

## Service Overview

**Speaker:** Johan L

**Sermon Series:** 9:30AM Summer Series

**Message:** New Beginnings

**Scripture Reference:** Acts 12: 1-16

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## **Service Welcome** *Speaker: Worship Team*

Good morning, everybody. Welcome to Parramatta Baptist Church. It's so great to have you all here tonight. Also, a very happy New Year! Well, why don't you turn around to somebody new and wish them a very happy New Year?

We're going to begin our service this morning and this new year by praising God with 3 songs. So, would you stand and sing with us? We're going to start with 'This is Amazing Grace.' Let's give God all the praise this morning.

## **Worship Singing**

**Song:** This Is Amazing Grace by Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro, Paul Wickham

## **Mid-Worship Prayer** *Speaker: Worship Team*

Let's pray. Heavenly Father God, we thank you that we can come together this morning and sing of all that you have done. Thank you, Lord, that we stand here as people who are forgiven and set free because of the blood of Jesus and the power of the cross. Thank you, Lord, that, even though we do not know what 2025 holds, and we might have our own hopes and dreams and plans and worries, we know that you hold the future, that you are sovereign over all things, over our jobs, our health, our families, different situations that we might be facing.

Lord, thank you that you go before us, that you go next to us, Lord God, that you're with us always, that we can sing to you this morning knowing that you are holy, that you are mighty, Lord God, that your spirit is with us.

Be amongst us here this morning in church. Lord, we ask, may we glorify you with our voices and our songs and our praise and worship as we hear the message and we pray together. Lord, have your way this morning. We ask that your Spirit be amongst us. Lord, speak to us. Lord God, work in our hearts and we just give you all the praise in this place this morning, and thank you, Lord that you are here. Amen.

## **Worship Singing**

**Song:** Only A Holy God by Dustin Smith, Jonny Robinson, Michael Farren, Rich Thompson

**Song:** Holy Forever by Brian Johnson, Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Jenn Johnson, Phil Wickham

## **Post-Worship Prayer** *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Our God and our King, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. We lift you high this morning. We declare that you alone are worthy of worship. You alone, the whole truth and grace together. And we thank you for your presence here among us by your Holy Spirit, Father, this morning, as we lift our voices to you, as we set our hearts and our minds on you, as we hear your words spoken, and

as we take the symbols of the bread and the cup. I pray, Lord, that you would just deeply touch us and remind us of who you are, your goodness towards us in Jesus Christ. Father may this time that we share together, Lord, bring glory to you, and strength and encouragement to each one of us. For your glory, Lord, we ask this. Amen.

## **Communion** *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Good morning, everyone. Please take a seat. I just want to lead us all into a time of communion as part of our worship.

I love that, during the school holidays, this is something that we get to participate in as a whole church. The celebration of communion is such a significant part of remembering what God has done for us at Christmas. The passage that I spoke on came out of John 1, and you may remember these words where John writes 'that the word became flesh and he made his dwelling'. He pitched his tent among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the father, full of grace and truth. And we're told that the next day, a bit further on in chapter one, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." In the very first chapter of John, he draws this not only into the story of Jesus coming, but also the purpose for why he came. He came not only to live among us and reveal the father to us, but he came to die for us. That in this beautiful exchange, the death of Jesus Christ would give each one of us life forgiveness, and a fresh start.

Jesus gave us a very simple way of remembering this. It involves two very basic elements of a meal, the bread and the cup. And Matthew writes, as he recalls Jesus' words and says, *"While they were eating, Jesus took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat, this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom."*

In these two very simple elements of the bread and the cup, we have the story of Jesus Christ, that he came to us, but he came to die for us, his body broken and his blood shed, and the cup and the bread are symbols of that and reminders of that for us. This is something that everyone is welcome to participate in. If you know Jesus and love him, then this table is open for you. There is no age restriction, this is just a beautiful time for parents to actually speak to your children about the symbolism and the importance of what we do and the story of Jesus Christ, which is so much part of what we've been speaking about over these past weeks, and so you're welcome to do so.

Just allow me to pray for us as we do that. Father, we thank you that in your wisdom and in your love, you did come to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and as we take these very simple elements of

bread and the cup, we are reminded of your love for us in Jesus Christ. And we're encouraged to continue walking in step with you by your Holy Spirit, because there will be a day where we sit at your table and we eat with you. Father, thank you for your grace. Thank you for the truth that you speak, and thank you for your kindness and inviting us to your table. We thank you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Just very simply, in your own time, just come and take some of the bread (there is gluten free options there as well), and take the cup as well and just go back to your chair and just allow that time to be one of thankfulness. It may be that as a family or the person you're sitting with, you may just want to pray together or just share something together as well. But we're just going to allow this to be a spacious time. So just in your own time, feel free to come the tables at the front as well as at the back. Thank you.

*--- Break as the congregation participates in communion together ---*

So, father, we do thank you, and we are reminded afresh of your love for us in Christ Jesus. As we step into this year and all that will bring, Lord, we know that your constant presence and your love is with us, and in that we gain strength. For that, we give you thanks. Amen.

## **Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events** *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Good morning, and welcome to Parramatta Baptist Church. My name's Steve. I'm one of the pastors (I should have said that earlier), and also, welcome back to those who are watching us on the livestream or delayed. Thank you for being here. It really is good to have you here this morning. This will be the last of our 9:30 services, so we will go back to 8:45 and 10:45 from next week. And for those watching the livestream, that means going back to an 8:45 live stream, except on the fourth Sunday of every month, where we do a 10:45 livestream so our 8:45 gets to do open mic.

Just a couple of things we want to let you know before we have our Bible reading. Firstly is that this is just a good opportunity to think through what next year will bring. A number of people have spoken to us about wanting to join a small group, and this year is a good time to think about joining a small group. And so, if you'd like to join a small group, speak with either myself or Bronwyn (who is somewhere in the room up the back), or fill out one of our response cards, which are by the response box by the door there. And we would love to work out the small groups for this year. That would be great.

The other thing, just to be aware of, is that many of our staff are away at the moment, but also this week will be the commencement of getting the basement rectified. There's some works that need to happen there that will also require the shutting down a lot of our communications here. So probably phones and internet will not be working for us substantial part of this week, which means a lot of us will be working (mainly Kathy and I at the moment) will be working a fair bit from home.

So, if you do call and don't get through, that's the reason why. So, if there's an emergency and you know the phone number of one of the deacons or the pastoral team, try us by mobile rather than calling the office, that will be really helpful. All right.

## **Bible Reading: Acts 12: 1-16 (NIV UK)**

*<sup>1</sup>It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup>He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup>When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup>After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.*

*<sup>5</sup>So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

*<sup>6</sup>The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. <sup>7</sup>Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.*

*<sup>8</sup>Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me,' the angel told him. <sup>9</sup>Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup>They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.*

*<sup>11</sup>Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.'*

*<sup>12</sup>When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. <sup>13</sup>Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup>When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!'*

*<sup>15</sup>'You're out of your mind,' they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, 'It must be his angel.'*

*<sup>16</sup>But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.*

## **Sermon: New Beginnings** *Speaker: Johan L*

Hi, everyone. It's so lovely to be back here, to be back among our church family and to be able to join you. So even though we're not here most weeks, we're still very much keeping in touch with people here. I also pray with a group of guys every fortnight, as a part of our ongoing connection with PBC as well. So, it's really lovely to be here and it's such a privilege to be able to speak on the first Sunday of the New Year.

Because, you know, the first Sunday of the new Year is such an excellent time for a fresh start, you know, to have communion together, to be reminded that, in Jesus, we can make a fresh start all the time, that no matter how much we messed up or the mistakes that we've made or, the bad habits

we've been trying to break. You know, in Jesus Christ, we can make a new start and to have a fresh beginning.

And so, looking one of the best stories for that, I think, is this very story here where Peter escapes from prison. Peter had lots of things to think about while he was in prison, awaiting execution, just like James. I wonder what's going through his mind and how frightened he was of what was going to come to him, and then to be released in such an amazing way to show the power of God over King Herod's hand.

I wonder what your biggest challenge was in the year that has just past. I wonder what if you've overcome or whatever challenges you were facing. So, I want to stop and I want to give you some time to turn to the person next to you and talk about a challenge that you faced in the last year. What was the challenge you faced and did you overcome it? I'm going to give you one minute. But make sure that you both have opportunity to share, so don't hog the whole minute.

*--- Break as the congregation discusses ---*

And that's a great introduction to the book of Acts, particularly Acts 1:8, which kind of gives you a whole overview of the book of Acts is all about, really. It's where Jesus says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." All the way through acts, we see God making new beginnings.

Peter's escape from prison isn't the only one. There's lots and lots of them, where God is doing new things, and we see the good news about Jesus breaking out into new areas and across cultural barriers particularly, which is so important, so God shows that he is in charge. He is the one who drives the growth and direction of the early Christian church, in spite of people, not necessarily because of them. So it's not really about the success of the Christians or how clever they are, but God shows that he is a work in spite of the slowness, the sinfulness, and the selfishness of God's people in the early church.

And so here's a story that we see God acting not as we would expect. He breaks down some of the old things before he starts something new. So we see God breaking down a lot of things in this particular story. First of all, he breaks the church leadership. Now, James, who was killed in the early part of this chapter, was a very important leader in the early church. He was one of the top three. So between John and James, who are brothers, and Peter, they were the closest to Jesus, and they were allowed to see things that were involved in Jesus' ministry in a more intimate way than anybody else.

For example, they were on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, when his clothes turned radiant white, and he was talking to Elijah and Moses on the mountain. Peter, James and John were

there. So James was a very important leader, and the church would have been thinking, "Well, without James, what are we going to do now? We've lost one of the most important three leaders in our church." It would have been a terrible loss for the whole church. He breaks the expectations of the believers.

So, they're praying really hard and fervently that Peter will be released, or that he will be spared. But God doesn't act like that. Poor Rhoda is not even believed when she answers the door, and she runs back to the people and says, "Peter is at the door!", and they go, "You've got to be out of your mind. You've got to be kidding." And it's so much like us, isn't it? When we pray for something really hard and really long, and then God answers the prayer, and we almost find it too hard to believe. He breaks the reader's expectations, because we just think it's really funny the way that, you know, Peter gets out and, and then, Rhoda is not believed and then they finally let Peter in through the door to join them.

He breaks Peter. Peter would have thought, "I'm dead. James is dead. I'm next. This is the last night. I've been in prison for a week. There is no hope." And he probably would have been resigned to suffering a similar fate. But then at the end of the chapter, we also see God breaking Herod. He'd been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they had reached a peace agreement. They had a big ceremony. And Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people, and they shouted to him, "This is the voice of a god, and not a man," and immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms, and he died. But the Word of God continued to spread and flourish. And we know that this incident is actually true, because another historian, Josephus, actually wrote about this incident. And so you can double check that it really happened.

You see, God often breaks down our expectations to show us that he is in charge, not us. When we started the Thai Christian Fellowship Group at Central Baptist Church a few years ago, one of the ladies who was the very first people to believe in Jesus and to follow Jesus, she decided she was going to go back to Thailand because she said, "I really want to tell my family and my village about Jesus." And so she went back, and we were praying for her, and she came back a month later and I said, "How did it go?" And she said, "It was terrible. It was so awful. It was so bad. I went down to the local river and stood on the bridge, and I thought about committing suicide because I didn't bring my husband with me. I only had my daughter with me and the whole village was gossiping about me. They thought I'd been working as a prostitute and they were badmouthing me and treating me badly. And even my own mother was down on me as well." And she said, "It was the worst time of my life." And she said, "Next time I want to go back and I want to bring my husband with me." She had a European husband. "I want to bring him back and I want to have a wedding ceremony in the village where I come from."

And she said to me, "Do you know anyone who works there who can help me?" And I said, "Oh, goodness me. You know, Thailand is a big place." This region of Thailand that she lived in has 28

million people, it's more people than live in Australia crammed into an area the size of Victoria. I said, "I really don't know if I know anybody there," but I had a family who I used to supervise in Bangkok who had moved up into that region, and I thought, well, maybe they know somebody who lives somewhat close by, maybe within an hour or so.

And so I made some inquiries. I wrote to them by email. They're a Dutch family, and I said, "Do you know anybody who lives near this particular place?" I can't remember, remember the name of it now. And they said, "Oh, yes, we live 11km away," and everybody that lives in this lady's village knew about the crazy Dutch people who used to ride up and down the rice fields on their bicycles, which is what Dutch people do, right? Every day. Bicycle. And so everybody knew about them and who they were. So, the next year the lady and her husband went back as a family, they had their wedding ceremony, and they had the opportunity to tell the whole village about Jesus. You know, God really broke down all our expectations about what he was going to do. And how unlikely is it that we would actually be close friends with somebody who was right there, who was able to help them?

God does break down our expectations, and he breaks our understanding too. There are some things about this passage I find hard to understand. First of all, when Peter is rescued, he comes back and he says to the people, "Go and tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," and he left for another place. I thought James was dead, wasn't he? He was killed in the first part of the chapter. There's actually two people called James. The first one who was killed was James the brother of John, the son of son of Zebedee. Okay. So he was one of two brothers. He was the one who was killed by Herod.

The other James was the half-brother of Jesus. Okay. And he became a very important leader in the church. And he was the one who led the big meeting where they decided whether the gospel was going to be shared with the Gentiles or not, and what kind of restrictions they would put on the Gentiles who believed in Jesus so that they could also minister to other Gentiles. So there's two people called James. So that clears up that one.

But there's another thing that I don't understand about this passage, and which Peter probably would have been wrestling with as well. And that is why was James killed, but not Peter. Is it somehow that Peter was more worthy than James? It's interesting that Luke writes that Herod wanted to put him on trial after the Passover, which is obviously is a reference to the death that Jesus died, and that Peter was very likely to face the same death that Jesus did. Peter must have known what Herod had done to James and what he was now trying to do to him, and so it wouldn't have been a lot of confidence that God was going to intervene to save Peter. After all, Peter was not any more worthy than any of the other disciples. Think about his relationship with Jesus. You know, he fought with the other two, James and John, about who was going to be top dog, who's going to be set at the right and the left, and who was going to be Jesus' right hand man. He really blew it there. He betrayed Jesus not once, but three times. He was too chicken to own up.



You know, it's really hard to understand why some people suffer and why other people seem to go free. Why is that? You know, Jane\* and I went to Bible college in the late 80s to the early 90s to prepare for ministry, and we lived on I lived on campus. I developed some very close relationships with the guys that I studied with, some who are serving all around the world now. But at the same time, we can think of at least 4 or 5 people who Jane and I studied with who are now dead. Some have died from cancer. It was a twisted bowel that killed another one. Suicide was another one.

Another one was a close friend of ours who was an evangelist, and he's been bedridden for over 20 years with chronic fatigue. Why did sickness and death hit them and not me? I've had 3 near-death experiences from car accidents and motorcycle accidents. But I'm still relatively healthy for my age. Many of my friends are not. God has given me a longer life and good health, and I'm really thankful for that. But in the end, it doesn't mean we are more blessed than my classmates who have died. Maybe it just means that God has a use for me in this world before I go on to the next one.

Now, we don't know exactly why God saved Peter in such a miraculous way, but he did and showed God's power over the ruler who tried to stop the spread of the good news. And as a result, Peter was able to speak at the Council of Jerusalem, which was the really important meeting that James looked over, where they made the decision that the Gentiles could join the church on an equal basis, and it didn't make it too hard for them. And as a result, the church grew to include people like us, and we now have the blessing of knowing the good news about Jesus and to have a relationship with God.

God is at work despite his people, not because of them. There are no heroes in this story except for God and the angel. Peter doesn't do anything except what the angel told him to do. He gets a new chance at life that he didn't expect. Herod wanted to get rid of Peter in the same way that he got rid of James, and in the same way that the other rulers killed Jesus and Stephen before them. In the end, God broke him.

And Luke, who wrote it to for us, he tells us that it was because of Herod's refusal to give glory to God and to give praise to God. The believers, they pray, but then they don't believe Rhoda when she tells them that Peter is at the door. Some believers will not believe even when their prayers are answered. Let's not fall into the trap of praying without believing that God is at work and that he's going to do something amazing through the prayers of his people.

People are fickle and fallible. People are selfish, and they're not like God, who is always dependable and secure and will keep working even when people give up. And here we see that this is all God's work. He's the one who breaks the chains around people and Peter, he's the one who breaks open the doors of the prison. He is the one who breaks Herod. He's the one who breaks the expectations of the Jewish leaders and believers when they pray. And when Luke writes Acts, he's not writing about the acts of the apostles. He's writing about the acts of God, the acts of the Holy Spirit, what God is doing to bring forward his church in spite of the obstacles and the barriers in the way.

So, what can we learn from this story? How does it help us? We're not likely to be thrown into jail or executed tomorrow, now or next week. This story is quite different from the experiences of most of us, but there are still some good lessons that we can take from this one. First of all, I think what Luke is trying to point out is how powerful God is compared to Herod. Herod was a loser. Kings like Herod are going to perish no matter how much they puff themselves up and make themselves important. The people of Tyre gave praise to Herod for their own political reasons, not because they worshiped him, and so Herod was condemned not for what he did, but more for what he didn't do, and that is to give praise to God.

We need to make sure that we are following King Jesus, even during times when it's hard and when it's painful. Peter had no guarantees that he was ever going to be free again, or that he was going to live to see the next day. But God saved him. God gave him more time on earth because God still had things for Peter to do.

I listen to a podcast last week and the podcast was about leadership and the guy who was being interviewed, he said, "It's really rare to find people who have a conviction that they are here for a purpose, that God has called them for a specific purpose and for a specific role, even in churches, even among Christians."

I want to ask you, do you have that conviction? Maybe you can think back to a near-death experience that you've had and think, "Well, God saved me from that, and I must be here for a specific purpose, and I want to know what that purpose is." You may not be deserving of it. Peter certainly wasn't, and I'm sure he didn't feel that he was. But like Peter, you are here on purpose. Some people walk around their whole lives thinking that they are a mistake, or they just make mistakes. But God doesn't make mistakes. He made you. He put you here and he wants you to live your life for him.

Not for money. Not for your parents, not for your friends, not for other people's expectations. Not your career. Not for anything else except to know and to love the Lord Jesus with your life. He loves you and gave his life for you. What more proof do you need of his love for you? Except that he was willing to give his life for you on the cross? Are you prepared to give your life to him in return?

So I want to encourage you to do three things. One. I encourage you to pray because prayer works. Pray works not because you pray well, or you pray long, or you pray a lot. But prayer works because God listens to you and he will work his plans into your prayers. He will change you through your prayers and will renew you in your inner being. So commit yourselves to prayer and sometimes God will answer prayer in the most surprising and exciting ways. Sometimes God will change you so that you have the power to trust him, even through the most difficult and trying circumstances. We don't know what he will do, and he will often do what we don't expect. But he will work, and he will change you if you ask for his will to be done.

Trust him. Peter would have been very uncomfortable being chained up with soldiers right there with him, but that didn't stop him from trusting God. He was asleep, so he obviously wasn't overly concerned about what was going to happen to him.

Wait. You know, our natural inclination is if we have a problem, we want to fix it and we want to fix it now, it has to be done quickly. But God doesn't always work like that. Sometimes he will fix things in his own way, in his own time. I'm not saying we shouldn't do anything to fix our problems, but we also need to be patient and allow God to do it his way. We think that Peter probably spent a week in prison, but God didn't intervene until the last night, so Peter would have had a week to think about what was going to happen to him.

One of my frustrations as a mission agency leader is the lack of mission vision in white European churches in New Zealand. Many churches in New Zealand think that mission means reaching out to your community around you, the church. Sending people overseas to millions of people who've never heard about Jesus before is just not a high priority on many churches' agenda.

It seems to be kind of a relic of an old colonial past, which is now outdated and should be discarded. And young people, who would be suitable for cross-cultural mission, are often so busy paying off their student debt, or getting caught up in their careers, or getting married and buying property, or building a family that they don't want to think about sharing their faith with the unreached people of East Asia. You know, there are 150 million unreached people right on our doorstep just north of Australia.

But there's very little vision for reaching them. However, where we are seeing a vision for missions is among Chinese and other Asian churches. Many of them have a lot of respect for missionaries who've taken the good news of Jesus to Asian countries. I often get people coming to me from Asian churches and saying, "Oh yeah, my grandfather was brought to Christ by a missionary, and I really want to give my life to serving in the same way." And we've seen a number of young and middle aged people being willing to serve God with their skills and experience, to take the good news of Jesus to those who've never heard of before, to use their profession to get into countries where traditional missionaries just can't go. And that's so exciting.

So while God seems to be closing the door on some people to be involved in mission, we're seeing God moving among other churches that we don't really expect. And that's exciting. So whatever discouragement and challenges you're facing right now, I want to encourage you to trust in the Lord Jesus that he will continue to guide you over the next year. Right now is a good time to renew your commitment to follow him and to let him lead and to guide you. And this story is a great reminder to us not to let our discouragement rule over us.

There will be people like Herod in your life who want to snuff out your desire to live a life dedicated to God. Don't listen to them or allow them to defeat you. God is still in control, and he wants to use

you for his purposes. So, as you move into another year, I want to urge you to give yourself to God in the same way. The next year might be the only one God gives you, so use it for his glory instead of doing your own thing.

So Peter thought his life was coming to an end, but God had other plans. So as we stand moving into a new year, let's remember that God is still in control and has a purpose for each of us. So I'm going to give you a little bit of time to reflect. I want to invite you just to write down one specific way that you can commit your life to God in the coming year.

Maybe it's dedicating more time in prayer, serving in a new ministry, joining a home group, or sharing your faith with a friend. Whatever it is, write it down. If you have a notepad, some of you do, or even a phone, just write yourself a little note. It's good to write it down so that you have a memory of it. We've been given another year in this world. Let's make the most of the extra time that God has given to each one of us. If we're not living our lives intentionally for God, then we might miss out whatever he wants to do in us and through us. As someone said, if you don't aim for something, you'll miss it every time.

### **Post-Sermon Prayer** *Speaker: Johan L*

So let's pray together. I'm going to just give you a minute of silence, and then I'm going to close off in prayer. Give you time just to think, to write something down, say, "Okay, this year, I feel that God wants me to do this." And then I want to challenge you as we leave to share that with somebody. Somebody close to you or somebody who can hold you accountable for that. "And so how are you going with that? You said you were planning on doing this. How is that going for you?" So let's just take a moment of silence and then I'll finish with a word of prayer.

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank you for your ongoing and marvellous love for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that you often do the unexpected, not the things that we necessarily hope for or think that you're going to do, but sometimes you'll do even greater things than that. Father, we thank you for this fantastic story of Peter being led out from prison, of the people praying, but then hardly believing that you actually did what they were asking for.

We pray, Lord, that you will help us to be people who operate in the same way. People who put you first, Lord Jesus, people who are willing to allow you to work in our lives, to commit ourselves to prayer, to trust you, and to wait to see the things that you're going to do to. Help us, father, to trust you with our whole lives and with the coming year ahead. We ask in Jesus' mighty name, amen.

### **Worship Singing**

**Song:** Living Hope by Brian Johnson, Phil Wickham

## **Post-Worship Prayer** *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

God, we thank you that you are the God of the new beginnings, that at the start of this year, we're reminded that constantly you are allowing us to step into new things, to walk away from our past and step into the future that you have for us.

So, father, my prayer is that we would be people who are praying, trusting, but also having that preparedness to wait and to see what you will do. But go with us as we step into this new year. Thank you for your presence and your love, which is unending. To you be the glory, amen.

## **Online Outro** *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

*\*Names have been changed to protect privacy.*