

26.10.25 am

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Date: 26 October 2025

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

- [0:00] Good to see a number of visitors today as well and especially those who are from the Scaldale camp. Hopefully you had some sleep over the weekend and won't have to catch up too much over the next hour.
- There's tea and coffee at the end of the service if you're able to stay behind please do so. I don't think we have notices on the screen today, don't know if they went forward. So I'll just give you off the top of my head a couple of things to note.
- First of all this evening the Gaelic service, the month of Gaelic service is on this evening at 6. It's the Reverend James McKeever who will be taking that. There will be a short time of fellowship after that as well for the English and those who are from the Gaelic as well who are able to stay.
- So from about quarter past seven probably onwards just a time of prayer and fellowship. In the course of this week things are fairly normal.
- It's all the usual go to the company, ladies Bible study, men's Bible study this week is that one Scott? Not this week but next week. Prayer meeting on Wednesday I'll be taking the prayer meeting myself God willing.
- [1:10] And the services next Sunday I'll take both these services God willing. Scott is in exam season so you can be praying for Scott and Gordon as they navigate through exams and essays.
- And Scott's through next week in Gerlach preaching so you can pray about that as well. One more notice and that's just in relation to ordination of Scott as an elder into the congregation here.
- And Duncan will give us the narrative for that please. Good morning everyone. So I read this notice last week and just to read it again formally in order to meet the relevant requirements.
- So at their meeting on the 15th of September the Kirk session agreed to propose that Mr Scott McLeod be appointed to the Office of Elder. It's normally expected that ministers in training if they're not already elders are ordained to the eldership during the training in order to give them first hand experience of the role.
- The election and ordination of office bearers requires both the approval of the Kirk session and of a majority of church members. One of the methods of election approved by the free church is that the Kirk session may propose certain names to the communicant membership for their approval and on securing the agreement of a majority to proceed to the ordination.
- [2:33] The Kirk session is therefore appointed to the congregational meeting to take place this Wednesday 29th October 2025 at 7.30pm. So that's at the prayer meeting this Wednesday when the name of Mr Scott McLeod will be proposed to the communicant members for election and ordination to the Office of the Eldership.
- So I encourage everyone, both members and adherents, to come to the prayer meeting on Wednesday evening in order to take part in that meeting.

And we look forward to all supporting Scott in this next step in church life. And if I can ask the elders to be here for 7pm, we need to formally open a Kirk session to hold a congregational meeting.

So if elders could arrive for 7pm, that would be much appreciated. Thank you. Thank you, Duncan. Duncan, your own Angus is giving warm and vocal support to your ordination, the prospect of your ordination.

So that's encouraging to hear. We're going to begin this time of worship and we will sing to God's praise from Psalm 40. Psalm 40, the first four stanzas of the Psalm, first four verses of the Psalm.

[3:53] Psalm 40, the first four stanzas of the Psalm.

We'll sing down to the end of verse 4 to God's praise and we'll stand to sing. Psalm 40, the first four stanzas of the Psalm.

I waited for the Lord thy God, and patiently did bear, and led to me the Lord.

Psalm 40, the first five stanzas of the Psalm. He did in mind my voice and cry to hear.

He took me from a fearful pit and from the mighty pain.

[5:16] And on a wrong He set my feet, establishing my way.

He put a new song in my mouth, a God to magnify.

Many shall see it and shall fear. And on the Lord rely.

O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies.

Respecting not the proud nor such. As turn aside to light.

[6:47] Let's unite our hearts in prayer.

Just before we do so, one notice that I forgot to read out, and that's for the older Sunday school class. So the older Sunday school class, the secondary school children, there isn't a Sunday school today you're staying in for the service.

So just to pass on that good news to you all. Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day, and we thank you for the psalm that we sang, where we can join our voices and our hearts with the psalmist and say that we do not want to turn aside to the lies of this world, but we want to hear and receive and live by the truth of your word.

And we thank you that as we think about the truth of your word, we are directed to Jesus, the one who said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

And we thank you that there is blessing, the blessing that the psalmist prayed for. We thank you that that blessing came in and through Jesus. He is the rock of our salvation.

[8:32] He is the one who is able to take us, to lift us from the mighty clay of our sin and give to us salvation, the forgiveness of our sin, the promise of life that is eternal, and the reality of joy and peace and purpose every day of our lives in this world.

So we pray that as we come together in the name of Jesus, that our minds and our hearts and our eyes would be focused upon the Lord Jesus, that we would be trusting him as our Savior, that we would be bowing before him and submitting to him and asking him to lead us as our Lord and our King.

Be at work, we pray, Lord Jesus. Be lifted up in all that we do today, that in our singing and as we pray audibly and silently, and as we read and meditate upon the word of God, Lord, we pray that we would see Jesus, that we would hear Jesus, and that we would be given faith to come to Jesus and find the blessing and the rest, that we can find no other place in this world, but only from him.

So help us, Lord, we pray, as we come to you. And we ask that you would be working in each one of our hearts. We thank you, Lord, for many who are visiting with us today, especially the young people from the Scalodale camp.

We ask, Lord, that the word that they have heard over these last couple of days would continue to rest in their minds and in their hearts. We pray that each one of the young people would be trusting in the Lord Jesus, and that they and we would live lives that are pleasing to you, lives that lift up Christ, lives that are not engaged in the meaninglessness of chasing the wind, as there are so many things in this world that would call for our attention.

[10:44] We pray that instead we would be fixed in our minds and hearts upon the Lord Jesus. We thank you, Lord, that we have this gift of prayer. We thank you that you incline your ear to hear us and we pray not only for ourselves here, but we pray for those who are absent.

We pray for those who are sick. And we ask that your hand of healing would be upon them, if that be your will, and that your presence would rest with them every day that they have in this world.

We remember, we continue to remember, especially Lydia, as she continues in treatment in Glasgow. We ask, Lord, that that treatment would be effective and that she and her family would know your presence with them.

We pray for Kenny and Scalpy as he recovers. We pray for Finley, McSween and Scalpy also. And ask, Lord, that they and others that come to our minds who are sick, would know the touch of the great physician.

We pray for those who are grieving as well. We are always conscious of those who are struggling with grief and loss. And as we name them in our own hearts, we ask that they would know the comfort of God the Holy Spirit, the touch of the God of all compassion.

[12:00] And we pray, Lord, for those who may be anxious, who may be lacking peace, who may be struggling with things that are not seen to us, but are known to you. We thank you that we can take everything and everyone to you in prayer, knowing that you are the God who cares for us.

So be with them, we pray. We pray also for those that we can think of who are healthy and who are not in distress, who may be happy in terms of all the things of this world, but who are outside of Christ, who are lost.

And we ask that they would come to see their need of Christ as we have seen our need of Christ. And we pray, Lord Jesus, that they and that we would, each one, come to you and find the rest that is promised to all who come.

We pray also for those who may be at a distance this morning. You're the God who calls us to come to you. You're the God who calls us to return to you when we drift and wander. And for any who may be at a distance, we ask, Lord, that even today they would be pulled back, that they would know the drawing of your grace and the blessing of restored fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

So hear our prayers and help us, we ask. We pray for Scott as he prepares to come into eldership in the congregation here. We pray for him and Gordon as they go through exams just now.

[13:29] And we pray as we think about the future that you would lead them and guide them. And Stuart also, as he goes forward into interviews this week in Presbytery, we ask, Lord, that as these men hear and feel your call upon their lives, that you would lead them in the path of your choosing.

So hear our prayers and go with us, we pray. We pray for a country that we are part of that has drifted far from you. We ask, Lord, that you would draw us back. We pray for a world that in so many ways is broken.

And as we think of many situations where there is conflict and unrest, we pray that we would know your intervention, Lord God, and your peace. Hear our prayers.

Continue with us, we ask. Take away our sin. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Boys and girls, would you like to come out, please? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[14:40] How are you all today? Good. Well, this morning, I have a picture to show you.

And on that picture, I want you to tell me if you recognize who this person in the picture is, and if you know what they were doing. So, if you look at the screens in just a second, hopefully we're going to see a picture.

Who's that? Who's that? Brownie says one. What did you say, Joseph? Papa. Who's that, Benjamin?

Papa. I was saying Papa's going to be in the children's store. No, he's not. Oh, yes, he is. No, he's not. Well, yes, he is. So, he's in the children's store.

Do you know what he was doing that day? What was he doing on that day? Can anyone guess? Look carefully at the picture. Finlay.

[15:50] He was doing the marathon. So, he was running a marathon. How long do you think a marathon is? Do you know Benjamin? Not Benjamin, but Dan Finlay.

It's just over 26 miles. He's running just over 26. That's like almost from here to Stornoway.

And so, that's a big achievement. I won't ask Brownie any questions because he won't thank me for it.

But do you think... I mean, we've seen Brownie when he's been out running. And he seems to run. And it doesn't look like it's a problem to him at all. Do you think mile one was difficult for him? Do you think...

Johnny? No, it was a breeze. Mile two? No problem. Mile three? No bother at all. Mile ten?

[16:48] Maybe starting to get... Yeah, isn't it? Starting to get a little bit harder. Mile 20? That would be tough. Mile 26? I think that would be super tough, wouldn't it?

But good on Brownie. He kept on going. And he kept on going. And even though he had a sore knee at one point in the marathon, he kept on going.

And he finished in a super good time as well. I won't tell him, because he hasn't told me if I'm allowed to tell. But he kept on going until he finished the race.

And there you go. What's he got around his neck there? Is that a necklace that Flora gave him? What do you think? Johnny? It's a medal.

Because he kept on going. And he finished the race. He finished the marathon. And you know, boys and girls, being a Christian, being a Christian is a bit like running a marathon.

[17:52] Because there's some days, and it's like mile one, mile two, mile three. Some days, and it feels quite easy, and it's enjoyable, and it's, everything's good.

And then there's other times, and it can be quite hard, about like when your knee is hurting, and your chest is, you're struggling for a breath when you're running a marathon.

Sometimes, when you're running a marathon, I imagine you're tempted to stop. Sometimes if I run three miles, I'm tempted to stop.

But for those running marathons, when you see them in the pictures, they're sometimes tempted to stop. Sometimes they may be thinking, if I took a shortcut through these trees, it would make it easier.

But what they've got to keep on doing is following the course, and keep on keeping on till they get over the line. And that's what we have to do.

- [18:54] If we're Christians, we trust in the Lord Jesus, we keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus. We want to see Jesus, it says there. So we fix our eyes on Jesus, and just like Briony would have fixed his eyes on the finishing line and thought, one more hour, half an hour more, ten minutes more, just keep my eye on the line.

We have to keep our eye on the Lord Jesus. And we're promised that if we keep on keeping on, just like Briony got a medal, Jesus says he will give a prize to everyone who finishes the course.

And do you know what the prize is? It's not in this world, it's in the next world. And what's the next world called for those who are trusting in Jesus? Finley?

Heaven. There's a prize in heaven for everyone who keeps on keeping on following Jesus. So, Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, let's finish with that.

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus. So let's pray that we'll be given the strength to do that.

- [20:13] Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you love us, and we thank you that you call us to follow you. And sometimes it's easy to follow you, Lord Jesus.

Sometimes it feels that's so good, and so, we're so happy as we're following. And there's sometimes, Lord, that you ask us to do things and go places, and it feels quite hard.

And sometimes we, we're tempted to give up. And sometimes we're tempted to go our own way, and not your way. And we pray that you'd forgive us for these times, when sometimes we do go our own way.

And we ask, Lord, that you would help us today to follow you, and to keep on following you, to run with endurance the race that's set before us.

We thank you, Jesus, that you kept on going all the way through this world, even when things were hard. We thank you, Jesus, that you carried on all the way to the cross, so that we could have our sins forgiven, and have that prize of everlasting life in heaven.

- [21:20] So we pray that we would have that. And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing now, and we're going to sing Mission Praise 51, Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of My Heart.

And we'll stand to sing to God's praise. Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, not be all else to me, save that Thou art.

Love my best, Lord, by day or by night.

Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, Be Thou my true word.

- [22:33] I am with Thee, Thou with me, Lord. Thou my great Father, Thou my true Son, Thou with me dwelling, And I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle, Shield sword for the fight, Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.

Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower.

Raise Thou me heavenward, Thou my power.

Thou my power. Thou my power. Riches I need not, Nor man's empty grace, Thou mine inheritance, Thou and all grace.

- [24:09] Thou my glory, Thou my glory, First in my heart.

High King of heaven, My treasure, Thou art.

High King of heaven, After victory won, May I reach heaven's Christ, O bright heaven's sun.

Heart of my own heart, Whatever be called, Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Okay, boys and girls, if you head to Sunday school, remember to pray for them as they go. And if we could turn to Matthew chapter 16.

[25 : 45] Matthew chapter 16.

And we'll read from verse 13. Down to the end of verse 27.

This is God's word. Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, Who do people say the Son of Man is?

And He said, Some say John the Baptist, Others say Elijah, And others Jeremiah, Or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, The Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, But my Father who is in heaven.

[27 : 04] And I tell you, You are Peter, And on this rock I will build my church, And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Then He strictly charged His disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, And suffer many things, From the elders and chief priests and scribes, And be killed, And on the third day be raised.

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, Saying, Far be it from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you. But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me, For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, But on the things of man.

Then Jesus told His disciples, If anyone would come after me, Let him deny himself, And take up his cross, And follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, And forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come, With his angels and the glory of his Father, And then he will repay each person, According to what he has done.

[28 : 36] Amen. And may God bless that reading of His Word to us. We're going to sing again now to God's praise. The last two stanzas of Psalm 40 in Gaelic.

Psalm 40, verses 16 and 17, In thee let all be glad and joy, Who seekingly abide, Who thy salvation love, Say still, the Lord be magnified.

I'm poor and needy, Yet the Lord of me a care doth take. Thou art my help and saviour, My God, no tarrying make. These two verses of Psalm 40, We'll sing in Gaelic, And remain seated to sing to God's praise.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. If you could turn back, please, to Matthew chapter 16 in your Bibles.

[32:46] Thank you. And as we go there, let's pray. Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We, again, we acknowledge with the psalmist that we are those who are poor and needy.

And Lord, we pray that you would pray. And Lord, we pray that you would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And know the salvation that he alone gives.

And Lord Jesus trusts you as their savior from the earliest years and walk with you all the days of their lives. We pray that week by week. And we ask, Lord, that you would hear and answer our prayers.

And that they would know the touch, the warming touch of the Holy Spirit upon their lives from their earliest experience. So minister to them, we pray.

We pray for those who are at home just now. Those maybe who are elderly. And who would love to be here but who can't be. And we ask, Lord, that you would minister to them where they are.

And that they would not feel alone but that they would know that you are with them. And that they would feel part of the congregation as we meet together. In the name of Jesus, we pray for the congregations around us, different denominations, wherever Christ crucified is preached.

We ask, Lord Jesus, that you would be building your church. We pray for the Scaladale folks again. And ask, Lord, that all the work that has been done in sharing the gospel message with them over these last couple of days would continue.

[35 : 08] And that the work that you have begun, you would see through to completion in their hearts as we pray that you would work in ours. Hear our prayers, take away our sin we ask.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to begin with a question this morning. I've seen this as quite a lot of young people here.

If you want, you can answer. And the question is this. How many times in Jesus' public ministry do you think he talked about the church or used the word church?

How many times do you think in Jesus' public ministry we have the record Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. How many times did he use the word church? Let's have a guess.

Don McRae. What a guess. 200 times. 200 times. Okay. Not a surprising guess.

[36 : 22] Let's try, let's try Grace McLeod. 100. Okay.

Half of Don McRae's. We're getting closer to the number. Katie Tennant. 140. He gets it from this side. Let me tell you. Twice. If you go through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

Let me tell you. If you go through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Let me tell you. Twice. If you go through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Let me tell you. Twice. If you go through Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

Scan through all four Gospels. And Jesus only uses the word church.

Twice. And both times he uses it. As in Matthew's Gospel. Once in Matthew chapter 18.

[37 : 25] And once in Matthew chapter 16. Which is where we are. And in this chapter, Jesus really sets out the nature and purpose of his church.

So over the next two weeks. I want to think about the church of Jesus Christ. And the nature and the purpose of the church of Jesus Christ.

Who the church are. What the church is to be doing. That's the kind of big picture. But I want to ask six questions. And we'll only think through three of them today.

We're going to do six today. But I had mercy. We're just going to do three today. And we'll do three next week. God willing. So the six questions I'll just give to you. Question number one.

Who are the church? Question number two. Where is the church being built? Question number three. What is the future of the church?

[38 : 25] So that's the road map for today. Who are the church? Where is the church being built? And what is the future of the church? And then next week, God willing.

We'll think about what is the church to be doing? What are we to be doing? If we are the church of Jesus. Question number five. Who is the head of the church?

Who has authority over the church? And the last question next week that we get there. Is what is the desire of the church of Jesus?

To question number one to three this week. Question number one is who are the church? Or some people might put it this way. What is the church? But the right way to ask the question would be who are the church?

And that's a question I think that many people will ask. People who are outside of the church will regularly ask that question.

[39 : 25] Who are the church? I see people week by week walking past. As I'm preaching and reading. I'll see people who walk along the road past. And they're there with their dogs looking forward.

But they're looking up. They're hearing the singing. And I can almost hear from their minds this question coming out. Who are the church?

They're peering up into this building. I think they're probably asking, who are these odd people? What is that strange group of people that choose to gather together on a Sunday?

What is it that they're doing? So there's people outside of the church. They're asking the question, who are the church? And then there's people who are inside of the church.

Those of us who may have come into membership in the church in recent times or in past years. From time to time, it's good for us to ask the question, what have I joined?

[40 : 31] If I'm a member of the church of Jesus Christ, what have I signed up for? What does it mean to be part of the church of Jesus Christ?

Well, Jesus answers that question in this passage. So who are the church? The answer is the church are the group of people who do what Peter did.

And what did Peter do? Well, Peter confessed faith in Jesus as the Christ.

And as the son of the living God. So let's just step through the conversation between Jesus and Peter. So if you open your Bibles and look down there, and let's just step through this conversation again and be reminded of what was going on.

In verse 15, Jesus asks the disciples a very personal, a very pointed, clear question. He says, who do you say I am?

[41 : 42] He's already asked them about the crowd saying, what do the crowd say about me? And they say, well, there's a whole lot of different things the crowds are saying. And then Jesus drills in. He looks eyes with them. And he says, but what about you guys?

Who do you say that I am? And Peter, who is the ever ready spokesman for the disciples, said in verse 16, you are the Christ. You are the son of the living God.

And Jesus says that's the correct answer, Peter. Peter. The name Peter in Greek meant, it was Petros, which meant rock or stone.

And so Jesus says to Peter, when he says, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, Peter hears from Jesus, that's the correct answer. And Jesus says to Peter, Peter, you're a rock.

Petros, you're a rock. And I'm going to build my church using people like you. People who are not perfect.

[42 : 48] People who are going to make a whole lot of mistakes along the way. But people who see and believe and confess that I am the Christ.

The Savior. The son of the living God. One commentator, Green, says the rock is not just Peter, but Peter in his confessional capacity.

Peter, full of trust in the Son of God, is the one who will become the rock man for the early church. The point is this. Jesus had found in Peter a real believer.

And on that foundation, he could build his church. So who are the church? The church are people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, just as Peter did.

The church are people who can say of Jesus, you are the Christ. You are the promised Savior. You are my Savior.

[44 : 02] The one whom I have asked to take away my sin. I believe it's taken away my sin. And you are the Son of the living God.

Not just a man. Not just a prophet. Not just a spiritual advisor that I pull in with some tricky questions in my life. But you are the Son of the living God.

Not just a good teacher. But you are God, the Son. And you are the people who can say that.

They, we, are the church. So if we just take a moment to apply this, I want to ask you the question.

Can you say what Peter said? Because if we don't say, and if we don't see, and if we don't believe, and if we don't confess that Jesus is who he said he is, we can never be part of this church.

[45 : 21] We might have our name on an adherence list. Of a congregation here. Or in Lewis.

Or somewhere far away. We might attend services regularly or occasionally. We might be very attached to a denomination or a building or a minister.

We might attend YFs and Sunday school and church camps. But without confession of faith in Jesus, we cannot be part of this church.

That's the negative. But if I put this positively, if this morning we do see, and we do believe, and we will confess that Jesus is the Christ, he is the Savior, he is my Savior.

He is the Son of the living God. Then Jesus says, you will be one of the living stones that make up my church.

[46 : 35] And let's never forget, the church is not bricks and mortar. Jesus doesn't build his church using dead stones.

It's built using living stones. And Peter learned that lesson. And Peter, he said that in his first letter as he writes to another church.

He says to them in 1 Peter 2, verse 5, You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house. So who are the church?

The church are people. The church are people. Not buildings. Not denominations. The church are people.

Who are trusting in Jesus. The Greek word is the word ecclesia. Which means a gathering of people. And we might meet at a river side, like they did in Acts chapter 16.

[47 : 50] We might meet in a community center, as we did in past days. We might meet in a cathedral. We might meet in the Scalorial Center.

We might even meet in a converted pub. It's not about the buildings. It's as thankful as we are for the fact that the buildings keep us dry.

It's about confession of faith in Jesus. The confession that the people make. That is who the church are.

are. Second question, where is the church being built? Now, if we think about buildings and building projects in this world, with building projects, there is a site that's identified, and on that site, the building work is planned, and then it begins to progress.

So, with Jesus' church building project, where will the building work happen? Well, it sounds from what Jesus says, like it's going to happen right up against the gates of hell.

[49 : 09] That's what he's going to build, right up against the gates of hell. Jesus says in verse 18, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Derek Thomas, the commentator, says, Jesus is saying to us that he is building his church in the very precincts and in sight of enemy-occupied territory.

That's what he's building, not in meadows, not in orchards, not in beautiful rolling fields, but right up against the gates of hell.

Now, if we think about building projects, there are many building projects that face opposition. New house developments in different places, wind farms, when we see plans for them going forward, overhead power lines. These kind of projects almost always will face opposition. Part of the community can be against it. Neighbors can make objection to work progressing on their land.

It's just the nature of building. And that's the picture that Jesus paints here. The gates of hell are very much against the church of Jesus being built.

[50 : 35] So what does that phrase, gates of hell, mean? Well, gates in the Bible can mean two different things. Gates, if we think about the Old Testament in particular, gates were places of power.

Now, if we want a planning application approved, if we're looking for social help or legal help, where do we go? We go to council offices. We go to government buildings.

Back in Old Testament times, back in biblical times, if you wanted approvals granted from those who were in power, you went to the city gates, to the town gates.

So remember Boaz. Boaz falls in love with Ruth. And Boaz wants to be able to become the kinsman, redeemer, and the husband of Ruth. But he needs permission to be able to do that.

So where does he go? He goes, Ruth chapter 4, verse 1, up to the gate. He meets with the elders of the town to seek approval from the powers that be.

[51 : 39] So the gates were places of power. And Jesus is saying, the gates of hell, the powers of hell, all the collective, focused, concentrated powers of hell will do everything that they can to oppose the building of my church.

Wherever my church is being built, says Jesus, you can be sure that the powers of hell are active against that building work.

So gates are places of power. Jesus is saying, the powers of hell are against my church being built. But gates are also points of access.

If you want to go and visit somebody in a property, very often you go through the gate. I went this morning into a house, and to get to the house, I first of all had to open and go through the gate.

For those who have gone off on holiday in October, flying away to far off places, you get directed to the gate. You go through the gate before you get to the plane. So gates are points of access.

[52 : 53] And so we have this picture of Jesus building his church, and he's building right up against the gates of hell. So we can see, even in our mind's eye, the entrance to hell is wide open.

And we see these hordes of people proceeding in the direction of hell. And Jesus is snatching people before they enter hell's gates and bringing them into his church.

C.T. Studd, famous cricketer, he was a missionary to China. He founded China Inland Mission.

He said this, Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

And that seems to align with the picture that Jesus is painting. Hell's powers are raging.

[54:17] But Jesus is building his church as he rescues people, as he saves people from hell and brings them into heaven.

So what does that mean in application for the church today? And what does that mean in application for individual Christians, individual rocks, who are part of the church, who are trying to reach people for Jesus?

Well, it means that we should always expect hellish opposition. Sometimes we're surprised when things are difficult, when there's opposition, when it's messy.

We shouldn't be. We should always expect, when we are working to try and lift up the name of Jesus, when we are seeking to preach his gospel and reach people and tell them that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

We have to expect hellish opposition. As congregations and as individual believers, it shouldn't surprise us when the powers of hell seem to oppose everything that we try to do for Jesus.

[55:56] Because Jesus tells us that's the way it's going to be. That's what you have to expect. That's the language of the hymn that we sang.

Be thou my battle shield, sword for the fight. Paul reminds us in Ephesians chapter 6 that we are in a spiritual battle.

And the question that we, if we are Christians, have to ask is, are we part of that battle?

It's very easy to become a Christian and breathe a sigh of relief and say, well, thank goodness I'm now going to heaven.

thank goodness I have peace in my heart. Then put your feet up and just go to sleep. I'm not trying to reach anybody for Christ.

[57:07] It's very easy to become a Christian and just drop down into first gear. But what we're called to do is get onto the battlefield and try and reach people for Jesus.

Think about all of your friends and all of your family members if you're a Christian. They're either going to heaven or hell.

Life here is short. Eternity is long. And they're going one of two places. If they're going to heaven, we thank God for that.

We rejoice in that. If they're going to hell, if they're on the road to hell, if we love them, will we not fight?

To try and reach them? Are we on the battlefield? Christians? Are we engaged in spiritual combat?

[58:31] Are we like Jesus did, going to the least and to the lost? Are we reaching out to people who seem like they're living within a yard of hell?

And pleading with them to come to Jesus? To come to the only one who can save them and us from hell and take us to heaven?

That's our calling. Who are the church? They are people who confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. the way Peter did.

Where is the church being built? It is being built right up against the gates of hell. Which is why there's conflict. Final question, very briefly.

What is the future of the church? Because that's a question that's often asked. you don't have to look for in the newspapers to find articles about the decline of the church.

[59:48] You don't have to search on the internet for too long to find people who have a projected extinction date for the church. And the world will often say in response to this question of the future of the church, the church is finished.

It's not been built. It's been demolished. But Jesus says that will never happen. Church buildings might close.

We've seen them closing all over Scotland. Denominations rise and denominations fall and that shouldn't alarm us too much because they're just denominations. But the church of Jesus Christ will be built.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail. That's the promise of Jesus. One commentator leg says the devil will resist Christ's building but he cannot prevail against it.

The church is not finished as some foolishly think. It is Christ's creation, Christ's building and Christ will complete the structure.

[61 : 17] That's the future of the church. And yes, we are involved in a spiritual battle and yes, sometimes that battle is hard.

But never forget, although the battle goes on and we may bear the scars of it, the victory is won because Jesus won it at Calvary.

and all who are in his church, all who are trusting in him share in that victory.

So when we're feeling discouraged and when we're feeling as Christians like the devil seems to have the upper hand, as often we do feel, we should go back to this verse and hold on to the promise of Jesus.

And we should go back to the cross, to that place where Jesus proclaimed with a loud voice, it's finished! And Satan and sin and death and hell with that proclamation were finished!

[62 : 42] And when we're feeling discouraged, we should go back again to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid and we find that the tomb is empty because Jesus' body rose from the dead.

Death could not hold him. Not only did he die to take our sin away, but he rose from the dead and he promises because he lives, we too, if we are with him in his church, we too shall live.

And if all that doesn't work and we're still feeling discouraged and we're still struggling with doubts, you know what we should do? We should go at the end of the Bible.

I know some people who, when they're reading a book, if the book is taking a turn and they're fearful that there's not going to be a happy ending, they'll go to the last chapter, check that the ending is happy and only if the ending is happy will they continue to read.

You know, we can do that. If we go to the end of the Bible and we read the book of Revelation, that takes us to the end of time. And what do we see there?

[64 : 09] We see that Jesus wins. We see that his church is built. And we see his people living forever with him in the new creation where, as Tolkien, I think, put it, everything sad has become untrue.

and there is perfect peace and perfect life. That's the future of the church of Jesus.

And the question to finish with is, is this your future? Are you and I part of his church?

let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth of your word.

We thank you for the promise of Jesus that he will build his church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. And we pray that each one of us would follow the example of Peter and confess from our hearts that Jesus is our saviour.

[65 : 30] He is our Lord. He is our King. And we pray that you would help us to follow him. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.