

The Damascus Road

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[0 : 0 0] I want this morning to look with you at Saul on the Damascus Road. I want to look at it from two perspectives.

First of all we'll look at Saul as the one who was the persecutor of Christians and how Jesus arrested him on that Damascus Road and his life was changed dramatically.

People speak about a Damascus Road experience and I know that many people will not have what they would call a Damascus Road experience. But the most important thing for any one of us is that we have had that experience of meeting with Jesus, recognizing him as the only saviour of sinners and trusting him as our own personal saviour.

Just a little bit, Paul, for a moment or two on that Damascus Road. In Philippians chapter 3, and I just wanted to take a moment just to read it, verse 5, Paul says about himself, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law of Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

What a CD. He was a brilliant guy who had studied the scriptures and knew so much of them of my heart.

[1 : 5 9] Who believed sincerely in Yahweh, the living God. He was religious, so fault.

He was a law keeper, so fault. He was the one that so many looked up to. He'd been taught by the best and now he was, as far as he could see, and as many others could see, he was one of the best.

Far as he had the far as. You can't compete with me with zeal. I'm just out and out for this God.

Yahweh. One earth made such a religious man, such an awful man, a man who was filled with bitterness, hatred, venom, breathing out, you know, just, he's pictured, in the words that everyone read, he's pictured almost like a dragon, breathing out threats and violence towards this group of people known as the way.

one earth caused them to be such a man. It was because of those people who were followers of the way, who were known as the way.

[3 : 3 5] They were men and women who had come to know and to love Jesus, who believed that Jesus was God's son, who came into the world to be the savior of sinners, who died, was buried, rose again, and ascended into heaven.

And in believing all these things, their lives were changed, and they met together, they prayed together, they worshipped together, they sang together, and as Saul, and others like him, saw this happening, they were God of fire.

Who do they think they are? What on earth are they doing? There is one God, living God, and this Jesus plays no part in it. And so he made it his business to go around arresting and even killing those who believe our message.

How much guy then can you be? You wonder, you know, clever guy, brilliant guy. Study the scriptures, the scriptures, which if you'd really looked at them, if you'd really thought about it, if you'd really tried to bring everything together in these Old Testament scriptures, would have realized that God was sending a son, that God was going to send a Messiah who would come and who would live and who would die and be buried and rise again.

But there was just this tunnel vision, this tradition, this law keeping, that was important and anything else wasn't allowed to be there.

[5 : 33] and so they decided we'll get rid of them. Not long before he went to Damascus and the road to Damascus that he would have taken would have taken him about a week to walk.

But before he went there, he was the one who we read was present at the stoning of Stephen. Stephen was unafraid and unashamed of Jesus, spoke the message boldly, and for that he was arrested, he was taken and stolen.

read a bit this week about what it was like to be stoned and it seems that the person would be taken up to a high mountain or a bit of height at least and thrown, thrown down the hillside and then boulders, not just stones, boulders would have been thrown on.

That's what happened to Stephen because he was faithful to Jesus. And Saul was the one who was sitting there, Saul's the one that they put Stephen's clothes beside and he consented to Stephen's stoning.

Just for a moment, think of what Stephen said as they're stoning him. Father, do your hands, just, you know, receive my spirit.

[7 : 11] Peace. In the midst of stoning, in the midst of the venom, in the midst of the hatred, peace. Receive my spirit.

And then those words, do not hold this sin against them. Those are the words that Stephen spoke to his accusers on that day.

But it brings back something to mind, doesn't it? It brings back to mind a Savior on the cross who says the same thing. Father, forgive them.

you just don't know what they're doing. That same Savior who in the agony of the cross says, Father, into your hands like you may whisper.

Peace in the midst of agony. Peace in the face of death. And forgiveness for enemies.

[8 : 20] peace. And so, Solomon goes on this journey to Damascus. The reaction from Stephen's death makes him worse.

But with even more hatred, more venom. That's what happens sometimes, isn't it? Somebody's so focused on something that I've got it right. And no matter what they see, and no matter what they're told, they're just going to go ahead and do it anyway.

And even get worse. And that's what happened to Solomon. Because there can be no doubt that as he sat and watched Stephen on that day, he would have been affected.

How can somebody die like that? What have they got that makes him so peaceful in the face of such horror?

Anybody would ask these questions. And I have no doubt that Saul asked these questions. But to hide it, away he goes. Give me some letters so I can go and get the rest of these Christians out in Damascus and I'll deal with them the same way.

[9 : 35] And on a week's journey, walking to Damascus, somewhere along the way, he would have thought of these things. And then the light shines from heaven. Jesus speaks to them.

And Jesus, all of a sudden, he realizes that, yeah, this Jesus is naughty.

This Jesus is alive and he's speaking as God from heaven. then he realized that he got it wrong.

Because Jesus was the way, the truth and the life. And his life, from that point, as he was led like a lamb into Damascus, instead of the raging lion that he had planned to be, his life was changed forever.

life. And that's what I want to focus on just for another few minutes. Because when Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus, he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

[10 : 52] the revelation that Paul, or Saul, received on the road to Damascus, was that Israel's one true God, Yahweh, that he was so full of knowledge about and so defensive for, was indeed Jesus.

Jesus. is God. And that revelation came to him on that road. And then there was this further revelation. That Jesus and his church were one.

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. So I have to realize that he was, as he was persecuting the followers of Jesus, he was persecuting God.

That was some realization to come to in these moments. This God that he thought he was defending, that he thought God needed defending, and he was going to defend them by destroying all the people of the way.

He now comes to realize that as he was persecuting the followers of Jesus, he was persecuting God. as I read that and I was looking at different things regarding it, somebody put it like this, that Jesus experiences my attitude, my words, and my actions toward his church.

[13 : 02] Jesus experiences my attitude, my words, and my actions towards his church, i.e.

his people, personally. That threw me out. Sure. things I say and do towards the church as represented by God's people affect Jesus personally.

But that's what Paul learned in that the master wrote that day. So, so, why are you persecuting Christians?

No. why are you persecuting Christians? So, from then, to the end of his life, through all the troubles, dangers, trials, all the persecution that he himself had to suffer because of Christ, from then, till the end of his life, Paul made it his work, his life's work, to share that good news of Jesus, God's son, God coming in the flesh, in the person of his son, dying on the cross, being buried and rising again in the third day.

That message of the gospel, that life-changing message of the gospel, that message that has transformed millions of lives throughout the world since that day, he made it his life's work, share that message.

[15 : 14] But he also did this, he made it his life's work to write down under written for our instruction now, so many books in our Bible that were written so that the church men, women, young people, boys and girls, as we grow up, as the people of God within the church, that we would know how to behave, that we would know how to act towards one another and you've all read these epistles, you've all heard messages on these epistles of how it's so important to live as the people of God within the church.

Just very briefly, want to look at three things which we've looked at many times or you've heard many times spoken of regarding the church.

If you were to take Paul's first letter to the Corinthians from chapter 12 and 13, you'll read about unity being one body, you'll read about diversity many parts all working together, knit together, staying together, praying together, loving together.

You'll read about unity, you'll read about diversity and because Paul, as a leader of the church in these early days when there were huge problems, knew that there would be so much need for teaching and all these things, brings us on to maturity.

And he does that in Corinthians, he does it in Romans, he does it in Ephesians, that's what he just loves to do. He wants the church to be together, he wants it to grow, wants it to be that place where good news of the gospel will be shared and people reach out with that.

[17 : 29] In 1st Corinthians, chapter 12, 13, what he speaks about unity from verse 1 to 13 in chapter 12, speaks about diversity in chapter 12 verses 14 to 31, and then 1st Corinthians chapter 13, which you've all read, all heard, and know all about it, speaks about maturity, speaks about how all these things that he wants to be seen in the church, so that the church is functioning as it shoots, and he says, love is the greatest, but he says all these different things about love, can I take a moment just to read them, all right, love is patient, love is kind, love is the only does not angry, does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,

It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Always protects. Always trusts. Always hopes. Always perseveres.

Love never fails. That's the maturity that Paul was looking for as he was guided by the Spirit of God to write these words.

So that when there's this unity and diversity which from time to time causes problems because there is no perfect church family, no perfect family in the world.

[19 : 57] Because I'm a part of this family, this family is not perfect. But as Christians who grow on to maturity, that maturity which is bundled up in love, which is patient, kind, keeps no record of wrongs and so on.

As that maturity grows then, so do the people of God. So the church is such a wonderful place.

And it's such an important place because it's a place where, as we looked at with the children, God is going to put the world right. I know God himself that will do that, but he's using us.

You and me. Working together. Loving together. Praying together. He's using us. So the church is such an important place.

Which is why I said earlier, I was just so taken aback in a sense, but it's not something I didn't know. Jesus experiences my attitude, my words, my actions, towards his church.

[21 : 23] Personally. How are we doing in church? How am I doing in church?

How am I doing in church? How are you doing in church? The next five minutes are probably going to be the hardest that I've done in the church in a long, long time, if not ever.

But because church is so vitally important to me, because I see it, the church here, as the answer to Inver Gordon's needs.

I'm going to share one or two things with you. How is church for you? Just over two years ago, we called Brian as a young minister to this congregation.

A unanimous call. 100%. Not many again, huh? A unanimous call with a promise to pray for, to support, and to encourage him along the way.

[22 : 50] As he seeks to do the work that he believes God has called him to in this place. How are we doing?

How are we doing? Are we praying for our minister? How are we doing for our support of our minister? How are we doing for our encouragement for our minister?

My apologies to those of you who are visitors this morning. But this is true for every church, really, at the end of the day. We have a minister who loves God. Loves the Lord Jesus with all of a sudden.

Loves God's word. And he loves God's word. He loves God's word. He loves God's word. He loves God's word. He loves God's word. He loves God's word.

I don't know if you've ever spoken to him about his study life. He might have to be bored by the time he's finished because he just loves study.

[23 : 58] If you want to find Brian, you'll probably find him in a bookshop somewhere. Even when he's at the restaurant in a bookshop. He just loves to read and study God's word through all these different books.

And then he loves to share God's word. So he spends lots of time studying God's word, books relating to God's word. And then he loves to share God's word. And you can tell that, don't you?

You can tell that when he's standing here and he's sharing truth from God's word. He just loves it. And maybe some weeks he's taking a wee bit longer than you think he should share the word. And the cloak keeps ticking. But it's God's word that he's raised, that he's saved. And he's sharing truth from God's word. And the cloak keeps ticking. And the cloak keeps ticking.

prayed over a message that he feels he wants to bring or God wants him to bring to this congregation and sometimes it may just take a little longer.

I wonder how many hours we spend watching the telly through the week. And an hour and a half in God's house on a Sunday morning once a week.

[25 : 30] Maybe something's too much. For me, it's been wonderful to see new people coming to church.

People who have lost their way a little and have come back perhaps. And there can be many reasons for people losing their way in church. And for that the church has to hold out its own house.

But it's been wonderful to see people coming back to church. Wonderful to have children in church. And I know it's holiday time just now, there are not so many, but there are times when the Sharia will pass about the place.

And it's wonderful to see children in church. Wonderful to see families in church. And it's wonderful to see and to hear of an interest among our young people in spiritual things.

Young people meeting in the mass have recently been, began studying a youth alpha course.

[26 : 44] And those teenagers are enjoying studying God's word. They've not come to church yet, such perhaps, but enjoying studying God's word.

They're getting used to God's word, something that they've never really known anything about in their lives. And they're welcome. And they feel it.

And they're learning. Can I just say that Brian is just really good at getting alongside these young people. one of them went home one night, not connected with this church, not connected to any church actually.

And he was saying how much he'd enjoyed being together. I must say that it's not always easy because some of these youngsters when we get together, trying at times.

If it was me that was leading it, there might be, it might not be coming back actually, if I'm perfectly honest, but they keep coming back.

[27 : 52] And you know what one of the youngsters said to his mother? She said, that's really good. He said, Brian's such a nice guy. He said, and I've never heard a description like this before and it certainly hasn't been used to me.

He said, you know, it's almost as if somebody came with Hoover and sat all the badness in the film. And I thought, oh my, I wish people were thinking me like that.

But that's, he's getting alongside these people. In the school. As I said earlier on, it was at Chloe's birthday party. I don't know, grandpas are supposed to go to 18th birthday party, but we were there.

And there's this group. Katie's birthday was the same. 18 year olds. And just, yeah, just lovely kids.

They've got a playlist and their phones. Taylor Swift and all the rest of it. Mercy's More. A Hundred Thousand Reasons. All these gospel songs that we've been singing here.

[29 : 02] These new songs that we've been singing. And Brian came after the prayer meeting just for a wee while to meet with them.

Or just to share in the birthday party. And the next thing I knew, he was sitting at the table with a group of these youngsters. And they just looked and said, we were having a great time.

and I spoke to him afterwards and they said, what earth are you talking about? And he said, they were just wanting to know about spiritual things. Just wanted to talk about faith. We wanted a young minister so that he could reach young people.

And he's doing that. Might be right in the scenes. It's happening. Pray for that one. Pray earnestly for that one.

Because our young people do not have a easy. But there is a relentless among them. When we called Brian, we called somebody who we knew had studied music.

[30 : 22] Loves music. Churches that he grew up in, all the praise bands, were just singing all the new songs you could get.

Loving them. You honestly expect to call a minister full of music. loving music.

And he spent his whole Christian life singing with praise bands and all the modern worship songs that the rest. Did you honestly expect him not to introduce some new songs?

Thank God he did. And as we look for more people to come, young people in particular, will learn more new songs.

There's not one of them, and there's not that many actually, when you stop and think about it, but we've learned that how he'd be wonderful. And if it was only that he didn't reduce his mercenaries more to us, then that would be enough for me.

[31 : 37] So why this little personal job? Three, four years ago, well, coming up for that, he asked me to come as your locum, and we shared together and prayed together, and this congregation came to a place where he felt that you were ready to help a new young minister.

But from time to time, directly, and sometimes indirectly, I'm hearing murmurings, complainings, some of them have touched on there.

Why? Two years in? So much. So much to be thankful for. So much to rejoice in what God has done, what God is doing.

Can I just ask one thing? I'm not here to give lecture or anything. This is a heartfelt concern. concern. I want to see this congregation grow.

I want to see I'm regarded touched and changed by this congregation, by God's power working within this congregation.

[33 : 14] And that can happen. Believe me, that can happen. God can do that. So what are we going to do? Remember you said you would pray for bride?

pray for her. Pray earnestly for her. When you come into church, on Saturday, remember all that I've said in the church, from when we started with our psalm about rejoicing going to the house of God, when the psalm is praised for peace within the house of God, where we rejoice because this is a day that the Lord has made, when we are brothers and sisters serving one another, loving one another, praying for one another, caring for one another.

The church is just such an important place. Important place for you and for me, but for this whole community, of whichever community we live.

So prepare yourself for worship. Pray that, pray for pride, and pray for yourself, pray for the congregation, pray that when we come together, that God will meet with us and bless us as he sees our need, and then we will rejoice together and be glad together.

we'll be glad to come, and we'll be glad to be here, and we'll be rejoicing as we're going out. Brian would be horrified if he knew that he was doing this today, I suspect.

[35 : 13] And I know this is not a perfect church, and we don't have a perfect minister, that he thought, we're all fooling away. But it's so good to be here.

And it's so good to be part of this worshiping fellowship of God's people. And I just pray that we will take seriously our responsibilities.

This is not God, as so often churches have been minister, and he did everything, and was expected to do everything.

That day is gone, I don't know that it was ever there, because it would never have been done right. Forgive me for that one. As God has called Brian here, and as we've called him here, I pray that the work that needs to be done in this place, he will be able to do, and do, in the glory of God.

We're going to sing in closing. We're going to sing a song that youngster tribe, so Chloe, come and start it for us, right?

[36 : 36] Ten thousand reasons. Bless the Lord, O my soul. As we sing together, just remember that as well as being a loving church, a trained church, also a praising church, so just sing.

Thank you for your patience. All I've said, is love. We're concerned that in this place, Jesus will be lifted down.

And men and women, boys and girls, be lovingly thrown to them. through