

God's Open Door

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Acts chapter 14 and reading at verse 27. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

God had opened this door of faith to the Gentiles. We live in an age when travel is the norm. The world has become so small and so connected and travel has become so easy that people don't think twice about going away anywhere.

My mother, who's 100, has been to London once. That's the furthest that she ever traveled in her life. Nowadays, people will nip off for a weekend.

They'll go to Paris or Barcelona or Rome. People don't think anything of it because, as we say, the world has become so small and the travel has become so easy and, I suppose, relatively cheap. So that's the kind of world that we're living in. A good friend of mine, he worked where his travel took him, his work took him all over the place.

[1 : 27] And I remember in one particular week speaking to him. And the previous week, in his working week, he had been to Edinburgh, to London, to Manchester twice, to New York and back.

And the furthest I had been was to Carlow in that one week. And that is the world that we're living in. For some people, their work is all over the place. But it makes you realize just how small the world has become and how easy communication is.

And, of course, these put incredible pressures and demands on people because that's tough going. Well, Paul was a man who was an incredible traveler.

And he was moving constantly. He was moving all over the place. But Paul wasn't traveling because he was a tourist or that he just was somebody who was restless and he liked to see different places.

That wasn't the reason for Paul's travels. Paul was somebody who traveled from place to place with one aim in mind. And that was proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ, bringing the great news of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to people.

[2 : 41] That was his great mission. Back, we find that the account of Paul's journeys, when you go through them in the Acts of the Apostles, are really quite extraordinary.

Because even in this chapter, we see that it was tough for the Apostle. Because, as we say, he wasn't there as a tourist. He wasn't there just because he loved to go from place to place.

He went preaching. And everywhere he went, he faced opposition. It was tough. He was imprisoned often. He was beaten up often. He had all kinds of horrible experiences.

In this chapter, we read that he was stoned and left for dead. That's how, that's what he got for preaching the gospel. And this is the way that the Apostle lived.

And when you look at his life, it really is quite remarkable. Of a man who just persevered, he went on, and he went on, and he went on, irrespective of what was happening.

[3 : 44] And even when he was in prison, he couldn't stop preaching. And the only way that the mouth and the pen of the Apostle could be stopped was by execution, which eventually came.

And that was his life from the moment that he became a believer. Of course, the Lord had told him that when he called, remember the journey to Saul of Tarsus, when he was heading down to Damascus, and when the Lord appeared to him in that marvelous moment of light where everything broke in upon the Apostle, God had said to him that his ministry was not going to be to the Jews, but to the Gentiles.

Yes, there would be ministry to the Jews, but his main ministry was going to be to the Gentiles. And the Apostle was also told that he was going to suffer a lot.

He was going to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I'm sure that as Paul suffered, I'm sure one of the things that went through his mind so often was, this is exactly the sort of thing that I used to do to other people.

Because Paul hated Christians. And Paul was somebody, remember it tells us, I would say it's in the Bible, in the A.V., about him going down to Damascus, that he was breathing out slaughter and threatenings to the church.

[5 : 14] His very breath was that of destruction of the church. He hated Christ so much. So I'm sure that when Paul was being beaten up, and when he was being imprisoned, and when he was being stoned, all these things would come through him.

I'm sure that even when he was being stoned, he'd be thinking, he'd be thinking back to the very first stoning of a Christian, Stephen. And it tells us that those who stoned Stephen to death, that they lay their coats or their jackets or their clothing down at the feet of this young man, Saul.

This was him. So I'm sure all these thoughts would be going back through his mind. And he was thinking all these things. But he was quite an extraordinary person.

Now, Paul, he had a strategy, of course, to his ministry. And he would go to the main cities. He would go to the main towns. And he would preach the word there.

And then he would encourage those who came to faith and believers who were there to go out then to the districts, to the smaller places, to the villages, to the rural parts, to the communities, and to bring the gospel.

[6 : 26] So Paul was a main city or a main town preacher. But then he would encourage others to go out with the gospel. And, again, his strategy was very simple.

Paul used different methods with different people because he always had different audiences.

When he would preach to the Jews, he would start.

The starting point was often different. When he would preach to the Jews, he always preached from the Old Testament because he knew that these were people who studied the Old Testament, that they were familiar with it.

So his launching pad when preaching to the Jews was the Old Testament Scriptures. But when he was preaching to the non-Jews, to the Gentiles, those who, as we see in these cities that he was in, who had no knowledge of the Old Testament Scripture, his starting point would be with the God of creation, with the wonder of God's handiwork, with God's goodness.

So his starting points, while they were different, his finishing point was always the same, was the Lord Jesus Christ. This was always where he directed his message.

[7 : 40] Didn't matter how he started, didn't matter who his audience were, the starting points were different, but he always worked to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, as we find even here in this chapter, we find just this incredible passion, this durability, as we could say, of the apostle. His perseverance, I just find it quite wonderful.

Because, say there in verse 22, we find Paul strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

I love that. Because this follows right after being stoned and left for dead. Now, you would think, a lot of people, if they were out in this work, and they were saying, right, this is what I'm doing, this is my mission, this is what I'm doing, but then they get so battered up, so stoned, that they're left for dead.

A lot of people would get up and say, well, that's me. If they were able to get up at all, they would say, that's me done. I've done my bit. I'm not going to, I really, and they would maybe even argue and say, well, Lord, surely you understand that this is not for me.

[9 : 05] This is, maybe it's for other people, but this has happened to me so often. I really must stop. That doesn't even enter into the apostle thinking. Rather than stopping, he's encouraging other Christians.

And he's saying, come on, you've just got to get on with it. And he's encouraging them, and he's telling them there's going to be tribulation, that that's actually going to be the way of it. We must, that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

So he's encouraging them to continue in the faith. And you know, they would have been really encouraged. Here's this man, and you could imagine his face would be black and blue, and there'd be bruises and cuts everywhere.

And he'd be saying to them, come on, Jesus Christ is worth following. There is no other way. The passion of the man was visible to all. And as they would look at him, they would be inspired by this man who refused to give up in the face of every opposition and every danger, even to his own life. And so, Paul, as we say, he's traveling around, and he's doing so much. You know, somebody said today, talking about today, and looking back to the days of the apostles, apostles.

[10:20] Because, when you look at the world that the apostles had, communication and travel, it was difficult. Most of us, sometimes Paul went by boat, but often he went on foot.

He went from one place to another, often by foot. And travel was difficult. And communicate all these things that today are so easy. And this person writing said, others in the past have done so much with so little, while we, often today, do so little with so much.

And that's quite a challenge to the church, that we who have so much, sometimes it can be said, we do so little, whereas those long ago who had so little did so much.

But anyway, we find Paul and Barnabas, and they're telling the church all the things that had happened. And that, when they had arrived in verse 27 and had gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them.

And how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. That God had opened this door. And God opens this door in different ways.

[11:40] And primarily, this door that he has opened is, of course, speaking of the great door of all. Now, I know that Paul is saying that God opened a door of opportunity, that God opened a door to enable them to witness, that God opened this door where they were able to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, Paul, writing to, I think it's the church in Colossae, asked them to pray, or was it the church in Corinth? I can't remember it's now, to pray for him, that the Lord would open a door in order that they might be able to preach.

But I want to look at this in its widest sense and think upon the door that has actually been opened. That door of faith that is to us.

We are the Gentiles. We are the non-Jews. We are the ones that the gospel has come to. And of course, that door is speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have to ask ourselves, what does the door speak to us of? Well, the obvious and the first thing is, it is a way of entry. That is a way that we get into any place.

[12:51] It is through a door. And that, of course, is what the gospel and that is who Jesus is. He is the door. Jesus declared that, remember, when he was talking about the great I am statement of being the good shepherd, he said, I am the door.

And one of the things that Jesus has emphasized is this, that Jesus is not just a way. Jesus is the way.

You know, there are people who will say that Jesus is just one of the ways to God. No, he is not. He is the only way. There are no other ways. If there was another way, Jesus would not have come. The Son of God would not have come into this world if there were other ways to God other than through the Lord Jesus Christ. So we've always got to remember that. Jesus is not just a way to God.

He is the way to God. There is no other way. Now, as we said, the door is the way of entry. And when we come to a door, we don't just stand and look at a door.

[14:00] Doors are not for looking at. Doors are for going through. And it's the same with Jesus. Because there are people who admire Jesus. They look at Jesus at his teaching.

I've spoken to quite a lot of people who aren't Christians and they look at some of the teachings of Jesus and they say, yeah, you know, he was a revolutionary. He was a radical. Some of his teachings are really quite extraordinary.

And they admire him from afar. People admire Jesus for what he did. They admired him in so many different ways. But the thing is, you can admire, but unless you accept who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, all the admiration counts for nothing.

And it's the same with people who can be quite close to the kingdom of God. There are people who can come to church regularly and they can hear all about the gospel and they can be moved by the gospel, impressed by who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

And they intend one day to become a Christian. They say, you know, I really have to sort this out because I do believe, I do believe what the Bible says and I do believe that we have to become

Christians.

[15:20] But you know, you can make all the resolutions in the world you may have all the impressions in the world, but unless you actually do, unless you actually come, unless you actually accept, all the impressions in the world will not do any good.

There has to be an entry. There has to be a going in through the door that God has opened for us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, it's an awful thing when you see people holding back and people do hold back. People hold back. And I often wonder, what is the problem?

Why are there so many people who believe intellectually, they believe in their mind about Jesus, they believe Jesus, yeah, I believe everything about him.

there are people who come to church who believe all the Bible, and yet they hold back. Why do they hold back? Well, they hold back because they're not ready.

[16:27] This is how they, there is this block in them, and they say, you know, I am not ready to hand over my life to somebody else.

You know, it's a huge sticking point because people say, I want, I want to be in control of my life. This is my life. I'm in charge of my life.

I don't want somebody else dictating to me how I have to live. It's a problem. And every Christian today will say, it's a problem that I faced.

It is something that we've wrestled with. Maybe we haven't gone through all the wrestling in our mind working it out like that. But that is at the bottom line why we don't want to yield to Jesus.

There's a stubbornness within us. What, what will it involve? I'm familiar with where I am. I'm familiar with who I am. What will happen to me once I become a Christian?

[17:29] These are real questions. Well, we can say there's nothing will happen to you but that which is good. it's a solemn thing to not go through that door that is open.

Jesus highlighted it in Matthew and he called the door there a gate and he said there are two gates.

There's a broad gate and there's a narrow gate. And there's a broad gate with a broad way.

And he said that on that way there are loads and loads and loads of people. But there's also a narrow gate. and it's a hard way.

It's a narrow way. It's been likened to going through a turnstile. You know, when you go through a turnstile only one person can get through at a time. It's narrow. You can't take loads of stuff with you.

On the broad way there's no turnstile. It's easy. You just drift along as you are. In fact, the broad road is the road that everybody is on naturally. That is the way we are by nature.

[18:32] It's a broad road. But coming to the Lord Jesus Christ is a place where we have to give up ourselves and where we have to ask the Lord to take over.

Lord, take over my life. And it's in that yielding up of ourselves that we find that we come to discover just who He really is.

And as Jesus said, it's a narrow way and it's a hard way. It's hard being a Christian. It's not an easy thing because we're told that we have to deny ourselves, take up a cross and follow Jesus.

And you know, naturally speaking, people don't queue up for that. You mean to say I've got to deny myself? Don't fancy that. You mean there's going to be a cross in my life? Don't fancy that.

And follow Jesus? He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So naturally speaking, a lot of people, they say, whoa, I'm not too sure about this. But you know, when we follow through everything that Jesus teaches us and everything that Jesus shows us and everything that the Bible shows us, the Bible shows us that because we have departed from God, that we have fallen out with God, we are rebels with God, we are enemies with God, God says, I want you back.

[20:06] But yet, the problem is you can't come back on your own. The problem is even this, you don't want to come back, but I want you to come back. And that's why God the Father has sent God the Son to get us back.

He is a good shepherd and he is a good shepherd who is also the door and he has opened that door and that door is opened tonight. That is a great invitation of the gospel that we enter in.

But a door is not only a way of entry, it's also a, we could say a door is a thing of security because we often talk of something behind closed doors, you can't see it, you can't get to it.

You can only get in if that door is unlocked. So, Jesus is also the door because once you enter in, he gives you that security so that you can't get back out.

That's the beauty of salvation. Once in, always in. I think one of the clearest pictures we have of that is right at the very beginning at the time of the flood.

[21 : 17] And remember how God had told Noah to build the ark and remember how all the animals went in and finally God told Noah and his wife and his sons and their wives to go into the ark as well.

And then it tells us these words, and God shut him in. It was God who closed the door of the ark. And just as God shut Noah into the ark, so God has shut us in to Jesus Christ.

So that there is no enemy, there is no temptation, there is no devil, there is no force, there is no power anywhere, even from the very depths of hell, that can open that door, as it were, and take you back out from the salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

There is a beautiful verse in 1 Peter which says that we are kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed at the last time. We are kept, the word is guarded, we are guarded by the power of God.

Every single person who goes through that door, the power of God in a guarding way is round that person. So that no matter where you are, no matter what you do, no matter what you experience, you remain safe.

[22 : 44] Jesus said no one shall pluck them out of my father's hand, and no one shall pluck them out of my hand. Like this double security, safe, safe for time, and safe for eternity.

But a door also speaks to us of separation. Because what's on one side of the door is there, what's on the other side of the door is there as well, on the other side.

And you know, that's what happens in the Christian's life, and what happens in life in general.

There's a separation taking place all the time between those who are believers and those who aren't.

that separation isn't sometimes that noticeable because it can be possible to not be too sure who is a believer or who isn't as you journey through this world.

so that the definition, although there should be a believer, should be known by who they are and their walk, is sometimes and some people who aren't believers appear to be believers.

[23 : 58] There are so many people that they're quality people and just the way that they live their lives, and particularly people who have a real interest in the gospel, they can have every appearance of being believers, but yet can still be outside the kingdom.

But the differences, which might not be so noticeable now, will one day become very noticeable.

And you know, the solemn thing is this, and I want you to take this to heart, tonight that door is open, the door of Jesus, the door of entry into the kingdom, it's open, but it's not always going to be open.

That's the solemn thing. There is a day when that door is going to be shut, and God is going to shut that door of opportunity. And that is why we mustn't play with our salvation.

When we are coming, or if we're interested in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is not a take it or leave it, it's not a something, it's urgent business, it's really sincere, urgent business that we're doing with the Lord.

But what I'm saying is one day this door will be shut. When Noah entered the ark and God shut the door, a lot of people laughed at Noah for all he was doing and probably mocked him and such like.

[25 : 18] Noah preached and he preached and he told them of the coming flood and they didn't believe him. Or if they did, they didn't think it would be any big deal. But when it came, I believe many were shouting to Noah, open the door Noah.

But Noah couldn't, even if he wanted to. Even if he saw relatives outside, cousins, he couldn't do anything about it. The door was closed. And Jesus paints the very same picture to us in Matthew 25.

You know in the story about the ten bridesmaids, five were wise and five were foolish. The wedding was coming, the bridegroom was coming, they were waiting the bridegroom to go into the marriage. And remember how the five wise, they were prepared, they were ready, they went in. And then it tells us these very solemn words, they went in with the bridegroom to the feast and the door was shut.

Then the five foolish came later on and they couldn't get in. And they were knocking on the door but it was too late. The day of opportunity had gone.

[26 : 31] And that is why we have to grasp this opportunity that's given to us because tonight this door is open. And that's what Paul is telling us about.

He said, I went out there to the Gentiles and God opened the door and I was given so many opportunities to speak. And the wonderful thing is that God was opening the door to people's hearts.

There's a version of Revelation which turns it the other way around. And Jesus says this, Behold, he said, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens, I will come in with him and will sup with him and he with me.

Isn't that beautiful? But I believe Jesus is speaking tonight and he's saying, look, I'm here in the gospel. What is your response to it?

The door is open. all I'm asking you to do is to believe, is to receive me. I hope there's nobody here saying, oh, I want to, but I'm not prepared for that yet.

[27 : 45] No, no, you have to. This is urgent business because the door one day is going to be closed and no one can then open it. Tonight it is open.

And the great thing is when we go through that door, the Lord then gives us further opportunities.

He opens other doors, doors to service, doors to witness, doors into other people's hearts.

Well, before you tonight go out this door if you're outside Jesus, please go through the door that has been opened before you, the door into the kingdom, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give you thanks tonight for again being under the solemnity of your word, a word that speaks both of life and of death, a word that sets out so much hope for us of getting right with God.

O Lord, help us not to push aside the things we hear, help us not to turn away from the truth, help us, Lord, to listen to the honesty of your word and to face up to what it says to us.

[28 : 58] We pray then to be with us, to bless each and every one of us, take us to our home safely and bless us when we return for the worship tonight. Do us good, we pray, and take away our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 24, this psalm that speaks to us off doors, Psalm 24, verses 7 to 10, it's on page 230, it's in the Scottish Psalter, the tune of St. George's Edinburgh, verse 7, ye gates lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last foray be lifted up, that so the King of glory enter me.

But who of glory is the King? The mighty Lord is this, even that same Lord that great and might and strong in battle is. Ye gates lift up your heads, ye doors, doors that do last foray be lifted up, that so the King of glory enter me.

But who is he that is the King of glory? Who is this? The Lord of hosts and none but he the King of glory is. Verses 7 to 10, Psalm 24.

Ye gates lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last foray be lifted up, that so the King of glory enter me.

[30 : 48] But who of glory is the King? the mighty Lord is this, even that same Lord that great in might and strong in battle is, even that same Lord that great in might and strong in battle is.

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ye enter me. But who is he that is the King of glory?

the King of glory? who is this? the Lord of hosts and none but he the King of glory is the King of glory is.

You Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Amen, Amen, Amen.

[33 : 25] Amen.