

When God is There and You Don't Know

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[0 : 00] I extend a very warm welcome to everybody this morning and all who are joining in we pray that we'll know God's blessing as we seek to worship him today.

We might know his presence even in our own homes as we gather in this kind of unique way and that we will know that the Lord is with us. We're going to begin with a prayer.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for all your goodness to us. You are our great God, the God of heaven and earth, the God with whom we have to do. And we pray, Lord, that you will bless us, bless us with health and with strength and with safety.

We're living in strange times, unique days, days that we've never seen. We've read about days like this in the past, but we have never experienced them. And we're living in a world that we realize is so small, so linked, so tied up one with another.

And today, as we live in this day of uncertainty, we give thanks that we worship a God who is certain and true. A God who is unchanging in all his ways.

[1 : 05] A God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. And we give thanks, Lord, that that is true and that your mercies are new every morning and that you're faithful to your covenant.

And we pray, Lord, that you will bless us. Bless us richly in every way. Bless us in our homes, in our families, amongst our loved ones. Pray for those who are ill.

Those, Lord, who have various illnesses. Remember all those who have many, many illnesses. People have been undergoing treatment for quite some time and will be increasingly worried over the situation.

But we pray, Lord, for all those who have this COVID-19 and who are laid aside by it. We pray for healing and restoration. We pray, Lord, for those who are seriously ill, those who are struggling with breath.

Lord, we pray that you will alleviate their circumstances and that a lot more ventilators will be provided. And that we will see your hand displayed where your mercy will be shown to us because we know you are a God who delights in mercy.

[2 : 18] Pray for those who are dying and how sad it is where people are having to die alone. Oh, Lord, our God, we pray that you will come close to them so that at one level they will not die alone, but that they will die in you.

Oh, Lord, be with them, we pray. And ask, Lord, that you will do us good, that you will open our eyes to your word, that we may hear what you have to say to us. Bless us in, we pray, and take away from us all our sin.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. I'm going to say a wee word to any of the young people who might be listening in today. As I said, we're living in strange times and most of you will no longer be at school.

And it might be quite a while before you go back to school. I'm sure there was a day you used to think, oh, it'd be great to have a long time off school. But the funny thing is, I'm sure most of you would now like to get back.

Lots of people are no longer able to work. Sadly, some people have lost their jobs through this. Hopefully they'll get jobs back. But it's a worrying time for many people.

[3 : 27] Some people, of course, have to still go to work. Those who are working in jobs that are essential, like the NHS or the emergency services, the fire, the police, the ambulance, the supermarket workers, delivery drivers, posties, all these.

And we're thankful that they are working. But a lot of people are able to work from home. And, of course, a lot of people can't work from home. Can you imagine being on a plane, going off on holiday or going somewhere, and the pilot says to you, Well, I hope, as he says over the tannoy, I

hope you will all enjoy your flight and that your circumstances in this flight will be very good. I wish everybody a pleasant journey just to let you know that today I'm working from home. I think they would find that really scary. I certainly would. I wouldn't like to be on a plane where the pilot is working from home.

But, you know, there's one person who works from home. And this person works from home all over the world. And do you know who that person is? That's God.

Because we're told that God is in heaven, our Father, which art in heaven. But he is also working everywhere in this world. And even although just now there's this awful illness going about and at scary times, God is still in control.

[4 : 55] He's working in this world. He hasn't changed. And the most wonderful thing is he wants us to come to him. He wants to be there for us.

And if we trust our lives to him, he will always be there for us. Every day and every night. And so it's very important that we go to the Lord and say, Lord, please, will you come into my life, into my heart?

Because God's working all over this world. Even although his home is in heaven, his hand is at work everywhere in this world. Doing, controlling, ruling over everything.

Even the things that we can't understand. So today, you go to this God, the God who is our maker, the God who controls everything. Say, Lord, bless me.

Come into my life. We'll say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

[5 : 59] And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

Amen. Maybe we're going to have a short reading just now. Our reading is going to be from the book of Genesis. Genesis chapter 28.

Genesis chapter 28. And first of all, we'll read from the beginning of the chapter. Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father. And take as your wife from there, one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.

May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham.

[7 : 10] Jacob left Beersheba and went towards Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones off the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.

And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

And in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land.

For I will not leave you until I have done that which I promised you. Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.

[8 : 23] And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And particularly these words of verse 15, where we read there, where the Lord says to Jacob, Behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back again to this land.

For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. Now I suppose this incident in the life of Jacob goes right against where we are today.

Because here we have Jacob leaving home. And we of course are confined largely to our homes just now. And of course our home is a place that we love.

It's a most secure place. It's a place that we feel, we use the expression, you feel at home. When you go to somewhere, as a house, you sometimes go to a house and you say, Ah, it was just like

home.

Which meaning it was a place that you could relax and you could feel just everything great, peaceful, and just feel at home. But as we know, when people just are confined in their homes, maybe they begin to get, tensions begin to rise a wee bit because they feel frustrated at not being able to get out.

[9 : 48] But home, of course, is a particularly special place. And Jacob, this man that we're looking at here, he was a home-loving young man. Home was where he loved to be.

Jacob was a twin. Esau was the twin that was born first, then Jacob. And they couldn't have been more different in nature and character. Jacob was a home bird.

He loved to be at home. Esau, on the other hand, was the hunting, shooting type who was always out. Unfortunately, it was a home where there was a division. There were favourites.

And that is really wrong. Jacob was Rebecca's favourite, the mother, and Esau was Isaac's favourite. And, of course, a divided home like that is wrong.

It causes issues and problems and it did in this home. Because parents should love their children equally, it's what they should do, what is natural to do.

[10 : 45] Now, of course, we know in the story that Isaac was determined to give the blessing to Esau, which was wrong because God had said that the younger was to inherit the main blessing, the great blessing that had come, the great covenant blessing that had come upon Abraham and then upon Isaac was to follow through upon Jacob and his children.

And through this, all the nations of the world were to be blessed. blessed. But, Isaac was determined to bless Esau. But Rebecca, you can read the story in the previous, go back and read, we haven't time just now, in the previous chapter of how Jacob managed, through the instruction of his mother, to deceive his father.

His father was then blind and Isaac thought he was actually blessing Esau when he was, in fact, blessing Jacob. And Esau was so mad at this that he decided he was going to kill Jacob eventually. And, of course, that's why, eventually, Jacob was decided to go, with the father's blessing, to go in order to find a wife.

And he was intending soon to come back. Once his brother's kind of rage had calmed down, he would come back. But, you know, it's quite sad because Jacob did eventually come back.

[12 : 06] But by the time he came back, his mother had died. And, you know, I always think it's so important that we, that when we part with one another, whatever the circumstances, that we part in love and in peace because we never know whether we're going to see that person again.

We hope we do, but we just don't know. And that's one of the great things about church is that when we finish our service in church, we have the benediction for we're parting with a blessing, the blessing of God, that God's grace and his mercy and his peace will be upon us.

So that's, that's a wonderful thing. So here's Jacob, this home-loving boy or young man, and he has to run from home. And he heads off. And no doubt that first night or that night when he stopped at this place Bethel, miles and miles and miles away from home, he would have felt so lonely and so empty and he'd be thinking of the fire at home and the warmth of home and the comfort of home and he felt abandoned, he felt lonely.

But, you know, he wasn't alone because God was going to reveal himself to Jacob that night in the most amazing way. And Jacob was going to discover that he was anything but alone, but that God was really with him.

And as Christians, we sometimes forget just what a wonderful privilege we have, knowing that the living and true God is with us, no matter where we go, that every day, every night, that God is with us, always under his protection.

[13 : 43] And then as Jacob slept, he had this dream and in this dream, this very powerful dream, he saw this ladder that came all the way down from heaven to the earth.

And on that ladder, he saw angels that were ascending and descending. And it's often been pointed out correctly, it's not, I'm sure you all know this, but it's just, it's one of these lovely moments in the Bible because if we were going to make up that story, we would say that the angels were first of all that they were descending from heaven and then they were back ascending up.

But here we find that first of all that they're ascending, which means that the angels were already present. They were already with Jacob. Jacob didn't realise that, but there was an angelic presence around him.

Even when he lay down that night to sleep, he didn't know that. And you know, that is true because the Bible tells us that the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

In other words, that every believer, every child of God, everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus can rely upon the fact that God is ministering to us through the angels and we have little idea how often we've been delivered, how often we've been protected by angelic presence.

[15:07] and so here's this ladder all the way from heaven to the earth and at the top of the ladder there above all is the Lord. And here we have this wonderful picture of this ladder from heaven to the earth and of course this is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ because one of the titles or one of the roles that Jesus has, he is known as the mediator.

Now as you know, a mediator is a go-between, a go-between two parties. And there is nobody more qualified to be mediator than the Lord Jesus Christ because he is God and he is man. Nobody else, there is nobody else qualified to represent us, to stand for us, to be in our place other than the Lord Jesus because as we say he is God and he is man.

And that really is, that really is quite the most amazing thing. So this ladder in a sense was typifying of this very fact that he is the great mediator.

And you make sure today if there is anybody here who is listening and that you don't know Jesus, that you don't know this mediator, you know, this is the way to get to God is through him.

[16:27] Please accept the Lord Jesus into your own life and ask the Lord to lay hold upon you because, you know, you might be saying, I don't grasp this whole salvation business.

I don't get it. I don't quite understand how I become a Christian. But the Lord says, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And you know, when you get that salvation, life changes. It doesn't mean that you're immune from all the troubles and problems of life, but you have the divine presence with you. And when Jesus is with you, one of the things that he gives you is his peace.

Before he died, he said to the disciples, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, give I unto you. That's a wonderful thing to have this peace that nobody can take away.

And even when troubles come into your life and problems and illnesses, there is still this peace. Wonderful thing. And so we find that Jacob is reminded by the Lord of who he is as the Lord is.

[17:32] That he's, that he, that's what he say, I was your father's God and I am your father's God. I was your grandfather's God and I'm your God with you as well.

And I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and bring you back again to this land. That must have been music to Jacob's ears.

Here he was running away from home and he felt so lonely, upset, and God saying, I'm going to be with you and I'm going to take you home again. I don't think Jacob could have heard better words at that moment.

And I pray that it will be true for us as well, that, almost in the reverse, that our lives will be brought back to normality again, that we will be delivered from this awful illness that's sweeping throughout, not just our land, but throughout this world.

And that the Lord will bring us back to our families because so many of us just now were separated from children, from grandchildren. Parents are separated from their children and grandchildren.

[18:40] Brothers and sisters separated, sometimes husbands, wives separated, brothers, sisters separated. And we're longing to get back because we miss. And we pray that these words that the Lord has saying here to Jacob may indeed in a way be given to us as well, that I will bring you back, that I will restore you so that things will be as they were before.

And then the Lord promises his continued presence with Jacob. And there's nothing in this world that Jacob would have appreciated more at that moment than hearing this. And you know, when God gives a promise, he gives a promise like nobody else does.

You know, when somebody gives you a promise, your acceptance of that promise and dependence on that promise depends an awful lot on your, of the reliability of the person who's making the promise.

But God, when God makes a promise, it is absolute. It, it, it, it, it's guaranteed. Just a couple of things in, in conclusion. If you're a Christian and God has, remember, has promised to be with you, he will be with you wherever you are, wherever you go, day and night, whatever circumstances. And remember that everything that comes into your life, even however difficult it might be, that God is your best interest in heart, at heart. And he's there to bless you, bless your present and to bless

your future.

[20 : 11] If today you're without Jesus, then I would urge you, urge you with all my heart that you would seek the Lord, seek him while he may be found. And you know, when you get Jesus, you get a friend who is with you for life and with you in death and with you forever, throughout eternity.

He will never leave you, never abandon you. You will know his presence in your heart and hope the peace that he gives you is beyond understanding. understanding. Let us pray.

Lord, we give thanks for our time together. We pray that you'll bless, bless our meeting and that we might know your goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life.

Watch over us and do us good and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we're going to tie this in with a singing from the congregation, singing from the church.

Probably won't get the like of this every week. It saves me trying to wheeze in front of you, which I'm not very good at doing. So we're going to be singing Psalm 23, The Lord's My Shepherd in sing psalms.

[21 : 18] Right. So we're going to sing Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know. The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know.

He makes me live down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow.

My wandering steps He brings back to His way. In strength, paths of righteousness making me save.

Unless He has gone miscain to display. Though I walk in depths falling where darkness is near, because He has gone because He has gone because He has gone with me, no evil I fear.

Your rod and your staff bring me comfort and cheer. In the sight of my enemies sat in the news spread.

[22 : 55] In oil of rejoicing you fall on my head. My cup overflows and I'm gracious in head.

So surely your covenant mercy and grace will follow me closely in all of my ways.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord Almighty. I'll pronounce the benediction. Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one, every one of you now and forevermore.

Amen.