

# 1 Corinthians Chapter 16

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, well we do welcome you in the name of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, particularly those visiting us, and it's lovely to have Debbie with us as well. We had some of the family here this morning. We trust together that as we seek the Lord's face, we might be encouraged in his goodness and grace and bring him our worship. And to do that, I'd like us first of all to turn to Ephesians in chapter 1. I'd like us to read some of the great blessings that we have in Christ, that we might come and worship him from that sense of thankfulness and gratitude for all that he is for us. So Ephesians in chapter 1, if you've got one of the church Bibles, that's page 1173. And I'm going to read from verse 3 to verse 14. From verse 3 to verse 14. So important that we remind ourselves of all that we have in Christ. So just follow with me as I read this passage as Paul writes to these believers in Ephesus. Verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times had reached their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and under the earth.

Sorry, and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will in order that we who were the first to put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed you were marked in him with the seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory.

And just for a moment as we think through those things we see there that God's wonderful salvation in four parts. We have his choosing and purposing and predestined to save us before the world was made.

[ 2 : 5 8 ]     A wonderful mystery we can't fully comprehend why he should do that but it's plainly written in his word. Then we have of course the work of Christ redeeming us with his blood upon the cross purchasing for us full salvation. Then we have of course that wonderful work of being included in Christ through faith in the gospel as it's proclaimed and spoken to us as we believed on him. And then just that snapshot into the future when we shall enter into the full inheritance. That wonderful day when we shall enter into all that God has for us in Christ in glory. Let me see what God has done. From start to finish salvation is of the Lord Lord. And we are a people who have received vast, glorious, wonderful, everlasting benefits all through his work, his plan, his grace. And our first hymn is a wonderful hymn, How Vast the Benefits Divine Which We in Christ Possess.

So let's stand and sing as we continue to rejoice in all that God has done for us in Jesus. Let's come to our God in prayer together. Let us all pray.

It's impossible, O Lord our God, for us to begin to count all the blessings that you've poured out into our lives. If we were to put them into two parties, as it were, two sections and count just the very physical things you've done for us, giving us life and health and strength and food and clothing and home.

Lord, we would run out of time this evening to speak about how again and again, through the many years of our lives for some of us, through the decades of our lives, Lord, you have constantly provided and met our needs.

And if we were to think about the spiritual blessings, and surely when we're to number them, they are even more. More than all the stars in the heavens. More than all the sand on the seashore.

[ 5 : 05 ]    The blessings that you've given to us in Christ. The love you've lavished upon us. The forgiveness you've given us for all of our sins. The relationship you've brought us into whereby we can call you our Father.

O Lord, these things are so precious to us. And Lord, it's not just what you have done, and not just what you are doing, but it's again what you have promised us.

O Lord, we have yet more to enjoy of you. We have more of your beauty and glory to wallow in and to delight in. And Lord, that's not just only in this world, but in the world to come, when we shall be with you and see you.

O Lord, how our hearts thrill at the thought of seeing Jesus our Saviour face to face. We just cannot begin to put into words just what it means for us to have such a hope.

That in this world of chaos and confusion, in this world of sorrow and grief and tears, O Lord, we know that we shall one day be free from all these things.

[ 6 : 12 ]    When you have promised you will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow, and there shall be no more death, when we shall enjoy the eternity of bliss in the very presence of our God.

Lord, this is not something that we have earned. It's not something that we have worked for. It's not something we've deserved. It's not something that we are hoping, perhaps, maybe, we might pass the test or get to the right place for.

This is our certain, sure inheritance, purchased by Jesus, left to us in his will, his testimony, that all who believe in him shall enjoy and have.

And as we come this evening, we ask that, Lord, our hearts may be lifted up, and our minds and our thoughts lifted up to consider and to praise and to worship you. O Lord, we ask that we may not ever count the things of God, the promises of Christ, the blessings, the benefits that we've been singing and reading about.

Help us never to count them as a small thing. Help us never to count them as everyday or ordinary, to take them for granted, to think somehow that we deserve them or that they are unexceptional.

[ 7 : 25 ]    O Lord, they are exceptional. They are so amazing. They are so wonderful. If only, if only the people around about us knew what a wonderful and awesome glorious God you are, but O Lord, it seems that it's hidden from their eyes.

Help us, we pray, to be those who take the gospel of God's great grace. Help us to be those, Lord, who speak and by our lives show that this God is worthy of faith and trust and obedience.

Help us by our lives to show again just what it is that all those around us are looking for can only be found in Jesus, in his grace, in his love, in his death and resurrection.

And Lord, we praise you and thank you that as we come this evening, we ask that you would equip us through your word. Speak to us and help us that we might be better ambassadors of Jesus.

We ask these things in his name and for your glory. Amen. I wonder if I could... 1 Corinthians and chapter 16.

[ 8 : 30 ] Those of you who are regularly here on a Sunday night have been for the long haul through 1 Corinthians. I don't know when exactly we started it. Sometime last year.

And we come to chapter 16. Not the very last sermon, I trust, on this chapter, but we're going to do something of an overview of it this evening and then pick up just a few points next Sunday to bring the book, as it were, to a conclusion.

So we're going to read the whole of the chapter. That's page 1157. If you've got one of the church Bibles, page 1157. 1 Corinthians 16. Reading from verse 1.

Now about the collection for the Lord's people. Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up so that when I come, no collections will have to be made.

Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

[ 9 : 48 ] After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you, for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you for a while or even spend the winter so that you can help me on my journey wherever I go.

For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit. I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. But I will stay on Ephesus until Pentecost because a great door for effective work has opened to me and there are many who oppose me.

When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord just as I am. No one then should treat him with contempt.

Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. Now, about our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers.

He was quite unwilling to go now but he will go when he has the opportunity. Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous.

[ 10 : 57 ] Be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived because they have supplied what was lacking from you for they refreshed my spirit and yours also.

Such men deserve recognition. The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord and so does the church that meets at their house.

all the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed. Come, Lord. the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus.

[ 12 : 13 ] Amen. Please start open before you, if you would, 1 Corinthians and chapter 16. Now, as I said, for those of you who've been with us over the past several weeks and months, we've been travelling through 1 Corinthians and it's been a real eye-opener, I think, to all of us.

Sometimes when we think about churches in the New Testament, particularly, or churches of old, we think, wow, wouldn't it have been lovely to be in a church like that in the time when Paul was there?

Wouldn't it be great? They must have been such good churches and such godly churches and such spiritual churches and such... And we found, haven't we, that the church in Corinth was a great big mess, absolutely full of all sorts of problems.

People falling out with one another and dividing against one another, taking one another to court, falling out about what meat they should eat and what they shouldn't eat.

There is sexual immorality of the most awful kind going on with incest and so on and we've realised that actually, actually it's not too bad in the 21st century in Whitby in this church that we haven't got everything right and we've got lots of problems as well.

[ 13 : 29 ] Thank God that many of the things that are there gladly, rather, are not to be found here by God's grace. And so 15 chapters, poor old Paul's really been labouring, hasn't he?

Having to argue and to discuss and to show from God's people in the past and the Old Testament scriptures and from reason just how, really, they've got it wrong and gone astray and we saw particularly one of the big problems in chapter 15 where the whole chapter is given over to this wrong view of the resurrection.

They've misunderstood, they've lost sight of the goal that Christ is coming and that we shall have new resurrection bodies that this world in which we live is not all that it's about. In fact, we could say that the church at Corinth, their biggest problem was that.

Everything that they argued about and fought about and fell over about was all about the here and now. All about relationships now. It was all about this world and the things of this world and there's a great many lessons for us to learn from them and from what we've read together.

I encourage you to read through that letter from time to time. And so when we get to chapter 16 it seems to be in one sense a bit of a PS on the end because Paul isn't having to deal with a particular problem here, is he, in chapter 16.

[ 14 : 49 ] In fact, we might even think it's a little bit bitty, a little bit, a bit of a strange sort of ending as he talks about different people and places and so on but really it's very much like we would close a letter, sending greetings from our friends to people that they might know.

If you're writing perhaps down to somebody in the south who used to come to the church, oh yes, so and so sends their regards as we got here and also about travel plans as well. I hope that I'll be able to come down your way in the next few months or year and see you.

There's all that sort of thing and a bit of news of what's going on in the churches and what's going on amongst God's people. But let's not think of this chapter as being unimportant.

Let's not think of this chapter as being the end of what God has to teach us in this letter. I believe that it's just as authoritative, just as important, just as telling that we have here.

As I say, really chapter 16 could almost be some of the notices from the notice sheet or a diary of the church events. Really, we have a snapshot into what was going on in the churches of Paul's day.

[ 15 : 55 ] What was happening amongst them and between them. How they were relating to one another. How they were living out their lives in this Roman Empire and the difficulties that they faced. And I think, therefore, we can draw from it, from this chapter, some very clear principles which hopefully we will see reflected in every local church.

Hopefully, we'll see reflected in our church and resembling something of what we see here. And I think there's just three couplets, I can put it that way, three pairs.

One, two longish ones and one quite short one that I want to bring out from chapter 16 this evening. And as I say, God willing, next week, we'll have a, there's just a verse, particularly verse 13 and 14 next week, I hope, that we can really dig our teeth into as a conclusion to the whole of the book.

And so the first couplet is this, we see that the churches of Paul's day, the New Testament church was both international and interdependent. International and interdependent.

Do you notice how many different places Paul speaks about? In fact, he speaks about five different Roman provinces spread over the known world of that day. We've got Galatia in verse 1, Macedonia in verse 5, Ephesus in verse 8, which is where Paul was at the time when he's writing, Achaia in verse 15 and Asia in verse 19.

[ 17 : 19 ] And of course, we also have Corinth itself and the city of Jerusalem over in Judea. Now that's a pretty international mix. When you think about it, in Paul's day, the known world, all they knew of the world was sort of the countries that went around the edge of the Mediterranean Sea.

So they didn't know anything really over beyond sort of what we now have, Iran, or so. They didn't know anything really much south of sort of Egypt and so on and much west more than sort of Spain and France.

And so when you think about that small area, that's really quite a mix, isn't it, of peoples, of cultures, of languages and so on. And we realise that in every single one of those places was a church, a group of believers and they all had a relationship with the church at Corinth.

They were all known to the church at Corinth and they were all related to through the apostle Paul. He was the link, we could put it. He'd been to those places and taught there and we know that he often taught the same thing there in verse 1, do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

So his teaching was consistent. He was teaching them the same sort of things. They were all based upon the same biblical doctrine of the teaching of Paul. And of course, as I said, he not only taught there but he visited them, ongoingly visiting them.

[ 18 : 39 ] Verse 5, I'm going off to Macedonia, he says. We know that he's going to go to Corinth from Ephesus because he says when I arrive, so on and so forth. And verse 7, he speaks about coming to them and doesn't want to make a passing visit but wants to save for some while.

What is all that teaching us? I believe all of that is teaching us, dear friends, as a local church, we must be wide-minded. We must be outward-looking. We must be looking and knowing what is going on amongst God's people throughout the world.

An international-minded church. That's much easier now than it ever was in Paul's day or ever since Paul's day until recent days when we have the internet and many other ways of keeping in touch and connecting and learning about and supporting other churches.

I think it's absolutely vital that a local church is not introspective, that a local church does not simply concern itself with what goes on within these four walls or goes on within this town of Whitby.

We need to be concerned for the whole body of Christ. We need to be interested. We need to find ourselves looking outward. And I think if we don't do that, and some churches don't, and we've got to be careful of that because we're a busy church, often we can be so caught up with what's happening here that we forget what's happening out there.

[ 20 : 01 ] But if we do that, then we're going to face two particular problems. One is this, I believe, that we shall become more and more selfish as a group of God's people. Not only in respect to our finances, but with respect to our prayers.

We'll only be praying about the things that impact us. We'll only be concerned about the things that touch our lives, our church, our circumstances. I've got to be very careful because I get into trouble sometimes when I talk about politics, and I don't mean to talk about politics necessarily.

One of the things that I don't like about the whole, and I'm not saying, I'm talking about Brexit, I'm not saying yay or nay to it. What I don't like is that whenever somebody stands up and talks about Brexit, it's always about what's the best deal for Britain?

What's Britain going to get out of it? What's in it for us? How it's going to affect us? We want the best deal for ourselves. We've got to look after this country above all costs.

Now, I believe that that's a wrong attitude. I think that's a wrong attitude for any nation to take, sorry, because we are a nation amongst nations. And our concern is, what is our place in the world?

[ 21 : 11 ] And our church, dear friends, a small group of believers, what's our place in the whole body of Christ? Well, what can we be doing that's going to encourage and help and support and strengthen other churches around the world?

That's why we have this collection being urged. Do you notice? Paul's not talking about the weekly offering that we usually have about, you know, collecting for the work of the gospel here and abroad.

He's talking about a special offering being set aside for the church in Jerusalem. And that was something that he often encouraged in other places as well. When he writes to the Christians in Rome, in Romans chapter 15, he talks there about them collecting for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.

It seems Jerusalem was really the hardest place to be a Christian and was someplace where they really went through hard times. Acts 11 tells us Agabus, the prophet, prophesied a famine was coming onto the land and perhaps that was part of the problem in Jerusalem.

Certainly we know the church was persecuted by the Jewish leaders there very severely and strongly and perhaps that was the reason they needed support. But over the reason for the need of support, support was given.

[ 22 : 24 ] Support was sent. Here is Paul saying to the church, gather together what you can, what you can afford, if I can put it that way, what your income is and send it off to support these believers in a distant land.

None of the people in Corinth have ever been to Jerusalem, never visited Jerusalem, probably never met anybody from Jerusalem, but they knew that there were believers there and they wanted to support them and encourage them. And I think that, again, dear friends, is something which is very much a sign of a healthy church, supporting foreign mission.

Supporting missionaries overseas, helping the gospel to be taken to various places beyond our borders. All of those things show that we have a vision beyond the local, a global vision for the Lord Jesus Christ.

But notice as well, just for a moment, as an aside, if I can put it that way, verse 3, then when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with the gift.

I think our church giving must always be very carefully measured and weighed in the sense that we need to be very careful about where we send the gifts that we give. I'm a bit wary of this myself personally when there's an appeal upon the television.

[ 23 : 39 ] I'm moved by it, but often I'm concerned, where is that money going to go? How do I know that money is going to reach those people? Is it going to be used in the right way? And as Christians, we mustn't just simply say, oh, we've sent £10,000 off to mission this year.

Yeah, but where's it gone? Who's been using it? Is it used for the advance of the gospel? One of the things that really has taken over, I think, in the UK is that many churches only want to give to humanitarian aid.

Now, those things are very important and very good, but dear friends, we need to be giving and supporting the gospel. The world can give humanitarian aid. The world is very generous in giving humanitarian aid, but only the Christian will give to Christian causes, to gospel causes.

I think, therefore, we need to be very careful that we don't get misled, in our giving. Paul is saying, look, be careful. I want you to approve, man. I'm going to send letters with him. I'm going to be very careful.

It's not just slapdash. The finances and the gifts that God has given us, we're to think and consider and use as we should. And as I say, the first problem is if we don't give, we become selfish.

[ 24 : 47 ] What can we spend more money on on our building? Now, we want to keep it looking good. We want to keep it honoring the Lord. But, you know, we could say, well, let's build a nice swimming pool downstairs and let's put on a nice barbecue area here.

No, we can get selfish, can't we? We want more of this or more of that. We need to keep giving. The second thing, I think, that we must, that being an international church, if I can put it that way, and looking out beyond our borders, and I don't just mean right overseas.

It may be looking out to Loftus where we've got believers there and Scarborough and Pickering and Gisborough and others where we have churches that we're connected with. I think one of the things that it will protect us from doing, if we are outward looking, is protect us from becoming narrow-minded and stagnant.

See, a church that has no outside input but keeps itself to itself can very soon become bogged down in the traditions that it's always had.

Church fails to see the need for change, the need for adaptation. It's never challenged about the way it does things. This is the way we've always done it. This is the way it's always been.

[ 25 : 57 ] Therefore, it must be the right way. Before long, if we're not careful, we begin to become very narrow. Therefore, we begin to be judgmental. Well, that church down the road, they don't do it the way we do it.

And our ways must be better. We become narrow. And again, some of us perhaps have sadly had the experience of meeting believers and churches like that which have hemmed themselves in.

Not with the scripture necessarily, not with the word of God necessarily, but with tradition, with the way that we sing, the music that we follow, the way that we do things and practice our beliefs.

And the reason I say that that is something which I don't believe is here is because we have so many different people ministering to different churches in different ways. Notice how Paul at the church at Corinth received ministry from several teachers, not just Paul.

We find Timothy is on his way and it's clear that he's coming to do a similar work to Paul because he said he's carrying on the work of the Lord just as I am, coming to teach, to instruct, to lead, to open up God's word.

[ 27 : 04 ] We know that Apollos was going to be on his way. Paul wanted Apollos to come. He recognized that perhaps he had a particular emphasis and ministry that Paul didn't have. Urges him to come, but he can't at the moment.

It's not possible. There's other circumstances preventing him. It's clear that the household of Stephanas, one of the families that Paul baptized and he mentions earlier on in chapter 1, they're clearly exercising ministry and service and also it seems they are also involved in some form of leadership.

Submit to such people. So we see a church which is not, if I can put it this way, simply just a one-man ministry, just a one idea, a one-trick pony.

That same Stephanas, along with Fortunatus and Achaicus, had been sent to Corinth, sent out from Corinth to Paul and were clearly a blessing to him and probably to many others as well.

What I'm saying is this, dear friends, what we see here is a church which is receiving God's word in its various forms. That doesn't mean it's receiving different messages, one saying this and one saying completely the opposite, no, but it's receiving, as it were, different influences, different breaths, different understandings.

[ 28 : 24 ] No one pastor, no one minister, no one teacher has the breadth of scope to deliver the full counsel of God's word unless they're Paul and Paul isn't here, I can assure you of that or anyone like him.

So are we open? Are we receiving? Are we being, are we actually listening to other people? Are we reading other books?

Are we as a church interdependent in that sense? Relying upon others? We're part of the FIC as a church here and therefore they have many abilities, many gifted people that they can help us and support us.

But also there needs to be ascending as well of our resources not just financially but sending out of missionaries. It's a great privilege for any church to be able to send out missionaries.

But we don't have to just send out missionaries, we can do that on a smaller scale too. People involved in United Beach missions which we have here or going and visiting missionaries in their circumstances.

[ 29 : 26 ] Look how Paul is so encouraged by that, getting some feedback. What I'm saying is this, dear friends, we must be those who are receiving and giving.

There needs to be a natural living flow so that we do not become stagnant, so that we never have anything flowing into us.

We're like the Dead Sea in one sense. We're never giving out but both giving and receiving. So the church was international and interdependent, giving and receiving, sharing and supporting, connecting, connected with other churches around and about.

And then we see as well that the church, and I'm using it in a slightly narrow way here but I think it's fair to say that the church was a church that faced both opportunity and opposition.

Certainly that was Paul's testimony of his time in Ephesus. Verse 8 and 9. I will stay on Ephesus until Pentecost because a great door for effective work has opened to me.

[ 30 : 30 ] Great opportunity. And there are many who oppose me. And clearly what was happening to Paul in the church of Ephesus must have been happening to the believers he was connected with, the church he was connected to as well.

If he experienced those things, they would have experienced those things. Don't need to turn back there but Acts chapter 19 tells us about Paul's visit to Ephesus and what happened when he was there.

And he was there for several months, many months indeed. Tells us about the things that occurred while he was there. As he preached the gospel as people were converted and the church was built and strengthened.

Now dear friends, as a church we have opportunities to share the gospel. Opportunities that God has given us whatever church we are, whatever circumstance we're in. Whether it be a really hard situation, whether it be a really encouraging situation.

And sometimes those opportunities that God gives to us can be like a great open wide door as it was for Paul here. Other times it can just be a chink of light as it were as the door is slightly ajar.



[ 31 : 35 ] But each one of those opportunities must be taken. So what I'm saying is this, that a healthy church is a church that's always looking for opportunities to take the gospel into its community.

It's always wanting, it's always delighting, it's always determined to be an evangelistic church. And one of the great death knells, if I can put it that way, upon any church is when it stops doing evangelism, when it stops taking the gospel, when it stops being concerned for the lost outside its doors.

When a church is only concerned how can we keep ourselves going, how can we keep our little number flourishing, then that's a dying church, a church which is on its way to closure.

we evangelise or we die. That's the reality. That's the way the church has always grown. That's the way the gospel has always spread. That's the way that God has always built his church through the preaching and proclamation of the gospel.

And we must be like that, dear friends. It's wonderful that we have fellowship times together. It's wonderful that we meet together for prayer and Bible study. It's wonderful that we do things in small groups and so on and so forth.

[ 32 : 44 ] But dear friends, if we only do those things and we are not concerned with the gospel and presenting and taking it, then surely that is a very bad sign. Thank God that in so many ways the church here is evangelistic.

The Real Lives mission that we had a few weeks ago with the open ears that are coming up in the summer for the ongoing outreach through mums and toddlers and other youth work and so on. But with opportunity, there will always come opposition.

Paul, isn't it interesting, Paul doesn't say, I will stay on Ephesus until Pentecost because a great door of effective work is open to me but I may come away if the opposition gets too big.

Or he doesn't say, I'm going to stay for a little while but it's getting really tough so I'm going to leave. The two are together. He recognizes, and we see that all the way through the scriptures, that when God's people act and are active, then we certainly will face opposition.

Satan, our enemy, will always seek to stir up trouble for God's people. And in that passage back in Acts chapter 19, as I say, don't need to look there but you can read it later on, we can see that there were several areas where Paul received and the believers with him real opposition.

[ 34 : 02 ] First of all, there was that satanic attack, those lies that we're told about when we find that there were those who were involved in witchcraft and sorcery and all sorts of dark arts there in that city of Ephesus.

Then of course he had opposition from the very worldly and materialistic silver workers who were making statuettes of Artemis and they opposed them because they thought that by preaching the gospel their trade would go down and so they attacked them.

And then as Paul speaks a bit later on in chapter 20 when he's talking to the Ephesian elders, he talks about how there was opposition there from the religious establishment, the Jews.

I served the law with great humility, with tears, in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. Do you remember when we looked at 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul speaks about how he faced death every day and how he says in verse 32, if I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?

I wonder, and this isn't, please don't think this is gospel or truth enough, I wonder, did he mean real animals? Or did he actually mean the opponents that stood against him?

[ 35 : 25 ] Were they like wild beasts in their savagery, in their determination to bring him down and to destroy him and to kill him? Or was it actual animals? I don't know, but the fact of the matter is that he really faced opposition.

Of course, that is one of the reasons why as a church and perhaps even as individuals, we let off the gas on evangelism. We don't want to speak too much about Jesus because people will, they get a bit annoyed with us or they get a bit huffy with us or they start to be, they reject us or they don't want to listen to us.

So we don't speak about Christ and churches can do that as well. We don't want any trouble, we don't want any hostility, we don't want people to dislike us, we want everybody in the town to like us so we're not going to really speak about the really harsh things of the gospel and of hell and of judgment, we'll just speak about the nice things.

Ultimately, that's not the gospel, that's not evangelism. Being nice to people isn't just evangelism. We have to proclaim, share, live the gospel.

And perhaps the most difficult opposition for a church and for Christians to face is the opposition of indifference. That can be a lot more difficult and hard to face than when people are aggressive or antagonistic.

[ 36 : 47 ] And that's surely one of the things that we find, dear friends, don't we, here in Whitby at this time, that there's just indifference to the gospel, indifference to things of Christ. Oh, that's nice. Oh, that's good for you, but I don't want to know.

I'm not religious. I'm not interested. One final couplet as we come to an end. As I said, this one is very brief but I think it's important and it comes out in chapter 16 and in verse 22.

So the church was international and interdependent.

It was, it was, sorry, it faced opportunity and opposition and lastly, it was active in the present but it was awaiting the future.

Active in the present but awaiting the future. There's a great deal of going, coming and going, isn't there, in the churches here in the New Testament.

[ 37 : 52 ] A lot of activity, a lot of things happening in the present. People engaged in service. Do you notice how that word service is used again and again? We have it there concerning Stephanas and his family devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people.

Timothy carrying out the work of the Lord and so on. And we recognise that there is real activity. This is not a church just sitting on its laurels. It's not a church sitting around just sort of looking at their navel, as it were.

They're busy and involved in the life of God's people and God's work. Refreshing one another, supplying what was lacking for one another and so on.

And yes, Paul gets to the very end as he takes the pen and we can put it this way in verse 21 and writes from his own hand. There's something that comes out very strongly there at the end of verse 22 and he writes, Come Lord.

Now, if you've got one of the new international versions, you'll have a little footnote which tells you the Greek for Come Lord reproduces an Aramaic expression Maranatha used by early Christians.

[ 38 : 58 ] Maranatha, Come Lord. Aramaic was the language of Jesus and the people of his day. It's not what the New Testament was written in, though there are phrases of Aramaic throughout the Gospel of Mark.

It's a prayer. A prayer that is on the heart of every Christian believer. A prayer that is at the centre of all that the church is about. It's that Christ would come again.

It's looking for and longing for his return. It's setting our eyes upon the finishing post. Setting our eyes upon the goal. Setting our eyes upon that wonderful day when Jesus comes.

And we can't lose sight of that. You see, if we lose sight of Jesus' return, if we lose sight of the fact that this world is heading for that ultimate climax when Christ will stand upon the earth in glory and honour and every knee will bow to him, then we can be so easily swamped by what's happening around about us.

We can be so easily discouraged by the world. Where is the world going? It's getting worse and worse and worse, we say. Oh, everything's terrible. There's so much iniquity and immorality and so on and so forth.

[ 40 : 05 ] If we have that goal, Lord Jesus, you are coming and we are working towards that goal. We're praying towards that goal. When we have our eyes fixed upon that, then we'll keep our heads upward.

We'll keep our eyes heavenward and we won't be overcome. And therefore, as a church, yes, it's good that we are busy. It's good that we are engaging. It's good that we are evangelistic.

But dear friends, we mustn't be so caught up with the things of here and now that we lose sight of really what it's all about. It's about men and women being saved for eternity and our salvation, which is for eternity, which is secure and certain.

That's what motivates us. That's what drives us. That's what keeps us heading forward. I'll close with these verses from Paul in Philippians chapter 3.

He says this, Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

[ 41 : 23 ] That's the goal. That's our eager expectation. That's our hope and to that we work and serve. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only wise God, our saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen.