

Jesus is Lord

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Date: 24 November 2019

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- [0 : 0 0] The Old Testament reading we had today was Psalm 2. And in Psalm 2, we see a very different Jesus to the one we're used to. He's not soft and gentle, but the ruling Lord.
- Fourteen times in our Acts passage today, Jesus is called the Lord. Psalm 2 says that the Lord laughs and scoffs at those who oppose him, that he dashes his enemies to pieces like pottery.
- And I wrote those quotes at the top of your handout. You see, Psalm 2 is a passage you're going to need under your belt. We don't do memory verses these days for adults, do we? Is it just a children's thing?
- Anyway, I think memory verses for adults is a great idea. And Psalm 2 is a great one to commit to memory. That's a passage you'll need in a city like ours, where if you read the bulletin today, it says it could become unlawful to share the Bible with someone or share what the Bible says with someone and offer to pray for them based on new state government legislation.
- Psalm 2 is a passage you're going to need in a city like ours, where Christians are insulted for supporting Christian views or biblical views, where we're pitied and perhaps maligned by family and friends because we trust in Jesus.
- [1 : 1 7] And while we might feel weak and afraid, Psalm 2 says that Jesus laughs, that he laughs at these attempts to beat him.
- Because even in Melbourne, Jesus is Lord. And this is the Jesus that Saul never knew. But it's the Jesus he meets on the Damascus Road in that famous conversion story.
- We're going to look at Saul's conversion. It's very famous. But from every angle, we're going to see that Jesus is the main character, that he is the Lord.
- And so please keep your handouts there and your Bible's open. It's going to help you. We're at point number one. When we first met Saul, it was a couple of chapters ago in chapter 8, and he approved the killing of Stephen, the first martyr.
- 8 verse 3 says, Saul began to destroy the church. The word there, destroy, is like when a wild animal comes in and destroys your crops. Today, 9 verse 1, it says, he is still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.
- [2 : 2 7] The language of breathing out, that literally means a wild snorting like a beast. And then in 9 verse 21, the people ask, isn't Saul the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem?
- Raising havoc literally means when a beast is mauling something. You see, our author wants us to see that Saul is a bloodthirsty beast.
- He's snorting and foaming at the mouth as he goes from house to house, dragging off the Christians and throwing them in jail. On the bottom of the page there, 9 verse 1, You see, he is a wolf.
- He's a wolf. And he's hunting for sheep. That is, of course, until he meets the shepherd. Verse 3, You see, Saul thought he had God and religion worked out.

But in an instant, his world is turned upside down. That Jesus, he thought was dead, is now alive. And speaking to him from heaven. In verse 2, Saul takes orders from the high priest.

[4 : 06] But in verse 6, he's 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 that's what God wanted.

Until he met God on the Damascus road. And now he realizes that his whole life, he's been on the wrong side. Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Notice the way the shepherd stands up for his sheep. I am Jesus who you are persecuting. To persecute the Christians is to persecute Jesus. Saul led the charge to Damascus.

Letters from the high priest in hand. Confident and proud. Eager to destroy. But by verse 8, he's the one being led. He's blind and humbled. Saul approved the killing of Stephen in verse 23 and 24.

But now he becomes the one they're trying to kill. The Christians would flee when they saw him coming. But now in verse 25, he's the one having to flee. Being led down the wall in a basket.

[5 : 14] You see, his whole life is upside down. He has lost everything. But he has gained Jesus. Which Philippians 3 says is a good deal to be made.

Because for the first time ever, Saul is convinced that Jesus is the Lord. 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. Verse 10. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias.

This is a different Ananias from the one in chapter 5. 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. Verse 12. Because in a vision, Saul has seen a man named Ananias. Come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

[6 : 14] Lord, Ananias answered. I've heard many reports about this man. And all the harm he's done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he's come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your 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 wolf to my city.

Don't you know he's come here to collect names? And now you've given him my name. Poor old Ananias. Verse 15.

The Lord said to Ananias, go. Go. This 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. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, Brother. Do you notice that? Brother.

[7 : 13] I don't know many stories about Nazi forgiveness or many stories about Taliban welcome. But here is the number one persecutor of the church who deserves to be dashed to pieces.

But instead, he's forgiven. And turned around and welcomed into God's family. Brother Saul, says Ananias. Ananias.

In verse 18. The scales fall from his eyes and he could see again. Blindness is a huge theme in the Bible. While Saul was regaining his physical sight, the Lord was giving him his spiritual sight as well.

The other disciples, they're still afraid of him. You can't blame them, really. But he has received the same baptism. Verse 18. He was gifted with the same Holy Spirit.

Verse 17. And he's met the Lord face to face. And so they welcome him as a brother. Part of the family. It's an extraordinary conversion.

[8 : 20] Given who he was. And all the commentators, lots of the commentators, they say that the story is here. So that we can trust that when he eventually becomes the Apostle Paul.

We can trust that he really is Jesus' disciple. And that his letters we can treat as Jesus speaking directly. But I don't think the commentators go far enough.

And this is our second point. And so if I could, Tina, can I have a slide on the screen? This is the plot of Acts.

We've used it before. And the story today, our chapter today takes place in stage two. Judea and Samaria. And for us, any Samaritan is a good Samaritan.

You know, kind and loving like the famous story goes. But not for the Jews back then. Thanks, Tina. That's fine. Not for the Jews back then. Do you know in John's Gospel, the Pharisees, they say to Jesus, they say, aren't you a Samaritan, Jesus?

[9 : 19] And demon-possessed? You see, Samaritan was an insult, like being demon-possessed. Samaritans were half-caste Jews, not pure-bloods.

Seven centuries of conflicts between them and Israel. But now they're being welcomed into God's family. See, our author is showing us you don't have to be from Israel.

You don't have to be Jewish to be saved. And the reason why is this. So that when the Gospel eventually gets to the Gentiles, we'll know that we're in the family as well.

You see, if Samaritans were the spiritual half-castes, the Gentiles are the spiritual outcasts. Chapter 10 of Acts, the author himself actually says this, the Holy Spirit will be poured out even on the Gentiles.

That's the author of the Bible. Even the Gentiles, he says. It's a remarkable thing. That Gentiles can be saved. And this is the reason we need to know it. We need to be certain that Jesus directed the Gospel in Samaria, so that when it spreads to the Gentiles in Australia, we can be sure that that was no accident either.

[10 : 37] And here's the thing. You see, maybe we take it for granted that Christianity has always been in Australia. Maybe we've grown up with Christianity being a European or a Western thing.

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 don't know whether you're in the family or not. You see, apart from the Samaritans, our author has also gathered a group of the least likely converts ever.

So two weeks ago, there was Simon the sorcerer, a black magic practitioner. Last week, there was an Ethiopian eunuch. Next week is Cornelius, the 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.

[11 : 42] But today, it is his sin that is exceptional. In his own words, later in his life, he calls himself the worst of sinners. A ravenous beast, destroying the church, devouring Christians until he met Jesus, who didn't judge him as he deserved, but welcomed him into the family.

If the worst of sinners, like Saul, can be saved, then Gentiles like us should not doubt our place in the family either.

Jesus is Lord. And I agree that it's clear that his conversion story is unique. It's very exciting how it all happened. A spare of thought for our RMIT students who had to give their conversion story.

Saul is a very tough act to follow. But we need to know that anyone being saved is an utterly supernatural act. Because all of us were on the wrong side with God.

All of us, at one point, were persecuting Jesus and his place in our lives. But he didn't judge us as we deserved. But welcomed us into his family.

[12 : 54] We may not have had smaller miracles like flashes from heaven or physical scales in the eyes. And that's okay. Because we've had the bigger miracle. The great power of God when he brought sinners like us into the family.

If you're not a Christian here today, which will be a few of you, Jesus says, come to your senses. Unless you are a worse sinner than Saul, you can ask for his forgiveness.

And you can be certain what the answer will be. For the rest of us who are Christians, Ananias is the one to copy. Ananias was terrified of Saul.

Didn't want to go near him. But Jesus ordered him to go and seek out his salvation. In this church, we've done a lot of praying for our loved ones to be saved. But I wonder, would we seek out and pray for the salvation of our enemies?

Our enemies like Saul was to Ananias. Maybe we don't have enemies. But we certainly would have people we don't want to go near. Ananias challenges us to seek and pray for their salvation too.

[14 : 04] Maybe for you that is someone at work. Someone from work. Maybe it's a neighbor who you hide from. What do they say? Good fences make good neighbors. Perhaps someone in your family.

Probably someone amongst the in-laws. Probably someone you've got a lot of baggage with. Would you seek out the salvation of your enemies? The way Ananias does for Saul.

I realize that's a really tough thing to ask. Especially because of the baggage we have with people. The damage they've done to us. But even Ananias protests.

But from his throne in heaven, the Lord said, go. So Ananias went. We know that Jesus is forgiving. But we probably forget that Jesus orders us and expects obedience.

Even if that means seeking the salvation of our enemies. When we started this series in chapter 1, one of the questions we asked was, what are you doing here?

[15 : 10] If even Saul can be in God's family. If even Ananias can seek out the salvation of his enemies. Chapter 9 challenges us. What are you doing here?

Because even in Gentile lands. Even over the souls of our lives. Jesus is Lord. What are you doing here?

What are you organizing your life around? Before we finish today. The author wants to give us one lesson in opposition.

This is point 3. Please look at verse 20. Verse 20. At once 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 this the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who called on his name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests? Yet Saul grew more and more powerful.

[16 : 07] 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.

Really remarkable stuff. It would be like having lunch with a raging atheist and they spend the whole time trying to convince you that there really is a God. Amazing. The Jewish synagogues in Damascus, they were ready to receive Saul to join forces with him against the church.

But in verse 22, he baffled them by proving Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord. The one enthroned in heaven laughs at those who oppose him.

Chapter 8. There was a great persecution against the Christians. It spread them throughout Judea and Samaria. It's really scary, that sort of stuff. But the one in heaven laughs.

It gave him a new audience to grow his church amongst. These past few weeks, we've seen Jesus convert Simon the sorcerer, wildly popular in his town.

[17 : 19] There was an Ethiopian eunuch who was the chief financial officer of Ethiopia. Next week is Cornelius, a Roman centurion of the Italian regiment. These are prominent people with influence for the gospel.

Today, verse 29, for the Hellenistic Jews, that is a Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus uses a Greek-speaking Roman citizen trained in the Jewish scriptures, a Pharisee called Saul.

He's the perfect weapon. Jesus calls him my chosen instrument. He's the perfect weapon. He's the perfect weapon. He's the perfect weapon. He's the perfect weapon. He's the perfect weapon. See, Jesus uses his enemies like pawns on a chessboard for his own gospel purposes.

He is the Lord. One of the questions which hangs over this whole section of Acts came from Gamaliel. Do you remember him from chapter 5? When the church was growing and rising, Gamaliel, he was a ruling member of the Jewish council.

And he said this, If this Jesus stuff is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you'll not be able to stop it. Do you know who Gamaliel's student was?

[18 : 32] It was a Greek-speaking Roman citizen, Pharisee trained in the Jewish scriptures named Saul. Do you know that? See, Jesus says, All right, Gamaliel, I will take your best student and I will reboot him and flip him.

And he will be the one to take my gospel to the ends of the earth just to prove that I laugh at you. Isn't that amazing? Jesus is Lord. You see, maybe we are destined to be the laughingstock of this city.

Maybe they'll pass laws stopping what we can say. Maybe they'll board up this holy place and evict us. But we needn't worry. Chapter 9 shows that Jesus always wins.

He always wins. Because he's the Lord. And so what are you doing here? Money, investment, politics, family, the future.

All these things occupy our time. But if Jesus is Lord, even over all these situations, perhaps I can give my time to his mission.

[19 : 37] Perhaps I can focus on what he is about in the world rather than what I'm about in the world. If you're going to reorganize your life around what Jesus is doing, you'll need to know how powerful he is.

You'll need to see him use enemies like pawns. You'll need to see that even the unlikeliest places or the unlikeliest people are not out of his reach.

What are you doing here? We may not have millions of dollars. We may not capture people's imaginations the way other things in this city do. But we are not underpowered.

We are not under-resourced. We have Jesus' words. And we are empowered by his spirits. What are you doing here? In verse 31, it says, The church was strengthened and increased.

Because those Christians in Samaria, they were living in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. I'm going to pray that we would do the same. Lord Jesus, we declare that you are Lord.

[20 : 45] We praise you that you are Lord even over the souls in this world, even in Gentile lands like Samaria and Australia. And Lord Jesus, please help us to get on board with your mission.

Thank you that it will not fail. We praise you that you are powerful enough to use enemies for your own purposes. That even the worst of sinners aren't too far.

Help us to reorganize our lives around your mission and not our own. And please, would we live in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit and the fear of the Lord.

We ask it for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.