

## 9.10.22 am

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Date: 09 October 2022

Preacher: Reverend Mark Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] And welcome to our morning worship. Special welcome to a number of visitors who saw coming in the door there. We're very pleased today to have Reverend Mark McLeod, who is the Minister of the South Harris Congregation, preaching here this morning while our own Minister David is preaching down there.

Tea and coffee are served at the end of the service in this room here, so please do stay if you're a visitor and make yourself known. And the evening service is at 6pm and that will be taken by our Minister David McLeod.

Tomorrow night the Ladies' Fellowship will meet here in the church to sort Blytheswood boxes. And then meetings as usual during the week, Little Fishers meets on Tuesday from 10 to 12, Road to Recovery at 7pm.

And then on Wednesday the prayer meeting will be in person and on Zoom at 7.30pm. Because of the school holidays, there won't be any jam-connected or routed meetings for the next two weeks. Next Sunday we have our services as usual at 11 and 6, and both of these will be taken by David. And just a date for the diary, the local women from Mission AGM will be held in the Scalpy Community Centre on Thursday the 27th of October.

[ 1 : 25 ] So these are all the intimations, and we pray now for God's blessing upon Mark as he leads us in worship. It's good to be with you again.

Let us come together to worship the Lord. Is there a sing-salms here? Is there a book here? Ah. So we're going to begin with singing in Psalm 65.

Sing-salms. Psalm 65. And we'll sing a verse 1 to 7, I think I gave.

I can't remember now what verses I gave. 1 to 7. Shout loud with joy to God. All our... Oh, 66. This is a funny book. It's split. I'm not used to the split one.

In Zion praise awaits you, Lord. To you our vows will pay. To you all people will come near. You hear us when we pray. When we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us lay.

[ 2 : 23 ] You pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away. So a picture of the psalmist becoming overwhelmed of his sins, guilt, and then turning to the Lord and receiving pardon.

And in verse 4, an important verse, how blessed are those you choose and bring within your courts of grace. A picture of the Lord coming and drawing us. Not ourselves in the first instance choosing him, but him drawing us towards himself.

For then enabling us to put our faith in him. That's something we'll be thinking about a bit later on.

So Psalm 65, verse 1 to the verse marked 7. To the praise of God.

And we'll stand to sing. Amen. Cheers. Amen. As I on place awaits you, Lord, to you our bows will be.

To you, all people welcome near, you hear us when we pray.

[ 3 : 33 ] When we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us, you pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away.

How blessed are those you choose and bring within your courts of grace.

We're filled with blessings in your house, in your most holy place.

With awesome gates of righteousness, you answer us, O God.

And share your hope of farthest seas and all the earth above.

[ 5 : 10 ] By strength and power you form the hills, you hush the ocean's voice.

You come, the tumult of their waves, and still the people's noise.

Amen. Let's unite our hearts and come before the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask, O Lord, that we would know something of that stillness that we sang of there even as we gather here today on a stormy Lord's Day.

But we give thanks that we can come in together as a gathering of your people and that we can come in and know that stillness that comes from coming before our Lord and our God in public worship as we do just now.

And as we come under your word and as we hear it and sing it and think on it, we pray, O Lord, that your word would transform our hearts. For your word has the power to do just that.

[ 6 : 37 ] We see evidences of that in Scripture, God willing. We'll see something of that in a few moments' time in our sermon. And how we see that even in our midst today with so many people whose hearts have been transformed by the power of the gospel.

We can remember a time when we were outside of Christ. We can remember a time when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. And then we were brought to that position, as the psalmist mentioned there, where we became overwhelmed by our sins and our guilt, where we became aware of the way in which we were lost, the way in which we were heading for a lost eternity. And you drew us to yourself. You worked in our hearts. And you enabled us to cry out to you. You enabled us to call upon your name and to seek that salvation that is on offer in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And help us never to cease to give you thanks for all that you have done in our salvation. And we don't just pray for those who have already come to know the Lord and to give thanks for them.

We also pray for those who perhaps, as of yet, are still outside of Christ. Our prayer is, O Lord, that your word would be at work in their hearts, even now, even as we gather.

[ 8 : 00 ] That your word would draw them in. That you would bring them into the courts of your grace, even as we sang there in that psalm. We ask, O Lord, that that will be through as well, not just for those present here, but those in our community here and throughout Harris and Scalpy and Lewis and the surrounding islands as well, we ask, O Lord, that we might see souls saved.

And even those who perhaps just now have absolutely no desire at all for the things of the Lord, we pray that you may work in their hearts because you, O Lord, are the divine gardener, the one who's able to take the hard ground and to break it down and to turn it into the fertile soil in which then the gospel will be planted in and bear fruit and grow.

And how we seek that. And to that extent, we pray for a day of great things. A day where young and old, boys and girls and men and women, will come and put their faith in Jesus and come and proclaim the praises of our Lord and our God.

And we pray for the Christians in here and connected to the congregation as well, those here and perhaps those listening elsewhere. We pray, O Lord, that you would build them up in their most holy faith.

Help us to understand the importance of discipleship and building one another up as well and doing so as a congregation, as a family of the Lord's people, not looking out just for our own spiritual growth, but looking out for one another and seeking to grow as a body, as a united body.

[ 9 : 33 ] And may that be the case here. May you unite the congregation and may you strengthen them in bonds of fellowship with one another. May you uphold those who are in leadership as well, the deacons and the elders, those who are involved in the different kinds of youth work activities connected to the church and the minister as well.

We pray, O Lord, that you would uphold them all, that together we might lift one another's hands in prayer and support one another, because we know that our enemy is powerful.

Our enemy is fierce and we are aware of that, the spiritual enemy that we face from day to day, the spiritual enemy that we face in the world around us as well. But we know that the one who is for us is far greater, far stronger and far more powerful.

And ultimately the victory is yours. And help us to remember that, especially in our own day with the way culture is going, the way our own nation is going as well, where we seem to be moving at a faster and faster pace away from the truths of your word and away from what our nation has been built on.

We pray, O Lord, that you would open our eyes, help us to see the wonderful benefits that the word of God has brought to this nation, the way in which it has brought us to where we are just now, and that people would turn to it again, not just as a means of guiding us in how to live as a nation, but that many would turn to it to find the words of life itself.

[ 11 : 04 ] And we ask that you would be with those who are in government over us, both here in Scotland and in London as well. And we pray, O Lord, that you would grant them wisdom, that you would work in their hearts and lives, and that you would raise up many of those who are your

people, that they might themselves find these places of leadership and power and authority in our nation, and that you might use them for good in our land, and even further afield as well.

And pray for stability in our world as well, that we're so aware of what's going on in different parts of the world, and more escalation of the events that are unfolding in Ukraine and Russia.

We pray, O Lord, that you would indeed in your time bring about a de-escalation there, that you would bring about peace, and that you would prosper your church in that part of the world as well.

So continue with us now. Do us good. Cleanse us from sin. Cleanse us from all our unrighteousness. Unrighteousness. We come confessing it, acknowledging that we are a broken people. Every one of us here, sometimes we can come to church and put on a face and think that everything is fine, but we know that we are a broken people with all sorts of difficulties, all sorts of spiritual problems, all sorts of sins to confess.

And we come confessing all these things before you now, knowing that we come before one who cleanses and who heals, who heals the souls of your people. So do so now, in Jesus' name.

[ 12 : 31 ] Amen. Amen. Well, if the young ones want to, do you come down to the front? Hello, Calus. I'm going to come down. Good to see you again.

Good to see you out on a rainy day. Now, hands up if you like Lego. Anyone like Lego here? There's a few hands up.

Yeah, a few people like Lego. Lego's up. Lego's up. Ah, great activity. I love Lego. Lego's a lot different now, though. When I was wee, you just had a big box of Lego, and there was lots of blocks in it, and you could just make whatever you want.

But now it's all sets, isn't it? You buy a Lego set, and there's a picture of the thing you're building, and then you get various things inside the box. You get packets of Lego, but you also get something else that's very important.

What else do you get in the box, as well as the Lego pieces? Yeah? Yeah, instructions. I've got one here. I found one here. It's a Lego Friends one. The instructions are important, aren't they?

[ 13 : 29 ] Because you can't actually build the thing that's on the front if you don't have the instructions. Well, you can try, but usually it goes wrong if you just try and guess how to build it. You need the instructions. And I've lost count of the...

This is an easy one, this one, but I've lost count of the number of times, maybe in bigger sets.

Maybe I've been helping one of our children build some Lego. And something goes wrong in the build. And we say to ourselves, must be the instructions.

They must be wrong. Must have gone wrong somewhere. There's no way we could be wrong. And then we look into it a bit more, and we realise it wasn't actually the instructions that were wrong. It was always us that were wrong.

Maybe we missed out a page, or we missed out a step, or we could have blocked in the wrong place, or whatever it might be. And what you soon learn is that Lego instructions, they're never wrong. They're always right.

The problem is always with us. If we get a problem with our build, it's always that we've gone wrong somewhere. And that's very like God's Word as well. God's Word.

[ 14 : 25 ] Because this is an instruction book for us. Instruction book for life. And you know, a lot of people think that this is wrong. That this is not right. And usually it's because they don't believe in some of it, or they think God is wrong in some of it, or they don't agree with some of the things that God says.

And they say, no, it's wrong. It's not right. But this can't be wrong. Because whose book is this? Whose word is this? Yep. Jesus is God's Word.

This is God's own Word. And can God lie? No, he can't lie. Can God get things wrong? No, he can't get things wrong.

He can't make a mistake. That means this book is absolutely right. Absolutely right. So if we want to live the Christian life the way God wants us to live it, it's so important that we, first of all, believe in Jesus to become a Christian, but then that we follow this instruction book.

Because this instruction book is absolutely right. If you want to keep right with building Lego, you follow these instructions. That's important too. But more important, way more important, if you want to keep right with living the Christian life, we have to make sure that we get to know these instructions.

[ 15 : 31 ] Instructions that are never wrong. So you remember that. Because some people might say to you, there's things that are wrong in here. There's nothing wrong. There's no error at all in the Word of God. This great instruction book.

So we'll bow our heads now and we'll come before God and we'll go pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we give thanks that you have given us your Word.

A Word that guides us in life. A Word that leads us to Jesus. A Word that leads us to put our faith in Jesus. But also a Word that shows us how to live as Christians. And our prayer is that even the young ones themselves, that they might learn this Word.

And learn to live according to it. And when others might tell them that there's things that are wrong and things that are incorrect, help them to be able to have the answer and to know that in God's Word there is no error.

That everything is correct. Because it's a Word that comes from one who cannot lie. And who cannot make any mistake. And who cannot sin. So bless them now as they go to their classes to hear more about this Word.

[ 16 : 29 ] I ask it all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. So thank you very much for listening. We're going to sing again now in the Singed Psalms. And we're going to sing this time in Psalm 87.

Psalm 87 in the Singed Psalms. This is a psalm that reminds us of the way in which the kingdom of God and Zion is made up of all sorts of people.

In this world we have maybe different kind of national identities. But in heaven those identities are out the window. And we go down on the register of God's people as Zion born. On Jerusalem's holy mountain he has founded his abode.

More than all of Jacob's dwellings. Zion's gates are dear to God. It's a picture of glory itself.

Glorious things of you are spoken. Zion, city of the Lord.

Many drawn from all the nations. A picture of people coming from all nations. All tribes and tongues. As your people I record. I will name as those who know me.

[ 17 : 30 ] Egypt, Tyre and Babylon. Philistine along with Cushite. And all these people from all these different nations. They're given one identity as being Zion born.

That is our identity as the Lord's people. One in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we'll sing Psalm 87. The whole psalm there. To the praise of God. On Jerusalem's holy mountain he has founded his abode. More than all of Jacob's dwellings. Zion's gates are dear to God.

Glorious things of you are spoken. Zion, city of the Lord.

Many drawn from all the nations. As your people I report.

[ 18 : 42 ] I will name as those who know me. Egypt, Tyre and Babylon.

Zion, city of the Lord.

Will descend and make her strong. Or did Zion God will enter.

In the people's register. They will sing us. They make music.

All might fountains on and high. Or in Zion God will enter.

[ 19 : 59 ] In the people's register. They will sing us. They make music.

All my fountains are in her. I'm going to read now from the book of Acts.

The book of Acts. And chapter 16. Which version goes up on the screens? It's ESV. It's ESV. It's fine. So Acts chapter 16.

And we'll read from the beginning. So let's hear the word of God. Paul came also to Derb and to Lystra.

A disciple was there named Timothy. The son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. But his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

[ 21 : 15 ] Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places. For they all knew that his father was a Greek.

As they went on their way through the cities. They delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith.

And they increased in numbers daily. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia.

Having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come to Mysia. They attempted to go into Bithynia. But the spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Mysia. They went down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there. Urging him and saying. Come over to Macedonia and help us.

[ 22 : 17 ] And when Paul had seen the vision. Immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia. Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So setting sail from Troas. We made a direct voyage to Samothrace. And the following day to Neapolis. And from there to Philippi. Which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia. A Roman colony. We 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.

[ 23 : 15 ] 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. And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone. They seized Paul and Silas. And dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates. They 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.

[ 24 : 13 ] 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 this 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 the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened. And everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke.

And saw that the prison doors were open. He drew his 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. There he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out. And said sirs.

[ 25 : 11 ] What must I do to be saved? And 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 to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night. And washed their wounds. And he was baptized at once. He and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house.

And set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household. That he had believed in God. But when it was day. The magistrates sent the police. Saying let those men go. And the jailer reported these words to Paul.

Saying the magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace. But Paul said to them. They have beaten us publicly. Uncondemned men who are Roman citizens.

And have thrown us into prison. And do they now throw us out secretly? No. Let them come themselves and take us out. But the police reported these words to the magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens.

[ 26 : 11 ] So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers.

They encouraged them. And departed. Amen. We pray for God's blessing. That portion of his word there. Now before we turn to look at a little section in that passage.

We're going to sing. First of all in Gaelic. And in Psalm 103. So Psalm 103. Praise God my soul with all my heart.

Let me exalt his holy name. Forget not all his benefits. This praise my soul. In song proclaim. So those first two stanzas. Psalm 103 in Gaelic.

O manum b'an e husanish. In jia yehovah mor. O manum b'an e husanish.

[ 27 : 26 ] In jia yehovah mor.

O manum b'an e husanish. In jia yehovah mor. I am a husanish. In jia yehovah mor. CHOIR SINGS  
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Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 30 : 42 ] Acts chapter 16. Acts chapter 16. And just reading again from verse 14. So Acts 16, verse 14.

Now, I know as a congregation, you're fairly used to hearing people's testimonies.

I think you have a few testimony evenings or fellowship evenings where you hear people's stories.

And that's a really good thing. I think it's very important that we hear testimonies and you hear explanations of how people actually come to faith.

And sometimes when you hear testimonies, sometimes you may be particularly gripped, you know, gripped by how the Lord has worked in this person's life.

Maybe there's been some kind of particularly amazing outward providence or some kind of outward thing that's happened that's kind of clearly shows that some amazing, powerful conversion has taken place in the life of that person.

[ 32 : 00 ] So an example from scripture would be, well, the obvious one we go to is Saul of Tarsish, Damascus Road. We always refer to the Damascus Road experience. That's some testimony Saul has or Paul has.

But also the Philippian jailer, I think you looked at the Philippian jailer not that long ago when McCritchie was here. Again, another amazing story, another amazing conversion experience.

And often when you consider those kind of kinds of conversions, we would say maybe they've got a bit of a sort of wow factor to them. You know, the kind of story that you'd get people at the front of a church and, you know, they'd share their testimony.

And you can imagine the Philippian jailer giving his story of this kind of a congregation, this kind of a situation, everybody being gripped by what's been said. But in many ways, the most amazing conversions of all are conversions here like this one with Lydia.

Those who are gently and very simply brought to saving faith without any earthquake, without any kind of shining lights or outwardly anything particularly happening.

[ 33 : 04 ] But a powerful conversion nonetheless, where the Lord is at work. And we'll see that in a few moments. The Lord is at work changing and converting the heart. Because ultimately it's God's power. It's not to do with the outward signs.

It's to do with the work of the Lord in our hearts. And we'll see that. And I think conversions like Lydia's here, they're remarkable for that reason. They're remarkable because outwardly, and I say this carefully, outwardly she has no amazing testimony to tell.

I don't, every testimony is amazing. But what I mean is from a sort of entertainment perspective.

Sometimes we think she's not got a particularly entertaining testimony to tell. But nevertheless, it's remarkable for that reason.

That's what makes it so amazing. That's what makes it something that perhaps many of us here can actually relate to. That it is in many ways so ordinary. Extraordinary, yes. Supernatural, yes. But in terms of the outward things going on, we'll see that it's very different to the likes of Saul and the Philippian jailer and others. Because when you think about Saul and the jailer, and you think about the experience that they had, it's almost no surprise that they came to faith.

[ 34 : 09 ] Because, you know, if you had an experience like them, and you would say, I would definitely believe. You know, if I had something like what Saul had in the Damascus road, I would definitely believe. Or the Philippian jailer. If I had an experience like that, I would absolutely 100% believe.

But for someone to be saved in a relatively simple way, in which Lydia is saved here, that is what is incredible. They're all incredible, yes. But that's what I want to particularly focus on today. Because I think these kind of conversions, they remind us that that change, that regeneration, that conversion, it's not something that God brings about merely by outward factors or outward experiences.

It's not that you have to experience outwardly a certain kind of thing. It reminds us that the power of that transformation and that renewal is something that God does in our hearts. And sometimes it can be invisible.

It can happen right now, and nobody else might know about it. Something invisible, something that happens within our hearts. And, you know, if you're an atheist, or if you come across an atheist, you know, atheists love to try and prove that even our conversion experiences are false.

[ 35 : 18 ] And, you know, an atheist, they may come up and they may say, well, they might put Saul's conversion down to maybe psychological effects. You know, he's obviously seen something, some kind of bright light, whatever it was.

And they say, oh, well, that's psychological effect of whatever he went through in the Damascus Road, because he clearly went through something. And that now he thinks he's converted because of whatever it was he experienced. Or, again, the atheist might look at the Philippian jailer, and they might put the conversion of the jailer down to maybe a psychological response to a near-death experience.

Because he was close to death. He was very close to actually taking his own life. And they might say the trauma of that led to this so-called conversion. But the atheist can't give an explanation like that for the conversion of Lydia.

Its simplicity is remarkable. A simplicity that highlights to us the inherent power, the amazing power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, today, I want to look at this encounter. And I want to look at this under the theme or in the context of the parable of the sower and the seed. And I want to look at three things.

[ 36 : 24 ] Or three headings are kind of from the theme of the parable of the sower and the seed. So, first of all, the Lord prepares the sower. Secondly, the Lord prepares the ground. And then thirdly, the Lord produces fruit.

You see this process going on in the life of Lydia. So, let's begin with the Lord preparing the sower. Now, the chain that brings us to Christ is sometimes a very long chain.

And it's made up of lots of different links. And one of the links in that chain is the Lord actually preparing someone to come to you and to actually share the gospel with you. There's lots of other aspects, but that's one link.

One link in that chain that brings you to Christ is God preparing someone to share the gospel. And that's how it begins here. The Lord begins this process in the life of Lydia by preparing a sower. Or he prepares someone to come and to share the gospel with Lydia.

And you see that man there, Paul, the center of it. And initially there, at the beginning of the chapter, he's all set to enter into Bithynia. But the Lord says no. He thinks that's where he's meant to go.

[ 37 : 27 ] The Lord stops him. Sometimes that happens to us. We think we're on the right path. We think we're where the Lord wants us to be. And the Lord will say no. No. You're not going that way. You're not going that direction.

And in verse 7, we read there that the spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go in. It actually stops him. So the Lord is going to use Paul elsewhere here. And then, of course, gives Paul a vision, a dream of some kind.

And in the vision, he sees this man of Macedonia. And the man of Macedonia is calling for help. And Paul knows what that means. Paul, he's very clear what that means. He knows that the Lord wants me to go there.

The Lord wants me to preach the word there. There's someone there who the Lord is preparing for me to share the gospel with. Of course, as it turns out, there was quite a number of people, actually, that he was going to share the gospel with.

But one of these people was this woman here, Lydia. Now, Lydia didn't know that at the time. Lydia would have been completely unaware at the time. But the Lord was putting in motion this plan to save her, to bring her to saving faith.

[ 38 : 29 ] She might have just been going about her usual business at this time. Unaware that, you know, 200 miles away, the Lord was working and preparing someone to come and meet with her outside of a river, to share the gospel with her, and to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you never know, really, who the Lord is preparing to share the gospel with you, or to share the word of God with you. That's the thing.

When the Lord is working in our lives, it's not just that he works in us. The picture is bigger than that. We tend to think individually. But the Lord's plan, it's big. And it incorporates even the person who's been prepared to share that message with you.

Even the person who's been prepared to share the gospel with you. Might be a parent. Might be a friend. A colleague. Someone in the church. A minister. An elder. Who knows who the Lord might be preparing.

Somebody who maybe you've never even met before. To come and to give you a word in season that was going to be used by the Lord for the salvation of your soul. And if you are a Christian here today, then you can think back on your own Christian life.

[ 39 : 39 ] And you can probably maybe, maybe not in every case, but some of you anyway might be able to identify the particular sower that planted the seed in your heart. And maybe when you think about your Christian life, you think of it as beginning at that point where you heard the gospel.

And you maybe started grappling with the gospel. Whenever you heard the gospel first. But actually, that's not where the work of God begins. The work of God even began before that. Even before you became aware of the reality of the gospel.

When he was preparing that person, whoever that person was, to actually come and to actually share the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ with you. And that's what we want ourselves now as those who are Christians.

We want to be used in that way. We want to be used by the Lord to scatter that seed elsewhere.

Maybe to people we haven't even met yet. People we don't even know. To share the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe as some shared it with us at one time. So, the Lord then he leads Paul here to Philippi. So, Paul comes. And it's Paul's usual practice.

[ 40 : 42 ] He's got this practice where he tends to go first of all to the synagogue. He's got this approach to the Jew first and then the Greek. That's his mentality.

That's his mission. And he does that. But the problem here is there's not actually a synagogue. But unusual. There was no synagogue here. But he finds out that there's some kind of a gathering of Jews outside the city by the riverside.

And that they're meeting for prayer. And it seems to be the case anyway that it's at least mainly women who are there. Which may explain why there's no synagogue in the place.

If it was mainly women Jews. And they're gathering there. And in verse 13 we note there that Paul he sits down and he's talking to the woman there.

Now, I say mainly women. We don't actually know if there were any men there. We're told that he sits with a woman. There may well have been some men there. We're not really told. But the point is it's the woman he sits with. It's the woman that he comes and it's the woman that he sits with during this prayer meeting and during this discussion.

[ 41 : 47 ] And I think that's interesting. Because a lot of people, you know, I mentioned to the kids. A lot of people think that there's things wrong in the Bible. And a lot of people actually make out Paul especially to be a very sexist man.

They make out Paul to be someone who's very much against women. Doesn't give any time to women at all. But, you know, look at what we have here. This is the first recorded gospel message in Philippi.

The first recorded gospel message in the whole of the continent of Europe. And who's it directed to? It's directed here to a group of women. It was a man of Macedonia that he saw in his vision.

The dream was a man of Macedonia. But the Lord directs him here very specifically to this group of women. This first gospel encounter here with this group of women.

So it's very unfair to say that Paul is sexist. He has no time for women. That's not the Paul that we see in Scripture at all. So the Lord, he prepares the sower. So the scene is set.

[ 42 : 45 ] Now, secondly, I want to move on now to look at the Lord preparing the ground. So this is us thinking about Lydia now. So we've seen Paul being prepared, led here.

He's ready. Now we're thinking about the ground of Lydia's heart. That's what the ground means in the parable of the sower. It's the idea of the heart. So what do we know about this woman here? What do we know about Lydia? Well, we see there that she is from Thyatira. And actually, Thyatira is a town in a larger region.

And the region is actually called Lydia. So there's actually a bit of doubt as to whether this woman is actually called Lydia or not. And it might be the case that maybe she is called Lydia, but it may also be the case that the locals in Philippi called her Lydia because she is the Lydian one.

She is from Lydia. That's something we do. That's in our culture very often, especially when you have so many Donalds and Johns. We refer to people based on geography, where they're from, where they're brought up, village or island.

[ 43 : 49 ] They did the same thing here as well. So here you have Lydia from this place. That's the overall place called Lydia, but specifically she is from Thyatira.

And what is special about that place? What can we learn from that that can help us to understand something about Lydia and something about her experience here? Well, there's two important facts that we can glean from the fact that she was from Thyatira.

And the first fact is that it was a place that was famous for purple dye and textiles. So it was famous for that. And we know as well from a reading that Lydia was a woman who was trading in this. She was trading in this purple dye. Now, why is that important? Well, that's important because there's only rich people who could buy purple clothing. It's hard for us to understand how one colour can be more expensive than the other.

But in this day, purple was a rich person's colour. And that means that if Lydia is selling this, then she's probably going to be doing pretty well for herself. She would have been a wealthy woman.

[ 44 : 54 ] And actually, there's evidence later on in the passage that highlights that she probably was quite wealthy. Remember that when they go to meet in the house, where do they meet? It's Lydia's house. It's obviously big enough for them to actually meet.

So Lydia seems to be a pretty well-off businesswoman. And again, why is that important? Well, I think that's important because, as Jesus tells us, sometimes that can be a barrier.

Sometimes wealth can be a barrier to the gospel. So in Matthew chapter 19 and in verse 24, well-known words, Jesus says, I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man or woman to enter into the kingdom of God.

And that is absolutely true, isn't it? We know that ourselves in our culture. Money and a kind of comfortable life, it can create all sorts of barriers.

All sorts of barriers to the gospel and to people accepting the gospel. Because people get blinded. They get blinded by how comfortable life is and blinded by money.

[ 45 : 58 ] Now, things might change very quickly with the way things are going. But generally speaking, relatively so. And people are comfortable. People have a lot.

And all of these things, they can blind us from our need of Christ. And we're aware of that. Even in Harris itself, so many people, they just don't really see their need. Don't really see their need for the things of the Lord Jesus.

And as Jesus was saying, yes, it's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of the needle. And yes, it's impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. But with the Lord, and this is the important part, with the Lord, the impossible is made possible.

And here we're going to see the Lord at work. And this wealthy woman, someone who you might think wouldn't have any need of Christ, and he's working in the heart of this woman, and he's going to bring her to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that's one important fact about Thyatira, the link to the purple and the indication that Lydia's probably well off. Another important fact about where she's from is that it's a place where there was a known community of Jews here.

[ 47 : 06 ] You know, Philippi seems to be a bit different, not as many Jews. But in Thyatira, there was a known community of Jews. So when she grew up there, she would have had a fair bit of interaction with the Jewish faith.

We don't know for sure if she was a Jew. We don't actually read that she was a Jew. But highly likely, when she was growing up there in Thyatira, she would have come to learn about the God of the Jews, and she would have become accustomed to worshipping according to the Jewish practice.

And we read in verse 14 there that she was a worshipper of God. That's what this woman was. She was a worshipper of God. And that word there depends what translations you're reading. Sometimes it's translated as God-fearing. She feared the Lord. That's the idea. That she was a worshipper of God, that she was a God-fearer, a God-fearing woman. Her upbringing has instilled that in her. Her upbringing has instilled in her a sense of God and a sense of the fear of the Lord as well. And I think that's true for many in our communities here as well.

[ 48 : 14 ] Maybe less so now, but it's still there. It's still there. People's upbringing here have, I think, largely given some kind of a sense of God, some kind of a sense as well of the fear of the Lord.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that people are saved. And, you know, you'd be amazed how many people will say, well, I'm amazed when I speak to people, how many people will say, I'm not a Christian.

I'm not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in the sense that I haven't put my faith and trust in him. I'm not a Christian, but I'm a God-fearer. You know, I'm a God-fearer. I have this sense of worshipping the Lord.

And I think that's legitimate. I do think that's a legitimate distinction. And I suspect if I asked everyone in here, I obviously don't know you all, but I suspect if I asked most people in here, you would all probably say, well, yes, I'm a God-fearer.

Yes, I am. I fear the Lord. You might say I'm not a Christian, but I'm a God-fearer. You haven't committed your life to Christ. You haven't taken Jesus as your Lord and your Savior, but you fear the Lord.

[ 49 : 24 ] And I think that is true because we have an example of it here. Even before Lydia was converted, this is before she's saved, she's a God-fearer. Before she's actually put her faith in Jesus, she has this sense of being a worshipper, a God-fearer.

But the thing is, there's different kinds of God-fearing. That's the issue here. The kind of God-fearing that the Lord's people experience is different to the kind of God-fearing that happens in someone who's not a believer.

Because for some people, maybe you've got a godly fear that will keep you at a distance from God. So, for example, some people, maybe you believe there is a God.

Maybe you believe in heaven and hell. Maybe you believe that Jesus existed, that Jesus died on the cross. You believe all these facts. You believe the Bible, like I was saying to children, you believe that this is the word of God.

You believe that it's correct. You believe all of these things. But all of these facts that you believe result in this kind of fear of God where you keep God at a distance.

[ 50 : 25 ] You don't want to come near God. You want the distance. You don't want to draw near to him. You don't want the Lord to draw near to you. It's a God-fearing that's actually keeping you away from God.

That's not the kind of God-fearing that the Lord's people experience. At one point, perhaps you all experience that kind of God-fearing that keeps you away. But as the Lord's people, when the Lord works in our hearts, the kind of God-fearing that we experience is a reverent fear of the Lord that draws us towards him.

We come in our sinfulness and we acknowledge our sinfulness and we ask the Lord for forgiveness. We ask the Lord for salvation. We're drawn towards him. We have this positive desire to come before the Lord.

So you've got two different kinds of godly fear there. One godly fear that pushes you away and another godly fear that draws you in. And you have to ask yourself, well, okay, I'm a God-fearer, but what kind of God-fearer am I?

Am I the kind of person that wants to keep God at a distance, keep away from the Lord? Or is it that positive fear that's drawing me towards that desire to know the Lord and to come and to have my sins forgiven?

[ 51 : 36 ] My prayer is that for everyone in here, the case would be the latter. But if it's not the case, ask the Lord to transform your heart. Ask the Lord to give you that desire to draw you to himself, to have that positive godly fear that leads you to salvation.

So here then, Lydia, she's a God-fearer, but she's not saved. God-fearer, but not yet saved. And at this point, her heart is closed to the things of God.

Then what happens is the Lord begins to open it up in verse, again, later on in verse 14. We read there amazing words, simple words as well. The Lord opened her heart.

That's it. Just those words. The Lord opened her heart. You have all these amazing stories and acts. So many, the thousands converted at Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch as well, another amazing story.

You've got, like I mentioned before, Saul, Philippian jailer, all of these different amazing stories. And with all these other conversions, what you get is, it's almost like an outside view.

[ 52 : 39 ] It's like an outside view of what's going on. It's like we see externally what's happening in the bright light or the earthquake and all these things. But here, when we're looking at Lydia, we get an inside view of what happens.

And when we look at this inside view, you see what's going on inside the person. And it's actually a change that's going on within the heart itself. And that's, as I mentioned earlier on, that's a work that's hidden.

It's invisible. It could be happening right now in you and the person beside you can't see it. You know, you'd see an earthquake, a flash in the sky. You'd see that. You can't see this. It's a hidden work of the Lord.

And the Lord is reminding us there, in case there was any doubt about it, salvation is his work. Salvation is absolutely his work. For example, the thousands at Pentecost, they weren't saved because Peter preached an amazing sermon.

They weren't saved because Peter preached a compelling sermon. That's not why they were saved. Peter did teach a compelling sermon. That's not why they were saved. Saul, as well, on the road. He wasn't saved because he saw a bright light.

[ 53 : 46 ] Again, he did see a bright light. But again, that's not why he was saved. Something was going on inside. Something invisible. Something inside the heart where the Lord is at work, renewing, transforming, opening up their hearts.

And that's what's happened with us as well. If you're here today and you're one of the Lords, this has happened to you. What you read of here with Lydia, it's happened to you. The Lord has opened up your heart.

Because, naturally speaking, our hearts would be hard to the gospel. Be hard to the gospel.

Naturally speaking, we are blinded from the truths of these things.

Blinded by the God of this age. Blinded by the devil himself. And supposing, I don't know who you think the greatest preacher of all time was. Supposing the greatest preacher of all time.

Well, Paul or Peter. Or one of these preachers of the New Testament. If they came in here today.

And they preached the most compelling, powerful sermon that you absolutely ever heard.

[ 54 : 50 ] Oh, do nothing for your soul. Unless, unless the Lord comes in and opens up your heart. And that's what we pray for in your congregation, in our community. We want that.

We scatter the seed, absolutely. But we want the Lord to open up hearts. Because it's only then that we'll see people come to faith. And when the Lord does that. When he opens up your heart.

When he breaks it up. And when he opens it up. Then when the seed of the gospel landed, it produces fruit. And all of a sudden you'll find yourself with a desire for the things of God. A desire for the gospel.

A desire to be with the Lord's people. A joy that you never knew before as well. It becomes like you're hearing the gospel for the first time. Even if you've heard it multiple times. Everything changes.

Your heart. Your desires. Your affections. All of these things change. And that leads to our third point. And just briefly on the third point. The Lord producing the fruit.

[ 55 : 44 ] So we've seen the Lord preparing the sower. The Lord preparing the ground. But thirdly the Lord producing the fruit here. Because, just to take a step back a wee bit.

The Lord has prepared the heart of Lydia. But that in itself is not enough. The heart has to be prepared. Yes, the ground has to be prepared. But it's important as well that the seed of the gospel is planted there.

It's not just that the ground needs to be ready. Yes, you need to have good ground. But the seed needs to land in it. The gospel needs to come in. And it's that combination of the prepared ground

and the gospel that brings this fruit.

And we read there in verse 14. That Lydia, her heart has been opened at this point. And now Lydia paid attention to what was said by Paul. She paid attention. And the English doesn't quite catch that.

But the idea there is she's gripped. It's not just she's listening. She is listening. She is listening. And she doesn't stop listening. She keeps on. She is gripped by what is being explained to her here by Paul and the others as well.

[ 56 : 51 ] And again, as I mentioned earlier, that's what happens. When your heart is opened up like that, you'll have that desire. You'll be gripped by the word. Again, maybe you have heard it thousands of times before.

But when the Lord works in your heart, it's very different. You're gripped by it. You hear it. And you want to listen. And you want to keep hearing what God is saying. And here, Paul would have explained here to Lydia all about Jesus.

And he would have explained to her the long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament, that the whole Old Testament is about. He's here. It's Jesus. He would have explained to her that Jesus, the one who the Jews killed and crucified, that that is the Messiah, the Son of God himself.

And that because of his death, because of his suffering on the cross, there's salvation, there's forgiveness of sin, there's all these things. And he would have told her to repent, be baptized, all of these things.

Paul would have explained all of that. And because, this is important, because the Lord has opened her heart, she takes heed of what's spoken to her by Paul.

[ 57 : 56 ] She takes heed of these things. See, the seed of the gospel. It bears fruit. And it bears fruit here to eternal life. And she puts her faith in the Lord. She's able to.

See, once the Lord opens your heart, it's not just that you're unable to hear it. It's more than that. It's that you're unable to respond to it. You're unable to actually put your faith and trust in Christ.

When God works in your heart, yes, he opens your ears. He opens your heart. But he enables you to come towards him. He enables you to put your faith and trust in him.

Something that seems so easy for the Lord's people. Put your faith and trust in Jesus. It seems so easy. But when you're outside of Christ, when your heart is closed, you can't physically do that. But when the Lord opens your heart, you're drawn in and you're able.

You're able to respond. You're able to put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, you have this amazing conversion here. And again, you know, I mentioned, you know, when you think about all the other conversions in the book of Acts, all the other amazing kind of conversions that are brought about by miracles and healings and earthquakes and lights and all these things.

[ 59 : 05 ] And yet here you've got a woman who's just had the gospel explained to her sitting beside a river. That's as simple as that after a prayer meeting. And she's saved. She's converted.

The Lord comes in. The Lord transforms her heart. And I think that's a reminder to us that we must never lose sight of the power of the gospel. Because we can lose sight of that.

We can start to think that it's all to do with the outward and to do with the outward things that we can do or experience. We have to remember the power of the gospel itself. The gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the ordinary way in which the Lord brings people to himself. And I say ordinary, theological speak probably. It's an extraordinary thing. But it's a usual way that the Lord works through the sharing of the gospel message.

And that should be a massive encouragement to us to do that wherever we are, work and families and community, to share the gospel. And to remember the power of the gospel.

[ 60 : 08 ] To remember what the gospel can actually do in the lives of people. It's not our job to do the saving. It's not our job to do the groundwork. We've seen that. But it is our job to scatter the seed. It is our job to share the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's do that. Let's be encouraged to do that. And remember the power of this gospel message. And as well, you see evidence here of our newfound faith as well.

That's another thing that's important. When you come to faith, there'll be evidence of that.

Sometimes it's called marks of grace. Evidences that you've actually come to faith.

Evidence that you've been transformed. I mentioned some of them before. Your desire for hunger for the word of God. A desire for worship. A desire to know Jesus more. There's lots of different

evidences that we've come to faith.

And you see something of this evidence here in the life of Lydia as well. Because notice she makes her home a place of fellowship and hospitality for Paul and his companions.

[ 61 : 09 ] So in verse 15. After she was baptized. And her household as well. Notice her whole household is baptized. 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. And then she wanted to use what she had. Her house. Probably a wealthy woman like I said. She wanted to use that for the cause. And to bring God's people together.

And that's exactly what you see here. And then interestingly. That's why I read to the end of the chapter. Remember after Paul and Silas. Remember when they're miraculously freed from the prison cell.

At the very end of chapter 16. Where do they go? After that ordeal. Where do they go? Verse 40. They go to Lydia's house. They go to Lydia's house. They meet with her brethren.

She makes her house a place where the Lord's people meet. She wants to be in the fellowship of God's people. And that's how it should be as Christians. Lord's people should have that desire.

[ 62 : 06 ] That desire to come together. Not just on a Sunday. Of course it's good on a Sunday. Or a midweek as well. To gather together physically. To be together. But more than that. To get to know one another.

To be part of one another's lives. Praying with one another. Regularly. Fellowshiping with one another. That's part of the evidence. And we've come to faithless desire. To be with the Lord's people.

And you see that here with Lydia. So you have this conversion here. Which from the outside. Maybe it might seem like. Maybe one of the most unimpressive.

And unremarkable conversions. In the whole of the book of Acts. But yet. It's an important one. It's an important one. Because here you get an inside view. Of what's going on in salvation.

Without the fireworks. Without the earthquake. Without the shining lights. Without the outward signs. You see the Lord coming in. Gospel being explained.

[ 63 : 04 ] The Lord opening the heart. And enabling this woman. To put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And surely our prayer is. That will be the case for all of us. Every one of us in here.

That the Lord would work in that way. That the Lord would work in that way. And those we know and love. And we pray for. Pray for conversions. Pray for people's hearts to be transformed.

And then go out of the gospel. You have to do both things. Don't you? Pray for that. Work to be done by the Lord. But we also have to go out. Scatter the seed. So let us do that. Let us do it to the glory of God.

And to leave the work of salvation. Up to the Lord himself. Amen. May the Lord bless. These few thoughts to us. We're going to. Pray now.

So I'm just going to. Bow in prayer. And then we'll sing our last psalm. Heavenly Father. We give thanks for the power of the gospel message.

[ 64 : 02 ] And even the. The simplicity. And the gentleness of. What we see. Even in the life of Lydia there. Especially in the context of the. Surrounding passages. And. Some of the perhaps dramatic conversions.

That we see. Even in the very same chapter. That we read. And yet to see. Lydia's heart. Just. Opened up. As the gospel is explained. And for her to. Put her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray oh Lord. That that will be true for. For all of us in here. And if there are some. Who are still outside of Christ. May you open their hearts. May you draw them in. And may they be aware of that themselves.

May they. May they. Understand the desire. For the things of God. It's not something that can be. Can be brought about for themselves. But only from you. You are the one who. Begins the work.

And you are the one who completes the work.

And help us to do our part. In scattering the seed. And sharing the good news. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. So cleanse us. Wash us. We ask. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. So we're going to.

[ 65 : 03 ] Conclude our time of worship now. By. I'm singing to God's praise. In Psalm 23. In the Scottish Psalter. Psalm. 23. The Lord's. My shepherd.

I'll not want. He makes me down to lie. In pastures green. He leadeth me. The quiet waters by. So we'll sing the whole psalm there. To the praise of God. And we'll stand to sing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. The Lord's. My shepherd. I am not want.

He gives me down to lie. In pastures green. He leadeth me.

In pastures green. He leadeth me. The quiet waters by.

[ 66 : 02 ] My soul he doth restore again. And me to walk again.

Within the paths of righteousness. Within the paths of righteousness.

Before his own it's sake. Yea, though I walk in death's dark veil.

Yet will I fear none ill. For thou art with me and thy rod.

For thou art with me and thy rod. And staff me comfort still.

[ 67 : 10 ] My table thou hast furnished. In presence of my foes.

My head thou dost with oil anoint. My head thou dost with oil anoint.

And my cup overflows. Goodness and mercy all my life.

Shall surely follow me. And in God's hands forevermore.

And in God's hands forevermore. My dwelling place shall be.

[ 68 : 19 ] And now may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Continue with you all now and forevermore.

Amen.