

Without Me - Communion Preparatory Service

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Before we begin, there's just one intimation, and that is that the session is already opened, and there is an opportunity given to anybody in the congregation who has not as yet professed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ publicly by coming to the table to meet with the session after. I'd be very pleased to meet with you. We begin our service singing in Psalm 139, Psalm 139, verses 1 to 10.

Psalm 139, verses 1 to 10. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up. Yea, all my thoughts afar to thee are known. My footsteps and my lying down thou compasses always.

Thou also most entirely art acquainted with all my ways. For in my tongue before I speak, not any word can be, but altogether, O Lord, it is well known to thee. Behind before thou hast beset and laid on me thine hand.

Such knowledge is too strange for me, too high to understand. From thy spirit whither shall I go, or from thy presence fly. Ascend I heaven, lo, thou art there, there if in hell I lie.

Take I the morning wings and dwell in utmost parts of sea. Even there, Lord, shall thy hand me lead, thy right hand hold. Shall me? Psalm 139, verses 1 to 10. O Lord, thou hast me searched and known.

[1 : 36] O Lord, thou hast me searched and known. I love my city, love.

I'm rising up. Yea, O Lord, my Lord, who's of power to thee are known.

By first steps and my lying down. The compasses for me. Thou also.

O Lord, thou hast me seen.

O Lord, thou hast me seen.

[3 : 35] O Lord, thou hast me seen. And even me thine hand. Such knowledge is to take for me.

To hide, to understand. To hide, to understand. From thy spirit whither shall I go, or from thy presence fly. Ascend I heaven, lo, thou art there. From thy spirit whither shall I go, or from thy presence fly. Ascend I heaven, lo, thou art there.

O Lord, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there.

Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there.

Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Thale where, thou art there.

[4 : 43] Where, thou art there. Where? How, you are O poor. Where, thou art there. Let mine, lo, art there. Where, thou art there. Where, thou art there. Who art there. Who art there. Bless brow. Where, thou art there.

Inroscopy, who art there. ienza priority world. Then■■ great Mario a. Hereafter save a day. How, you stay good? Wherefore shall thy hand be?

Will thy right and home shall live? Let us pray.

Lord, we give thanks this evening that we come before the God who has searched us, who knows our sitting down and our rising up. We give thanks that there's nothing about us that is hidden from you.

And although that can be at one level a disconcerting thought, as we view our own lives and the deceit that is so much part of us, and the sin that indwells us, and so often we can have a sense of shame of who we are and what we are.

[5 : 55] And yet the wonderful thing is that all of this is known, and that in Jesus Christ all of this is forgiven. We are told that if we confess our sins, that thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And so, Lord, we bow in your presence tonight, giving thanks that we come before this God, our Creator God, the God who has brought this world into being, and brought us into being in this world.

And the God who is not only the Creator God, but the God who governs over all, who knows the end from the beginning, who does according to his will with the armies of heaven, and with the inhabitants of the earth, and who can stay your hand.

But also the Saviour God, the God who has made provision, and the God who has done everything that is necessary, in order that we may be saved.

And so we give thanks tonight anew, for your great and wonderful love to us. And we give thanks as we prepare in our hearts, and as this congregation has been doing, preparing to come to the Lord's table.

[7 : 14] Lord, we give thanks for that wonderful provision that you've given to us, as a means of grace. We give thanks, Lord, for the way you look after us so carefully and intimately, and this means of grace to strengthen our faith.

And we pray, Lord, that we might be encouraged in the provision that you have made for us. Now, Lord, as we look to you tonight, we pray that you will bless us, and that you will come in with us, and that you will do us good.

And just like the disciples on the Emmaus Road, as they found that the Lord was for making to go further, they said to him, they pleaded with him to stay with them.

And they are saying that the day is far spent, to come in with them. And we pray, O Lord, that you will come in with us. And the day is far spent, as far as we're concerned, too, because our lives are short, and our time will soon be over.

For some, it'll be soon over. The day of our departure from this world is far closer to us now, for many of us, than the day of our birth.

[8 : 28] And so we pray that we might have the wisdom to count our days, and to apply our hearts to wisdom, and that we may seek to be found in the main things. And the main thing is to be found in Christ, and to be seeking to be more and more like him.

And we ask for that heavenly desire, that we might set our affections in the things that are above, not in the things on the earth. Although many of the things of this earth legitimately occupy our thinking and our time.

And we are caught up in many things. Help us, Lord, not to be absorbed by them, to the expense of seeking to be right with you.

And help us, Lord, to seek you in all that we do, so that our lives will be consistent, and that we will live consistent Christian lives in our dealings with everybody.

Whether it be at home, or if it's in a place of work, or whether it be at school, or whether it be with other people. Lord, our God, we ask that you will help us, and that we might seek to follow you with all our heart.

[9 : 39] Forgive us when our following might be half-hearted. Forgive us, Lord, when, like Peter, we might be following from afar off. Although it is good to follow, it's not good to follow afar off.

We pray that we might follow you close by, and that we may seek to know you more and more. We ask, Lord, to encourage your people here over this weekend, and that they will all be able to say, it was good for us to have been here, and that we might meet with Jesus in a new and a fresh way, and that you will presence yourself with us.

We pray, Lord, that you will bless us according to our own particular needs. A variety of needs are great, and for each one of us tonight, we might be at a different point of experience.

And so we ask, Lord, that you will do us good, and that you will provide for us physically, and mentally, and spiritually, and emotionally. Provide for us in every way as we live in challenging, difficult times.

We are aware, Lord, that there is a squeeze that is going to put pressure on us in every way, and there's going to be difficult financial restraints placed upon us, and life is going to change, but we pray that in it all and through it all that you will above all help us, and help us help our leaders and those in authority to look to you.

[11 : 05] It may be that this is part of what you are doing, is bringing us, although it's not an easy thing, you may be bringing us to the place where we have to cry out to you.

This is what you used to do with your people long ago, that they would abandon you and forget about you, but then when invading nations came, and famine came, in the end, it was always in the end, they cried to the Lord.

But we pray that we may cry to you. It might appear strange, and it might appear that it's the last thing that would happen to us as a nation, that we would cry to you. But oh Lord, we pray that we will.

And we ask Lord that you would be gracious to us, and that you will hear the call and the cry of your people. And we pray Lord that you will answer, answer beyond our asking or thinking.

We give thanks Lord for all the people, maybe who are housebound, but are men and women of prayer. Those may be in advanced years, and are no longer able to get out and about.

[12 : 08] But while they are physically bound, their prayers are not. And we pray that you will hear and answer their prayers. Oh Lord, we pray that you will bless us then, and bless every home and every family, and any who are visiting at this time.

Lord, that you will bless us all. Pray for those who are of a heavy heart. Lord, pray for those Lord who are challenged regarding their faith. Pray Lord for those who may even be thinking about coming forward, but that right now there might be every obstacle in their way.

That's so often what happens. The evil one will put plenty in our way, and our own hearts can put plenty in the way to stop us. But oh Lord, we pray that we will look to no one but to Jesus, and that we will hear what he has to say to us.

Oh Lord, we pray then, if there are any who should be at your table, and who have not as yet come, grant them the grace and the courage and the strength to make that lovely profession, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We pray then that you'll bless this congregation at time of vacancy. Be with the intermoderator. It's been unwell. We ask your healing hand upon him. We pray, Lord, that you'll direct this congregation in the right way, and that you will lead them to, and lead a pastor to them, and that you will provide for them, and encourage them, we ask.

[13 : 34] And we pray, Lord, that you will strengthen those who are struggling in their faith tonight. Maybe there's somebody here who's an old Christian, and they feel that maybe they never started right.

And they feel that along the way that, although there have been maybe high points, they feel that right now there's big question marks over where they are. Lord, may you come to them, and give them a sense of your love for them, and encourage them in the way.

Bless us then, and do us good. Be with any who mourn at this time. Well, we know that there are always heavy hearts, and that mourning is something that doesn't leave us after a while, when we lose loved ones.

And so we pray for all whose hearts are heavy, those who have the silent tear. We ask that you will draw very close to them, and encourage them, and bless them. Watch over us then, we pray, and cleanse us from our every sin, we pray.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We'll sing again this time in Psalm 138. Psalm 138. Amen. Psalm 138.

[14 : 48] And we're going to sing. We'll sing from verse 4. I might have put down from verse 3, but we'll sing from verse 4 to the end of the psalm. Psalm 138.

All kings upon the earth that are shall give thee praise, O Lord, whenas they from thy mouth shall hear thy true and faithful word. Yea, in the righteous ways of God, with gladness they shall sing.

For great's the glory of the Lord who doth forever reign. Though God be high, yet he respects all those that lowly be, whereas the proud and lofty ones afar off knoweth he.

Though I in midst of trouble walk, I life from thee shall have. Against my foe's wrath thou'll stretch thine hand. Thy right hand shall me save.

Surely that which concerneth me the Lord will perfect make. Lord, still thy mercy lasts. Do not thine own hands works for sake. Psalm 138.

[15 : 48] These verses to God's praise. All kings upon the earth that are shall give thee praise, O Lord. For faith of all the earth that are shall give thee praise, O Lord.

When thou hast with all thy mouth shall hear thy true and faithful word.

In the righteous ways of God, with gladness we shall sing.

For God's praise, O Lord.

God bless you.

[17 : 47] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[20 : 55] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[22 : 37] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thy right hand doth sustain. Amen. And taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise.

[30 : 06] And so on. Down really to the end of the chapter. Just a few observations along the way. As we know this was a quite extraordinary moment in the experience of the disciples.

We read here this is the third time that Jesus had revealed himself to the disciples after his resurrection. And he performed this miracle because they had had a bad night fishing.

And then they had caught nothing. And Jesus had said to them, well look, go out and cast on the right side. And we know what happened. And Jesus is showing them in a very powerful way.

Because before he had said, I will make you fishers of men. And Jesus is showing them here in a very powerful way. A truth that we all need to learn. Jesus, the word of God says, without me you can do nothing.

And that's one of the hardest things for us to grasp and to understand. Because so often we feel self-sufficient and self-reliant. And there are times the breaks are put on in our life and realize, oh, this is beyond me.

[31 : 17] I don't know what to do here. I'm out of my depth here. This is a problem. But so often in life we feel it's the way we're made that we're kind of in control.

That we can deal with the situation. But when we become a Christian, it's one of the things that the Lord is always having to show us. That without me you can do nothing. And that our absolute dependence is upon the Lord.

Because we're told that it's in him that we live, we move and have our being. A very existence daily depends upon God. His goodness to us.

His forbearance with us. It's him who determines the number of our days. So God is always bringing us back to points where he shows us, without me you can't do anything.

And so he's showing the disciples in a very powerful way, as he's going to make them fishers of men, the power is mine. The resources are with me.

[32 : 19] I'm in control of the fish and I'm in control of human beings. And so it was a very powerful lesson that the disciples got there at the edge of the lake.

And then Jesus invites them to come and to eat. And it's a very special moment that where Jesus breaks bread with them.

And I'm sure that as the disciples sat there with Jesus, where it says, and then Jesus comes and takes bread and gives them and fish likewise.

Just very recently Jesus had broken bread with them. And they didn't understand what he was doing when he said, Take, eat, this is my body that is broken for you.

They weren't able to grasp that then. But now things have changed. And they're beginning to understand bit by bit. Of course, after Pentecost, when the Spirit came in great power, they came to understand an awful lot more.

[33 : 27] But it was a gradual opening of their eyes. Very often the same with their shells. Because often it's as time goes on we begin, we say, you know this, it's only now I'm beginning to understand this.

Things that we may have thought we understood. And then it's like the Lord puts new light on it. And we say, ah, I see this now. And I'm sure as the disciples watched Jesus take the bread and break it and give it to them, they would be thinking, oh, now we understand about his body being broken.

And when Jesus says to take and eat, we know that Jesus provides for us all the time. And one of his great provisions is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that's what we do every Lord's Day and every meeting when we come to God's house. We come and eat. Jesus says, come and eat. He's made this provision for us. Because we know that the Word of God is the bread of life.

Man shall not live by bread, by baker's bread, but by the Word of God. This Word, this is what sustains us spiritually.

[34 : 40] Yes, we need the ordinary bread for nourishment. We need food daily, the natural food for sustaining and nourishing us. But we need spiritual food to grow in grace, to come to a greater knowledge of the Lord.

And that's what the Lord wants every time we come to his house. He says, I want you to eat, to feed on me and be nourished. But he's also given us a table, which we will come to tomorrow if spared.

And at that table we will remember in the breaking of bread of what Jesus really did for us. And how thankful we're living in gospel times.

Where we're given this understanding, where the Word of God has shown us in the most wonderful way what Jesus has actually done. In what his broken body represents.

What his shed blood represents. And so tomorrow we've spared. And this is what we prepare for. We're preparing to come to remember the Lord's death until he comes.

[35 : 46] There's going to come a day when the Lord returns. And we won't be meeting anymore in this world like this. But until that time comes, it is something that he's given the church in order to remember him by.

So he's saying to us as well, come and eat tomorrow. Come and eat tonight on my word. But come tomorrow to take of the broken bread.

Now I'm quite sure that the disciples would be, there would be a hushed silence. Because it was quite remarkable. There would be joy in their hearts.

They'd be saying, this is like the old days. And Jesus is showing that although there is a radical change that has taken place, he is still the same Jesus. Because we know now that the body that he has is a resurrected body.

And is no longer governed by the forces that govern our body. Because we know that he could appear and disappear. He could come through locked doors. It was different.

[36 : 51] But he is showing here that he's still the same Jesus. As he joins the disciples here in eating. And he's more or less saying to them, I still care for you.

I still love you. I still fellowship with you. It is still my delight. And let's remember that. The Lord delights in his people. God's people are his portion in this world.

Do you think about that? You know how you might say to yourself, I wonder what in this whole wide world is most important to God.

Well, he tells us. His people. If tonight you're one of his, you are the most important, the most precious thing that he has in this whole wide world.

That's what he tells us. And so, here is Jesus and he's showing that his people are so important that at one level, although everything has changed, at another level, nothing has changed at all.

[37 : 53] But I'm sure amongst the disciples there, there's one person and there's an annoying niggles going on in his heart. And that's Peter. Because, as it says, and we're aware of that at the beginning of the chapter, it's Peter who said in verse 3, I go a-fishing.

And they said to him, we also go with you. And apparently, the strength of the word there, I go fishing, is I'm going back to the fishing. Peter was a fisherman by trade before he became a disciple of Jesus.

That's what he was. He was a fisherman. And when he says, I go fishing, he's literally saying, well, I'm going back to the fishing. Because Peter, although he still loved Jesus, and we see that here, I think Peter felt, by what he had done, that in many ways, it was over for him.

I'm sure he often thought to himself, how can I go out and tell people to follow the Lord Jesus? When I openly denied that I had anything to do with him, before watching people, I said, I don't know the man.

He means nothing to me. With oaths and with curses, I did that. Only a few days ago. So I'm quite sure Peter would be saying, it's over for me.

[39 : 20] I can't go and tell people about Jesus. So I'm sure, while there would be joy in Peter's heart, there would be also a sense of shame and embarrassment.

Because, although Jesus had met with him in the upper room, here he is with the Lord. He would never as long as, I'm sure, in Peter, when he lived to old age, and he lived to old age, there were some things he would never forget.

But one thing he would never, ever, ever, ever forget was the look that Jesus gave him after he had denied him. Remember how it tells us that the Lord turned, Jesus turned and looked at Peter.

It was a look that had far more in it than any words could convey. And so Peter would be going through all sorts of things here in his mind at this time.

And so we find that Jesus is going to deal specifically with Peter. And I love the way that the Bible is so gracious and so tender in the dealing with all of us.

[40 : 33] Because while the demands in Scripture are high, and while God expects obedience from us and requires obedience as the evidence of love, the Lord also knows that we are fading flesh.

And he knows our weaknesses. And you know, that's one of the things that comes across over and over in Scripture. That even although we fall, we will not be utterly cast down.

You know what it says in the psalm? The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. And though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down. Why? For the Lord upholds him with his hand.

Isn't that beautiful? The Lord has a hold of you. And yes, just in the way that a little child, you might do the hold of a little child, and that child might trip and fall.

But he or she won't fall all the way down because you're holding by the hand. That's what the Lord is doing for us as well. And he will raise us back up. The Christian life, although there is only one beginning when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it's also a life of new beginnings.

[41 : 45] New dawns along the way. And Peter was just going to discover that. And again, I love the way that Jesus deals with Peter because it would be very easy, you would say, for the Lord to go to Peter and say, Peter, I can't believe your behavior there.

You could almost picture, if it was us, of going straight to him and saying, Peter, you're a disgrace. Did I not say about that? Did I not put specific promises and pick you out specifically?

And look at what you did. No. It's a gentleness. The very first thing that Jesus does is he feeds Peter. He nourishes him.

He gets him into a proper state physically and mentally before he begins to deal with them. And we should learn these lessons from Scripture, just how gentle and tender the Lord is.

And Jesus begins by questioning Peter's love to him. He doesn't question and say to Peter, Peter, what's your faith like? He doesn't say to Peter, are you really believing in me?

[43 : 02] Are you committed to me? No, he asks one very simple question. Peter, do you love me? Because that is the foundation. Even faith, we're told, works by love.

And love is the great evidence of us really following the Lord. You and I will not follow the Lord unless there is love in our heart.

And that love comes, of course, from God. We love him. Why? Because he first loved us. That's where it began. It began with his love to us, not our love to him.

If it was our love to him, we wouldn't be following because our love would ebb and flow and our love, just as it is by itself, would come crashing down. But the love that we have for him is as a result of his love first to us.

And so this is a great question that the Lord is asking. And he's saying to Peter, in the same way as he's asking you and me tonight, and this is the great searching question, do you love me?

[44 : 10] And I'm sure that as Peter looks in on himself, he says to himself, Jesus has every reason to question my love as he looks into my heart.

And you might be sitting here tonight, I might be doing the same thing and saying, the Lord has every reason to question my love tonight. Because the Lord who knows everything, and that's what Peter said, Lord, you know everything about me.

And what the Lord does. And we might say to ourselves, when the Lord looks in on me and he sees all the deceit, and he sees all the failures, and he sees all these things and my disobedience and everything, no wonder he's going to question my love.

But you know, like Peter, if you love the Lord, that's what you're going to say to him, Lord. You know all things. You know that I love you.

And the Lord, of course, questions Peter about his love to him, and he says to him, so when they had died, Jesus says, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?

[45 : 25] More than these? What? Well, I believe here, very simply, more than the other disciples. And the reason Jesus is doing that is because it's not so, if Peter hadn't fallen and denied Jesus the way he did, and if Jesus, if the whole denial episode hadn't occurred, and Jesus homed in on Peter and said, Peter, do you love me more than these?

Peter would have said, yes, Lord, I do. You can count on me as number one. Why do we say that? Because remember how Jesus had said to Peter, when Peter had made his proud boast, he said, Lord, I'm ready to go to prison for you.

I'm ready to die for you. And Peter meant it. Peter meant when he said that. In other words, Peter was saying to Jesus before his denial, Lord, if there's one person that you can count on, if there's one person that will be through thick and thin with you, it's me.

I will stand by you, supposing it's prison or supposing it's death. The others might forsake you. I'll be there. But it's a different Peter now.

Because no longer could he make that boast. Because he has come to discover a little of who he really is. And so Jesus, Jesus deals with him so, so gently.

[46 : 59] And he asks a question. And as we say, love, of course, is the great key. And Jesus, in answer to each question, he says, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep.

And of course, he begins, as we see, with the lambs. The lambs are so important in the Christian life. Whether it's a lamb of being young in age, or whether it's young in the faith, the Lord is a special place for those who are tender and young in the faith, or those who are just young in years.

And so, he's saying, it's so important, Peter, that you feed my lambs and you tend my sheep and tend my lambs. And Peter would understand failure in a way that he never understood before.

And let me say, it's not a good thing to experience failure. But sometimes, it's so helpful in the Christian life. Because we can sympathize with others.

We have an understanding of our own heart in a way that we didn't before. because very often, naturally speaking, there is a hardness within us. There is a legacy left within us from the very beginning.

[48 : 17] They talked about, the old theologians, they talk about the covenant of works at the very beginning. Because before the fall, where Adam was upright, and he was able to give that obedience before God, then, of course, the moment sin came in and the fall, that it became impossible to give the obedience that God required.

And yet, there is still lingering within us that thought that we can of ourselves give an obedience that will satisfy God.

We sometimes think that God owes us one. He doesn't. He doesn't owe us anything. So, you see, once we have discovered failure, once we have discovered the pain of not being what we should, the self-righteousness is being broken.

And it gives us a heart, a tender heart, a shepherding heart. And that's what Jesus is saying. He's saying to feed the sheep and the lambs and to tend them.

In other words, you have to go after them. You and I know that there's no animal more prone to straying than a sheep. And you can't feed the sheep if it's not there. So you've got to shepherd.

[49 : 39] And he's saying that to Peter. You've got to look out for them. Look out for the sheep. Look out for the lambs. If the lambs have gone off, go out and get them. Look after them. Bring them back. because often they won't come back themselves.

You need to go. The Lord has given us. This is part of what he's given us as shepherds and under-shepherds that we're looking out and looking out for one another.

So this is what the Lord is saying to Peter at this time. And of course, Peter, this is the third time in a sense that the Lord has called Peter to follow him.

Remember at the very beginning when Andrew brought Peter to Jesus and then when Jesus called them all when they'd been fishermen to leave their nets and follow him. And then again, he's saying to Peter to follow him.

Now, it's very interesting here that Jesus talks to Peter and it must have been music to Peter's ear to realize that he still has a future, that Jesus hasn't given up on him.

[50 : 48] And can I say to anybody in here tonight who's following the Lord Jesus and you feel, you feel that as a Christian that the Lord is finished with you.

He's not. Be persuaded of that. even although tonight you may look out and it's, your vision is dim and you feel bleak in heart and you think that the good days are over and that you're never going to be of much use again to the Lord.

That's, that's your own heart and the devil going at you. The Lord has a space, has a place for you as long as you live in this world and he has a field of service for you as long as you live in this world.

Whatever it is. So don't listen to this that the good days that it's all over for you. It's not. And it wasn't over for Peter either. And the Lord is telling Peter something regarding his future.

And he's telling him here that, that he said, when you were young you girded yourself and you walked the way you wanted but when you'll be old when you're old thou shalt stretch forth thine hands and another shall gird thee and carry thee whether thou would not.

[52 : 01] This spake he signify by what death he should glorify God. Isn't that interesting? The death that should glorify God. We tend to think of life as glorifying God.

And we say Lord because remember our first our first characterism man's chief end is to to glorify God. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And so we our prayer is help me Lord in my life to glorify you. But we see here that death that we can glorify God in our death and indeed I believe that ought to be a prayer of the Christian.

Lord when I come to die may my death bring glory to your name. Of course we don't understand that because you and I know that death is that thing we recoil from is that it's ugly there's nothing there's nothing beautiful about death that we can talk at a human level although at a spiritual level we know there's another dimension to it and there is something beautiful because we know that the souls of believers have their death made perfect in holiness.

What a wonderful moment that is. The souls of believers are made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory. Isn't that wonderful? There's something awesome taking place just at that very moment.

[53 : 30] But at a human level death is awful. But here we see that we can glorify God in death and we find that the Lord is telling Peter you know there's a lot ahead of you Peter and we're told here that you're going to be an old man.

It's when you're old. So Peter has quite a number of years and it's always interesting because you and I know of how very shortly after this when the persecution started and Herod executed James, John's brother.

Next in line was Peter. Peter of course was a great preacher and thousands had been converted under his preaching at Pentecost. Remember how Herod thought oh that's who I'll silence next.

Takes Peter puts him in prison. We remember the incident in Acts chapter 12 and what happens there? We find and it's wonderful that Peter is sound asleep the night before his execution and what pillow is he resting his head on?

I believe he's resting his head on the promise of Jesus when you are old. It's not old. This is only a few weeks later. And so Peter is I firmly believe that Peter has no fear and that Peter believes that it's not the end because the Lord has said when you're old and you and I know what happens.

[55 : 04] How the angel appeared in the prison and the chains Peter's chains fell off and how Peter led Peter out so that he was delivered, he was freed.

So again we often find that when God gives a promise, that promise is often tested. You'll find that. You know when the Lord gives you faith to lay hold upon his word in a specific way, there's maybe some, you're reading the word, there's maybe some kind of dilemma, some question, something going on in your life.

And you're reading, or the word comes to your mind powerfully. Maybe it doesn't happen very often, but there's an occasion when it came powerfully, or you're reading and it was powerful, and you were given the faith to lay hold upon it.

You're able to say, God, that's mine. Well, be absolutely well, I shouldn't say be absolutely pushed, but there's a strong chance that you'll be tested on that very promise.

Very often, when you're laying hold upon the word and you're basing your experiences and your life on God's word, that it'll be tested.

[56 : 19] Well, it certainly was tested in Peter's experience. But so, as Jesus is here talking to Peter about the future and so on, we see the old Peter rising up because Jesus had just said to Peter in verse 19 and when he had spoken this he said to him, follow me.

And that's the thing Jesus is saying to you and to me as well tonight. And if you're here tonight and you've never come forward and you're a believer, you love the Lord, the question that the Lord is asking you, do you love me?

And if the answer in your heart is, yes, I do, Lord, well, he's asking you to follow him. And who's he asking you to follow him, follow you to his table? It's your duty.

It's your privilege to own him and to confess him as your Lord. It's the most beautiful thing that you can do. It's something the Lord wants you to do.

Do this, he said, in remembrance of me. And you know, when we follow the Lord, we follow him by becoming Christians. We take the name of Christ into our life.

[57 : 32] Christ Jans. Remember, they were first called Christians in Antio. You know, at a wedding, it doesn't always happen, but most times, the bride will take the surname of the groom.

There's the odd occasion when it's reversed, but it's 99% of the time. I've never done a wedding where it's been anything different, but I have heard of them. But the bride takes the name of the groom.

You know, spiritually, that's what happens when we come to faith. We take the name of the bridegroom, Christ, Christians. That's what we become.

And if we take the name of the groom, then surely we ought to show in our lives that he is our Lord, that he is the one that we're devoted to.

So Jesus says, follow me. But it's here we see, and with this we close, we see, and we all know this, but it's always worth highlighting. Then Peter turning about sees a disciple whom Jesus loved.

[58 : 37] He sees John. And Peter seeing him said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? You see, Jesus has just spent the last wee while talking to Peter about his life, about his future, and straight away, just instantly, when he says, follow me, John just seems to be going by.

There's the old, Lord, what about him? You've just talked about me, what about him? And we find Jesus saying to him, what's that got to do with you?

That's basically what Jesus is saying. If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Now, Jesus hears us and saying to us that we shouldn't be concerned about other people, or that we shouldn't worry about other people, or care for other people, that's not.

But Jesus is saying here, here's Peter, and he has had a really serious talk with him, and he's been setting out his future before, and then instantly, all of a sudden, his attention has gone, John, what about him?

And Jesus is saying, forget John just now, I've said to you, follow me, your focus, Peter, is on me, not on John, or what John's going to do, and that's what Jesus is saying to us tonight, and particularly if there's anybody here who's thinking about the table, don't think about what others are going to do, don't think about what others will say, you know, that's one of the things that keeps people back, what will they say at home, what will they say in the community, what will they say in the workplace, what will they say here, doesn't matter, what is that to you, you follow me, our eye has to be on Jesus, just like when Israel crossed the Jordan, remember how Joshua set them out, and the ark of the covenant was way ahead, led by the priests at a distance, as they were marching to the promised land, why was the ark so far ahead, because their eye was to be focused, not on the person in front of them, not on those who were marching just ahead, all their eyes were to be focused on the ark, that's who they were following, and it's the same for you and me, yes we need each other, we're important to each other, but above all our focus has to be on

[61 : 13] Christ, that's who we're looking to, that's who we're to follow, let's pray, Lord our God we pray that we may have that single-minded focus that focuses upon you, help us Lord not to be distracted and so easy for us to be pulled aside, we're prone to it, we pray that you will fill our vision and that all the distracting sounds and all the distracting sights will be taken away from us so that we will see none but Jesus bless our time together and take us to our home safely cleanse us we pray from our every sin in Jesus name we ask it Amen Our concluding psalm is Psalm 23 Psalm 23 the shepherd psalm and we've got to remember that the Lord truly is our shepherd Lord as we said already the session meets after the service and if there is any person in the congregation tonight who has not yet professed their love for the

Lord Jesus an opportunity will be given to you afterwards to meet with the session Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd I'll not want he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by my soul he doth restore again and me to walk doth make within the paths of righteousness even for his own name sake yea though I walk in death's dark vale yet will I fear no for thou art with me and thy rod and staff may comfort still the whole Psalm 23 the Lord my shepherd on the boat he lived to them through the who angels give power to in things

He loves me, that I am all to find.

My soul, he now restored the head of me to walk around me.

Within the paths of righteousness, in what is all I may say.

[64 : 27] Yet though I walk in the dark hill, yet will I fear not you.

For I am the Lord with me and the way of all.

I'm still, ye come, for still. My table, how art furnished In the presence of my Lord, My heaven, O God, will I annoy.

And like a boy, For goodness and mercy of my life, Shall surely follow me, I am in God's hand forevermore.

My dwelling place shall be.

[66 : 44] If you'll give me an opportunity to go to the door just after the benediction. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

Amen.