

# The Great Re-Evaluation of History: Reckoning With the Risen Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn now to our reading for this morning, and we're in the book of Acts, and Acts chapter 9, so do turn in your Bible to Acts chapter 9.

And we're reading here of the Apostle Paul's encounter with the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. These are major turning points for Paul, and really the turning point of all human history, really, given the impact of what happens from this point onwards.

So Acts chapter 9, and reading from verse 1. But Paul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus.

So that if he found anyone belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul said, who are you, Lord?

[ 1 : 29 ] And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.

Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

And for three days, he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias.

The Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, here I am, Lord. And the Lord said to him, rise and go to the street called Straight.

And at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. For behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias.

[ 2 : 34 ] Come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias answers, Lord, I have heard from many about this man.

How much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.

But the Lord said to him, go, for he is chosen, a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him, he said, brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me to you so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized.

[ 3 : 47 ] And taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue saying, he is the son of God.

And all who heard him were amazed and said, is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon his name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?

But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him.

But their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him. But his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him. For they did not believe that he was a disciple.

[ 4 : 59 ] But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.

And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

And walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Amen. May the Lord bless his word to us this morning.

It's a terrible mistake to underestimate the significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Last Sunday we saw that the resurrection signifies the great rebirth for humanity, indeed for the whole creation.

[ 6 : 14 ] He is the firstborn from the dead, says Paul to the Colossians. The first of a great rebirth of many brothers. The eternal church of God through Jesus Christ.

So if we grasp the meaning of the resurrection, therefore, that must lead to a great re-evaluation of history. Because the fact of his resurrection guarantees the fact of his return.

To judge the world in righteousness. And to confront all his enemies with a display of awesome power, terrifying power.

And that's why even when Christ's closest friends and disciples have a confrontation with the risen Jesus, even in a vision as the apostle John did when he was, remember, exiled on Patmos for his loyalty and friendship to Jesus, that encounter was utterly overwhelming.

John saw the Son of Man with eyes of flaming fire, feet like dazzling bronze, a voice like the sound of a mighty waterfall. And when I saw him, says John, I fell at his feet as though dead.

[ 7 : 31 ] Now that's how it was for Jesus' closest followers. Read on a little bit in Revelation to see what it meant for his enemies. In Revelation 6, in abject fear and terror, we're told they flee to the caves rather to be buried alive than see the face of him who sits on the throne and face the wrath of the Lamb of God.

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

Because if anything in the Christian gospel is clear, it is this. In the words of Revelation 1 verse 7, Behold, he is coming in the clouds, and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him.

And all the tribes of the earth shall wail on account of him. There will be a reckoning with the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the judge of all the earth for every human being who has ever lived.

And that fact, assured by the resurrection, surely demands, therefore, a great re-evaluation of history. What it means, where it's all going.

[ 8 : 55 ] For every person in this world. So as to live every day with a right understanding of the real power of the risen Lord. And his real plan for this world.

And therefore, what it means to be among the real people of the risen Lord Jesus on that day that he comes to judge us. Well, if ever we saw such a great re-evaluation of the world in the light of a reckoning with the risen Jesus, it's here in Acts chapter 9.

And we're going to look at it this morning under three headings. First of all, look at verses 1 to 9. What we see is a fearsome confrontation that shows us unforgettably the real power of the risen Lord Jesus.

What we see here in this historical encounter on the road to Damascus is but a foreshadowing of what John promises will be so eventually for every single creature, when every eye will see him.

And it's a powerful reminder to us never to underestimate the extent to which he will go to vindicate the people of his name and also to confront those who persecute his name.

[ 10 : 14 ] Now here's Saul. Saul appears first in Acts chapter 7 where he's looking after the coats of the people who are killing Stephen. Then in chapter 8, he's the one who instigates the great persecution that scatters the whole church from Jerusalem with terrible violence.

And here in chapter 9, verse 1, he's still at it. He's breathing out the air of hatred and murder against, notice, the disciples of the Lord. And now he's off to Damascus, a couple hundred miles away, to extend that zealous persecution.

But suddenly, he's stopped in his tracks with a voice from heaven, accompanied by a bright light. And it shouts out, verse 4, Why are you persecuting me?

He says it again in verse 5. Notice, it's me, it's Jesus that you're persecuting when you persecute my followers. My people are the apple of my eye.

You touch them, you touch me. And therefore, in doing that, you slander and you mock the king and the judge of earth and heaven.

[ 11 : 23 ] And you cannot do that with impunity. That's a great comfort, I think, isn't it, to Christians today who are being persecuted in many parts of the world.

Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, will confront the persecutors. Because you cannot seek to harm the Lord of earth and heaven and hope to escape.

That reckoning may be delayed, but it will certainly come. There is a judgment to come. And that ought to be a comfort to Christ's people.

But also, it ought to be a real warning to those like Saul who think that they can persecute the cause of Christ and escape, scot-free. Never can that happen. But it gave us a great shock to Saul.

He thought he was serving God. In fact, he was utterly opposing him. Well, that's still true today, isn't it? There are people, violent fanatics, who think they are serving their God by killing Christians, by murdering converts to Christianity, and so on.

[ 12 : 34 ] And, of course, not just violent fanatics. There are very civilized people, apparently moderate religious people, even within the professing church.

But actually, who are bitterly opposed to the true gospel of Jesus. They show contempt for those who seek to spread the gospel of Jesus.

But, friends, all such enemies of Christ and his gospel need to know that they are underestimating the risen Jesus totally. He will vindicate his people.

He will vindicate his name. And he will, one day, totally overwhelm his persecutors with a word of power. And what you see here on the Damascus Road with Saul is a foretaste.

It's just a tiny echo of that overwhelming power, that fearsome confrontation that will face everyone on that day of judgment. But sometimes God will do it before judgment day, in an overwhelming confrontation of fearsomely powerful mercy.

[ 13 : 44 ] That's what happens here. Don't underestimate either the length that the risen Lord will go to capture his chosen ones. Verse 15 tells us, doesn't it, that Saul is his chosen instrument of mission to the whole wide world?

I suppose Saul was something like the Richard Dawkins of the first century. If Richard Dawkins actually had the power to lock up Christians, I'm sure he'd probably quite like to. If not in prison, then in mental hospitals.

That's what he thinks of Christians. And make no mistake that Saul here was a very, very powerful man. He was powerful in education, in ability, in a huge mind.

He was powerful in religious society. He was very powerful in terms of a harm that he could inflict. A powerful man. And, I think, a very proud man.

And yet, with a word from his mouth, the risen Lord Jesus had him polexed in the dust, blinded, helpless, and utterly overwhelmed. And his whole life, and everything that it ever had stood for was reversed.

[ 14 : 57 ] Permanently. Forever. I know that all of this was not quite as sudden as we might think. John Stott, I think, is right to point out that Saul must have pondered these things a lot for a long time because he'd been witness, hadn't he, to that gracious death of Stephen, for one thing.

And God had no doubt been at work in his conscience. It may well be that Saul of Tarsus actually heard Jesus preaching in the flesh, often. In chapter 26 of Acts, in the third account that we have of Paul's conversion, he tells us that Jesus also said, Saul, it's hard to kick against the pricks.

And so Christ had been pricking him for some time, I think. But I can't really agree with John Stott when he says that God's grace was gradual and gentle with Saul.

And that when at last he revealed himself like this, in the light and in the voice, quote, it was not in order to overwhelm him, but in such a way as to enable him to make a free response. Well, if this isn't being overwhelmed, I'm not really sure what is being overwhelmed.

The picture we're given here is that act of sheer sovereign grace by which the risen Jesus inflicts upon Saul his powerful, fearsome mercy. He arrests him.

[ 16 : 19 ] That's the phrase Paul uses himself in Philippians chapter 3. He says, Christ took hold of me. He seized me. And that's certainly what we see here, isn't it?

And that seizure changed him forever. And God can do that, you know. He does do that still. And maybe there are some people who can't be saved except in that dramatic and violent way.

Previous chapter here, chapter 8, you can read about the Ethiopian eunuch. And for him it was a very gentle thing. It was almost a natural thing. He was a seeker and he became a finder. But here it really is the opposite.

It's violent. Here's a murderer who becomes a missionary in an instant. But God has a history of that kind of thing, doesn't he?

Remember the story of Jonah? It was a pretty overwhelming encounter that he had, wasn't it? With the great fish. Or think about John Newton, the slave trader, the most vicious of men.

[ 17 : 26 ] And it was through disaster, near shipwreck, that God seized him and turned his life around forever. And maybe that is especially necessary for powerful men, for proud men.

Think of Jonathan Aitken, the disgraced politician, do you remember? Who came to faith through the ignominy and the shame of prison. But don't underestimate what the risen Lord will do to claim his chosen vessels.

If need be, he will knock somebody flat out into the dust in order to do so. And don't think, by the way, oh, how awful that must be for that sort of thing to happen to them.

To be overwhelmed, to be utterly undone by the power of Jesus. By that fearsome power in the day of mercy. Well, that may indeed be a terrible experience.

But as one writer puts it, far better that the disturbance come now and our souls are led into the peace of God than to remain in a state of false security and comfort until it's too late and find ourselves in the wrong with God forever.

[ 18 : 42 ] So if you're a modern day soul, you need to know that day is coming for you. And you ought to plead with God that that day of overwhelming experience will be soon.

So that what you're flattened by is the fearsome power of his mercy, not the fearsome power of his wrath on the day of judgment. But this chapter is not really just a personal story about Saul's conversion.

Indeed, it's actually all about the risen Lord Jesus. And the encounter that we see with Saul and indeed other people in this chapter, they're telling us above all about the risen Christ.

All about his power, yes, to confront and to change the human heart. But also about his plan to fill the whole earth with a people for his name.

And so the second point that Luke makes plain to us is this. It's a far-reaching conversion that shows us unmistakably the plan of the risen Lord Jesus for the world.

[ 19 : 53 ] Luke says, don't underestimate the determination of the risen Lord to have a worldwide people for his name. See, this event that shatters the life of Saul of Tarsus, it's a world-changing event.

It will shape the whole of human history. verses 10 to 19 tell us how God reveals to Ananias that he's to meet Saul and welcome him into the church as one that Jesus has chosen to be the key herald of the gospel to the whole Gentile world.

This ultra-Jewish Pharisee is to become the champion of the Gentile dogs and their inclusion into the church of Jesus Christ.

The great persecutor and murderer is to become the great preacher and missionary. And you think God has no sense of humor. Don't underestimate the risen Jesus.

He will surprise you at every single turn. And the number of this section is verses 15 and 16. That's where God reveals Saul's place in the mission of the New Testament church.

[ 21 : 08 ] Notice two things. First in verse 15. It reveals the scope of his missionary plan. He is a chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

You see, yes, to the Israelites. But as we'll see, his primary mission will be to the people and the rulers of the Gentile world. If you turn forward a few pages to Acts chapter 13 with me.

Listen to Paul articulating this himself. Chapter 13 verse 46. Paul and Barnwell spoke out boldly.

They're in the synagogue. And he says, it was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. But since you thrust aside and judged 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. And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

[ 22 : 17 ] And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. That's a quote, isn't it, from the prophet Isaiah from chapter 49. One of the servant songs.

Where God says that where Israel, God's servant, failed in her calling to be a light to the nations of the world, the Messiah, the true servant, would fulfill it all. I will make you as a light for the nations that salvation may reach the ends of the earth, says Isaiah.

And Paul, you see here, is applying that to himself and his co-missionaries because he understood that they were called to be servants with the Messiah and part of that great mission to the whole world.

And in fact, if you read on in Isaiah 49, it says exactly that, that God redeemed and chose his people in Christ, his church, to be the bearers of this great salvation, a true Israel in Christ.

But Saul of Tarsus would have a unique role as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. That's what he called himself later on in Romans. So you see, the scope of the missionary plan of the risen Jesus is not small.

[ 23 : 31 ] It's global. It's worldwide. The gospel must be preached to all nations, Jesus had said. And you will be my witnesses, not just in Jerusalem and Judea, not even just in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth.

And here is that final stage beginning with this far-reaching conversion of Saul of Tarsus. And that's why most of us here this morning who are Christians, we are Christians because of this total re-evaluation of Jesus in Saul's mind and heart that very day.

You read on in Acts and you'll see how having turned to the Gentiles as we read there in Acts 13 in Antioch, later the Spirit took him right through Asia, minor Turkey, then on into Europe in Acts chapter 16, Macedonia, and from thence ultimately to Rome.

And from there ultimately the gospel came even to Scotland. Scotland. See, Saul's conversion here was far, far more than just a personal story.

This was a matter of global significance. Of course, in one sense it was unique. And his conversion was unique.

[ 24 : 52 ] He became a real apostle. He met the risen Jesus as all the other apostles had done. And so he had a unique ministry in history. But in a sense, every conversion to Christ reveals something of the scope of God's missionary plan.

Because he calls all that he calls to faith also into that same worldwide mission. Sometimes it is globally significant. Like Robert Melfort when he went to Africa or Alexander Duff to India or Hudson Taylor to China or others like them.

But always, always it is eternally significant. All of us are called not just for ourselves but we're called to serve and to join those who bring light into the darkness of unbelief in whatever that place is that God has called us to serve in our family in our friendships in our workplace.

Sometimes, yes, to the very ends of the earth. And therefore, we must take also careful note of the second thing that's revealed to Saul here which is not just the scope of Jesus' missionary plan but look at verse 16.

The suffering of his missionary people. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

[ 26 : 18 ] Again, there's irony, isn't it? Saul was on his way to make other people suffer for the name of Jesus. But now he is going to become one of the chief sufferers.

And very quickly, you see how true that is. If you look down in verse 23, you see the Jews were plotting to kill him. They were watching night and day in order to kill him. Again, in verse 29, they were seeking to kill him.

Why? Why that? Why so much suffering? Well, because as Paul came to understand so clearly over the years, the kingdom of Jesus advances in this world as Christ's missionary servants share in his sufferings, share in the way of the cross.

Because that is the power of God at work for salvation. Death works in us, says Paul to the Corinthians, that life may be at work in you. The cross, as we saw in John chapter 12, is the power of God for salvation.

But the way of the cross beckons everyone who would therefore share in that power. my father had a saying that I used to hear very often.

[ 27 : 36 ] The message of Christ crucified can be preached effectively only by a crucified man. And that's what Paul began to learn that day and proved so deeply in his experience.

Listening to his words later on in Philippians, I want to know Christ, he says, 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 am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, for the church.

You see, if you're a Christian, that also is the call of your conversion. Not just a small, a personal thing when the Lord arrests you and turns your life around.

That's what you think. You've underestimated the significance because you have become part of his great missionary plan for the world. You might say, well, it doesn't feel like that to me.

[ 28 : 41 ] I'm not seeing great fruit for mission like that. Well, perhaps you haven't yet learned the reality of verse 16 here. 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.

And there's nothing uniquely apostolic about that pattern. It comes to all fruitful Christian people. Only the seed that dies will bear much fruit, says Jesus.

Listen to Paul again in Philippians 1, verse 29. For it is being granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

Engage in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. True conversion is always into true conflict. And if you're a real Christian, that's your calling too.

That is how Christ's far-reaching plan of salvation will be accomplished. But there's more that we mustn't miss in this story because again it's not just primarily a story about Saul, it's about the risen Jesus, it's about his power, it's about his plan, but it's also about his real people.

[ 30 : 07 ] Not just Saul, he's just one of those who have their part to play in this chapter. And don't miss what Luke records about these faithful co-workers. to show us what it means to be real people of the real risen Jesus.

Luke's saying to us, don't underestimate the extent to which the risen Lord will use, even very strategically, ordinary people who bear his name. And he'll use them in the fulfilling of his great mission to the ends of the earth.

Those who are exceptionally gifted, those who are unique great ones like Paul became, yes, God does use them and he'll always have such exceptional souls in his church. But for every one of these, there are many, many more who have just as vital a role to play in the church of Jesus Christ.

They may be forgotten, they may be overlooked, but they are not so to Jesus and they play a vital part in his plan and purpose for the whole of eternity. And Luke's flagged up some of these for us in this chapter right here, all around, this magnificent man, Paul.

And he's done it for our encouragement and for our challenge. And I'm so glad he does. Because none of us here is a soul of Tarsus with a ministry as great as his.

[ 31 : 27 ] Very few of us will have very public ministries in this land or in any other. But all of us are called to play our part in Christ's kingdom mission.

So don't overlook the vital role that's played here by Ananias, by Barnabas, or even by the unnamed disciples in verse 25. Paul just calls them brothers in verse 30.

Look at Ananias first in verses 10 to 19. What did he do? Well, he welcomed Saul as a real Christian brother. And that must have been a very hard thing to do, don't you think?

What he thought when God spoke to him in a vision in verse 10, goodness knows. He's very polite to the Lord in verse 13. Lord, he says, but he must have been thinking under his breath, Lord, are you nuts?

Do you know what you're talking about? He was scared stiff, wasn't he, at the thought of meeting this man Saul? But God said to Ananias in verse 15, go.

[ 32 : 31 ] And he did. He went. And in verse 17, he greeted this murderous terrorist who had very probably hurt and maybe even murdered some of his own loved ones.

And he met him with those wonderful words, look, brother Saul. Do you think that was an easy thing to do? I think it was very, very hard.

Because he had to trust God, first of all, that it was safe for him to go and be near this man. And hard because we find God's grace to people like that very distasteful at times, don't we?

We find it very, very hard to forgive somebody like that and welcome them into fellowship in the church. But Ananias welcomed Saul as a real Christian brother.

And through that ministry of Ananias, Saul found his new life of fellowship among Christ's people. You see, even a Saul, a Paul, needs someone to welcome him as a brother, to open the arms of acceptance before he can begin to fulfill his destiny.

[ 33 : 48 ] And that's a great gift, isn't it? To bestow on someone. No one really remembers Ananias, but we wouldn't have had the great apostle Paul, would we, without his welcome?

And we don't know, do we, what plans God might have for the person that he sends our way and asks us to welcome him to fellowship as a real Christian brother, as a real Christian sister, even when it might seem very hard.

Maybe somebody who has actually badly wronged us or hurt people that we love. And that can happen, can't it, even in churches. I think of Corrie Ten Boom.

I know some of you will have read her story, how she was imprisoned by the Nazis for shielding Jews during the war. And how after the war she met a guard who had terrorized her in that Ravensbrück concentration camp.

And she met her at a Christian meeting. And this torture was giving her testimony about how she'd become a Christian. She could feel the hatred welling up in her heart as she saw her and remembered all these things.

[ 35 : 02 ] But at the end of the meeting she managed to go and embrace her and welcome her as a Christian sister. I wonder if you could imagine doing that. Now that was Ananias.

And he shows us what it's like to be a person, part of the people of the real risen Lord Jesus Christ. And that's a kind of suffering too, isn't it?



But that empowers real Christian mission. Then look at Barnabas in verses 26 and 27. Later on, back in Jerusalem, probably some years later, and everybody's naturally afraid of Saul.

They don't believe at all that he's a real believer. But Barnabas welcomed Paul's gift as a true apostle. And that's really the significance of verse 27.

He vouches to the Jerusalem apostles that Paul had had exactly the same experience as them. He had seen the risen Lord Jesus. Remember Acts chapter 1? That was the requirement for an apostle.

[ 36 : 08 ] And he has the same ministry as they have. Just like Peter, he preaches boldly in the name of Jesus. Barnabas, you see, saw Paul's potential.

And he rejoiced to help him fulfill his calling under God, even though Saul's calling was now going to totally eclipse somebody like Barnabas.

It's a great gift, isn't it, in any church when there are people who are not trying to grasp the limelight for themselves, but they're on the lookout for the people of potential. And they're determined to mature them and nurture them and see them into their true ministries for God.

You need to be a humble person to do that, don't you? A patient person. And it might take many years to see that potential come to full fire. But in human terms, without Barnabas, there never would have been an apostle Paul.

And many, many of the greatly gifted and greatly used servants of God throughout history will testify to just how vital in their development were the unknown Barnabases who mentored them, who helped them, who were patient with them, kind with them, and helped them into their early years of Christian life and growth and Christian service.

[ 37 : 33 ] Now maybe that's your calling. in this church. It's a great calling to be a Barnabas. And in a church like ours, there ought to be those that God is calling into special service in his church.

Gifted young people, people that God will use greatly and publicly as evangelists, as teachers, as preachers, as trainers, and so on. Not apostles. Paul was unique, but like that.

But they need Barnabases too. They need sons of encouragement to help them find that true vocation through prayer, through friendship, through support. I'd have thought that if the risen Lord Jesus wants to use our church to send out many such workers, then he must be calling many of us to be Barnabases too, don't you think?

real people of the risen Lord Jesus, real faithful co-workers. So there's Ananias, there's Barnabas, and then thirdly, there's the unnamed ones, verse 25, the disciples.

Verse 29, the brothers. Those who just recognized Paul's needs as a real fellow human being. And they helped defend him against the real stresses and strains of ministry.

[ 38 : 53 ] They helped protect him from those who were trying to hurt the church by seeking to hurt Paul. And they stepped in with just very practical measures to help him escape, to preserve his life, to preserve him for future ministry.

In other words, there were people who recognized that Christian leaders like Paul are still just human beings and have the same needs as other human beings. And so they gave him real human help.

And Paul needed that. Paul deeply appreciated that. Just read the end of nearly every one of his letters in the New Testament and the acknowledgements to all these people who we've never really heard of, who helped him.

And that's a great calling, isn't it, for the real people of the risen Lord. Because often it is those who are in positions like that of leadership who have a larger share of the assaults of the enemy from outside and sometimes from inside the church.

And they have the same flesh and blood as everybody else, the same emotions, the same hurts, the same griefs, the same fears, the same temptations, the same sins. And any brothers like Paul who just recognize them as fellow human beings.

[ 40 : 08 ] And without these unnamed co-workers, soldiers, Saul's ministry wouldn't have begun, would it? And it certainly wouldn't have been sustained. And where ministries do collapse from stress or from burnout or just from despair in the church today, very often it's where those kind of brothers and sisters just haven't been much in evidence.

faithful co-workers welcome real Christian brothers and sisters. And they welcome and they nurture the gifts of real Christian leadership.

And they recognize the needs in these people as just real human beings. But when that is happening, look at verse 31. So, the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it multiplied.

Well, there's much more that we could say about this chapter but we must conclude. Whatever else you do, friends, do not underestimate the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

His power is fearsome to confront, to overwhelm those who oppose him. His plan is far-reaching to convert those that he will turn around completely and use to further spread his kingdom to the whole wide world.

[ 41 : 41 ] And where his people are faithful they can be real co-workers even if the names are never known to the world. They'll never be forgotten by Jesus.

And nor will their vital part in his great plan of salvation be overlooked on the day when he returns. On that day on the Damascus road Saul of Tarsus began to see just how wrong he was and he had a major revision of his estimate of the risen Lord Jesus and a great re-evaluation took place of his whole understanding of history and his place in it.

And maybe that's something some of us here this morning need to do. because if you still think like Saul thought that morning when he went out you are in big trouble.

You're not dealing with a Jesus who is a meek little lamb. When John saw his vision of the lamb at the heart of heaven he saw him didn't he as the lamb who was a lion.

he saw him as the lord of glory before whom all heaven and earth fell prostrate. As so often it's C.S. Lewis I think who captures this best in the conversation that he gives us in the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe between Lucy and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan.

[ 43 : 11 ] If there's anyone says Mrs. Beaver who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking they're either braver than most or just silly.

Then isn't he safe said Lucy. Safe said Mr. Beaver who said anything about safe don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you?

Of course he isn't safe but he's good he's the king I tell you. Friends don't ever underestimate the risen Lord Jesus he is far from safe as Saul of Tarsus find out that day in a very striking way but he is good he's the king I tell you and he's calling us to follow him and join in his worldwide mission.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you that our risen Savior is powerful to turn around the lives of the most implacable opponents of you and of your gospel and your church.

We thank you that he has a great plan to bring the saving joy of eternal life to the very ends of this earth and we thank you Lord that you call us as your people to be a part of all this that you are doing which shall never fail and which will prevail and be ultimately victorious.

[ 44 : 48 ] Help us Lord named or unnamed to be joyful in that train to join with our risen Savior and so to be filled with joy on the day of his return.

Hear us and help us for we ask it in Jesus name Amen. Amen.