject. I'm going to look at some implications and we'll follow it up this evening. And this is so difficult, I'm going to get you to do all the hard work. So let's look at John chapter 6. And I want you to have a Bible there if you can possibly have one or look across at somebody, because I'm going to ask you what it says so that you can tell me. John chapter 6, as Mark read it to us, verse 37 and onwards. And I'm also going to dip into verse 60 to 65. Right. Here's what Jesus says.

And he's talking to some people who are not believing him. The Jews are not believing him. He says, verse 37, all that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. And then the Jews grumble. And in verse 60, the disciples said, this is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?

[19:23] Well, there are hard teachings. Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascent where he was before? The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe, for Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. And he went on to say, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him. Okay, let's look carefully at those verses. So I've got here on the screen some people, Jesus's audience. I've got the Father and the Son and the will, which is actually referred to at least twice. So let's ask ourselves this question. So we're looking at the will as it is in verse 40. What is the Father's will? Please somebody shout it out. In verse 40, what is the

Father's will? Thank you very much. That's what it says. This is the Father's will. Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day. So who, to whom could you say this truthfully? There's a word in there that gives us a clue to this, at least there is in my translation. To whom could you say this truthfully and make this as an offer or a promise? Everyone. It says everyone there, doesn't it? Everyone. Verse 40, everyone. So you could say this to everyone. If you look to the Son and believe in him, you will have eternal life. Is that correct?

So we could go down to the open market, if they'd let us. They'd probably think we were a little bit out of order. We'd go down to the open market, stand in the open market and say to all the people there, if you look to the Son and if you believe in him, you will have eternal life. That's correct, isn't it? That's what that verse tells us. Everyone, anyone, everyone, you could go down to the open market and shout it out, if you look to the Son and believe in him, you will have eternal life and he will raise you up at the last day. And they would say, how do you know that? He'd say, because Jesus says he will do it. To whom can you offer this and what do they have to do? Believe. So there's something they must do. You must look and believe. You know, it was Spurgeon when he was converted, wasn't it? He came and sat in a little chapel under the balcony looking miserable and the preacher says, young man, you look miserable. Why don't you look to the Lord Jesus and believe? You can do that.

Anyone can look. And Spurgeon looked and believed. This is a story about English Baptist history. What must they do? And what's the end result?

Have eternal life and be raised on the last day. And who's going to raise them on the last day? Jesus. Do you think he's capable of doing that? Do you think he's competent to do that? Do you think if he says he'll do it, he'll do it? Well, I do too. And how many of those people who look to him and believe in him will be raised on the last day? All of them. Because it's a promise. And how many will be raised on the last day who have not looked and believed on the Son? None. Because there's no other way to be saved. Whoops, I clicked too quickly. I've not done this. The answer's none. So let's just do that again. What is the Father's will to look and believe on the last day? Look

and believe and be raised on the last day. So this time, I've shown you the people who, these arrows are an arrow of looking in faith. So this person with a sort of orangey blob looked and believed. And this person looked and believed. And this person looked and believed. And they will be raised on the last day.

[24:02] Now, these people didn't. This is sort of life, isn't it? Not everybody looks and believes. But these did. And to whom could you offer this? Everyone. What must they do? Look and believe.

What's the end result? Jesus will raise them on the last day. How many of those will be raised on the last day? Every single one of them. And how many will be raised who haven't done this? None at all. That's correct, isn't it? Because you did the work on that. I just asked the questions. Yeah? Okay, let's look at the other verses. So that was verse 40, which gives us a picture, a very complete picture. But there's another picture that is drawn as well. And this is in verse 37, 38, 39, where he talks again about the Father's will. Well, actually, he talked first about the Father's will.

All that the Father gives me will come to me. Whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all he has given me, but raise them at the last day. So I'm going to say this is Jesus. Jesus is not stupid. He knows he's saying one thing, and then a sentence later he's saying something else. So we've done the second thing that he said, and I drew the picture of it, and you told me what the answer was. So let's look at what he says just a sentence previously. So here is verse 39, the will of God. Somebody tell me what the will of God is, please. Verse 39. Yep. Yep. Okay, this is the Father's will. This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

[25:59] So notice here the languages of what the Father does, and the Father gives. And it doesn't say the time scale of this, but I think it's fair to say that this is something that happens way before Jesus even gets to speaking to these people, that the Father has decided to give people to Jesus.

And on the basis of other bits of the Bible, I'm going to say this happened way back. This happened actually before God made everything. There is a sense in which he said, this person, this person, this person, I'm going to give them to you. You raise them up at the last day and lose none of them. So let's just do this. What is the Father's will? We've just done that. Now, to whom does this apply? To whom does this apply? Who are the people referred to as being raised at the last day in this sentence or these few sentences?

Yeah, they're saved. Yeah, thank you. And how does Jesus describe them? Very simple words, but very profound meaning. All that the Father has given. So the people here are given by the Father to Jesus. That's mysterious. That's deep. The Father has given some people to Jesus.

That's who it applies to. And who does this? Who is the person who does the action when it's giving people? The Father. This is the action of the Father. Now then, I put verse 14.

Why have I put verse 45? It is written in the prophets, they will all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. How many people does the Father give who do not come?

[28:11] None. That's right. How many people does the Father give who do not come to Jesus? Answer, none. Does it actually say that? All. All. Verse 37. All that the Father gives me will come to me.

Yeah? How many does he give who don't come? None. And how many people come to Jesus whom the Father has not given to him? None. None. None. Because they can't come unless the Father has given.

That's right, isn't it? Verse 44. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And the same thing in verse 65. No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.

That's correct. That's what the verses say, isn't it? That's what Jesus says. And how many people are given to Jesus who are not raised up at the last day?

How many people are given to Jesus that he fails to keep? Which verse? 39. This is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. Is that correct?

[29:46] Okay. Well, let me put this as a little picture again. So this time, I've got the same picture as before. Same people. That one

believes. That one believes. That one believes. But this time, we're looking at it from the sort of mystery of God's will point of view, rather than what we go and shout out in the open market point of view. So these arrows are arrows of giving. The Father has given that one and given that one and given that one to the Son and they receive eternal life and will be raised on the last day. So just repeating what you've said to me, what is the Father's will? That those who he has given will be kept and raised on the last day. To whom does this apply? It's to those who are given. How many people does the Father give who don't come? None. All the Father gives will come. How many people come whom the Father does not give? No one can come unless they're given by the

Father. How many people are given but are not raised up at the last day? All the given ones are raised up at the last day because Jesus is tasked with raising up all the given on the last day. Do you think Jesus is up to the job? Do you think Jesus is competent to keep the ones that God has given to him and raise them up at the last day? Yeah, so do I. Here's a verse in Deuteronomy which perhaps might help us.

The secret things, so it just doesn't have the word things, it just says the things that are secreted. It's funny, you can't really say that in English. The things that have been secreted belong to the Lord, but the things that have been opened, the opened things, belong to us and to our children forever that we may do all the words of this law. That's in Deuteronomy 29, 29, and I think this is a helpful idea that there are secret things that belong to the Lord and they're in his will, they're in the depths of God's understanding and there are such things. We can't understand them really, we're not supposed to. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the open things belong to us and our children forever that we may do the words of this law. And I usually have this picture of the iceberg and the waterline and above the waterline are the revealed things and we're to do them. Take them on face value, do what it says. And below the waterline of this iceberg, there's a lot there and you can, you know, if you're, there's actually a lot, you can only see a little bit of it, but there's a lot below the waterline. And I think that idea of above the waterline being revealed and below the waterline being the secret things of God works well with this because I think Jesus is going above the waterline and below the waterline. Here's above the waterline and he says, if you believe, you will be saved. It's an open thing. And he says, the open things, you do them.

Believe. But there's depths. Oh yeah, there are depths, but you do what it says on the surface. It says, believe, believe. Yeah. And then under the waterline, same people, but this time we have the mystery of God who gives people to the Son. How come that person believed? Well, I told him to believe and he did it. But how did, why, why did he do that? Because actually in the depths of God's will and mind, he gave that person to the Son before the world was made.

And this person, how did, how come they believed? I know, it's because he went along with his mate and his mate didn't believe and he did. What made the difference? Well, here we're told under the waterline, the secret things of God, God gave that person to Jesus before the world was made.

[33:55] And how come you believe if you're a believer? Because in the depths of eternity, God decided that so-and-so person is a bit of a rag bone. But I want them to be in eternity with me.

And I'm going to give this person to my Son. And I'm going to say to Jesus, this person now belongs to you. Die on the cross for them. Send your Holy Spirit to bring them to faith. Put your arms around them and never let them go.

Get them to heaven. Don't fail. And Jesus says, I will do your will. And he is competent to do that.

It's a question about Jesus. Can he do what he's been told to do?

I think the answer is yes. And that's why we're here, isn't it? And the thing is, you see, Jesus has no hesitation about telling us this open thing.

And the next sentence telling us this mystery thing. I know people sometimes say, oh, well, I can't find this difficult to understand. It doesn't compute. But Jesus says, look, take me at my word.

[35:31] There are open things to do and there are secret things beneath. I'll just let you into them so that you can have your heart and mind made grateful. And that you can be filled with awe and wonder. And you can just understand how great my mercy is. Human understanding is strained to the limit. But here we can bow in awe and wonder. We really can, can't

we? I can't understand this.

Why God should choose me. Why he should go to that trouble in the depths of eternity to give me to his son. But that's what he tells me. And I'm not going to disagree with him.

So we started off with these questions and these themes. And I think Jesus has answered them all, actually. The T one. How bad is sin? Are people capable of coming to Jesus without God? And the answer is no, because Jesus said it. No one can come to me. You know, you're human race. You truly will ought to come. But you can't. Because your sin is so bad. You're so stuck that no matter how hard I call you, unless I actually draw you, you don't come. But I'm going to draw you. And he did.

The bottom line, this choice, this choice to give me to the son, was it because he looked ahead and saw that I was particularly something or particularly something else? And it just says he gave. He just decided to do it. His choice was unconditional. He said, for reasons best known to myself, I want to save that person. And I'm going to put in an F, the free offer. Can we offer this freely to everybody?

We can, aren't we? Because Jesus said it. Everyone who believes in me, everyone who looks to the son and believes in me will be saved. So we can offer that freely. And the L, does Christ in his death envisage his task is to save everyone without exception? And the answer is no. There is an open offer which is genuine. But the task that Jesus has received is very specific, to save the ones whom God has given to him. And it was specific on the cross. And is there anything in God's work that guarantees to succeed? Irresistible grace? Is there something irresistible? Well, there is, isn't there?

[38:19] Because all the Father gives me will come. There's no doubt about it in God's secret, under the waterline will. They will. You know, when God looks forward to heaven, is he sitting there sort of biting his nails thinking, I don't know whether anyone will actually be there because I'm going to leave it all to them. I'm just going to stand back. And, you know, I've got no guarantee that anybody will be there at all. It's not like that at all, is it? In fact, if you look and think of the book of Revelation, where there is a picture of the redeemed. Now, when I was at school, we used to have school photos where we all just sort of lined up like this, chairs and rows. And there's a camera in the middle that went clockwork. And it took a picture of all the school. Now, I don't know, do they still do anything like that nowadays? No. Anybody got one of those big long ones like that? Hand up. Come on, own up. Anybody got one like this? Big long,

I've got, yeah. And there's my photo. I'm there. And the book of Revelation is like a photo of the church. And if you could just see enough detail, your face would be there. Because it isn't that you, God says you might be in heaven. God's already decided it. He's already decided it. And you've been spotted there already. Is there anything in God's work that guarantees to succeed? Yes. Can we be sure of the future? Well, if Jesus has been tasked with keeping us so that we're not lost, I trust him on that, don't you? That he will keep me to the end. And it doesn't absolve me from the duty of believing and fighting and repenting of sin and mortifying the flesh and taking up the cross day by day. It doesn't absolve me from that. But God has said, I'll make sure that works.

You carry on. You keep doing what you're supposed to do. And even though you're a, you still have indwelling sin, and even though Satan prowls around seeking whom he may devour, you would be watch, you'd be on the watch for all that stuff. But it'll work. I'll get you there.

You'll be there. You'll be there. So in those few verses, if you think about it, I think all those questions were answered about this understanding of salvation. I'm very happy to answer questions about it this evening. And maybe it's the sort of thing that needs chewing over, as I hope we'll do this evening. But I wanted just to spell out some responses to this. I think the first response that comes to my mind is how humble we ought to be. Paul said, what did he say? This is, I can't remember. Well, it's just me, the chief of sinners. Somebody give me the rest of the verse, because it's gone out of my mind. Should we find it where it is? It's in Timothy, isn't it? I should have looked it up, shouldn't I? Go on, say it again, Steve.

[41:50] Yeah. I think that's, yeah, 1 Timothy 1.15. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst or the chief. And this is, Paul could say, I can face the fact about how much of a sinner I was, because I know how big my redemption has been. You know, Tim Keller's thing, you are a worse sinner than you think, but the love with which you've been redeemed is a bigger love than you can possibly imagine. How humble we ought to be. Who do I think I am? I'm a sinner saved by grace.

What do I deserve? I deserve God to turn his back on me and disown me. I deserve the displeasure of God. And it wouldn't be unfair of him to do that. It would be totally right. But he saved me instead. And he saved me for nothing in me, but just out of his pure goodness and mercy. How grateful we ought to be. There's a song and a text which says, to the praise of his glorious grace.

What a great God. What a great salvation. If he can take people like us, bring us a faith, keep us to the end and get us to heaven. What grace to take people from the gutter and take them to the throne.

[44:02] To take beggars and urchins and seat them with princes. That's how great grace is. I'm not saved by anything in me, but as a free gift that I just cannot account for. It's a free gift.

God saves us freely. My dad has a friend who was a school teacher. He was a head teacher, actually. And he said, I was walking along the beach in Nevin in North Wales, says the head teacher, and somebody just came up and thumped me in the face for no reason at all.

I have no idea why he did it. For no reason. It seemed very unfair. Well, we're on the receiving end of the opposite, aren't we? We were walking along through life and God just came and blessed us for no reason at all.

And no wonder Paul could say, oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. You know, we're here thinking about deep eternal matters.

How grateful we should be. Thank you, Lord, for saving me. Whoops. I'm sure there's something else I was going to say. Yeah, how grateful.

[45:22] So humble and grateful and confident. Christian life is a funny old thing, isn't it? Because we have a good mixture of the shame of our sin and the glory of our salvation.

With no trust in ourselves, but a huge trust in Jesus. How confident we ought to be. And Paul can say this in Romans 8. Where he says, what should we say in response for these things?

This is Romans 8, 38. Or actually, I've got to verse 32. If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all.

How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Who is it that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died. More than that, was raised to life. And is at the right hand of God, interceding for us. And what shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[46:28] Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There's a wonderful confidence, isn't there? What was God doing before the foundation of the world, planning salvation for me? Will my sin make him let me go? No. Will he forget?

Is Jesus incompetent? No. And I think also ought to soften our hearts. How compassionate we ought to be. How patient we should be. How are we saved?

Because we deserved it? Not at all. In Romans 9, 16. In the old version it says, Not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but on God that shows mercy.

[47:44] In my New International Version it says, It does not depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. It's all mercy.

Brothers and sisters, if you're proud, what have you got to be proud of? Nothing. If you want to boast about anything, boast about this, that God showed mercy.

That's all we have, isn't it? It wasn't that I ran or willed. It wasn't my desire or my effort. It was just mercy.

And if God showed such mercy to us, how much mercy we should show to the people around us. God could save me.

He could save anybody. So let me pray. Let me invite other people. Let me say to other people, God could save me, he can save you too.

[48:54] This is what God's done for me. He could do this for you. Let me look at other people with the eyes of Christ. He showed me grace.

He showed me mercy. And he can show mercy to anyone. It's amazing. Let's just stop for a moment.

Lord, sometimes our hearts are so hard and so callous to the realization of the amount of mercy you've shown to us.

And just how sheer and undeserved that mercy is. We just want to stop and thank you now for this grace that called us.

Lord, make us gracious, grateful people.

[50:17] We lift our hearts to you. Amen. It is Amazing Grace, and that's the song we're going to sing, and I'll hand over to Mark to close our meeting.