

Persecutor Turned Preacher and Two Converts

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[0 : 00] We'll begin our worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 29 from the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 29, and we're singing verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 29 from the Scottish Psalter, and we sing verses 1 to 5. Give ye unto the Lord, ye sons, that of the mighty be, all strength and glory to the Lord with cheerfulness give ye.

And to the Lord the glory give that to his name is due, and in the beauty of holiness unto Jehovah bow. The Lord's voice on the waters is the God of majesty.

Doth thunder, and on multitudes of waters sitteth he. A powerful voice it is that comes out from the Lord most high. The voice of that great Lord is full of glorious majesty.

The voice of the Eternal doth asunder cedars tear. Ye God the Lord doth cedars break that Lebanon doth bear. Psalm 29, verses 1 to 5.

[1 : 10] Give ye unto the Lord, ye sons. Give ye unto the Lord, ye sons, that of the mighty be, All strength and glory to the Lord with cheerfulness give ye.

All strength and glory to the Lord with cheerfulness give. All strength the Lord with glory give, That to his name is due.

And in the beauty of holiness And to Jehovah The Lord's white song The water's is The God of majesty Doth thunder and On multitudes Of water's city A powerful voice It is that comes

And from the Lord Most high The voice of that Great Lord is full Of glorious majesty The voice of the eternal God Asunder cedars' hair Yea God the Lord Does cedars' break That Lebanon Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen We're just going to bow in prayer I should have intimated that I'm sure you're all aware That there is The Holiday Twinnies There is a creche Upstairs in the hall And the Holiday Twinnies For children aged 3 to 7 Is in the hall as well Next door Just bow in prayer For a moment Lord our God We give thanks for Another day Where we can worship you Although it is a wild day today We're conscious that You are the God That rules over the calm And over the storms And so we pray That we may rest in you And to trust in you With all our heart We pray Lord That you will bless us At this holiday time As people are away We pray your blessing on them When they're on holiday And we pray for those Who are here on holiday May be catching up With friends and family We give thanks Lord For these times And we know that You are the God Who wants us to Come apart

[5 : 09] And to rest a while And these times Are good for us And so we pray That you'll bless us Bless each and every One of us today But above all That we may Look to you Trust in you Believe in you And come to know you As Lord and Saviour Watch over us Then we pray And keep us Ever looking to yourself And forgive us Our sin In Jesus name We ask it Amen And just a We word to The young folk Just as you know The holidays are on Just now And I don't know Whether it was In all the schools But just before The holidays Joshua Got a report A report card Or a Report sheet As to how he was doing And it got me Thinking back Myself to these Awful times When you used to get A report card And I was I suppose

The teachers You always feel that They have all the power And they tell Your parents How you're doing In your reading In your writing In your maths And you know When you get into secondary How you're doing Whether it's physics Or chemistry Or all the different subjects How you're doing And then at the end They kind of Tell what they think Of how you're doing Or what you should be doing And I remember one year I was about ten at the time And the report was not good And there was nothing about it That was good And I was wishing That someone would Pinch my school bag Because I didn't want To go home With a report Or that That I could some way Lose my bag In fact I actually remember On the way home Taking the report out And holding it Hoping the wind Would blow it away But it didn't And My parents

Weren't best pleased Particularly my mum Was always Trying to push me And I was I actually Wasn't very good At that sort of thing It's funny I met Someone For a wee while Way back in the

day I was teaching For a while And I met somebody Very well known In this town Who said to me Hey I've got a bone To pick with you He said I was clearing out stuff And I found An old report card You gave me And you put in it Could be doing much better But too interested In what other people Are doing And I Well I said It must have been through If I wrote that You can ask me afterwards Who it is I don't want to say Just now But the thing is We could all Make out reports I would hate If you were to make A report On my sermon today If you started Making a report About your mums Your dads Your brothers Your sisters How would you do A report about yourself But you know In a sense

God Is doing a report On us as well Because he's taking Note of everything Not only that we do And everything we say But even everything That we think And you know You say to yourself Oh my word Because the bible Tells us That there's going to Come a day When we When we've all Got to go Before the lord And we're told We have to give An account To explain What we've done In this world Whether good or bad And that's why Jesus has come He's come into the world To make our report Good Because do you know What he does When we Trust Jesus Believe in him Love him Obey him Follow him He wipes away Everything bad From our report And he stands In our place And it's the most Wonderful thing And that's why It's so important That we ask Jesus To come into our heart And into our life And I know some of you Have done that I would pray that All of you Do that So that you will know The wonderful cleaning Of what Jesus Does for us We're going to say The lord's prayer Our father Which art in heaven Hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come Thy will be done On earth As it is in heaven Give us this day Our daily bread And forgive us Our debts As we forgive Our debtors And lead us Not into temptation But deliver us From evil For thine is the kingdom The power And the glory Forever Amen We're going to sing Again now From the second psalm Psalm number two And this is in Sing Psalms Verses six to the end Psalm two From verse six To the end The lord has made it

[10:15] Known to them My chosen king I have installed On Zion My own holy hill He is the one Whom I have called The king then Solemnly declares I will proclaim The lord's decree Today your father I become You are my son He said to me Ask me And for your heritage I'll give you nations Near and far You'll break them With an iron rod And smash them Like a potter's jar Now therefore Kings Through wisdom find You judges of the earth Give ear With reverence Come and serve the lord Bow down with joy And trembling fear Pay homage To the royal son Lest you in wrath A side are thrust For swiftly can his anger blaze Blessed are all Who in him trust Psalm two From six to the end And sing psalms The lord has made it Known to them The lord has made it

Known to them My chosen king I have installed On Zion My own holy hill He is the one Whom I have called The king then solemnly declares I will proclaim The lord's decree Today your father I've become You are my son He said to me Ask me

Ask me And for your heritage I'll give you nations Near and far You'll break them with an iron rod And smash them like A potter's jar Now therefore Kings True wisdom Find You judges Of the earth Give ear With reverence With reverence Come and serve the lord Bow down with joy And trembling fear

Pay homage to the royal son To the royal son Blessed you in wrath As I do For swiftly can his anger blaze Blessed are all Blessed are all Who in him trust Let us again bow in prayer Lord as we come before you The mighty and glorious God We pray that we will come with a sense of Through reverence and godly fear We are in the presence of the almighty The creator of heaven and earth The one with whom we have to do The one that one day we all have to give an account of What we have done here whether good or bad We pray that you will help us as we worship you today We pray that you will help us in all that we are about throughout the week We give thanks that we are able to depend upon you And we pray for a growing sense of trust in you Because so often we do lean on our own understanding Rather than trusting you So we pray that you will grant us the faith every day to live by faith So often we are wrapped up in ourselves And we forget that so often there is a bigger picture Help us Lord to have visionary eyes That may see beyond ourselves And to understand so often Lord That when you work You work often through us In ways that we don't understand So grant us patience in the face of your providence And grant us faith as we journey At every step We pray Lord that you will bless us all here today

[15:36] With all our different needs We ask Lord that you will keep us safe And that you will bless us That you will bless us in our homes And bless us in our families Lord we pray for all those who are unwell Just now we are so conscious That there are so many who are in need And we ask your

blessing upon them We pray for healing And we pray for help We pray for strength and for grace And we realise that when our world changes So often with illness That it has a huge impact upon everybody And so we ask that your grace will be sufficient We give thanks for the promise of sufficiency of grace And we pray that that might be laid upon And that your people will all be blessed We pray your blessing of those who mourn And whose hearts are heavy and sore And we are conscious Lord that death Death changes everything for our family And even although the days may have moved on In many ways

Family does not move on There is a remaining settled sore And so we pray that you will Be with every broken heart today And everybody who is feeling the pain and the sorrow And the grief that comes Through the loss of loved ones Lord we pray for us In all the different situations we confront In every relationship that we are in Whether these are in family Or whether they are church relationships Or work relationships Or community relationships And whatever it is Lord We pray to help us And to bless us And to guide us And to uphold us Help us to be good witnesses In a world where We have always got to remember That we are as your word says Living epistles Read by people And we pray that Our witness might be a good one And forgive us Lord For when we let you down So often by what we say And what we do And we forget a watching world That are taking note And often assessing

And making a judgement As to who Christ is By the way we live And so we pray that we might Live worthy of the high calling To which we have been called We pray that you will bless This congregation And we ask that you will be with James and with Donna We pray that everything will have gone well And that as she has returned home And that she will regain strength again We pray to be with her And we pray that Lord That you will be with James As he approaches the final time Of his ministry here And we realise what a huge loss It is going to be for us So we pray that you will sustain him And bless him And that he will know the power Of your spirit ministering in him In these days We pray for Calamurdo and Joan As they are awake just now And we ask your blessing upon them And we pray for everybody Who works here in this congregation So much is done So much is done Often that isn't Maybe recognised and realised

By so many But there are so many things that are done But nothing is hidden from your eye And you take note of every single thing That is done in your name And we know Lord That each thing that is done by faith In your name will receive its own reward And so we pray to encourage your people And be with them In a day where there is so much to discourage us We live in a day where there is a growing oppression Towards the cause of Christ We pray Lord That you will overturn every attempt that is made With regard to the legislation for this conversion therapy And that people will be brought to realise That it's an encroachment really upon the freedoms of the Gospel O Lord our God We pray for liberty for our nation Gospel liberty Gospel freedoms Maybe we have taken all these blessings for granted for too long And we pray then that you will keep us Always having this freedom

Gospel freedoms We pray then for our politicians Whether they are in Westminster or in Holyrood We ask Lord that you will guide them from on high Not according to their own earthly wisdom But that even despite themselves Despite maybe their ignorance of the truth Or their opposition to the truth That you will still influence them Because the King's heart is in the hand of the Lord And he is able to turn it whichever way he will We pray for our royal family And ask your blessing upon them at this time Where there is illness And we pray for healing We pray your blessing upon our local council Our council and our councillors We ask to bless them And we pray that you will be with all Who are places of responsibility in our land And grant them wisdom That we may indeed be able to enjoy Gospel freedoms and gospel blessings We pray your blessing upon Muriel

[20 : 45] And we give thanks Lord for her coming home And to grant her safety and health and strength We pray your blessing upon all who serve you In different countries And ask Lord that you will encourage them Maybe through difficult and dark times And pray that you will sustain them and keep them Particularly when the evil one might be attacking them And telling them that their labour is completely in vain May they be encouraged in knowing that no labour in the Lord is in vain We ask then that you will be with us as we wait upon you And pray that you will take away from us our every sin In Jesus name we ask it, Amen Amen We are going to read two sections of God's word Both in the book of the Acts of the Apostle Chapter 9 first of all And we read verses 1 to 15 Acts 9 verses 1 to 15 And then in chapter 16

But Paul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord Went to the high priest And asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus So that if he found any belonging to the way Men or women He might bring them bound to Jerusalem Now as he went on his way He approached Damascus And suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him And falling to the ground He heard a voice saying to him Saul, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting But rise and enter the city And you will be told what you are to do The men who were travelling with him stood speechless Hearing the voice but seeing no one Saul rose from the ground And although his eyes were opened Although his eyes were opened He saw nothing So they led him by the hand And brought him into Damascus And for three days he was without sight And neither ate nor drank Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias The Lord said to him in a vision Ananias And he said, here I am Lord The Lord said to him Rise and go to the street called Straight And at the house of Judas Look for a man of Tarshish named Saul For behold he is praying And he has seen in a vision A man named Ananias Come in and lay his hand on him So that he might regain his sight But Ananias answered Lord I have heard from many about this man How much evil he has done To your saints of Jerusalem And here he has authority From the chief priests To bind all who call on your name But the Lord said to him Go for he is a chosen instrument of mine To carry my name Before the Gentiles and kings And the children of Israel Then we turn to chapter 16 And we read from verse 13 We find Paul and his missionary journeys here In verse 13 Or we can read in verse 12 And from there to Philippi Which is a leading city Of the district of Macedonia And a Roman colony Who remained in this city some days And on the Sabbath day We went outside the gate to the riverside Where we supposed There was a place of prayer

And we sat down And spoke to the women Who had come together One who heard us Was a woman named Lydia From the city of Thyatira A seller of purple goods Who was a worshipper of God The Lord opened her heart To pay attention To what was said by Paul And after she was baptized And her household as well She urged us saying If you have judged me To be faithful to the Lord Come to my house And stay And she prevailed upon us As we were going to the place of prayer We were met by a slave girl Who had a spirit of divination And brought her owners much gain By fortune telling She followed Paul and us Crying out These men are servants of the Most High God Who proclaim to you the way of salvation And this she kept doing for many days Paul having become greatly annoyed Turned and said to the spirit I command you In the name of Jesus Christ To come out of her

[25 : 28] And it came out at that very hour And when her owners saw That their hope of gain was gone They seized Paul and Silas And dragged them into the market place Before the rulers And when they had brought him To the magistrates He said These men are Jews And they are disturbing our city They advocate customs That are not lawful For us as Romans To accept our practice The crowd joined in attacking them And the magistrates Tore the garments off them And gave orders to beat them with rods And when they had inflicted many blows upon them They threw them into prison Ordering the jailer to keep them safely Having received his order He put them into the inner prison And fastened their feet in the stocks About midnight Paul and Silas were praying And singing hymns to God And the prisoners were listening to them And suddenly there was a great earthquake So that the foundation of the prison Was shaken

And immediately all the doors were opened And everyone's bonds were unfastened When the jailer woke And saw the prison doors were open He drew out a sword And was about to kill himself Supposing that the prisoners had escaped But Paul cried with a loud voice Do not harm yourself For we are all here And the jailer called for lights And rushed in And trembling with fear He fell down before Paul and Silas Then he brought them out and said Sir, what must I do to be saved? They said, believe in the Lord Jesus And you will be saved You and your household And they spoke the word of the Lord to him And all who were in the house Amen And may God bless to us These readings of his own holy word We are going to sing again now Sing Psalm Psalm 46a Psalm 46a Psalm 46a Page 59 God is our refuge and our strength Our ever-present aid And therefore though the earth gives way We will not be afraid Though mountains fall into the sea The waters foam and roar We will not fear Though mountains quake As waves engulf the shore A river flows A river flows whose streams delight The city of our God The holy place in which the Lord Most High Has his abode To the end of verse 7 Six stanzas of Psalm 46a God is our refuge and our strength

God is our refuge and our strength Our ever-present aid God is our refuge and our strength Our ever-present aid And therefore though the earth gives way And therefore though the earth gives way, we will not be afraid.

Though mountains fall into the sea, though waters fall and roar, we will not fear.

[29 : 05] Though mountains quake as waves in countless shores, a river flows to streams delight, the city of our God, the holy place in which the Lord most high has his abode.

God is within this holy place, the city will not yield.

For God will come at break of day to be her help and shield.

The nations are in disarray, the kingdoms disappear.

God speaks and at his mighty voice, the whole earth melts with fear.

[31 : 01] The Lord Almighty is with us to strengthen and sustain.

For Jacob's God our strong defence and fortress will remain.

Amen. Probably the greatest missionary that the church has ever known, who was once one of the worst persecutors.

And then to look at the conversion of two of those who were by this converted missionary, had come to faith through his ministry. Now as we know, there were few religious people who hated the Lord Jesus Christ, quite like the Apostle Paul or Saul of Tarshish as he was then.

And he was schooled in the ways of the Jewish religion. And he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

He was somebody who understood the law at levels that few people could understand.

[32 : 49] He had been taught by the best. And he was somebody who prided himself in his knowledge of the truth. But it just shows how blinded people can actually be.

And that's one of the things I would always, why it's so important that when we come to God's word, that we come with a prayer in our heart that the Lord will open our eyes to understand, to see.

And that we be prepared to change preconceived ideas, pre-held ideas, to have them moved.

Because sometimes we can have our own ideas and we're absolutely passionate and we hold to them.

And sometimes they're not quite in keeping with God's word. So that every time we come to God's word, we have to say to the Lord, Lord, make me ready to be changed. To change my thinking if that's necessary.

So that I will actually see and be, so that your word will have an impression and impact upon my heart and my life. Because you see, Saul was somebody who studied the word of God.

[33 : 58] But because he had pre-held ideas. Because the whole sort of the school of the Judean law, their understanding of who Christ was to be the Messiah when he came.

Christ didn't fit their picture. And so this was a major problem. So we've always got to guard against that. Well, that was Paul's or Saul's great problem.

Is that he had his own idea of who the Messiah was. Jesus didn't fit it. So in his eyes, Jesus was simply an imposter. And he couldn't believe that Jesus had the audacity to claim to come from God and to be God.

Now it's more than likely that Saul actually would have seen Jesus. I'm sure he was still alive. He would, Saul would have been alive in the time of Christ.

And it's quite possible that Saul actually heard Jesus. But he certainly was somebody who had been involved in the stoning of Stephen. They laid their coats.

[35 : 06] Those who were stoning had put them down. And Saul saw the face of Stephen shining. Where Stephen was given this glimpse into glory of.

And seeing Jesus standing there. And his face was shining. That didn't stop them stoning. And Saul saw all that. And he gave total assent to the stoning of Stephen.

And there seemed to have been a fire lit in Saul's heart. A fire of hatred against everybody who followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he was going to do his utmost to wipe this way that they called it. Of the Christian faith. To remove it altogether. And so when you look at Saul of Tarshish.

You see somebody and you'd say. That's as hard a person. As ever will come. To faith in Jesus Christ. You would write Saul off. And say impossible.

[36 : 08] Well. We shouldn't write anybody off. Because God's grace can go anywhere apart from hell.

God's grace is not in hell. God's grace is all over this world. There's this common grace. Which everybody receives. And we. There's so many of the benefits that we receive in life come to us. Of course. All that's good comes to us from God. But God's grace is full of surprises. And God works often in what we deem impossible.

Nothing is impossible with God. And right throughout the history of the church down to this day. The Lord is saving and bringing in people. That we might have written off.

That we would never believe could ever be Christians. So we should never ever put anybody outside in our own thinking. The grace of God. In fact it's incumbent upon us to be praying for people.

[37 : 10] To pray for. If you think of somebody and you say. Oh that person will never be a Christian. That's all the more reason. To start praying for them. That they might be awakened.

And that they might hear the gospel. And that they might come to faith. Well anyway here's Saul. Man on a mission. And he has the full backing of all the religious leaders. As he's making his way down.

To cause as much havoc as possible down. And he's heading to Damascus. And you know it's really sad when you see this. That these people the likes of Saul.

Is actually thinking he's doing God a service. He's doing this as a religious man. Thinking that he's helping God. And right to this very day. There are many people being put to death.

By religions. And they're doing it as a service to God. In their own thinking. And Jesus said that was going to happen.

[38 : 07] He said that Jesus warned. And he prophesied. That they're going to put you to death. And they think that they're doing God a service. When they put you to death.

It's an extraordinary thought. Well here's Saul. And he's about 150 miles. Down from Jerusalem. And then all of a sudden. This incredible blinding light.

As he describes later on. Brighter than the midday sun. And it shone down upon him. And it blinded him completely. And he couldn't see anything.

And he fell to the ground. And you know it's interesting. That this is always the impact. The effect. Of the glory. Of the Lord.

On anybody. When Jesus was here in this world. We know he was here in the human nature. And it was as all the glory that belonged to him.

[39 : 05] As the divine was eclipsed. And people just saw the man. But there were moments. When something of the glory.

Would come through. Like at the transfiguration. When they came to arrest Jesus. Who are you seeking? Jesus of Nazareth. I. He says. I am.

I am he. What happened? They all fell to the ground. They couldn't stand. Before the glory. That was revealed. Just for a moment. It was too great. Fell down. You see.

Ezekiel. When he's given that vision. He falls to the ground. You see it at the time. Of the dedication. Of the temple. In the time of Solomon. They couldn't stand.

In the presence. Of the glory of the Lord. You see John. In the book of Revelation. He falls as one dead. At the display. Of the glory of Jesus.

[40 : 00] This is the risen Jesus. And so. This is what happens to Saul. The Lord gives. A revelation of himself. To him. He falls down. Just. Just in a heap.

And that's the glory. Before. Whom we have all to appear. It is before the risen Jesus. That is where the judgment seat. Will take place.

Many people think of Jesus. Simply as the human Jesus. Well he still is the human Jesus. The human nature. He took. He has forever. He continues to have. But it is now.

In all the glory. That he has sworn. And it is this glory. That no human. Can stand before. And that's why. We're told in Philippians. That before him.

Every knee. Will bow. And every tongue. Will confess. That Jesus Christ. Is Lord. To the glory of God. The Father. No atheists.

[40 : 57] No agnostics. No mockers. No scoffers. No. No infidels. No infidels. On that day. All with one accord. Will acknowledge. That Christ. Is Lord.

It's a very very. Very solemn thought. Well we see here. That. Saul. Is absolutely. Overcome. By the.

The presence. And the power. And then this voice. Says. Saul. Why are you persecuting me? You see. Every blow. That is struck. Against the follower.

Of Christ. Is felt. By. By Jesus. Because he's head. Of the church. You know. When you get hit. And you're. In any way. Yes.

It is where you get hit. That hurts the most. But you feel. Your whole. Being feels it. Well the Lord. Is showing us here. That. Every blow. That is hit. Christian.

[41 : 52] Is felt. By him. As well. Now. There are so. Many things. That we could say. Here. But. Because we're going to. Move on.

Very quickly. But. Just that we see. Here. As. That. Saul. As he goes along. As he goes along. Two or three things. That.

That has happened here. Saul. Tells us. Later on. That he was. Apprehended. By Christ. Christ. Christ. He was on his way. To persecute Christians.

And all of a sudden. The one who was on his way. To arrest. Christians. Is arrested. By Christ. Christ. Stops him. In his tracks. He's apprehended. By Christ.

Wonder if. Anybody here. Can experience. Know something. Of that experience. Maybe your conversion. Is such. That you know. Of how you were going.

[42 : 47] In one direction. And then all of a sudden. You were stopped. You were stopped. In your tracks. And you knew. That a power. Greater than your own. Was working in you. That was the beginning of it.

Well that's how it was. With. With. With Saul. He was. He was. Arrest. And then. Side by side. With that. There was a.

There was this light. This divine illumination. This light shone. Now immediately. I don't believe.

That right away. That there was a. That immediately. Saul came to immediate faith.

In Jesus. But he was completely. Thrown. And the work had started. This. This light. That blinded in.

On him. It's extraordinary. How here's Saul. Who was thundering down. Into Damascus. With fire. Breathing fire. He's actually led. Blind.

[43 : 46] By other people. Into Damascus. Just shows what God can do. Just like that. But God is at work. In Saul. And he tells us again. Of this light.

That there was this divine. And. In a way. In a way. And I'm sure. I'm sure the Christians. In Damascus. When they heard the news. They're coming down. To create havoc. To put us to death. To take us to prison. To take us to prison. They'd be praying. Chief. Persecutor Saul. How are we going to be saved from him? And if they had looked.

At Saul. is divine illumination. As he says elsewhere, God commanded light to shine out of darkness and he has shone light into our hearts.

Just as at the very beginning when God said into the darkness, let there be light. So he continues to do so. Let there be light. And we need that light.

[44 : 45] Because you know, when that light comes from the Lord, all of a sudden things begin to make sense. You might be sitting in church week in, week out. And it's alright you come and it's great you come.

But there's a lot of things that just don't make sense. And you're saying, I wish I could just get the hold of this properly. I'm figuring out quite a bit of it, but I feel a lot just drifting by.

What you need is this light. This illuminating light. where your mind is opened up. Where everything begins to make perfect sense.

And you say, Lord, now I see. Yes, it's so clear. It's so obvious. Well, that's what happened with Saul. He had been in darkness.

A darkness that was satanic, but a darkness of the blindness of his own heart. A blindness, and I don't believe for one moment that Saul didn't have moments of doubt in his own mind.

[45 : 49] He had seen Stephen in his death. He had heard testimonies from other Christians. He was fighting. He was an angry man. Do you know, some of the most angry men and angry women are because there's so much that they're battling with within themselves.

Sometimes that anger spills out because they're angry at what's going on within themselves. They want to believe one thing, but there's something that's going against.

Well, anyway, this light came in. And the other thing that Paul tells us that God's grace was in abundance. That's another thing that's happened. God's grace.

And God's grace enables a person. It's like the final part of the jigsaw. So the most important part is where the will is broken, where we hand over to the Lord.

That's the hardest part. If you're today here and you're not a Christian, that's the hard part, isn't it? Giving up. Because we want to be in control. We want to go where we want to go.

[46 : 54] We want to do what we want to do. We want to say what we want. We want to be masters. There's a control freak. You hear the word? He's a control freak. She's a control freak.

We're all control freaks by nature. We want to be in charge of our lives. It's the hardest thing to give up. But we have to.

For Christ to be ruler and master. And Paul discovered that. He had to let go. He had to yield. And that's what God's grace enables us to do.

To give up the last thing that we want to give up. And so we find this. That this is a changed man. And he's a man now on a different mission.

He was on a man on a mission before. Going to have to race on because the time is going. We're just skipping on. And then we find by God's grace that Paul becomes, names changed to Paul, becomes his missionary.

[47 : 52] And a great New Testament missionary. He goes down into Philippi. And we find there in chapter 16 that on the Sabbath day, they make their way to the riverside where there's a group of women praying.

It would appear that in Philippi, there weren't enough. Apparently, you had to have 10 men, 10 Jews. You had to have a quorum of 10 to start a synagogue.

Well, it would look like there wasn't sufficient. There weren't 10, sort of what you would say, religious Jews there to start on. So there was this meeting by the riverside, a woman who had come together.

And Paul went there and he spoke to them and he shared the gospel. And amongst the women there, there was this lady, Lydia. And she was from this place, Thyatira.

And she was obviously doing very well. Thyatira apparently was known for its dyes, for dyeing, coloring different things. And she was a seller of purple, which was probably dyed in purple and probably doing very well.

[49 : 02] And it would appear that she was a very sincere and genuine woman, a religious woman, a woman who seemed to have kind of embraced the Jewish faith and was a sincere and genuine worshiper of God, but didn't have Christ.

It was all on an outward. And you know, there's a lot of people like that. There's a lot of religious people, even within the Christian church. But everything is outward.

And they believe in God and they come to worship God and their worship is sincere. But you know, it's not there.

It's not there yet. It's not hard. They've got to get beyond. Well, that Lord's Day morning, that's what happened with Lydia. She was a good woman, a sincere woman, a genuine woman, a woman who worshipped God and served God in her own way, but her heart hadn't been changed.

Her heart hadn't been touched. But that morning, it tells us very simply, the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

[50 : 16] How different. No blinding light. No voice from heaven. It couldn't have been more different. She's just sitting there and she's listening and as Paul speaks, the Lord opens her heart to receive the truth and to accept Jesus.

You know, maybe that's how it is for you. Maybe as you look back over your life, you say, I can't follow Paul. No idea about that. That's dramatic. In fact, it's so low key in my life, sometimes I don't, I can't tell you.

Can't tell you any day or hour or can't even tell you what month. All I know is I was once blind, but I now see and I love the Lord.

There was a day my worship was purely outward. Now it's inward. It's in my heart. And I really, I really love coming to worship the Lord. See, that's a change within.

And that's what happened to Lydia. And we see the result of that change in her heart because she opens up her home to Paul and she says, come on, come to my house.

[51 : 28] And you know, that's what happens when the Lord works in a person's heart. He opens more than the heart. He opens them, them out to serve, to work, to, here I am Lord, use me.

Now we're just skipping through because the time is going. And then we come and again, they're all familiar stories but it's just showing the difference of how God works with different people.

And we're familiar now with the story here. Paul is still in Philippi and every day as Paul and Silas are going about, there's this young woman who's a fortune teller and she's crying after them, these men are the servants of the Most High God.

And at the end, Paul gets fed up of her and he commands the evil spirit to come out of her. The evil spirit comes out. But the problem for the men who owned this girl or not who owned or exploiting her was that the money, the social money, she was telling people's fortunes for money stopped. Income was gone. So they were incensed and they dragged Paul and Silas to the rulers and said, look, these men, and they came in using the racist stuff. These men are Jews.

[52 : 43] We're Romans. And they've come in and they've started teaching us things that are not lawful. Now the thing is, Paul and Silas were actually Roman citizens and had all the protection that that brought.

And they couldn't, what happened to them couldn't have happened, wouldn't have been allowed to happen had the authorities known. That's why the authorities afterwards are petrified when they discover that Paul and Silas are Roman citizens.

But anyway, without any inquiries, whatever, they get them and they give them a horrendous flogging. And they put them to the prisoner and said, put these men into the maximum security wing of the prison.

That's what he does into the inner prison and sticks their feet into the stocks. And you know, it's wonderful the attitude of Paul and Silas. when you put yourself in their situation, there you are and your feet clumped in these awful things.

Your back is pouring blood where you've been beaten horrendously and your limbs are sore, everything is aching. I'm sure if it was me, I'd be saying, Lord, what on earth?

[53 : 58] Why, Lord? I'm only trying to serve you. I came here because I believe this is where you were pointing me to. And that's exactly where the Lord was pointing him to, pointing Paul to.

But you see, we always only see what's happening to ourselves right in front of us. We don't see the big picture. You see, there was somebody in that prison that needed to be converted.

And so Paul and Silas have to get into that prison to be used by the Lord for that conversion. So we've always got to remember the picture is always bigger than ourselves. And it's a lesson that we have to learn over and over again.

So there, in the prison, we find that Paul and Silas, they're actually praising God. They're praying and praising God. And it tells us that the prisoners heard them.

What a testimony. What a testimony. And we read, of course, of how the earthquake came, of how the prison doors were flung open and everything. And a prison officer, the jailer, was going to kill himself because he knew the punishment.

[55 : 10] If you were a prison officer and a prisoner escaped, you were put to death. That was the rules. So he knew prison doors opened, they'll all be away, I'm a dead man walking.

But there was more than that. The man was utterly disturbed because Paul cried out and he says, don't do any harm to yourself. We're all here. You know, this shouldn't happen.

And the man all of a sudden, you've got to remember that this man here would be one of the most brutal guys that you could meet. He'd be a hard man with no feeling. He was used to every kind of torture, every kind of pain.

He afflicted people with no thought or care. but all of a sudden he's a trembling wreck because God has come into the picture. And this man's conscience all of a sudden is troubled.

You know, God gave us a conscience and a sensitive conscience is a wonderful thing. Far too often consciences, our conscience can become deadened so that so many people walking around their conscience is dead.

[56 : 23] all of a sudden this man's conscience is troubled. And all of a sudden everything is thrown upside down. And he realizes I'm in a terrible situation.

Here's this man who didn't fear God or man. All of a sudden he fears God in a way that he didn't know was possible. And he cries out what must I do to be saved? And we know very simply the answer.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. What does that mean? It means believe in your believe in your mind.

Believe everything that the word of God tells you about Jesus. That's important. You believe everything the word of God tells you. That's not enough.

It's important to have it in your mind but it needs to go deeper. You need to believe in your heart. That's where you need the Lord and you have to say to the Lord Lord help me to believe.

[57 : 23] I want to believe. I believe there might be people here today and that's exactly where you are and you say I want to believe but I'm stuck. When you ask the Lord Lord right now open my heart to believe in you and break my will in order to receive you.

And you know if you really pray with all your heart that's what you really want the Lord will answer your prayer. That's the kind of prayer he will answer. And you ask the Lord that he will come in and once the Lord comes in he will do you good.

And you might be saying to yourself think of all the things I've done in life and the kind of person I am and will the Lord take me? Of course he will. We've just looked at three people they couldn't be more different.

the ferocious persecutor the nice religious woman and the hard-hearted jailer all their experiences are different but they all found faith they all came to believe in Jesus.

So what about you? Well today is another opportunity for you to believe. Let's pray. Lord we give thanks for how varied the ways of experiences are in people and yet at the end of the day there is only one way where we come to believe and to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

[58 : 59] And so we pray Lord that you will open any eyes that so far have not seen open any ears that so far have not heard so that they will see and hear and believe.

We pray that you will bless us. Take us home safely. Watch over us and keep us and guide us day by day. Forgive us our every sin in Jesus name. Amen. We're going to conclude singings from Psalm 146 in the Scottish Psalter from verse 7 to the end.

Psalm 146 from verse 7 to the end. Who righteous judgment executes for those oppressed that be? Who to the hungry giveth food? God sets the prisoners free. The Lord hath given the blind their sight, the bowed down doth raise. The Lord doth dearly love all those that walk in upright ways. The stranger shield, the widow's stay, the orphan's help is he, but yet by him the wicked's way turned upside down shall be. The Lord shall reign forevermore.

[60 : 15] Thy God, O Zion, he reigns to all generations. Praise to the Lord give ye. Psalm 146 from verse 7 to the end. Who righteous judgment executes.

for those oppressed that be, who do the hungry giveth food, God sets the prisoners free.

The Lord doth give the blind their sight, the pardon of the praise, the Lord doth dearly love all those that walk in upright ways.

The strangers shield, the widows save, the or open hell is he, but yet by him the way is way, turned up, side down shall be.

The Lord shall reign forever more like God who died on thee.

[62 : 30] Praise to all generations, praise to the Lord to the Lord give peace.

I'll go to this door on my right. Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen. véx amen.

for all people in Thank you.