

Acts 9:31-43 "Why the Biblical Miracles Are True"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[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.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we are coming to parts of your Word that, well, Father, for some of us, we sort of just hear this Word, but we live our lives a very, very different way. And Father, for others of us, we hear this Word and sort of struggle. We don't quite know what to think about it, but we want to believe it. And so, Father, we ask that you would bring this, your Word, deeply into our hearts. And Father, you would help us to think about it and think about it well. Think about it so that we might live well and live at peace as we go about our tasks.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. There's a fellow that I've gotten to know, and he's an atheist. And by the way, he's a really great guy as well. He's an atheist and a really, really great guy. And he fairly soon on, he asked me what I did. He'd see me sitting, you know, looking at big fat books in a coffee shop. And he asked me what I did, and I told him I'm a pastor. And I, of course, asked, when somebody asked me that, I always say I'm a pastor. And then I asked them if they have some type of spiritual beliefs or connection or heritage or tradition or whatever. And that's when I discovered that he'd been raised Jewish and was still culturally Jewish, but he was an atheist. Anyway, several times since then, I've, something's come up and I've tried to make a bit of a point about it. And every time,

[2 : 58] I mean, he didn't literally shout me down, but he almost shouted me down. He didn't literally put his hands in his fingers and go, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, I'm not going to listen. But he did the equivalent of it, that he didn't want to talk about this at all. Don't talk about it.

He would rude, not rudely, but he'd very clearly interrupt me and just say, I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to think about it. And then just a couple of weeks ago, I said to him, well, have you ever done any study about some of these things? Like, you know, would you like, are you open to considering some evidence for the existence of God and for the Christian faith?

And before I even finished that, he just said, no, no, no, no. Just kept saying, no, he's not interested in considering any evidence whatsoever. Just no. Now, I'm telling you this for a variety of reasons, because one of the stories that we're about to read is a text that for many people in our culture, they would just roll their eyes at it. In fact, I guess that if I was to get this fellow to read it, he would just throw his hands up in despair at how gullible people like me are, that I would even want to read it. And he's part of a, you know, but here's the thing.

As I said in my prayer, a lot of us Christians, we believe it on one hand, but we don't believe it on another hand in terms of how we live our lives. And we might feel a bit uncomfortable with it. That's one thing. That's one of the reasons it's so good that it's in the Bible. But before we go any further, having a closed mind, because that's in a sense what this fellow has, he has a closed mind. He's dogmatic about his beliefs in a closed mind. I just want to say as we go into this story that it's a human problem. It's not a problem just for atheists or something like that. It's a human problem. And that means we Christians also are tempted and in fact often live with very, very closed minds. And,

you know, the Bible here and the Bible constantly, the message of the gospel is, is that if we want to grow in knowledge, if we want to grow in wisdom, we have to be open to new information. We have to be open to new evidence. God does not want us to have closed minds, but open minds because he wants us to grow in knowledge and maturity and wisdom. And you can't do that without having an open mind. So as that is our introduction, let's look at this text, which is

I said, would cause this friend of mine to roll his eyes if I ever actually even got him to read it. And even for Christians, can make this squirm a little bit if we get right down to the nitty-gritty of it. So let's look. It's Acts chapter 9. We're going through the book of Acts. It's Acts chapter 9, and we're going to begin reading at verse 31. And just before I go any further, it's a very interesting little, I don't know how to pronounce the word, interregnum. You have these series of very significant conversions. And we've just had the story of the significant conversion of the man named Saul. His Jewish name is Saul, and his pagan name is Paul. And that's how most people remember him by the name Paul. And his conversion is very significant, combined with the next conversion, which is the conversion of the first pagan. And it's that combination of things. Paul will end up being the man who primarily takes the gospel to the pagans. And that's one of the reasons there's a whole pile of us, if we traced our ancestry back, our ancestry is pagan. And that's why we're here worshipping Jesus today, because of these two big stories. And in between these two big stories, there's this funny little three bits. And so let's look at them. And the first one goes like this, verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

[6 : 49] I just sort of pause. The word built up there, I'm not going to talk about anything other than just point it out. It's a passive word. So it doesn't imply, what it's saying is that God built it. It's not saying, you know, they all, you know, rolled up their sleeves and sort of built it. No, no, it's saying that God built up the church. I'll continue reading. We'll read it again. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Now, you know, just imagine if you were to go to the, you know, the nearest Tim Hortons or some more boutique coffee place, and you were to just to say, you know, this is a really important text for Christians. And I think every Canadian would say, why on earth would you want to add more fear in your life?

I mean, that's just like the absolute last thing that anybody would like. In fact, one of the reasons they'd say you shouldn't be religious is it just makes you more fearful. And I'm going to, we're going to talk about this text, but it's going to be easier to talk about it if we see the next two stories and then flip back to it. So what happens next? It's verse 32. And it goes like this.

Now, as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived in Lydda. There he, by the way, Lydda is now called Laud. And if you've ever been to Israel, the airport, the main commercial airport for Israel is in Laud. That's sort of where it is. But back then it was called Lydda and they didn't have an airport. Verse 32 again. Now, as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aenus, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, Aenus, Jesus Christ heals you.

Rise and make your bed. And immediately Aenus rose and all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and they turned to the Lord, implying that many turned to the Lord. Now, I just sort of want to pause here for a second. So I'm not going to tell you, but I was watching a politically incorrect podcast this week. And I, or maybe it was, I don't know if it was a week or two weeks old. I can't remember. But it was on the fifth anniversary of, and I don't, Juicy Smollett, I don't know how to pronounce it. You know, the fellow five years earlier who'd made a claim that he was out in Chicago in the early, late at night and two, two white guys with MAGA hats mugged him, right? And it ended up showing that he completely fabricated everything in the story. And, and the point of the podcast was they were looking through the, the increasing number of claims of hate that are being launched. And this, the, the, the person doing the podcast looked at, I think it was four or five ones that had happened over the last year, all of which were immediately accepted as gospel truth by the media, but within a month or two with no ask, not asking any type of, of questions about, you know, it, but then later on it was shown that they were in fact completely and utterly invented stories. And, and the podcaster was just pointing out, he didn't say by the way, that there were no hate crimes going on. He just said, there's a pattern to false ones in terms of lack of detail and lack of specificity and location and a range of other types of things that shows that they're invented made up stories. Now I'm saying that because in this story and in the next story, it's very easy for people to say

they're just invented and made up stories, but they aren't invented and made up stories. And that's for several reasons. First of all is the book, in general that it's found in. And as I've talked about before, this is a book that claims to be a history written by one who was an eyewitness of some of the events and everything in it is based on eyewitness testimony. That's the claim he makes. It's written when many of these eyewitnesses are still alive and can comment on it. And in a sense, the book never gets blown out of the water as being completely false all of the time. And one of the things is that if in the book, there's so many references made to historical people and events that by and large, not for every bit, like they can't pinpoint the exact year, for instance, that Paul got converted, but they know roughly when, probably within about 12, six months or 12 months, they know when it happened. But there's so many specific historical references and historical individuals that they can plot when different things happened. And in fact, Israeli archaeologists will often go to the New Testament, both to the

Gospels and the Book of Acts, to help make archaeological discoveries in Israel because of the accuracy of the book. Even though they obviously, as Jewish believers, don't accept that it's true, but they understand that it's historically quite accurate. So that's one thing about it.

[12:02] But the second thing is, if you look at this story again, you'll see that it doesn't have at all the type of characteristics that a made-up story has. It doesn't use once-upon-a-time language.

Well, look at it again, just if you could go back. He tells you that it happens in Lydda, verse 32. It tells you about the name of the man that he found, Aenus. It tells you that, you know, there might have been like, I don't know, 50 Aenuses there, but he was the one who was bedridden for eight years who was paralyzed. And the other thing is, you know that this can't be a psychosomatic illness because it's eight years long. And it's eight years long at a time when there's no social security net, which means that he would have had to be trusted upon somebody else to pick him up and carry him out somewhere to beg. And that's how he would have had to live.

Like, there's no particular benefit to claiming that or having a psychosomatic illness, which would be short-term, not something which was eight years long. And then Peter says to him, Aenus, verse 34, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed. And immediately the man rises.

And here's the kicker. All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him. In other words, he was well-known, and the story is well-known, and many, many people saw him walking around. In other words, for years to come, when they saw him, he was a walking testimony to the fact that this guy by the name of Peter said that Jesus heals you, and he was healed. And in fact, it even says that many of them turned to the Lord. So there's so many details in here that Luke's original readers could have gone to Lydda and that area and asked, was there a guy by the name of Aenus here who, I just read this story, it probably happened to you about 20 years ago, was there a guy, they could go and they could ask, because this is, he's giving lots of opportunities for you to check, rather than things which are going to hinder it. Now there's obviously other meanings in it. I'm going to hopefully get to that at the end of the sermon, but I think there's a point. If you could put up a point, Clara, here's the point. And this is true of the Gospels, it's true of all of the stories in the book of Acts. This is not a timeless story. It's not a timeless story. It's not a once upon a time story. It's not a timeless story, but a story in time and place for all times and places.

It's a story in time and place, in time and space, in time and history, but it's for all times afterwards. It's something that really happened. Now people will say, well, George, that's completely and utterly possible. As I said, my friend, the atheist, would probably, if I could even get him to this point, throw up his hands in despair and said, gosh, George, I thought you were sort of at least minutely intelligent. You've now disproven that. You're completely gullible. Science has disproved this.

Medicine has disproved this. It's completely and utterly impossible. Well, I'm going to say a couple of things about that. I'll be a bit nerdish in a couple of minutes, but let's get to the big whopper. I mean, that's small potatoes compared to the next story, and let's look at it. And as I'm reading it, notice again, I'll point them out, all of the things in the story which are not like how you want to invent something that's sort of generic.

[15:17] Well, you know, it was sort of that, and you know, what, it's verse 36. Now there was in Joppa, and just by the side there, Joppa is now called Java, and it is the closest port to Jerusalem.

And if you go to Israel, you can see the ruins of Joppa. It's just, it's right beside Tel Aviv, or sort of surrounded by Tel Aviv. And I think the ruins are from the times of the Crusades, obviously not this time, but this is where Jonah went to get a boat to run away from God.

And if you go to Israel, the main way to get into the old city, the most popular way to get into the old city of Jerusalem is through the Java Gate. Why is that? Because it's on the Java Road. And why is it called the Java Road? It's the road that takes you to Java.

So this is a port city. It's very, very, it would have been very, very well known. Would not have had a huge population by today's standards, but you know, a couple of thousand people, maybe a little tiny bit bigger, an important port city. So back to the text story. Now there was in Joppa, a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means, sorry, Dorcas. Just anybody here planning to have a girl pick Tabitha over Dorcas. Dorcas will get that, your daughter, in a lot of trouble for the rest of her life. Tabitha just probably was way better in Greek and Latin. Anyway, so they tell you the names of the person that continues on. She was full of good works and acts of charity.

In those days, she became ill and died. And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, please come to us without delay. The story never tells you why they ask for that. It might just be that they wanted to be reminded of the gospel, about the fact that Jesus really had risen from the dead. It's unlikely that they've asked him to do what he's about to do. This is going to be something that would have just, frankly, blown their minds. Anyway, they go back. They urged, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, please come to us without delay. So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing the tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

[17:42] Now just sort of pause here for a second. So once again, in this story, Luke is doubling down on the miracle, and he's also very specifically placing it. These people had, Dorcas had died. We'll all make, we'll remember the story better if we call her Dorcas rather than Tabitha. Dorcas had died, and they'd washed her. They'd carried her upstairs. Then they asked two guys to go a 10 and a half mile walk to where Peter was. That's well over three hours. And then they have to find Peter, and then he has a over three hour walk to come back. And in the meantime, they're with her.

And there's other details in the story, right? That she is in Java. And actually, there's another very important figure here that she actually must be in a very large house and a very large two-story house. And that's very significant because in that time period, most houses would have just been one floor. A bit of an aside, but if any of you come, Louise and I live in an area of Ottawa called the Linwood Village. It's a little part of Bell's Corners. And if you came to Linwood, I don't know how many houses there are in Linwood Village. I don't know, 200 houses? I don't know, something like that. But there might only be eight or nine houses that have two floors.

So if I was to tell you this story, I don't remember the street, but it's a two-story house. Well, that actually would, like, if you said it happened in the Glebe and it wasn't a two-story house, throw up your hands. Like, every house is two stories, right?

It wouldn't help you at all. But if you came to Linwood Village, it would really help you. There's only a couple of houses like that. You could go through them and check them very, very simply. So once again, there's these constant details. And so, yeah, these constant details. So what happens, right? This is a story that's not talked like a made-up story, but is grounded in time and place.

Verse 40, Once again, lots of specific historical detail.

[20:17] that if you wanted to go back and check it out, you could check it out. Now, I know there's at least one doctor in the room. I don't know how many are listening. And I mean, the doctor will tell you that there's no natural explanation for this. And naturally, it's completely and utterly impossible. Medically, it's completely impossible for a woman who's been dead for seven, eight, nine hours to come back to life.

And some of us might say, well, part of the problem with this is that, I mean, these were all gullible people. They didn't know anything. They didn't know science. They didn't know medicine. And they just made some type of big mistake. And the simple reply to that is that compared to our culture, they were experts in death. Like it might very well be that a large number of doctors and nurses have actually never had to deal with a death, depending on the type of medicine that they've gone into, or maybe just a very small number of cases. But in the, I got these facts from the internet, so they have to be true. But in the first century Roman Empire, it's estimated that for like, for people of like Roman citizens, and like, like not just everybody, but for Roman citizens, and in general of that upper classes, 25 to 30% of births wouldn't make it to the age of one.

25 to 30% of all babies born won't make it to the age of one. And 50% will not hit their 10th birthday.

They can't estimate how many women would have died in childbirth, but obviously would have been a very significant number. You know, in my own family, and in Louise family, my sister and several of our sisters, because of complications, they might very well have died in childbirth. When I was in Eganville, and I had a lot of older people, surprising how many older people had been raised by aunts and uncles because their moms had died in a subsequent childbirth. So in the ancient world, not only would there have been a high number of women dying in childbirth, 25% or more of children aren't making it to the age of one, 50% of children aren't making it to the age of 10. And the average lifespan for a male, I couldn't find a statistic for women, I'm sorry, the average lifespan for men, and these are Roman citizen types, is 30 to 35.

[22 : 44] Now obviously there are people who live way past 30 or 35, but the average is 30 to 35. Now what the point is, there's no funeral homes. This is a people who are familiar with death. They are experts in death.

They were surrounded by death, and they had to deal with it themselves. They had to wash the body. They had to sit with it. They had to bury it. They would have been remarkable experts in death.

Tabitha was dead. So that's the point of the story. Now, some people, I'm going to take a bit of a nerdish moment, give me a bit of grace.

For some of you who aren't interested in these nerdish issues, try to listen, but if you have to have a bit of a nap, maybe I'll try to think of a joke or something to draw your attention back after we get through the nerdish bit. But here's the thing. First of all, in our culture, and I'm thinking of my friend here, he is creating, in a sense, a false dichotomy.

That the choice is between being a gullible person and a thinking person. A scientific person and an unscientific person. What they've missed is that the real choice is between being open-minded or closed-minded.

[24 : 08] This is why at the beginning, and if you're watching this or if you're here as a guest, I'm not making a claim that Christians by nature are open-minded. Closed-mindedness is a human problem. It cuts across all creeds, all religious positions, all ideologies.

And closed-minded people want to shut down discussion, want to shut down and want to shout down. And that's a human problem. I'm not making any type of culture war comment here. But I'm just saying the culture war should make us aware of a human problem and should call us to examine ourselves.

But the choice is between being open-minded scientists or a closed-minded scientist. An open-minded thinker or a closed-minded thinker. That's the choice. And in this particular case, I would say my friend is closed-minded and dogmatic.

Not even willing to consider any type of evidence. That's quite astounding. If you go do some research about atheists in particular, Dawkins and several others, they very publicly said there's absolutely no evidence whatsoever which would ever make them leave their atheism.

I don't have the faith to be an atheist. I've had periods of doubt about Christianity, you know, but they're absolutely dogmatic. So how does that affect here? Well, and they say, well, George, George, George, George, George, George, George, George, George, George, George.

[25 : 24] You know, science and medicine has proven this. No, no. Here's the big mistake they make. And this is the really nerdish part. Okay. Sorry. Warned you. Hopefully you don't all fall asleep, but there's a bit of a nerdish thing here.

I'll try to be very brief. So what is science? Science is a way of doing controlled experiments in the context of a body of knowledge and theories that develop out of these experiments. That's what they are.

And at the heart of all experiments is they try to create a closed system. Okay. They might get chem... They might have a clean room or a soundproof room. If they're doing experiments that they shouldn't have sound, they try to make it soundproof.

And they try to account for everything in terms of the temperature, etc. So they try to control all of these types of things and they do their experiment in a closed type of system. And they have a theory and they're trying to see if their theory is falsified or if there's...

It might be true and they'll do repeated experiments. And that's how science works. And that's how science should work. And if you're a Christian in science, you should do those types of experiments. But here's the problem.

[26 : 25] Many people mistake thinking that when you do a scientific experiment, you do it in a closed system and then believe that the whole world is a closed system. It doesn't matter how many PhDs they have. It doesn't matter if they teach at Princeton or MIT or Harvard or Yale or their Sorbonne or Moscow.

Science cannot prove that the entire universe is a closed system. It just can't. And that's the point of issue here when it comes to things like miracles. Christians believe that we live in an ordered universe that has been created and designed by the triune God.

And the triune God wants human beings to flourish and know the truth. And so the scientific method in a sense is an answer to prayer. That people will try to figure out how things work, how germs work, how viruses work, right?

How light works. How light works. So that we can flourish and be fruitful and fill the earth. And that there can be life rather than death. And that's all completely. But the very bottom line is that Christians believe that it's not a closed universe.

There is a God that does exist. We can see evidences as designed everywhere. By the way, if you want to have some fascinating things, go online and watch YouTube videos by Dr. James Tour from the University of Houston.

[27 : 46] Blow your mind. They'll really blow your mind. They're fantastic to watch. And you can see evidences of design everywhere. And so what most miracles are, are fundamentally God either taking something out of his created order or creating something in his created order.

And it's a little bit like this. Let's say that you want to do an experiment about, you know, momentum and how forces move and work.

And so you have a very, very flat table. And you experiment to make sure that it's completely and utterly level. And you have a closed room so there's no breeze. And you measure the temperature. And you control the humidity.

And you have a controlled scientific thing. You have different balls out there, all the same size. Everyone weighed. They're completely as close to perfectly spherical as you can possibly get them. And you go through experiments of hitting the ball at a different time and watching how things move. And you're doing it to calculate momentum and all that other type of stuff. And you do it and you do it and you do it and you do it.

[28 : 53] And you can scientifically, hopefully, start to predict how things happen. But what that doesn't account for is one mischievous member of the research team that as the ball is first hit, he or she reaches out and takes one ball off the table and then adds another ball somewhere else.

Now, everything that's going to go on on that table will still follow the laws of physics. But it won't be how they predicted it at the beginning. And it won't be that way.

Why? Well, because somebody took one of the balls away and somebody added a ball. It's going to change all of the different patterns. And at the heart of a miracle, most miracles, is God removing something from the created order and or adding something to the created order.

And so for a doctor to look at the case of a man who's been paralyzed for eight years and is healed, assuming that he had been able to go back in time and you do a medical, full medical diagnosis before and then after, what you would see is that some of the things within the body that were there that were stopping function have now just been removed.

And things that are needed for function are there. Since science and medicine doesn't disprove the miracle, what it does is it makes the wow bigger.

[30 : 17] And it would be the same thing for the dead body, an even bigger wow. And of course, God also, Jesus being the Lord, not just of this physical order, but of the bigger order, calling the spirit of Dorcas, the soul of Dorcas back into the body, which has been, in a sense, redesigned or recreated in a way that it's now going to have health.

So if you're in science, do science. Do it as well as you can. Be a leader in your field. If you're a doctor, be the best doctor you possibly can. Read the scientific literature.

Look at the best peer-reviewed studies. Follow it and be up to date and do it the best you can. If you're an engineer, do your engineering to the best you can. But all the engineering and all the medicine and all the science in the world isn't going to tell you whether or not God chooses to do a miracle. And the God who does exist does miracles.

And it's not a contradiction of your science, your engineering, or your medicine to do both, to believe in both. In fact, it fits. It fits. Now, how to wrap this story up.

A couple of things about why this story is a story in time and place. What did I say earlier? It's not a timeless story, but a story in time and place for all times and places. And here's the first thing, and here's why it's not just a matter about arguing.

[31 : 48] And I've said this, you can't say it enough in our culture. I think every human being in our culture has some type of intuition and some type of yearning that life is stronger than death.

I mean, we might be in despair about it because death always seems to win. We might be in despair about it because of our own death. Part of the problem we have in our country, of course, with medically, with euthanasia, call it what it is, is, of course, that we have almost, we have people who encourage despair.

We have people who encourage despair. But despair is what happens when you have yearnings and hopes and intuitions and you just come to believe they're probably really not true and it's crushing.

And I think human beings have a deep yearning that life is stronger than death. It feels as if death is something offensive and life is what should really be.

And we have a yearning for it and an intuition that it's true and only the gospel grounds that institution, intuition, and answers your yearnings. Only the Bible. Only the gospel.

[33 : 04] Only the Bible is, it gives you an explanation of how to understand science and a closed thing and talks about the importance and dignity of human beings.

And talks about in this grand big story how God's intention was for life and how death came into it from human beings. And how Jesus comes and defeats death and defeats that which causes death and rises from the dead.

In fact, one of the things which is so wonderful and powerful about this story of Dorcas is it's helping to show that Luke, who wrote it, he understands the difference between myth and fact. He understands the difference between vision and reality.

He understands the difference between healing and resurrection. He understands the difference between resuscitation and resurrection. Because Dorcas will still have to die.

Jesus is completely and utterly unique. And Jesus defeated death. And that, there's reason, there's history, there's poetry, there's a grand narrative, there's a profound worldview, and only Christianity grounds that intuition that life is stronger than death.

[34 : 14] And it is the only answer to the yearning of your heart. In fact, if you could put up the next slide, here's part of a way, one of the ways to express the gospel.

Life himself died for you who are doomed to die so that in him you might truly live. That's the message of the gospel.

Jesus, how does the John's gospel begin? By the way, you can just pray, you know. You never know what's going to happen sometimes when you go into a coffee shop. Like, it's absolutely the case.

Like, there's this one young guy. You can pray for him. You can just pray for him as the young guy. And he has, like, no Christian background or interest. But he's taking a course in sort of late antiquity.

And I go in to get a coffee, and he asks me about the Christological controversies of the 4th century and 5th century. And he says he'd like to talk to me about it.

[35 : 12] I have to brush up on that. He asked me about the difference between the Antioch and the Alexandrian school. I'm thinking. But he's taking a course at Carleton, I think, or Ottawa U, and that's the course.

And he's decided he wants to study the Christological controversies. I've been praying for this guy. I would never in a million years think I might have a conversation because a course taught by a secular person on this.

So you can just pray for him. But that's the whole message of the gospel. Oh, that was one of the things. He was talking about the book of John. And I said, well, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made, and in him was life. And he said, wow, you've memorized that? I said, it's like every Christmas I have to preach on it.

So I eventually memorized it. He said, yeah, I'd like to talk about that. But what does that tell it? It's saying that life himself came to earth and died for you.

[36 : 10] He died for you because you were doomed to die. And he died for you so that in him you might truly live. That's the gospel. That's why this is a story in time and place, a true story in true time and in true place for all times and places.

We're all going to die. That's why we really desperately need Jesus, and only the story of the gospel grounds our intuitions and answers our yearnings. And just two other things very briefly.

And one of the things about this story that's really challenged me, I have to confess, I couldn't pray for somebody who was dead to come to life. I can't imagine doing that. Now, I do know, and in fact, at an earlier service, a fellow from our congregation from Africa, when I said that there's many places in the world where there's stories of people doing that and them coming to life, he was nodding.

I don't know if it's a good thing about us that we wouldn't pray for it. But I don't think I – I have prayed for people who have been paralyzed for many years. I prayed for people. In fact, I – I mean, some other time, I've had a fellow who should have died, and after I prayed for – when I pray for somebody who's close to death, I always pray that they would – I pray several things.

I always pray that if it's God's will, that he would heal them, even at this last moment. And I also pray as well that he would know Jesus and be prepared to see Jesus face to face.

[37 : 34] And if he's a Christian, that Jesus would be very near to him at this hour of death. But I always pray for them to come alive, to be healed. And this story just challenges us in several ways.

It challenges us that we are to pray big prayers. Brothers and sisters, pray big prayers. I was just telling my wife the other day about a fellow who has very serious brain cancer tumor, and he should have died five years ago, and he's still kicking around.

Every time I see him, I say, aren't you supposed to be dead by now? And he says, yeah, that's what the doctors keep saying. So we need to pray big prayers.

Don't be embarrassed about it. God can say no, but pray big prayers. And just really, finally, this whole thing about walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, which is how we all began.

And very, very briefly, some of you have heard me talk about the fear of the Lord before, and it's a really important virtue in the Bible. And really at the heart of it, and I do a whole sermon just on it, but at the very heart of it is an increasing knowledge of the difference between you and God.

[38 : 48] It's a common human problem. It can be, even though, like, my wife and I are separate people, it can be very easy to somehow internally and psychologically and existentially somehow think that, to blur the difference between the two of us to some small thing.

So maybe I think that she's going to think the way I do or want what I want and vice versa, or, you know, the sins that I'm prone to, you know, that she might be or the thing that, you know, whatever. And it's very, very hard, and that's even with human beings that we see, and with God who's invisible, it's constantly a temptation, given how proud we are, to blur the distinction between God and me.

And the reason that this is such a powerful virtue is that we need to be informed by the gospel that God and me are very, very, very different and separate. And that's at the heart of what the fear of the Lord is.

And at the same time, the comfort of the Holy Spirit is about God's closeness, that the Holy Spirit, when I become a Christian, is closer to me than my very breath. But here's the thing I want to tell you in closing, as a closing story.

For a variety of reasons, I was, you know, I'm meditating upon this text every day, and one of the days I realized I was having a hard time thinking about it because I was very anxious.

[40 : 06] I was very anxious. And I'm a very thick male, and I cannot notice sometimes when I'm very anxious. And then I sort of thought, well, maybe I should pray about this, because, you know, I was thinking about most Canadians would think the last thing I need when I'm anxious is to think about the fear of the Lord, right?

And I thought, well, you know, actually, the fear of the Lord is one of the most important things to have as an antidote to anxiety. And then I thought, I'm really dumb, I thought, well, I'm too anxious to pray.

Rather than saying, I'm so anxious I have to pray. I said, I'm too anxious to pray. So then what I did, and I want to encourage you this in the closing word.

I actually wrote down, I've done this off and on throughout the years. I wrote down every single thing I was anxious about, even very small and stupid things. We can be anxious about small and stupid things.

Because even though we think we're really big, a lot of times we're small and stupid. So I wrote down everything I was anxious for. And then I said, Father, can you help me to walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit in this anxiety?

[41 : 17] And I wrote down everything. I'll be honest, I wrote down, I think it was 15 or 16 things I was anxious about. And in every case, I'd write it down and I'd say, Father, help me to walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit in the midst of this anxiety.

Now, I'm not going to tell you that every time you do that it works, but the load that was lifted off me at that time and for the rest of my week was quite astounding. Brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you to memorize verse 31 and boldly pray in the...

Oh, actually, I think I might have had a point. Yes, if you put up the point. In the midst of anxiety and fear, pray that you will walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. I want to encourage you to do that.

In the midst of anxiety and fear, pray that you will walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. It's what Jesus would like you to do. Let's stand. Bow our heads in prayer.

Father, it is a relief to remember that you know everything about me, that you know everything about us.

[42 : 37] It is a relief to remember that you know the dreams we have at night that we don't remember. You know the past that we don't remember. You know the things we're ashamed about, the things we're proud about, you know the stupid things, the silly things, the good things, the wise and the brilliant things.

You know everything there is to know about us. And Father, we give you thanks and praise that when Jesus died for us on the cross, he died with a clear-eyed knowledge, deep knowledge of everything about us.

And still, life himself died for us who are doomed to die, that we in Jesus might have true life. So Father, we thank and praise you that you know sometimes we foolishly think we can't pray because we're too anxious.

And Father, we ask that this word and your Holy Spirit that you would say, no, no, that's exactly what you need to pray most and help us to do that. And Father, help us to pray for the virtue of the fear of the Lord and to walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, especially, in everything in life, Father, but especially in the midst of our fears and anxieties.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he is our Savior.

Father, bless us with a deep knowledge of this. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

[43 : 52] 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. Amen. Amen.