

Then They Left

by Philip Swann

The sermon explores the theme of being left alone and how the gospel of Jesus Christ can change people's lives and deliver them from evil spirits.

Duration: 1:00:44

Scripture: John 10:27

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the last sentence of Acts 16:14, which says 'then they left.' He discusses the experience of being left alone when we don't want to be. The preacher then tells the story of Paul and his friends encountering a girl possessed by an evil spirit who was publicly denouncing them. After ignoring her for a while, Paul commands the spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ, and it leaves her. The preacher relates this story to situations in our own lives where we may feel alone and encourages seeking support and encouragement.

Transcript

Read at verse 11 and continue to the end of the chapter. The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16, verse 11, to the end of the chapter, and I'm reading from the New International Version. From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.

From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony, and the leading city of that district of Macedonia, and we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gates to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.

If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house, and she persuaded us. Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.

This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, these men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved. She kept this up for many days. Finally, Paul became so troubled that he turned round and said to the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her.

At that moment, the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, these men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly, there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once, all the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose.

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, don't harm yourself, we are all here. The jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.

He then brought them out and asked, sirs, what must I do to be saved? They replied, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds, and immediately he and all his family were baptized.

The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and his whole family. When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order, release those men.

The jailer told Paul, the magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released, now you can leave, go in peace. But Paul said to the officers, they beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No, let them come themselves and escort us out.

The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them.

Then they left. And may God bless to us that portion of his word. Father that whoever we may be, and whatever our situation may be, you will draw near to us now, as we draw near to you.

And you will meet us in our weakness, and you will speak to us great things of your great son, Jesus Christ. We ask this in his precious name. Amen.

Passage of Scripture that was read to us, Acts chapter 16. I'd like you to turn to that. It's a very well-known passage, contains some very exciting and dramatic conversions.

But I want us this evening to take for our text the very last sentence in Acts 16. The last words of verse 40. They simply read, then they left.

Then they left. I suppose it is a universally miserable human experience, that of being left alone at a time when you don't want to be left alone. A few months ago, I had to go for a minor operation.

And I was naturally, as you probably would be as well, a little bit nervous on the day. And I was reassured in the day theatre by the professionalism of the nurses and the doctors. But then I was led eventually into an area with a lot of, I must say, a lot older people.

And they were all sat there watching the television as we tried to remain calm. And every now and then a name would be called out. And you had to go.

And this person would disappear, never to be seen again. And a little bit nervous. And I was sat there.

And eventually, of course, it was time for my name. And I was called out. And I was trying to be brave.

And I was led in. I actually walked in. It was a bit of a shock.

You walk into this little theatre, little operating theatre. And I lay on the bed. And they were just about to put me to sleep when one of the patients who had previously had their surgery wasn't very well.

And they all had to go out. And I was suddenly on my own, lying on the table in an operating theatre. It was a rather bizarre experience.

It only lasted for a few moments. But I really felt miserable and lonely and nervous. And was so relieved when the theatre sister came in and held my hand and reassured me.

We can all identify with loneliness. Being left alone, that is, at a time when we want people to be with us. Maybe your first experience of this was when you were a child.

And your parents would say, well, now it's time to go to sleep. And they would go. They would turn out the lights.

And you longed that they would still be there. Maybe you tried to string it out for a little while. Just one more story or something like that.

You wanted company. Maybe some of you have had the experience this summer of your parents assisting you and encouraging you as you studied hard for those exams. And they did all sorts of things to make life easier for you.

They promised to help you. They brought you cups of coffee or whatever it was that you needed. But then there came that point where you had to go into that exam room and all the encouragement of your teachers and your parents and tutors, maybe.

They all had to stay outside. You were on your own. Maybe some of you are in business.

You have to make a decision. It's a tough executive management decision. And you make it.

You realise maybe you're going against the grain. And you feel alone. You look for some support.

Someone to encourage you. These words speak of people leaving. And as a consequence of leaving, they were leaving some people alone.

Now, if we hadn't had the passage read to us tonight, and I just told you what our text was, then they left, you might obviously be asking yourself two questions. The first question, if you're a thoughtful person, would simply be this. Well, who is leaving? Secondly, what are they leaving? And really, I want that to take the basis of this message this evening.

Who is leaving, first of all, very briefly, and then, much more developed, we're going to look at what exactly they were leaving behind. The people who were doing the leaving, there are four of them. Two were named very clearly in the passage this evening.

They are Paul and Silas. But there were another two with them. We're told in some verses which we didn't read this evening, just right at the beginning of chapter 16, that there was also another one who had joined them on this missionary journey, a young man by the name of Timothy.

So there is Paul, Silas, Timothy, but there is also a fourth. It's a job to spot him, but it is Luke. If you look at verse 11, you will read there, from Troas, we put out to sea.

Luke is the one recording this and writing it. And he is, with that little word we, obviously referring to himself. So there's Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

And they had arrived at this amazing city of Philippi, a Roman colony, a place that was vibrant, wealthy, but of course, thoroughly pagan. They arrived there, not out of any decision of their own. In fact, if you were to read for yourself in verses 6 through to 10, you would realize there was actually some confusion about where exactly God wanted Paul and his companions to go.

In fact, where they tried to go, God hindered them and resisted them from going. Until wonderfully and gloriously, they came one night, we're told this in the ninth verse, if you'd like to look at it. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, come over to Macedonia and help us.

Now, Philippi was in the region of Macedonia. And after seeing that vision, we read these words in verse 10. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

They drew a conclusion. This vision isn't just because of too much carbohydrate before they went to sleep. This was from God.

And they were to go to Macedonia and they were to preach the gospel. The repercussions of that conclusion were enormous. The gospel of Jesus Christ was for the very first time about to enter the great continent of Europe.

It wasn't their decision. It was God's. Now, I just want us to think briefly for a few moments, who exactly these men were.

Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy. We know perhaps not a great deal about some of them and more about others, Paul in particular. We know that Paul, Silas, and Luke were Jewish.

We know that Timothy was half Greek. Luke, of course, had the privilege of hearing and seeing Jesus. As he ministered, of being there amongst the twelve, eating with them, sleeping with them, going on their

journeys, having the privilege of asking Christ questions, and hearing his voice and seeing him at work.

Timothy was very different. He had the privilege of having a grandmother and a mother who were Christians. There is a sense where Timothy is third generation Christian.

But then there's Silas. We know really very, very little about Silas. We know that he came from Jerusalem.

He'd been brought up a Jew and he was a Roman citizen. But that's really all we know of Silas' background. Paul, we know a great deal about Paul.

Paul had been brought up a Pharisee. That is, he had been brought up to love the religious ritual and theory of his day. And he was utterly, totally devoted to the things he was hearing.

He was a man that as soon as he heard of Jesus Christ, he hated him. And he hated him with a powerful hatred. This is why later on when he wrote a letter to Timothy, he was to describe himself as the worst sinner.

That isn't any false piety. He felt that and he meant it. This was a man who hated Jesus Christ.

But Luke, Timothy, Silas and Paul all have one amazing thing in common. They had all gloriously come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Now we only have Paul's story and record as to how this happened in his life.

We don't know exactly the details, particularly with Silas and Timothy. But with Paul, we have great detail and you know the story. The height of his fury and persecution of Christians, because that's what he was doing.

He saw it as his duty to stamp out the name of Jesus Christ and to stamp out his followers. And so he did and he acquired and got hold of a letter from the high priest in Jerusalem, giving him permission to go to that region of Damascus, go through the synagogues, drag out men and women who were Christians and have them thrown into prison. It was Paul, of course, as you know, who consented to the stoning of Stephen.

There he is going on that journey. Bible speaks of him breathing out threatenings and slaughter, murderous threats towards Christians. And he's going along that journey and suddenly, and the Bible uses that important word, suddenly, suddenly, he is surrounded with the presence of God.

And a voice asks him, speaks to him. Paul is arrested by Jesus Christ. Lord, who is it? It is I, Jesus, who you persecute.

And Paul became Christian. So these are three, four very, very different men from very different backgrounds, very different ages, from different localities. Some had great benefits, as Timothy did, being brought up in a Christian home.

Someone like Paul certainly didn't. But they had all come into this one amazing experience of Jesus Christ as their saviour. And they'd gone at this command of God to Philippi.

And they had gone there, as Paul tells us, rather Luke tells us, in verse 10, to preach the gospel to them. They hadn't gone there to tickle their minds with the latest ideas or to give their political opinions or anything like that. They had gone there to preach the gospel, this message that had set them free.

They had gone to preach to others. It is a wonderful privilege to hear the gospel preached. It changes people.

Do you know, you could be someone sat here tonight who is very far from God. Maybe only you know that in your heart. The gospel changes people.

Not because there is anything magical in its words, but because of whom the gospel points us to. Jesus Christ hasn't changed. He is still the same yesterday, today and forever.

He's the same. The same one who changed Paul. And he can change you tonight.

That is absolutely true. Well, they'd been in Philippi. They'd been very busy preaching the gospel.

Now they were leaving. That really brings us to our second question. What were these men leaving behind in Philippi? Well, in essence, they were leaving behind a work that God was doing.

It was God who had sent them there. They'd gone there to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's message, God's revelation to this world. And through that message, God began to work.

People within Philippi began to hear of this Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God who came into our world, lived amongst us that perfect life. Of how he had died on the cross for our sins and was risen from the dead. And they heard this message and some of them were converted.

There's a lovely little phrase in verse 40 or it just speaks at the end there of how when Paul and Silas came out of prison, they went to Lydia's house where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. We don't know all of the names of the people that were converted in Philippi, but there was a group of brothers, men who God had transformed and changed. But there are three people that we know a considerable amount about in terms of the transformation that this preaching of the gospel brought to them.

And these are three very different people, just as the apostles were very different men. The first you see in the reading we had tonight in verse 15 through to, sorry, verse 11 through to 15, a woman called Lydia. It was a Sabbath day, it appeared there was no synagogue in Philippi.

And so we read on verse 13, we went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer. And there were a group of women and they were worshipping God. They were God-fearers.

Lydia at the end or rather in the middle of verse 14 is described as being a worshipper of God. Now there's an important thing to note here. Lydia was a worshipper of God, but she wasn't yet a child of God.

She had a great respect for God. She would have prayed and taken prayer seriously. She would have perhaps heard things she enjoyed singing and she would have sung them with great sincerity, but she wasn't yet a child of God.

Until wonderfully Paul is there and he's speaking to them of Christ, doing what God had sent him to do, preaching the gospel. And we read at the end of verse 14 those very important words, the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. And if you're not yet converted, that's what you need.

You need the Lord to open your heart. And that doesn't mean you can sit there and wait for it to happen. He invites you to call on His name tonight.

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Being saved means God opening your heart to respond to the message. Lydia was converted.

She's a very interesting lady. She was a businesswoman. It seems that she was wealthy.

Most probably she was a very shrewd woman, thoughtful, not the kind of person you could pull the wool over their eyes easily. Wonderfully she's converted. And then secondly there's another woman, but she's extremely different.

And you can see her in verses 16, rather her conversion, verses 16 to 18. She is a girl who is possessed by an evil spirit. This is a real thing.

This girl is in the grip of satanic powers. Somewhere along the line she had dabbled with pagan practices and she had become possessed. And it appeared that she had this power whereby she could persuade people that she could tell them their fortunes.

And as a result this poor girl has been cruelly abused and exploited by people wanting to make money out of her. Paul and his friends are one day going along the road. This girl started shouting after them.

Verse 17. These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved. There's a bit of debate as to whether perhaps those last words should be they are telling you a way to be saved.

But she kept this up for some time and it was a very obvious public denunciation. It was fury, it was anger coming from the evil spirit within her. After a while Paul and the others, they ignored this for several days, but after a while they could not keep silent any longer.

Until one day Paul just turned round and said to the spirit there at the end of verse 18, In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her. At that moment the spirit left her. None of that theatrical battle that goes on as portrayed sometimes in Hollywood where there's this amazing struggle and good just about nudges it in the final analysis.

We're told at that very moment the spirit left her because there was a power whereby that demon had been driven out of her. That is a power with no rival. Jesus Christ.

One who Paul would later on tell us as he wrote to the Philippians who has been exalted to the highest place. And it was in his name that this devil was driven out and the girl was wonderfully delivered. But of course as a result she could no longer do these things that she had done before.

She couldn't appear to tell the future and the man who had her found that they couldn't use her anymore. And so they were angry and we're told in verse 19 they had Paul and Silas dragged off to the marketplace to face the authorities and they were brought before the magistrates and there was a great uproar and eventually the magistrate commanded that they should be thrown into prison and they were. And that of course brings us to the third character who is probably best of all known from Acts 16 the jailer.

There in verses 23 to 34. Jailers of course had a reputation for profound sadism and brutality. They were not just custodians they were torturers.

We know that Paul and Silas were stripped and severely flogged verse 23 tells us and thrown into the prison into the inner cell. Their feet were bound in stocks. It probably was an excruciatingly uncomfortable position and there they are.

Jailer has done his job and you can imagine him sitting there can't you with a bottle and he's enjoying himself. He's done his job won't have any trouble from this lot tonight. But then in the darkness he hears these men singing hymns of praise to God.

And I for one can't believe that that was all they did. They were gone to Macedonia to preach the gospel and I'm sure in those hymns they would have interspersed them with words and exhortations concerning Jesus Christ and the need to know him. Well in the night there is suddenly the most dramatic of events.

Verse 26. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.

And you can imagine as the dust is settling in the darkness and all the jailer can hear are the sounds of doors swinging on their hinges. Immediately draws the conclusion that those prisoners have made a run for it. So Paul and Silas in that inner jail still in their chains would have heard the sound of a sword being pulled from its scabbard.

And out goes the cry through the darkness from Paul. Verse 28. Don't harm yourself.

We're all here. And the Bible tells us that this jailer who previously had been thrashing them came in trembling before Paul and Silas with these remarkable words. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? He isn't speaking of the Roman authorities.

He isn't speaking of the problems that he has in his life. He is speaking surely of what he heard that night about Jesus Christ. Back comes the answer.

As it always does with the gospel to the point. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You and your household.

And the man believed and he was saved. Three very different people. Lydia, seeker, converted in a service.

Girl possessed by an evil spirit. Delivered on the streets. The jailer, cynical, hard man.

Saved in the middle of a suicide attempt. Each one has one thing in common. The one who has made the difference is not Paul or Silas.

But it is Jesus Christ. Do you know anything of this tonight? There are many people in this world who can make a great difference to you. Teachers at school, a wife, a husband, your child, your parents.

It can make a great difference to your life. They can encourage you. They can challenge you.

They can teach you. They can give you an example. But Jesus Christ can save you.

Do you know Him? Do you know Him? Well, these three people had come to know Him. And as a result, they were converted. And it is then that we come to our text.

Then they left. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke. They come to Philippi.

They preach the gospel. They've seen some conversions. Marvellous encouragement.

But then they left. We can only assume that they left because God was telling them to leave. But there is a sense whereby you have to ask yourself, was that wise of Paul? Was he really doing the right thing? After all, these are young Christians.

Vulnerable to the pressures and temptations of an overwhelmingly pagan city. They've had limited teaching. I'm sure Paul and Silas and the others would have done their best to point them to the truth of the gospel and the truth concerning Jesus Christ.

And whatever limited time must have been jam-packed with fellowship and prayer and Bible teaching. But they weren't there very long. And so there is this little group of Christians.

They hardly know anything. They're in the middle of an overwhelmingly pagan society which is totally unsympathetic to the Christian gospel. And if that isn't enough, the Bible tells us that there is a devil prowling around Philippi as he is around our towns and cities today like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

So Paul, are you doing a sensible thing? I mean, who's going to help Lydia as she grapples with the morality of shady business deals? Who's going to help the girl who was once possessed live a clean, pure life for Jesus Christ? Who's going to encourage the jailer to be a good Christian husband and father? Who on earth is going to begin to help to unravel this man's problems about witnessing at work? It all looks so fragile, doesn't it? All the entire number of Christians in Europe, verse 40 tells us, could meet in Lydia's house. And it is an incredible picture of frailty and fragility. No books, no camps to go on, no conferences, not even an evangelical movement of Philippi.

Nothing. Nothing. One another in this one great experience of Jesus Christ as their saviour.

Sense where maybe you're feeling like this tonight. If you're in school or college, maybe you've been back a few days, you haven't even been back a week, and already things have seemed to be starting to fall apart. Promises, prayers that you made during the summer, encouragements that you knew, the zeal with which you went back to school or college, the determination that you had, and perhaps not even a full week has gone, and you feel you've, you feel it's all just falling apart.

And you say to yourself, how am I going to cope? This isn't even really the autumn, we're still at the edge of the summer. How am I going to manage? Where am I going to be by Christmas? Perhaps, maybe you've been to the conferences this year, and you've heard the preaching of God's Word, and you were with other Christians, and you enjoyed the fellowship there, and the preaching of God's Word. It so thrilled you and encouraged you.

You said to yourself, no going back. Amen to it all. I'm going to be different.

Now the dust is settling, and it doesn't seem so easy. How are you going to cope? Maybe you're somebody who's been converted recently, and you look and you think, well the rest of my life, how am I going to cope with my heart, with the temptations I experience, and how easily I give in to them? Or how am I going to cope with being a Christian in my family? There is no one else in my family who's a Christian. How am I going to cope? Or how am I going to cope in my marriage, or at work, or wherever it would be? And you identify with these concerns.

And I think that Lydia, and the girl who was once possessed, and the old jailer, I think they must have felt like that. You can imagine it, can't you? The jailer. He had to go back into work the next day and explain it

all.

It must have been very, very difficult. It must have been complicated. But that wasn't what he was interested in doing.

It wasn't the amazing fact that none of the prisoners had escaped that he really wanted to talk about. He wanted to talk about Christ who had saved him. How was he going to do it? But it seems that Paul was quite happy to leave them.

And indeed, from something he writes later on, it seems he had great confidence in leaving them. But why is that? I want to tell you straight away that Paul had not established in Philippi a group of people taken up simply with a system of ritual of worship or having meetings. These are people who are in fellowship with the living God.

That's what you are if you're a real Christian. You're in fellowship with the living God. I couldn't help noticing this afternoon the screen back here.

It says no signal. It's dead. It's dead.

It needs a message from the man over there, I think it is, with his laptop to send a message to the projector here that makes this image appear on the screen. But at the moment, it's dead. There's no light.

There's no message. The Christian is alive. There's a message they've received from God.

There is power that has changed their lives and turned them around, whereby now they shine. And the message they shine is this, not that I'm better than you, not that I'm more moral than you, not that I'm more clever than you, but the great message the Christian shines is this, I know God by his mercy and his grace. Now the God who these people knew was a God who had promised them and indeed promises every single person who trusts in his Son, Jesus Christ, something vital and powerful.

And it was because Paul knew that this had been promised to them, he had the confidence to leave them. We know Paul had this confidence. You see, a few years later, he would write a letter to the Philippians.

And in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 6, we read these words, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ. That's where Paul's confidence was. The fact that these were Christians didn't depend on him, it depended on God.

And God had begun a good work in them. Now let's get hold of this tonight. You see, you go back to school, maybe you've done it this week, and you just go back to college, you go back to work, to your family, or your children or whatever it is, and you've told them you've become a Christian.

They look at you with a little bit of pity and they say, oh, that's nice, I'm pleased for you. Of course, they think you've found religion or something like that. Paul, when he refers to what had happened to these people, he said, what is it you've received? You have received a good work.

And it is. It's God's work. It's a great work.

What is this good work? It's salvation. There you were, dead, wonderfully. God came to you with the message of the Gospel and you heard of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit worked on your heart.

He opened it like he opened Lydia's, so that you could respond, and you did, you responded in faith and repentance, and now you're alive. But, says Paul, when he wrote to the Philippians, this good work is not yet a finished work in you. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

God is committed to seeing his good work finished in his people. He is the one, Paul says, will carry it on to completion. You know, sometimes as Christians, it's important that we make the distinction between our justification and our sanctification.

Justification. That moment, that point where God declares you to be no longer guilty, but free, justified in his sight. I want you to imagine a canvas, a great canvas that an artist is going to write on, paint on.

The canvas is really your life. There's a moment in your life when the paint from the artist on his brush touches the canvas. Justified by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

God is the artist, and the canvas is your life. And he begins to paint, and it's a wonderful scene. There's a great sunset, and it's glorious.

The high points of the Christian life. And then there are other places, the dark valley down here, the discouragement, the battles that we have to face. And eventually a picture begins to emerge.

And when he's finished the picture, well, he signs it. And it's complete. And where do you see it? You see it hanging in the gallery of grace in heaven when he takes you there.

There's a work to be done. There's a life to be moulded and changed and fashioned. He will carry it on to completion.

So as Paul and Silas and the others left Lydia and this jailer and this poor girl who'd been possessed, and they left the brothers, they left them in this confidence that the good work that has started, who is the one who's going to see it through? It's Christ himself. And there's great encouragement for you here. Maybe you're struggling and it's been a terrible week for you.

Here is the encouragement for you. My sheep hear my voice. And I know them.

They follow me. I give unto them eternal life. They shall never perish.

Neither shall any man pluck them from my father's hands. The eternal security of God's people. We sing this hymn sometimes, don't we? The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose.

I will not, I will not desert to its foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake. I will not, no will not, I will not forsake.

Great encouragement in this. Paul and the others must have gone in. Great encouragement.

Good work has begun. It's going to be completed. God has promised.

But you know, there's a challenge in this as well. Did this mean for Lydia and the others they could simply sit back and wait for God to do everything? And there's some Christians who tell you this. They'll say, or let go and let God.

As if you just somehow breeze along in the Christian life. Bible doesn't teach that. As well as securing us to himself, God requires that we walk with him.

Tells us to keep in step with his spirit. Remember perhaps when you were a little boy or girl and you had your sports day at school and there were all the races and then there was that race. It was a sort of novelty race.

The three-legged race. And you remember how your leg was shackled, usually to the slowest person in the class or the most cumbersome. And you had to race.

And how did you do it? Well, there's only one way to do it successfully. There has to be a harmony and a unity. If one starts to go and the other isn't ready or pays no attention to the pace and the way in which that person is running, you fall flat on your face.

We are joined to Christ. We are in union with him. And though our salvation is secure and our heaven is guaranteed by the finished work of Jesus Christ, he calls us while we are here to keep in step with him.

You might say that is precisely my problem. The Bible says he who endures to the end will be saved. You say, how can someone like me keep in step with Jesus Christ? How can someone like me endure to the end? Do you know, it's good to feel like that.

It's right. There should be a humility about our living as Christians. But the wonderful thing is that the word of God tells us that God has provided the means and the way for us to keep in step with him.

And I'm sure this was in Paul's mind and the others as they left Philippi. You see, we are to stand firm in the Lord. Paul would write to the Philippians in the fourth chapter, first verse, stand firm in the Lord.

That's where our strength is to come from. Maybe you're struggling and you're fearful and you're wondering how you're going to cope and go forwards as a Christian. You are to stand firm in the Lord.

What exactly does that mean? How do you stand firm in the Lord? How would Lydia and the others be secure and strong? The Bible speaks to us on this. You know, some of you are going to university and banks and places like that. They want to get your grant off you as soon as possible.

And so they offer you the student survival pack, special rates and discounts, vouchers for HMV or Virgin or something like that. And they give you these things, how to survive at university, the student survival pack. Or I noticed in the newspaper the other day, a certain computer company selling computers they will give you a student survival pack.

And it consists of one of those nifty new scooters and a backpack. It makes you want to buy a computer, doesn't it? Well, I want to tell you tonight this. God has his own survival pack.

And it's not just for students. It's for all who come to him. What is it? Well, I can't think of any better words than these.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not be faint. Jesus Christ gives his people wings. But what does it mean? What exactly does it mean to hope in the Lord? It means to live life in the close company of Jesus Christ.

How are these people to go forward? How are you to go forward? How are we to stand in our increasingly pagan and unsympathetic age towards the gospel? How are we to have any confidence of the future?

There's only one answer. We are to live our lives in the close felt company of Jesus Christ. How do you do this? You say, preachers, you're always saying we must live close to God.

And how exactly do you do that? What does it mean to walk with God? What does it mean to find strength? Well, you're to live your life grasping the vehicle that Christ has provided. You see, if you want to fly, you need a plane. If you want to sail, you need a boat.

You want to go forward as a Christian, you want to stand firm, you need God's vehicle. Can't do it any other way. This summer we were on holiday.

I enjoy fishing. We were up in the highlands of Scotland. And I found out that on this estate, there was some lovely hillocks with these wonderful wild brown trout.

And I inquired and I bought a ticket from the gamekeeper. He was a fascinating man. He says, no problem, he said.

You can drive. He said, there isn't a road, but the ground is good. Drive your car for about a mile and a half.

And then you'll have to park your car or get dropped off. And then you've got a two mile walk up the hills. And then you come to this marvellous hillocks.

So we got in the car. My wife was there. She said, well, I'll have to drive back.

You'll drive up there. I'll drive back. We got, we were driving along and suddenly we hadn't gone 500 yards.

We came to the most incredible quagmire. This huge bog. Now, we haven't got a four by four or a Land Rover or anything like that.

So it was just impossible. And I looked at a mile and a half walk up here and two miles up into the hills. When all of a sudden there was this sound and it was a gamekeeper coming along on his quad bike.

And he said, go on then, he said. It's all right. My wife took one look at it.

Oh, wait, not driving back through this mud. You certainly don't know what's on ahead. We've only gone 500 yards.

And so there he was with his quad bike and there were two big bags of fertiliser strapped to the back of it. And I'm there in my waders with my rod and my net and the rucksack full of sandwiches and my fishing bag and my cap. And he said, climb on, he said.

I could hardly move with that lot of staggered across. I went to get on as you would on the pillion of a motorcycle. Not like that, he said.

You'll have to sit the other way around. So I had to sit literally with my back to his perched on the top of this quad bike with these big bags of fertiliser held on by a bungee strap. And then I was on the top holding on to all these bits and pieces.

Hold on, he said. Off we went. I can still hear him laughing as he went along.

I was thinking to myself, Jesus Christ has a vehicle to take you through the Christian life. He doesn't just say, sit there. He says, hold on.

I had to work. I had to keep my balance on that quad bike. Otherwise I'd be off.

I had to humour him as well so that he wouldn't throw me off. I had to do all these things. I had to work with him on that bike.

The Christian life is like this. You have to keep in step with Christ. You have to work with him.

What is God's vehicle? What is this business of living life in the company of God? I'll tell you tonight what it is in essence. In essence, it is listening to him speak and speaking to him. Reading his word and prayer.

You might be sat there tonight. You're very clever and you're saying to yourself, that's far too simple. Christian life is far more complicated than that.

And you preachers, you say, oh, read your Bible and pray. And that's the great need of the day. You say, it's far too simple.

It must be more complicated than that. I'm talking to a few people today about exercise and getting fit and losing weight. You know, there are people, they say, I'm going to go get fit, going to lose this weight and get myself sorted out.

And so what do they do? They go into the sport shop. They buy the latest kit. Go Faster Stripes everywhere.

They take out an expensive subscription with the local leisure centre. They've got all the ice or whatever health drinks. They even may get themselves a personal trainer.

But do you know what getting fit at the end of the day is about? It's about sweating and hurting and punishing your body. And you know, there are some Christians like that. They love to get the latest books and hear the latest theories and the latest little controversy or something like that.

They like to go and be seen in all the right places and engage in all these things and think somehow, these are the things that matter. You know, if you think these are the things that matter, you've deluded yourself. The real thing that matters is spending your life in the company of Jesus Christ.

It's a simple thing. Listening to God and speaking to Him. There are so many Christians that get into serious problems because they haven't grasped this.

It's about listening to God's Word daily and spending time in prayer with Him. This is the vital thing that God uses in the completion of His good work in His people. How can a young man keep his way pure? You might say, my mind so often is filled with things that shouldn't be there.

How can I, of all people, ever live a pure life? God says this, by living according to my Word. You want help with purity? You must read God's Word. I've hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Or you might say, how can I begin to understand this world with all its pressures, with all its philosophies, with all its ideas? God tells you not to be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world. You say, how

can I do that? That verse goes on, doesn't it, in Romans 12. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

How does that happen? It is by reading the Word of God, not watching Newsnight for the latest ideas on the world, but reading God's Word, hearing His truth and applying it. How are these people to stand before Philippi and its overwhelmingly pagan culture? How are they to sort out their problems and their difficulties as they try to get on in the workplace? How were their children, who were converted, going to cope in the schools and in the university and in all the things that were going on in Philippi? It's by listening to God and applying His truth. Faith comes by hearing.

So many Christians say, oh, that I have more faith. Well, faith comes by hearing the message. The message is heard, Paul tells the Romans, by the Word of God.

Read His Word. Pray. I was a little toddler in Sunday school.

I learned a little chorus. Read your Bible. Pray every day if you want to grow.

I've read a few theological books since then and been to conferences and heard learned men. By the end of the day, I've come back to that little chorus that I learned in Sunday school. It is absolutely true.

It's no good looking to your pastor and his preaching. It's no good looking to your youth leader and their understanding of contemporary issues and the kind way and the patient way in which they spend time with you. That isn't where the strength is found.

They can help you. Of course they can. The strength is really found on your own in quiet, reading the Word of God, listening to God speak and praying.

And you know, as you read, what do you find? What will these people have found as they read Paul's letters and the Old Testament? They'll begin to realize how majestic God is. They'll say, oh, that I knew more of how great God is. And they wait for some experience to happen to them totally out of the blue.

God doesn't work like that. He has great things to tell us about Himself in His Word. We must read His Word.

We must seek to understand what He says about Himself. And as you read, you will begin to see how God wants you to think and how He wants you to live as one of His children. You'll begin to see the world as it really is and have new values.

Why is it so often that Christians, we seem to live for the here and now values, the things that money can buy, the experiences our senses can have? It is because sometimes we haven't grasped the most fundamental things that God is saying to us in His Word. As well as reading His Word, we need to pray. And as you pray, what do you find? The amazing thing is that the God of this Word realizes you can talk to Him about anything.

And He invites you to, and to bring your concerns and so those troubles that you have about going on as a Christian and standing and being clean and being right and being firm and strong and a good witness for Him that you want. Take those concerns to Him in prayer. Open your heart to Him about your problems.

And as you pray that way, you will find that God answers prayer. And as you pray, you will find your life is changing. Feel you're not going forwards as a Christian? Are you praying? This is the way Lydia will be

enabled to remain faithful over the years.

This is the way that the girl who was once possessed will find power to guard her heart. This is the way that the jailer will be turned into a man of grace and compassion by spending time. You know there are loads of books around today about the need of the day.

All sorts of theories and ideas. Our greatest need today is a deeper knowledge of God. You might say I'm not even somebody who's at a stage where I can be concerned about the state of the nation and all those sort of clever books that people read and write.

But you say I'm concerned about how I'm going to stand and go forwards as a Christian. Your greatest need is to spend time with God. Read His Word.

When there's preaching, realize that you're listening to God's Word being spoken about. There should be a sense that we're afraid to miss a service. We're afraid to miss a Bible study.

As you realize that a prayer meeting is about talking to God with other Christians. Be there. Talking to God.

So many Christians get into spiritual difficulty because they ignore the vehicle that God has provided. That little quad bike in the highlands of Scotland took me up the path, took me all the way and I had a great day out. God has a vehicle.

Doesn't break down. Read His Word and pray. And they left.

But they left people in fellowship with God. The camps are over. Conference is finished.

No more meetings like this for a year. And you say and sometimes you hear people say oh I live for these things. We understand we love these things.

Shouldn't live for these things. One who you need more than anything else is with you all the way and all the time. You need to spend time in His presence.

Maybe I speak tonight to someone who has spent far more time in other things recently and with other people than with God. You know if we were to sing that hymn to close, where is the blessedness that once I knew when first I saw the Lord. You say oh I really agree with that.

Are you spending time in God's presence? You've got so many opinions about how churches should be run and what's wrong with the country and all the rest. Are you listening to what God is saying? Maybe tonight, maybe this day is the time to put that right. Get back to those things.

Get on board God's vehicle. Spend time in His word and pray. Nothing more precious.

Nothing more vital. Nothing more necessary. And nothing more glorious.

Spending time with Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we are aware of our failings and our weakness so often.

We are conscious Lord of how easily we spend time with one another and with the passing things in this world. Yet Lord there's not one of us here this evening who would honestly say we are content with the quality of our fellowship with you. So we would pray Lord that in these days of decline just as Lydia and

the others those years ago learned to go forwards by fellowship with you.

Father we pray that we too might be a people who go forwards in fellowship with you. If there are people here tonight Lord who have lost their way in that means of grace of reading your word and praying. We ask tonight that here and now they may recommit themselves to these means.

And they may take up these means with great energy. And you will meet them in these means and bless them and secure them mightily. We ask these things now in our Saviour's precious name.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22636.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/philip-swann/then-they-left/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net