

Acts Chapter 14

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[0 : 00] Peter says, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And into an inheritance that can never perish or spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. What a wonderful thing to begin our worship, to lift our eyes and remind ourselves of all that God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 24] Let's stand and sing together, my heart is filled with thankfulness. The song's going to be on the screen. I think I need to get out of the way. And let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we come before you this evening acknowledging that we deserve nothing from you.

Lord, you're our creator. You made us. You're perfect. You're holy. And we are your creation. And we have fallen.

In thought and word and deed. In every aspect of our lives. We are not as we should be.

We have deliberately turned against you. We have been rebels. We have been rebels. We have been rebels. And yet, Lord, the joy that there is in thinking of your love for us.

[2 : 34] That into our darkness you pierced it with light. That you sent your son, the Lord Jesus. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us.

We thank you, Lord God, that you loved us enough. That you loved us in a way which is impossible for us to fully grasp. Yet you gave us the most precious gift that you could ever give.

Your son, the Lord Jesus. The spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And it's only in him and in his name that we come.

And it's in him that we are full of thankfulness. That he paid the price for our sin. He took the punishment for our sin. And it's through him, through his suffering, that we are healed.

And we come tonight acknowledging that you have made us right with God. That through the Lord Jesus you have cleansed us. Through the Lord Jesus you have taken away our sin.

[3 : 41] Through the Lord Jesus you have given us righteousness. And simply by your grace and through the mechanism of faith you have brought us into your family.

And we can say that if we have trusted in Christ we truly are children of God. And Lord we look to you tonight and we ask that you would help us to keep our eyes set upon you.

Lord so easily our eyes get distracted. Our hearts chase after the things of the world. The glittering things of the world sometimes lead our hearts astray.

Sometimes even the best things of the world. The good things, the honourable things of the world become too important. And we push you away in our lives.

Lord we pray that you would set our hearts straight tonight. That our spiritual vision would be focused upon you. We pray Lord God that we would see all that you have for us.

[4 : 39] That we would enjoy what you have done but yet see Lord what you want us to do day by day. Help us to live out this new life that you have given us in Christ. Help us to see, open our eyes we pray to see the urgent need that there is in the world of the gospel to be proclaimed.

Help us to sense the urgency that there is that our neighbours, our friends, even people in our own family. The people that we bump into on the street. How desperately they need to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

What an importance it has. How Lord we pray that you would give us a burden for the lost people of this world. How we pray that we pray that Lord more people will be saved.

How we pray that we would hear and know this wonderful gospel. So Lord we offer ourselves to you again. As we come in worship we don't only sing of your glory.

Lord we acknowledge that we need to change. And we pray that tonight you would indeed touch our hearts. That you would move us. We don't want to just go through some empty ritual.

[6 : 14] We don't just want to say that at the end well we've been to church again. We pray that we would have felt and known the touch of your spirit on our hearts and lives. So please we pray.

Lead our hearts. Lead us as we worship together. Fix our eyes upon you. Help us to encourage one another. Help us Lord to hear your word to our hearts.

And most of all we pray Lord that you would help us not to be just hearers of your word only. But to be doers of it also. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. The psalmist says, Psalm 100, shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. The psalmist saying oh what a thing it would be to see the whole earth crying out and worshipping the Lord.

And we're going to sing something of that as we sing together. Oh for a thousand tongues to sing. My great Redeemer's praise. It's number 556.

[7 : 16] 556 in the hymn books and we'll stand to sing. Acts chapter 13.

I did scribble down the number in the church Bible. Page number is 1107. 1,107. We're going to read a few verses at the beginning of chapter 13.

And then flip to later on in chapter 14. You may be familiar with this section of Acts. I don't know. But we're reading the beginning in chapter 13 of the first missionary journey.

Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas. So we'll just read those first three verses as this journey begins. Chapter 13 and verse 1.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manian who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul.

[8 : 28] While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

And if you've got an NIV Bible in front of you, if it's similar to mine, you'll find that they go to Cyprus if you look at the headings. And then the next section, they go to Pisidi in Antioch.

And then we find them at the beginning of chapter 14 in Iconium, as they're proclaiming the gospel, and then to Lystra and Derb.

And that's where we're going to pick up the account in chapter 14 and verse 19. So they're in Lystra. Chapter 14 and verse 19.

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

[9 : 34] But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day, he and Barnabas left for Derb. They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.

And then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church. And with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia.

And when they had preached the word in Perga, they came down to Atalia. And from Atalia, they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

[10 : 43] And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. And we pray that God will add his blessing to his word and speak to us from it. Doors.

Doors. Doors. Fascinating things. Doors. Do you ever wonder about doors? Doors. In particular, open doors. Doors that are sort of partially open are particularly interesting to me.

So, you know, when you walk around somewhere like Stathes or maybe the back streets of Whitby, particularly in Stathes in my mind, as you walk around, especially when you get off the beaten track, you find that doors go straight onto the pathway, don't you, in Stathes?

And often, it seems, doors are just a little bit ajar. And I can't help but sort of just peer in and wonder what's going on. Or just around the corner from us, there was some work going on.

Someone had bought one of the little cottages around the corner from us. And you could hear all the drilling and the cutting and the sawing and everything else that's going on. And the door stands ajar.

[12 : 06] And you just think, I wonder what it's like. I'd love to see the job that they're doing, and just appear inside. I don't want to just push the door open a bit wider and have a look. Other doors, though, are not so much intriguing, but maybe intimidating.

Going into a prison, for example. I don't know if you've ever done that as a visitor or otherwise. And the door's quite an imposing thing.

And the system, not just the door itself, but the way in which you get entry into a prison, is quite an intimidating feeling. You walk in and the door closes behind you and the doors are all locked and you get checked and then another door opens and it seems about ages before you actually feel as if you're even in the prison, as it were.

Or we went on a visit once to the nuclear power station in Hartlepool. Has anyone done that? It's a fascinating experience if you get a chance to go. And we went outside to the education centre and we were told, it was like with the homeschoolers, and we were told all about it and we had some questions and answers and stuff.

And then we went on a tour and as we went over to the entrance area, it felt like you were going into a prison. There were all sorts of searches and the moment we stepped out of the entrance area, there was a guy standing there with a gun and fully clad and he's almost like army gear, the nuclear police.

[13 : 36] And also, the other thing about doors is there's the sense in which so far we've been talking about going in a door, finding somewhere to go in, but sometimes there's something fascinating about going out of a door.

So, have you ever been in one of those shops where you walk in and it gets hotter and hotter and hotter? You've walked in on a cold day perhaps and you've got all your layers on and a great big thick coat and you just get hot and you just want to get out and get some fresh air.

Perhaps you've been and visited someone and felt a bit awkward and have been desperate to get out. We went on a trip once, no, it wasn't a trip at all, we were house hunting and the moment we set foot in this house, we thought there is no way this is the right place.

There's just something about it, I won't go into the details, it's not very nice to the person that owned it, but we walked in and we just thought, no. But we had to sort of smile and look around the house and make an exit as soon as we could.

Now it's interesting, the reason why I'm talking about doors, if you haven't spotted already, look at verse 27, chapter 14 and verse 27 of Acts. When they arrived back from their missionary journey, they come back to Antioch in Syria, that's the church where they'd been sent from, it says, on arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

[15 : 13] You know, in several times in the New Testament, Paul talks about open doors and there's other references to doors as well. Doors, perhaps, we might say of opportunity.

Sometimes he's talking about doors to go in. Sometimes he's talking about doors to go out. And also, I want to think this evening about the time when he called us to pray for doors to be opened.

So firstly, let's think about this door to come in. It's here in verse 27. A door of faith. I want to imagine, you to imagine, I don't know how easy this is for you, whether you're someone that's been hiking and stuff in the past.

We've got a few hikers here. You know, if you've been out on the North Yorkshire Moors somewhere or you've been up walking, and there are days, aren't there, where it's just beautiful. It's just delightful. The sun's out and even if it's not, you're just admiring the scenery and it's just a wonderful experience being out in the fresh air.

But you'll know if you've gone hiking more than a few times that there are days where it's just miserable and you're wondering what on earth you're doing this for when you could be sat at home by the fire. And I want you to imagine that you're out on one of those sort of days and it's wet and it's misty and it's miserable.

[16 : 38] You're cold and in fact, you're also lost. And you come to a house, the only house that you can see for miles and miles around.

And you're thinking, well, perhaps we'd better go and knock on the door and find out where we are. And as you approach the house, there's this lovely mat outside the door that says, welcome. And as you get closer to the door, you can see all the lights blazing inside.

It looks lovely and warm. You're still shivering cold and wet and you can hear laughter and joy. You can hear people enjoying themselves. There's a real family atmosphere inside, it seems. And you're standing outside and it's freezing.

And of course, the problem comes that the door's shut at the moment. You can't get in. You can't just walk in. It's someone else's house. So you decide that you're lost enough and cold enough and worried enough that you need to knock on the door.

What you need is some warmth and some rest and someone to show you the way. And you get the most wonderful welcome.

[17 : 44] I guess you're worried when you do something like that. Is it somewhere where people come every week and they get fed up with it? But no, you get the wonderful welcome. They bring you in. They treat you like family. They get you the hot chocolate, but not just hot chocolate.

You get it with cream and marshmallows on top and sprinkled chocolate on top. It's just lovely. They treat you as if you're family. They help you dry off in front of the fire and it's just a lovely feeling to be amongst people that care and they send you off on your way.

And to some extent, the Gentiles had been in that sort of position for a long time. Lost and outside the blessings of God's people.

So many of them without a knowledge or understanding of the things of God. But now, a door had been opened to them.

Perhaps they might have even had a glimpse in and been able to see that there was something special about this house, this family of Israel. They could see that there were blessings going on.

[18 : 47] It seemed like a wonderful atmosphere. But they knew that they were lost and now, it seems, that a door had been opened, a door of faith, as Paul calls it here in verse 27.

You know, and it's true, if you know the book of Acts, you'd be able to tell me that, well, you know that there's been Gentiles that have been converted before now.

Cornelius stands out as an example earlier than this. But here, we're talking about Paul going to places that were predominantly Gentile places.

These were Gentile churches that he was planting. Something was changing. This first missionary journey had accomplished something that had never happened before. In these places that he'd visited, in what's current day Turkey, actually, he's seeing churches established that are mainly Gentile.

And the way he describes it when he gets back to his church in Antioch is that he gets them all together and he reports all that God has done through them and how he, that's God, had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

[20 : 00] And the first way I want to just apply this tonight, I don't know many of you, and just ask you, have you come in from the cold? Have you got to the point in your life where you realise that actually trying to do things your way is not going to lead to good things?

and that actually what's in our hearts is not good and that we need to change in order to come to Christ.

In fact, we need to come to him in order to change. Let me put that round the other way. That we're, as it were, keeping ourselves out in the cold while there's a lovely big welcome sign and an unlocked door ready to swing open for you to come in.

Perhaps today you need to make that first step of faith. I don't know, perhaps you hesitated outside the door. I guess the first time you've come or even if it's that you've been several times walking into the church is something about it, walking in.

Perhaps you're with people who you think, well there's something going on here, I don't quite grasp, but it feels lovely and warm, it feels good. And if that's you, that's the presence of God, then he's calling you.

[21 : 25] He wants you to enter this door of faith. He's calling you to believe and to trust in him. Perhaps today is the first step of faith that you're going to make.

But perhaps you've already done that. Perhaps you can look back many years and remember that time when you first received, you first stepped into this door, you first saw and understood faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to encourage you tonight just to recall that with thanks. To remember what it was that God had done that day. Brought you from a kingdom of darkness into a kingdom of light.

Taken you from being lost and inverted commas, wet and cold. Trying to go your own way. And he's brought you in to his family and blessed you.

And think too of those steps of faith that God has brought you through in your life if you're a Christian this evening. There'll be many times when God has called you into a new deeper faith.

[22 : 29] Thank him for that. And ask him tonight, is there a door of faith that's been open to you in terms of something he wants you to do? Some way he wants you to exercise your faith in the coming week?

Some courage that he wants to impart to you in order to face difficulty or to take a new opportunity that he's presenting to you. Perhaps some person that he wants you to witness to.

Perhaps some area of service in the church that you can make a contribution to. I wonder if you need to take a step of faith today.

What a wonderful thing it is to know that that door is swung open. This door of faith, we're living in an era where the door is open for all those who will trust in the Lord Jesus.

What a wonderful thing it is to be invited to come in and to enjoy the blessings of the family God. So that's the door to come in but also let's look at the other side of this coin as it were, the other side of this door that it's a door that required Paul and Barnabas to go out.

[23 : 54] It was a door of service. In order for this door to be entered for the Gentiles to come in, Paul and Barnabas and others needed to go out of the door of service.

Going outside can be a wonderful thing, can't it? A couple of weeks ago we went out to Kieldale, an area that sort of had a, you've probably got places like this, that just mean something to you.

And Caroline and I, when we were quite early in our marriage, sometimes we used to go on a Sunday after church, we used to go off and take a picnic on a lovely sunny day and we'd go and have our picnic at this particular spot in Kilda up in the hill.

And we went there a couple of weeks ago and we were telling our kids, you know, as you do, this is where we used to sit and this is what we used to have to eat. It was just a lovely time, it was just after all those horrible days of rain and there was a break in the weather and we had a lovely sunny day and we went out and we enjoyed it.

Some days it's lovely, isn't it? But do you also know the feeling, even if you're not experiencing this in the fullest sense, of what an agoraphobic would feel like? Perhaps there's times that you experience it too where you wouldn't say you were an agoraphobic but to go out is a real challenge.

[25 : 10] To set the foot outside the door, perhaps through depression or other things, it's just the feeling and thought of facing the world just seems so difficult. I guess we've all, to some extent or other, felt or tasted that a little.

Similar with this door, isn't it? A door of opportunity to serve. It is a door that brings joy, that brings peace, it encourages us, but there are times when we're very fearful about this door of opportunity to go and tell others about the Lord Jesus.

I want to turn to a couple of the other passages now where Paul speaks about going out through a door. Firstly, 1 Corinthians chapter 16. 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verses 8 and 9.

1 Corinthians 16. I'm just going to read a couple of verses from verse 8. Paul says, 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.

A great door for effective work. The ESV has there a wide door for effective work.

[26 : 47] door. And yet, there's a wideness in this door. There's loads of opportunities but there is also a great deal of opposition.

A great door for effective work is open to me and there are many who oppose me. Perhaps you feel something of that here in Whitby.

I certainly feel it in Loftus. That there are many opportunities. The door seems enormous. The possibilities of serving God in this place seem too much really for us as a church.

How can we deal with all these opportunities? We'd love to reach out. It seems so wide and yet it's also very challenging. There are people and things that oppose us, obstacles to the work.

I want to turn to Colossians chapter 4 and verse 2. Again, speaking about a door to go out, a door of service being opened, a door of opportunity.

[28 : 08] devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains.

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. again here as a door being opened for the message or a door being opened for the word to proclaim the mystery of Christ.

Wonder how we feel about this, about the opportunities, the door that is open for us in the land in which we live, with the legal status that we have, the ability that we have to go to others and take the opportunity to share our faith.

How we feel about the challenges that we're facing. I wonder if you feel a sense of both joy and challenge. Well, you're not the first person to feel both of those things.

The joy and the challenge of bringing the gospel to others. us. I wonder, in this regard, whether we need to take a step of faith too, where the door's swung open and we're sort of teetering on the doorway, where there's people in our minds, perhaps we're thinking of, who we really want to tell the gospel to, and just asking the Lord, help us bring the gospel to these particular people.

[29 : 50] What a wonderful thing it is. Today is the day of salvation. The door is still wide open. The door of us to serve God by telling other people about him.

It's wonderful to hear of your events going on and it's good to have things that we can draw, ask people and invite people into. In some ways, that's one of the easiest ways, isn't it, to take a little step, inviting people to come to things.

But it's also about going out to them, isn't it, and bringing the gospel to where they are. Lastly, I want to just deal with this question about praying for open doors.

If you look back at the verses that we've looked at, it's very clear who opens the door. In Acts chapter 14 and verse 27.

On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. It's God that was opening the door.

[30 : 58] 1 Corinthians 16 and verse 8 and 9. It's implied rather than explicit here, but I think it says the same.

Paul doesn't speak about creating an opportunity himself.

He speaks about God opening a door of opportunity for him. And then we look again at Colossians and it's the most explicit of all.

In fact, it's there that it tells us that we must pray about these open doors. Devote yourselves to prayer. Colossians 4 and verse 2. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us too that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains.

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. What we're talking about here is not the fact that the door is open in terms of it's possible to be saved.

[32 : 05] He's saying pray that those specific situations would happen where the door swings open and it's clear that the gospel has an opportunity, that there's an opportunity to express the mystery of Christ to someone.

That in a specific situation we would see the door swing open and that conversation with that person come alive about spiritual things. And if you're like me, it's frustrating, isn't it?

there's people that you love and care for, people that you want to speak about and the conversation flows and you're thinking, Lord, please open the door that we might speak of spiritual things.

And your heart's yearning and you're thinking, how do I do it? I don't want to get tongue-tied, but Lord, please just help me to speak to this person about spiritual things. we're not talking here, are we, about the church in Revelation?

Laodicea, I think it is, isn't it, where the door is shut and Jesus is outside the church. What a horrible thought. And you know you've got those pictures, haven't you, with the handle on the inside and Jesus wants to come back in.

[33 : 19] We're not talking about that door and that knocking. We're talking about when Jesus said, ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7, 7. So let's seek God for opportunities to serve him.

Let's ask him to draw people into his kingdom. Let's commit ourselves to pray for things to change that we might be able to speak to people about the Lord Jesus.

That we would find those doors swinging wide open. That people would be softened in their hearts and ready to speak about spiritual things. That we would be given courage when we're fearful to go and speak about the Lord.

So, this evening let's be thankful for our own experience of entering this door of faith. Let's thank God for every little encouragement that we've felt as this door is still open.

[34 : 30] Let's thank him that today is the day of salvation. We're living in an era where the kingdom of God is growing and people are being invited to join. Pray that others will come in.

God is to thank the Lord for every time we've sensed an open door of faith for us. Perhaps some of you can think back to times when the church was growing quickly and you were really excited and let's pray that the Lord would open a door in the same sort of way in our generation today.

Perhaps some of you have read of some of those wonderful revivals that have happened around the world. Perhaps was it 1905 in Wales or up in the Hebrides and you've read of the wonderful things that God did.

Drawing people to himself miraculously opening doors that seemed as if they were shut. Can we not pray? Surely we should be praying for those same things to be happening today.

Let's commit to pray for these things. In closing I just want to I was just browsing the internet looking at some of these comments about the door and I found if any of you read Spurgeon morning and evening you might recognize this although it is from the 17th of December.

[35 : 53] This is what he says about the verse. His verse is speaking about John 10 and verse 9 which of course Jesus says I am the door. He says I am the door. By me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and find go in and out and find part.

This is what Spurgeon says Jesus the great I am is the entrance into the true church and the way of access to God himself.

He gives to the man who comes to God by him four choice privileges. Firstly he shall be saved. The fugitive manslayer passed the gate of the city of refuge and he was safe.

Noah entered the door of the ark and was secure. None can be lost who take Jesus as the door of faith to their souls. Entrance through Jesus into peace is the guarantee of entrance by the same door into heaven.

Jesus is the only door, an open door, a wide door, a safe door and blessed is he who rests all his hope of admission to glory upon the crucified redeemer.

[37 : 07] man. Secondly he shall go in. He shall be privileged to go in among the divine family sharing the children's bread and participating in all their honors and enjoyments.

He shall go into the chambers of communion, to the banquets of love, to the treasures of the covenant, to the storehouses of the promises. He shall go in unto the king of kings in the power of the Holy Spirit and the secret of the Lord shall be with him.

Thirdly he shall go out. This blessing is much forgotten. We go out into the world to labor and suffer but what a mercy to go in the name and the power of Jesus.

We are called to bear witness to the truth, to cheer the disconsolate, to warn the careless, to win souls and to glorify God. And as the angel said to Gideon, go in this thy might, even thus the Lord would have us proceed as his messengers in his name and strength.

And fourthly and finally he says, he shall find pasture. He who knows Jesus shall never want. Going in and out shall be alike helpful to him.

[38 : 26] In fellowship with God he shall grow and in watering others he shall be watered. Having made Jesus' all he shall find all in Jesus.

His soul shall be as a watered garden and as a well of water whose waters fail not. Let's pray. Father God we just rejoice and thank you for opening a door of faith for us.

that the access to the heavenly throne has been made open. The very gates of heaven are wide for all who will trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just thank you Lord for every single person in this room that has reached out in faith and knows what it is to be welcomed into your home. To know what it is to be your children.

To receive the blessings that there are in being with you. And we pray Lord God together that we wouldn't just stay there and enjoy the blessings without being willing to go out of the door of service and speak for you and live for you in this needy world.

[39 : 53] And Lord God how we cry out to you today that you would open specific doors of opportunities for us this week that we might be able to speak for you to show our love and to show your love to this dying world.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Lord we thank you for being with us tonight and as we leave this building we'll go through a door and we pray that that might be a door of service.

That in this coming week we will offer ourselves to you. That you will take and Lord use our minds. That you will use our money.

That you will use our abilities. And particularly Lord that you would use our tongues. That we might speak of the Lord Jesus and bring glory to him this week.

And we pray that many in future days will enter in to that wonderfully open door of salvation in Christ. In his name we pray.

[41 : 06] Amen. Amen.