

Beyond the Big C - Hope in the face of death

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[0 : 00] It was a great joy to have Jeremy Marshall with us and what follows is an interview with him, his sermon from Luke chapter 7 and a time of Q&A.; We hope you enjoy it. Well, as I mentioned, it's a real joy to have Jeremy Marshall with us this morning. Jeremy, thanks so much for coming and being with us. There are all sorts of other things you could be doing with your Sunday morning.

I'm very grateful that you're here with us. I know we'll hear more from you as you preach later in the service, but we'd love to get to know you a little bit and hear about your life and circumstances. We've got about 10 minutes or so. Jeremy, why not start by telling us a bit about who you are, where you are, family, that kind of thing. Sure. So thanks so much for inviting me. I'm just a bit further south, just on the edge of the M25 in Sevenoaks.

I'm married to Jeanette and we've got three adult children plus two assorted spouses, girlfriends, whatever here. So quite a household. We've also got a daughter in Cambridge who's doing a PhD and then two boys, the youngest of whom is just about to graduate, except, of course, he won't graduate.

But he's not so sad about missing his exams. He's more sad about missing the cricket season. Thanks, Jeremy. And you used to be in London working. Tell us about your career and what you used to do for a job.

[1 : 22] Yeah, I used to work in private banking, which is a euphemism for helping very rich people like yourself, Jake, make a lot of money and expand their vast fortune. So I worked for 20 odd years for Credit Suisse all over the world. And then about 12 years ago, I was headhunted to be chief executive of a family owned private bank called Seahore & Co., which knowing a bit about Dulwich, I'm sure there are a few people watching who I'm familiar with.

But don't worry, your secret's safe with me. It's a 350 year old family owned private bank. And I was fortunate enough to be the first ever non-family chief executive. Give us a bit more of a flavour of that. I can't comprehend. What sort of thing does that mean you were doing?

So in general, private banking is about helping wealthy people with their money, advising them, investing, lending them money. And Halls Bank is an amazing place, still owned by the same family. It's on the 12th generation of family ownership and fantastic building in Fleet Street. Been there since 1690 and full of old masters, courtyards with fountains and gardens.

Yeah, it's an amazing place to work and a dream job, really. And by the sounds of it, you were working with some of probably the richest people in the world, I guess.

[2 : 40] What was that like? What were some of your observations about that? Well, the rich are like the rest of us. They've just got a lot more money. But one thing I think that's very striking is that, although, of course, on average, it's easier to be worth a few billion than to be living on a rubbish heap.

A lot of rich people are not happy. And a man called Jim Carrey, the actor, said, I wish everyone could have their dreams come true so that they could see that having your dreams come true doesn't make you happy.

And I think that's true with some wealthy people. I can remember one very successful and wealthy person I had breakfast with one morning and about three days later, they committed suicide for reasons that have never been explained.

So it's a mirage to think that having huge amounts of money makes you makes you happy. One of the things I think with very wealthy people in the city is they're often very driven. They're very driven. They're searching for something.

And enough is never enough. If you get to 10 million, you want 50, 50, 100. And there's always something more. There's a kind of restlessness, I think, with many people in the city. Not everybody. Some people are content.

[3 : 46] But in general, the argument that having a lot of money makes you happy is not true. Thanks, Jeremy. That's really interesting. You don't do that anymore. I've heard you talk before about the day that your life changed.

Could you say a bit more about that? Sure. Yeah. So it changed twice, really. Once was nearly eight years ago, just after the London Olympics, when I found a tiny lump on my rib in the shower. Ended up at the Marsden.

They said, you've got this rare type of cancer called a sarcoma. I went through treatment. And then for about two years, everything was fine. And then almost exactly five years ago to the day, I was here in Seven Oaks at a friend's house.

And I went to adjust my collar. And on my collarbone, I felt this time a massive lump, like a golf ball, not like a pea. I went back to the Marsden. They ran tests.

And then I was waiting in the waiting room with my wife. They said, come through. We walked down a little corridor. The nurse just said, I'm really, really sorry. I went into the room. There were all these oncologists there.

[4 : 47] And they said, look, we're really sorry. We don't know how we missed this because I've been through screening. But you've got tumors everywhere. And there's not really a great deal we can do. And obviously, the next question you ask is, well, how long do you think I've got?

And they always, well, you know, who knows? But basically, after pushing them, they said, well, 18 months. So please don't think I'm some kind of amazing Christian or expert on cancer. No, when they told me that, I burst into tears.

And it's really hard to have cancer. I'm also on a sort of one-man mission to absorb all spare NHS capacity. So if you read about hospital crisis, I'm the person responsible.

I've had, I'm now in my 26th chemo. I had it on Thursday. So if I fall asleep in this, you'll know why. My hair's still here, but it is coming out. I've had a dozen operations.

But I've also done ophthalmology as well as oncology. I was blind for a while. I recovered the sight in one eye. And then the last few weeks, I thought, hey, let's try something else. So then I went on to cardiology because I had chest pains and a high fever.

[5 : 50] And I was admitted to hospital. And actually, they thought it was COVID. And they still sort of think it was COVID because I had this inflammation of the area around the heart, which is very classic for COVID.

And I keep testing negative. So who knows? So, yeah, what I'd say to everybody watching is welcome to my world. So for the last five years in particular, I've been living with the fear of death. Every time somebody coughed or sneezed on a train, not in the last few months, but in the last five years, I was afraid because as now I have no immune system. So that experience has been a tough one.

In my book, I compare it to like being on a comfortable train journey, going into London, maybe on a commute. And suddenly there's a kind of rattle and you're switched on to another line, not the line you thought you were going on to a comfortable destination of retirement, but a line that's marked death.

And the grim reaper comes and sits opposite you in the carriage and starts looking at you. So that's been my world for the last five years. And in a strange way, which I'm sad about, I wish it wasn't so, but now everybody is experiencing something of what I've been experiencing.

[6 : 57] Well, Jeremy, thanks so much for talking so honestly about some of those things. We'll have more time for lots of questions later. I'm sure there'll be all sorts of things that people want to ask.

But I guess one thing that might come to mind is people, you're a Christian. You've really very clearly suffered in all sorts of ways.

And so it might be that some people are thinking, why do you believe? Who is this God that you believe in? How, if he's so good, if you think he's good, why has God put you through this?

Where is he in this? What sorts of things might you say to something like that? Yeah, look, it's a great question. And please do come back to me. And also, if you're watching and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian or you're not sure, please be as sceptical and probing as you like.

You can really ask me anything. I love doing this. Where is God in this? He's with me. When I go through, I've had about a dozen operations you're being wheeled in.

[7 : 58] I've also had various MRIs, which I hate because they feel like you're being in a coffin. And I'm afraid. I'm afraid. And I feel when I remember the promises of God.

Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. So God doesn't promise us a bypass around the valley of the shadow of death. The Bible says it's given to each of us to die.

And after that, the judgment. What he promises is much better than a bypass. He promises that he'll be with us if we trust in him, if we believe in him, if we place our hand in his hand.

And he also promises us that we're going somewhere. The last verse of Psalm 23, which I just quoted is, surely goodness and mercy will follow me every day of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So as a Christian, we can know the presence of the Lord Jesus now. And in facing death, that's been my experience. We can know where we're going. Why? Because one day, 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

[8 : 58] We're going to talk about that or something related to that in a bit. So Jesus Christ is both the past, 2,000 years ago, the present that we can know him now, and the future.

Because if we trust him, we're going home. And what's home like? No more fear, no more suffering, no more pain, no more death. Jesus says, I have the keys of death and hell.

If you have the keys to something, you own it. So death is a terrible enemy. But Jesus says, I own it. Jeremy, thanks so much. We're looking forward to hearing more from you later as you help us with Luke chapter 7 and answer some more questions at the end of the service.

Soon afterward, he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

And a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep.

[10 : 07] Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still, and he said, Young man, I say to you, arise.

And the dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all. And they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people.

And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Thanks so much, everyone, again, for watching in. Jake posed me this question.

What's the Christian answer to fear, suffering, death? There are lots of philosophical or theological answers we could raise, but what the Christian answer really is, is a person, Jesus Christ.

And that's who I want to tell you about today. And to do that, let's go back 2,000 years ago. Let's go back to Palestine. Imagine a country the size of Wales. And we're in the northeast corner.

[11 : 13] And we're at the top of Lake Galilee. And we're in a town called Capernaum. And we're with Jesus. We're one of his followers. Please imagine that. One day, Jesus says to his disciples, let's go to Nain.

Now, Nain is about 20 miles or so from Capernaum. But it's a really out-of-the-way place. There's nothing special about Nain. And maybe you can imagine a kind of walking, large crowd going off to Nain.

And maybe you would think, why are we going to Nain? That's such a strange place to go to. And it would take all day, pretty much, to walk. And imagine some kind of walking university, walking college.

Jesus is teaching people. And as the day comes on, we begin to draw near to Nain. And we're going up a hill. Nain's on a hill. And as we're going up the hill, this large crowd with Jesus, we notice there's a large crowd coming out of the town.

And the two crowds meet in the gate of the city. Maybe if you have like a narrow road in Dulwich, there's two cars coming the other way. One's going to have to give way, aren't they? Because they both can't come through at the same time.

[12 : 13] And that's what we see if we look here. If you've got a Bible with you, don't worry if you haven't. It says, soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain. And his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.

As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother. And she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. Now, there's something very interesting here, which is 20 miles is a long way.

And at just the right time, Jesus is coming up the hill at just the time that this funeral procession is coming the other way. A funeral procession, by the way, full of sadness and grief.

Because this poor lady, she's lost her only son. Death is terrible in our time. But in those times, if you were a widow, you had one son and he was dead. That was it, basically. No social security.

And probably because of that, that's why the crowd of the town is so moved.

They go out with this grieving lady. But you see, at just the right time, Jesus meets this funeral procession going downhill. Jesus is coming uphill.

[13:21] And they meet five minutes earlier. And the funeral procession wouldn't have left the town before Jesus arrived. Five minutes later, the funeral procession would have already gone.

But no, at just the right time, Jesus meets this funeral procession. And by the way, if you're watching this, I believe that's the same for you. At just the right time, Jesus meets us.

Because we're all on the way to death, aren't we? It's strange, coronavirus. Because it's made us think about death. Those daily death numbers, 528, 436.

Every day, those numbers are sort of seared in our minds, aren't they? But the curious thing about humanity is that the one thing in life that's certain is death, right? I'm sorry to be so cheery on a Sunday morning.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers, said, You can avoid everything in life except death and taxes. Having worked in private banking, I can tell you that's not altogether true. But you can't avoid death, can you?

[14:17] No, you can't. So Jesus meets us at just the right time. At just the right moment, he meets us on the way to death. And each one of us is going to die.

Well, why are we going to die? Well, the Bible says the wages of sin is death. Now, there is natural evil in the world, isn't there? There's coronavirus, there's cancer. But there's also, if we just look in the newspaper, there's stabbing in Reading.

There's evil, moral evil. And not just moral evil in other people. If we're honest, there's moral evil within each one of us. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who spent 20 years in a Soviet labor camp, said this.

He said, The line between good and evil doesn't run between countries, doesn't run between political parties. It doesn't even run between people. It runs right down the middle of each one of us. And if we're honest, each one of us have done things that are wrong. Each one of us have broken our relationship with God. And God could justifiably say, You chose to disobey me. You chose to do things wrong.

[15:17] Very well, have it your way. But the wonderful news, friends, and this is amazing that God doesn't give us what we deserve. No, that's amazing, isn't it? He doesn't give us what we deserve. That's what the Bible calls mercy.

But he does give us something we don't deserve, which is he meets us on the way to death. So there's Jesus meeting this funeral possession at just the right time. And he meets us at just the right time.

And I would suggest to you, and I know this may seem unlikely, that if you'll open your ears, he's meeting you now. Now, what's the next thing we see? When the Lord saw her, the lady, the grieving lady, his heart went out to her, and he said, Don't cry.

Then he went up and touched the bearers. That's B-I-E-R, not B-E-E-R. They were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. So I want to draw your attention to two characteristics of Jesus Christ. What's Jesus like? Because if we're in suffering, there are, I suggest, two key questions. Is there a God? And if so, what's he like? We might think there's a remote deity who made the universe, put it underway, but then doesn't really care, is indifferent.

[16:29] But the Christian message is the opposite, that God is not indifferent, that he became a human being. And when God sees us in our suffering, and when he saw this poor lady in her suffering, grieving, taking her only son to be buried, he says here in the English, in my version, it says his heart went out to her, or he was deeply moved.

But literally, I'm not a Greek scholar, I got this from reading a commentary. The word in Greek, which is what the eyewitness accounts are written in, is this, it's splenkenor zanomai.

If there are any Greek scholars listening, and I got it wrong, you can correct me afterwards. What does that mean? It means literally his intestines were twisted. In colloquial English, which I'm sure we don't speak in Seven Oaks or Dalits, but we may in other parts of London, you would say, Jesus was gutted.

You see, God is not a remote deity, but he became a human being, and he suffered. Jesus suffered. Now, the incredible creator God, who made the universe, he can't suffer, but the son of God, fully God and fully human, as we were rightfully praying earlier on, can, and he experienced fear and suffering.

In fact, he went to the cross. He suffered far more than we would. Why? Because he loves us. And the cross, Christians believe, is the only way that we can get right with God, the place where Jesus paid the bill.

[17:52] And what's also amazing is, I think, Jesus' empathy with this woman. Because, first of all, he says, don't cry. And secondly, he does something which we might easily miss, which is, he goes up and he touches the stretcher.

Now, it wouldn't have been a coffin like we would have in a funeral. It would be a stretcher like if you, I'm a Watford fan. Some of you might think there's enough suffering in my life without adding extra suffering. Anyway, we had a good draw yesterday.

And I was watching the Arsenal-Brighton game and the Arsenal goalie was carried off on a stretcher with a bad injury. That's the kind of thing it would have been, an open stretcher with maybe a cloth over the face. And Jesus goes up and he touches the stretcher.

Now, for a rabbi in those times, that's a very strange thing to do because that makes you ritually unclean for seven days. And normally, in the culture of that time, when you touch the dead body, that would, if you like, infect you and make you unclean.

But Jesus has something unique, which is, he reverses it. He reverses it. Jesus is about to make the boy alive. It's not, death has death and evil and suffering have no power over him.

[19:01] And that touching also is a touching that he touches us today, I believe. As you listen to this, I believe Jesus reaches out to you and touches you and says, don't go to death.

Don't go to death. That's the Christian message. We had that wonderful quote earlier, didn't we, from Jake. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and I am the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, will live.

That's the heart of the Christian message. So we see Jesus' compassion. We see God's compassion and compassion for us. God could justifiably leave us in the mess we're in, heading for death, but no, he intervenes.

We can't save ourselves. Nobody can save themselves from death. We can't get rid of the grim reaper, can we? Even if we live, and I hope you all live, to a hundred, we can't get rid of him.

But Jesus has this incredible compassion and empathy and connection. And the Christian claim is this, the creator God that made the whole universe and everything in it became a tiny, helpless baby, lived a life, went around doing amazing miracles, died on a cross, and we need something else, right?

[20:13] Because if there was just a God who met us, and if there was a God who was full of compassion, that might be like us. Imagine, God forbid, that one of our children was ill, or a loved one, or a sibling, or a parent, and we would go and meet them, wouldn't we?

We wouldn't leave them. I know when I was in hospital, no one could come and see me, but normally we would go and see someone who was very ill, and we would be full of compassion. We would feel moved. I remember when my father was dying, I felt full of tears and sadness.

But that's not enough, is it? That's not, because we can't do anything about it. But here's the amazing news. Not only does Jesus meet us at the right time, not only is he full of compassion, but he can do something about it, because what does he do?

Then he went up and touched the bearers they were carrying him on and the bearers stood still. He said, Young man, I say to you, get up. The dead man sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. God has come to help his people. This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

[21:25] By the way, we might say it's kept spreading for 2,000 years on, hasn't it? Like a kind of wonderful virus, not the coronavirus, but the God virus that's kept spreading and spreading and

spreading. And now here, it's kept spreading to us 2,000 years later.

Now, interestingly enough, almost exactly the same place, just a few miles away, a man called Elisha, who was a powerful, amazing prophet of God about 1,000 years or 800 years before this. He had also raised a young boy from the dead and probably the people in that area would have remembered that story, but there's a crucial difference. When Elisha raised the boy from the dead, he prayed, oh God, give me this boy back again.

But Jesus doesn't need to do that because he's God. He doesn't need to appeal to a third party as we would. No, he's God. He just says, young man, I say to you, get up and the young man comes back to life.

And friends, this is in front of probably hundreds of witnesses. This is not done in a corner. This is something in public view and Jesus must have logically also healed this boy of whatever illness he'd had.

[22 : 32] It would have been rather crazy to heal him and then he died again immediately. No, he came back to life. And what's coming back to life like? It's about restoring communication, isn't it?

What does the boy do? He begins to speak again. That's why death is so grievous. My father died nearly 20 years ago. I would say most days I think about him and maybe some of you do that with loved ones.

You think, oh, I must tell him that and you think, no, I can't. He's dead. But Jesus restores that communication. He also restores our communication with God because this resurrection is a picture of two things.

First of all, it's a picture of Jesus' own resurrection. And that, friends, is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. If there is hope in the face of death, and I realise that's a very, very big claim.

And if you read our friend Richard Dawkins, he'll tell you there's no hope in the face of death.

There's not even any meaning. Dawkins says, the universe has nothing to say but blind, pitiless indifference. But the Christian claim is that there is hope in the face of death and that is based on evidence.

[23 : 32] The people in the story who were praising God and said, this is amazing, God has come, which was right. That was the right thing to say. They didn't, it wasn't wish fulfillment. No, it was evidential.

It was factual based. And this resurrection of this boy, who would one day, of course, die again, this points us to a much, much greater resurrection, which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Christianity stands or falls on this. On the morning of Easter Sunday, AD 33 or 34, just a short time after these events, did or did not this happen?

Did the stone get rolled away from the tomb? Did Jesus, who'd been dead for three days, come back from the dead? And was he then seen by hundreds, even 500 people at one time?

If that didn't happen, then that's, Christianity is a delusion. It's the biggest con in history. But if it did happen, then friends, and this is amazing, there is hope in the face of death, not just hope for me, hope for anyone.

[24 : 34] This is nothing about me being a religious person or people on this being religious. No, this is something external to us. The Christian message is we can't save ourselves. But the Son of God who became a human being, who died for us on the cross to take our sins, he proved he was God by rising again from the dead.

Now, just finally then, maybe some of you are watching and thinking, well, okay, very interesting story, but what response is required in the story?

Well, we didn't read this before, but if you want to go back and you read the first few verses of Luke, there are two stories that are contrasting. This is about a Jewish lady with a dead son.

The previous story is about a Roman centurion with a dead, with not a dead, but a dying servant.

And in that story, there's tremendous faith because Jesus says, yeah, I'll come and heal this guy.

And the centurion says, no, no, no, you don't need to come. I'm in charge of my soldiers. I tell this man, you go here and this man go there. So just say the word and the servant will be healed.

[25 : 38] And Jesus says, wow, I haven't seen such great faith even in Israel. And there's a contrast here because this is the faith in Israel. Now, maybe you're thinking, where's the faith in the story?

Where's the faith? Jesus just, the widow doesn't say anything. The boy can't say anything, can he? He's a picture of us, right? He's dead. He's dead. And he hears the word of Jesus saying, get up. And that's a picture of becoming a Christian. So where's the faith? Here's the faith. Then he went up and touched the beer they were carrying him on and the bearers stood still.

Now, what were the bearers of the stretcher thinking, friends? I suggest to you they were curious as to what was going to happen because they weren't expecting this, were they? And maybe some of you weren't expecting to meet Jesus this morning.

But he stands in front of us and the bearers stood still. Now, they could have done something different, couldn't they? They could have said, excuse me, we've got a crematorium appointment to keep.

[26 : 37] Excuse me, who are you? Just keep out of the way. They could have just pushed past. But no, they stand still because they're curious. They think, oh, I've heard about this man, Jesus.

I think he's raised other people from the dead. Maybe he'll do something. And friends, what matters is not the amount of faith we have. It's better to be the Roman centurion than to be the bearers of the stretcher.

But both had faith. They just had very little type of faith. And if you have a small faith or even if you don't have faith, if you have curiosity, you think, well, maybe there's something in it. Then I beg you, look into this further.

It's crazy not to you. What I'm offering today is do you want life or do you want death? It's as simple as that. And death is not just physical death because we all must go through that, but eternal death, separation from God because where are these people going?

Where's death taking this boy? He's taking him downhill. He's taking him away from life. And Jesus stands in the way of death and he stands in the way of your death. And he stands there and says, I am the resurrection and I am the life.

[27 : 43] And I implore you, what have you got to lose? Look into it. Now, Jake put some of those ways you can look in further. Look at the evidence. Decide for yourself.

Let's imagine after lockdown, you think, I know I need a new car or I need a secondhand car or I need an old banger or something. I need a car. What do you do? You research it, don't you?

You go on the internet, you go to Auto Trader, then you go to a showroom or you go, you find someone with a car to sell and you have a look at it. You don't just drive off in it. And I'm not asking you to drive off in the Christian faith, drive off with Jesus Christ.

I'm asking you, look at the evidence. And I believe as you look at the Bible, which Christians believe is a series of letters from God to us and especially one of the four eyewitness accounts.

And those were written by two people who were with Jesus and two people who came immediately afterwards and investigated and spoke to the eyewitnesses. They're reliable. You can ask me why. I think they're reliable afterwards.

[28 : 40] And those eyewitness accounts, as we look at them with a Christian friend, either in a course or one-on-one, whichever you prefer, then I believe Jesus Christ offering you life will step off the pages.

But there is a choice because you remember the 23rd Psalm, which I quoted earlier. The Lord's my shepherd, I shall not want. There's only two shepherds in this life. One shepherd is the Lord Jesus leading us to life.

The other one is death, right? Leading us away from God. Who wants to go with death? Why, friend, why choose death over life? It's insanity. It's madness. And what do we need to do to become a Christian?

We don't need to do anything. We just come with open hands. This widow wasn't expecting Jesus, was she? She wasn't expecting anything. She was expecting death. And suddenly, without any warning in front of her, is someone who says, I have the keys of death and hell.

And that's what Jesus says to you this morning. And I would, as a friend, I don't know you, but I would long that everybody would come to know this saviour because he makes all the difference to me facing death.

[29 : 47] And he can and will make all the difference to you as well. So receive the Lord Jesus Christ, I urge you. Believe in him. And even if you think, well, I'm not ready to believe, then at least, like the bearers of the stretcher, be curious and look further.

May God bless you and thanks so much for listening. And please do ask me any questions you like. Anything at all is fine. Thank you. Jeremy, thanks so much for what you've shared with us so far. There's been some really good questions come in.

I'll try and group them as best I can. Try this one for starters. When did you put your trust in Jesus and how did that come about?

Yes, I was brought up in a strongly Christian home. In fact, my father was a pastor, but those of you who know those kind of kids know they're the biggest trouble. And I used to drive my father around the bend because I didn't, I didn't like going to church.

I didn't like listening to him. I used to argue with him incessantly. So one thing, so I'd say it was a gradual process. But one thing that played a big part was my father was a bit eccentric.

[30 : 51] Every summer he used to take us Bible smuggling behind the Iron Curtain. So there I had, if you like, an early taste of suffering because we went to these churches, especially in the USSR, where often the pastor would be in a Soviet labor camp.

And if you were a young person in that church, you couldn't get a job. You couldn't go to university. You couldn't find even somewhere to live. And yet these people had this amazing hope. Amazing. So that made a big impression on me.

Why on earth were these people following Christ? It was a completely stupid thing humanly to do. Maybe unlike being in England where historically being a Christian has been quite respectable. And the only thing that occurred to me was because it was true.

Otherwise it was bonkers. So yeah, I was a Christian, but also having cancer is an acid test, right? Not everybody who has a serious illness necessarily goes one way or the other.

But what I found was when I was really ill was, yeah, did I really believe what I said I had believed before? And yes, with God's help, I can say I do.

[31 : 53] And if I would say I'd experienced more of God in the last five years than in the previous 50, I would also say tongue firmly in cheek, if you want to be, have help with evangelism, get cancer because it's great.

It gives you a powerful incentive or it can do to tell others because you realise, wow, this is, I've got something amazing that I want to share. Thank you.

I think this is a great question. You mentioned and I mentioned too a couple of ways of initially getting started and thinking about some of these things. This question says, I have been examining, but I'm still not sure.

What should I do? Yeah, great question. Great question. Keep examining, friend. Keep examining. And you know, we talked, didn't we, about what's Jesus like?

We talked about his power over death, but we also talked about his compassion. There's a great story in the Bible which shows Jesus' compassion for us as we struggle with our doubts. And by the way, I have doubts and fears.

[32 : 56] And the story is Thomas, right? Doubting Thomas. So if you don't know the story, it's this very simply. Jesus' other ten disciples meet Jesus.

Thomas isn't there. He misses out. When they tell him, we've seen the Lord. He's risen from the dead. Thomas goes, no, no, no, no, no. I don't believe that. You must be joking. In fact, he goes further. He says, I will not believe unless I can put my fingers into the nail holes in his wrist and my hand into his side where a Roman soldier thrust a spear to check he was dead.

That's pretty ghoulish, right? Now, a week later, Jesus appears to Thomas. You would think, wouldn't you, and maybe this is for the friend who asked this, that he would say, Thomas, you were with me for three years.

This is disgraceful. Go away. No. What does he, he gives him more evidence. He says, okay, Thomas, here I am. Please go ahead. Now, Thomas falls on the ground and says, my Lord and my God, okay, because eventually the evidence is overwhelming.

But Jesus then says something amazing, which is really helpful, I think, for anyone struggling. And all of us struggle with this. Being a Christian is not about eliminating 100% of doubts and questions.

[34 : 03] It's about meeting Jesus Christ, which is what Thomas did. And Thomas is told by Jesus, Thomas, you're blessed because you've seen and believed, but much more blessed are those who haven't seen and yet have believed and what's belief?

I would say this to the friend who asked this question. It's not an intellectual ascent that these things happened. It's meeting Jesus and trusting him. That's the essence of being a Christian, meeting

Jesus and trusting him.

So if you're still struggling along, I'd also encourage you to ask questions. That's what I used to do with my father, driving him nuts, right? So if you've got all these questions, that's great.

I hope you have a Christian friend or if not, Simon or someone I'm sure would be happy to help you. Ask. Ask anything. Jesus promises this. Ask and you will receive. So come.

Come to him with doubts. Come to him with questions and I believe you'll get answers. Thanks, Jeremy. There's three questions that are fairly similar. I'll ask you all of them and you might like to distinguish between them.

[35 : 09] I can pick and choose. Yeah. But I think they're on a fairly similar theme and you can see what you want to say to them. So the first one is you must be, do you ever have moments where you doubt?

If so, how do you remind yourself of God's promises? Do you ever, do you ever doubt God's goodness? How to say, how do you stay so positive in the face of cancer? And the third question on a similar theme is I'm going through cancer at the moment.

I'm afraid. How do you get through it? Well, I've got to take the third question there because that's a kind of fellow sufferer. Look, I do feel afraid. I often feel afraid.

And yeah, I've never doubted whether God exists, but I do doubt why on earth this is happening to me and what's going on. So I didn't, where do I find, if I'm ill at the moment, I'm on all these heart drugs, right?

So the doctor gives me and when I take them, if I need medicine for my soul, I go to God's word and I would go here to the third friend, especially to the story of Jesus in the storm, right?

[36 : 13] That's a wonderful story. I find that amazingly helpful. I've done, by the way, 20 devotions. If you go to Gafcon or you go to my blog, which is JSJ Marshall, I've done 20.

I've nearly finished them. And one of them is about Jesus in the storm. So very simply, here's the story. The disciples are told by Jesus, let's go to the other side of the lake. Tremendous storm blows up.

The boat begins to sink. Jesus is asleep. What do the disciples and what do I feel? We feel God doesn't care. God doesn't care. And the disciples roughly wake Jesus up and say, don't you care? We're going to drown. And Jesus gets up and he rebukes the waves and it's complete calm. And then he says, then it says in the eyewitness account, it says the disciples were even more afraid. Isn't that strange? And that's been my experience. They were even more afraid in the calm than in the storm because it began to dawn on them who Jesus was, that he wasn't just a rabbi.

[37 : 15] He was the son of God because only God can do a creation miracle and calm a storm. So in the storms of life, in cancer especially, we can have two doubts. One, is there any God?

It's just random. And secondly, does he care? Does he care? And yeah, that's sometimes what I feel. Why me? Why not somebody else? And what I can say is that I have found the Lord Jesus to be trustworthy, not just full of compassion in the previous question, but also trustworthy because what does he promise us?

Friends, he promises he'll bring us to the other side and the other side is through death to himself where there'll be no more pain or crying or sorrow. So if you are a Christian and you're going through cancer or you're facing death or suffering, the Lord is in your boat, friend.

And even though he may appear to be asleep, he's not and he will bring us to the other side. And if you're not a Christian, then please, I beg you, I implore you, get him into your boat because each one of us is going to die.

But yeah, where do I find help? I find help when I read God's promises. Look, I'm with you always, even to the very end of the age. I'll never leave you or forsake you and I find those amazingly helpful. But I do have doubts and fears.

[38 : 27] Yeah, that's to be human, right? Thanks, Jeremy. One more question just to round things off. Someone asks, you must be a person who's highly motivated. How has the fear of dying changed your motivation?

That's true. I don't think, I've done a lot of these. I've never been asked that question before. Yeah, I guess I was fairly motivated, probably wrongly motivated to make money, I guess.

I don't know, going into the city, not doing something like Jake or Simon, more useful for society. Well, as I touched on earlier, this is not about me.

I'm not a holy person. I'm not a person who, I've tried to be honest, I hope, and talk about my fears and so on. But what I want to talk about is not me.

I want to talk about somebody, the Lord, who makes all the difference, who walks with me through the valley of the shadow of death. And each one of us is walking through that valley, whether we know it or not.

[39 : 25] And the valley, if you like, has closed in in the last few months. Now, maybe hopefully it'll close, it'll open up again. But what the motivation I have is that I feel I have some body amazing I know and I want to tell other people about him.

and also God himself is telling me to tell you about him. The Bible says God is patient, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to faith in him.

So that's what we're about as a Christian. We're not about being moral or about being good or respectable. No, we want to tell you about Jesus Christ, that he's amazing and that he's the answer to life and death.

Jeremy, if somebody wanted to get in touch with you, what would be the most helpful way of doing that? Twitter, email, what's the most helpful? Email, email is the best thing.

Yeah, or if you want to read more of my ramblings, you can read my blog, especially I've done 15 of a 20-part series on trying to cope with fear, suffering and death. And that 20-part series looks at different passages in the Bible.

[40 : 27] It looks at things we haven't had time, well, I've just touched on, Gethsemane, for example, where Jesus is experiencing that terrible fear and suffering of the cross or the road to Emmaus. That's a great story if you've got doubts or questions, by the way, because the disciples on the Emmaus road are riddled with doubt.

I could preach a sermon on it, but I won't, I'll be kicked off. But they've got the evidence staring them in the face because they've been told that morning by women, and we should probably listen to women more, that everything that Jesus said was going to happen had happened, but they don't believe.

And what happens? Jesus opens up the word, the Bible to them, and their hearts are warmed. Did not our hearts burn within us? So that's my last word. If you're struggling along full of doubts, then meet Jesus, meet him through his word, and your heart will be warmed.

Jeremy, thanks so much for joining us. As I mentioned, you could have been doing all sorts of things, and we're so grateful that you were with us for this morning. Thank you. If you want to read Jeremy's blog, I think you could probably find it just by searching Jeremy Marshall on Google, but I've put the link to it in the chat, and I've also put Jeremy's email address there.

If you've got questions that you didn't want to raise publicly, but you want to put to him, do send him an email. He likes to answer that sort of thing. Thanks so much, Jeremy. Well, I hope you've enjoyed being with us this morning.

[41 : 55] Thanks so much for coming. Thanks for watching. I hope it was an encouragement and a help to you. If you'd like to find out more or think a bit more about some of the things Jeremy was talking about, you can get in touch with us by emailing admin at [gracechurchdulwich.org](mailto:admin@gracechurchdulwich.org), or you can watch more content like this on our YouTube page, which has all our recent sermons.

Or if you'd like to, you can join us on a Sunday morning. We'll be on Zoom for the foreseeable future, so get in touch, and we'll provide you with the details for how you can join. Thanks again. Thank you.