

23.10.22 am

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Date: 23 October 2022

Preacher: Reverend Kenny I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Good morning everybody and welcome to our service this morning. Special welcome to any visitors who are with us today. And we have preaching today Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod who was formerly the Assistant Minister in the Stornoway Congregation.

Tea and coffee are served after the service. Charlie will come out that door and be served there so please feel free to stay afterwards for a cup of coffee and a chat.

And then the evening service tonight God willing will be at 6pm as usual. On Tuesday Road to Recovery meets in the church at 7 o'clock and anyone who has any issues with addictions is very welcome to come and attend that meeting.

Also on Tuesday night up in Stornoway Rita Nikemba the founder of Dwelling Places Uganda will be speaking in the MA MacLeod Memorial Hall regarding that work at 7.30pm.

So if you would like to attend and need transport please have a word with Shona regarding that. Prayer meeting as usual Wednesday night at 7.30pm here in person and online on Zoom.

[1 : 1 1] Women for Mission AGM is on Thursday night in the Scalpy Community Centre.

Friday clubs for young people I understand are back on this week. I'm seeing, yeah, they're all on. So that's the usual clubs, Jam Connect and Rooted at the usual times.

And then next Sunday morning Reverend Joe Barnard will preach here in the morning and David our minister will be preaching in the evening.

Joe Barnard will be up speaking at the weekend conference The Pursuit of God in an Age of Pornography and various meetings highlighted there.

So there's a men's meeting Friday night 7.30pm in the County Hotel in Stornoway and then on Saturday two meetings that are down here in our own congregation in the morning 10.30pm for parents, carers and youth workers and in the evening at 7 o'clock for 18 to 13 year olds.

[2 : 1 7] And then on Sunday night there will be a big YF at 8pm up in the church in Stornoway. On the notice there was mention of a women's meeting with information to be announced but I haven't had any more information regarding that.

I don't think no one else has got any information. So the woman, it's in the Mother Valley Memorial Hall in Stornoway at the past 7 on Friday night in the Alley of McDonald. All right, okay.

Pastor of sport worker will be speaking. That's great. So these are all the intimations. So we give a warm welcome to Kenny and I to our pulpit today and pray for God's blessing upon you as you minister his word to us.

Thank you very much. We're going to begin our worship singing to God's praise from Psalm 34. Psalm number 34.

And this is from St. Psalms verses 1 to 9. Psalm 34 verses 1 to 9. At all times I will bless the Lord.

[3 : 2 3] I'll praise him with my voice. Because I glory in the Lord. Let troubled souls rejoice. Together let us praise the Lord.

Exalt his name with me. I sought the Lord. His answer came. From fear he set me free. They look to him and shine with joy.

They are not put to shame. The suffering man cried to the Lord. From him deliverance came. And we'll sing verses 1 to 9 of this psalm. Psalm 34, 1 to 9.

At all times I will bless the Lord. I'll praise him with my voice.

Because I glory in the Lord. Let troubled souls rejoice.

[4 : 3 3] Together let us praise the Lord.

Exalt his name with me. I sought the Lord.

His answer came. From fear he set me free.

They look to him and shine with joy.

They are not put to shame. The suffering man cried to the Lord.
[5 : 35] From him deliverance came. The angel of the Lord surrounds.

And guards continually. All those who fear.
And honor him. He sets his people free.
Come taste and see. The Lord is good.
Who trusts in him is blessed. Oh, fear the Lord. You saints with need.
[6 : 43] You will not be oppressed. Let us bow in prayer.

Oh, Lord, we give thanks this morning that as we bow before you, that we're able to come to the King. How wonderful it is that there's an open door for us. And that you are the God who has promised to hear and to answer prayer.
Sometimes we have to confess that when we come to you, maybe we don't come in a right spirit. And other times that we come, we are very conscious that we ourselves can be quite spiritually distant and far off.
But the wonderful thing is that you have opened a door. You have made a way for us to come to you. And we pray today that as we gather together like this, that we may have a desire to worship the Lord.

That there might be this sense of your greatness in our heart. This awareness that you are King. That you are Lord over all. That you're creator of heaven and earth.
[7 : 51] And that you do according to your will with the armies of heaven and with the inhabitants of the earth. And that there's nobody who could stop you. Nobody can say, what are you doing?

Because, Lord, you know best. You know what is right. We pray for the faith to be able to see this. Because we live in a world that is so often topsy-turvy.
We live in a world that often doesn't make sense. And, O Lord, there are many wonderful things. And we here in this part of this world experience just so many blessings.
We realize that this world is a world where there's so much pain and sorrow and suffering and sadness. And so we ask, O Lord, that in all the pain of this world, you might intervene. That you might help. And we give thanks, O Lord, that you are not a God who is distant and remote. But that your presence is everywhere. We're told that, that, take I the morning wings and dwell in utmost parts of sea.
[8 : 55] Even there, Lord, shall I hand me lead. Thy right hand hold shall me. And so you're with us in our sitting down and in our rising up. And everywhere we go, we know that your presence is there.

And so, Lord, we pray to bless us as a gathering today of your people. And we pray that you might be at the center of our worship. That we might know you in a very special way. Lord, draw near to us, each one individually, personally.
We confess our sin. We do so collectively. And we do so individually and personally. And we give thanks that you are the God who has made provision for all our wrongdoing, for all our sin. And your word assures us that if we confess our sin, that you're faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so we pray that you will do that for us today. Pray, Lord, to bless the singing of your word and the reading of it and the preaching of it. And bless everybody here. Bless our homes, our families, those whom we love. Remember those who are ill, those who are old now and can't do for themselves, who are dependent on others.
[10 : 06] Lord, we give thanks for our carers and all who help. We pray for all our medical profession. And we give thanks, Lord, for all the different strands of our NHS.

And we pray to encourage and help them. Remember all the emergency services. We commit them, Lord, to your care and keeping. And we pray to bless this congregation. And we pray that it will be a growing witness in the community here.
And that more and more will come to faith. That you will add to your number every day such as should be saved. We pray for David and his wife and family at this time.
We commit them to you. And we pray for everybody here, young and old alike. We give thanks for all the young people of the congregation. We pray that you will bless them in the early days of their lives.
Do them good, we pray, and encourage them. Lord, we ask that you will watch over us now as we wait upon you. Grant wisdom to those who lead us.

[11 : 05] We seem to live at a very strange time between the COVID and the war in Ukraine and all that has followed on from that.

And all the energy crisis that faces us. We live in difficult times and uncertain times. And so we pray as we see a great degree of uncertainty and we could almost say chaos with regard to the ruling and management of us.

We ask, Lord, for wisdom to those who lead us. Wisdom from above. Give guidance. And so we pray for Westminster and Holyrood. And we pray locally here for our council.

Grant wisdom to all our leaders. Leave us not to ourselves, we pray, and do us good. Cleanse us from our every sin, we pray. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Hi, to the young folk. Do you come around here? And so we work out who counts themselves as young.

[12 : 11] Here we go. Now. Well, I want to speak to you about somebody who was very, very old.

You're young. And the psalm says, I once was young, but now I'm old. And I'm going to talk about my mum died this year in July.

And she was very old. She was one week off 105. That is old. She was born in 1917. And so when she was a wee girl, there was no, she couldn't, there was no tap, no running water.

There was no lights. Used to have lamps and all that. So she saw an awful lot of changes in her life. But the one thing she had, even up until she was about 95 or 96, was she had a really good memory.

She could remember things. And years ago, she used to be a teacher. And in fact, sometimes people would come, people who were interested in old photos, would come to her to try and work out who these, who some of the people on the photos were.

[13 : 30] Because her memory was so good. But then, very sadly, her memory began to go. She began to forget things. And when we get older, that happens.

We all forget things. But you know, her memory got so bad, that sometimes she forgot who I was. And she lived with us.

And one day she was looking at me. And she was now about, this was when she was about 103.

And one day she looked at me and she said, I think I know you.

Oh, well, yes, I said. I said, I'm your son. My son, she said. Since when?

Oh, well, I said, all my life. My life? Really? So, it's very sad. But it was quite funny too. But it was, it was, it was quite sad.

[14 : 29] Because, for my mum, and it's the same with mums, their family are just so important. And, but, this is sometimes what happens when we get older, we forget.

But you know, the wonderful thing is, God never forgets. Because it tells us in the Bible, that even, even a mother, it's, this is what it says, it's like the most impossible thing to happen is that a mother would forget her child.

Most of, it's like that's the most, almost impossible thing to happen. God says, even if a mother would forget, I won't forget you. And isn't that wonderful?

That we have a God who will never, ever, ever forget us. God never says, hmm, if we come to him in prayer, if you say a wee prayer, God's never going to say, now who is that who's praying to me?

He knows you. He knows you. He knows your name. He knows everything about you. And you don't have to come to God and say, by the way, Lord, this is so and so, and give your name.

[15 : 35] You can just say to him, you just go straight to him and say, Lord, help me. Help me in school. Help me at home. Help me with my friends. Help me, Lord, I've lost this.

Help me, I'm scared. Help me. We can go to God with anything. And the most important thing is that we come to know him. And we come to know him by having Jesus as our own Lord and Savior.

So we need to ask Jesus to come into our heart. And if we've got King Jesus, we've got somebody who will watch over us forever. Go and say a wee prayer. Lord our God, we pray to bless us.

And we give thanks, Lord, for when we're young to know about Jesus. King Jesus, the greatest king in the whole wide world. And he's our king.

And so we pray today that you will bless us. Bless the young folk, we pray, giving thanks for them.

And we ask, Lord, that you will watch over us all and do us all good.

[16 : 33] And take away from us our every sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Now we're going to sing again from Psalm 118.

And this is from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 118. And from verse 15 through to verse 23. Psalm 118 and at verse 15 through to verse 23.

In dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health. The Lord's right hand doth ever valiantly.

The right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is on high. The right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever valiantly. And so on, Psalm 118, verses 15 through to 23.

In dwellings of the righteous. In dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health.

[17 : 52] The right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is on high.

The right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever valiantly.

I shall not die, but live and shall the works of God discover.

The Lord doth me chastise it soar, but not to death given over.

O stand ye open unto me the gates of righteousness.

[19 : 25] The right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever valiantly. Then will I act turn into them, and I, the Lord, will pass.

NINGNINGNINGNING!NING!NING! The gate of God by it, the just shall enter it.

The will I praise, for thou me heard, and that's my safety being.

The stone is made, a cornerstone, which builders did despise.

This is the doing of the Lord, and wondrous in our eyes.

[20 : 50] Now we're going to read God's word in the Acts of the Apostles, and we're going to read in chapter 12, the Acts of the Apostles, and in chapter 12.

About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands, and some who belonged to the church.

He killed James, the brother of John, with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of unleavened bread.

And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

[22 : 14] And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, Get up quickly. And the chains fell off his hands.

And the angel said to him, Dress yourself and put on your sandals. And he did so. And he said to him, Wrap your cloak round you and follow me.

And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city.

It opened for them of its own accord. And they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel, and rescued me from the hand of Herod, and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer, Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

[23 : 42] They said to her, You are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.

But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Tell these things to James and to the brothers.

Then he departed and went to another place. Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death.

Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. And they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

On an appointed day, Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, The voice of a God and not of a man.

[25 : 03] Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms, and breathed his last. But the word of God increased and multiplied.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. Amen.

And may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. We're going to sing in Gaelic from Psalm 40. And we'll sing the first two verses of the psalm.

NING!! Thank you.

Thank you.

[27 : 09] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[29 : 39] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 12. And I want us to think about this chapter, but maybe if we're to home in on any particular verse, maybe it might be verse 5, where it tells us, So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

But considering the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that the moment that we begin to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, that our life changes, changes radically, and it changes for the best, changes for good.

And the moment we're in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's a life that we're made to the Lord, and it's a life that we're made to the Lord.

But the moment we're in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's a life that we're in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's a life that we're in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That peace comes into our heart. There's a new peace because we're at peace with God. The joy of the Holy Spirit, the love of God is shed abroad in our heart.

[31 : 25] There's all these kind of things that have come into our heart which changes. So you say to yourself, it's a wonderful thing, and so it is being a Christian. But it's also a difficult thing.

Because it's never an easy thing as a Christian to live in this world. Because there are so many forces and so many powers that are at work against the Christian.

We can just look at the life of Jesus, and we can see all the forces and powers that were at work against his life. And of course we know that there are forces and powers even within ourselves.

Our own heart of unbelief, what we would term the flesh, is still opposing God's work within us. And it makes life difficult because we have a sympathy with sin.

That was one of the great differences between Jesus and us. Although Jesus was like us, in every other thing he had no sin.

[32 : 28] He could see sin for all its ugliness. For just how awful it actually was. And it grieved him. Now we're not like that. Except there are times where God shows us how offensive and of how ugly sin really is.

But sadly there's a side to us that sympathizes with sin. But there are forces at work that are opposed to the Christian faith.

And that of course makes it difficult. Because we know that the devil and the world and everything is opposed to the Christian faith. And that's what this chapter is highlighting very clearly to us.

Is that there's a man here, this man Herod, who is trying to silence the church, the new church, the early New Testament church, right at the very beginning.

And, you know, it's one of the things that we grew up with here was the great, and this country, the great freedom.

[33 : 32] There's a lot about it today, a freedom of speech. And it's very important for the gospel that we have freedom of speech. That we're able to say without fear.

And people should, we should have this freedom to say. And going back sometime, we would never envisage that there is coming the time and it's beginning to happen.

Where sometimes street preachers will get arrested or they're taken in. Because there's complaints about what they're saying. Which may be in accordance just with God's word.

So there's a squeeze starting in our own, even in our own land, about these things. But way back then, there was a real power at work against the gospel.

And so we have this man Herod. And the Herod dynasty, they were a very cruel lot. And when you look at their actual history, they were particularly against the church.

[34 : 32] Because this man Herod, Herod Agrippa, who had James beheaded and then arrested Peter, was a grandson of Herod the Great. Who had all the babies in Bethlehem killed.

Remember when he tried to get baby Jesus. And he ordered that all the infants would be put to death in Bethlehem. In his attempt to eradicate, to get rid of Jesus.

So that was a grandfather of this man. And this man, this Herod, is also a nephew of the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded. So you can see these Herods, they were nasty people who had a real grudge or a hatred of the church.

But as we know that even people, if they raise their hand against God and against his cause, they are not ultimately going to succeed. And the end of the chapter shows us that very clearly.

So here's Herod and Esau, as it were, puffed up with power. And he decides to take one of the leaders of the early church.

[35 : 39] Now this was, on his part, a political move. Because the Jews hated the Herods. They didn't like Herod.

And so he was trying to carry favor with the religious leaders. And by taking James and beheading him, he could see that this was something that the religious Jews, who were so opposed to Christ, they really approved of.

And that's why he then thought, okay, this was a good move. I will now take Peter, who is the head of the church. Peter was the one, of course, remember, who was used by the Lord at Pentecost, where thousands were converted.

And Peter, of course, preached that fearless message. And of the importance of repenting and believing. Because he said to them, you, he said, are the ones who put Jesus to death.

And you know, the message of the gospel has never changed. It is still to repent and to believe.

And if anybody here today, you have to say to yourself, you know, I'm still outside.

[36 : 51] I still haven't come to the place I should come to. It's the two things that the Lord is saying. We need to repent of our sins and to believe. God doesn't ask us to go on a course, a great theological course.

Because some people say, I couldn't become a Christian. My knowledge is so limited. I know there's so much in the Bible I don't understand. I could never be much of a Christian.

God doesn't say that that's what you have to be or become. He just says to believe. That we have to come and repent, be sorry for our sins. And say, Lord, forgive me.

Accept me. And the Lord will if we are serious about it. And when Peter preached this message of repentance and believing in the Lord, as we know thousands were saved.

And so Peter is taken. And Herod puts him in prison. And you'd think that Peter was the most dangerous prisoner in the world. You know, sometimes you look at some of these terrorists or people have created terrible acts.

[37 : 59] I don't think they would have been under greater security in a prison than Peter was. Because there were 16 soldiers in four groups of four.

It would appear that two were chained to him in the cell. Two were standing at the door of the cell.

And then they would take it in turns every, maybe I don't know, every few hours to change shifts.

So you'd think Peter must be a really dangerous criminal. But his only crime was preaching the gospel. So here he is in prison and he's chained.

And when you look at it, you'd say to yourself, well, Peter, your case is absolutely hopeless. At a human point of view, if we could look into that prison, we'd say, Peter, you're a doomed man.

Because for a start, bribery wasn't an option. Because as we read there, the guards were executed.

[39 : 02] It was a crime. And back in the days of the Romans, if a guard slept on duty, they would be executed. If they lost a prisoner, they were executed.

And so they were guarding. They knew that their life was at stake. So there was, they were, Peter was chained to them. He was behind bars. And we would probably say the maximum security wing of the prison.

So at a human level, Peter, you're a dead man. But that's the beauty of that verse, verse 5. So Peter was kept in prison, kept secure, kept in the inner prison. But, despite that, earnest prayer was made to God by the church. Earnest prayer for him was made to God.

Earnest prayer. Continuous prayer. Urgent prayer. Incessant prayer. And, you know, it's the most awesome gift that God has given to us. The gift of prayer.

[40 : 02] You know, so often we take it for granted. But it's incredible to think that the creator of heaven and earth, the God who brought into being by the word of his power, you and I can go to him any day, any time, about anything, with anything.

In fact, that's what we're told in the Bible, that in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Sometimes we think, oh, it's too wee to take to God.

This is just a wee thing. Lost the car keys, can't find them. Go to God. You know, I'm sure we've all been there and maybe there's something really important that we've got to get and we can't find and we turn the place upside down.

And it's only when we've reached an extreme point and we don't know what to do anymore that we begin to pray. God helps us. And we so often say, why do we leave it to the last resort?

We should be going to the Lord right away, first and foremost. And so we find that we have this wonderful opportunity, this amazing gift is given to us where we're able to go to the God of heaven and earth.

[41 : 14] And we've got to remember when we go to the Bible, it tells us about what God does. He opened the sea after prayer. Shut the mouths of lions.

Brought bread from heaven. You look through the Bible and you see how God responds to the prayers of his people. And I'm sure all of you here could tell a story of how God has actually answered your prayer.

Sometimes you might say, well, he hasn't answered my prayer. But sometimes the answer's in ways. Sometimes we've always got to remember God doesn't always answer right away. And God doesn't always answer our prayer exactly the way that we want.

Because sometimes what we ask for is not the best for ourselves. So there are various aspects.

There are a series of sermons in that in itself. But God does hear our prayer.

And God does answer prayer. And so the church here is praying. And it's so important to pray in a right way. Because, you know, I'm sure we all look into our own hearts.

[42 : 25] At our own prayer life. And sometimes we have to say, you know, my prayer life isn't that great. Sometimes we go through the motions. Sometimes we're lazy in prayer.

Sometimes when we finish praying, we have to say, you know this, I don't even know what I asked for. You know, so that's not real prayer.

Although we're going through it. And sometimes the Lord will allow things into our lives. And you know when that happens. As soon as our normal day-to-day life changes.

And something comes in that shakes us a bit. Then prayer takes on a new urgency. We start getting serious with God again. We don't just drift in prayer. We don't just go through the motions. It's real prayer. But that's how it should be actually all the time. We should have this real urgency and energy in prayer. So here we have Peter in prison and the church praying.

[43 : 25] And as we say, it's this great privilege that's given to us. And if there's anybody here today and you're not a Christian, you don't realize what you're robbing yourself of in not having the King of Glory as your own King.

The privileges, the benefits, not only for death but for life. Because you're missing out on so much. So you make sure and ask Jesus to come into your heart and into your life.

But you know, something's quite amazing in a sense when you look at Peter in the prison. Because we find that Peter tells us in verse 6. Now when Herod was about to bring him out on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers.

Right? So this is Peter's last night on earth at a human level. Next day, Herod's going to take him out and execute him. But how do we find Peter? Well, here he is.

He's between two soldiers sleeping. And you might say to yourself, right, how would I be if I know that first thing in the morning the doors of the prison are going to open, the chains are going to be taken off, and I'm going to be taken out to be executed?

[44 : 43] I wonder how we would be. Would we be sleeping? Because Peter is sleeping like a baby. And one of the great things that we find, so we have to ask ourselves, how is Peter like this? Well, at one level, possibly, it's one of the things that the church might have been praying for. They might have been praying, Lord, take, please give Peter calmness and peace. Give him sleep. Because we know in the scripture it says, so he gives his beloved sleep. Because Peter had lots of anxieties. Peter was married, we know that. So he had a wife. John Bunyan writes, John Bunyan who gave us a pilgrim's progress, and we know he was in prison for a long time for his faith. And he wrote, this being in prison, he said, where I am parted from my wife and my family, is like the ripping of my flesh, of my bones. That's how he felt it. So we've got to look at Peter and say, look, Peter, this was difficult for Peter. And there's the whole weight of the church, the anxiety of the church, of what's going to happen. [46 : 07] He's the leader of the church. What's going to happen to the new church if he's taken out and he's executed? But we find that Peter is fast asleep.

But you know, there's something else I believe. Because Peter, I believe, is sleeping. His head is on the pillow of Jesus' promise.

Because you remember, back in John 21, when Jesus was restoring Peter. Remember how Peter had denied Jesus and fallen? And at the end of the chapter, Jesus tells Peter what's going to happen to him.

How he's going to die. He's telling him he's going to get the martyr's death. But he says, when you are old. It's when you're old. And this is only a very, very short time after.

So Peter at this stage is not old. So, I think there's an element of the reason why Peter is sleeping so soundly.

[47 : 08] Is that he believes, that he's saying to himself, I don't know how God is going to work. But Jesus told me that it's when I'm old I will get the martyr's crown.

And so he's sleeping on the promise of Jesus. Are you and I able to do that as well? Because maybe, maybe you're going through experiences just now.

And your world is difficult. It's in a bit of a turmoil. But you have God's word. Well, cling to it. Cling to God's word. Because providence can change very quickly.

God's word won't. And very often, when we rest on God's word, we can be almost persuaded that God will try us in this very thing. He'll test us in this very thing.

So that we will find that what we believe God is going to do, sometimes there's not only a delay, but the very opposite begins to happen.

[48 : 07] You see that so often in the likes of, the life of David, the life of Joseph. Remember, David, David was told he used to be king. And for years, it looked like the least likely thing to happen.

But then one day it did happen. God will always be true to what he says. And so we believe that Peter is resting here on the promise of the Lord.

And now we find that God sends his angel and the angel awakens Peter and he says, get up quickly. And so we find the chains fell off his hands.

And I think one of the things we've got to say here is you'll notice the order. The angel says, rise up quickly. Now, Peter could have said to the angel, listen, there's no point.

I'm chained. I can't rise up. But Peter gives immediate obedience to the command from heaven, rise up.

[49 : 09] And it's when he rose up, the chains fell off. And there's a spiritual thing there as well because so often with regard to salvation, people say, oh Lord, just save me.

And they kind of expect them just to be able just to live as they're doing and that somehow God will all of a sudden intervene and that's it. No, God says, look unto me and be ye saved.

Seek and you will find. Knock and you'll be open. God asks us to do, it's only a simple thing, but this is what he asks us to do. And when we do that, then the chains will fall off because by nature, we are held by chains.

Chains of sin and we don't realise the chains that are holding us back, holding us back from the Lord, chains holding us down. But the Lord says, you look to me and I'll get these chains off.

And the moment you fix your eyes upon me and you seek me with all your heart, the chains that are holding you back will fall off.

[50 : 14] And maybe for somebody today, there's something holding you back. You're almost there. You've almost been there for a long time. But somehow you're still, you say to yourself, I'm still here and I need to get there and I don't know how to get from here to there.

I need to. But how? Well, the Lord will take you. But you have to say, right Lord, I'm serious here. I want salvation. I want you to give me the gift of salvation. Remember, salvation's a gift, not something you work up yourself.

It's given to you by God. So you ask the Lord, Lord, give this salvation to me. Make me willing today in order that I may receive Jesus as my very own saviour.

And so we find here that Peter gets up and he obeys the angel and out they go and everything opens up on the way out. And as they're going out, as they kind of reach out, Peter realizes, ah, this is for real.

[51 : 27] You see, initially he thought it was a vision because it's when they're outside, he realizes, and I'm sure you're saying, he's probably rubbing his eyes and he's feeling the walls of the street and he's saying, well, I'm really out because the angel then had left him.

And he realizes this is for real. And do you know something? I think we often don't realize it, but there are angels around us as well because we're told in scripture that the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

And if you are a believer today, you are an heir of salvation, you're an heir of glory. And so there are angels ministering to you and we don't know how often we have been delivered by an angel.

An angel may have protected us and kept us because the fallen angels, the evil spirits maybe have a design upon us to do us harm and they're administering spirits protecting us.

We don't know. But you remember there's a classic example in scripture where Elisha with a servant is in the city and the city is surrounded by the enemy.

[52 : 41] And the servant says to Elisha, oh, we're done for Elisha. Look at, look at all the soldiers round about and Elisha said, oh, there's more with us than there are with them. And I think at that moment the servant must have thought, oh, poor Elisha, he's losing it.

But Elisha said very simply, Lord, open the young man's eyes that he may see. And God gave that young man a vision, or not a vision, but opened his eyes to see the spiritual world.

And all round Elisha there were horses and chariots of fire. And there was this awareness, oh, the servant said, I didn't know this.

So we don't know what's going on, we can't see, we're bound in the world that we're living in, a finite world, and so on. So here is the Lord and he's sending his angel to deliver.

And then we find that Peter, when he discovers where he is, he makes his way straight for the house of Mary, of John Mark.

[53 : 50] We read there that when he reached, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark. And of course, we read a lot about this man, Mark, and Paul's missionary journeys and we believe that this is a Mark that wrote the Gospel of Mark and that Peter was the one who gave Mark so much of the information.

But then we have what is almost quite a humorous incident because Peter makes his way straight there. This is where the prayer meeting is going on. He knows where they'll all be gathered at probably a big house and Mary must have been a woman of some means.

And he starts knocking at the gate, at the door. And Rhoda, when a servant girl, goes to the door and instantly recognizes the voice of Peter because apparently it was the custom when you knocked at the door you said who it was.

It's so and so. And she recognized Peter's voice right away. And she was so excited that she forgot to open the door but she ran back in and she said to them, Peter shut the door.

And they said to her, you're mad. And you know, when you look in and you're saying, here's the church and they're praying, Lord help Peter. Oh Lord, that it might please you to open the prison doors and let Peter out.

[55 : 17] And Rhoda said, he's out, he's at the gate and they're saying, Rhoda, you're mad. Lord, let Peter out. And you know, when you look at it you say, this is, it's kind of mad.

But you know, sometimes we're a bit like that ourselves because like the man who came to Jesus, he says, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. And so often in our prayer lives can be sometimes a wee bit crippled by our own personal unbelief.

But here the Lord is saying, and he doesn't, and he does, and there are other times God answers our prayer and we don't even recognize that he's answered. And so there's this wonderful moment where there's this realization for the church.

God has heard and God has answered our prayers. And as we consider this this morning, let us always remember in our prayers the persecuted church. that they are, there's many today in prison. There are many people who don't have the freedoms and liberties we do simply because they love the Lord Jesus Christ. And this girl, Rhoda, the servant girl, she had more faith than any of them.

[56 : 29] She had more belief. She knew it was Peter that was at the door and the others wouldn't believe. And you know, that's another thing we've always got to remember. A person's position in the church doesn't indicate the level of faith that they have.

It might be a young girl in this congregation or a young boy might have more faith and I have more faith and some of the office bearers may have obviously don't have the same maybe knowledge or theological experience or the same experience of life or all these things.

But sometimes the faith, Jesus talks about the faith of a little child. You look in the gospel and you say, who had the greatest faith of all Jesus followers?

Who grasped what Jesus was about most? Was it John? Was it Peter? No. It was Mary of Bethany. Mary understood what Jesus was about in a way that they didn't.

When she anointed Jesus and she was criticized for it, Jesus said, let her alone against the day of my burial. Has she done this? It wasn't until John saw the empty tomb, it tells us, and he believed.

[57 : 45] It was like everything came together. He grasped what he couldn't grasp before. So we've always got to remember that our church is full of people who have great faith.

And here's an example of this young girl. One last thing. We can't but miss the end of the chapter. Here's this man. God is a wonderful way of turning everything around.

Start of the chapter, here's this man, Herod. He's got all the power. He's got the voice. His voice brings life and brings death. He's killed James and now he's raised his hand against Peter.

And he thinks he's it. The end of the chapter, he still thinks he's it. And the people round about in order to try and inflate his ego, tries to tell him he's it.

And he takes all the glory to himself. And God says, Herod, your time's up. You should be giving the glory to me. And he smote him and he died. Died in agony.

[58 : 48] And you know, then it goes on and it tells us something else beautiful at the very end of the chapter. Despite all that has happened there, but the word of God increased and multiplied.

Beginning of the chapter, the church is under threat. The sword is raised against it. The end of the chapter, the church is multiplying and growing.

You see, God's in control. It's his cause. And we've always got to remember that. And that's a great encouragement. You make sure that you're on God's side.

And you're on God's side if you have God. Because God and you are a majority. Let's pray. Lord, we pray to bless us. We give thanks for our time this morning.

And we pray that as we reflect upon your word and we're brought to see this, the way that you are delivered, Peter, we know that you are still the God who delivers.

[59 : 48] you are able to do great things and we pray that you'll do great things for every single one of us in our own lives. We pray, Lord, your blessing upon us all. We pray for those whose hearts might be heavy, those who mourn, those who have experienced loss.

We pray that your comforting, gracious hand may be upon them. Bless our time together. Bless a cup of tea, coffee afterwards. And prepare us, Lord, for the evening service and do us good, cleansing us from our sin.

In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen. We're going to conclude in the third psalm from Sing Psalms. And here, this is telling us about, although there's thousands of enemies round about, still the Lord gave David sleep.

And that's the wonderful thing. When to the Lord I lift my voice in face of those who hate me still, the Lord will hear my cry to him and answer from his holy hill.

I settle down and sleep in peace. I wake in God's upholding hand. I will not fear ten thousand foes who circling round against me stand.

[61 : 01] We'll sing these verses four to the end of Psalm 3 to God's praise. When to the Lord I lift my voice in face of those who hate me still, the Lord will hear my cry to him and answer from his holy hill.

I settle down and sleep in peace. I wake in God's upholding hand.
I will not fear ten thousand foes who circling round against me stand.
Unrise, O Lord, save me, my God.

Deliver for your mercy's sake. Strike all my enemies on the joy.
[62 : 53] The wicked's teeth in peace and bring.

The Lord alone deliverance and no other source of help of help are we.

Therefore upon your people all may your eternal blessing me.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and obeyed upon each one of you, now and forevermore. Amen.