

# Acts 9:1-30 "The Most Famous Conversion in History"

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Just bow our heads in prayer, please. Father, we ask that you would, in your kindness and mercy, Father, we just thank you for your kindness and your mercy. Father, there is no one kinder than you.

Lord Jesus, there is no one kinder than you. And Father, in your kindness towards us, may the Holy Spirit help us to listen to your Word very deeply, and may Jesus and who He is and what He's done, may He form us at a very deep level. And for those of us who are His, may His comfort, may His presence comfort us and cheer us at this time. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated. Back just after I came to this church, which was a long time ago now, about a year or so after I came to this church, it was announced that a fellow by the name of Billy Graham, I know that's like, I don't know, do people still remember Billy Graham? Okay, a lot of you still do, maybe not all of you, but a fellow by the name of Billy Graham, it was announced that he was going to come to Ottawa to do a series of crusades. He was going to speak at the, whatever they call the big hockey stadium now, I keep getting it mixed up, Scotiabank Place, I guess it is. And as part of that, the Billy Graham team wanted different churches to sort of get behind this, to provide counsellors and greeters and other types of help for that. I'd only been at the church about a year or so, I think, maybe a year and a half.

[ 2 : 45 ] And I wanted our church to be a part of it. And the church at that time was not the type of church that would have supported something like the Billy Graham mission. And in fact, you might want to talk to somebody like Andrew afterwards, because the very first time we had an introductory video introducing the Billy Graham campaign coming to Ottawa, and me saying I'd like us to be supported, the hostility from the congregation was so severe that all of the team, Andrew was one of them, they all resigned. Because so many people in the congregation were mad about this. And in fact, there was an attempt to, you know, force me to go back and all of this type of stuff, lots of drama.

Anyway, the bottom line is, at the time, I had these two very interesting, just sort of average Anglican type guys who were my wardens. And I said to them, like, what do you think I should do? You know? And one of them, and if either of these guys are watching, you know, shout out to both of you, I have fond memories. And one of them was in the Navy. And his attitude was just, I mean, I don't know if he saluted or not. He just said, listen, you're the CO, I'm the XO. The CO says we go here, we go here and I'll help you. Like that was as simple as that. And the other fellow, who would never in his life listen to a Billy Graham evangelistic thing, he just said, George, I'm completely and utterly puzzled by the whole congregation. This man has been one of the most influential men in history, the history of the Western world, in the last half of the 20th century.

Like, I'm just curious to hear him. Like, I don't understand why anybody wouldn't be curious to hear this guy who's been arguably one of the most influential men of the latter half of the 20th century. That's all he said. So I pressed on. And in fact, actually, our church had a very robust involvement in the Billy Graham mission. And I still have very fond memories of it.

Now, I mention this because regardless of where you are spiritually, whether you are a Christian, or whether you're trying to figure out what the Christian faith is all about, or whether you're watching me to get some ammo as to why you shouldn't be a Christian, whatever, wherever you are, the thing that we're going to look at today is arguably one of the turning points in human history. Like, not even, like, it's like a no-brainer that it's one of the turning points in human history. And anybody who's at all interested in how the world came to be should be interested in something which is very, very easily argued is one of the turning points in human history.

[ 5 : 14 ] Now, obviously, and you don't even have to be a Christian to acknowledge that Jesus's life and birth and death, and I believe resurrection, is one of the things which changed the course of human history.

And this thing here, which happens about a year later, year and a half later, is one of the reasons why, well, it's not just Jewish people in this room speaking Hebrew.

Why there's a whole pile of, I mean, my ancient ancestors painted themselves blue, danced naked, taunting the Romans. How did people like that ever become Christians?

Well, it's because of this very remarkable conversion, which is a turning point in human history, that even though the message of Jesus had not yet pierced the pagan world, and he wouldn't be the guy who would do the initial thing, this is the guy who ends up bringing the message of Jesus to Europe and spreads it far and wide to people of many, many different languages and people groups.

And it's that missionary movement that's launched and really headed up by him, which continues to this day. And so it is arguably a turning point in human history, so let's have a look at this historical account of it.

[ 6 : 28 ] And if you have your Bibles, it's Acts 9, verse 1 and following. And it's helpful if I open it up to the right thing myself. And just as a reminder, you know, I got the privilege of speaking at a wedding.

Actually, two weekends in a row I've had the privilege of speaking at a wedding. And one of the things I said there, because I was going to read in both cases, actually it was John chapter 2. You know, we get a little bit confused when we look at a book with this really expensive type of paper, and, you know, there used to be gold stuff on the edge.

Because now, of course, it's viewed as being the Bible. But when it was originally written, I doubt if Luke thought I'm writing something for the Bible. He just wanted to provide an eyewitness-based account of the first 30 years of the Jesus movement.

And that's what we have. An eyewitness-based account of the first 30 or so years of the Jesus movement, written while many of the eyewitnesses were still alive.

And so this is Luke's account of what happens to a man by the name of Saul. And it goes like this. But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

[ 7 : 57 ] Now, just sort of pause here for a second. Just a couple of things. First of all, I want to warn you in advance. I'm liable to slip up. I don't know. I think those from the congregation were at the wedding yesterday.

It was one of the rare weddings I did where I didn't mess up a name throughout the whole wedding. People who have been to many weddings that I do, they sort of wait for when's George going to get one of the names wrong.

And in fact, I have to confess, all the way through the rehearsal, I kept wanting to call the bride Susie. And I think I even called her Susie, which is her mom's name.

But anyway, I'm going to maybe mix up Saul and Paul throughout this, but they're the same person. Like many people who've come from another culture, you have maybe your cultural name, and then maybe because it's hard for Canadians to pronounce it, you come up with a Canadian name to match it.

And that's the same type of thing that's going on here. Many, many Jewish people at the time would have had their Hebrew name, and they also would have had their pagan name. So Saul is the Jewish name, and Paul is the pagan name or the Roman name.

[ 9 : 07 ] And I'm more familiar with calling him Paul, but this, because right now it's all about this fellow who's Jewish, they're going to use his name Saul. So if I mix up and say Paul or Saul or whatever, it's the same guy.

It's just me being a little bit confused with names. And the second thing about this is actually it's a really cool thing. If you look at the text again, verse 1, it says breathing threats.

In the original language, there's an image that goes along with this type of breathing. And what you're to imagine is you're a lion.

You're somewhere, and there's a wild lion. And you know it's going to pounce. And before it pounce, it starts huffing. It breathes heavily, like a bull before it charges breathes heavily.

And that's this type of thing, an image of a murderous wild beast huffing and huffing before it attacks. That's how Saul is described.

[ 10 : 10 ] And so he has this murderous plan. He has been one of the ringleaders of the death of the first Christian martyr. He's been responsible for the deaths of other Christians.

And now he wants to go and extend this campaign of murder to Damascus. And now let's get back to the story.

And by the way, one of the things to understand here when they're heading to Damascus, and I think we have at least one person in the congregation here who's lived in Damascus, or at least near about it, and you can ask them about it. But in those days, Damascus was an oasis destination in the middle of desert.

So it's in the Middle East, and he's traveling through desert. And as he's coming to this oasis city of Damascus, this is what happens. Verse 3. Now, as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul said, Who are you, Lord?

[ 11 : 23 ] And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do. The men who were traveling with Saul stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And just sort of pause there for a second.

So there's a couple of things about this story. And the first thing is that there's parts of the story which are public or observable, and parts of the story which are private and not observable in the whole event.

So if we were to go back in a time machine, it would be a very big time machine if we could all go back. If we were able to go back to a time machine in some time probably about the year 34, and this time machine also happened to know that we should be on the road and close to Damascus at the right day.

We don't know the precise day. There's certain things that we would see that are just observable that you can't deny. And the first thing that you would see is that you would see this unbelievably bright light. I don't know how many of you have ever been in the Middle East or close to the equator, but it gets really bright, especially if it's the right time of the year in the Middle East.

[ 12 : 44 ] There's hardly any clouds in the sky. It's hot, and it's very, very sunny. And even though it's very, very sunny, there's a bright light so bright that even on a very, very sunny day near noon, it's brighter than that, and you would see that.

And the other thing you would see is the men traveling with Paul or Saul and Saul all falling to the ground. And they fall to the ground. Our charismatic friends would call this slain in the Spirit.

And just a little bit of a note, for those of you more Reformed and evangelical who sometimes wonder about our, from your point of view, kooky, charismatic friends being slain in the spirits in the New Testament.

This is an example of it. They get knocked down by God. And while they all get knocked down by God, the men get up after they've been knocked down by God. But Paul continues to lie down. And all of the people there, including yourself, will hear some type of voice, something being said. But that's all you'll see. The other thing that you'll see, which is public and observable, is that when Paul is finally helped up, he cannot see.

[ 13 : 54 ] He's blind. And he's had to be led into this other city. What you don't see is, or understand, is you don't get to see Jesus. Jesus.

Only Paul sees Jesus. He doesn't just see the light. He sees Jesus. The man who was crucified a year, year and a half earlier, just outside of Jerusalem, and who was buried in a tomb. And Paul, like all others from Jerusalem, Saul would know that the grave was empty and that they'd never found the body. And he sees Jesus. And he hears Jesus speaking to him. But only Paul hears that.

Now, for many people over the years, this is a very problematic event. But it's only problematic if you're sort of... I don't know how to word it without making it sound like I'm putting people down. And so just give me some mercy. I don't mean to put you down. But the problem is that there's not enough thinking about what's going on here. And a simple way to explain it is that the resurrected Jesus, or an angel, is not like a camel.

[15:00] That's all you have to understand. A camel and an angel, or a camel and the resurrected Jesus, they're not the same. You don't see them the same way. So, for instance, we all can see camels, big, hulking things.

And so if there had been a camel in the middle of the road, and Saul is saying, look at the camel, and everybody else is saying, Saul, there's no camel. Like, there's nothing. Like, they'd all be worried that maybe he's mentally ill or something like that, because a camel is a camel is a camel, and you can see it.

But if you think about it for a second, if there are, in fact, beings like angels, or if there is, in fact, a resurrected Jesus, by the very nature, an angel is something, is someone, and the resurrected Jesus is not someone that we can just observe.

They are not simply observable by our own power. The angel, or in this case, the resurrected Jesus, has to reveal himself. They have to choose to be seen.

It's not a sermon about angels, but I believe, the New Testament teaches, that even now as we gather, we do not just gather as ourselves hearing God's word, and we do not gather just by ourselves to sing God's praises, but there are angels present with us, and none of us can see them.

[16:19] But if an angel chose to reveal itself, it might be that it would just reveal itself to victory or to Steve, and the rest of us wouldn't be able to see it, because you can't see angels.

But I believe the New Testament teaches that there are angels present. When we sing God's praises, I mean, part of it, when that hymn says, tune our hearts to sing your praise, it's partially tune our hearts to be like angels, who love you and obey you, to sing in harmony with the praises of the angels.

I think that's a wonderful image, and it's a New Testament image. So it's not at all odd that only Paul would see Jesus, and only Paul would hear Jesus talk to him.

But some people might say, George, okay, that doesn't make any sense. You know, I sort of can get it that if there is a being like an angel, or if there is something like a resurrection, I can sort of get it in fact, if you think about it, for those of you who read science fiction novels or fantasy novels, this idea of having some type of a way to cloak your visibility to others and choose who can see you, it's a very common theme in science fiction and fantasy novels.

It's not a stretch if you're open to thinking about it. But, George, isn't it far more likely that what's really going on here is that Paul has just had, well, in fact, many people think he's had like an epileptic fit or something like that, but that's, there's no, nobody can seriously look at the historical knowledge we have of Saul and think that he was mentally ill.

[17:50] People who say that are just plain games. All they have to do is walk around outside of our church for five minutes and see many mentally ill people and know that that does not describe Saul, just doesn't describe Saul.

So, but the other thing is, many people say, well, it's just a vision. And one of the things which is so cool about Luke's history is that Luke, it's almost as if Luke anticipates that objection and even more importantly that God anticipates the objection and so does something to mess with our thinking or actually to help us to think straight.

Look what happens next. Begin reading it at verse nine. So Saul is in Damascus, he's been led into Damascus, verse nine, and for three days he, Saul, he, Saul, was without sight and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias and the Lord said to him in a vision, notice that, in a vision, Ananias. And Ananias said, here I am, Lord.

Now just sort of pause here. In the original language, this is a little bit like, once again, if you ask somebody like Ross when he was in the military, if he called up a lieutenant and the lieutenant

would come and say, here I am, like, reporting for duty, sir.

[ 19 : 08 ] And that's the same type of idea here. Like, Ananias, like, I'm ready. It's not just, here I am. Oh, well, it's not like, oh yeah, by the way, I'm over here. No, no, I'm ready. You know, what's your command?

And verse 11, and the Lord said to him, rise and go to the street called Straight, which I believe is still in Damascus. I think it's actually one of the oldest continuous streets on the planet. Although that's what the commentary said, I've never seen there. But rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.

For behold, he is praying, and he is seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.

But Ananias answered, Lord, Lord, I have heard from many about this man and how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.

[ 20 : 05 ] And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name. But the Lord said to him, go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. Now just sort of pause here before we continue. There's a couple of things here which are very interesting. And the first thing, remember I said that it's almost as if the triune God anticipated our objections and wove into the story a way to undermine our objections, and Luke records it.

Because what we see here is that Luke understands the difference between seeing a camel and a vision or seeing Jesus and a vision. He makes it clear that he understands that distinction, that it's a valid distinction.

But what he wants to make clear, and it makes it even clearer as you read through the rest of the book of Acts and as you read other things, other historical letters from the time period, that Paul didn't have a vision.

He saw Jesus. He saw the resurrected Jesus. It wasn't a vision. He saw him. He saw him. And Ananias puts right in, by the way, Luke says, maybe to his, you know, to, who is it that he dedicates the book to?

[ 21 : 31 ] I can't remember the name right now. Eh? Theophilus. Maybe he's actually even saying to the Theophilus after it's all written, Theophilus was going to say, that's so neat, Luke.

I appreciated what you put in there because I was going to say that maybe it was just a vision, and dang it, you wouldn't put in that you understand the difference between visions and seeing Jesus. And that's, and the other thing here which is so, just to point it out, like one of the things that stories do for us, it seems like, for instance, in Sunday school and other things, you often tell kids stories, and one of the things that stories from the New Testament do is they form us to understand ideas. And they just do it in the flow of the story. So what's actually being communicated here, which is very important, because a lot of people have, like people outside the Christian faith worry about this, and sometimes Christians fall prey to it.

But the worry is that God asks us for blind obedience, blind trust. Sometimes he will, but primarily what he wants is thoughtful obedience.

Not blind, but thoughtful obedience. And that's seen in the story. God appears, God speaks, it's an auditory, not a visual vision, it's an auditory vision, and the Jesus, the Lord, speaks to Ananias, tells him, I want you to go and you're going to meet this guy Saul.

[ 22 : 59 ] And then Saul, and then Ananias responds back. Now he's not being mouthy, it's not like, you know, you look at maybe some parent dealing with their 13-year-old, and they try to communicate something to their 13-year-old, and their 13-year-old gets really mouthy back at the parent.

But Ananias just says, in a sense, okay, just time out, Lord, you do realize you're sending me to talk to this guy who kills Christians. Like, you do realize that's what you're asking me.

And in the whole flow of the story, when Jesus speaks to Ananias again, Jesus doesn't give him a smackdown for being mouthy, he doesn't tell him off. He appreciates that it's a reasonable question, he's counting the cost of the decision.

And Jesus says to Ananias, no, no, I want you to go ahead, and I want you to understand that I'm actually about to call this guy into a mission that means he's going to go to all sorts of pagan people, he'll talk to kings, he'll also talk to Jewish people, and he's also going to suffer for the

gospel, and I want you to know that, and I want him to know that.

And so what you see here is an example of thoughtful obedience. It's still obedience, but it's thoughtful. God delights in honest questions, and that's what happens.

[ 24 : 20 ] So what happens? Actually, one of the things which happens next is very, very beautiful, and I don't know if any of you have thought about it before, but it's very beautiful, and in some ways it's a foretaste of heaven for Christians.

What happens? Look at what happens in verse 17. So Ananias departed and entered the house, and laying his hands on Saul, he said, he said, Brother Saul.

I'll explain why that's so significant. Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit, and immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he regained his sight.

Then he rose and he was baptized as a Christian and taking food he was strengthened. Now what's so wonderful about this story? Ananias didn't say, you dirty rat.

I know some of those people you killed. And some of those people you killed, I know Mary and she still has those scars. He didn't say anything like that. He puts his hands and we all know how important a touch of affection and respect is.

[ 25 : 44 ] We can usually tell the difference between a touch which is hostile or manipulative and a touch which is an honest touch. We crave honest touches like this and he touches Saul.

And what happens next is that Ananias recognizes that he and Saul are alike. No human being deserves heaven. The whole message of the gospel is that apart from Christ I am separated from God and I deserve God's judgment.

And the message of the gospel is that Jesus' life and his death upon the cross a death he didn't deserve that that when he dies on the cross the judgment that Saul deserved fell on Jesus.

the judgment that Ananias deserved fell on Jesus. The judgment that George deserved deserves fell on Jesus.

The judgment that Steve deserves fell on Jesus. And I am made right with God not by anything I have done or can ever do it is purely God's grace offered through the finished work of Jesus upon the cross that I receive by faith alone that I am made right with God and I have no basis or claim other than that other than that and so I am equal to Saul I am equal to Ananias I am equal to Steve I am equal to any brother or sister in Christ that is the only basis I have to be received by Christ and Ananias recognizes that and here's the wonderful thing to help bring home for us the hope of heaven.

[ 27 : 29 ] I have said this many times and it goes back to a text like this when I die not because I am at all special I am not at all special not because I am a presbyter it has nothing to do with being a presbyter purely and utterly by the grace of Christ and his finished work upon the cross and that Jesus came to me and sought me and provided within me the freedom that I could respond and put my faith and trust in him and when I breathe my final breath and then I die and my eyes close on this world my eyes will open in the new heaven and the new earth and God the Father will look at me and he will smile and he will say George my child I've been so looking forward to you being here welcome that is

God's initial final word about you in Christ so when we see Ananias laying his hands on Saul and saying brother Saul that is a hint a foretaste of those even greater words that will be said by our father in heaven when he says George my child welcome Steve my child welcome Ken my child surely my child welcome now the story takes an astounding turn and a bit of a dark turn there used to be an organization called Campus for Christ and they did spectacular work but I think one of the things that they did was very weak is that they said God has a wonderful plan for your life and the problem with that is that we tend to interpret wonderful life by Canadian standards Paul didn't have a wonderful life at least by Canadian standards let's see what happens this odd turn that happens it continues on in the second part of verse 19 for some days

Saul was with the disciples at Damascus and immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue saying he is the son of God and all who heard him were amazed and said is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name and has he not come here for this purpose to bring them bound before the chief priests but Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jewish people who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ and when many days had passed some of the Jewish people there plotted to kill Saul but their plot became known to him they were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him but his

disciples took him by night and led him down through the opening in the wall lowering him in a basket you see this profound irony here that the man who wanted to go to Jerusalem to kill Christians becomes a

Christian and now in some ways the passions which he has inflamed are now turned against him and people want to kill him and it continues on in that vein look what happens next verse 26 and when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples they were all afraid of him for they did not believe that he was a disciple but Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road Saul had seen the Lord who spoke to him and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus so Saul went in and out among them at Jerusalem preaching boldly in the name of the Lord and Saul spoke and disputed against the Hellenists by the way the Hellenists were the same group that were responsible for the death of Stephen isn't this just so remarkable that Saul when he comes to Jerusalem goes to the same people to share the gospel see one of the things when we pray for persecuted

Christians one of the things that Christians should pray and it comes from this we pray that the God the persecutors will stop persecuting but we also have to pray for their conversion because that's the most important thing and then it goes on so he verse 29 and he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists but they were seeking to kill him and when the brothers learned this they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus now just a couple of things to wrap things up see so once again why is it that we believe that the historical evidence is that there's good solid historical evidence that Jesus really rose from the dead this adds to it Saul at any point in time could have Saul in a sense from an earthly point of view left everything once Jesus appeared to him alive and he becomes a Christian if you ask many Jewish well not a lot of Jewish people aren't that informed about their tradition but if you go to the synagogues and talk to the rabbis the name of Gamaliel is still well known amongst

[ 33 : 02 ] Jewish people as being one of the greatest teachers of law who ever lived and that was Saul's mentor but now he loses his mentor he loses his social standing people are trying to kill him and he will end up being shipwrecked and beaten and stoned and all sorts of types of things and in every all of these things it could have all ended he could have regained his status by just saying ha ha ha okay whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa got ya no Jesus didn't Jesus still die Jesus still dead I didn't see him just joking just messing with you ha ha ha he just had to say that and his life could go back but he doesn't say that he says the grave is empty Jesus is alive I've seen him I've seen him you want to kill me kill me if you want I've seen him we have all sorts of people we have death cults all over the place where people die for causes as I've said before people don't die for a fact very rarely

Saul will eventually die for a fact it's true it happened but some might say why on earth would anybody want to become a Christian if all that's going to happen is that God doesn't have a better plan for your life and in fact George do you realize what would happen if I became a Christian in Ottawa today and it got out that I was a Christian like I don't think my life would be better I think my life would be worse like for a lot of us George in a place like Ottawa like a lot of people they see Christians as the problem they see Christians as the bad guy they see us as being haters not lovers like why would anybody become a Christian well part of the answer is I mean part of it you should only become a Christian bad me now

Saul is persecuting Christians but Jesus doesn't say why are you persecuting Christians he says why are you persecuting me and in verse five Saul says who are you Lord and the Lord says I am Jesus whom you are persecuting what this text is telling us you know I've already shared that what let Ananias what Ananias realized when he prayed for Saul was that he and Saul were the same in the sense that they like me are completely dependent upon the judgment that I deserve fell on Jesus so that the life that he deserved could be given to me but then when we give our lives to Christ when Christ comes to us and presents himself in a spiritual sense or his presence to us and we you know that you partly in some ways and you see this with

Saul partly what it means to become a Christian is you say to Jesus I surrender like you turn to him and you say I'm going to stop running I'm going to stop fighting you I'm going to stop hating you I'm going to stop raging you I'm going to stop ignoring you I surrender I'm yours and that's what the Christian life is about in terms of growing I surrender the beautiful hymn I surrender all that's how you begin conversion and that's how you grow in conversion I surrender all but then Jesus becomes so closely identified with you that you are so in him that if I get persecuted because I am a

Christian those people who are persecuting me are not just persecuting me they are persecuting Jesus himself that's how closely identified he is with me I am not alone I am always with Jesus and I am in Jesus I forget that and I try to sometimes hide that or reject that when I want to do something which I know is wrong but that's how closely he has identified with me and he has taken me into himself so that he can say when you saw have been persecuting Christians these Christians are so closely connected to me and are actually in me that you're actually persecuting me I'll leave you with a story some of you are familiar with the person Corrie Tenboom if you haven't read her book The Hiding Place you should find it you should read it it's a very beautiful book Corrie Tenboom with her sister and her dad were Dutch Christians when the Nazis invaded Holland and out of their love and obedience to Christ they hid Jews and after they'd been hiding Jews from the Nazis who wanted to kill them a neighbor a neighbor ratted them out and the

[ 38 : 45 ] Nazis came and captured the Jews and in anger threw not only the Jewish people into the concentration camps but Corrie Tenboom and her sister and her dad all went to the concentration camps and while in the concentration camps her father and her sister died but Corrie Tenboom by God's grace survived and in fact actually lived quite a long life and there's a wonderful story later on when somebody said this God that you worship that you think is so powerful why don't you think it's quite likely that one day he will forget about you and you will in a sense fall between his fingers and he'll just leave you because you know you just slip between his fingers and Corrie Tenboom looked at the person and said that will never happen I am his fingers I am his fingers can't happen he'll never forget me he'll never let me fall

I am his fingers please stand let's bow our heads in prayer father thank you for Jesus thank you for his life thank you that he came to seek us thank you that he died the death that we deserve as Christians that we deserve and he took the judgment and the punishment that we deserve and that he offered his sinless life and standing with the father to us who do not deserve it and he did it all out of love for us and to save us because we could not save ourselves and father we thank you for him and for what he has done we thank you father that he is not he is not dead but alive and that he through the holy spirit continues to seek people to be his own not physically but he continues to seek us and father

I ask for any who might be here or watching if you feel at all friends that you feel any type of tug towards Christ know that it is him calling you to give yourself to him we thank you father that Jesus comes to us that he wants us to be your children by adoption and grace and we ask father that you know how we sometimes struggle with loneliness and sometimes with depression and sadness and unfulfilled desires and longings and father you know all of these things about us and we ask father in all of those times and in good times as well that you will help us to remember Jesus and who he is and what he has done and that he is so close to us at all times and so with us at all times that we will flee sin that we flee despair remind us father deeply day by day in

Christ that the final word about us will not be failure will not be loser but will be child I am so glad you are with me father make these truths deeply dear to our hearts and we ask these things in the name of Jesus your son and our savior and all God's people said Amen God's God God God God God God He God God God