

22. God's Church Still Needs the Gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 August 2009

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Page 921 in our church Bibles. God's church still needs the gospel.

That seems to be the message of this chapter this morning, as we'll see. After the apostolic mission to the Gentile world, the non-Jewish nations began in earnest, as we saw last time, the beginning of chapter 13 in Cyprus.

Verse 13 tells us that then they set sail from Cyprus to Pamphylia, that is the southern coast of Asia Minor, what we know as Turkey today.

And so interestingly, they moved from Barnabas' home territory, he came from Cyprus, to an area that no doubt Saul of Tarsus would have known very well, because it's not very far at all from Tarsus.

Now, Paul was always a strategic thinker, and so verse 14 tells us that they went on to Pisidian Antioch, that is the chief city of the area. And that's where they went after they left John Mark, when he went off to Jerusalem.

[1 : 15] We're not told here why he went away, but as we'll see a bit later on in Acts, it's obvious that that parting wasn't entirely happy, for whatever reason. And it's just worth noting that personal issues among gospel workers seem to be a feature of gospel work right from the very beginning.

But again, as we see in this passage, the same pattern ensues. The second part of verse 14 tells us that they go, first of all, to proclaim the gospel to the people of Israel, that is, to the outward descendants of Abraham, the Jewish people, to whom, of course, the Messiah had been sent.

And they'd done that in Cyprus, and when they had, they'd met with the very worst of the Jewish religion, the corrupting and blatantly evil opposition of Bar Jesus, the Jewish false prophet.

He was the one, remember, who did everything he could to oppose the message of Christ, the Jewish Messiah. But here in Pisidian Antioch, at least at first, it's a different story.

It's the Jewish synagogue at its very best. It's the place where, as verse 15 tells us, the word of God was being earnestly honoured. The law and the prophets were being read week by week and carefully studied.

[2 : 31] And they say to Paul, would you like to get up and give a guest sermon today, Paul? Not like most ministers on holiday. I'd be rather horrified if that happened to me, if they said, oh, hello there, I see you're a minister.

Would you like to get up and give the sermon? No, thank you. But Paul wasn't on holiday. He was on a mission. So verse 16 says, he stood up and started to speak.

And when he does, when he proclaims to them the glorious truth that everything in the law and the prophets, everything that they had promised and longed for and looked for, that everything was now fulfilled forever in the life and the death and the resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus, when he did that, these Jews at least, at least to begin with, as verse 43 says, many of the proselytes also, they rejoiced in what they'd heard.

They rejoiced that God's grace had come to a wonderful fulfilment and that they were living in the glorious days of the fulfilment of everything that God had promised to Abraham way back centuries before.

And just as rejection of the gospel by the Jews in Cyprus had led on to salvation for the Gentiles, especially the proconsul, so also here, the acceptance of the gospel by the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, that also leads to a marvellous overflow of God's grace to the Gentiles also, as we'll see, Gentiles also believe.

[4 : 02] And that's something there of the marvellous mystery of God's appointed plan of salvation, to bring both Jews and Gentiles together in Christ, whether the Jews are rejecting the Messiah or whether they're accepting him.

That's what Paul speaks about, isn't it, in Romans chapter 11. It's a mystery, but it's a marvellous one nonetheless. Whether his own people reject or accept, the result is the gospel going to all the world.

I've planned to take the whole of the rest of this chapter and even perhaps part of chapter 14 together. But there is something rather unique about this passage that we read. It's the only time in the whole of Acts that Paul is recorded for us by Luke preaching a sermon in a synagogue.

That is, we might say, to a congregation that has a history of solid Bible reading and Bible teaching. And what we get from him is a brilliant synopsis with full apostolic authority of preaching the gospel of Christ from the Old Testament scriptures, from the Law and the Prophets.

And so I felt it worthwhile for a couple of reasons to focus on this sermon, particularly today, for ourselves. Firstly, because there's so much confusion in the church today about how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament and indeed how the Old Testament relates to Christianity as a whole.

[5 : 27] There's all kinds of misunderstanding and ignorance about that. The God of the Old Testament, well, he's angry and vengeful and full of wrath, but the New Testament with Jesus, that's so different.

That's what some people think. Or the Old Testament's full of laws and demands and commands, but the New Testament's different. It's all full of love. Even many Christians today are much, much more shaky on their understanding of the Old Testament than the New Testament because they spend most of their time reading the New Testament, not the Old Testament.

And so often they're very confused and wrong. I thought that it would be helpful to focus on how Paul shows so clearly to this Jewish synagogue that the Bible is one story of one God and one Gospel and one story of his grace.

But also, I suppose, secondly, because what Paul's sermon shows us is that it seems at least that you can spend your whole life in a church that reads and takes the Bible seriously, just as that synagogue did in Antioch, and yet you can still be really completely ignorant about what the Gospel's really all about and what it means for you personally.

And it's just possible that there might be somebody here this morning in that situation. So let's thank God that he caused Luke to preserve this great sermon of Paul's for our service this morning.

[6 : 56] And my job this morning, then, is rather easy, I suppose. It's simply to pass on Paul's sermon to you. It didn't feel quite as easy during the week, I have to admit. But anyway, that's what we're going to do.

So let's look at Paul's explanation, then, in these words of the whole of the message of the Old Testament and how it fits with the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you see what his sermon is all about from start to finish.

It's all about how the law and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus, but it's all about the grace of God. Paul preaches God's persistent grace despite Israel's constant rebellion against God.

And he preaches God's present grace despite Israel's climactic rejection of the Messiah, Jesus. But he also preaches God's personal grace despite the corporate rejection of Israel as a nation of the gospel of the Messiah.

And that's what true Christian preaching ought to be, then, shouldn't it? Proclamation of the extraordinary, persistent, and present, and personal grace of God shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 15] So, Paul's sermon has three sections. Each one begins, then, with an appeal to Israel, to his brothers, beginning at verse 16. So let's then look at verses 16 to 25, first, where Paul preaches clearly the persistent grace of God.

And he says that that's seen in God's preparation of Israel and then in his sending of them a perfect saviour in the reign of Jesus, the King.

Despite the constant failure of Israel and despite their constant rebellion against God's sending of many leaders and saviours to them all through history. You see how in these verses he skims over some of the key points of Old Testament history.

And he shows that that history documents again and again, all through the age of promise, God's persistent grace in the pattern that he gives them of sending them saviours and others.

Each one who foreshadows the perfect saviour who is to come and who comes at last, he says in verse 23, in the person of Jesus, the seed, the offspring of David who will reign on David's throne forever.

[9 : 22] And that's the climax of Paul's first point, isn't it? Verse 23, of David's offspring he has brought to Israel a saviour, Jesus, as he promised.

That is the ultimate perfect saviour. But look at the pattern all the way through that story. He's saying it's grace from the start and it's grace to the end. Verse 17, there's electing grace.

God chose the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God made Israel great while they were in Egypt, not them themselves. There's redeeming grace, second half of verse 17.

It was his arm, God's arm, that led them out, not their strength. The persistent, forgiving grace of verse 18. He put up with them in the wilderness. Well, doesn't that statement cover a multitude of sins?

Just read the book of Exodus, the book of Numbers. Constantly, they rebelled against him. constantly, he bore with them. Deuteronomy chapter 9, God says to them plainly, it's not because of your righteousness and goodness that you're my people.

[10 : 30] You're a stubborn people. It's because of my love and grace. This is powerful, protecting grace in verse 20. He gave them judges, he gave them deliverers, saviours, like Gideon and Samson and all the other judges who constantly led them and protected them through days of absolute anarchy and chaos.

When every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes and turning away from God, yet God constantly brought them back with deliverers. Then he gave them a king, even though by asking for a king they were rejecting God's soul rule over them.

And when they got what they deserved in the king Saul who was a hopeless failure, he gave them again a king, this time David. A man after his own heart, a man through whom he would heap up his promises until at last as God's promises got more and greater and better all through history, at last there was that promise so clearly that one day a greater than David would come and sit on David's throne forever.

That his kingdom would stretch from shore to shore and his blessing would cover the whole earth forever. The whole story of Israel, do you see, is a story of God's persistent grace.

That's his message, a relentless, persistent pattern of sheer goodness and mercy and love all through the history of God's people right from the beginning. And now, he says, that story has come to a climax in Jesus.

[12 : 06] He is the perfect saviour who was promised and he has come to reign forever. He is greater than every prophet, every judge, every king.

He is greater even than John the Baptist, he says, one that they had all heard of, who was famous. And John the Baptist himself said in verse 25, no, no, of this man I am not even worthy to untie his sandals.

Now you see, I am sure you can see that Paul's words just explode forever there, the idea that there is some great gulf between the Old Testament and the New Testament. That there is one way of salvation in the Old Testament and quite another in the New Testament.

Or that the God of the Old Testament is one thing and the God of the New Testament is another. Or any other kind of division. Certainly these grotesque parodies and perversions that people like Richard Dawkins like to claim as the God of the Old Testament.

No, the whole Bible, according to Paul the Apostle, is one great story of promise and fulfillment. And all through that story, it's a story of God's persistent grace.

[13 : 18] Undeserved and yet undiminished. Grace as he prepares his people for the coming of the Messiah and grace as he provides ultimately that perfect Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our God is a God of persistent, merciful grace. Maybe you just need to hear that this morning. Maybe some of you particularly feel the need to know that our God really is a God who persists in his grace despite persistent failure, despite the muck-ups that you know that you make of your life.

Well, that's the message that Paul preached that morning in the synagogue in Antioch and the people were thrilled. Verse 42, we want to hear about this same thing next week, they said. Of course. Because many Jews, many were waiting and longing for exactly that message from God.

They knew that God was a God of grace. They knew that he had promised the coming Savior. And they longed for that. They searched the scriptures. They prayed looking for God to fulfill his promises.

and they longed for the day of Christ for the Messiah. They longed for that perfect Savior to come. Do you remember old Simeon that Luke records for us at the beginning of his first book? In Luke chapter 2, he was righteous and devout, we're told, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[14 : 47] He was waiting for the perfect Savior of God's promise because he knew that his God was a God of persistent grace. Despite all Israel's sin and failure as a nation, people like Simeon and many people it seems in that synagogue that morning in Antioch, they knew that and they had faith in God and they trusted his faithful promises.

And then Paul appears that day and says, it's come. It's happened. The perfect Savior has come. His name is Jesus. And he has come to reign on David's throne.

Your faith has been vindicated. God has kept his promise. But what exactly does that mean? Well, Paul's next point in verse 26 to 37 is that he preaches the present grace of God because he says that God's grace is seen in the accomplishing of a permanent salvation by the resurrection of Jesus despite the climactic failure and rejection of Israel of God's perfect Savior and King.

The heart of Paul's message here as always is the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And where the Old Testament law and the prophets revealed God's grace in the promise of Christ, so the apostles declare God's present grace in the glorious salvation that's now been accomplished forever in Jesus.

It's encapsulated there in verse 26 and verse 32. Do you see? Verse 26, to us has been sent this message of salvation. And verse 32, what God has promised to the fathers he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus.

[16 : 35] God's promised salvation is fulfilled, he says, by his perfect Savior whose name is Jesus. Now, I need to ask a couple of questions here.

What exactly was the promise to the fathers that Paul says was fulfilled in Jesus? That's surely a vital question. Most of the scholars and commentators I've consulted don't seem to give much attention to that question at all though.

One of them says, well, the promise must be the promise of verse 23, the Savior, Jesus, as he promised. But it must be more than that because Paul's talking about what he has done to fulfill the promise to the fathers.

What is this promise to the fathers then? Well, actually, that's quite plain if we take notice of what Paul says about that elsewhere in his preaching in Acts and also in some of his letters and in fact in some of the other apostles' letters too.

The promise to the fathers was from the very beginning the promise of a truly permanent salvation, of everlasting life, life in a recreated world free from the curse of sin, free from death itself.

[17 : 49] It's the promise of a permanent existence in the presence of God forever, in God's everlasting kingdom. That was the promise that was given to the fathers, to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and to all Israel.

Nothing less than that. Paul's very plain about that if you read him elsewhere. In Romans 4, verse 13, for example, he says this, God promised Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the cosmos, the universe.

That is, that he would inherit the whole world forever. If you read Hebrews chapter 11, it's just as plain, isn't it? The fathers treated God's promises not just as a promise of a temporary earthly home in a promised land.

No, there were strangers and exiles on earth and they knew that fine well. They were seeking a homeland, says the apostle. They were seeking a better city, a heavenly one. God has prepared for us just such a place, a permanent salvation.

How did they think that that could possibly be when they saw that people died and were buried? Well, Hebrews 11, verse 19 says plainly that Abraham reckoned that God could raise the dead.

[19 : 04] He knew that God could raise Isaac from the dead if he was sacrificed because he knew that ultimately God would raise all his people from the dead. That was his promise. The promise to the fathers that the hope of Israel was that God's permanent salvation would come to his people through resurrection to eternal life.

Now, some skeptics might doubt that. But that is certainly what Paul himself preached constantly in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 23, verse 6, for example, when he's before the Sanhedrin, he says this, it's with regard to the hope of Israel and the resurrection of the dead that I'm on trial, he said.

In chapter 24, when he's before Felix in verse 14, he says the same, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law and written in the prophets, having hope in God which these men themselves accept, that's his Jewish accusers, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

Maybe clearest of all is in Acts chapter 26, verse 6, where he's before Agrippa. Listen to what Paul says. I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which these 12 tribes hope to attain as they worship earnestly night and day.

And for this hope I am accused, O king, why is it thought incredible that any of you, why is it thought incredible by any of you that God should raise the dead?

[20 : 34] That's the hope of Israel. God promised Abraham and all his true seed the blessing of eternal life in his presence through the resurrection from the dead, through the defeat of death.

That was always God's promise. I will be your God and you will be my people forever. Second question then.

How has that promised hope been realized in the person of Jesus Christ? Well, the answer, says Paul, is through the extraordinary mystery of God's redeeming grace.

Despite Israel's failure to recognize the Messiah, says verse 27, they did not recognize him because although they read the Bible every week, they didn't understand its true message.

despite their ignorance and the sheer injustice and the wickedness of the leaders of the Jewish nation, God's own people, despite their rejection and their murder of God's Messiah, verse 28, executing him for no reason.

[21 : 43] They were just, in fact, unwittingly fulfilling God's wonderful plan of salvation. Verse 27 says, they fulfilled the law and the prophets that prophesied Jesus' coming, even as they condemned him.

Their wickedness could only bring about what God's amazing plan and purpose, that purpose, should take place. That's what Peter says too in Acts chapter 4, isn't it?

Because that death was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises of God that would at last promise a full and permanent atonement for his people's sin.

That would justify them and restore them forever so that the promise to the fathers would be fulfilled. And so to vindicate his perfect saviour and declare his perfect salvation as being accomplished, verse 30 says, God raised him from the dead.

And that fact of history, says Paul, in verse 31, is witnessed to by many, by the disciples who knew him right from the earliest days and they testify in their droves to the reality of his risen life.

[22 : 59] The first fruits of the promise to the fathers, a real man risen from the dead and living eternally. uncontestable witness to the presence of the risen saviour.

Present living witnesses. But also, and this was just as important for those synagogue goers there in Antioch, uncontestable witness also in the law and the prophets to exactly this.

Verse 33, what God has fulfilled for us by raising Jesus is just what the scriptures promise, says Paul. He quotes Psalm 2 there in verse 33.

Just one line, of course, but they knew the psalms off by heart, all of them. And they knew that that psalm's all about the exaltation of the king, of the anointed one, the Messiah, God's own son.

Despite all the opposition of kings and rulers against him, God's holy son will be raised to life and raised to reign. That's what Paul's saying the scriptures say.

[24 : 00] And therefore, he says in verse 34, if he lives forever, he's never going to die again. He'll no more see corruption. And what that means, says Paul, is that now at last, the everlasting blessings of God's permanent salvation will be yours, will be offered to you, God's people.

I will give you, plural he says, the holy and sure blessings of David. Because Jesus is risen. And that's a quote from Isaiah chapter 55, verse 3.

Again, the people would know it well. Might even have been that those passages from Isaiah were the very ones being read that day in the synagogue. We don't know, but may well be that that's why Paul quoted these things.

But that verse comes just after the wonderful Isaiah chapter 53 that we all know where it speaks of the servant of the Lord suffering and dying for his people that through his suffering many may be counted righteous by God.

And the next chapter begins, you remember, the wonderful news of what that's going to mean for God's people. Sing, O barren one, burst into song and cry aloud to their salvation.

[25 : 16] My covenant of peace will not now be removed from my people, says the Lord, because of what my servant's done. It's permanent. The chapter goes on to speak of a glorious vision of a kingdom of peace and righteousness.

The heritage, says Isaiah, of the servants of the Lord and their justification, their vindication from me. And then chapter 55 of Isaiah begins with God's wonderful words of invitation.

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Buy, eat, drink freely and without price. incline your ear and come to me, says the Lord, hear that your soul may live and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

That's what he quotes here. You see what Paul's saying? Isaiah's word is very plain, he says. God's servant, Messiah, must suffer and be mistreated and be rejected and die because he dies as a sacrificial lamb in order that your guilt and your sin may be dealt with forever.

And in his victory, in his vindication, at last, the blessings of that eternal covenant, the sure and holy blessings I promised to David will be yours forever.

[26 : 41] And David too promised the triumph of his favoured offspring. God had told him that one day his seed would rule and through him the world would be saved.

He knew his own personal future depended on that, that God would not let his Holy One see decay. That's why he can say in Psalm 16, which Paul also quotes here, that his own future is safe because God will not allow his Holy One to see corruption.

Paul's saying, you know that David knows he wasn't speaking about himself. David died and went to the grave like everybody else, but he spoke like that because God promised a perfect Saviour who would himself defeat death and bring in a permanent salvation of eternal life for all God's people.

And that's what's been fulfilled, says Paul. Verse 37, He whom God raised up, Jesus, did not see corruption. So let it be clear to you that God's permanent salvation has therefore come.

Permanent forgiveness of sins forever. Permanent freedom, justification from everything that the law could not free you from. It's all fulfilled, the promise to the fathers through the dying and the rising of Messiah who is called Jesus.

[28 : 13] All that Abraham and the prophets and all the others longed for, it's here. God had saved something better for us and to us, he says, has been sent this message of salvation.

See, Paul preached the present grace of God, the wonder of a truly persistent salvation that was now there and was guaranteed by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No wonder he called it good news in verse 32. It's the news, isn't it, of the transformation of the whole universe. It's a certain hope of a future eternal life in the presence of Jesus with the resurrection bodies just like the risen Jesus.

No more to return to corruption. And that's what the message of the Christian gospel really is about. It's that big. I don't know if the folk in the synagogue there in Antioch had ever really understood before just how great was the magnitude of what God had promised to them.

And certainly, it's true that many Christians today don't yet grasp how great and how vast the work of Christ really is. It is the death of death in the death of Christ.

[29 : 29] It's the birth of life everlasting, of life eternal, life from the grave, a permanent salvation forever in glorious resurrection like Jesus.

What does that mean for those who are struggling with weak and weakening bodies, feeling every week, every month, their greater frailty, feeling perhaps and fearing their own demise?

What does it mean for somebody who's watching their beloved life partner gradually weakening month by month in their bodies and perhaps in their minds even more painfully? Or their parents seeing the decay that grinds them down and robs them of their personality and what they once were?

What does that message mean for those who are even now already walking in the dark place of bereavement and loss, broken hearted at the pain of losing a life's partner, a parent, a loved one, a friend?

It means, says Paul, to that synagogue that morning, it means great good news because God's permanent salvation has come in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that means that even now decay and death itself it's working backwards.

[30 : 55] It's being destroyed from the inside. The reversal of the curse that robs us of all that has begun and in Jesus' resurrection we have a sure and certain hope of a resurrection to everlasting life.

And that means, friends, that for all who are in Christ Jesus, all the pain, all the grief of the decay and the death of our human bodies, all of that pain is only temporary.

It's just like the temporary separation of Jesus from his friends and from his Father in the tomb. But what is permanent is the certainty of a liberation into life that is everlasting.

Because our greatest enemy, the enemy of death has been destroyed, the thing that robs us of everything that's most precious and beautiful in this world and in our lives. What God has promised to the Father, says Paul, this he has fulfilled to us by raising Jesus.

We bring this great good news. Friends, if that doesn't make your heart want to sing for joy this morning, then it just means you haven't yet grasped the Gospel.

[32 : 16] You haven't understood what the Christian hope is all about. You may have been reading the Bible all your life, but you haven't yet understood the full wonder of it. Certainly many that day grasped it for the first time.

Verse 52 tells us at the end of their chapter that their hearts were full of joy in the Holy Spirit when Paul preached to them God's present grace in Christ.

His persistent grace and his present grace. But you'll see that Paul doesn't finish, does he, at verse 37. He goes on in verses 38 to 41 to press the message home with real power and with real passion because he also preaches the personal grace of God.

And that grace is seen in urging, oppressing summons to respond to Jesus despite the corporate failure of Israel to respond to the gospel of their saviour. God's grace, you see, always demands a response.

Some kind of proclamations always demand a response. A response just can't be avoided. It's not like the questions that the interviewers put to the politicians where they ask a question and say just answer yes or no.

- [33 : 29] And they go off on a complete tangent and avoid it altogether. No. Some proclamations demand a response. If you receive a summons from the court, you have to respond, otherwise you're in contempt.
- There's dire consequences. And so it is with the gospel, you see, it issues a summons. It's not just an impersonal summons though like a court, it's deeply personal.
- Because God is offering himself in the summons that he gives in the gospel asking people to respond. It's a personal summons. It must be answered.
- If you say to somebody, will you marry me? That is a deeply personal summons. It has to be answered.
- Not to answer that request is to answer negatively. It's to reject the proposal, isn't it? And you see, verse 38 here is exactly that kind of proposal.
- [34 : 29] It's a pressing personal summons. Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Full forgiveness, full permanent justification for all that you know the law itself could never free you from.
- Your sin, your guilt, the power of death over your life. Moses and the prophets knew that themselves. That's why they constantly called you to trust in the promises of God.
- Trust in the one who at last would come to meet that deepest need. And now he has come, says Paul, and he summons you. He summons you to receive his blessings, to respond to his overtures of grace.
- This is your destiny, he says to them. You must respond, you must take it to yourself. It's like Jesus at the Last Supper, isn't it? When he acted out that pressing summons.
- Take, eat, this is for you. My body and blood, my death. It's for you. You must take it. You must respond personally.
- [35 : 40] God's grace always is like that. It gets right up close and personal to every one of us. It's for every single man and woman and child, even within the visible body of the family of Abraham, says Paul.
- It's to us, he says, that this salvation has come. To us Israelites, it's to the church of God that this salvation has come. What he's saying is you're not born into this salvation naturally.
- You're born for it. Yes, you are. It's your destiny by God's grace. It's your destiny by his gracious providence to have known from infancy the scriptures that are the way of salvation.
- salvation. It's God's grace that you've known from infancy and for all your life. The family of God's grace and the arena in which he makes himself known.
- But you also need God's personal grace. You need the forgiveness of your sins, just as Jesus said to Nicodemus, who was a Bible teacher of Israel.
- [36 : 47] You need to be born again. It's your destiny, he says. But it's not automatic. You can't abdicate that responsibility and reject your destiny.
- That would be a tragedy of monumental proportions, wouldn't it? It's like the abdication of Edward VIII was a tragedy nationally and over the commonwealth. He flew in the face of all that he was destined to be when he abdicated the throne.
- And so Paul, you see, is pressing God's personal grace upon his hearers. This is for you, he says. Take it. Don't reject it. Beware, verse 41, lest you should be found like those people that the prophets always encountered.

Scoffers, those who wouldn't believe what God was saying he was doing in his grace and mercy, even when he was. Don't let that happen, said Paul, to a Sabbath congregation full of men and women and families, all of whom had grown up all their lives with the privilege of an open Bible, the privilege of God's people all around them.

You of all people, he says, should respond personally with wholehearted submission, with joy to the calling of the Lord Jesus Christ in this day of grace.

[38 : 12] Don't let it happen that you should be found rejecting. So as I close, I just want to say this morning a personal word, especially to all of those here this morning who have been in this church all their lives, especially to our children and young folk, many of whom are with us this morning.

If ever there was a message of God directly for you, it's this message that Paul gave today in that synagogue. You've grown up with all the blessings of the word of God and the family of faith all your life.

You've maybe been baptized in this church and brought up as outward sons and daughters of the faith of Abraham, the people of the Lord Jesus Christ. You've heard the Bible all your life.

You've lived with your parents' faith all your life and those around you. But friends, you also need to understand that Paul's summons is for you. It's not enough even to just know fully what the gospel really is all about.

It's not enough to know that the Bible is a story of God's persistent grace that delivered a perfect Savior in the reign of Jesus. Or even that it's a story of God's present grace that has delivered a permanent salvation in the resurrection of Jesus.

[39 : 30] All of that isn't worth anything unless you also know that it's the story of God's personal grace. The grace that delivers to you today, now, a pressing summons to respond to Jesus Christ.

Some of you just at this stage are just leaving school. You're going to be in a new stage of life. You're going to college or university or to work and you're spreading your wings.

You're beginning to leave your parental home behind you. And Paul says to you what he said to those church families that day in verse 43.

Continue in the grace of God. Don't leave behind the gracious purpose of God that he's calling you to. Make it personal for you.

Some of you are teenagers and perhaps you're just beginning to get to that stage where you take it all for granted. You're saying, yes, I know all that. I've been in church all my life. Sermon coming out of my ears.

[40 : 35] Bible studies here, there and everywhere. But I know it all. Just that I don't want to take it quite as seriously as my parents do. Well, says Paul, don't presume on God's grace.

It's possible to be part of the church all your life, he says, and yet reject the Savior's grace when it comes personally to you in the appeal of this word of salvation.

Boys and girls, some of you are much younger. But don't forget, it's to you also that this great message of God's salvation comes. For you personally, it doesn't matter how little you are, it's never too early for you to give your lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus loves to summon little children also to himself. And all that love him, all who want to be his, his grace is for you. It's for you personally.

It's not just for your parents. God's church still needs his gospel. But it's a gospel of his persistent and present and personal grace.

[41 : 52] So why would anyone ever want to reject that? Let's pray. God, our Father, how we thank you for your great and rich grace to us in Jesus Christ, your Son.

May we, all here this morning, many of us so deeply privileged by your gracious providence and exposing us to your grace from our very earliest days, may we, every one of us, be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit as we receive at your hand the greatness of your permanent salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.