

Through Many Tribulations(5) - Persecution

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[0 : 00] And chapter 3, we're going to look this evening particularly at the passage that deals there with the persecutions that Paul is referring to, but especially with verse 12.

We can read from verse 10, but we're going to focus on verse 12. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra.

Which persecutions I endured, yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Let me just read to you from a book by a man called Armando Valadares.

He was taken prisoner, sent to prison in 1960 in Cuba, in one of Castro's horrendous jails. And he was there until 1982 when he was released.

[1 : 16] And he was subsequently appointed by the late President Ronald Reagan as an ambassador to the United Nations in regard to human rights. This is what he wrote in a book called Against All Hope, which he wrote in relation to that horrendous experience of that prison.

And if you read that book, some of the details in it are utterly harrowing to read. He says, I was utterly exhausted.

The lack of sleep and the tension were seriously affecting me. I sought God then. My conversations with him brought me a spiritual strength that gave me new energy.

I never asked him to get me out of there. I didn't think that God should be used for that kind of request. I only asked that he allow me to resist, that he give me the faith and spiritual strength to bear up under these conditions without sickening with hatred.

I only prayed for him to accompany me. And his presence, which I felt, made my faith an indestructible shield. A man with faith in Christ, experiencing extreme persecution.

[2 : 35] That obviously is extreme, that kind of persecution. But it's not at all rare, even in today's world. And the agencies that we mention in prayer, like the Open Doors and Barnabas Fund and Steadfast Global, actually bring account to us, from what they set before you, of that kind of persecution still being carried out in this world.

Not just against Christians, but nevertheless, it is certainly, in many cases, against Christians for what they're standing for. And that focus is brought before us for prayer, of course, from these agencies.

And, of course, we condemn, as Christians, we condemn all persecution against whoever. It doesn't matter whether it's against Christians or other religions or no religions at all.

Persecution is always wrong. And persecution is always denounced in Scripture as something that is to be abhorred. It has no place in the Christian life, and it should have no place, indeed, in human life either.

But the focus for our attention this evening is very much on Christian persecution, the persecution of Christians, that is. And that, of course, has been, as you know, more in the news recently than it has been for some time.

[3 : 59] There were some complaints that all too little in our news bulletins was heard about the persecution of Christians, whereas other persecutions were frequently reported.

But in any case, with regard to what happened in Sri Lanka, the horror that happened there, and also the release of Asia Bibi, or Asia Bibi, had spent all these years in jail and was subsequently released, and is now, we believe, in Canada.

The news items focused on these and brought to our notice the ongoing persecution of Christians in that regard. Two things I want to look at from this verse, really, tonight.

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. First point to make is that for faithful Christians, persecution is inevitable.

For faithful Christians, persecution is inevitable. And you can see from that that it belongs to that series of studies, that is within that general title we've given these studies, Through Many Tribulations.

[5 : 06] Persecution obviously fits into that. And wherever you have conversion and living for Christ, it always attracts opposition, it always attracts to some degree or other persecution.

This text states it very plainly, very matter of fact, doesn't it? It says all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

There's no deviation from that. Of course, when you say that, it doesn't mean that there isn't a range of persecutions that are carried out against Christians. I mentioned some there in the extreme, at the extreme end of persecution.

But persecution ranges from the mild right through to murder. Right through just from words said in passing to the likes of what we read there from the account of the prisoner in Valdares in Cuba.

And you'll find that hostility, whether it's a mild or the extreme end, is nevertheless directed against Christians for what they stand for.

[6 : 18] It is from maybe hostile governments, but it can also be from individuals within individual homes. It's not less than persecution when somebody is denigrated for Christ, for their Christian faith, for their Christian stand, for their Christian witness, even if it is by a member of their own family.

And that takes place in our own country, and in our own island indeed. And it's still persecution, wherever anybody for their Christian faith, though not necessarily imprisoned, though not necessarily violently assaulted, nevertheless verbally, mentally, different ways.

We can know something of persecution when we stand for Christ. And that's why I'm using in the first point here, faithful Christians, for faithful Christians, persecution of one level or another is inevitable.

That's what the text really says. All who desire to live a godly life, a faithful life, a life that's committed to Christ, will suffer persecution.

So there are two points to make under that. Firstly, this persecution reveals the persecution that we experience as Christians. And if you're experiencing it, even within the confines of your own life, to whatever extent, it reveals a fundamental contrast between the life that a Christian lives and every other form of life or every other form of human behavior.

[7 : 55] It reveals a fundamental contrast. What Paul is saying here is that Timothy was very familiar, indeed had followed his teaching and his conduct, his aim in life, his faith, his patience, and also his persecutions that happened to him in the places that he's mentioned there, which persecutions I endured.

Because what comes across there and frequently in Scripture is that the Christian life is at odds with all other ideologies and religions and lack of religions and unbelief.

Whatever it is that's in contrast to the Christian faith and to living faithfully for Christ is going to actually, in some way or other, be in contrast to the life you live and sometimes and frequently in conflict with it as well.

In fact, if you remember Jesus himself, when he prayed for the disciples in the upper room in John chapter 17 and verses 14 to 16, they really pinned down this contrast for us where he says to the Father as he prays for his disciples, he says there in verse 14, I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world just as I am not of the world.

[9 : 28] And so on. Jesus conscious of the fact that his disciples were going to be living in the world, were going to be surrounded by the world, by the culture of the world, by the opposition of the world, praised to the Father, not that they would be taken out of the world but kept from the evil one, kept from the powers that would seek to get at them, would seek to undermine and to bring disillusionment to them and would seek to overthrow their work for Christ.

They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. Therefore the world hates them. The world does not fall into line with what they are living for.

And you find that that's the very nature of the Christian faith. The opposition that Christians face, the opposition you face yourself as a Christian, it's due to the very fact that your Christian faith, the Christian salvation, is so radically different to anything around it.

It's the nature of that faith itself that draws opposition to it. Whether that opposition is political or personal, that nature of the Christian faith lies at the heart of why there is such a thing as persecution or fundamental contrast between that and the world around it.

Think, for example, of how you see in the Bible itself. Herod at the time of Christ's birth carrying out that brutal persecution, murdering all of these infants.

[11 : 02] Why? Because he heard that this Savior, this Christ, had been born into the world. And that was a threat to him as he saw it, as we'll see in a moment. Think of how the Roman Empire persecuted, came to persecute Christians during the time of the apostles and in the immediate aftermath of that and for generations after that.

Because it was all too easy to blame the decline, whatever decline it would be in the Roman Empire, blame it on the Christians. persecute the Christians, take it out on the Christians.

Why is there persecution of Christians today in the likes of North Korea and other places? Because the faith that these Christians live by is at odds with and in contrast to that world and is seen by them as a threat to their existence and to their way of life.

And it's the same when you come to think of opposition personally. It doesn't have to be from governments, from those in authority. You can have it, as we say, on a very personal level, on a very individual level.

Think again of Jesus in John 15, this time saying, at verse 18, you remember there, he's saying, about the disciples as well, to them for their teaching before they go out into the world.

[12 : 20] At verse 18, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master.

If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they have kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

And that is Jesus saying that this is part and partial of the Christian's life in this world. It is through many tribulations, as we saw to begin with, that we enter into the kingdom of God.

These tribulations continue at one level or another. Tribulation in your Christian life, by no means, is an indication that God has left you, that God is no longer interested in you.

[13 : 22] It is the very opposite. What he is saying is tribulation is part and partial of that great contrast between you as a Christian and the world around you. That is Jesus' reminder, as we said, the disciples there.

And you can see that coming through very often in some of the poetry that you find in the course of history. there is a poem by William Ernest Henley called Invictus, which means inviolable or unconquerable.

And in that, you can see these verses I am going to read how the spirit of the world and the spirit of the world towards God and towards God's people really comes across so strongly because these verses set out for us the idea that this is really an unconquerable soul that I possess and I am in charge of it and it does not matter what the likes of a Bible would tell me this is what I am going to insist upon.

This is how he wrote, Out of the night that covers me black as the pit from pole to pole I thank whatever God's may be for my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeonings of chance my head is bloody but unbowed.

[14 : 45] It matters not how straight the gate how charged with punishments the scroll. That's a reference to the Bible of course. Straight gate the threatenings of God's law.

It matters not how straight the gate how charged with punishments the scroll. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain.

of my soul. That is the rebellious proud resistant human heart to the overtures to the appeals of the gospel to the demands of God's law.

I am the captain of my soul. I am the master of my fate. And it's from that and from that sort of principle that persecution opposition resistance or whatever kind comes to break out against Christians.

because Christ is seen and the claims of Christ are seen as a threat. And you know that yourself from your own experience. You don't have to go further than the way that the gospel and the message of the gospel and the claim of Christ in the gospel is set out for us and comes to meet us inwardly in our souls and our mind and our conscience.

[15 : 57] That's why I said not that I was conscious of in prayer of connection necessarily with this but why it's important that we pray to God to keep us faithful to his word.

Because if we just bring his word and change his word and bring it into conformity to the culture of the age to what the world is saying to what the world demands to what your own heart demands that's not going to be much good in terms of hitting your conscience.

It's not really going to tell you much about needing to change your life inwardly or in any other way. It's just live as you are. Make the best of it as you are. But when God's word really touches your heart you know then that Christ is a threat to your own perceived liberty.

That Christ is a threat to your own preferences your own choices your own chosen relationships your own aspirations the way that you want to live your life.

That's what brings up this opposition that's what shows you the radical contrast between what is in Christianity what is in Christ what is in the gospel what is in a Christian life and the world around it and the opposite of that.

[17 : 19] That's the first thing it reveals a fundamental contrast where Paul says all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted but secondly faithful Christians for them persecution is inevitable because it's part of a greater conflict it's not just revealing fundamental contrast but it's part of a greater conflict because the Bible tells us we're actually part of a cosmic conflict all we see about it all we see of it is a tiny little slice in our own personal lives or in the world that we live but the Bible is adamant and the Bible is clear that the way in which a Christian is engaged for the Lord against certain powers and forces that are lined up against them is part of a much greater warfare a much greater conflict a conflict indeed that extends throughout the cosmos because it brings in what Paul calls the principalities and powers led by the dark power of Satan himself we can never lose sight of that when we see opposition to what we are as Christians to what the

Christian faith is because it fits into this greater conflict between God and the forces of darkness remember Jesus Matthew chapter 4 Luke chapter 4 the account you have there of Christ's temptation in the wilderness Christ coming to know the power of Satan personally standing against him and seeking to bring him away from the path that he is on the path of obedience to the Father where he says ultimately all these kingdoms of the world that have been promised to you as Messiah I know he has not used these words but that is what is behind the words as you see from the answers of Jesus to him what is being offered basically is what is promised to the Messiah after the accomplishment of his work in this world through death and resurrection and ascension to glory that he will then be seated in glory and have dominion over the whole of the universe while Satan is saying all this will I give you if you fall down and worship me

Satan as we said before is an expert at the shortcuts and showing you the shortcut and he is behind much of the persecution that takes place against Christians in the world and you don't have to go outside of scripture for that the book of Acts as you know is an account of the advance of the church the advance of the gospel in the days of the apostles as they went out with the gospel into the gentler pagan world and in chapter 13 I'm just taking one example from others that you could find in the book of Acts as well you have the same sort of thing in the book of Nehemiah and so on in the Old Testament Acts 13 and verses 6 to 10 where you find Paul having reached the island of Cyprus they arrived at Salamis a town on the coast of Cyprus they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews and they had

John to assist them when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos they came on a certain magician a Jewish false prophet named Bar Jesus he was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus a man of intelligence who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God but Elemas that's another word for this Bar Jesus Elemas the magician or that is the meaning of his name opposed them seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith and then you notice how Paul dealt with that what he said to him Saul who was also called Paul filled with the Holy Spirit looked intently at him and said you son of the devil he's very blunt because he has to be blunt you son of the devil you enemy of all righteousness full of all deceit and villainy will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the

Lord he knows that there's an agency behind this man there's a dark power operating this man this man is a willing servant of the dark power of Satan himself and that's what's standing against the advance of the church in the book of Acts even if it's not specifically mentioned as in these passages you know that you can apply that to the other passages too and when you find Paul saying that whoever would a being as the devil and there are such beings as agents of the devil and there are such human beings as agents of the devil and that's why all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted we try for example as a Kirk session and as ministers Kenny and myself as we seek to advise people especially young in the faith even if they're not young in years when they come to ask to be admitted to the

[22 : 54] Lord's table and when they're granted that privilege very often will say to them well remember this further step is going to be noticed not just by your saviour but also by your opponent by your adversary who's going to stand in your way who's going to use various means open to him to try and thwart your progress to try and discomfort you to try and remove your assurance from you and so on you will suffer persecution as part of a greater conflict and you don't have to go further than the book of the revelation the last book of the bible what is it about you might say i have no idea what it's about it's a mysterious book to me well it's like that in many of the passages to ourselves who try to preach the gospel some of it's very difficult to understand and that's what makes it attractive to people who want to give you all kinds of weird and wonderful teachings from it that aren't true to the gospel but if you want to generalize it as much as we can you can say in summary that the book of the revelation is about this cosmic conflict between

Jesus Christ and his people and all the forces that are arranged against him and so the book of revelation is about it's about that cosmic war it's not a puzzle book it's not given us to mystify us it's given us to assure us it was written to Christians to assure them that even though they were facing such immense powers to persecute them at times to put them to death at times they were still on the winning side they were on the lamb's side and they would prevail and they would ultimately be with him in the presence of his throne that's God's message to you tonight that while indeed persecution is inevitable so too is victory so too is the winning through on the Lord's side and that's what we are assured of most of all in relation to difficulty and persecution and tribulation that's the first thing then faithful Christians for them persecution is inevitable let's move on secondly for faithful

Christians persecution is productive I'm going to run through this fairly quickly because the time is passing but there are four points that I want to make briefly in this for faithful Christians persecution is productive firstly because it's within God's plan remember 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 12 to 16 Peter is saying there don't be surprised my beloved brothers by the fiery trial which is about to test you he says don't be surprised about that don't think that that's something out of place don't think that it doesn't actually have a part in God's plan for you don't think that somehow God's taking you outside of his plan for a while and then he'll take you back into his plan where there isn't such a thing as a fiery trial for you that's not what he's saying he's saying don't be surprised it's within God's plan it's part of

God's purpose for you it's always been the case Genesis chapter 50 and Joseph's declaration to his brother he says you sought to do me harm by what you did to me by getting rid of me by wanting to put me to death by my eventual coming to Egypt but God meant it for good so as to preserve life what a wonderful insight Joseph had into the mind of God into the plan of God and what he says there he obviously saw his persecution by his brothers his bad treatment by others too as part of God's plan as within God's plan I don't know if you've seen any of those programs on television called the repair shop those of these programs some the ones that I have seen they're fascinating because the repair shop all these skilled people different crafts craftsmanship and then you find somebody coming along with something that's battered and broken very often their family heirlooms very valuable sometimes it's plates sometimes it's an old radio sometimes it's something else that needs to be attended to and these experts set about it then it shows at the end of the process how they've repaired them how they've got them back into working order and was really wonderful is just to see the face of those who've brought the object and when the cover is taken off it there's a gasp because it's just like new and it's back in working order the

Bible and it's saying to us in regard to our difficulties as Christians whatever you're going through tonight as a Christian whatever form of tribulation or even persecution it might be remember you can take it to the expert take it into his workshop put it into his hands because he knows it's already part of his plan for you he's designed it for you he's placed it there deliberately just as you find in Romans 8 28 for all things we know that all things work together for good to those who love God thankfully he didn't leave it at that to those who are called according to his purpose that's the key isn't it his purpose where even persecution of whatever form it is is already part of his plan that he's designed from all eternity for you tonight you may be suffering as a

[29 : 06] Christian you might be meeting with all kinds of opposition whether it's within your home in your workplace and wherever you go to spend time and recreation maybe it's even in school it doesn't matter principle is still the same if you are desired to live a godly life you will be persecuted you will be facing opposition of all kinds but it's within God's plan it's part of what he's designed for you not outside it secondly it's connected with God's promises you know there are thousands somebody has calculated there are actually over 7000 promises in the bible directed towards Christians towards their assurance towards their comfort their guidance and so on and let me just pick up one or two in regard to persecutions I'm 34 many many many are the afflictions of the righteous but yet at length

God delivers him from them many are the afflictions of the righteous many kinds of affliction many in number as well as variety but yet God ultimately takes them out of them or her out of them that is God's intention that's God's purpose the afflictions work their own works Isaiah 43 again just that well-known passage it's well-known to you all I'm sure I find it always a wonderful passage to read through where Isaiah 43 assures the people of God of how God looks after them even going through the waters and in the fire when you pass through the waters I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you when you walk through fire you will not be burned and the fire shall not consume you why for I am the Lord your God fear not for I have redeemed you I am he who created you who formed you who made you for myself where is there a greater source of assurance even in the scriptures themselves than that fear not says

God for this is who I am and this is what I have done as Jesus came walking over the water in John chapter 6 what did he say to the disciples who were terrified don't be afraid it is I myself and you know the mark the fingerprint of God for his people is in all their sufferings because they're within his plan they bear his fingerprint and you can say though sometimes it's very difficult to say that we know that but you can still say of them that God is speaking to you through them and his presence especially is assuring you don't be afraid I myself am here and thirdly it's a unifier of God's people because this persecution this persecution that's productive it's within God's plan it's connected to God's promises it's a unifier of

God's people when you go to the passages in the New Testament Romans 12 1st Corinthians 12 you'll find the imagery there of the body of God's people as a spiritual body different parts but each part relating to the other when one part suffers the other suffer with it when one part rejoices the other parts rejoice with it just like in your body there's such a thing as referred pain sometimes you might have something that's gone wrong with you physically but maybe the pain isn't actually felt at that exact spot it's maybe transmitted through the nervous system to something else maybe it's a pain in your shoulder nevertheless it might be related to something else in your abdomen it's called referred pain a pain that's felt somewhere else other than where the problem actually is well the Lord's people as a spiritual body there's always referred pain because whenever we have a

Christian that's undergoing troubles or difficulties more than ourselves that pains us too the pain is referred to us that's why it's called a body we're not isolated from each other we're there to support each other and you know there ought not to be a better support network in existence than the body of Christ the people of God to look out for each other to look after each other remember Jonathan and David the wonderful pact and relationship between them one time David out in the wilderness pursued by Saul for his life what did Jonathan do he went out to David took a great risk knowing his father could possibly have killed him too or likely have killed him too if he knew that he was helping David he went out for Samuel 23 verse 16 the

[34 : 31] Bible tells us he strengthened David's hand in God what fabulous words what words to describe the bond between the Christians between Christian people believing people he went out at the risk of his own life and he strengthened his brother David's hand in God that's what we live for isn't it not just for Christians elsewhere to support them through open doors or steadfast global wonderful that is we support each other locally in our own individual context because persecution difficulty trial is a unifier of God's people it should be it should draw us closer together to look after each other it's within God's plan it's connected to God's promises it's a unifier of God's people finally it's a setting for God's presence maybe that's the most remarkable thing of all and the most precious thing of all indeed it's a setting for

God's presence remember again back in the book of Genesis when you come to chapter 39 in the book of Genesis and how God's presence there is assured to Jacob when you find him sorry to Joseph when you find him in these different circumstances three times throughout chapter 39 of Genesis you read first of all when he arrived in Egypt and was taken into the house of Potiphar the Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man but then things changed because this man's wife tried to seduce Joseph and he resisted and she concocted a story that Joseph had tried to rape her and her husband believed it and so he ended up in prison Joseph ended up in prison but then you read but the Lord was with

Joseph and showed him steadfast love in the sight of the keeper of the prison and thirdly the keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him three times the Lord was with Joseph throughout difficulties and trials the one thing that's so crucial and that Christians desire to know more than anything else probably is the presence of the Lord that's what pained Job more than anything else that in all his sufferings he just could not find the Lord's presence the way he used to until God taught him and came back to reveal himself to him and in the most unlikely circumstances the Lord presents himself his presence to his people you know by now that I love the songs of Ellie Holcomb who's been through difficulties herself in her life and one of her songs it's called find you here and this is what she says this is how she writes and sings it's not the news that any of us hoped that we would hear she's talking about a trial of some kind in her life it's not the road we would have chosen no the only thing that we can see is darkness up ahead but you're asking us to lay out worry down and sing a song instead you say

I should come to you with everything I need you're asking me to thank you even when the pain is deep you promise that you'll come and meet us on the road ahead and no matter what the fear says you give me reason to be glad and I didn't know I'd find you here in the middle of my deepest fear but you are drawing near here in the middle of the lonely night here in the middle of the losing fight here in the middle of the deep regret here when the healing hasn't happened yet here in the middle of the desert place here in the middle when I cannot see your face here in the middle with your outstretched arms you see my pain the Lord's upholding of his people and his presence to his people because as Christians we face sufferings and here's one of the great points in union with Jesus it's not just that our suffering connects us to the suffering of

Jesus our suffering connects us with Jesus himself and with the presence of Jesus and if you need to know one thing in your life more than anything else whatever your circumstances are tonight it's that you know Christ himself with you in your life a Chinese pastor and you know that this is not from recent times but you know for yourselves that persecution of Christians is very much again in the news as far as China is concerned but this was a Chinese pastor who spent 23 years in prison and this is what he once said to Christians who were not facing persecution that's important Christians who were not facing persecution this is what he said to them I was pushed into a cell but you have to push yourself into one you have no time to know

[40 : 21] God he's talking to people who don't take the time to know God he was pushed into a cell by his persecutors he had no option and in that cell he got to know God better you he says have to push yourself into one you have no time to know God you need to build yourself a cell he doesn't mean that literally of course so you can do for yourself what persecution did for me simplify your life and know God that's the crux of it simplify your life do away with the complications and know God let's pray we thank you oh Lord for the charge that you have over our lives for the control that you have for the plan that you have for each and every one of us especially that for your people where your people from all eternity have been taken into your plan not only your great plan of salvation but your plan individually for their lives and we thank you for that in the way that the psalmist elsewhere could say that your thoughts of him were written in your book before he was ever formed oh Lord make us thankful for who you are for what you are for what you do for what you assure us you will yet do bless us now we pray and continue with us help us as we sing our final item of praise not only to remember our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the persecuted church of Christ but enable us Lord to sing with faith and dependence and thankfulness in regard to our relation with you ourselves hear us we pray for Jesus sake amen final singing is psalm 124 psalm 124 that's in the sing psalms version of psalm 124 tune is old 124 that's on page 170 now this is a psalm that was frequently sung we understand in

Scotland during the time of the covenanters and you know that the covenanters were persecuted by forces belonging to the king because of their resistance to the king's demands in regard to the gospel and the worship of God so even out on the hillsides and on the moors as they worshipped God this was a psalm that was extremely precious to them in the midst of their persecutions if the Lord of God the Lord had not been on our side let Israel say had not the Lord been near when foes attacked us filling us with fear and when the wrath against us reached its height alive we had been swallowed in their spite psalm 124 let's sing the whole psalm in conclusion if God the Lord had not been on our side let Israel sing how the Lord be near when woes attacked us filling us with fear and when their wrath against us reached its height alive we had been swallowed in their spite we would have been well up by the flood over our heads the taunted would have gone the waters would have carried us along but praise the Lord for he has set us free and has not left us to their cruelty we have his skin just as a captured bird out of the power that has been set free the spear is cut we are at liberty our help is in the name of

God the Lord who made the earth and heavens and his word I'll go to the main door this evening Lord we pray that you would bless to us the food we are about to receive of the fellowship we pray again that you bless Chriselle as she speaks to us of crossroads we pray that in our midst we may know your presence and your blessing and your spirit presiding over us and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore Amen