

# God Sovereignly Saves Sinners for his Glory

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[0:00] Good morning, Watermark. The scripture reading today comes from Acts chapter 9, verses 1-20.! If you're using the church Bible, you can turn to page 863.

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Thomas was a rough and tough man, and so everyone called him Staffordshire Bill in the community. But Staffordshire Bill was known in the community as a profane and a pretty immoral man.

He spent most of his evenings in the pub drinking himself into a stupor. He had no friends. He was very lonely because even the other people in the town that liked the things he liked didn't like doing them as much as he did.

He was known for his language, his crassness, and he was a lonely man. One night he's in the bar sitting there drinking himself into oblivion, and he hears a conversation at the table next to him.

[4:46] Two men are talking, and he hears one man saying to the other man, Last Sunday I was at that church down the road, and that preacher said nobody is hopeless.

He said there is hope for everybody. Well, Staffordshire Bill immediately is sobering up very quickly. His heart is arrested, and he thinks to himself, I will go to that church next Sunday and find out what that preacher has to say.

If there's hope for everybody, maybe there's hope for me. Well, the next two Sunday nights he goes down to the chapel in Sanfords, Wales, but he loses his nerve.

And so he hovers around the front doors, and he doesn't want to go in, and so he goes home. But over the third week, he finds that he is restless, but he can no longer turn to alcohol to drown the terrors of his soul.

And so the third Sunday night, he heads back to the church, and he's hovering around the front door, wondering whether to go in or not. And someone says, Bill, are you coming in? Come grab a seat with me.

[5:47] And so he goes inside. And to his amazement, he found that he could understand everything the preacher said. But what's more, he didn't just understand it, he believed it. And that night, for the first time in his life, his life was turned around.

His heart was flooded with peace, and he said a lightheartedness overcame him. As he left church that night, the man who had invited him in introduced him to the preacher's wife.

Her name was Bethan Lloyd-Jones. And the man invited him and says, Mrs. Lloyd-Jones, this is Staffordshire Bill. And at that, Mrs. Lloyd-Jones recounts the story. She says his whole body flinched as if somebody had struck him with an almighty blow.

He says, oh no, oh no, that is a bad old name for a bad old man. I am William Thomas now. And for the next three years, Staffordshire Bill was 70 years old.

For the next three years, he becomes a joyful, contributing, integrated member of not only the community, but of the church. And he dies at the age of 73, a beloved member of the church community.

[6:49] Friends, what makes somebody a Christian? How does God change people deeply? How does God take somebody that's so far away from him and bring him near, in fact, make him his friend?

Many of us here would consider ourselves Christians, followers of Jesus. But I also know that many of us here are not. Many of us are still on a spiritual journey, wondering about the claims of Christ. No matter where you are in your faith journey, do you know what does it mean, what does it take to make someone a Christian?

For somebody to change deeply and profoundly? And this is a very important question. And it's important for three reasons, I think. The first reason is, as I said, many of us here would consider ourselves followers of Jesus.

But is that really the case? Are you sure of that? Jesus, at the end of his very famous Sermon on the Mount, he says, there are many, many people who will say to me one day, Lord, look at all the things we did in your name.

And I will turn to them and say, I never knew you. Just because you think of yourself a Christian doesn't mean you really are a follower of Jesus. So it's an important question for us to consider.

[7:55] But secondly, it's an important question for those of us that are followers of Jesus. Maybe we felt that God changed us a long time ago, once upon a time.

And yet that change has kind of dissipated. It's no longer real to us. And it feels like a distant memory. And yet God wants that to be real and alive in our hearts constantly.

To be aware of the power of God to change our lives. And then, of course, the third reason is, as I said, many of us here are still on a journey of faith. You're not a Christian, but you're wondering, what does it mean to be a Christian?

And for you, you too need clarity on what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? How does God take someone and change us deeply? Now, as a church, we're continuing to work through the book of Acts, as Iris read to us.

And the book of Acts is this wonderful, wonderful book in the New Testament. About how the gospel, the good news of Jesus, spreads from Israel and Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

[8:52] And God's plan was for the gospel not just to stay in Jerusalem, but to go all over the Roman Empire and to the ends of the earth. But in order for it to do that, God needs a man, a person, someone to lead his global mission.

To take his gospel to the non-Jewish world outside of Jerusalem. And so God does a very surprising thing here. He chooses the most unlikely, questionable, dodgy character that he can find in the whole of Israel.

And he turns this enemy into his ally. He turns this opponent into an instrument of his grace, a messenger of the gospel to go to the ends of the earth.

And so the main point here is this is what we see in this passage. That like the account of Staffordshire Bill, the living Lord Jesus Christ changes deeply one of his greatest opponents and turns him into his ally.

In order to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Friends, how might the living Lord Jesus Christ want to change us? In this passage, we're going to see how God changes people deeply.

[9:54] And we're going to see it in five simple ways, okay? Five simple things about how God changes us deeply. So let's look at it together. Firstly, how does God change us and how do we know Christ deeply?

Firstly, personally. Personally. This is, I think, one of the most obvious things about this passage. And yet it's amazing how, I think, easily it's overlooked. Saul's personal encounter with the Lord Jesus.

Now, this is obviously a great surprise to Saul. In his mind, Jesus of Nazareth was nothing but a charlatan. He was a false messiah type figure. Somebody who made all sorts of outrageous claims but couldn't back them up.

And so, for him, Jesus is somebody that's corrupting the Jewish faith. And so Saul's ambition in life is to stamp it out, to destroy it. But what changes Saul here is not a logical argument.

It's not more evidence that is presented to him. It's a personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the interaction here. Look at, I think it's verse 4.

[10:58] Look at Jesus' words to him. He says, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Look at the personal pronouns there. When Saul looks around and says, who are you?

Jesus says, I am Jesus, the one that you are persecuting. This is what drives the wedge between Paul's former life and the newfound person that he becomes later on.

This is what rocks his world and brings about a complete turnaround. Because even though Saul had an incredible mind and was intellectually and theologically very, very astute, what changes him is not just a theological argument, but a personal encounter with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

And friends, that's true for anyone that wants to know God. It may come through a sermon, maybe come through Bible reading, maybe some other personal encounter, but it must be a personal encounter with the living God.

When I was in, I think it was 8th grade or 9th grade, long, long, long, long, long time ago in high school, my English teacher, we read a poem together by Francis Thompson.

[12:04] You might know the poem. It's called The Hound of Heaven. And I'll never forget sitting in that classroom. This poem really gripped me. But Francis Thompson, his early life was one of one dead end after another.

He studied to become a priest, but he failed that and dropped out pretty soon. Then he decided to become a doctor like his father, but he failed that and also dropped out of his medical studies.

He then joined the military, but he was fired after one day for not being a very courageous soldier type of person. And he went to London, but he was very interested in poetry. And he had a back pain, and so he started taking opium to deal with the pain in his back.

And he soon became an opium addict and was living under the bridges in the streets of London next to the Thames River. But while there, he would write poetry. And one day he writes this poem, and he sends it into a magazine.

And the editors of the magazine are so astounded by this poem that they take him into his home, and they nurse him, and they look after him for the next couple of years. But the poem that he writes is called The Hound of Heaven.

[13:04] Listen to it. He says this. He's writing about how God's unrelenting, unwavering way that God has set his heart upon a man. He said, I fled from him down the nights and down the days.

I fled him down the arches of the years. I fled him down the labyrinth ways of my mind and in the midst of tears. I hid from him, from those strong feet that followed, followed after, with unhurrying chase, with unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy.

They beat, and a voice beats more instant than the feet. It's the introduction to this poem. It goes on and on and on about the Hound of Heaven, this God that has set his sights on him and is honed on him and is chasing him down and is calling him to be one of his own.

And the point here, friends, is that how does God meet us? It's not just in theological arguments. It's not just in philosophical arguments. It's in the person, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Hound of Heaven that sets his sight on you and calls you and draws you in and he changes you.

Friends, have you encountered the living God like that? Have you heard the voice of the Hound of Heaven calling you, confronting you, challenging you, calling you? Can you say that Jesus himself, the person of Jesus is real to you?

[14:27] Friends, if you're a Christian, is the person of the Lord Jesus still real to you? Or is that a distant memory from long ago? When last did the living Lord Jesus speak to you through his word and prayer calling you?

This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to know the real living Lord Jesus and to have him speak to you, to be moved by his presence and his grace. How do we meet God? How do we change deeply?

Meeting Christ personally. But not only personally, but also powerfully. I think this account of Paul's life in Acts 9, we see one of, is a story full of surprises.

Many of us will know the story because it's so famous. But for the first century readers who read this for the first time, this story would have been utterly shocking. And the reason is pretty obvious.

We meet Saul a couple of times in the book of Acts. And as we've met him before this, Saul is the one that is persecuting Christians. He hates Christians. He wants to destroy them. But the person that we meet at the beginning of the chapter is not the same person we meet at the end of the chapter.

[15:31] Look at how the chapter begins. Verse 1. Now Saul, breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters to the rulers of the synagogues that if he found any belonging to the way, that's the way of Jesus, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Later on in Acts, he tells us that his goal wasn't just to arrest them, but to have them executed, to kill them. But look at how the chapter ends. Well, actually, halfway through the chapter, verse 20. And he immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, he is the Son of God.

What accounts for this radical, radical change in this man Saul? Now, of course, not everyone who encounters Jesus is going to do so in the same way.

Some people's transformation is slow and gradual. Some is radical, dramatic and sudden. But for all who are going to encounter the living Lord Jesus, it means being changed deeply and profoundly in a way that does not leave you the same.

I once heard a story, I might have shared it before, of a man who, this is like many years ago in the ancient world, would travel from city to city, maybe on work or whatever it was, but in each city, he had a lover, someone that he would visit and spend the time, the weeks in the ancient city at her house or they would spend together.

[16:56] And so maybe not so unlike modern people as well. But then and one day he becomes a Christian. He becomes a follower of Jesus. And so he's on his travels and he goes to one of the cities where he previously had had a lover and he walks past her.

And she recognizes him and she goes up to him, but he kind of shoos her away and he kind of doesn't really engage with her. And she thinks, he must not recognize me.

Maybe it's been so long. And so she says, you know, Pedro, whatever his name is, it's me. It's me. Don't you recognize me? And he says, I know, but it is no longer me.

The man you once knew is gone. I'm someone altogether new now. Friends, this is the story of the gospel, what God does time and time again.

It's the story of Staffordshire Bill. It's the story of Saul who became Paul. It's the story of millions of people around the world. That when God meets with us, he doesn't just slightly improve us.

[17:59] He powerfully and radically reorientates us and changes us deeply. And one of the reasons for this is because sin, which is our rebellion against God, sin is such a deep and pervasive thing.

It's something that takes over our hearts, our identity, our being. Often we think of sin as just a bad action. Right? I lied. I stole something from the cookie jar. I, you know, was dishonest.

But actually the Bible says that sin is such a deep and pervasive thing. It originates in our hearts and it manifests in the actions of our lives. But Jesus, when he wants to change us, he's not just trying to change our behavior.

He wants to change deeply our heart, our being, our identity, our personality, our character, the people where we've become. Sin has corrupted not just our actions, but our hearts, our central being, the kind of control center of our lives.

And therefore it affects our identities, our personalities, our characters, every part of our being. But the Bible says that where sin abounds, God's grace super abounds.

[19:03] Where sin is pervasive, God's grace is even more pervasive. God is able to take the very deepest parts of our lives and change that. God's redeeming power and pervasive grace abounds all the more, which means that Christ's liberating power is never a superficial thing.

It's never just an intellectual thing. It's a deeply, deeply transformative thing. It must take hold of all of us. It's why when Jesus, in speaking to Nicodemus, says, we must be born again.

You must become a whole new kind of person. For instance, why in the ancient world, not in the ancient world, in previous times, when people got baptized, they would often be given a new name. You are baptized, Sarai.

Welcome, Sarah. Or whatever your name wants to be, right? If you don't like your name, there's a good chance you can choose a new name, right? But why? Why? Because when God changes us, when God saves us, when you encounter God, it's powerful, it's deep, it's transformative. This is, of course, what happens to Saul. Jesus doesn't just improve him or modify him or restrain him. He changes him. We meet God personally, meet God powerfully. But thirdly, look at what Saul does.

[20:15] He meets God painfully. I'm sorry there's all these P's, okay? It's just the way I am. I'm sorry. But Saul meets God painfully, painfully. Notice here, for Saul, his encounter with the living Lord Jesus is not an easy thing.

When Jesus meets Saul and confronts him, it's a painful thing. Look what he says. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul, after that, falls to his knees.

In the Bible, to be brought to your knees is coming to the end of yourself. It's like being almost being brought, being made dead. Remember John on the Isle of Patmos? He sees God, he's a revelation of Jesus, and he falls down as though dead.

Being brought to your knees is like coming to the end of yourself. And the reason is because, as we said, Jesus doesn't just want to improve Saul's life, but to completely reconstruct it. It's like those home improvement programs you see on Netflix, right?

Where they take a house and they completely reconstruct the entire thing. Actually, home improvement is a terrible name. It's almost like a demolition project. And it rebuilds it completely.

[21:20] And listen to how C.S. Lewis explained this in his book, *Mere Christianity*. He says, imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in and rebuilds that house. At first, you can understand what he's doing.

He's getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on. You knew that that house, that those jobs were needed doing, and so you're not surprised. But then, he starts knocking about the house in a way that hurts abundantly and does not seem to make any sense.

What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage.

But he is building a new house altogether, one that he intends to come and live in himself. That's a great analogy. Jesus is not just coming to modify a little bit of our lives.

He wants to meet us profoundly, deeply. But that means it's going to challenge us. That's going to be confronting. It's going to hurt. Now, why is that? I think there's a couple of reasons. I think one reason is Jesus is going to challenge our pride and our self-sufficiency because he says that in order to know him deeply, we need to firstly acknowledge our need for him.

[22:35] We need to acknowledge that he is the center of the universe, not us. And human beings, by nature, we want to be the center of the universe. We want to be the center of our lives, right? And so, Jesus comes and says, you are not the center.

I am the center. You are not worthy of worship. I am worthy of worship. You are not majesty. I am majesty. And that's very challenging. And I think that's one of the reasons why Paul is struck blind here is because in a way, he then needs to be led into the city.

We know that Saul is a young man. He's rising through the ranks. He's getting a name and a reputation for himself. And what does Jesus do? He's struck some blind. Now Saul needs to be led by the hand into the city and found where to sit and where to lie down.

He's being brought to his knees. Encountering Jesus brings him to his knees. Many commentators say that at the beginning, when it talks about Saul was still breathing murderous threats, it's the language of like a wild animal that's kind of enraged.

And it's this animal that is gnawing and challenging everybody. But how does Saul end? The chapter ends with him blind being led into the city hand in hand like a gentle child.

[23:44] And that's very humbling. And that's not easy. Friends, this is what happens. This is what must happen for anyone that encounters Jesus. To be confronted with our lostness, with our sinfulness.

To be confronted with the fact that we ourselves are enemies of God by nature brought to our knees. And think also about Paul's reputation here. He's the rising star of Judaism in Israel.

Everybody knows why he's gone to Damascus. He's gone to arrest and kill those Christians. And now they're going to find out that he's become one. And later on in the chapter in verse 30, it says that after a while they took him down to Tarsus.

Tarsus is the city that he comes from. How do you think it was for Saul to go to his parents, his brothers and sisters and say, Mom and Dad, I've got something to tell you. I've become one of them.

Friends, encountering the Lord Jesus is painful. It's difficult. But here's the other way that I think encountering Jesus is difficult. It will confront your entire worldview.

[24:46] Sometimes everything you've ever believed in will be questioned and turned on its head. Towards the end of the book of Acts, Saul is on trial. And when he's on trial, twice he tells the story of how he became a follower of Jesus.

So actually we hear this occasion three times in the book of Acts. One in chapter 9, this morning, one in chapter 22 and one in chapter 26. But in chapter 22, some people have kind of arrested him and he's defending himself and he tells the story of how he became a Christian.

And he's telling the story and they're all listening intently and then at one point he says, and God sent me to be a messenger and apostle to the Gentiles that the non-Jewish people can hear about this God of Israel.

And Acts 22 says this, up until this word they listened to him but when they heard this they raised their voices and said, away with such a fellow from the earth. He should not be allowed to live.

When Saul says, hey the Gentiles are being welcomed by God, that's too much for them. Get rid of this guy. And then in chapter 26 he's standing before Felix the governor, he's arrested, he's on trial and he tells Felix his story of how he became a follower of Jesus.

[25:58] And then he says, and Felix is listening, listening, listening and then when Paul says, and the risen Lord Jesus Christ who died rose again, Felix the governor interrupts him and says, Paul you're out of your mind.

all your great learning has made you mad. You've become insane. So think about that. Saul tells a story, everyone listens, but there's two things that are highly offensive.

That God would want to welcome in the Gentiles and non-Jewish people and that Jesus died and rose again. No Jew's going to believe that. But friend, Saul just a few years before was one of them.

To Saul, that would have been ridiculous. Nonsense. In fact, if you told Paul that God was welcoming the Gentiles and that Jesus had died and risen again, Paul would have flipped his lid.

In fact, he did. That's why he wants to kill these Christians, right? And yet now, Paul is standing before all these people saying, it's true. It's true. Saul's entire worldview, everything that he's believed in, his entire intellectual framework and worldview for how the world lives is turned on its head, turned upside down as he starts to rethink life in light of the person of the Lord Jesus.

[27:14] And in many ways, that can be deeply disorientating. Everything you've been told, everything you brought up believing is suddenly brought into question and you realize God is the center of the world and that has implications for our lives.

The way we live, the way we spend our money, the way we steward our sexuality, the way we go about work, the way we forgive those that have hurt us. Friends, in many ways, encountering Jesus is not always a walk in the park.

It's challenging. It's difficult. It's painful. Rosaria Butterfield in her excellent book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, writes this. She says, My coming to Jesus was messy and dangerous, a complete train wreck.

To say that those early years were rough on me is a great understatement. I lost friends and cultural capital. I did not lose my job, but that's because I was a tenured professor. But I did have to go before the tenure board and explain what happened to me.

She, by the way, was a professor of queer ideology and LGBT studies at Syracuse University in New York and was a tenured professor. And she had to explain to her tenure board why she had changed her mind.

[28:20] She said, I was now despised by the people I loved, but one thing was clear. I was once God's enemy. Now I was his friend. Friends, meeting Jesus personally, powerfully, painfully, falsely, quickly, purposefully.

Look at verse 15. Saul's been taken to Damascus. There he is waiting and there he is waiting for the Lord Jesus to tell him what to do. And at the same time, God speaks to another disciple called Ananias.

The Lord tells Ananias to go and find Saul, lay hands on him, which is a way of kind of blessing or anointing, giving favor. And Ananias says, God, you've got to be kidding me.

Do you know who Saul is? And Jesus says, yes, I do know, verse 15, but the Lord said to him, go, he is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and before kings and the children of Israel.

Now, as we said earlier, on the one hand, Saul is somewhat unique. Saul is uniquely called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Okay, bad news, none of us here are going to get that calling.

[29:21] Okay, you are not going to be called to be a great apostle to the Gentiles. That has, that office has already been taken and has come and gone. None of us are going to write books of the New Testament.

Okay, the New Testament is done. But, on the other hand, what is true for all of us is that encountering the risen Lord Jesus Christ means re-looking at our lives through the lens of God's great mission to take the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Another way of saying that is those who encounter the Lord Jesus start to see not just God's personal plan to save me, but God's cosmic plan to redeem the whole world, to bring about a new creation, to rescue not just me from judgment but to restore all things, to make all things new, to bring all peoples and nations into his kingdom.

And that means that those who have met and encountered Jesus are now drafted into his global redemption plan. Friends, you see that? When Jesus reveals himself to you, it's never meant to end with you.

Yes, he wants to save you and forgive you. That's just the start. He's bringing about an ever-expanding global cosmic plan to renew all things and you're saved into his global plan.

[30:33] Here's the last thing finally. When we meet God, how does God change us deeply? He changes us personally, powerfully, painfully, with a purpose, but finally, publicly.

We see when Saul encounters Jesus here, it's not just personal and private, but it's also public and communal. And we see this in two different ways. Notice firstly, the role that Ananias plays.

Ananias is not so sure about this, right? And so he says to Jesus, you've got to be kidding me. Do you know who this guy is? And Jesus says, yes, I do know. He's my chosen instrument. I will use him.

And then in verse 17, how does Ananias address Saul? Remember, Saul is the guy that has come to his city with authorization letters to arrest him, drag them back to Jerusalem, Jerusalem, and possibly have him executed.

Look at what he says in verse 17. Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus appeared to you on the way, has sent me to you so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

[31:38] And then Saul is baptized. And baptism is the community's affirmation that this faith is genuine. Nobody baptizes themselves. The community baptizes you and says, you are one of us.

Welcome. Baptism is the gateway into the church community. And they baptize him and authenticate his faith. And we see the same thing the next week with Barnabas. Welcome Saul into the community.

Saul doesn't become a Christian and then go off on his own, but he's pulled into the community. His faith becomes public. And did you notice in verse 4, Saul, what does the risen Christ say to Saul in verse 4?

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? But in Saul's mind, he's not persecuting Jesus. He's persecuting Christians, right? I mean, Saul wants to kill Christians. He doesn't even believe in Jesus at this stage.

And yet, in Jesus' mind, they're one and the same thing. Friends, you see what that means? Jesus so identifies with his people that the way you treat his people, his body, his community, his church, in some ways, is the way that you're treating Christ himself.

[32:42] Jesus so identifies with his people that to reject or belittle or alienate his people, his body is in some ways to reject, belittle, or alienate him. And the reason is because Christ is present in his people.

And so what that means is that when you get saved, when you get born again, you come into a relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ, but you also come into a relationship with his people, with his body, his community, his church.

And that means we are more important to one another and to each other's spiritual growth than you could ever imagine because to know Jesus is to not just know him personally, but to know him publicly, corporately as well.

Friends, the conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus is in some ways unique as the living Lord Jesus Christ changes him deeply, powerfully, profoundly, personally.

and yet in other ways, what we see in Paul and what we heard in Staffordshire Bill and what we hear millions and millions of stories throughout the ages and all around the world in Rosario Battlefield and millions of others in every corner of the world is the same story over and over again.

[33:48] How the living Lord Jesus Christ changes us, draws us into himself, draws us into his family, changes us deeply and personally. Friends, have you encountered Jesus like this?

Have you encountered the living God in this way? Do you know what it's like for the living Lord Jesus to call you, to confront you, to challenge you, to welcome you?

Friends, have you met him like this? Are you able to say the person I once was is not the person I am anymore? That's what Jesus is able to do for all of us. That's what Jesus wants to do for us.

That's what Jesus wants to do for us today. Why don't we come to now in prayer and ask him to do that once again. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, if there's one thing the Bible tells us again and again, it's that you are not just a theory, you're not just an idea, you're not just a philosophy, you are the living God, the living risen Lord Jesus Christ, the one who once was dead but now is alive again.

God, you are changing people. You've been changing people throughout the centuries. You're changing people today. God, many of us here in the room have got stories of how you've changed us deeply, personally, profoundly.

[35:03] God, many of us are still longing for that, wanting that. God, I pray, I pray God, by your spirit, won't you come and meet with each one of us. Lord, those of us that have walked with you for many years and know your grace, come and meet with us once again.

Meet with us deeply and personally. God, the worries of our hearts, the longings of our hearts, come and meet with us, we pray. God, those of us maybe that have been very religious like Saul, done all the right things but never known you, come God and meet us personally, profoundly.

Come and change us, Lord. God, those of us that are very aware that we're still on a journey. Oh God, come and open the eyes of our hearts. Lord, let the scales from our eyes drop.

May we see you and be changed. God, as Martin Lloyd-Jones said all those years ago, there is hope for everyone. No one is beyond your redeeming grace.

God, may that be true for every one of us in this room. In your great name we pray. Amen. Amen.