

Acts 15 v 9-10

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[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 16, the passage we read, and verse 6, they went through the region, page 1114, Acts chapter 16, verse 6, they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia, they went to Troas, and a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Amen. This book, of course, is a history of how the first church, or the first New Testament church, began, began after Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven once again.

And when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, that was truly a red letter day, a historic occasion. That was the day in which God's people were anointed as never before and energized as never before with a new confidence to preach, to explain, and to confront men and women with the good news of Jesus Christ, who he was and why he came into the world.

[2 : 0 0] And the Acts of the Apostles is a history of how the church, remember, we're not talking about a building, we're not talking about a denomination. There was only one church in those days. It was people, people who God had changed and who had come to discover who and what Jesus Christ was.

They had come to trust in him permanently and personally in their lives. And their lives had been totally turned on their heads, rather turned right side up, I should say.

They were brought out of darkness and they were new people altogether. They had a new perspective on life. They had discovered why they were here in this world. That's what every Christian discovers, why I'm here in this world, why God has created me and what God wants to do with my life.

I discover as a Christian that I'm not random, I'm not chaotic, I'm not some kind of chance happening. I have been created specifically as me by God in order to glorify him and enjoy him. And I will never find satisfaction or peace or contentment until I come to that point in my life where I orient, where God orients my life.

[3 : 1 5] He turns my life towards himself so that I see, that I've never seen before, why I'm here and what life is really and truly all about.

And of course, right from the very beginning, those people who were changed, the disciples who were told by Jesus to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations, they were driven by this great force, the force of God himself.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit, they went out and they simply shared the message of the gospel. Well, the truly remarkable thing about the Acts of the Apostles and indeed the history of how the gospel has spread all over the world is that it has never spread by force.

It has never spread by war. People talk about holy war and jihad. Well, if some religions operate that way, well, that's so be it. That is not the way that the Christian gospel has ever operated.

The gospel takes hold of people's lives by persuasion, by the message of the gospel, by the word of God.

[4 : 3 4] And there's something about that message in itself that has an irresistible power in which a person who hears the message is struck personally by the fact that God is speaking to them.

And this is not just some group of clever men or a group of highly skilled sales marketing experts who have come to sell you a product just as the way in which so many people operate today.

It's not about how expensive our marketing campaign is or what gimmicks or techniques we use to spread the gospel. It's about ordinary communication and explanation and simple speaking. That's the way it was. There was nothing, apparently, there was nothing impressive about the Apostle Paul. There's no question he was a deeply clever man. Spent a lot of his time studying. And he knew his theology as well as how to put it into practice. And that's why today those who are preparing for the ministry must never sacrifice knowledge of the Bible.

[5 : 52] It is absolutely paramount that our young people who are training for ministry, they must know and learn as much as they possibly can about the Bible.

The Apostle Paul, if ever there was a man who was on fire for the Lord and who reached as many people as he possibly could to tell them the gospel, he also knew as much as he could about what the gospel meant.

So even today, if you read the letters to the Romans or Galatians or Philippians, you'll be confronted by the deepest of truths that even scholars today find it hard to fathom.

An immensely clever man. And yet there was nothing really very impressive about him. He was an ordinary person. I don't think he looked very impressive. And yet he was used by God to reach more people for the gospel than anyone before him or after him.

To this day, there wasn't a single individual who did more for the church of God and for the cause of Jesus Christ than this man, Saul of Tarsus.

[6 : 58] And of course, much of the Acts of the Apostles is about him and his life, his conversion in Acts chapter 9. And how at first, the believers just couldn't take in the fact that here was a man who was a persecutor of Christians and God turned him around to being a Christian himself.

We must never despair. You think of tonight the person who you know to be the least likely person to be converted. And you pray for that person.

And pray believing that God could change that person's life. Because if ever there was someone who was least likely to be a Christian, he was rampant in his opposition to the gospel and to the church.

He hated Christians. He hated the mention of Jesus. And yet, that day when God met with him on the road to Damascus was the day in which his life changed.

And everything beforehand, he had to reject. He had to walk away from it. And he had to admit that he had been wrong. And everything that he had believed about himself and about God's requirements.

[8 : 10] But that now, Jesus was the way to God. That's what the gospel is all about. Jesus, the way to God. And that became, for Paul, his driving force.

There was a sense in which the apostle Paul just simply could not resist the urge to preach the gospel. And if ever there was an energetic book, you read through page after page of the Acts of the Apostles, and you don't know what's going to happen if you've never read it before.

If you've never read it before, I would ask you tonight to make a point of reading it. It's an exciting book. It's a book which is full of suspense. You don't know what's going to happen from one day to the next.

As Paul makes his way thousands of miles. A lot of the book is concerned with journeys. Three specific journeys that Paul and his companions took.

Some of it was overland. Some of it was by sea. And it wasn't the powered, nice ship that we have today. The Isle of Lewis or a cruise ship or something like that where you can sit back and read a newspaper or read it.

[9 : 18] No, these boats were dangerous ways to travel in those days. And we must never try to impose our culture on a culture that existed 2,000 years ago.

So that when you say, well, it would be great to travel. No, no, it wasn't great to. Trust me, it was not great to travel in those days. It was incredibly difficult. And it involves living rough and hardship.

And it involved hunger and thirst and persecution. Paul himself tells us the kind of dangers that he faced. Hardships, afflictions, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit.

We were treated as imposters and yet true. And then he tells us they were beaten. They were often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews. Forty lashes left one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. That's no fun. Frequent journeys and danger from rivers.

[10 : 25] Danger from robbers. Danger from my own people. Danger from Gentiles in the city and the wilderness at sea. Danger from false brothers and toil and hardship. Many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst.

Often without food and cold and exposure. Any normal individual would have given up as soon as he began. And yet Paul said, Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

He says in Philippians chapter 1, For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And so if you're looking for inspiration as a Christian tonight, Then go to the book of Acts.

Go to the New Testament. But go to the book of Acts. And you find out what energized the people of God. The disciples. The apostles. The joy. The power that they enjoyed.

That didn't mean. You see, there's this. There's so many misconceptions about the New Testament. Some people think that people like Paul, They enjoyed success everywhere they went.

[11 : 25] It didn't matter where he went. Crowds of people would come. And he would preach to them. And they would all be converted. And then he would go to another place. Crowds of people would come. They would all be converted. And people say, Oh, wouldn't it be great to live in those days?

Well, if that's what it was like, Then it would be great. It wasn't like that at all. There were periods of time When Paul would go to certain places. And there would be what we would call a revival. Hundreds, thousands of people would be converted. But there were other places Where no one was interested in the message of the gospel. Just like today's world.

Paul knew what indifference was Just the same way as you. And I know what indifference is. There were other places where There was downright opposition to the gospel.

They hated him. And they would have killed him. If they had had the chance. And if the Lord had allowed them in his providence To kill him. And in fact, of course, at the end of his life He was put to death For the sake of his preaching the gospel.

[12 : 33] But he willingly and gladly Looked at death in the face And said, For me to live is Christ. To die is gain. He was driven By this message of the gospel.

And not only is the book of Acts Is a book of Acts Full of power and suspense Not knowing what's going to happen It's also a challenge to us.

Because it asks us Very interesting and very difficult questions. It asks us How much do we really believe What we say we believe? We live in a totally different world.

We live in a much more comfortable life. We would not be None of us Would be able to survive The kind of lifestyle That Paul and the other apostles Had to live For the sake of the gospel.

Their life was, of course, Much simpler. So was everyone's. Everyone's life Was much Very different from The kind of life That we live. I often wonder And this is a wee bit of an aside I know I'll come back very quickly I often wonder Saying this to someone else How we would respond If there was persecution In our day.

[13 : 47] We would not take to it very well. And I'll tell you why. Because in those days Way back at the very beginning If you took a man Out of his home And put him in a prison And made him lie on a mat on the floor No big change.

It would probably be dirtier than his home. If you gave him Bread and water There wouldn't be a huge amount Of difference From what he would get At his house Because these people were poor. If he had to exist In rags In the prison Then there wouldn't be A huge amount of difference Because he's only got One set of clothes In the house anyway. These people lived A simple life.

So if you took them From their simple life And put them in prison For their faith I'm not saying it was easy. Their freedom Was taken away from them But they could tolerate it.

How do you think You would survive If you were taken Away from your Memory foam Mattress?

And if I didn't have The choice of food That I have every day Opening my fridge And if I wasn't able To take a shower every day In fact once a month maybe You and I would not Take to it kindly.

[15 : 21] I wonder what would happen. It's an interesting question Isn't it? If we were persecuted For our faith And how quickly We would simply Give up.

I hope we wouldn't. But that whole question Raises the Even more The deeper question How do I really believe In this gospel?

That's a question That we should come back to Time and again Because it defines Who we are And what we are As God's people It defines our behavior And our conduct And our speech And our choices And our decisions Do we really believe That we are Chosen by God And called by God And

brought into His family?

Do we live As He As children of God? Do we live The joy of the Lord? Or do we Do we lose sight Of who we are All too often And get caught up In all the complexity Of a world That doesn't want To know The gospel And have we begun To let our To diminish Our lamp To hide our lamp Under a Under a A bed As Jesus said Because it's much More comfortable When we blend in With everyone else And do And live And say And speak And conduct ourselves The way everyone else does And to not let anyone know That we are Well for the apostle Paul That was not Even part of his thinking He could not Possibly live like that And the only way Is to keep Our attention On what God has done For us In Jesus Christ Paul never ever

Lost sight God forbid He said That I should boast In anything Except the cross Of our Lord Jesus Christ And that was because The cross To him Was everything The substance Of the gospel Was everything Now whether or not You have A background As Paul had In religion He was a religious man He was a Jewish man He'd been brought up Presumably in a good home He had been a Very diligent Conscientious student As a young man And he had A determination That he was right And everyone else Was wrong Until God changed him And so for him It was a conversion But Nevertheless As he looked back Over his life He could say That he was Like the worst Of all sinners Because he had Persecuted The church Of God Now that may not Be your background But I hope That none of us Here have ever Lost sight Of what we once Were And what we Would have been If God had not

[18:18] Opened up our hearts And changed our direction And filled us With his Holy Spirit And the same God And this is This is so So important Tonight The same God Who has changed You and me Is the same God Who can change Your neighbour Your sister Your brother Your husband Your wife Your daughter Your son The same God Who can change The person you work with The whole of Stornoway He could change them Tonight He could change The whole of Scotland That's what Paul Believed in He wasn't content With just sitting back And saying Well things are going Against me So I'm just going To give up No Paul was driven You can see this In the way in which He was led By the Holy Spirit This chapter Is so interesting It's chapter 16 It's a milestone In the history Of the gospel It's where the gospel Crosses the threshold From Asia

Into Europe If it hadn't been For the events In this chapter We possibly Wouldn't be here Tonight That's how Amazing this chapter Is Somehow This is the second Missionary journey And he sets off From Judea And we'll just Leave aside The row That he had With Barnabas Over John Mark Whether to take him With him That's a different Story But Paul And Silas And Timothy They came They made Their way Overland And if you Follow it On a map Of Asia Minor You follow Their way It's interesting To do that And they're Going northwest And they're Doing two things They're first of all Going to the churches They knew about To strengthen them To pray with them To encourage them To teach them To deliver the decision That you read about In Acts chapter 15 And they're being Guided by the Holy Spirit I guess that they're Trying to make decisions As to where to go They didn't know Where they were going Every decision They seemed to make Was one in which They were dependent On the Holy Spirit So they wanted to Turn right To one place They couldn't go And they wanted to Turn left to another Place they couldn't go To the right Was Bithynia An area in Asia Called Bithynia To the left Was an area Called Asia Minor And for some reason In verse 6 The Holy Spirit Did not allow them To go Now we don't know Any more detail About that We don't know How the Holy Spirit Made that known Whether it was That he made it Impossible for them He closed the door For them in some way But they knew That they were guided Up to the North west coast To a place called Troas It was a dead end It was a coastal town It was the furthest They had ever gone There was nothing But sea in front of them So there was only one choice They had to go back Which they knew They shouldn't do Or else they Move forward It's a bit like On the road to Ullapul If you go on the road To Ullapul There's no way You can get past Ullapul To the right Is Scoury And these places And to the left Is Gerlach And these places These roads were closed As far as Paul was concerned There was only one way And that's Ullapul Well what can you do You either turn back To Inverness Or you get the boat To Stornoway That's what he did He got the boat And they arrived Eventually In Philippi Which was The first European town What we call Europe This is where we are We are Europeans That's how the gospel Came here In the first place We thank God tonight For Acts chapter 16 And for taking The gospel Into Europe And They went To where there was

A group of women Praying All of these All of these details Are loaded with The most challenging Pieces of information Instead of going To Philippi Which was a major town And they went To a small place They went To where The riverside Where there was A place of prayer And where They sat down And spoke to the women Who had come together That's how The gospel Came Into that area Through small things It's no surprise Is it Because the gospel Always Started small From the very beginning When Jesus Came into the world He wasn't born In a palace He wasn't born With great spectacle Or Outward honor He was born To a Young lady Who was pledged To be married To Joseph And from there The son of God

[23 : 23] Grew Becoming Grew up As one of us In their home Remember the story Of how Jesus Sat on a well With the woman Of Samaria And From that one Conversation That woman Went back To her own people To her town Called Sychar And she She became The witness To them She said Come and see A man Who's told me Everything I've ever done Could this not be The Christ That's how the gospel Spreads People to people Person to person One to one I know that there are There's a time for Services and preaching And for crowds of people But you think of your own life And how much of your life Has been influenced By that one person Who is giving you The encouragement That you needed At that particular time That one conversation That you've had With that Christian That you knew That's changed your life Perhaps some of you Tonight have been converted

Through a conversation With one person It wasn't some minister Standing in a pulpit It was your mother Or your father Or your grandparent Or your friend Or your relative Who just simply shared The gospel with you And that's what Paul Believed in Passionately He went to where There was a group of women You wouldn't expect You wouldn't expect Much from a group of women On the riverside But that's how God operates He doesn't operate By the powers And the authorities Of this world He starts with the Little groups We have to Never despise Where there are Little churches Little groups of people Who knows what's Happening tonight In various places In Scotland And in England Where they don't have The sort of 400 That we have Tonight Where maybe half a dozen Of them are meeting In a house for Bible study Because they don't know Where there are Other Christians In places of the world Like Turkey And in places Like Africa And India And places in Eastern Europe Where there are no Big buildings Like we have But there are Groups of people Who love the Lord And who are gathered Together because They love the Bible And they want to Learn more about the Bible They want to pray That's how God starts That's where God operates And we too Believe In small things We do not Despise a day Of small things Because from that Little group Lydia Within that Little group Was this Person called Lydia A woman Whose heart The Lord Opened To the gospel That's what the gospel Is all about The power of God Because in the message Of Jesus Coming into the world God speaks And he opens up People's understanding And he confronts them

With who they are And who he is Where are you tonight Yourself With regard to this Great message Are you Disinterested How can How can You not Be interested In whether There is A God That doesn't Make sense Because Surely The question Whether there is A God Is got to be The most Important question That you can Ever Possibly Ask Ask Because If there is A God Then it Answers The question Who am I Who are you So how can You say Without even Thinking about it Well I'm just Not interested No that doesn't

Make sense To me At all And you may Say well That's for People who are Interested in Studying and Reading and Stuff like That That's okay For them To think About these Things But you know I'm a simple Plain person Well so was Lydia So was The apostle So was So were The disciples They were Just fishermen Please don't Use that As an excuse Because what You're really What you're Really trying To do Is you're Really trying To avoid An awkward Question And the Awkward Question Is this If there Is a God And if I am me And God Is created To be me Then God must Have A bearing On my Life If there Is If I am Here for A purpose For a Reason Then The only Way I'm Ever going To find That out Is From God And that's Awkward Isn't it Because it Means that You've got to Stop what

[28 : 27] You're doing And how You're living Your life You've got to Stop and You've got to Make God Your first Priority If there Is an Answer As to Why we Are here In this World Then Surely Surely You want To know That answer Please don't Tell me You don't Because That's Just Nonsense You've got To know Why you're Here You know Why?

Because there Will come A time When you Won't be Here Your life's Going to End And you're Going to Have lived Your life Without Ever Finding Out Why you're Here Don't tell Me that Makes any Sense It Doesn't But you Know The more You think About it The more Uncomfortable It gets Because it Means you Have to Think Differently Because you Have to Discover that Life is not Just about Finding out What pleases You and What gives You the Happiness and Jolly and The pleasure And the The joy In this Life You've Got to Think God You think God And you're Not used To that If you're Not alone Nobody was I wasn't Used to That But that's The way It is Surely If there Is a God Then surely And then You think Well you Know okay If that's The question If that's The case Then You know

Who is God In that Case All the Other Religions In the World Fine Let's Ask That Question If you Want to Go Down That Road Then Let's Ask That Question But Take it Seriously And read The Bible And ask Yourself Does What I Read In the Bible Make Sense The Bible Tells Me That I'm Created In God's Image That's Why I'm Different That's Why You're Different From Every Other Creature In The World That's Why We Think And Reason That's Why We're Asking These Questions The Bible Also Tells Us That Something Horrific Has Happened To This World Amongst Human Beings In Which We Become Corrupt And Deceitful And Injust And Lustful And In Which We Become Mistrusted We Become Lying People Deceiving Greedy Selfish People And We Know That That's Wrong There's A

Voice In Us There's Two Voices Within Us There's A Voice That Tells Us To Do What We Want To Do There's Also The Voice That Says Yeah But If You Do It You Are Guilty In Fact You're Guilty Anyway That's What The Bible Tells Us And Perhaps That's The Reason Why It Is So Awkward For Us To Think About The Gospel Because It Confronts Us With Who We Are It Tells Us The Truth From God's Eyes About Ourselves And That's Not Easy To Find Out But Surely If I Was Sitting Where You're Sitting Tonight I'd Be Saying Well Even If It Isn't Easy I Want To Know The Truth I Want To Know Who I Am I Want To Know Who God Is Even If It's The Most Painful Message In The World I Need To Know It Because This Life Doesn't Make Sense Otherwise The Message Of The Bible Goes On To Tell Us That It Gets Worse That Because We Have Gone So Badly Wrong And Because All Of Us Have Gone So Badly Wrong That We Are Under God's Anger And Wrath And One Day We Will Be Punished For Our Sin The Bible Tells Us That The Soul That Sins Shall Die And When The Bible Speaks About Death It Talks About Eternal Death It Makes Absolutely No Bones About It That When A It Is A Clear Message That Affects Every One Of Us But The Bible Also Goes On To Tell Us That God Did Not Give Up On This World He So Loved The World That He Gave His Only Son Jesus Christ Of Nazareth Was Born Into This World He Was The Son Of God God Came

[32 : 51] Into This World As A Baby In The Womb Of Mary And Was Born Into This World So That One Day He Would Give His Life On The Cross As The Sacrifice For Our Sin To Take The Punishment The Hell That We Deserved The Story Of Goes Goes On That He Rose Again You Think This Is Strange Paul Thought It Was Strange As Well Paul Started Off Completely He Had No Time For This Story At All He Thought He Could Please God By His Own Efforts By Being The Best He Could He Was Wrong Maybe You're The Same Maybe You Think You Can Please God By Your Own efforts You Can't Just Like The Apostle Paul You Have To Come To That Point You Have

To You Have To Discover The Truth That You Can't Redeem Yourself No Amount Of Goodness Or Attempted Goodness Can Ever Bring You Back To God If You're Going To Be Saved It Has To Be By God Himself And That's What God Has Done He's Reached Out And He's Picked Us Up Through Jesus Christ Who Has Died For Us He's Taken Our Place He Became Our Substitute He Died The Death That We Deserved On The Cross And Rose Again On The Third Day To Prove That His Death Was Indeed The Punishment For Our Sin And Tonight As 2000 Years Ago What I'm Saying Here Is Exactly The Same As What The Apostle Paul Said To The People In Phrygia And Galatia And

Macedonia And Philippi And Athens Is That By Faith In Jesus If You Come To Faith In Jesus If You Come To Ask Him To Redeem You And To Forgive Your Sin That You Are Don't Tell Me You Are Not Conscious Of Sin We're All Conscious Of Sin You May Have Tried To Suppress It Or Run From It Or Tell Yourself That It's Not That Important And Not That Serious And Yet That Voice Of God Keeps On Nagging In Your Soul Doesn't It You Think A year From Now And I'll Have Sorted This Out And I'll Have Proved To My No It Won't God The Voice Of God Keeps On Talking To You Doesn't It And Reminding You That

You'll Never Find What You're Looking For Until you find Christ. Because Christ alone is the way to God.

Do you want it tonight? Do you want to be truly washed from all the guilt and the filthiness and the shame? I can't do it. His elders can't do it.

[36 : 17] Your wife who's a Christian can't do it. Your husband who's a Christian can't do it. God can. And he promises. He promises.

You have tonight the word of God. Jesus says, ask and you shall receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.

Ask the Lord. Come to him. Have the faith to come on your own to him. No one else can come with you. No one else can help you in this. You've got to come to the Lord and you've got to ask the Lord to turn your life around and to restore you to himself.

To open up your heart. To shine his light into your life. To set you free from a life of guilt and shame. that's what the gospel is all about. That's what the apostle Paul found. That's what he discovered on the road to Damascus. And his life was never the same again.

[37 : 22] So much so that he just wanted to spend the rest of his life telling everyone he could possibly get a hold of the great news that Jesus had come into the world to save those who were lost.

So there you go. There's the gospel. What are you going to do with it? Come and ask the Lord to transform your life only he can but he will if you come.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven we pray now that you will that you will truly empower your word to each one of us.

We pray that we will not only we will not only be inspired by what we've just read and what we've been thinking about. That you will make us bold and confident in our lives as Christians.

But Lord we pray that if there's anyone here tonight who isn't yet a Christian who isn't yet truly converted we pray Lord that what we've been thinking about this evening will be the means whereby they come and where they put their trust finally once for all in the Jesus who alone can save us and redeem us to God.

[38 : 57] Our Father then we pray that you will that you will not leave us to ourselves. Please keep us from avoiding the greatest question in the world and Lord confront us with it tonight and do not let us go until we come finally to Jesus Christ in his name.

Amen. Amen.