

Audio file

[testimony \(3\).mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

It's a privilege to be here tonight, friends, and thank you to Pastor Seaton for his very warm welcome.

00:00:08

I was...

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It was requested of me that I give my testimony.

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Those of you who knew anything about me will have probably looked at something about me on the internet.

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But first of all, I'm going to turn to the word of God, to the epistle.

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of Paul to the Ephesians and chapter 2 and verses 8 to 10.

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Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, the church at Ephesus, chapter 2 and verses 8 to 10.

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Let us hear the word of God.

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For by grace are ye saved,

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through faith.

00:01:00

And that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

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For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them.

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Perhaps you are all wondering how the gospel began.

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The gospel began in the counsels of eternity with the God of all grace.

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But the work of God began in my own life with a very simple question.

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I was a young boy growing up in

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Roman Catholic Ireland.

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Pastor Jack Seaton is from the north of Ireland.

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I'm from the south of Ireland, from the Republic of Ireland.

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And it was very Roman Catholic in my day.

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And the question that dwelt upon my heart as a young boy was, How can I be right with an all-holy God?

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How can I know the one true God?

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Anyone who's ever thought about the God of heaven and earth or the gospel or the Bible will perhaps have asked themselves something similar or pondered that deep question, How can I be right with God?

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How can I know God?

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How can I be forgiven by this God?

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That question haunted me, and I only discovered the answer when I was 23 years of age.

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The Bible teaches us that God is a holy God.

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He is the immortal, the invisible, the only wise God, as Paul records for us in the epistle to Timothy.

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He is the creator God, and God tells us how he created the world in the first chapter of the Bible.

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But he's also a God of love, and a God of grace, and a God of mercy.

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And He proved that love by sending His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Now, those truths were well known to us.

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We did believe that God had made the world.

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We did believe that God was holy.

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And we did believe that God was loving, that He sent His Son.

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But the thing was, we never had it applied to ourselves.

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We never thought that God could love us individually.

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And whether we're religious or not, this story, I trust, is relevant to all.

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Perhaps there are some listening maybe later on a recording, and they're asking that simple question, How can I know this God for myself?

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Well, I grew up in a good Catholic home.

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I attended Mass every Sunday.

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We went to special events, special holy days.

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novenas and missions, as was particular to our day.

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Some of my relations were priests and nuns.

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We prayed for them regularly as they were serving God in Africa.

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And you can get a flavor of the religion from the fact that we followed through at school.

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We were, well, first of all, as a baby, I was christened.

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So that's where I have that strange Irish name, Garode.

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And then I had my first confession, and I had communion, and I had my confirmation.

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And if you know anything about the religious system of Roman Catholicism, or even the Church of Scotland, you'll understand those things.

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But the scriptures that remind us of those things are this scripture that Paul again wrote.

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He says, Having a form of godliness, denying the power thereof.

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For all the world, we thought we were Christians.

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We were told by the church, by our parish priest, that we were Christians.

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We had become Christians as babies, as little infants, and therefore we didn't really think that we needed any more.

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At the age of 11, something happened to wake me up and shake me up, if you like.

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I had an accident.

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Fell, cut my head, needed an emergency operation, and the Lord spared me.

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The text that the psalmist writes about us, Our times are in thy hands.

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I didn't know these Bible texts, but that summarizes in many ways how the Lord spared me.

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I had a hemorrhage, it was discovered, and I had a long, drawn out operation, and I was spared.

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And as a Catholic boy at the age of 11, I wanted to serve God.

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I knew he had somehow spared me.

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And as a Roman Catholic boy at school, I wanted to become, I decided I should become a priest and serve God.

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At the age of 11, 12, I went to see my parish priest and I asked him about becoming a priest and he looked at me and he says, You're too young.

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But at the age of 18, I was drawn to consider again the vocation, is what it's called in religious terms, to the priesthood.

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And I started to study with the Societies of Missions to Africa.

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I went on a pilgrimage to do penance, to seek guidance regarding the priesthood.

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And my parents were supportive.

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My aunt, who was a nun, was extremely supportive.

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and any other religious people, members of our family.

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I studied at the Roman Catholic Seminary in Maynooth.

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I started studying in September '93, and you might be interested to know what kind of things we studied at Roman Catholic Seminary.

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We studied philosophy and arts, English and Latin, Catholic social teaching.

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We studied English.

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because obviously our English needed to be improved.

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We were doing a kind of a, how would I put it, a diploma, a pontifical diploma, and that would have then lent itself to studying theology.

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We would have spent three years studying philosophy and arts, and then four or five years studying philosophy.

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And you might say, well, what was that to do with Christianity, and where's the Bible in that?

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And indeed, the Bible was read at the church, at the masses every day.

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We usually went twice a day to mass.

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We went to confessions once a week.

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But the Bible wasn't the central teaching document, if you like, of the Catholic Church.

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In fact, maybe I should say this, I began to read the Bible for myself.

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And you might think, Well, that's a very good thing to do.

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It's a very wise thing to do.

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But the Roman Catholic seminary did not see it like that, because I was reading the Bible without any glosses or any commentaries or any Catholic theological input.

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How can I read the Bible?

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But I began to read about the Lord Jesus Christ.

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I read a little bit of Mark's gospel.

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I didn't know where to start.

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I found Matthew

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interesting with all that genealogies.

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I didn't know what it all meant at the time.

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But I was reading in Mark's gospel one day, and I read in chapter two, this little phrase, and I'll never forget it, it's the wonderful description of the healing of the man with the palsy, or in our version in the Catholic Bible, it was a paralytic, he was a paralyzed man.

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I came to this text in verse 5, and you've known this text, you've heard this text, but these are words that jumped out at me, if I can say that, and these were the words, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

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Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

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Now, the whole story is about Jesus' wonderful healing of this man who was paralyzed, most likely from birth.

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And surely, as a compassionate Jesus, he would have healed a man first.

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No, the first thing it is was forgive his sins.

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And it set me thinking.

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That means that Jesus can forgive his sins, not their sins, but he can forgive a single person's sin, an individual's sin.

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Well, maybe he can forgive my sins.

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And that was a question that stayed with me until I decided it wasn't wise for me to continue my studies.

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I was supposed to do 10 years at the Catholic Seminary.

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I did two.

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And the priest decided I probably wasn't the most suitable candidate.

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After having questions like that, I started to question,

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how I could be forgiven myself, how I could have forgiveness for sin, how I could know God as my personal God, how I could know Christ as a Savior, how I could understand the Bible like it's here and you understand it.

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I also began to question the position of Mary, which you don't do in the Roman Catholic Church.

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You can question many things in the Catholic Church, but you dare not question Mary's position.

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Because Mary, of course, we were convinced, we were told, we were taught, was sinless.

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And yet we recited her song, her prayer at every devotion and every prayer in our Catholic seminary.

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And it's quite clear that my soul rejoiceth in God, my Savior.

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And you can see what the Lord is doing here.

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I then began to question the position of the Catholic Church in regards to Peter and the claims that they make about Peter that are not found in the Bible, of course.

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And over time, it was very clear that I should leave.

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And I thought, That's the end of my religious journey.

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That's as far as I can get.

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I went and spoke to missionaries who had served God in Africa for 40, 50, 60 years, and hoping they might give me some insight.

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And they said, Well, you'll never know what you're looking for.

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You'll never know the truth.

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You'll never know forgiveness for sin, for yourself.

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I said, But what about this man in the Bible or some of these characters?

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We also happened to read Saint Augustine's Confessions.

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Little did the Catholic hierarchy realize that Augustine's confessions can be used of God to convince one of grace, God's grace.

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But I left the Catholic seminary and began to work, and I ended up traveling to London in 1997.

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But I went to mass every day, and still was very devout.

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And I went to various churches of various views and shapes and sizes, I went to various religious organizations, including the Jehovah's Witnesses,

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the Latter-day Saints, the Church of Christ, and you name it, I went searching.

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I'm searching.

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That's the picture I want you to take with you.

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And in many ways, I was reading the Bible on and off, and then I met a Christian, a work colleague on a psychiatric ward in London in 1997.

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believe the month was July, 1997, and we had three weeks of working nights together.

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And as the more we worked together, the more I realized this man was different.

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And he began to speak to me about the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal way, and told me over time, using the Bible, the book of Romans particularly, he explained the gospel to me from the book of Romans,

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And he started with a pretty pertinent text, in many ways a challenging text.

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He says, well, you're old, you have a lot of religion, but you don't know Christ.

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Now, of course, that's over a period of time we developed a friendship and an interest.

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His name was David for just for historical reasons.

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But he read a text like this.

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He says, there is none righteous.

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No, not one.

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There is none that understandeth God.

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There is none that seeketh after God.

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They are all gone out of their way.

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They are together become unprofitable.

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There is none that doeth good.

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No, not one.

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That's from Romans 3 and verses 10 to 11.

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Then he read this.

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he read in verse 21 but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and unto them that believe for there is no difference for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God he emphasized this and then he went and said verse 24 being justified freely by his grace and that's where Ephesians 2 and verses 8 to 10 come in because then he went to Ephesians 2

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And he explained to me very simply that Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 4 is a picture of us all without Jesus Christ, dead in our transgressions and our sin.

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But what God does is astonishing.

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And God tells us through the writing of the Apostle Paul that we cannot be

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be saved by works, nor even by our religion, but by grace, by the grace of God alone.

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And that grace is not merited.

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It's not a reward for good works, for religious works.

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As I had been a very devout Catholic, there was no reward in God giving me salvation because I was a good person or a good Catholic.

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No, the grace of God was given by God alone.

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But we're saved not by our works, and this was his emphasis, but by grace are ye saved through faith.

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Through faith.

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And he used that little thing, that little mnemonic that folk use over the years, I think it's an alliteration, it's called Grace, God's Riches at Christ's Expense.

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And I thought to myself, I've never heard anybody talk to me like this.

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I've never understood what God's grace is.

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I've never understood what faith is.

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I've never understood what God's mercy is.

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And here's this man, he was in his 50s at the time.

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Here's a man explaining to me the grace of God, the grace of God.

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And then he said this, he said, The grace of God is not found in sacraments,

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Or anything that you do, the grace of God is found in Jesus Christ.

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Although you might think, well, surely you became a Christian that night.

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No, not at all.

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I was one of those very hard walnuts.

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Very hard to crack.

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More like a Brazil nut.

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Impossible to crack.

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My heart was hard, although I was open.

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The Lord needed to do something else.

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And so I began to think and read, and he gave me leaflets and literature and little gospel leaflets, and I read all those things, but I still wasn't a Christian.

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But I was awakened.

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I was stirred.

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And then I began to commence the studies as a nurse in London, and I met some more Christians.

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and they seemed to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

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And you can see what the Lord is doing here, just slowly but surely softening me, drawing me to Himself.

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But on Sunday, the 8th of February, 1998, I finally became a Christian.

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This, of course, is three years after I'd left the seminary.

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I left the seminary in 1995.

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I had been in the wilderness, probably for the best part of three years.

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Now,

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On this very morning, this Sunday morning, I'll never forget it, I used to listen to BBC Radio 4 every Sunday morning for the worship service, and it was about quarter past 10.

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And the preacher that morning was a preacher from Blackpool, and he preached a sermon on Luke chapter 10.

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Luke chapter 10, a sermon that in many ways was just the right kind of sermon for me.

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It was on the Good Samaritan.

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And in Luke chapter 10, verses 30 to 36, we have this description by our Lord Jesus Christ of a man that goes down to Jericho and he's beaten, he's robbed of all his worldly goods, but more importantly than that, he's left half dead.

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And he's incapable, he's unable, he's helpless, he's powerless, he's half dead, he's not yet dead.

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And then a priest comes along and a Levite come along and they ignore him.

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They just pass on to the other side of the road.

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And then this Samaritan comes.

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And that's where the preacher changed the whole tack.

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He says, You might be thinking that this is all about being a good person.

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But let me ask you a question.

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Who is the Samaritan?

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Who is this Samaritan?

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He comes to the man who's helpless and hopeless and half dead, and he bends down and he speaks to him and he shows compassion to him.

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There's only one who could be the Samaritan.

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But the first question he asked, then he asked this question.

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It was an interesting sermon.

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He said, Who's the man on the road?

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Who's the man on the road?

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And he says, You may not think this, but it's you.

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You're a helpless sinner and you're broken and you're powerless and you're half dead.

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So who's the Samaritan?

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Well, this is Christ.

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And he comes to where you are.

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And then he said something that only God could have ordained.

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He said, Someone is listening this morning and they think they need to improve their lives so that God will forgive them their sin.

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He said, You can't.

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What happens in the gospel is that the Lord Jesus Christ comes down to where you are.

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and He saves you, and He forgives you, and he's exactly what happens in this parable.

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And then towards the end of his sermon, it was only 15 minutes, he said, You're there this morning.

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What do you need to do next?

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God's been speaking to you.

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He didn't know who the Lord was speaking to, but the Lord knew who He was speaking to.

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He says, Get down on your knees.

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Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sin and trust in him as your Saviour.

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Tell him all your sin.

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Tell him all the things that you've done wrong.

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He knows them all anyway.

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But ask the Lord Jesus to come into your heart and save you from your sin.

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And he will save you.

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And he will give you a new life, a new purpose, a new direction, and a new future.

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So I did just that.

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I knelt at my bed.

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I repented of my sin.

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I'd been reading the Bible over the last few weeks, a few months beforehand.

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I had read religious books.

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I'd read about knowing God by a famous writer.

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I had gone to Christian Union.

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I had been going to an evangelical church, but that was the message.

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That was the sermon that God had appointed from all eternity for me to hear so that I would get down on my knees, repent of my sin.

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and trust in the Lord Jesus.

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I was now born again.

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John chapter 3 and verse 3, the Lord Jesus says, Ye must be born again.

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I was a new creature in Christ.

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I had a love for the Lord Jesus Christ that I'd never known before.

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And I also knew what it was to open the Scriptures and read them for the first time and know that the Word of God is true.

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every word of it.

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Now, not everybody has a time and a place and a date to say when they first became Christians, but there is evidence of being a Christian.

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There's a love for the Lord God Almighty.

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Did Jesus not teach his disciples, We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves?

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We must love the Lord's people, but also we love the Bible.

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It is God's truth.

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The Psalmist says, How wherewith can a young man cleanse his way?

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But taking heed thereto according to thy word with my whole heart have I sought thee, O let me not wander from thy commandments.

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You see, when the Lord worked in my life, I didn't know all that I now know, and yet I still know very little compared to how much I should know.

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But I know this.

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The God in His grace met with me that morning.

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And though it hasn't been all a bed of roses, it hasn't all been easy.

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There's been many ups and many downs.

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There's been many mountains and many valleys.

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I know the truth.

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When the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel, He said these words, Lo,

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I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

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To be a Christian is the most marvelous privilege in life.

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To know Christ as your Saviour, to know God as your Heavenly Father, to know that the Holy Spirit is not just some strange

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theological term, but he's the holy person who lives in your life and helps you to live for the glory of God is the greatest privilege of all.

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I was converted in 1998, but the Lord hadn't finished with me.

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As you realize, there are times that we get led astray, and I was led into the charismatic movement.

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Friends of mine, well-intentioned, I suppose, wanted me to experience more of God.

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The thing is, there was very little emphasis on the Bible and a lot of emphasis on experience.

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And don't get me wrong, there should be, in the Christian life, there should be experiences of growing in the knowledge and grace and love of God, but it's always in line with Scripture, and that's so important.

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But I also,

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met a young lady who was also working in London and I had just completed my studies in nursing and we both got to know each other at our Bible study.

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We began to get to know each other through studying the book of Romans.

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It was a study that the church were doing at the time.

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And amazingly, there were so many young singles in London at the time, all in this church, all studying Romans.

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And I suppose I could say it with a smile.

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Many romances were found in the study of Romans.

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We got to know each other, Elizabeth and I.

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We courted.

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And then she disappeared.

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She went back to do further studies at Nottingham University, and we rode to each other.

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Those old days, you didn't have phones and texts and special WhatsApp and all that kind of social media.

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There was none of that.

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We just had to write physical letters.

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We still have them.

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And we got to know each other more through writing than we did through speaking.

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I began to study at a seminary, not a Catholic one, a Bible teaching seminary in London.

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And after two years of full-time study, completed the course and became a pastor in Birmingham.

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It was our first church.

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And we served the Lord there for seven years.

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Then I worked for a Christian organization for the next seven years, almost seven years.

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And then I became a pastor of another church.

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And during that time in our first pastorate, we were gifted with two precious daughters, Esther and Naomi.

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The Bible says about our wives that they're precious among rubies.

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Far, far more precious than rubies.

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Imagine if some of the rich people today were to just take that text on board.

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Far above rubies?

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More precious than gold?

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Absolutely.

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Who can find a virtuous woman or a virtuous wife?

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Only the Lord can.

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And He did.

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And we've known our trials.

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We've known the faithfulness of God through our trials.

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And as I said, we've been blessed with two precious daughters.

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Now, in conclusion, very briefly, it is amazing.

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God's grace is amazing.

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We are saved by grace through faith.

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It is a gift of God.

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It is.

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But it's not of ourselves.

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And that's so important.

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In this day and generation, people want something for themselves.

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But God's grace is not of ourselves.

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It's by grace are ye saved through faith and not of yourselves.

00:28:21

It is the gift of God.

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Not of works, lest any man should boast.

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But then, what's the reason for our salvation?

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What's the reason for God meeting us in grace and saving us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is that we may then do works.

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that would honor, that we would serve Him all our days.

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They have been ordained from all eternity, as Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10.

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We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus onto good works.

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And that's where the good works come in.

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You see, as religious people growing up in Ireland or religious people you meet today, they think their good works earn salvation.

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It's the opposite.

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It's a complete reverse.

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The good works of the Christian are fruit of our salvation.

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The root is salvation.

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The root is salvation by grace.

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The fruit is the good works we do for the glory of God.

00:29:26

Lastly, I believe the Lord, as the Bible tells us, Jeremiah tells us, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.

00:29:37

I wonder, with all that has gone on in our lives as Christians and all that's gone on in my life, there is only one Savior.

00:29:48

He's the Lord Jesus Christ.

00:29:51

And when we know Him, we can point others to Him.

00:29:56

As one man said to me as a young Christian, he says, Jesus promised this, Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden,

00:30:07

and I shall give thee rest.

00:30:08

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

00:30:16

You know, friends, it's a testimony of God's grace.

00:30:20

It's a testimony of his love, of his mercy, of his forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ.

00:30:27

The title of my message was From Religion to Christ.

00:30:31

What's the title of your testimony?

00:30:34

Do you know him as your Savior?

00:30:36

Would you be able to sing with John Newton in his famous hymn, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

00:30:46

I once was lost, but now I'm found.

00:30:49

'Twas blind, but now I see.

00:30:52

Thank you very much.