

Jesus is Lord

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[0 : 00] The Old Testament reading which we had today was Psalm 2, a classic passage. And in Psalm 2, you see a very different Jesus to the one we're used to. He's not the soft and gentle Jesus, but the ruling Lord.

Fourteen times in the Acts passage, Jesus is called the Lord. Psalm 2 says that he laughs and scoffs at those who oppose him, that he dashes his enemies to pieces like pottery.

This is a passage, Psalm 2 is a passage you're going to need in a city like ours, where on the notice, as it says today, it could become unlawful to share with someone what the Bible says.

Do have a look at that and a petition. Psalm 2 is a passage you're going to need in a city like ours for these sorts of things, where Christians are insulted for supporting long-held biblical views, where we may be pitied or maligned by our family and friends.

Because we trust in Jesus. We might feel weak and afraid. Psalm 2 says that Jesus laughs at his enemies' attempts to beat him, because even in Melbourne, Jesus is the Lord.

[1 : 16] And this is the Jesus that Saul never knew. But it's the Jesus he meets, famously on the Damascus road. We're going to look at Saul's conversion from a few angles, but underneath every angle, we'll see that Jesus is the Lord.

And so, as I said, keep your Bibles open at Acts chapter 9, and the handout will really help you. We're at point number one. When we first met our character Saul, he approved the killing of Stephen in chapter 8.

And in chapter 8, verse 3, we were told that Saul began to destroy the church. And the word destroy there is like when a wild animal gets in and destroys your crops.

Today, in our reading in verse 1, it says Saul is still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. The language there of breathing out literally means like a wild snorting, like a beast.

Over in verse 21, chapter 9, verse 21, the people ask, Isn't Saul the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem? Raising havoc literally means a beast mauling something to death.

[2 : 26] You see, our author wants us to see Saul as a bloodthirsty beast, snorting and foaming at the mouth as he goes from house to house, dragging off Christians and chucking them in jail.

On the bottom of the page, chapter 9, verse 1, says, Saul went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

You see, Saul is a wolf. He's a wolf hunting for sheep. Until, of course, he meets the shepherd.

Verse 3, You see, In verse 2, He is the one taking orders from Jesus, being told what to do.

He thought the way to show your religious zeal was to persecute Christians. He thought that's what God wanted until he met God on the road. And now he realizes, for his whole life, he's been on the wrong side.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Do you notice the way the shepherd stands in the way of his sheep there? To persecute them was to persecute Jesus.

[4 : 15] He says, I am the one you're persecuting. Saul led the charge to Damascus, letters from the high priest in hand, confident and proud, eager to destroy. But by verse 8, he is blind.

He's the one being led. And he's humbled. He approved the killing of Stephen. But by verse 23 and 24, he's the one they're trying to kill. The Christians used to see Saul coming and flee.

But now in verse 25, he's the one fleeing. As he's led down in a basket with the dirty laundry. You see, Jesus has done this.

Psalm 2 says that he will dash his enemies to pieces like pottery. And surely that is what this wolf deserves. Except Jesus has other plans for him instead.

Verse 10. Please look at verse 10. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision. Ananias, go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

[5 : 24] Because in a vision, verse 12, Saul has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Lord, I heard many reports about this man and all the harm he's done to your holy people in Jerusalem.

And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on his name. Poor old Ananias. This is not the quiet time he wanted that morning. He knows Saul's reputation. He's right to be scared. Lord, you've brought a ravenous beast to my city. He's come to collect names. And now you've given him my name. Thanks very much.

But verse 15. The Lord said to Ananias, go. This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Verse 17. Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. And something remarkable happens here. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, brother.

[6 : 25] Did you notice that? Brother. I don't know many stories of Nazi forgiveness or of Taliban welcome. But here is the number one persecutor of the church who deserves to be dashed to pieces, but instead is forgiven and welcomed into the family.

Brother Saul, says Ananias. In verse 18, the scales fell from Saul's eyes. He could see again. Blindness is a huge theme in the Bible.

While Saul was regaining his physical sight, he was also getting his spiritual sight. But the other disciples, they're still afraid of him and you can't blame them, to be honest. But Saul has received the same baptism.

He has received the same Holy Spirit. He has met Jesus on the road. And so they welcome him. Part of the family. A brother.

It's an extraordinary conversion story, actually. And all the commentators, they say that this story is here so that we can trust that when Saul becomes Paul and writes big chunks of the Bible, we can trust that his words are Jesus' words.

[7 : 43] But I don't think the commentators have gone far enough. And this is our second point. You see, we need to know where we are in the book of Acts. At the moment, we're in Judea and Samaria.

And Barry, can I please have a slide? Thank you. So this is the plan of Acts from chapter 1, verse 8. We've been in Jerusalem and for the past few weeks, we've been in stage 2, Judea and Samaria. And that seems fine. For us, a Samaritan seems like a good Samaritan. Anyone we hear, a good Samaritan, loving and kind. But for Jews back then, terrible.

In John's Gospel, the Pharisees, they accuse Jesus. They say, aren't you, Jesus, a Samaritan and demon-possessed? You see, Samaritan was an insult. It would be like having a demon inside you. They were half-caste Jews, you see, not pure bloods. Seven centuries of conflicts between them. But now, they're being welcomed into God's family. Our author shows us that you don't have to be from Israel to be saved.

[8 : 54] And the reason why is this. So that when the Gospel eventually spreads to the Gentiles, you know that that was Jesus' plan as well. A few weeks ago, we talked about holy places.

We said, how can Jesus be the Lord of the whole earth if he's limited to just Jerusalem and just Israel? You see, if Samaritans were half-castes, the Gentiles were the absolute outcasts.

In Acts chapter 10, even the author, he says, the Holy Spirit will be poured out even on the Gentiles. Even the author is shocked about the Gentiles.

And this is the reason why. We need to be certain that Jesus directed the Gospel in Samaria so that when it spreads to Gentiles in Australia, we can be sure that that was no accident either.

And maybe that's not news to you. I guess we take it for granted that Christianity has always been in Australia. Maybe we think Christianity is a European or Western thing.

[10 : 02] Maybe you don't doubt that Australians can be saved. But maybe you doubt whether you can be saved. You see, maybe Christianity hasn't always been in you.

Or maybe because of your sin, you doubt your place in the family. You see, apart from Samaritans, our author has also gathered together the least likely group of converts ever.

Two weeks ago, there was Simon the sorcerer, a black magic practitioner. Last week, there was an Ethiopian eunuch. Next week is Cornelius, a Roman centurion. And today is Saul, the number one

persecutor of the church.

Saul is exceptional. He will go on to write much of the New Testament. But today, it is his sin that is exceptional. In his own words, he calls himself the worst of sinners in 1 Timothy.

He is a ravenous beast, destroying the church and killing Christians. And until he met Jesus, he didn't judge him as he deserved, but welcomed him into the family.

[11:12] You see, if the worst of sinners can be welcomed, then Gentiles like us shouldn't doubt our place in the family either. Jesus is Lord.

And I agree that his conversion story is quite unique. It's very exciting. Spare a thought for Lachlan who had to give his conversion story this morning. Saul is a very tough act to follow.

But we need to know that anyone being saved is an utterly supernatural act. All of us on the wrong side with God, all of us persecuting Jesus and his place in our lives, but he didn't judge us as we deserved, but welcomed us into the family.

We may not have had smaller miracles like a light from heaven or physical scales on the eyes, but we had the bigger miracle, the great power of God when he brought sinners like us to forgiveness and into his family.

If you're not a Christian here today, Jesus says, come to your senses. Come to your senses. Unless you're a worse sinner than Saul, you can ask his forgiveness confident what Jesus' answer will be.

[12:29] For the rest of us here today, Ananias is the one to copy. He was terrified of Saul, didn't want to go near him, but Jesus ordered him to go and seek out the salvation of his enemy.

In this church, we've done a lot of praying for our loved ones to be saved, but would we ever pray or seek out the salvation of our enemies? Maybe we don't have enemies like they did back then, but we probably have people we don't want to go near.

Ananias challenges us to seek out and pray for their salvation too. Maybe for you that was or is someone from work. Maybe it's a neighbour that you're always hiding from.

Good fences make good neighbours, don't they say? Perhaps it's someone in your family, probably one of the in-laws. maybe someone you've got a lot of baggage with.

Ananias seeks out the salvation of the one who was trying to kill him. It's remarkable stuff. And I realise it's tough. Even Ananias protested, but from his throne in heaven, the Lord said, go.

[13:42] And so Ananias went. You see, we know that Jesus is forgiving. We love that about Jesus, but maybe we forget that he orders us, that he expects obedience, even if that means seeking out the salvation of our enemies.

When we started this series in Acts chapter 1, one of the things we asked was, what are you doing here? You see, if even Saul can be in the family, if even Ananias seeks out his salvation, chapter 9 and challenges us, what are you doing here?

Even in Gentile lands, even over the souls of our lives, Jesus is Lord. What are you doing here? What are you organising your life around?

Before we finish today, our author wants to give us a lesson about enemies. Please look at verse 20. At once he, that is Saul, began to preach in the synagogues, that Jesus is the Son of God.

All those who heard him were astonished and asked, isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem amongst those who call on his name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?

[14:57] Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. He used to persecute Jesus but now preaches that he is the Son of God.

Verse 20. It would be like going to a liberal party fundraiser and Scott Morrison stands up and tells you to vote for the Greens. It would be like having lunch with a raging atheist and they spend the whole time trying to convince you, yes, there really is a God.

You see, the Jewish synagogues in Damascus, they were ready to receive Saul, ready to join forces with him, but instead, verse 22, he baffled them by proving that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lord.

The one enthroned in heaven laughs at his enemies. In chapter 8, his enemies, they persecuted the church, they scattered the Christians throughout Judea and Samaria and that sounds scary to us but to Jesus, he just used that to spread his gospel further abroad, to grow his church.

These past few weeks, Jesus has converted Simon the sorcerer, wildly popular in his city. There was an Ethiopian eunuch who was the queen's financial officer.

[16:18] Next week, there is Cornelius, a Roman centurion of the Italian regiment. Jesus has converted prominent people with influence and today, verse 29, for the Hellenistic Jews, that is Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus uses a Greek-speaking Roman citizen trained in the Jewish scriptures, a Pharisee called Saul.

He is the perfect weapon, the specially chosen instrument. See, Jesus uses his enemies like pawns. He assembles them like pawns on a chessboard for his own gospel agenda.

One of the questions we asked, one of the questions which hangs over this whole section of Acts comes from Gamaliel, a ruling member of the Jewish council. In chapter 5, he said, hey listen, he quietened everyone down.

He said, listen, if this Jesus stuff is from God, sorry, is from human beings, it will fail. But if it is from God, you'll only find yourself opposing God.

Do you know who Gamaliel's student was? It was a Greek-speaking Roman citizen trained in the Jewish scriptures, a Pharisee called Saul. See, Jesus said, okay Gamaliel, I will take your best student and I will flip him and turn his life upside down and convert him and use him to spread my gospel to the ends of the earth, even to the filthy Gentiles.

[17:51] The one enthroned in heaven laughs at his enemies. Jesus is Lord. You see, maybe we are destined to be the laughingstock of this city.

Maybe they will pass laws which outlaw everything we do. Maybe we'll be evicted from this holy place and have to meet in the back of McDonald's or something like that. But here is the point. We needn't worry because this passage shows that Jesus always wins because he is the Lord. And so, what are you doing here?

If you're going to get behind Jesus, if you're going to reorganize your lives around his mission, you're going to need to know that he is powerful.

You're going to need to see that his enemies can't beat him, that he uses them like pawns. You're going to need to see that even the worst places and the worst sinners aren't too far from him.

[18:50] What are you doing here? See, we don't have millions of dollars. Maybe we won't capture people's attention the way other things in this city do, but we're not underpowered.

We're not under-resourced. We have Jesus' words and we have the Holy Spirit. So, what are you doing here? Verse 31 says, the church was strengthened and it increased because those Christians there, they were living in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. So, I pray that we would do the same. Lord Jesus, we praise you. You are the Lord. You are the enthroned one. We praise you that you are Lord over the whole earth, even filthy Gentile lands and filthy Samaritan lands.

You are the Lord over even the souls of our lives. We praise you that none of us are too far gone, that we're not too big sinners for you to save.

We thank you for this demonstration of your power today. Please help us get behind your mission. Please help us base our lives around what you are doing in the world and not ourselves.

[20:11] Please, would we live in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of your spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.