

# Persecution and Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to look at that chapter that we read together earlier, Acts chapter 12.

And rather than taking any particular verse as a text, I'd just like to work our way through the chapter because it strikes me that the chapter ought to be read and understood as a whole. It's one complete story from start to finish. And it's one of the amazing things that happened at the very beginning of the church, what we call the early church, the church when it began, just after Jesus rose from the dead and he ascended to be with the Father.

And on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured down upon the group of believers that were meeting in Jerusalem, empowering that group of believers so that they went out with the gospel and began to spread the gospel all over the land in various towns and villages and communities in which they were.

And sometimes you are tempted to think, well, wasn't that a marvelous experience? You read Acts chapter 2 and you read about the 3,000 people who were converted on that one occasion.

[ 1 : 24 ] And we think, wow, that must have been some experience to be amongst all of those people and to see that number of people converted. And of course, I think we would agree from that point of view, from one point of view, it would have been a marvelous experience.

But don't believe, don't let's kid ourselves that it was easy to be a Christian at that time. It was only a matter of time before those very same people who had been converted, and particularly those who were preaching the gospel, they were hounded and persecuted and they were subjected to the horrific acts of cruelty and imprisonment and even death itself.

And this chapter is about one of them. That's the first thing that strikes me about this chapter is the whole word, the persecution, the way in which Christians were persecuted because they believed and followed Jesus.

Now, the persecution arose because the Jewish leaders were still jealous of the gospel. Now, this was something that had happened way back in Jesus' time, and they never stopped being jealous of the way in which the gospel had taken hold of people, particularly their own people.

By now, people who weren't Jews were becoming Christians. Romans and Greeks, people from all over the place, were becoming Christians. And this was part of the problem as well because the Jews, they saw themselves as a separate race and they prided themselves in being a separate race.

[ 2 : 58 ] And one of the things that stuck in their throat was the way in which Gentiles were coming in and being accepted as part of the same faith as they were. They couldn't stand the way in which this was.

There was this mixture. They were religious racists. That was part of the problem. But they were also jealous of the popularity of this new faith.

They were jealous of the fact that their own people were seeing something in Jesus Christ that they weren't able to provide. And what they saw was simply this, that they recognized that he was the promised Messiah.

As they read their Old Testament, it was obvious, as it's obvious to anyone who reads their Old Testament seriously and then compares it with the life of Jesus. And it's obvious that Jesus fulfills. He is the one who was promised in the Old Testament, like Isaiah chapter 53, for example, and passages in Isaiah and passages in Moses and the prophets.

[ 3 : 57 ] They all accurately describe the life and the suffering of Jesus Christ. Now these Jews, they came to see that for themselves. But their leadership, they were so proud and so prejudiced that they couldn't stand what was happening.

And they used any means. They formed all these different alliances. They formed alliances with the Roman authorities. So that this newfound movement that was making such progress and spreading to so many places, so that they could make as powerful attempts as they could possibly to stamp out this new movement before it got any further.

Now what they should have done, of course, was they should have sat down and they should have examined the life of Jesus for themselves. That would have been the reasonable thing to do. But unbelief is not reasonable.

It talks about being reasonable. It's one thing to say, oh, let's be reasonable. But when it comes to being reasonable, very few people are when it comes to Jesus Christ.

And they make up their own minds beforehand without even examining his life or his teaching or his death or his resurrection. They have their minds already made up. And it's usually that they don't want anything to do with him.

[ 5 : 15 ] That's the way that unbelief operates. And that's why, by all means, sit down and examine the life of Jesus for yourself.

That's how a person comes to faith in Jesus. Have you done that for yourself? Have you sat down and said, let me just look at this life, the life of this extraordinary character.

That's what the Jews didn't do. Their reaction was hatred and prejudice. And their reaction was to stamp out everyone who belonged to this new faith.

And it's amazing how that took place. The history books are full of the way in which Christians were persecuted. And this part from the very beginning, including this time here.

Now, it amazes me, you know, when I was reading this earlier on, the thought that struck me was, I wonder how I would have been.

[ 6 : 16 ] It's impossible to put yourself in the situation of Peter. Here is Peter. He's a disciple of Jesus. But he was an ordinary human being like you or like me. He was full of weakness.

We know that. We know more about Peter than we know about anyone else in the Bible. We know more about his weakness and his vulnerability. We know all about the way in which he fell into all kinds of...

He had to be rebuked by the Lord. He denied the Lord. He had to be brought back. He had to be restored. So we know all about Peter. He's a transparent person.

We know all about him. And yet in this chapter, he's prepared to sit in a prison cell and wait for his death.

And he, the night before, this is what amazed me, the night before he's due to be put to death because he believes and he loves the Lord, he sleeps. Would you be asleep if you knew that your life was about to end the next day?

[ 7 : 21 ] Would you really be asleep? I would love to think that I would be, that I would be so prepared to meet the Lord the next day that it wouldn't trouble me.

But there's something within me that tells me that I wouldn't be asleep. Well, I suppose that the Lord gave him the grace and the peace of mind and the presence of mind to be able to face that day.

And yet it's an awful thought, isn't it? It's a real thought. I wonder. And the other thing that struck me was the difference between their day and ours.

We are Christians. We believe and we love the same Lord Jesus that Peter and James and John and Paul, they stood for the same. But, oh, life is so different, isn't it?

Our lives are so comfortable. We're going home tonight in our cars. We have a warm, comfortable church building. We meet with absolutely no fear of persecution.

[ 8 : 23 ] Nobody's going to come in that door and drag us off to prison. That's not the way it was then. We're going to go home. We're going to drive our cars. It doesn't matter what kind of weather it's going to be outside.

It could be raining. It could be snowing. It doesn't matter because we're going to go in our cars. We're going to go home. We're going to go into our kitchens. We're going to make a cup of tea. We're going to make some toast, toasted cheese. And then we're going to go to our nice, warm, comfortable beds.

For us, it costs nothing to be a Christian. Or at least it costs very little. I wonder, I really wonder how it would be. And I talk to myself. I really wonder how it would be if my life was in danger because I was a follower of Jesus.

I know, I think, I really think it's a useful thing to think about. To wonder how strong would we be? Oh, it's easy to sit in a gathering and to debate theological points.

It's easy to sit in my front room and to read theological books and the books that tell me about, and I, we all do it. I do it as well. And it's quite, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with any of these things. And yet, this is the bottom line.

[ 9 : 32 ] To what extent are we prepared to lay our lives on the line? Because that's what Jesus calls us to do. In this world, he said, you will have trouble.

That was the promise of Jesus. And he promised that all of this would happen. The other thing that struck me about Peter being persecuted was this.

You remember way back when Jesus rose from the dead and he met with his disciples on the shores of the Lake of Galilee. And when he cooked fish in front of them and where they had ample evidence that he was risen again, he ate with them, he drank with them, and then he said to, he turned to Peter and he said, Simon, do you love me more than these?

And he pointed, I believe he pointed to the boats. Do you love me more than all of these things you've been doing your whole life? In other words, do you love me so much that you're prepared to leave all of this and come and follow me and be my disciple and my minister and an evangelist and a preacher of the gospel?

And Simon's response was, Lord, you know that I love you. You know that I love you. Now you might read that chapter and you think, well, wasn't that a lovely expression of Peter's love for the Lord?

[ 10 : 44 ] But it was an expression which was going to be tested because, and here was the test. And I'm sure that on this very night, Peter, as he reflected over his whole life, because that's what, I'm quite sure that that's what a person does.

That person knows that they're going to die and really we ought to be living every day as if it was our last, shouldn't we? Because it could be. We really ought to be. And I'm sure that as Peter reflected over his life, he must have reflected over how he had denied Jesus and how he had repented and he had come back and how Jesus had said to him, do you love me more than these? Simon, do you love me? Three times he asked him, do you love me? And three times, Simon had absolutely asserted, yes Lord, I love you. But that's not an empty expression.

Whenever we say to the Lord, I love you, God is going to test that as an expression of our faith and our commitment to the Lord. Now it may not be sitting in a prison cell waiting for our execution, but it will be some other way.

It's going to be tested. Our love for the Lord and our faith in Jesus is always tested in some way and here was Peter and he was being tested on this occasion and that test is coming by way of persecution.

[ 12 : 02 ] These are very challenging thoughts, aren't they? They challenge all of us as to what place the Lord has in our lives. What place he has in our lives.

The second thing that strikes me about this chapter is prayer. First thing was persecution. The second thing was prayer because the same night, in fact, days beforehand, while Peter was in prison, verse 5 tells us that earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Now the church wasn't a building like we have. The church used to meet in people's homes. They didn't have buildings like we have. They used to meet in people's homes and the home in which the church in Jerusalem was meeting or one of the churches anyway was in the home of a woman called Mary who was the mother of John Mark, the Mark that wrote the gospel.

That was the same young man who the night Jesus was betrayed, he had fled naked because he had left his nightgown behind. He had panicked and he left. Here was him amongst the disciples once again taking part in the church.

at the same time as Peter was in prison, the church, the people of God, the believers, they were meeting together and they were praying but they weren't just praying.

[ 13 : 21 ] They were praying earnestly for him and it strikes you, doesn't it, that if we were in the kind of danger that members of the church in Jerusalem were in, I think our prayer would be different.

Our prayer would be so urgent and earnest. That's why I think that that word is put into verse 5. It wasn't just that they were praying, they were praying earnestly for him, fervently for him as if the outcome depended on the fervency of their prayer.

That's how we should be praying. That is a mark of true prayer. It's not the length of words that you can string together or the fluency of the words that you can string together.

It's the earnestness, the fervence, the fire, that drives us in prayer and you're only going to have that fervency when you see one thing and that is that God is listening to your requests and he is answering you according to your requests.

That's what prayer is. And there's always the question that arises, well if God is sovereign, if God is looking down on Peter and he loves Peter and he's called Peter into his service and if Peter's being persecuted, surely God knows himself what to do.

[ 14 : 38 ] Surely there's no need for the church to pray for him. After all, what is prayer if God knows the end from the beginning? Well that's the way that we always try and get out of it, isn't it? It's the way that we try and offload the responsibility of prayer.

God doesn't want to hear us saying that because the simple answer is this, God's sovereignty, his rule over everything includes the prayer of his people and these people were fervent.

You know why? Because God was working in the church and he was creating that sense of urgency within his people that brought them to him in prayer. That's the way it works.

And so God created that sense of urgency through their worship and then he heard their prayer and as a response to their prayer he acted to rescue Peter from the prison.

Now the next question that arises is this, why did Peter get rescued and James, another of the disciples, why was he put to death? Was it that the church wasn't praying as fervently for James as it was as they were for Peter?

[ 15 : 48 ] It's an interesting question, isn't it? Why was it in the same chapter we read that one disciple gets put to death and the other disciple is rescued by an angel? We don't know the answer to that question, do we?

Except for one thing, that God knows the moment that we're going to leave this world because he has appointed it.

And that moment, when it comes, there's nothing you can do about it. That moment is not going to be an accident, it's appointed. That's what the Bible tells us, it's appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment.

And so we mustn't think of James' death as an accident. James' death is deliberate. In the providence of God, that was his time, God had prepared him for it, his work in this world was done. And the moment that your work is done in this world and the moment my work is done in this world, God will take us from this world. But Peter's work wasn't done.

[ 16 : 57 ] God still had, the story wasn't finished, God still had a work for Peter to do and therefore, come what may, Herod and all his forces and all the forces of the Roman Empire and the Jewish authorities and everything that was arrayed against Peter, it wasn't going to take his life.

God was going to move, heaven and earth in order to rescue Peter because God still had a work for him to do. It's impossible, see this in a few moments time, it's impossible to fight against God.

The most foolish thing you can do tonight is to fight against God. But you know, the other thing that encourages us to pray and it's not just a question of urgency and danger, the sense of danger that one of their number, one of their own members was just about to be put to death.

You know, I guess, I guess, if one of our members was just about to be put to death because they were following Jesus, the seminary would be full.

Wouldn't it? I hope it would. And we'd all be praying for the one thing, we'd all be focused on the one thing because we would have that sense of urgency.

[ 18 : 17 ] Not quite sure if I understand why we don't have that sense of urgency in any case. I was reading out on Wednesday in the Open Doors magazine, they were asking for prayer for particular countries and particular Christians.

Now, okay, we don't know these people, what difference does it make? Why should it make a difference whether we are whether they're friends of ours or not, they're brothers and sisters of ours? So we still have a responsibility to pray for them especially because we have the opportunity and God has given us much.

To whom much is given, much will be required. And God holds us accountable for and one of the things one of the things he's commanded us to do is to pray.

These people were people but there was a major flaw in their prayer meeting. And that was when their prayer was answered exactly as they had prayed. They didn't believe it.

When Peter was taken out of prison by the angel miraculously, if you had gone to any of these people who were in that prayer meeting that night and you'd have said to them, is God capable of a miracle?

[ 19 : 21 ] They would have said, of course he is. There's nothing that's impossible with God. You see, it's one thing to believe it. It's another thing to experience it. It's one thing to pray for something. It's another thing to pray expecting that God will answer your prayer.

expecting that God will answer your prayer. And that's what these people failed to do.

So that when Peter turned up at their door and this servant girl, Rhoda, she answered the door. She didn't answer the door. She didn't open the door. But she heard Peter knocking and when she heard his voice, she ran into the rest of the people and she told them who it was and they refused to believe that God had answered their prayer.

How is that for faith? And yet it's a rebuke to each one of us. What difference would it make to our prayer if we knew that God was going to answer it as we had prayed?

It's a real challenge, isn't it? What difference is it? But that's what prayer is. Prayer is coming to God with real needs, with real requests, believing that as we come to him in Jesus Christ that God hears us and specifically answers our prayer.

[ 20 : 44 ] Thankfully, he doesn't answer all our prayer because sometimes our prayer is wrong and sometimes our prayer is asking for the wrong reasons and for the wrong motives. Thankfully, he doesn't always answer the way we want and yet we have to ask him.

We have to first of all believe that he is hearing us and he's answering in his own way and he's answering in ways that are best for us and yet we still have this problem, don't we, of an unbelieving church, a church that isn't expecting the unexpected and that doesn't really and truly grasp that God is listening to them and hearing their prayer.

They thought it was his angel. They were prepared to believe anything except even the most bizarre thing that it was his angel. There's an interesting theory according to, as to what they might have understood that to have been but we don't have time to go into it this evening.

What a witness it was to Rhoda. I don't know who Rhoda was. All we read is that she's a servant girl. I don't know whether she was a believer or whether she wasn't. If she wasn't, what kind of witness was that?

When she sees and hears people praying for Peter and then amazingly when Peter turns up at the door and she goes in and tells them and they'd say, well it can't be Peter. What kind of witness is that?

[ 22 : 01 ] Here's their opportunity to prove to this girl Rhoda the power of God. But you know, she has a responsibility as well because she, let's say she wasn't a believer.

I don't know, maybe she was. Let's say she wasn't. Maybe she was an ordinary servant girl and she hasn't come to faith in Jesus yet. Just the same way as some of you haven't come to faith in Jesus yet.

And yet, here is our opportunity. She sees and hears with her own ears the evidence of answered prayer. She sees a living testimony of what it is to be a Christian and to be part of the family of God. The power of God. She sees the very life of the church itself. That Jesus' resurrection means that God is answering prayer. What's she going to do about it?

You have seen also living proof that Jesus is alive. There is living proof that Jesus is alive.

[ 23 : 01 ] The question is, when we come to discover that living proof, what impact does that have on your life? Will you come to him? Will you trust in him? Will you follow him? Will you have him as your savior?

It's a challenge, isn't it? It's a real question. So that's prayer. But then, there were, there was an enormous paradox as well.

That's the third thing I want us to look at this evening. There was persecution, there was prayer, and there was a paradox. A paradox is when, when the opposite takes place to what you expect. when you have a situation where, instead of two things coinciding with one another, you have two opposites. I said, for example, there's a, there's a certain paradox between James being put to death and Peter being spared.

But there's also a paradox in the guards. I think we forget the poor guards that were put to death.

There were 16 men who were put by Herod given the responsibility of guarding Peter when he was in prison.

[ 24 : 15 ] Four squads of soldiers, that's four times four, which is 16. And their responsibility was to guard particularly that one man as he sat in his prison cell waiting for execution the next day.

And I wonder about these men. I guess they were ordinary men. They must have been ordinary men. Possibly having wives and families. like many of us here.

And I wonder what their thoughts were. You see, because here's the paradox. You see, these, these 16 men, they had the keys to the prison. And according to likelihood, according to statistics, this was not the last, their last day on earth.

But according to Herod's plan, the prisoner who they were guarding, this was his last day on earth. So, they must have felt in a position of security and safety.

And they probably felt sorry for Peter about to be executed the next day. Even having watched hundreds of executions in their lifetime, they possibly felt sorry for Peter.

[ 25 : 29 ] But it's not likely that any one of them would have thought, I wonder if this is my last evening in this world. And yet, that's precisely what it was. Because the next day, the man who they were guarding, waiting for his execution, was set free by God.

And they, who were in positions of power and authority, they were the ones who were executed the next morning. The situation that they started off with was totally reversed.

That's what I mean by a paradox. It was totally reversed. It was turned, their world was turned upside down. And from the last evening when they were guarding faithfully, maybe they were lazy in some respects, I don't know.

But, dear me, three doors, all of them locked, sixteen soldiers. How likely is it that one man is able to pass through three doors and sixteen soldiers?

I think we can afford to be a little bit complacent in a situation like that. But it's nothing to do with their complacency. There's no evidence that they were unfaithful in any way. They had everything locked, everything secure.

[ 26 : 48 ] There was no way that Peter could escape. What they weren't accounting for was the power of God. And that was very foolish.

Very, very foolish. And I wonder how many of us tonight are planning your lives, planning what's going to happen this week, planning your dreams and your ambitions and your to-do list, all the things that we go into a new week with.

Some of these things you have to do because that's your responsibility. You don't find it very easy but you say, well, I've got to move on, I've got to get on with it. Some things just have to be done. Other things, well, these are my aims and my objectives.

Perhaps the school holiday is coming next week. This is where I'm going to go. I'm really looking forward to it. That's the way we live, isn't it? Are we taking into account the reality of God?

Are we giving God the first place? Are we seeking first the kingdom of God and giving him the place that he deserves and that he demands? as Lord, very foolish to do otherwise, just the same way as it was for these poor men for whom that night was the last night that they were to live in this world.

[ 28 : 13 ] Now, it's no use saying, but Herod, you know, he's a ruthless, what a guy, how can he, how can he be so cruel? It wasn't their fault.

He could see as he came in the next day and he saw Peter having escaped, he knew he should have been able to trust these guys and their word and their account and their testimony that this must have been an act of God.

and why should he be so cruel as to order them to be put to death? How can he, and then you move on, that's where you start, and then you move on to God. You say, how can God allow that to happen?

How can God allow such tyranny in this world? That's awful, that's dreadful, and you start pointing the finger at God, don't you? Why does God allow the evil and the tyranny and the atrocities that happen in this world?

God? And I agree, there's a real question there, because people suffering this evening, as we speak, there is suffering going on.

[ 29 : 17 ] People are being tortured. None of us knows what it means to be tortured. We have no clue as to what it means to be tortured. We haven't a clue as to what it means to hear a judge or a king or an officer saying to you, saying to take this person out and put him to death.

Their whole world must have fallen. It must have collapsed. We can only imagine the utter panic and fear that any ordinary man must face when he hears those words that within a few moments

time his life is going to be taken from him.

And that is exactly the reality of the thing. But you can't blame God. Because God has given a measure of freedom to people in this world. He's not going to reach out his hand and stop when people decide to do sin things.

Because he has given freedom and liberty to people in this world. Herod did this because he decided to do it. Because he was so full of his own power and his sense of importance he thought he could do anything he wanted.

You see that at the end of the chapter. That's the way he had lived. He was an utter rascal. The guy was a tyrant. He was a monster of cruelty and wickedness. They all were.

[ 30 : 29 ] All the Herods. All you have to do is read the history of them. They were incredible people. And if ever you want to find a picture of the kind of person that you and I could be, you just read the history of the Herods.

And don't start thinking that they've got something defective. These people were just as ordinary as you and I. They were indifferent. They were brought up in a different time in a different way.

They were ordinary people. We would have been the same. sin. Because the Bible tells us that we are all. We've fallen short of the glory of God. That's where sin begins.

Who knows where it ends? Who knows where it ends? But don't expect God. Because that's what it means to live as part of a fallen world. It means that we exercise our choices in this world.

And that means that a person like Herod in a position of power is able to exercise the most monstrous decisions. And he couldn't care less about who suffers in the process.

[ 31 : 34 ] That's the kind of world we live in. And it's testimony to the fallenness of this world. To the way that this world, Paul puts it, this creation groans.

Groans. That's one of the way in which the creation groans. Because it falls victim very often to people who are monsters of wickedness.

These poor men, all they were doing was their duty. And yet, they were put to death for it. That's injustice.

You know, I would love to think that some at least of these men were prepared to die. Do you know why I'm saying that?

Peter, because they were put in charge of Peter, and the shift was changed every, when the watch finished. So that means that they weren't in the same place throughout the whole night.

[ 32 : 36 ] Four of them would be on the outer door, but then they would move in closer, then they would move in closer, and the ones who were next to Peter would move out to the outer door, and the shift was changed every two or three hours.

That means that every two or three hours, a different set of soldiers was handcuffed to Peter. I don't believe that Peter ignored the opportunity to spread the gospel to these people.

I just don't believe it. Peter was full of the Lord. These were his last hours. He knew he was going to be put to death the next day, and surely if you're a believer in Jesus, if you know you're going to be put to death, you want to leave this world full of Jesus, having done everything in your power to spread the gospel so that who knows who he might take with him to heaven.

Who knows? I believe that that's exactly how Peter spent his last hours, telling them all about Jesus and who he was and why he died and how he rose again, and who knows, maybe these men came to faith in Jesus, some of them at least, so that by the time their execution came, Herod actually didn't win any victory at all.

That was the last day they ever spent, the last time, maybe the first and the only time they ever heard the gospel. It's a really solemn thought, isn't it?

[ 34 : 11 ] It's really solemn, isn't it? Because you and I could be exactly the same tonight. It could be the last time you ever hear the Bible, the last time you ever hear about Jesus, the last opportunity that you have to come to faith in him.

You've heard that before. One day it's going to be a reality, and it could be tonight. It's a really solemn thought. Here's living evidence. Here are real men, and that was the way they spent their last hours.

The last paradox is Herod. He was the man in power, a cruel, ruthless man, who obviously thought that he was invincible.

He spent his life, all you have to do, I can't go into, we don't have time to go into, the time has gone to the kind of deceit that he exercised in order to get to power. He was drunk with his own power, a

sense of his own importance.

He thought he could do anything. It's quite clear even from this passage that he loved importance, full of a sense of his own importance. And so it's quite in keeping with his character when he appeared that day in front of all these people.

[ 35 : 27 ] The people were shouting the voice of a god and not of a man, and that was the moment. And the historian, by the way, Josephus, who wrote lots of things that took place around about this time, he writes about exactly the same event, and tells us that at this moment all of a sudden he was consumed by agony.

I don't know what was going on inside him. I suppose doctors have names for possible condition that he had, but what the Bible tells us here is that God was working, and that despite the fact he thought he was in good shape, he wasn't.

again, once again, his days were almost at an end. Just when he thought he was at his fittest and his best and his highest in this world, his days were at an end.

Again, hugely solemn thought. The last thing I want us to see is what it says in verse 23, an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory.

Because he did, however he died, he says he was eaten by worms. I don't know what that means.

But what I'm really interested in are these words, because he did not give God the glory.

[ 36 : 52 ] There are loads of things you could say about Herod. He was a very unjust man. We see this in this chapter, how he put these 16 men to death. He was a deceitful man.

He was a glutton. He was guilty of all kinds of gross sinfulness, the kind of things that we would recognize as being awful.

And yet, when it comes down to why God struck him, this is the reason, because he did not give God the glory. See, that's where sinfulness begins.

It's not by what we do. It begins with what we don't do and what we fail to do. Give God the glory.

The question that we're left with this evening is simply this.

Do you give God the glory? Do you live for God? Do you love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength? Is God the number one? Is he on the throne? Is he your Lord?

[ 38 : 03 ] Is he your saviour? I'm not asking if you're perfect. I'm asking simply this. Is Jesus your saviour? And that's it. Because if Jesus is your saviour, then God does get the glory in your life.

You seek first the kingdom of God. You come to him as he asks us and commands us and invites us to do through the open door that Jesus has died to open for sinners like ourselves.

Come and give him the glory by recognising what he has done in his death on the cross and by asking for his forgiveness and for the newness of life that he alone can give you.

Let's pray. Father, tonight once again we ask that you will speak to us clearly from your word.

We thank you for your word. Thank you for the way it reaches into our world and for the way in which it reaches into our hearts and for the way in which you so powerfully open up our hearts and explain to us the things which we never find an explanation for in any other place that we look in this world.

[ 39 : 22 ] So Lord, speak to us now we pray and show us yourself through your word. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.