

15. Revising your Estimate of the Risen Jesus

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[0 : 00] I'll do turn, if you would, to Acts chapter 9 and to this passage that we read together, and that'll be a great help as we seek to study it together this morning. Once again, you'll have to excuse my croaky voice.

I want to speak all about revising your estimate of the risen Jesus Christ. As our Chancellor and Prime Minister have now discovered, along with many others throughout the world, and as I'm sure we will all begin to discover more and more as this year goes on, it has been a pretty foolish and devastating thing for our leaders to have underestimated the significance of the economic collapse that is now upon us.

But let me say this, this Easter Sunday morning, that a far, far greater folly, with far, far greater consequences, is to underestimate the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The world has always done that, and the Christian Church has, alas, often been very guilty of it also. But if that's true of you, then I hope that today will be the day when you also revise your estimate of the risen Jesus Christ in the way that Saul of Tarsus most certainly did that day on the Damascus Road.

The New Testament, when it talks of the risen Jesus, never, ever, ever does so in terms of him simply perpetuating the life of the helpless babe of Bethlehem.

[1 : 38] Far less does it speak of him as the helpless figure nailed to the cross, the Jesus that you see on the crucifixes of the Catholic churches.

No, the apostles did indeed preach Christ crucified, but they preached the Christ once crucified, but now risen and Lord of glory, reigning on high, summoning men and women to repentance and faith with the word of his command.

The resurrection is never, ever seen in the Bible as a return merely to the status cores, as Jesus our friend back again and everything's the way it was before.

No. The Jesus who was despised and rejected and spat upon and scorned, the Jesus of history, that is indeed.

But not now and not ever again. Margaret Clarkson's lovely hymn that we sometimes sing at Christmas gets it absolutely right. The hymn, Earth Gave Him No Welcome.

[2 : 47] Despised and rejected, forsaken was he. Earth gave him no welcome but Calvary's tree. And that's true. But our hymn ends like this with these words.

Earth shall not see him rejected again. Triumphant in glory, the king comes to reign. And friends, that is the gospel of the apostolic gospel.

The risen, glorified, triumphant king of glory, who will come in power and might to judge this whole cosmos and to rule it forever.

So it's vital at Easter that we remember not just the narrative, not just the facts of Jesus' resurrection, but also the preaching of its significance by the apostles.

We must never forget what Paul said in Philippians chapter 2, that he suffered death on a cross, and therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[4 : 00] Don't for a moment ever underestimate the immeasurable greatness of his power, as Paul spoke of to the Ephesian church. The power that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him, he says, at the right hand in the heavenly places, far above all authority and power and dominion, and above every name, not only in this age, but in the age to come.

He put all things under his feet. And that's the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is Lord of heaven and earth, nothing less.

And the fact of his resurrection guarantees the fact of his return to judge the world in righteousness, and to confront all his enemies, all his persecutors, in a display of awesome and terrifying power. That's why even when his own people have a confrontation with the risen Jesus in the Bible, even in a vision as the Apostle John did in the book of Revelation on the island of Patmos, even when his friends and followers confront the risen Jesus, it is utterly overwhelming and devastating for them. John, we read, saw the Son of Man with eyes of flaming fire, feet like dazzling bronze, a voice like the roar of a mighty waterfall. And when I saw him, said John, I fell at his feet as though dead.

[5 : 32] If that's how it was for one of Jesus' devoted followers, one of his apostles, I'll read on in the book of Revelation to see what it meant for his enemies. Chapter 6, for example.

Sheer abject terror when the rulers and great ones of this world flee into the caves and beg to be buried alive. Just like that in an awful earthquake last week in Italy.

Rather to be buried alive than to have to see the face of the Lamb of God. They fled, we're told, from the wrath of the Lamb.

Yes, you see, to underestimate the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is without doubt the greatest folly, the worst calamity possible for any human being on this planet.

Because if anything at all in the Christian Gospel is clear, this is clear. Listen. Jesus says, Behold, He is coming with the clouds.

[6 : 34] Every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Well, if ever a chapter of Scripture spoke about a greater revision of a man's estimation of the risen Jesus Christ, surely it's this one in Acts chapter 9.

So it's very appropriate, isn't it, for us on this Easter morning. I want to look at it under three headings and three sections. And we'll sing and pause in between each. But first of all, I want us to look at Acts 9, verses 1 to 9.

It's a story, isn't it, of a fearsome confrontation. A fearsome confrontation that shows us the real power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

What we see here in this historical encounter on the Damascus Road is just a foreshadowing of what Jesus promises will be so ultimately for every single creature.

Every eye, He says, shall see Him. And it's a powerful reminder to us never to underestimate the extent that He will go to to vindicate the people of His name and to confront those who persecute Him and oppose Him.

[7 : 48] So let's look at this. Here's Saul, verse 1. We met him at the end of chapter 7 when he was looking after the coats of the people who were gladly stoning Stephen because he preached about Jesus. We saw him again in chapter 8 when he instigated a great persecution that drove Christians all the way out of Jerusalem and all around the country with terrible violence.

And he's still at it, says verse 1, breathing the air of hatred and murder. He's against, notice, the disciples of the Lord. Now he's off to Damascus, some hundred or two miles north of Jerusalem to extend that persecution.

But suddenly, he's stopped in his tracks. He's arrested by a blinding light that shouts out, why are you persecuting me?

You see, earth shall not see him rejected again. The risen Lord is not helpless, is he? He confronts his persecutors. And notice he says it again in verse 5, it's me, Jesus, that you are persecuting when you persecute my followers.

Touch them, and you touch me. My people are the apple of my eye, says the Lord. And therefore, you slander and you mock the King of earth and heaven when you touch them.

[9 : 10] And that is something you cannot do with impunity. That should be a great comfort today, shouldn't it, to many Christians in different parts of the world who are being persecuted for the name of Jesus.

Jesus will confront his persecutors because you can't do that. You can't seek to harm the Lord of heaven and earth and escape. It might be delayed, but it will come.

There is a judgment to come. Rico Tice was reminded of that the other day, wasn't he? And that ought to be a comfort to Christ's people, but it also ought to be a real warning to people like Saul who think that they can persecute the cause of Christ and escape scot-free.

Never. Never. But it came as a real shock to Saul. He thought he was serving God. In fact, he was totally opposing Him.

Well, it's still true today, isn't it? There are many violent fanatics who think that they're serving God by killing Christians, by persecuting and murdering those who convert to Christianity from Islam, for example.

[10:28] There's others who are not violent fanatics in quite the same way. They're perhaps very civilized and moderate people, sometimes even within the professing church, but bitterly opposed to the evangelical gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And constantly sniping with snide contempt those who seek to spread it. But you see, whatever your form, to be an enemy of the true gospel of Jesus Christ and Christ's people, you need to know that you are underestimating the risen Lord Jesus completely and utterly.

And He will vindicate His people without question. One day, He will absolutely and utterly overwhelm all His persecutors with a word of His power.

You'll see that tonight in 2 Thessalonians 2 where we read that He will destroy the evil one by the breath of His mouth at the appearance of His coming. You see, what you see here in this chapter on the Damascus road is a foretaste, it's just a tiny echo of that overwhelming power and the fearsome confrontation that will confront every single person on that day.

But sometimes, you see, God will do it in advance before Judgment Day. as He does it here in an overwhelming confrontation of fearsomely powerful mercy because that's what it is.

[11:53] Don't underestimate either the extent that the risen Lord will go to capture His chosen ones. You see how in verse 15 He tells us that Saul, this Saul, is His chosen instrument for mission.

Now, you could hardly find a more unlikely candidate, could you? I guess Saul would be something like the Richard Dawkins of the first century. That is, if Richard Dawkins had the power to actually lock up Christians.

I think he'd like to, don't you? If not in prison, at least in mental hospitals because that's where he thinks we belong. Make no mistake, this Saul was a very powerful man.

Powerful in education and ability. He was one of the great minds of the ancient world. Powerful in his religious standing. Powerful in terms of the harm that he could really inflict upon the church.

A powerful man and a very proud man. And yet, with a word of his mouth, the risen Lord Jesus has him poleaxed in the dust, blinded and helpless, utterly overwhelmed.

[12:58] And his whole life from that day absolutely turned around. Everything he stood for utterly reversed forever. Now, I've no doubt that all of this was not quite as sudden as it all appeared here.

John Stott, in his commentary, I think is right to point out that Saul must have been pondering these things. His conscience must have been troubled for some time. He had seen Stephen's witness and testimony at his martyrdom for one thing.

It may very well be that Saul of Tarsus had heard the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh preaching many times. It seems rather unlikely that he hadn't. Later on in chapter 26 of Acts where he once again gives his own testimony about these events, he tells us that Jesus also said to him, Saul, it's hard for you to kick against the pricks.

So the Lord had perhaps been pricking him, touching his conscience, prodding him for some time before this great event. But I can't agree with John Stott when he says this, God's grace had been gradual and gentle with Saul.

And that when he at last revealed himself to him like this, enlightened and in voice, he says it was not in order to overwhelm him, but in such a way as to enable him to make a free response.

[14:16] Well, it just seems to me that if that isn't being overwhelmed, then I'm not sure what is being overwhelmed. He's polack's in the dust. He's blinded. He's helpless. And the picture that we have of Jesus here dealing with Saul is one of absolute sovereign mercy and grace.

He inflicts upon this murderous man the fearsome power of his mercy to arrest him. That's the word that Paul uses himself in Philippians 3.12.

He says, Christ took hold of me. Christ seized me. And surely that's what happened here on the road to Damascus. He seized him. He grabbed him. And he powerfully changed his life forever.

And God can do that, you know. He does do it. He still does it to some people. And maybe there are some people who just can't be saved by the Lord Jesus except in such a violent way.

We read last week, didn't we, in chapter 8 of the Ethiopian eunuch. And it seems so gentle, so natural. He's wandering along the road in his chariot. He's reading the Bible. And almost as

naturally as anything, Philip comes up beside him, opens the Scriptures, and he is gently brought into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:29] But it's not always like that at all, is it? And this could not have been more different. And God does have a history of that kind of powerful, violent conversion.

Remember Jonah, for example. He had a pretty overwhelming experience, didn't he, before he got himself sorted out. Think of John Newton, the slave trader, if you've read that great biography by Jonathan Aitken, how he was a vicious man, a brutal man, a rough man, and it took disaster and slavery and shipwreck for God to reach down and draw him out of his darkness.

Think of Jonathan Aitken himself and the testimony he gave us on Monday evening. A once very powerful and proud man. Maybe it was only through the ignominy and the shame of public disgrace and imprisonment that God could violently bring his mercy in such a life-transforming way.

Don't underestimate what the risen Lord will do to claim his chosen vessels. If needs be, he will knock you flat in the dust to do it. And don't think how awful, how awful for that to have happened to them.

To be overwhelmed, to be utterly undone by the power of Jesus. How terrible. It may have been a terrible experience, but as one writer says, far better the disturbance to come now and to be led into the peace of God and to remain in a state of false security and comfort until it's too late and find ourselves on the wrong side of God forever.

[17:14] I'm sure it was a terrible experience for Saul. But it was the greatest experience of his life. So if you're a modern day Saul, you need to know that that day of poleaxing before the risen Jesus Christ, that day is coming for you.

And you need to pray to God that it will be soon. So that when you're flattened by the fearsome power of God, you're flattened by his mercy. Not flattened by his wrath.

That was the great mercy that happened to Paul, Saul, that day. Now this chapter is not at all just a chapter about the personal story of Saul's conversion.

Not a story primarily about Saul at all. It's about the risen Jesus Christ. And it's about Saul and the others who encounter him. But it's primarily telling us about Jesus, about his power to confront and change those who oppose him.

But also about his plan. His plan to fill the whole earth with the people for his name. So I want to turn from this fearsome confrontation to think about Luke's second point that he wants to make plain to us.

[18:31] And that is that this is a far-reaching conversion. A far-reaching conversion that shows us the real plan of the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus. Don't underestimate, says Luke, the determination of the risen Lord Jesus to have a worldwide people for his name.

And this event you see that shatters the life of Saul of Tarsus is actually a world-changing event. It shapes the whole of the future of world history. Verses 10-19 tell us how God reveals that to Ananias.

He's to meet Saul. He's to welcome him to the church as the one that Jesus has chosen to be the key herald of the gospel to the whole of the Gentile world. So this ultra-Jewish Pharisee is to become the champion of the Gentile dogs and their inclusion into the church of Jesus.

And this great persecutor and this great murderer is to become the great preacher and the great missionary of the early church. And do you think our God doesn't have a sense of humor?

Don't underestimate the risen Jesus Christ. He will surprise you at every single turn. That's the message Luke's telling us. Now the nub of this section if you look at it is in verses 15 and 16 where God reveals Saul's place in the mission of the New Testament church.

[19:58] And he reveals very clearly two things. First in verse 15 he reveals the true scope of his missionary plan. He's a chosen instrument he says to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

You see? Yes to Israelites but his primary mission will be to the people and to the rulers of the Gentile world. Just turn forward a couple of pages with you to Acts chapter 13 verse 46 and listen to how Paul articulates this himself a little later on.

Paul by the way is the new name given to Saul after he becomes a Christian. So verse 46 Paul says it was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you that's Jews since you trusted aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life behold we are turning to the Gentiles for so the Lord has commanded us saying I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring

salvation to the ends of the earth.

When the Gentiles heard this they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. Now what Paul is quoting there is from Isaiah chapter 49 and verse 6 from one of the great servant songs of Isaiah where God says that where Israel his nation his chosen people his servant where they failed to be the great light to the nations of the world that God called them to be then the Messiah the Christ his true servant that he would fulfill all that they failed to do.

I will make you he says to his servant a light for the nations that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth Isaiah 49 verse 6 You see in the passage we read Paul applies that directly to himself and his missionaries because he understood that they were called to be part of the mission of the servant of God of the Messiah to the whole earth in fact if you read on in Isaiah 49 you'll see that there God says exactly that that God redeemed and renewed Israel in Christ will be the bearers of that great salvation but Saul of Tarsus would have a unique role as Paul the apostle to the Gentiles that's what he calls himself in Romans 11 on Romans 15 he says this I am a servant of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God Romans 15 verse 16 so you see the scope of the missionary plan of the risen Jesus Christ is not small it's global the gospel must be preached to all nations said

[22 : 52] Jesus you will be my witnesses at the beginning of Acts not just to Jerusalem not just even to Judea and Samaria but to the very ends of the earth and here is the final stage of that great gospel mission beginning with the conversion of this one man Saul of Tarsus and that's why friends almost every one of us perhaps every single one of us in this building this morning is a Christian believer if we are one because of that total reevaluation of the risen Jesus Christ that day on the road to Damascus by this man Saul if you read on and actually see as we read in chapter 13 that beginning of the great mission in Antioch and then chapter 16 when Saul is trying to go east into Asia and the Holy Spirit of God comes and turns him around and says no go west and he goes over into Macedonia into Europe and from there ultimately to Rome and where those of us who have heard the gospel of

Jesus Christ mostly in this building heard of him you see Saul's conversion that day was far from being just a personal thing about him it's a matter of global significance the plan of God of course in one sense Saul was unique and his conversion was unique he became a real apostle he met the risen Jesus he heard his voice as all the other apostles had done he was called to a unique ministry in history but in a sense you see every single conversion to Christ reveals something of the scope of God's missionary plan because all of those that he calls to faith he calls also to be taken up in that mission sometimes it is indeed globally significant like when he laid his hand upon the life of Robert Moffat who became a great missionary to Africa went to India or Hudson Taylor to China or many of these great ones in history whose conversion has shaped the course of nations sometimes a single conversion like that is globally significant but always friends always a re-evaluation of the risen saviour that leads someone to trust him like that is eternally significant because all of us are called to

Christ not just for ourselves but to serve and to join with those who bring light into the darkness of unbelief to the places that God has sent us or put us among our friends with our families in our work places for some of us indeed yes to the far flung places of the earth and so in that sense every one of us must take note very carefully of the second thing that's revealed to Saul here in verse 16 not just the scope of Jesus missionary plan but the suffering of his missionary people I will show him he says how much he must suffer for the sake of my name again it's fraught with irony isn't it Saul was intent on making others suffer for the name of Jesus Christ now he is going to become one of the chief sufferers himself for the rest of his life and very quickly we see how true that is if you just turn over to verse 23 the

Jews we read were plotting to kill him verse 24 they were watching day and night in order to kill him verse 29 again they were seeking to kill him but why why was God going to teach him that there must be so much suffering well because as Paul came to understand so deeply in his own theology the kingdom of the risen Jesus advances in this world as his missionary servants share in his sufferings as they share in the way of the cross because it's the way of the cross that is indeed the power of God for salvation and Paul came to know that perhaps more than any other death works in us he says to the Corinthian church so that life may be at work in you the cross you see is the power of God for salvation and the way of the cross therefore must beckon to everyone who would

wield that power and be a part of that powerful gospel mission of

Jesus Jesus there's one thing I learned from the ministry of my own father it was that the message of Christ crucified can be preached effectively only by a crucified man he used to say you see that's what Paul Saul of Tarsus began to learn that day on the Damascus road and it's what he proved so deeply in his experience ever afterwards listen to the words he says later to Philippians chapter 3 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings or to the Colossian church I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church and you see if you're a Christian your life has been turned around as Saul's was that day on the road to Damascus then that's the calling of your conversion too it's not a small thing or a personal thing when the risen Jesus

[28 : 46] Christ arrests you and lays hold on your life you've totally underestimated his purposes if that's what you think it's part of his great missionary purpose and plan for this whole world that he laid his hand upon you and your life that doesn't really feel like that to me you might say doesn't seem to be anything like that kind of significance well maybe that's because you haven't yet learned the reality of verse 16 because you see a conversion with the scope of verse 15 will never be real apart from the reality of the suffering of verse 16 those two things go together and there's nothing uniquely apostolic about that pattern it's common to all faithful Christian people listen to Paul again Philippians 1 verse 29 to the church for it has been granted to you for the sake of

Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have if you're a Christian that's your calling too it's how Christ's far reaching plan of salvation is going to be accomplished through this world that he will show you how you also are to be a chosen instrument in his hands and to do that he will show you also how much you must suffer for his name far reaching conversion not just about you well there's one more point I don't want us to miss as we conclude in this story because again I say it is not primarily a story about Saul it's a story about the risen Jesus about his power about his plan but also about his people yes including

Saul but not just Saul he's just one just one of those who have a significant and a vital part to play in that story of the risen Jesus so I don't want you to miss this third thing that Luke records about his faithful co-workers faithful co-workers who show us the real people of the risen Lord Jesus Christ Luke's telling us here not to underestimate the extent that the risen Jesus will use often very strategically the ordinary people who bear his name and how he uses them to fulfill his great mission to the ends of the earth those who are the exceptionally gifted ones the unique great ones like Paul well yes he does use them of course he does and he will always have people like that in his church but for every one of those there's often and always very many more who have just such a vital role to play in the church now they're often forgotten they may often be overlooked by us but they're not overlooked by Jesus and they have a vital part to play in his plan and his purpose for the whole of eternity and Luke is flagging these up for us here in this chapter for our encouragement and for our challenge and I'm glad he does aren't you because none of us I guess here in fact I know none of us here is a soul of

Tarsus none of us is ever going to have a ministry anything like his unique worldwide ministry and in fact few of us will have ministries of any significance at all in a national way or a global way but all of us all of us are called to play our part in the wonderful kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ so don't overlook this vital role played here by these others by Ananias for example and by Barnabas and even by those who we don't even get a name for the disciples of Saul we're told about in verse 25 or the people that in verse 30 we're just told are brothers look at Ananias first of all verses 10 to 19 what did he do well Ananias welcomed Saul as a real Christian brother when that must have been a very very hard thing to do don't you think I don't know what he thought when the Lord spoke to him in that vision in verse 10 goodness knows verse 13 he's very polite isn't he

I bet he was thinking to himself Lord are you nuts he was scared stiff at the thought of going anywhere near this murderous man who was laying waste to Christians all over the place but in verse 15 God said go and he did he went and in verse 17 you read this extraordinary thing that he greeted that murderous terrorist and that's who he was somebody who had very probably imprisoned and beaten and murdered people that he knew and loved and the very first words he said to him were those remarkable words in verse 17 brother Saul you think that was an easy thing for Ananias to do it was very very very hard hard because it was very hard to trust God that it really

was safe but also hard surely because we as human beings just find

[34 : 29] God's grace to dreadful distasteful people like that very very hard to stomach don't we very very hard for us to welcome somebody like that as a true Christian brother just like I am at least I find that hard but Ananias welcomed Saul as a real Christian brother and through that ministry through that welcome Saul found a new life of fellowship among Christ's people even a soul that God is going to use so wonderfully and uniquely even he needs a welcome from a brother even he needs the arms of love and acceptance before he can begin to fulfill the destiny Christ has for him and that's a great gift to bestow isn't it that gift of welcome nobody remembers Ananias go out in the street and you might find some people at least still today have heard of the apostle Paul but I bet you they wouldn't have heard of Ananias but we wouldn't have had the apostle

Paul or his ministry without that welcome of Ananias would we and we don't know either do we what plans God might have for the people he sends into our way the people that they ask us to welcome into our fellowship as a real Christian brother a real Christian sister no matter how unlikely it might seem to us we don't know even if it seems very hard it could be somebody who has terribly badly wronged us it can happen it can happen even within the church can't it it is hard for us to welcome those who are already our brothers and sisters sometimes this came to my mind when I was thinking of this story of Corrie ten boom concentration camps for helping the Jews and how in her book she tells how after the war she was at a Christian meeting and she was shocked and horrified to see down at the front of this Christian meeting someone who had been one of the guards in the concentration camp at

Ravensbrook one of the most brutal wicked horrible people that she had ever encountered who had wronged her and had brutalized she sister she spoke of the horror and the hatred welling up in her but by the grace of God she was enabled to go and embrace her as a true Christian sister well that was Ananias on that day it shows us doesn't it the people of the risen Lord Jesus there's a kind of suffering in that isn't there a deep inward suffering that can welcome like that somebody like Saul of Tarsus you see that's the power isn't it of the real mission then look at Barnabas in verses 26 and 27 later on back at Jerusalem this may well be some years later many days could very well mean that and they're all afraid of

Saul well not surprisingly they don't believe that he really has been converted they think he's an undercover agent trying a new tactic to persecute the church but Barnabas welcomed his gifts as a true apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ I'm sure that's the significance of verse 27 do you see he vouches to the Jerusalem apostles that he is exactly like them he has had the same experience as those apostles had he has seen and heard the risen Lord Jesus in the flesh that was the requirement remember in Acts 1 to be an apostle and he also says he had the same ministry as theirs just like Peter he also is preaching boldly in the name of Jesus carefully chosen words you see Barnabas perhaps more than anybody else he saw Paul's potential and he rejoiced to help him fulfill that potential and the great calling that God had called him to even though it was going to totally eclipse any ministry that

Barnabas himself might ever later on you remember it was Barnabas who went to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch to set him on his way strengthening the church there and beginning his great apostolic mission and what a gift it is what a great gift in any church to have people like Barnabas not after the limelight for themselves but on the lookout for people of potential and determined to welcome them to nurture them to see them into their great ministry that God has called them to you need to be a very humble person to be like that don't you you need to be a patient person because it might take years for somebody's potential to come to its full flowering but you see without Barnabas in human terms we would never have had the apostle Paul either would we certainly not the apostle Paul as we know him and you know there are many many greatly gifted and much used servants by

[39 : 43] God all through history who will testify to how somebody like a Barnabas was vital and desperately important in their own development some totally unknown person that you or I have never heard of is very often behind the scenes the one who nurtured the great missionaries the great preachers the ones who have done great things for God all through history in their early years of Christian life and growth the one man that very few people know the names of who's responsible for the raising up of great men like John Stott and Dick Lucas and others you don't know their name but they were a Barnabas and friends maybe that's what God is calling you to in this church it's a great calling to be a Barnabas and in people that God is calling out to special service gifted young

people perhaps people that God will use greatly and publicly perhaps evangelists teachers missionaries not apostles of course

Paul was unique nobody's going to be quite like him but these ones need Barnabases too they need sons of encouragement to help them to nurture them to help them find their way to the true vocation that God has called them to I'd have thought that God wants to use a church like ours always to send out many workers throughout this land and throughout the world but for every one of those surely God is calling us to be having many Barnabases real people of the risen Lord co-workers who nurture the people of the Lord Jesus Christ and thirdly there's these unnamed ones disciples in verse 25 they're called brothers in verse 30 but they recognized Paul's needs as just a real and ordinary human being didn't they and they helped defend him against the stresses and strains of his ministry and they helped protect him for those who were trying to hurt the church by hurting

Paul and they stepped in with just very practical measures to help him escape to preserve him for future ministry in they're just real human beings they're just the same needs as everybody else and they gave him real human help and Paul needed that and he deeply appreciated it we don't know the names of any of these people Paul named some of them in the list at the end of his letters he never forgot the vital co-workers who were essential to his mission that's a great calling too isn't it for the people of God because often it is those in these special ministries who do face a larger share of the assaults of the enemy from outside and sometimes from inside the church they have the same flesh and blood as everybody else the same emotions the same hurts the same grief the same struggles the same temptations and they need brothers people who recognize their needs as ordinary human beings and without these co-workers

Saul's ministry would have been nothing like it ever was it certainly wouldn't have even begun and where we see ministries today collapse from stress and burnout and despair very often where there just hasn't been brothers and sisters in evidence like that faithful co-workers real Christian brothers and sisters those who welcome those who seem to be most unlikely into the church those who recognize and nurture the special gifts of some who come into our midst and who want them to be fulfilled in the service of Christ and those too who just recognize that they have the same needs as everybody else as normal human beings well there's much more we could say I'm sure about this chapter but we must conclude let me just go back and say this whatever you do do not underestimate the risen

Lord Jesus Christ his power is fearsome to confront and to overwhelm those who oppose him and his plan is far reaching to convert those he will turn around completely and he will use to spread his worldwide kingdom forever and where his people friends are faithful they can be and must be real co-workers in that even if our names are never known to the world they'll never be forgotten by Jesus and they'll have a vital part in his salvation on that day on the Damascus road Saul of Tarsus began to see just how wrong he was about Jesus and he made a major revision of his estimation of the Lord Jesus Christ and maybe that's something that some of us need to do this morning because if you still think today as Saul thought that day then friends you're in big trouble big trouble you're not dealing with a

[45 : 10] Jesus who's just a meek little lamb when John saw his vision of the lamb slain from the foundation of the world he saw him as the lion of the tribe of Judah the lord of heaven and earth at whose feet heaven and earth bows as usual it's C.S.

Lewis who captures it best of all listen to the conversation between Mrs. Beaver and Lucy about Aslan the great lion in the lion the witch and the wardrobe if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking they're either braver than most or just silly said Mrs.

Beaver then isn't he safe said Lucy safe said Mr. Beaver don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver is telling you who said anything about safe of course he isn't safe but he's good he's the king I tell you don't ever underestimate the risen Lord Jesus Christ he is far from safe as Saul discovered that fateful day on the road to Damascus but he's good he's the king I tell you and he wants to overwhelm you not with the power of his wrath but with the power of his abundant life changing mercy that's the message of Easter day you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you