

Jesus - Alone, Yet Not Alone

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[0 : 00] John chapter 16, John 16 verse 31, these words, Jesus answered them, Jesus answered his disciples, Do you now believe? Behold the hour is coming, indeed it has come, and you'll be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone, yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.

For those of you who have been here for the last three weeks, you'll remember that we've been looking at examples in the Old Testament of individuals who acted alone, who acted with great courage in the face of adversity.

We looked at two men, two men whom God used, two individuals who stood for truth before the enemies of God.

And those men who showed great courage when they took their stand for truth, when they relied on God to enable them, to help them to do what God had given them to do before others.

The first individual, if you remember, was the Judge Shamgar. Remember, he single-handedly, we're told in the Book of Judges, he engaged in battle with 600 Philistines, single-handedly, using an agricultural implement, having no help from any of his own people, none from amongst God's people willing to help that man.

[1 : 34] Only Shamgar, one man against many, and yet used mightily of God. And then, the past two weeks, we looked at another individual, Baruch.

We noticed this secretary, a Jeremiah secretary. This man whom Jeremiah dictated the word of God to, to give to the people in Judah, because the people had been so disobedient against God. Jeremiah wasn't permitted to go into the temple to give that word, so Baruch, the secretary, went in on his own to deliver that word to the many, many hundreds of people before him.

And then, not long after that, giving the same word before the king's officials, standing as one man before these others, delivering God's message from the same scroll.

God would bless Baruch for his faithfulness, for Baruch standing for truth. When Baruch stood alone, as it were, in the face of so many who were unfaithful towards God.

[2 : 41] So, we saw these two individuals, these individuals who were alone, yet not alone. Alone in the sense of standing for truth in their particular circumstances, before a vast number of people, whether they were indifferent to the word or hostile to it.

Yet, these same individuals were not alone. Because God was with them through their aloneness. God was with them to strengthen them, to equip them, to equip them for the task that God had given them to do.

And with the promise of God with them, the same promise that we have for each one of us, who knows the Lord, who loves the Lord, that promise that when you are alone, you who call on the name of the Lord, who are His, when you are alone, maybe in the face of hostility for your faith, maybe when you're rejected because you love the Saviour, maybe when you're separated from because of your faith, when you're alone, you have that assurance that you're not alone, that God is with you at all times.

And that promise stands true, it stands strong for all who are God's people. You can think of the words of Jesus, and Jesus gave to His disciples, Behold, I am with you always, as we said to the children, even to the end of the age.

And with that promise, that promise of Jesus towards those who are His, towards you, you who know the Lord and Saviour, well, we're going to turn to these words that we just read a moment ago, where Jesus speaks of Himself and His aloneness, and Jesus being alone, yet not alone.

[4 : 28] And looking at these words, particularly in the context, of course, that Jesus gives them in the hours, in the moments leading to His death. Now, in a fortnight's time, God willing here, we will

again be remembering the Lord's death through the act of communion, through the sacrament. So even now, it's good for us, in a time of preparation, to dwell, to think on the experience of the Lord Jesus in the hours before His death, and the hours before His death. And to consider His aloneness in relation to His disciples, yet His not being alone in relation to His Father, as we see here expressed in John 16.

So, three things, the main headings to consider this morning. Firstly, we're going to look at the fragile faith of the disciples. And then we're going to look at the falling away, of course, the temporary falling away from Jesus, by these disciples.

And then thirdly, this great statement, the fact of Jesus alone, yet not alone. So, firstly, the fragile faith of the disciples. As we said just before we read this chapter, I mean, Jesus is giving His farewell speech to His disciples, and He's doing it to encourage them.

[5 : 50] He's assuring them that though He's going to be away from them physically, they're not going to be left on their own. He's already spoken to them about realities to come.

He's spoken about the hatred that they're going to face from those who hate the Lord Jesus. But, as Jesus promises, He's going to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, the help of the Holy Spirit.

So, when Jesus does depart, the disciples and all who are His, Jesus are not going to be alone. So, they're not to be discouraged. Not to be discouraged at the prospect of Jesus' departure, nor be discouraged about the persecution that's going to come.

Because they're not going to be left alone. Jesus says at the start of chapter 16, I've said all these things to you, to keep you from falling away, to keep you from falling away utterly.

And as Jesus, of course, tells them this, He gives them this detailed account of the Holy Spirit to come in their lives. And yes, they're going to face persecution, but they'll have the resource of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them.

[7 : 01] The helper, the comforter, will be theirs. And as Jesus gives this reassurance of the Spirit's work, as He focuses in on His death, tells them they're going to see Him no more.

See that in verse 16. But then they will see Him again. The resurrection, surely. He says there'll be a weeping. There'll be great sadness at His death. But then joy will come when they see Him again. And of course, that's exactly what happened. But that seeing again of Jesus, of course, is going to precede Jesus' departure into heaven. Jesus is going to return to His Father.

Because of course, He's going to return from whence He came. He's going to return to heaven from earth. And the disciples at this point, yes, they express their belief that, yes, Jesus truly has, that the Lord has truly come from God.

Okay, they haven't understood everything about Jesus, about His death, and about His resurrection, and His ascension. But they say they believe Him. Yes, we know that You know all things.

[8 : 10] We don't need to ask You any more questions. Jesus answers. Jesus searches their hearts. He gives them the statement. Just listen to the intonation. Do you now believe?

Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming. Indeed, it has come when you'll be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Do you now believe, Jesus says?

In other words, how little faith you have, disciples. And it's one thing to state, Jesus is saying before me, that you believe. But what about when your faith is really tested?

When you're really tested in the fire of adversity? Jesus tells them. He plainly tells them. You know, you might see you believe, but you're actually showing the limitations of your faith.

Because Jesus says, you're going to be scattered, soon scattered. You're soon going to be separated. You're from me. And then I'll be alone. Now, before we actually look at this, falling away from Jesus, from leaving Jesus alone, each one of us has to pause at this point and ask, and you ask yourself, as I have to ask myself, in the sincerity of our own hearts, do you believe?

[9 : 24] Do you believe? Is your faith in the Lord Jesus, that firm faith, that sure faith, that adequate faith, that reasonable faith, that's going to stand in the pressure of the world?

the pressure of that mob mentality, that despises the Christian for her faith, for his faith? You who take the Lord's Supper in a few weeks' time, yes, that will be a public profession of your faith.

You'll be expressing, that I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for me. But what about the quality of that profession? Because you're going to come up against the world. The world's going to mock you, as it mocks your Saviour.

You're going to be tempted to compromise in a million and one ways, to pressurise you, to conform to the world, to squeeze you into the world's mould.

That mould that has nothing to do with the Gospel of Truth. Are you going to stand? As the hymn asks, Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold, their wings are striped, when the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

[10:47] That's okay, that's poetic language. Maybe in some cases, old-fashioned language, but it makes the point. Is your faith strong enough for the time when you are going to be battered for your faith?

When you are going to face the storms of hostility, and mockery, and rejection, and separation? When you are going to be left alone? Will your anchor hold?

I mean, do you know your heart, in other words? Jesus knew the hearts of His disciples. But you see, at that point, the disciples didn't truly know themselves.

I mean, they're expressing confidence in their belief. You know, we believe. But that confidence is going to be shattered when that testing time soon comes. And they'll run away, all of them run away from the Saviour.

That's exactly, as we know, what happens in the next few hours after Jesus tells them this. And Jesus is left alone when He's bereft of His companions. And that takes us to our next point, the falling away, the temporary falling away from Jesus.

[11:55] Because Jesus plainly tells them, you're going to abandon me. In that hour, in that moment of great crisis, when the forces of hell are going to be arrayed against Jesus, the same disciples who moments before had expressed their belief in Jesus, they're going to run away.

They're going to be scattered. They're going to flee to the safety of their own homes. They're going to leave Jesus to face the hostility of His enemies. So what do we make of this falling away from Jesus?

Are we going to condemn the disciples? Are we going to discredit them for their lack of faith? Well, surely we have to say with others that what we're reading here, yes, of the falling away of these disciples surely tells us that the church, the church of God, the church depends ultimately on what God has done, what God has done on the Lord Jesus and not on the courage of these first disciples.

Yes, these early disciples were those who would form the early church. Of course, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, they were the ones who founded, as it was humanly speaking, founded the church.

But they were discredited men, of course, by their falling away from Jesus. But it's these same men whom Jesus entrusted to build His church and doing so not on their ability, but in what the Lord Jesus had done to strengthen them, to empower them by His Spirit, to forgive them, to forgive them for their sins.

[13:36] And you know, these disciples who knew that forgiveness of the Lord Jesus, they would carry that with them for the rest of their lives. So what about ourselves?

Because, of course, Jesus is still building His church and He's building His church through weak, fragile, yes, often immature, people like myself, like others, because I have, you have.

You've failed them so often. I've been found wanting so frequently, falling away from Jesus when I ought to remain firm when facing those who were attacking my Savior.

When I'm sure we can all save truthfully. There have been these times when we've preferred the security of being at a distance away from the fight rather than in the front line itself.

When you've been called to stand alongside the Savior and you've run away. Can you connect that with your experience as a Christian? Well, the disciples certainly could.

[14:43] I mean, that very night, that very night when they claimed to believe, they would run away from Jesus. Running away and all that scattering.

Jesus is using this language here to speak of just, you know, running in all directions because of their fear. And Jesus was betrayed when the attackers came and the Romans, the soldiers came, the temple guards rather came.

The disciples run away. As we said, these same disciples are going to be the founders of the church after Jesus ascends to heaven. These same disciples are going to spread the gospel fearlessly, courageously.

These spirit-filled men are going to be those apostles whom God will send to proclaim salvation in Christ alone. So, here's Jesus' words to these disciples telling them that they're falling away or that they're being scattered.

Yes, of course, they tell of the weakness of the disciples' faith at that moment, that point in time. But that is not the end of the matter because they'll return.

[15:50] They'll return to be with Jesus. Why? Because of the love of Jesus. Yes, the disciples are going to desert Jesus temporarily. It's not going to be forever because of the constraining love of God.

God who saved these men, these individuals. That love would keep saving them. And that's a wonderful reassurance for any Christian, any believer here today. Maybe times when you've fallen away from God.

Yes, when you've drifted away from your Saviour for whatever reason. Perhaps fear of others. Perhaps even lack of faith in the God of love. But remember, He never leaves you even though you might fall away from Him from time to time.

But that still leaves us here to consider this profound statement of Jesus. We might say this divine paradox. You know, on the one hand, Jesus saying when the disciples leave Him, I'll be on my own. I'll be alone and yet not alone. Alone yet not alone. Alone bereft of the disciples' companionship and support yet not alone because His Father is with them.

[17:07] So, I think we need to look at this in two parts. Look firstly at the aloneness of Jesus and do it to worship Him, to exalt Him and to deepen your understanding in His suffering, His suffering for us, even what He endured for your sake, even in His being alone bereft of His disciples' companionship at this critical point in His life.

So, Jesus says, you will leave me alone. What do we take from this? Well, the first thing to notice here surely is that Jesus is wholly aware that He's fulfilling Scripture.

Some 500 years before this, the prophet Zechariah prophesied of this very happening in the life of the Messiah. You go to Zechariah 13 verse 7, the Old Testament, where we read, Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, was the shepherd of the Lord Jesus, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts, strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

And as Jesus is nearing the time of His crucifixion, He becomes more vocal in telling His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, that He must suffer for them there, that He must die for their sake. He's come to save. And He's fulfilling Scripture. He must go to Jerusalem. He must suffer there. He must die for sinners. And now Jesus telling even these disciples that they're going to leave Him, they're going to be scattered.

[18:42] Again, Jesus showing His utter awareness of His fulfilling Scripture. And surely this assures us of our trust, our full trust in salvation through Christ alone.

You know, when we think of the promises of the Old Testament, fulfilled in the New, the promises from a loving God who's promised to send a Messiah, the Christ, the Savior, Jesus is fulfilling that promise through His suffering, through His obedience, through His being willing to come from heaven to earth to suffer for your sake.

And yes, even to suffer alone, so that you might have the eternal company of God, your Savior. So Jesus must suffer, He must suffer alone, He must suffer the indignity of being separated from His closest earthly companions, just as He's approaching the cross, just as He's about to hang there on that cross.

He must suffer that loss, yes, temporarily of course, but these moments when His suffering is real and suffering is deep. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, remember just not long after He mentions these things to His disciples here, remember what happens in the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples, His closest disciples, they sleep.

He asks them to keep watch and pray, but they fall asleep. And then, of course, in direct connection with this prophecy, Jesus is arrested and His disciples scatter.

[20:26] They go this way, that way, every other, every way. And then when He's tried, even when He's tried and Peter stands at a distance, Peter the man who at one point had claimed He'll never desert you, Jesus, he denies Jesus three times.

You know, in human experience, when you're hurting, when you're suffering, when you're in pain, is it that time you most crave the company of others, friends, loved ones.

Some here have known bereavement in recent days. You want, you crave that loving support of others whom you know are going to support you, to care for you. Even to receive a letter in a time of loss is a great comfort from a friend.

Even that arm around your shoulders. that to care, that to will give human kindness if you like, to give to somebody who's utterly lost in bereavement is something, if you've ever gone through that, you know exactly the comfort that that brings.

Look at Jesus here. I mean, He's about to bear the sins of His people. He's about to face the pains of hell. He goes alone without His disciples.

[21 : 46] He does it for your sake. He's going to face His accusers. He's going to face His enemies. He's going to face the mockery of men. He's going to face the enmity of Satan. He's going to be that lamb that's led to the slaughter.

And His companions will have deserted Him in that very hour of His suffering. Jesus will go to the cross alone and do so in full obedience to His Father's will and He'll do it with that supreme courage.

He's not going to turn back. Even though His friends have turned their backs on Jesus, Jesus will not turn His back on God His Father. Not even that very Thursday evening before His crucifixion. We have to save. For a Savior. For a Savior who was willing to be alone for the sake of those for whom He came to give His life.

for whom He suffered in the intensity of His aloneness. Even now as we're meditating on the suffering of the Lord Jesus, praise Him.

[22 : 54] Worship Him. Worship Him for that obedience, for that courage, for that strength. Because He didn't turn back. He didn't indulge in any self-pity.

He's going to go where the Father has sent Him for the sake of salvation for sinners for whom Jesus came to give His life. Even if that meant going alone, Jesus did it.

Even if that meant being separated from those who had been with Him for these three years. Even separated from His three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John. And yet, while Jesus is going to be alone from His disciples, the disciples scattering after His arrest, Jesus will not be alone.

What does He say? Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. We mentioned the agonies of Jesus in Gethsemane.

Remember, soon after this conversation here with His disciples. And you read it, as we notice in Matthew 26, of the disciples sleeping when they should have been awake, keeping watch with Jesus.

[24 : 02] But what's happening at that time? We're seeing Jesus not alone because He's with His Father, His Father with Him. Jesus is calling on His Father, Ask Father, My Father, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not as I will, but as You will.

And then a few moments later, again Jesus addressing His Father as My Father. If this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done. So, even there in that hour of Jesus' need, He is not alone.

His Father is with Him. God the Father is in full communion with God the Son. Jesus is not alone when He's facing His betrayer, Judas Iscariot. He's not alone when He's facing the cruel mockery of the Roman soldiers who fawn some kind of obedience to Him.

Jesus is not alone when those mockers taunt Him on the cross. Jesus is not alone when He gives up His spirit and He cries out, it's finished, it's accomplished.

He's fulfilled everything His Father has given Him to do. He is that once for all sacrifice for sins for us. He means such was the love of the Father towards the Son that the Father, when Jesus said, Father, into your hands, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, my God, the Father, the Father, receives that spirit of Jesus.

[25 : 31] You know, the Father went to the cross with the Son, with Jesus. Yes, we know there'll be that moment of dereliction when Jesus, in His sin-bearing, would cry out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But that was a moment. It was a moment when Jesus bore the sins of His people, when the Father couldn't look upon sin, when Jesus became sin for us.

It was a moment, remember that moment, as we said, when Jesus gave up His spirit and death. Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit. And so, we come before, yes, before God the Father and thank and praise Him for His faithfulness to Son and indeed to thank Him for all His blessing towards those of His people who may be alone and yet are not alone.

because if that love of the Father we've seen here, that love of the Father to the Son speaks of God's faithfulness in time of trial, even the trial of Jesus and His suffering, then the love of the Father with you should encourage you when you're going through particular times of difficulty and suffering and you know that you might be alone, humanly speaking, and yet not alone for God is with you.

Yes, alone perhaps, being abandoned by others, but not alone, God is with you. It's said that Jan Hus, the famous early 15th century Czech martyr, when he was imprisoned to await an execution for his faith, that it was this verse in this particular part of John 16:32 that comforted him particularly when he looked at himself and his imprisonment alone, yes, bereft of human companionship, human support, and yet knowing that the Father, God the Father, God was with him.

[27 : 36] And I pray that many of you here are going through particular times of hardship, pain, suffering. Well, you recall these words of Jesus. He's alone, but not alone, for the Father is with me.

Jesus knew the Father's love when all else around him deserted him. Jesus continued to the cross with that knowledge of the Father with him.

Well, you think of that love of God towards you. You think of that love keeping you, watching over you, providing for you, with you, with you always, knowing that you're not alone.

The almighty maker of heaven and earth, he cares for you. It's with you always, you who are his by faith, faith in the Lord Jesus.

This verse has been a particular blessing to myself, really, all this past week, the past few days, and I pray it's a blessing to you in such a time as this.

[28 : 41] It's a blessing, I pray, that for you, as you walk with your Lord and Saviour, that you abide in him, you keep abiding in him, and know that he is faithful, he's true, and that God will truly bless each one of you in his ever-present love with you and for you, for his sake, for his glory.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we give you praise for the comfort of your word, for the encouragement of your word of truth, that when we are alone, we're not alone.

Lord, you're with us. Lord, assure your people of that love. May your people know that you're with them, and that you never leave them, you never forsake them, you're with them always.

So here is, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. Bless our final psalm of praise for this morning. Bless us, Lord, and keep us. May your face shine upon us in your love.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 143, page 439, the second version, from verse 6 to the end.

[30 : 05] The tune is Heber. Lord, I do stretch my hands, to Thee my help alone, for Thou will understand all my complaint and moan, my thirsting soul desires, and longeth after Thee, as thirsty ground requires, with rain refreshed to be.

Verse 6 to the end, Psalm 143, to God's praise.