

Guest Preacher Rev. George Macaskill

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Preacher: Rev. George Macaskill

[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the Word of God. I want to speak from a verse in Philippians chapter 1, but I want to read about how the Philippian church was planted.

So I will read in Acts chapter 16. The book of Acts chapter 16, I will read verses 6 to 34, and find out how this church began.

So Acts chapter 16 at verse 6. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia.

And when they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas, and a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him, saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us.

[1 : 22] And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothracea, and the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony.

We remained in this city some days, and on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer. And we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, If you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.

[2 : 44] And she prevailed upon us. As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl, who had a spirit of divination, and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

She followed Paul and us, crying out, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation. And this she kept doing for many days.

Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the Spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

And it came out of her that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, These men are Jews, and they're disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.

- [3 : 57] The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely, having received this order. He put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.
- And the prisoners were listening to them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.
- When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.
- But Paul cried with a loud voice, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here. And the jailer called for lights and rushed in.
- [5 : 18] And trembling with fear, he came down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.
- And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.
- Then he brought them up into his house and set foot before them, and he rejoiced, along with his entire household, that he had believed in God.
- And may God bless to us the very reading of his own truth. Now, if you turn a few pages further on to Paul's letter to the Philippians.
- Philippians chapter 1, and here is what Paul wrote to them. I'm not very sure exactly how many, how long afterwards.
- [6 : 44] Philippians chapter 1, and as God would help me, I'd like to concentrate on verse 6. Philippians chapter 1, at verse 6.
- And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
- This church at Philippi is regarded as one of the best churches recorded in the New Testament.
- That is quite amazing when you think of the first three members in this church. You remember how it began.
- That's call, as we read in Acts 16. This vision that Paul got, come of a man crying out to him, come over to Macedonia and help us.
- [8 : 05] Now, Paul had a certain strategy when he was going out on mission to either a new continent or a new country or a new town.
- His strategy was to look for a synagogue. So, of course, he looks for the synagogue in Philippi.
- And what happens? Because there isn't any. Why? Why is there no synagogue in Philippi?
- And the explanation seems to be that the Jews, they were not given authority to build the synagogue unless there was ten men gathering together.
- If you didn't have ten men, you couldn't build the synagogue. Well, that's the position in Philippi. In fact, can we not ask the question, was there one man?
- [9 : 09] There's no record of one man in Philippi. So, Paul has to plant a church and start from scratch. Now, here is the practice of every Jew.

Every morning, the head of a Jewish home would gather the household together and he'd pray to God and he'd thank God for three things.

First thing in the morning. He'd thank God, first of all, that he was not born a woman. Now, I'm only telling you what the custom was.

He prayed, he thanked God he was not born a woman. Secondly, he thanked God he was not born a slave.

And thirdly, he thanked God he was not born a Gentile. Isn't that interesting? Who are the first three members God brings into the church at Philippi?

[10 : 26] A woman, Lydia. A slave girl, demented. And thirdly, a Gentile prison warder.

Doesn't God challenge us at our traditions. These three girls, these three people, we read them.

Lydia. What kind of person was she? Now, I don't know if you're like me, but when I thought of Lydia, I used to think of an old woman with a shawl and she's sitting on a wee card table, a wee desk, and she's playing about with little pieces of purple.

Nothing could be further from the truth. That's not the kind of person Lydia was. Lydia was not an old woman with a shawl. Lydia was a very well-to-do sales executive, trading with royalty.

Purple's a royal color. Lydia mixed in high society. Lydia was an up-market business woman.

[11 : 40] That's who she was. High society. Mixed with royalty. Celebrity, if you like. She was not a full Jewess.

Probably what they would call a God-fearer. Apparently, one of her parents was a Jew. I can't remember which one. Her mother, I think, yeah. They gathered for prayer down by the riverside.

The Lord opened her heart to receive the gospel which Paul preached to her. and she challenges Paul and she says to him, from now on, worship in my house.

She had servants. She had a big house. Make the church at Philippi, make the premises be my home. She challenged him. Would you do it? Paul wasn't willing but our Bible tells us she prevailed upon him.

So that's the first member in this church plant. Who's the second? A slave girl possessed by a demon.

[13 : 03] She dabbled in the occult. She practiced and associated with witchcraft. And of course, as we read, she was actually breaking the peace, shouting and screaming and tormenting Paul.

And Paul is annoyed. He's grieved. And he exercises the demon so that the girl from then onward is of no use to her masters.

So they get rid of her. But you know, Christ receives the casts off of the devil.

There's hope for anyone, anywhere.

that's the second member in the church at Philippi. Third member, a Gentile prison warder.

[14 : 26] You see, exercising the evil spirit landed Paul and Silas in prison. doesn't the devil overstep himself so often?

He's gone too far. What happens now? Paul's converting people in prison. He converts the prison warder. Satan oversteps himself.

He goes too far. The prison warder and it seems all his family are converted to Christ. that's the first three members in the church at Philippi.

What would you say if your presbytery came up and said, look, we're going to start down the village, we're going to start a new church here, and there's the first three converts. What kind of questions would you ask?

Do you think it would be a wise thing to plant a church with that start? What do these three have in common?

[15 : 39] What do they have in common? Different backgrounds, different cultures, different education, if they have education. What unity is there?

What do they have in common? Well, I'll tell you what they have in common. They're all sinners. sinners. But, of course, you can say that about any group.

Whether it's the golf club, whether it's the bowling club, whatever it is, whatever group you have, they're all sinners. But here's something they've got in common.

These sinners, they know they're sinners. They know they're sinners. But even more importantly than that, not only do they know they're sinners, they trust Christ for salvation.

That's a Christian. You see, there's lots of people convicted of sin. But what do they turn to? Some go into convents, some go into monasteries, some try Buddhism, some try this, some try that.

[16 : 53] A Christian doesn't just know he's a sinner. He goes to Christ with his sin, realizes that Christ died to pay God for the sins of all who believe in him, and they believe in him.

Doesn't matter what your past is like, nothing matters, but you're depending on Christ for forgiveness and salvation. They've got that in common.

sin. But not an awful lot else. Not an awful lot else. How can Paul have such confidence in them?

Demented slave girl, a Gentile which was obnoxious to the Jew being brought up, and an upmarket sales lady. what's the potential?

How can Paul have such confidence in them? Answer, he doesn't have confidence in them. He has confidence in God. That's the explanation.

[18 : 02] It's God who worked in them. My friend, Christianity is a work of God in you and in me.

It's a work of God. If you just turn the page, no, don't need to turn the page in some Bibles, chapter 2 verse 12.

Now, I'm going to say something here. Never quote Philippians 2 12. without quoting Philippians 2 13.

Always quote the next chapter. Let me read it. Philippians 2 12. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed me, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

That's 12. Always go on to verse 13. For, or, as it could be translated, because it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[19 : 25] Now, if you don't know your Bible and you don't know much about Christianity, you might think verse 12 is saying, oh, I have to work out my own salvation. Finish the sentence in the next verse.

Work out what God has worked in. That's the command there, and it's very important.

Indeed, those who really study the Greek, the original, say it would be better translated, continue to work out what God has worked in, or carry on working out what God has worked in.

You see, Paul, I don't know about you, but to be honest, I'd be a little bit nervous saying the things Paul says about these three people until I got to know them better, until he spent a few months with them, or as they say over here, until you burn a stack of peats with them.

You don't know someone until you burn a stack of peats with them. Well, Paul hasn't done that with them, has not done that with them, but he's confident God has worked in them. He's confident.

[20 : 49] He believes they're genuine Christians. You see, we don't know what's in somebody's heart. I don't know. The crack session doesn't know what's in your heart.

It accepts your word of testimony, what you've said. But we can examine the way you live.

We can examine what effect God working in you has. God convicting you of your sin, and God showing you, look, the only way you can get to heaven is you depend on my son's death for pardon.

That should make a difference to your lifestyle. and we can only see your lifestyle. Paul is convinced that these people, young in the faith, different backgrounds, different cultures, he's convinced genuine Christians.

Now, we need to ask, what does God work in a sinner when he converts them, when he saves them, when he makes them new creatures in Christ?

[22 : 02] What does he work in? Two things I'll mention. He works in his Holy Spirit. It's called regeneration, or as I said to the children, you must be born again.

Or, as it could be translated, you might see it in some of the margins of some of your Bibles, you must be born from above. You need a new heart, a new spirit.

Every Christian, if there's a Christian sitting beside you, you can touch them, the Holy Spirit's inside that person. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit indwelling on.

That's hugely encouraging, but we have to be very careful that we do not grieve that Holy Spirit. we don't quench his work, that we don't resist what he's trying to teach us.

We're Christians are responsible to carry out what the Holy Spirit teaches them. But you see, how do I know what the Holy Spirit's teaching me? Well, the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible.

[23 : 17] You can be sure everything you read in the Bible is the Holy Spirit teaching you. Now, that's the first thing.

Every Christian, God has worked the Holy Spirit inside them. The second thing he's working that I'll mention, the Spirit has worked in every believer the germ seed of every Christian grace.

grace. The germ seed of every Christian grace. Not some of them, all of them. Every Christian believer has the germ seed of every Christian grace.

More of some, less of others, but you've got a little bit of every Christian grace. And it's our duty to exercise and grow that little thing.

through, how does it grow? How do we grow? You remember, you remember the disciples said to Christ on one occasion, increase our faith.

[24 : 34] And do you remember the reply Jesus gave? If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you'll be able to say to this sheep, be planted and be cast into the sea.

And that's all he said. No explanation. I was always confused with that. I could never grasp that. But the disciples seemed to understand. And only when it was said to me, look, what is Jesus saying there?

He's actually saying, look, you don't need more faith. Faith is not like building blocks. You're building a wall and you're running out of building blocks.

Oh, you need more concrete blocks. Faith's not like that. Faith is a seed. It grows and expands. You don't need more seeds.

If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, the Savior teaches us, you'll be able to do this with a grain. So what the Savior was really teaching was this, practice using the little bit you have.

[25 : 45] You might only have a grain of faith. That'll save your soul, but it needs to grow. So you ask, how does it grow? Practice using it.

Use it. It grows through exercise and it grows through contact with Christ. Christ. We are told, grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

You grow in grace by learning more of Christ, becoming more like Christ-like. We have to become more Christian by practicing and it does not come naturally to us.

it's a struggle, it's a fight. Here's an interesting thought. There is no growth in grace without some frustration, without some kind of suffering, some kind of irritation, some kind of distress.

You see, the natural man can't receive these things, but we're talking about the spiritual. It doesn't come naturally. It comes spiritually, by faith.

[27 : 12] So it's a struggle. It's a struggle. Think about it. Chastity is not a virtue in a eunuch.

His hormones aren't working. Rising up early in the morning is not a virtue if you suffer from insomnia and you can't sleep.

It's not grace to rise early. You can't sleep. That's natural. We're talking about the spiritual. The spiritual does not come naturally to us.

Therefore, it's a struggle. The rich, the multi-billionaire, his faith is not likely to be tested by, put a thousand pound in the plate tonight.

Millionaire, billionaires don't know how much they have. It changes from day to day according to stock exchange. It's no struggle, a billionaire to put a thousand pound in the plate. The laid back guy is not likely.

[28 : 22] God's not going to test his faith by asking him to wait a while for this. That suits him great. No hurry, no stress, relax.

By definition, growing in grace is a struggle. So my Christian friend, if you are finding it difficult to be Christ-like, you're probably doing everything just right.

It's not natural to grow in grace. it's spiritual. And the spiritual and the flesh don't get on together.

So naturally, there's a struggle. And the church in Philippi has to learn these things. Our celebrity upmarket sales executive lady, she's to get on with a demented slave girl, not lose her temper, not be impatient.

gentile prison warder, he was so rough as we read, putting Paul and Silas in the stocks.

[29 : 37] He's to learn to be gentle and soft and meek and understanding and considerate. To be Christ-like, it doesn't come naturally.

We're to grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. By learning more of Christ, by beholding Christ, looking at Christ's life, we learn to become what we were originally designed to be.

Now, the work of sanctification, the work of becoming Christ-like, is not finished in time. only at death are our souls made perfect in holiness.

At death, our souls. But what about your bodies? Your bodies are never made perfect until the resurrection, until you behold him, when you rise with your new body and you see Christ before you.

When I behold him, when I see him, then I'll be like him. But not till you rise again will your body be sinless. And even in our last times, our last hours, there's still sin present in our bodies.

[31 : 08] So it will always be a struggle. It's not natural. It's spiritual. God's work can begin so small, you might know you have it.

Speaking personally, I believe I was a Christian for five to eight years without realizing it. A grain of mustard seed. Can you see it?

You probably can see a grain of mustard seed. It probably can, but just. It can hide even in the crevices of the wrinkles of your hand. It can be so small, not sure it's begun at all.

We're to be very careful what we see, because the Savior said, a grain of mustard seed can do a lot if it's used properly. And of course, God never abandons a work, however tough, once he begins.

Isn't it amazing? And I say this carefully. Not even sin, not even our sin can change God's purpose to make us holy, of making us holy.

[32 : 34] Take heart. You'll have sin with you as long as you live. But the resurrection, a new body, wonderful.

You see Christ, the new heavens and the new earth, wonderful. Well, let's ask now as we close in, how can you tell if I've got that grain of mustard seed?

God's love. And let me challenge you to, if you're listening to me, and you're not asking the question, do I have a grain of mustard seed of faith?

earth, then I think we can say, you're spiritually dead. You don't even want it.

Something wrong, desperately wrong. You don't even want it. So I trust that some asking the question, how can I tell I've got that grain of mustard seed that will take me to glory?

[33 : 46] Number one, Christ means something to you. Religion, even the Christian religion, is not just rules and regulations, or I should say, I think it's only the Christian religion that is not full of rules and regulations.

Oh yes, there's regulations how we're to live, but that's not salvation. salvation is about. Salvation is about possessing Christ's righteousness.

Now, do you understand you can have all the religion in the world, do you understand you can keep the law as best as you can, but you're still not a Christian?

You're not a Christian until Jesus Christ means something to you. Okay? develop it a wee bit further.

You can tell the work has begun in you if you see the need for the cross, for the need for Jesus to die. You see, there are people who say they're Christian, but they say there's no need for Jesus to die.

[35 : 08] He just did that to show us a perfect example of self-sacrifice. My friend, listen, sin must be paid for, either by you in a lost eternity or by Christ in a place called Calvary.

Sin must be paid for by death. death. My Bible tells me Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

That's where my hope is. Christ's death. If Christ did not die there differently from the other two, paying God for the sins of believers, I have no hope for the next world.

No hope for the next world. And here's, I think we can see an infallible mark of those whom the good work has begun in.

You desire to be like Jesus, and you complain you're not like him enough. Your complaint is, I'm not like Christ enough.

- [36 : 29] I tell you, that's a mark of life. not death. The dead have no feelings. The dead have no feelings. You're spiritually alive if you're complaining, I'm so unlike Jesus.
- I hope you've got that complaint. You wish, you desire to be more Christ-like. What a mark. You belong to the Son of, you belong to the, you belong to Jesus.
- us. Well, we close three things very, very quickly. You'll have noticed, if you're listening, that I've applied this verse to personal salvation.
- That's not the context. It's perfectly logistic to do it as far as I can make out. But what's the context? Context is congregational.
- Speaking to the congregation. Do you find congregations go down? You get depressed, ah, we're finished. He who has begun a good work in any congregation will continue to the day of Jesus Christ until you turn against Christ, unless you turn against Christ.
- [37 : 53] The congregational surely, secondly, we have this lesson. God begins a work to finish it.
- He does not begin something and never end it. He who has begun the good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ, the great day of judgment.
- He starts it in order to finish. My last thing, if you're here, if you're listening to me online and you are not a Christian, how does the work begin?
- It begins the same way it began in Philippi. Acts 16, we read it, verse 31, the Philippian jailer, the earthquake shook him up and he said, what must I do to be saved?
- What's the answer? How does it begin? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It's real, it's true, and once he begins it, he'll continue it to completion to the day of Jesus Christ.
- [39 : 16] may God the Holy Spirit make his word effectual to every one of us. Let's bow our heads. Our Father in heaven, please take the things of Christ and make them known to us.
- Unite every one of us in saving faith to your dear Son. So hear in mercy, answer in peace as we pray only in Jesus' name.
- Amen. We conclude our service of worship by singing from Psalm 92 in the Scorish Salter.
- That's on page 353. Page 353, Psalm 92 in the Scorish Salter. We sing verses 12 to the end.
- It's a common meter, common meter. Psalm 92 at verse 12. But like the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one, he shall like to the cedar grow that is in Lebanon.
- [40 : 27] Down to the last verse. To show that upright is the Lord, he is a rock to me, and he from all unrighteousness is altogether free. Psalm 92 at verse 12.
- But like the palm tree flourishing. the mountain flourishing shall be the righteous one, he shall li kiss oi In the hands of God are founded by His grace.
- They shall grow up and flourish all.
- In our God's holy place. And in old days when others fade.
- They fruits till forth shall bring. They shall be burned and forced now.
- [42 : 24] And they be furnished. To Jonah, the righteous Lord.
- He is a rock to me. And He through all our righteousness.
- And He is all together free. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- And the love of God. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with us all. Now and forevermore. Amen.