

The Love of God

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[0 : 00] Lord, speak into our lives with your authority.

Speak to us with love, with hope and with strength so that we might hear you and know deep inside our spirits that we are your people and that you are our God.

Amen. Amen. I could pretend that this was just a normal service, that the events of last Sunday didn't happen, that we didn't have the news that we have had.

And I could choose to ignore the difficult situation we find ourselves in. Amen. I don't want us to get caught up in witch hunts and apportioning blame.

Going down that route isn't helpful. But I do want to acknowledge the pain and the hurt that so many folk have expressed to me.

[1 : 23] This morning, many of us are wounded in spirit and soul.

We're not sure of what to do. And I have no easy answers.

But one thing, this morning's reading, in that still small voice of Jesus, says to us, perhaps it's taking up what Jesus said, that the world don't need to go to the doctor.

It's those who are sick that need to go to the doctor. And perhaps we only come to Jesus when we're desperate, when we're in need of his healing, when we're in need of that restoration of our souls.

And it's there, and the Omi there, that we can find that closeness and that intimacy with him. Whilst I was preparing for this morning, I came across a poem in an introduction to a book.

[2 : 55] It was a book called The Ragamuffin Gospel.

And in it, a chap called Brendan Manning describes what the gospel was for.

The people whom the gospel is intended for. And he says it's not for those who've got it all together. Not for those who know everything.

Not for those who think they've got all the understanding. And they know God's heart and they know God's mind. He says it's for those who don't know.

Those who are exhausted. Those who are worn out trying. Those who are hurt and bruised. That's what the gospel is for.

[4 : 01] God has found God's heart and bruised. And he wrote his book because he was such a person. And he wanted to reach out to people who were hurting like he had been.

And just to bring to them the love of God expressed in Jesus and shown to us in the Bible. God has given us, put us in that place of receiving from him.

And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing. And it's the thing.

And it's the thing. And it's the thing. In our hearts. Where we have to examine ourselves. But it's a place where we don't do that self-examination alone.

We do it with the Lord. We do it with the Holy Spirit. Because he doesn't want to dredge up things to point the finger and to condemn us.

[5 : 27] He wants to mend. To mend what's broken. To renew us. To restore us.

Let's have a look at the words that we've read. Come to me. Come to me.

Come to me. What an invitation. This is Jesus. This is Jesus inviting us to come to him. I remember when I was a child my nan used to take me into town, into Liverpool on a Saturday and she would give me lunch.

You're perhaps wondering where this is going. But from the restaurant I'd look out of the window across at what was I think, now I think it was Liverpool City Mission.

and above the door there was this text. Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[6 : 38] That was a message for the people of Liverpool back then. And I believe it's a message for us today. We are carrying a heavy burden. We are carrying a heavy weight.

But we come to Jesus with it. Because we are the people that he's there for.

Those who carry that burden are there. He's there for us. You see, in Isaiah it says he won't he won't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smouldering wick.

So if your flame is only burning in a tiny little way, if your flame of faith feels as if it's only hanging on by a fingertip by the nearest breath, Jesus isn't going to blow it out.

Jesus isn't going to blow it out. I'm not going to blow it out because he's not going to do that. Jesus wants it to burn and to burn stronger. He's not going to snap the reed and throw it in the fire if you feel you're a bruised reed.

[8 : 03] He's not going to snuff out your tiny little flame of faith. He's going to fan it into a big flame.

Into a flame that reflects the fact that he is the light of the world. Isn't that amazing? That's what he wants to do for us. He doesn't want to snuff us out.

He doesn't want to make us as nothing. He wants to build us up. The Bible talks about having faith the size of a grain of mustard seed.

And that was an image of the smallest seed possible at the time. That's all we need. The smallest glimmer of faith.

God's And Jesus can do marvellous things with us. We need to come to him. We need to take him up on his invitation to come to him.

[9 : 13] And when we do we find he's there for us. That he has our backs. The passage said when we come to him he puts his yoke upon us.

Now a yoke was something from the agricultural practices of the New Testament times where having one animal to pull a plough or a cart wasn't enough.

They needed two. And so they had that wooden bar that went across the animal's necks to hold them together so that they would walk in step. And then they could draw the load.

They needed both animals. We need Jesus. Jesus is not an added burden. Something else that we have to include in our lives out of some sense of duty or tradition or custom or family habit.

Jesus is not an added burden. And the yoke that he puts on us that joins us to him he says it's easy. It's not going to rub us and chafe us.

[10 : 39] The yoke on the animals have been basically tailor-made for them. They're made to fit each creature and Jesus fits with us as he knows each one of us.

We have a tailor-made relationship with him. Your relationship with him is different to my relationship with him. But we all are united in having a relationship with our Lord.

And that burden that we're pulling, that burden that we're carrying is lightened because now Jesus shoulders it with us.

He doesn't take it away necessarily, but we no longer have to bear it alone. And there is a lot of wisdom in the adage, a problem shared is a problem halved.

And it's a lot less than halved when it comes to Jesus. He takes the lion's share of that burden. So why are we yoked with Jesus?

[11 : 58] Why are we put next to him together to deal with our difficulties and our problems? A young animal doesn't know what it's doing.

It doesn't know how to make the cart move. It doesn't know when to stop and when to go. It doesn't know what pace to walk at.

So an inexperienced young animal is yoked with an older one. One that knows the ropes. One that understands what the job's all about. That's what discipleship is.

It's being with Jesus so we see how he does things. So we learn the ropes from him. From the ultimate teacher.

nature. And you know as we do so, as we learn his ways, as we learn from him, as we rub shoulders with him, we find we have that rest for ourselves.

[13 : 10] Jesus was somebody who you could imagine would have every reason to be on the go, restless, not at peace with himself, because he carried, he carried a burden, he carried the knowledge that his life was going to end on the cross.

He lived the life of a homeless person. He says that even the foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

you know, his son was always at rest. He was always in that place of peace, apart from perhaps those hours in the Garden of Gethsemane when he had to find that place of peace again.

He wants to reach out to us with that same peace. peace. And Jesus had that sense of peace, because he spent time with his father.

Before everybody was up, Jesus would be up, and he would go out of the house he was staying in, into a quiet space, away from all the hustle and bustle, away from people demanding his time, demanding miracles, bringing their sick to him.

[15 : 02] And he would find that space just to be with his father. father. He was embodying the words of that wonderful psalm that we are so taken with, the 23rd psalm.

And the shepherd makes the writer lie down in green pastures, leads him by his side still waters, and restores his soul.

Jesus found that equivalent of the green pastures and the still waters. He found that place of soul refreshment, a place where he could stop and rest physically, but perhaps more importantly, recharge his spiritual batteries.

So, as I've said, discipleship is about learning by example. And so, we need to look and see how Jesus lived, so that we can copy him.

We need to set aside time to be alone with God. We're all very partial to our electronic devices and our TV sets.

[16 : 29] perhaps we should be putting them aside for a time, so that we're not distracted by them. Perhaps we're not like Jesus and having people bringing their loved ones for healing, but we've got other things that distract us.

We might go out for a walk, go up a mountain, go plenty round about us, or maybe it's just as easy to go to your bedroom, but to find that quiet place, that place to listen for God's still, small voice, a place to experience his presence.

we might not do a lot of actual praying or talking, we might just take on and take in the enjoyment of being with God.

That's what Jesus did. Let's learn from him and try and do it ourselves. and you know, we don't always get it right, do we?

I find it very difficult to find a quiet time, a quiet space, because I don't sit and do nothing very readily.

[18 : 04] but I find if I get out and I walk, I can find that space. And when I haven't for a while enjoyed his presence, I get crotchety.

I get, I'm not the person God wants me to be, and I have to come back to him. I know his forgiveness, I know his restoration, I know the broken bits of my life are being mended.

You see, I'm somebody who is quite self-reliant. I like to do things, and I have a way of doing them.

And very often, try to do it in my own strength. I need to thought after rather too many years of being a Christian, or rather not enough years of being a Christian, I would have learned.

But you know, still make mistakes. things. And I still need to come back to Jesus. I still need to say yes to his invitation to come.

[19 : 36] And just let him know that I can't carry today's burden on my own. That I need him beside me. That I need that bond between us to help me, to lead me, and to guide me.

I need him to teach me his ways. Because that's when I'll find rest for my soul.

it's when you will find rest for your souls too.