

Mysteries of this World, Miracle of Heaven and the Mandate of God

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[0 : 00] Good morning and a warm welcome to church this morning. It's good to be back with you and I'm grateful for those who stood in the gap when I was away, those who preached and took prayer meetings and took services. I know some are here today and so I'm very grateful and I know that God has blessed you as a congregation through the ministry in my absence.

Those who are visiting with us today, there's a few faces I don't recognise. It's good to see you and if you're able to stay at the end of the service, there'll be tea and coffee. Please stay, it'll be good to meet and have a chance to enjoy fellowship.

Evening service this evening at 6pm and I'll take that service, God willing. Ladies Bible Study meets tomorrow at 8 at 32 McQueen Street as normal. First Fruit Fellowships Church of Scotland Hall, Tuesday at half past 7 as normal and also the prayer meeting at half past 7 here on Wednesday. And the service is next, Lord's Day at 11am and 6pm as usual and hopefully it'll be conducted by myself. A couple more things to note. One is the website which is now online and you can look at various things online on the website and download sermons on that website as well.

But if you'd rather have a CD, please speak to Amman and you can still supply CDs to those who need them. Also a date for your diary is two weeks today, 16th of August. In the evening, there'll be no evening service here but it's the Lever Bar of Communion and so we have agreed that when it's a scalper or the Lever Bar of Communion, the two adjacent congregations will close on the Sunday evening and we'll come together.

[1 : 47] As much as we can. So 16th of August, make a note of that. Please make every effort to go. It's very encouraging when those from the two sides come together and come together in worship.

If you think there's a need for a minibus or something like that, please speak to me at the end of the service and we can see what we can arrange if that's considered to be necessary.

I think these are all the notices so let's begin our service and worship God by singing to his praise. The words are on the screen, I hope, in just a minute.

Mission Praise 266. And we sing about much that we cannot tell but we also come in joy and praise for what we do know of our gods.

Let's sing as we worship God together. I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship, should set his love upon the sons of men. Let's stand to sing together.

[2 : 47] Let's unite our hearts.

Let's sing. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this morning and we thank you for our being together in this place.

We thank you for your promise that you will be here with us because we come this morning in the name of Christ. We come putting our faith in him, in his blood, in his righteousness.

We thank you that Jesus is the way and Jesus is the truth and Jesus is the life. And Lord, we thank you that that way into your presence is open.

We thank you that through Christ's blood shed for us, we are able to come into the presence of a holy God and call you our Father who art in heaven.

[4 : 01] We thank you, Father, that your name is hallowed, that your name is holy, that you are a holy God. And Lord, we confess that we, as we bow before you, are those who are not holy.

We confess our sin as we are called to each time we come into your presence. We confess, Lord, that we fall far short of your standard, of your holiness.

And even our righteous acts are as filthy rags before you. But Lord, we thank you that still you bid us come. And we thank you that as we confess our sin, you have promised, because you are faithful, because you are just, because Christ died, you will forgive us our sin.

And purify us from all unrighteousness. And so we pray, even as we think back over days and weeks and perhaps years, even as the evil one digs up sin of the past and throws it back at us, we pray, Lord, that you would forgive us our sin.

That you would remember it no more. That you would take it away as far as the east is from the west. And Lord, that you would bless us with that sense of forgiveness and assurance that we are accepted in Christ.

[5 : 31] There is so much of your glory, Father. So much of your holiness. So much of your work that we cannot understand. We have sung. So much that we cannot tell.

But Lord, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us as a God who is full of mercy. And a God who is abounding in love. We thank you that you are the God who is patient with us.

And you are the God who calls us to come. When we are weary, when we are heavy laden. And your promise is that we will find rest in Christ. And so we pray that we may know the reality of that Sabbath rest as we bow in your presence.

And as we take the name of Christ upon our lips. We pray that you would cleanse us from sin and fill us with the Holy Spirit. That our worship this morning may be true and sincere.

And acceptable in your eyes. We pray, Lord, for those who are in particular need today. We thank you that Jesus is the one who satisfies and meets us at the point of all our needs.

[6 : 43] We pray for those who are grieving. For families who have lost. Some who have passed from time to eternity over these weeks.

We ask, Lord, that you would comfort them in their grief. We pray for those who would wish to be amongst us this morning but who are in hospital. And who are at home recovering from hospital treatment.

And we ask that you would meet them at the point of their need where they are. And that you would draw near to them. And bless them. We pray for those who are away from us on holiday.

We ask that you would give them rest and refreshment where they are. Pray for those who are with us on holiday. And we ask, Lord, that you would refresh them. And bless them in their time.

Here and with us. And particularly this morning. We pray for every place in this area. And across the nation. And across the world. Where Christ crucified will be preached today.

[7 : 43] We thank you that the word of God will progress. And has been progressed. And will always progress. And even though heaven and earth pass away. We thank you that your word is eternal.

That your word lasts forever. And Lord, we pray now that as we continue. At this time that you would bless us. And that you would lead us by your spirit.

Lift our eyes from ourselves and from each other. Lift our minds from the things that distract us during the week.

And enable us, we pray. To think upon the things of God. And to know your blessing. In this time together. So hear our prayers. And go before us now.

And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Boys and girls. Would you like to come out please? I remember the days when you wouldn't come off your chairs.

[8 : 43] Now you're almost sitting in my shoes. That's good. That's a funny joke. Huh? How have you been? Have you enjoyed your holidays? Yeah?

Have you done anything interesting? Anything interesting we go on in the holidays? This is when the parents always their heads go down. And they hope there's no answers. Fun holidays, have you? Yeah.

Has anybody been away? Where have you been away? Caitlin? Malik to see her baby cousin. Malik to see her baby cousin. Yeah. Where have you been? To Airdrie. To Airdrie? Good stuff.

Natalie, where are you? London.

London? Johnny, you're quiet today. Are you in London too? London too. Good, good. Well, I was away on holiday as well. And when I was on holiday, one of the things that we went on on holiday, we went on two things to get us on holiday.

[9 : 44] The first thing we went on was a car. Not that one. Not that one, but that is a car.

I'm not sure how well it would do in the car was sold. But it's a car. And we also went on a plane. Well, just like that actually.

Can you tell me, who's ever been on a plane before? Any of you guys been on a plane? Put your hand up. Been on a plane. Okay. Okay. That's good.

Lots of you have been on planes. Can anybody tell me, please, how heavy are planes? I wouldn't have known either until I looked it up.

But I think it is 300 tons. Do you know how heavy 300 tons are? 300 tons is about 5,000 and a bit times as heavy as I am.

[10:45] Do you think I can fly? I can only jump about that. And I definitely can't fly. Can anybody please tell me then, how something that's made of metal and weighs 300 tons can do that?

And go all the way up. Higher and higher. And sit there for 2 or 3 hours. And then land back down. More gracefully than I can when I jump off a chair.

How does it work? Anyone? Propellers. And how do they work?

They go round and round fast. And how does that happen? Bethany? Because they're controlling the plane.

They're controlling the plane. What does the controls do? How does it work? Grace? We have a driver. We have a driver.

[11:50] And how does the driver drive it? Anna? There's an engine. And how does the engine work? John Struthers?

What is he? You know what the answer is? You know what the answer is? Don't know. We just don't know.

And even though we had an expert here, he was an expert on these planes, and if we said, can you explain to us please how that works? After two minutes, we don't understand.

If I ask John to come out and explain, how does, never mind the Bugatti Veyron, but how does the Volkswagen Golf engine work? After a minute, I'm lost. I don't know.

I just can't understand. But you know, I trust the car enough to get into it, even though I don't really understand how the engine works.

[12:53] And I trusted enough to get onto that plane, even though I haven't got a clue how the engine really worked.

And you know, boys and girls, there's lots about God that we just don't understand. Can you understand that he has no beginning and he has no end?

No? I can't. Can you understand that God is everywhere all the time? Well, if you can, you understand better than me.

Can you understand that whenever we pray, even if five million people are all praying at the same time in different places, God hears everyone as if only one person was speaking.

We just can't really understand. Sometimes things happen in the world as well. And we can't understand why they happen. But you know what God asks us to do.

[14:06] He doesn't ask us, Lois, Lois, God doesn't ask us to understand everything about him. But he asks us to trust him.

And it's different, isn't it? Do you trust God? Do you think you should trust God? What kind of things encourage you to trust God?

Do you think he loves you? Yeah. Do you think he cares for you? Yeah. All the time? Yeah. And in the days that things happen that you're wondering, how did that happen?

Do you know what you should always go every day to remember? Go back to the cross. Is that what happened on the cross? Jesus died.

Why did he die, Jonah? Because he was going to go to heaven. Well, he was going to go to heaven, but he died to wash away our sin. And why did he want to wash away our sin?

[15:08] So we can go to heaven. So we can go to heaven. And why does he want us to go to heaven? Because he loves us. Because he loves us. And so we trust him. Okay? Let's pray.

Amen. Lord God, there is a lot that we just can't understand. We think about who you are and how great you are.

There's a lot that we can't understand that happens in the world. Sometimes hard things happen to us. Sometimes things happen and they're sore and they're difficult to understand.

But we pray that we would always trust you. Even when we can't understand you and even when we can't understand everything about this world, we pray that you would give us faith that we would

trust you.

And help us every day to keep going back to the cross and keep remembering how much you love us. Lord God, that you came to this world to take away our sin so that we could go to heaven.

[16:09] And you did it simply because you love us and you want us to be with you forever. So whilst we have time in this world, we pray that you would help us to confess our sin and to say sorry for our sin.

Help us to take your hand and ask you into our lives. Help us to trust you. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing now.

We're going to sing from the Psalms in Psalm 25 and verses 1 to verse 7. And the words will be on the screen in just a second.

To thee I lift my soul. O Lord, I trust in thee. My God, let me not be ashamed nor foes triumph over me. And we sing down to the end of verse 7 to God's praise.

We stand to sing. To thee I lift my soul.

[17:13] O Lord, I trust in thee. Okay, we'll stop. We'll try that again. To thee I lift my soul.

O Lord, O Lord, I trust in thee. My God, let me not be ashamed nor force I over me.

Let none but wait on thee. Be good to shame us all, but those are with a cross that shame upon them all.

Show me thy grace, O Lord. Thy path so deep shall be And do thou keep me in thy truth, let my teacher be.

For thou art God, thou dost To thee salvation send, And I upon thee overlay And expecting to attend Thy tender mercy I pray thee to remember Unloving kindnesses for thee A freedom of hope forever

[19:52] My sins and thoughts of you To thou, O Lord, For thou art forget After thy mercy Be great on me And for thy goodness Praise Boys and girls, Boys and girls, I'm going to go to Sunday school right.

And if we could turn in our Bibles, please, to Acts chapter 12, come to the end of this section of the book of Acts. Thereafter we see Paul's ministry, the second section.

Acts chapter 12, and we read from verse 1 of this chapter. It was about this time that Tim Herod arrested some who belonged to the church intending to persecute them.

He had James, the brother of John, put to death with a sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

[21:23] So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains, and sent his suit stood guard at the entrance.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. Quick, get up, he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him, put on your clothes and sandals. Peter did so. Wrap your cloak around you and follow me, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening.

He thought he was seeing a vision. They paused, they passed the first and second guards, and came to an iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it.

When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly, the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, now I know without doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.

[22:39] When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance and a servant girl named Drodha came to answer the door.

When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so rejoined, she ran back without opening it and explained, Peter is at the door. You're out your mind, they told her.

When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, it must be his angel. But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Tell James and the brothers about this, he said. And then he left for another place.

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

[23 : 45] Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sire. They and I joined together and sought an audience with them.

Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robe, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.

They shouted, This is the voice of a God, not of a man. Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of God continued to increase and spread. When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

Amen, and may God bless that reading of his holy word to us. Callum will not come and lead us in prayer in Callum.

[25 : 02] employees and all Alright, how to findittens-the city of Krishna.

The secure mettrestips is all under the way. Falls comunque and hiking.

Some of them and married, the disciples sent me here, and I'm Rach roschin who add friends. My parents went to this garden.

Dear descent to your ombres, and e — Get living together for your children, and with lovers currently in as long as lowbeitet being.

I asked this question that was already sucking down but static deeper OUT.ending with no more C-ita, like versuchen themamad Rick há become more humble.

[26 : 33] When I umm to be doin' ahead and a menace will overcome the C-ita place, Não answers where these Malay wallets can analyze but take steps to further.

and pray.

Some bitterointment to volunteer homes are safe and addicted to Jesis. In jadas, we have to reach out we'll find more and more!!

We won't eat today's season- in Spain. We won't eat in the reunionaste, not some hot that war. Man is burning, what may be the last two months...

roba s g Jacqueline its like whistening the tower 2021 We we just 1 2

[28 : 52] Think then We prayed and answered them in mouth.

How do you know that? There are people of God who meet adults.

Among be beaches that are sure to come to Africa. Have to stay in with Lamar and Daxemaus.

Amen. We sing again to God's praise.

We sing from Psalm 25, continuing in that psalm, but we sing in Galat, verses 8 to verse 10. Two stanzas. God good and upright is, the way he'll sinners show, the meek in judgment he will guide and make his path to know.

[30 : 21] The whole paths of the Lord are truth and mercy sure to those that do his covenant keep and testimonies pure. He's who stands us in Galat and we remain seated to sing.

Galat and we remain seated. He's who stands us in Galat and we remain seated.

Galat and we remain seated. He's who stands us in Galat and we remain seated.

Galat and we remain seated. Galat and we remain seated.

Galat and nam Galat is Thank you.

[32 : 35] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Let's pray this for a moment. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word which we have been singing.

[34 : 32] And Lord, we pray that you would help us. As the psalmist cried out to you, we would cry out to you that you would guide us, that you would show us your ways. Lord God, that you would lead us in your paths.

We thank you that the whole paths of the Lord are truth and mercy, sure. And we pray that you would reveal to us by the power of the Spirit, the truth of your word. And Lord, that you would show us where we stand before you. Lord, that we would look to you for mercy. That we would look to you for grace. That we would bow in worship. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you could turn with me, please, to Acts and chapter 12. Acts chapter 12, the passage that we read together. And hopefully we'll look through a fairly high speed, this whole chapter, this morning. And just thinking back a week, I was thinking as I was preparing this time last week, I was still in another country.

[35 : 47] Mary and I and the girls were still in another country. And when you're in another country, you have to, to some degree, become acquainted with some of the phrases that are used in another country, which speaks a different language.

So you have to get some vocabulary under your belt. You have to be able to get your tongue around some phrases. Gracias. Adios. Hola was about as much as I managed.

I managed to figure out the numbers in Spanish. The girls figured out how many, how to ask for ice creams many times in Spanish. But there's certain phrases, you know, when you're traveling from country to country, and you have to just get your tongue around these phrases.

Well, here's a phrase that every Christian needs to get their tongue around. In our journey through time, towards eternity, here's one phrase that every Christian must get their tongue around.

And the phrase is this. I don't know. I don't know. You know, it was in Acts chapter 11, the church in Antioch that we studied a few weeks ago.

[37 : 01] And in Antioch, it was the first time that the church were called Christians. And as we know, the term stuck.

And it's a term that still we are referred to using today. And as I was doing a wee bit of research online for this sermon on the perceptions that people have of Christianity and of Christians.

Apparently, one of the most unattractive things about Christians today is we're regarded by many people as no-toss. We have an answer for every question.

We have an answer for every situation. And so people will sometimes come to Christians and they're going through hard times. They're having painful experiences. They're going through complicated problems.

And before they even had a chance to tell us what their problem is, we're ever ready with this cliched answer. We're so quick to speak and not to listen.

[38 : 07] We are so quick, apparently, to give people the impression that God has enabled us to understand fully what is going on in our lives and ours.

But the truth is, God has not revealed all things to us. And as we sang from the first hymn this morning, there are many things that we cannot tell.

And we cannot understand in life. We might pretend at times to know all. We might be fearful sometimes of saying the phrase I don't know. But we shouldn't be. No honest Christian can be a know-all.

I mean, think about it. We did a little with the children anyway. How can we know it all about God and all his ways? If we understand fully who God is and everything that he is doing, that sets us on the same level as God.

But we're not on the same level as God. He is other than us, to use a technical term. He is beyond our comprehension.

[39 : 25] He is more than we can understand in his essence and his being and in his works. Yes, he has revealed himself to us in some measure.

But we can't get our heads around who God is and what he is doing. Not fully. Eternity will not be long enough for us to get our heads around who God is and what he has done.

As the scripture says, his ways are higher than our ways. And his thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

There's so much about God that we don't know. That shouldn't cause us to be lazy. It shouldn't cause us to just be giving up and not seeking to know more of God.

We should always want to know more of God. But there is so much about him that is started in mystery. And that's a tension that we actually, as people of faith, need to learn to live with.

[40 : 29] As the church back in Acts chapter 12 had to learn to live with. So three points as we seek to navigate through this chapter.

The first point is we can note the mysteries of this world. The mysteries of this world. And what I'd like to do, especially as we look at the opening verses of this chapter, is try and think ourselves into the chapter.

And try and think yourself in particular into the family of James. Think about yourself as one of the family or one of the close friends of James.

And how you feel as you learn of what happens in this chapter. Remember, James was in a family. James was the brother of John, we know.

We know that James was one of the sons of Zebedee. He was one of the original twelve. And we learn in verse 1 of the chapter, chapter 12, that he had been arrested for belonging to the church of Jesus Christ.

[41 : 43] And he was arrested with malice. There was intent to persecute him. And ultimately what happens is that James pays the ultimate price for being a follower of Christ.

James' verse 2 is put to death with the sword. As many still are today. As we read of and as we see increasingly on our news, James was one of the first who paid with his life for the faith that he professed of Christ.

James' death must have been such a painful loss to his friends and to his family.

There must have been such desperate grief to deal with. When we think about when anybody is lost, when anybody that we love goes from this world, there is such acute grief. But when you think about the circumstances through which James died, he didn't die of old age.

He didn't die of natural causes. James died a brutal, cruel death. And so for those who loved him, what pain they must have had as they thought about that.

[42 : 58] But that's not the end. As we see here, James dies in verse 2. But shortly after that, another of the church are arrested. The Jewish people, verse 3, approved of the first execution.

And so Herod decides he's going to find another Christian to seek their approval further. And he gets a great catch in getting Peter, verse 3. And so Peter is arrested like James was arrested.

And Peter is thrown into prison, just as James was thrown into prison. And Peter is awake in trial, just as James is awake in trial.

And it looks like Peter will be killed. Just like James was killed. Except he's not. And what we read as the chapter progresses, is that the Lord amazingly intervenes.

And the Lord, through these angels, delivers Peter. And that must have brought such joy and such confidence to the church. But from the perspective of one of James' family, from the perspective of one who was very close to James and who very much loved James, the miraculous deliverance of Peter, if anything, probably made their grief harder to deal with.

[44 : 33] And the question, I expect, that would have bubbled up from inside and been heard coming from them, would have been, why?

Why? Why did James die? And why did James die and Peter lives? Why was one delivered?

And one was. Wasn't that they were only praying for Peter as a church? Well, although we have a record that they were praying for Peter, my expectation is they would certainly have been praying for James as well.

I don't think it was because there was no prayer going up for James. And the commentators agree with me on that one. Had the Lord not noticed that James was in trouble until it was too late, or certainly not.

Because, as we said with the children, he sees everything at all times. Not even a spiral falls without the Lord noticing.

[45 : 47] And so why did James fall? Why is going to be the question? Why did it happen?

Why? And the answer is we don't know. We aren't told in Acts chapter 12 and we aren't told in Acts chapter 13 and we aren't told in Acts chapter 14 and we could go on and the answer that we still must settle back in is we don't know.

It's a mystery. And that's something that we as people of faith, people who are trusting Christ, if you are this morning, something that we have to learn to live with.

There are questions that are left hanging. But we can still ask them. We can bring our wives to the Lord reverently and yet we can bring them.

Like the psalmist did. Listen to Psalm 42. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me?

[47 : 15] Why must I go about mourning oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, where is your God?

Then he turns the wife back. Why are you downcast, my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my saviour and my God.

See, the psalmist, as God inspires him, gives us this motto. When we're dealing with these mysteries. We can bring our wives.

The psalmist brought us wives. He still gets no answer. But as he looks to God and as we travel through that psalm with him, even though he gets no answers, he finishes up by saying, I will put my hope in you.

because you are my rock and you are my saviour and you are my God. And so we follow that example when we're going through hard times.

[48 : 33] As many of you probably will be and as many as you have in the past, we are encouraged to bring our wives to God.

But as we do, as we come to him and as we look to him and as we see our rock and as we see our saviour and as we again come back and see that cross and as we remember how deep the father's love was in sending his son to that cross, his son who cried out on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me and got no answer.

As we look there, as we look to him, we are encouraged all the more to trust him. I remember St. with Ferguson speaking once about heaven and what he was saying was that one of, he believes one of the most staggering parts of heaven will be when we are actually able to take our wives to God and our answer.

When God reveals to us what he was doing in these mysterious times when we thought he was doing nothing.

[50 : 02] when we see the fullness of his loving purposes worked out even at the point of doubt for us.

That would be something of heaven. And so we see first of all here the mysteries of this world and the second thing we see here is the miracle of heaven.

We see that as we go from verse 6 down to verse 11 the account that we're given of Peter and the escape. Just read the verses again.

Peter verse 5 was kept in prison but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring Peter to trial Peter was sweeping between two soldiers.

You get the full picture here. This is no lax security prison. This was high security. that night before Herod was going to trial Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

[51 : 10] Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in his cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. Quick get up he said and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him put on your clothes and sandals and Peter did so. Wrap your cloak around you and follow me the angel told him. Peter followed him out of prison but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening.

He thought he was seeing a vision but actually what was happening in reality was a miracle. This was one of these occasions where the wonder and the power of heaven breaks into earth.

a heavenly messenger takes Peter out of this high security prison supernaturally.

Verse 7 the chains that Peter was bound with fall off supernaturally. And then verse 10 they supernaturally pass two sets of guards as if these guards were invisible.

[52 : 22] and then they get to this massive iron gate and the massive iron gate which led to freedom opened by itself supernatural and they walked through it.

And I don't know all of you here this morning. I don't know what everybody's thinking. Some here might be struggling with that supernatural revelation that we have on this account here.

Some people may be saying I just struggle to believe that kind of stuff. The ethics of Christianity yes and all that but this kind of thing it just seems so implausible and if that's you and if you're having that struggle then for your encouragement I would say to you well Peter shared that struggle with you.

Peter thought he was dreaming. Such was the wonder of what he was experiencing but it happened. It happened. This is not some fable.

This is not some myth. This is not hyperbole. This is reality. This is what happened. And in verse 11 Peter is almost pinching himself saying I almost can't believe it but now I know without a doubt.

[53 : 35] As he brushes himself down he looks around with you and he realizes on the outside. It took a moment for the reality of it to dawn on Peter but it did.

he realized he had experienced a miracle. For the church who were gathered it took even longer for them for it to dawn that a miracle had happened.

Because in verse 11 to verse 12 you follow with me we see the narrative change. The camera flicks from Peter to the church who were gathered.

It flicks from the ecstatic Peter realizing I'm free to this gathered church who were bowing in prayer. Where were they gathered? Verse 12 who were gathered in the house of Mary.

And that's just a little reminder for us there. The church is not the building. The church was not some majestic temple. The church was the house of Mary at that point.

[54 : 38] As they came together in prayer. That's what they were doing. They were having a prayer meeting. This is another reminder and these are peppered all the way through the book of Acts. Everything that they did was saturated in prayer.

The people as they gathered, that early church, every opportunity they had, they were gathered together to pray. We should remember that. We should learn from that.

If there's anything we're going to skimp on, it shouldn't be prayer. It shouldn't be corporate prayer.

So they're having a prayer meeting. Why are they praying? They're praying for Peter, we're told.

The church was earnestly praying to God for him. What were they praying? Well, they were praying to God that we assume that he would not be executed, but he'd be released.

So we have this scene and there's the prayer meeting and the prayer meeting is going on and all of a sudden, there's a bang. Now, some of you're awake. That's a bonus. There's a bang at the door and someone's knocking and Rhoda goes out to the door.

[55 : 49] She listens and she hears the voice and she recognises it's Peter. And she's so startled and she's so overjoyed that she doesn't even open the door.

She charges back in at the prayer meeting. Peter, the fugitive, high risk, still standing on the outside. She charges back into the prayer meeting. She runs to tell the others, verse 14, Peter's here because they were so full of faith.

They praised the Lord. Is that what happened? No, it wasn't. They said Peter's not here. Peter's in prison. No, no, Peter's here. He's at the door. And then they believed.

No, they don't, verse 15. They say she's out of her mind. And it strikes me as it has done in various occasions going through Acts.

We are given such gritty reality in the portraits that we are given of the early church. There's almost a bit of comedy in that kind.

[57 : 00] As we think of Rhoda charging back and forward and the people praying and the answer coming and they're too dull to even realise the answer. It's almost like the dad's arm of church.

And I think it underlines for us yet again that the Bible is true. I mean, why would this be included if it wasn't true?

It's hardly flattering. You know, it hardly causes the early church there to be shown in a good light in this instance. It's included because this is what happened.

This is how it was worked out. And God obviously inspired Luke to leave this sin for the encouragement of bumbler's like ourselves or like myself anyway.

You think about it, when we're coming back from a long drive, the girls were in the back of the car. And they started looking at photographs and videos on the iPad of memories, I suppose, through their lives.

[58 : 12] And there's some beautiful pictures and there's some kind of polished pictures, not many of them. And there's many, many pictures that are not flattering, put it that way.

And you've got videos of the wee ones. I remember the day that Anna burst into a packet of Jaffa cakes. And the Jaffa cakes were over every wall in the house and the car cuts on her face.

She was black with Jaffa cakes. I've got other accounts of when they were starting walking and they're fumbling along and they're stotting away and they're tripping over. Now, when you're looking back over these as a parent, you don't say, for goodness sake, get rid of that picture, get rid of that video when we're trying to feed Grace and she's got that mints and tatties all over her face.

What an embarrassment. Get rid of it. You don't. You leave it in. Or you don't say, for goodness sake, get rid of that photograph or that video of them.

They can't even barely walk. They're falling all over the place. You don't get rid of them. You actually cherish these things. Because these are records of little people whom we love getting bigger and getting steadier, and getting more mature.

[59 : 28] And just like a adulting parent looks at these videos of a toddler learning to walk or learning to feed herself, we have this account in here and it's almost as if God our Father smiles as he instructs Luke to leave this in, showing how a bumbling early church are coming to terms with the awesomeness of the God whom we were coming more and more to know.

It takes a while for us natural beings to grasp the supernatural wonder of God who he is and what he has done and is doing.

And that is the main point within this point. The fact that God is supernatural and Christianity is supernatural.

it isn't just some kind of handy code of practice for life in the natural world.

The claims of Jesus are not simply good moral this world ethics. The claims of Christ are supernatural otherworldly claims.

[61 : 07] And God at work in the world was and today is still doing. Even in our hearts a supernatural work.

How can people who are dead in transgression and sin be born again? Through the supernatural intervention of God the Holy Spirit who shows us Christ and shows us our need of him.

J.B. Phillips wrote a book in the 70s I think it was entitled Your God is Too Small. And that was a lesson that Peter was learning in the moment of freedom.

And that is a lesson that we regularly need to relearn that God is much bigger often than what we perceive him to be in our minds.

he will not live in the compartments of our lives that we carve out for him. He will not remain in the boxes that we try and squeeze him into.

[62 : 20] And if we realise more of the wonder and the power and the glory of God, we might spend less time thrashing around trying to do things that we're not able to do.

and you and I might spend more time on our knees before the God who's able to do much more than we can imagine or ask or think.

But be reminded as we look at this account that God was and God is the God of miracles. Be reminded on this large day the day when we remember that Jesus died and rose again.

That God is the God of miracles. And so we have the mystery of this world and we have the miracle of heaven and finally and very quickly we have a mandate of God as we come towards the end of this chapter.

The mandate of God. The question to ask simply is what is God required of us? what is God's mandate on our lives?

[63 : 35] What does God require of us? Well even thinking back to this chapter God does not require perfection from us. We know that from the last point because Peter and the church were far from perfect.

We know also that God doesn't require from us a kind of silent terrified subservience that drives us away from God. We know that we can come to him honestly.

We can even bring our wives reverently to him. So what does God require from us? He requires our worship.

He requires the worship of every created being whether poor or rich, whether young or old, male or female, servant or king.

He requires our worship. And King Herod from verse 19 to the end is highlighted for us as a man who was not bowing in worship.

[64 : 57] He's highlighted as a man who was living as if God did not exist. He's revealed to us as a man who was putting God's people to death as if he himself was the ultimate judge.

As if he would not ever have to answer for his actions. And why did he seek to kill these Christians? Well, we know he sought to kill the Christians, verse 3, because it seemed to please the Jews.

It increased his popularity and brought him votes for the election. It made the people adore him. It drew the people's worship. And in verse 22, where we have that account, and this account also, we have a historical writings that are non-biblical, which I have no time to go into just now, but we have

this account backed up in non-biblical historical records where Herod stands up to make this speech and he's dressed in this silver suit and the sun is glistening on him.

As the people are hearing this speech, they cry out that Herod is a god and Herod is silent. and Herod does not object. And Herod does not take that moment to redirect them to the one true God. Herod accepts their worship.

[66 : 28] And to cut a long and gruesome story short, Herod is judged for it in the moment and Herod is judged determined for it if there was no change.

And we finish simply by meditating upon the fact that God is love and he is saviour and he is the one who calls people to find life and joy and peace and salvation in worship of him.

but to those who resist him and to those who live as if God did not exist, to those who live as if they will never have to stand before him and answer to him, know this that he is judged and he is sovereign and no one will fail to stand before him on that final day and no one and nothing will stand against him and prevail.

Herod tried, Herod tried to live apart from God, he tried to live as if he was God, he tried to halt the progress of the word of God through the apostles but after Herod is gone, verse 24, the word of God was and is still continuing to increase and spread.

So let's listen to that word so that we will not have to stand with Herod before God as our judge. instead today, first of this time, let us turn in worship and trust him as our loving saviour and follow him as gracious Lord.

[68 : 52] Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us sufficiently that we see our sin and are needed you.

We thank you that even as we meditate upon this chapter we are giving guidance as to how to live in this world and when we go through heartbreak and when we go through difficult times we thank you that we are still able to come to you honestly and reverently.

We thank you that as we come to you as promised with questions and doubts as we direct them to Christ we are given faith.

So Lord we pray for anyone here this morning whose faith may be wavering. we pray as one prayed a goal saying Lord I believe help me overcome my unbelief.

And Lord we thank you that you are the God who is super natural. We thank you that you are the God of miracles. And Lord we pray that you would work a miracle in each heart here.

[70 : 13] That we would be resurrected from the deadness that sin reaps within our lives and that we would be born again as we look to Jesus.

And Lord we pray that whilst there is time today as we hear your voice we ask Lord that we would not harden our hearts but that we would trust Christ as Savior and that we would follow him as Lord. Hear our prayers and may your word rest with us and we pray that we would respond to it and meditate upon it as your day continues.

And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. We sing to conclude words on the stream and mission phrase 988 for those who use the books.

how deep the father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that he should give his only son to make a lexious treasure, how great the pain of searing loss the father turns his face away as wounds which marred the children.