

Jesus in the Dark

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[0 : 01] And we extend a very warm welcome to everybody this morning as we seek to worship God. And wherever you are, we pray that the Lord will bless our time together.

Of course, we would love to be able to meet in church, but we can't. But as we meet through technology, we still pray that God's presence will be with us and that we will know that he is our Lord and our God.

Lord, we're going to begin, first of all, with a word of prayer. Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks again as we seek to draw near to you. We pray that you will bless our time together.

We pray that we will know that you are King and Lord of heaven and earth, the God in whom we live and move and have our being. Our days are numbered by you. We do not know the length of our days.

We have no idea even what tomorrow will bring, even what tonight will bring. But we give thanks that you know, because you are ever-present. And you know the end from the beginning.

[1 : 07] And we give thanks, Lord, that our lives are lived in you. And we pray if there's anybody watching today who does not know you personally, that even today that they might come into that knowledge and into that friendship, into that union with yourself, and to understand and experience your peace, the peace of God that passes knowledge, that passes understanding.

We pray, Lord, that you will bless your word as we come to it. We pray that it will be fresh and open to us, even although it is something we're familiar with.

And everybody knows what the incidents and episodes of Scripture that are so well known to us. But we pray that your Spirit will make these things fresh and applicable to us.

And that we will understand what you're saying to us. And that we'll understand more of who you are. And of your great purposes for us and to us. We pray, Lord, that you will bless us at this time, a time of difficulty and uncertainty, a time of fear and anxiety, a time where illness is all around us.

There is an unseen enemy in the air and that is being passed from one to another. The sad thing is that friends and family can pass from one to another and we don't know.

[2 : 33] And so we pray in the greatest stress and the pain and the sorrow that this virus has brought into so many homes and families. Lord, we pray that you will help all those who are broken, all those who have lost loved ones.

Draw close to them, we pray. We pray, O Lord, for those who are working at the very centre, and the front line of this. We pray for all the medical profession, all doctors and all nurses and all carers and all who are involved, health care assistants and all the different personnel, the porters, everybody who is involved.

We commit them to your care and ask your protection. O Lord, O God, we pray that you will provide all that is necessary, that the protection that each one might receive.

We pray for our carers. We give thanks for those in homes and those within the community. Pray to bless them and to keep them. Give thanks, Lord, for all the other workers, for all our emergency services, the police and the fire service and the ambulance service.

Give thanks, Lord, for our posties and for our lorry drivers and for all who are working in supermarkets and all who are working in shops, all who are providing for us all the different areas of life that are having to carry on in a public way.

[3 : 59] Protect them, we pray, and we give thanks for them. And we ask, Lord, that you might indeed provide a vaccine that medical science will soon come to understand just the intricate workings of this virus and be able to get a vaccine soon.

And we pray that even in medicines that already exist, that whether it is marrying together, some of these medicines are beginning just to discover that a medicine that is already in existence is able to take off the worst effects of this illness.

And we pray, Lord, that you'll have mercy upon us. Help us through all that is happening to turn to yourself, to recognise that you are God in heaven. And we pray that you will bless us and that there will be a turning to yourself nationally and internationally.

We pray for our leaders and all in authority over us. We give thanks, Lord, for returning health of our Prime Minister and we pray to bless him. We pray for all who are in need just now.

And we ask, Lord, that you will protect us and do us good. Pray then that your word will go out today, wherever the gospel is preached and proclaimed, to the furthest corners of this world.

[5 : 18] We give thanks, Lord, that there is praise encircling this world as your people at different times rise up to worship you. Watch over us, then, we pray.

Be gracious to us and cleanse us from our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Now, before we read, I'm just going to say a wee word to the young people, to any young folk who are tuning in.

I'm going to ask you the question, do you like jigsaws? Well, I'm sure most of you do. I always like jigsaws. It's something I used to do quite a lot of when I was young.

I haven't done a jigsaw for a long time because very often jigsaws take a long time to do. But maybe in this period of lockdown, maybe people get a chance again to do a jigsaw.

I've never ever bought a jigsaw with a thousand pieces or even 500 pieces. To me, that's just a nightmare. I like simple jigsaws. And when I was young, I had a few jigsaws.

[6 : 21] And I remember one, I can remember it as clearly today. And it was a scene, a farmyard scene. The picture there, a farmyard, there was a barn and the hay. And there were cows and there were sheep and horses and pigs and ducks walking.

And I loved that jigsaw. And there was only about, I don't know, maybe 40 pieces in it. And I did the jigsaw so often that I used to time myself doing it.

I would put a clock beside me with a second hand and I would time myself to see how long I could do it. And then I would scramble it up again and then try and beat the time, the last time and make it see how often, or the best time that I could get in doing that jigsaw.

But you know the most annoying thing about a jigsaw is if there's a piece missing. And there's nothing worse than coming to the end of a jigsaw and finding there's a piece missing.

Because, you know, see when you finish a jigsaw, it doesn't matter how often you do the same jigsaw, there's a sense of, da-da, I've done it. You feel good. Yahoo, it's finished.

[7 : 27] But when there's a piece missing, you go, oh no. And you have to start searching around and you wonder, where now is that piece, this missing piece? Because when you look at a jigsaw and supposing it's a beautiful picture, you don't notice the beauty of the picture.

What you notice is the piece that's missing. Because that just stands out. And you know, life is made up of loads of different pieces that all come together.

And life is made up of all kinds of different people who all come together. And every single one is important. You look at your family.

And everyone in your family is so important. And that's what makes when we lose somebody from our family. And now there's somebody missing from our family.

It hurts. And that just the family doesn't look right. And the family would never look right again. Because somebody's missing. But maybe at this particular time, we've come to maybe appreciate each other a little bit more.

[8 : 36] Because everybody is so important. And as you today and as I, we miss so many of our families. Some of our families are away in other parts.

And some are even close by, but we can't see. We can't see sons and daughters. We can't see grandchildren. We can't see brothers, sisters just now.

And we really miss them. Because they're all so important. And maybe we didn't realise just how important they are to us. It's the same with school. With school, you may be missing some of your school friends.

Or nursery friends. Or maybe you're missing in church. Of course we're missing church. One of the things I'm missing, incredibly, is missing all the people.

And that all, every person in the congregation is so important and precious. And so we miss. And if we are important and precious to one another, we are even more important and precious to God.

[9 : 37] Because He is our God. And He cares for us. And He tells us that. And He tells us to cast all our care upon Him. Because He cares for us.

So when we go to bed at night, when we cannot care for ourselves, ask the Lord, Lord, please, when I'm asleep, care for me. Watch over me. Because the Lord wants us to do that every day and every night.

He wants to care for us. To put all our cares and our worries to Him. One other thing that we might say about the jigsaw is that life is like a jigsaw.

Because our life is like a jigsaw with all the pieces spread out. And so often we're trying to put the pieces together to make life to run smoothly.

And sometimes it doesn't run smoothly. And sometimes we can't get the piece. You know when you're making a jigsaw, you're trying this bit and you're trying that to see if that fits and it doesn't. Sometimes life's a bit like that.

[10 : 41] And we're just not getting the pieces together. But you know God sees the whole picture all the time. And He wants us to trust Him so that He will fit our life in the right way.

He has a plan for our life. A plan that is good for us and good for other people and good for Him in that He'd get glory from our life.

So you ask the Lord every day, as I must ask, Lord, help me to live in such a way so that my life is lived according to Your plan, so that I will live in such a way that it is good for me, that it is good for other people, and it is good for you.

May God bless these few thoughts to us. Now we're going to read God's Word. And we're going to read from Matthew chapter 14. Matthew chapter 14.

And we're going to read from verse 13. Matthew chapter 14, verse 13.

[11 : 52] Now when Jesus heard this, He withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by Himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed Him on foot from the towns. When He went ashore, He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, This is a desolate place, and the day is now over. Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.

But Jesus said, They need not go away. You give them something to eat. They said to Him, We have only five loaves here and two fish.

He said, Bring them here to me. And then He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and said a blessing.

Then He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

[12 : 59] And those who ate were about five thousand men besides women and children. Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side while He dismissed the crowds.

And after He had dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, It is a ghost!

And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

Amen and may God bless to us this reading of His own Holy Word. Now we read there that passage about Jesus feeding the thousands and then Jesus walking on the water.

[14 : 09] And I want us just to think a little about this. There are some sayings that find their way into everyday life. Sayings from the Bible. And of course, Jesus is walking on the water is one of these.

Because it captures our imagination. Because you and I know the one thing that we cannot do is walk on the water. It's something we'd all live to do. And what a different world we would live in if we were able to walk on the water.

It would make life so, so different. But we can't. And that's why this story really appeals to us, this incident in the life of the Lord Jesus. Now we read here that huge crowds are following Jesus and it tells us this, that He had compassion on them.

And that is one of the wonderful things, one of the wonderful characteristics of the life of the Lord Jesus was His constant display of compassion. And Jesus hasn't changed because the Bible tells us that His compassions fail not.

that this and Jesus has not changed what He was yesterday, He is today, and He will be tomorrow. And we've got to remember that He is always a compassionate Savior.

[15 : 25] And the thing is that Jesus knows your hurts and your pains. Because Jesus came into this world and experienced all the hurt and all the pain at an unimaginable level.

And we have to remember, of course, that this world that Jesus made, Father, Son, and Spirit, made this world, the world that they initially and originally made was not a world of hurt and pain and sorrow.

It was not a broken world as it is today. It was a perfect world. But we read the account in Genesis of how the disobedience of Adam and Eve brought in the brokenness that today we experience with all its hurt and with all its pain.

Well, it's into this world that Jesus came. And He met all the suffering and all the hurt that was thrown at Him and all that He confronted in His time here.

And He was always compassionate. And in fact, He was especially compassionate to those who were marginalized, to those who were misunderstood, those who were sort of sidelined by society.

[16 : 42] You see, He seemed to have a special place for those who were on the outside. And it's very interesting if we study God's Word aright, particularly in the Old Testament, and you will find so many of the prophetic judgments that were made.

Yes, number one was against idolatry and spiritual adultery, which is idolatry where we depart from God and set up whatever idols within our own life and within our own heart.

But following on from that, God's judgments were always prophesied against injustice and against oppression and against the downtrodden where the people were being downtrodden by ruthless oppressors.

God really hated seeing that in the land. And that's part of where His judgments were pronounced against. So we see this tremendous compassion within the heart and within the life of our Lord Jesus.

Now, as we know, the disciples, unfortunately, at this stage in their life were by and large quite hard-hearted men. They weren't the sort of the gentle, gracious writers that we read about later on as we come to the epistles because Peter and John in the early days seemed to be quite hard-hearted.

[18 : 09] We remember that when the mothers brought the little infants to Jesus, they tried to shoo them away. Leave them alone. Don't come away. Go. Of course, we have Jesus saying, Oh, no, no, no, no.

Suffer the little children to come unto me. Forbid them not for such is the kingdom of heaven. And again, we find these same disciples here's this huge crowd and they're saying to Jesus, Send them away.

There's too many of them here. They need to send them away into the towns, into the villages so that they'll get food. But Jesus had compassion on them. And Jesus said to the disciples something that kind of blew them away.

When the disciples said, Send the crowds away to get food. Jesus said to them, No, you give them something to eat. And you can almost see the disciples looking at they just they couldn't believe their ears.

What's Jesus saying? But of course, we know the story that Jesus performed this miracle with the five the five loaves and the two fish and he gave plenty to eat to the thousands who were gathered there.

[19 : 21] but we read then in verse 22, Immediately, he made the disciples get into the boat to go before him. So that's the first thing that we see here.

He made the disciples get into the boat to go before him. And you see, we have to ask the question, why? What was Jesus doing here? Well, the first thing is that he was teaching them a lesson.

And they needed to learn a lesson because in Mark's account of this incident, we read that the disciples didn't understand or didn't consider the miracle because their hearts were hardened.

Their hearts were hardened. And you know, we can drift along as Christians with hard hearts. Where we don't, and if we have a hard heart, we don't consider Jesus.

We don't consider who he is. We don't consider what he's done. And in that, we don't enjoy our Christianity. We just kind of accept it.

[20 : 28] And maybe, you know, we can be Christians and you can be looking back and saying, oh, there were great days in the past, but today, it's not the same. Well, let me say this. Jesus is the same.

He hasn't changed. And we can so often be guilty of lacking appreciation of where we now are because his blessings are new to us every single day.

And there's something seriously wrong with our hearts if we're actually sort of saying, oh, Lord, I just don't like this. When you think of what the Father did for you, when you think of what the Son has done for you, for me, for the cost involved.

So every day, we need to ask the Lord, Lord, give me a soft heart, give me a tender heart, give me an appreciative heart of what you've done for me. God doesn't want to see us just kind of drifting along with complacent, hard hearts.

Because you see what happens to the disciples. Jesus sends them into a storm. Oh yes, Jesus' eye was upon them. Jesus was still caring for them.

[21 : 44] He was going to meet them in a storm. But first of all, they were going to go into that storm because they needed it. And you know, sometimes the Lord allows storms into our lives because we need them.

He needs to shake us a wee bit because we've lost our way, we've lost our appreciation of Him, we've lost sight of what He has done for us. And maybe even at this very time, so many Christians are saying, oh, I'm saying it too, I'm longing to get back to church.

Maybe we didn't appreciate church sufficiently. Maybe we didn't appreciate each other in the way that we should. And maybe, first of all, we didn't appreciate the Lord in the way that we should.

So as we have time to reflect and think on these things, it is important that we learn to get back to Him and to trust in Him and to put Him at the centre of our lives because we've got to remember that our hearts are never just an empty, vacant space.

And if the Lord is not at the centre, then someone else or something else is. They can be legitimate things, but they can push the Lord right out. And we are so prone to idolatry, to giving our hearts over to other things and to other people.

[23 : 04] Idolatry is unbelievably subtle. We're told in the New Testament that covetousness is idolatry. So the Lord who knows our hearts is saying to us, I want you to examine yourself and I want you and me to get right again with me.

So sometimes, of course, every storm that comes into our lives isn't because of hardness or heart of these things. But anyway, sometimes it can be. But the other reason that Jesus wanted to get alone and send the disciples away was that He wanted to get to be alone with His Father.

He wanted to do a time of prayer. And so we read, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. And that was one of the things, of the many things that marked out the life of Jesus was His urgency and His need and His dependence upon the Father.

He couldn't but pray. It was part and partial of His life. Every step was marked by devotion and prayer. And even after the feeding of the thousands, straight away, He's back with His Father in prayer.

And I think there's a huge lesson here for us. After this display of power, straight away, He's away to His Father in prayer. Because, you know, sometimes when we've had blessing or a great answer to prayer or a great sense of the Lord drawing close to us where we've experienced what we would term the blessing of God.

[24 : 44] Sometimes we're off our guard. We rest in the experience that we've just had. And we've taken our, yes, we're enjoying the moment, but afterwards a complacency can set in.

And you and I, as we look back over our lives, how often after a time of great blessing have we found ourselves plunging, falling. It's because we didn't continue to seek the Lord in the blessing or immediately following on after the blessing when Jesus is showing us the importance of back to the Father.

And of course it was also Jesus' great delight to be in prayer. He just couldn't help Himself. He just wanted. It's what He wanted. And you know, it will show an awful lot about our own lives.

What our prayer, our private prayer life is like. Are we wanting to be with the Lord? Or do we find it, we say, is it just natural to us to be going to the Lord, to be going to the Lord?

We'll speak a lot about where we are spiritually with a desire in our heart for this. And again, what we've got to remember is that Jesus prayed constantly to the Father because He lived in dependence upon Him.

[26 : 04] Now of course, Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God. But as He came in our nature, it was as if His divine, He never ceased to be God, but it was as if His divine was eclipsed.

And He was living in utter dependence. He had to, as our representative, in utter dependence upon the Father and the Spirit. And He's setting out a great example to ourselves that this is how we too should live, living in absolute dependence upon God.

And it's one of the lessons that the Lord teaches us over and over and over again in life. You have to trust me. You have to depend upon me. And it's not natural to us because we want to be in charge of our own lives.

We want to be boss. And you know how often you hear people when things are going wrong, they say, oh, life is tough just now. I don't feel in control of my life.

And people hate that. We all want to be in control. And God is saying, I have to show you now and again that you're not actually ultimately in control.

[27 : 18] I am. God has to show us that. Sometimes it's painful because as I said, we want to be boss. We're like little children. And you know, when a wee toddler is starting to walk, they will always hold their mum's, dad's hand.

But as they get a wee bitty bolder and get a little older, they become more independent. And they want to go down their own. They don't want you to try and take their hand.

They say, no, until trouble comes, until something frightens them. All of a sudden, you find a little hand going up. Oh, I need mum. I need dad. And we can be like that as well because the Lord is saying, here is my hand.

And we're saying, no, I want to, I can do this on my own. Leave me to myself until trouble comes and then we find the hand going out. And I'm talking here particularly to the Christian because this is how we so often walk.

But the thing is this, that the Lord actually always has a hold of us. Even when we don't realise it. As a Christian, the Lord always has a hold.

[28 : 32] And even if we stumble and fall, we won't fall all the way down. Because we're told in the Psalm that the Christian, this is, even though he fall, he shall not fall all the way down because the Lord upholds with his hand.

Isn't that lovely? You sometimes see little children and they're walking, holding on to mum or dad, granny or whoever, and they trip. And they, it's like they're taking a header, but they don't fall because they're being held.

They're almost swinging there because they're being held up. That's what the Lord does with you and with me as well. He holds us up. And something else. You know if you're walking with your wee one and they don't want your hand and then all of a sudden the hand comes up because they're a wee bit worried.

Do you like that? Of course you do. You love when they put their hand up so that you can take their hand. And the Lord loves when we stretch out our hands to him. And can I say to anybody today who doesn't know Jesus as saviour, will you reach out?

The Lord is here. He has reached out to us in the gospel. His hand is outstretched with gospel blessing. And he's saying to you, take, receive, take me, accept me.

[29 : 47] Here I am today. Will you ask the Lord, Lord, please come into my life? And the Lord is showing us in this day that we're living in, this day of uncertainty. We're not in control.

This world thought they were in control. Nations thought they were in control. All of a sudden we realise we can't control. This tiny little germ we can't see.

And all the might and all the wealth of this world can't control. Let us remember who is ultimately in control. Well the disciples were, there they were, they had headed off across the water and of course we read there that the storm broke out.

Jesus had sent them away. And this terrible gale blew up all of a sudden and we're used to that. We know how quickly the weather can change and going from flat calm to all of a sudden you say where did that wind come from?

Well that's what happened to the disciples. And there they are in the boat and it's a tough night because the wind is against them. Now they're experienced sailors but they're struggling.

[30 : 56] And then it tells us that in the fourth watch of the night, that's between three and six in the morning, there appears this apparition as it were coming towards them on the water.

And whatever fear they may have had in the boat because of the storm, that certainly gave way to a new fear because they were terrified. They thought this was a ghost because the one thing that they knew is that nobody can walk on the water but it is a person walking towards them in the shadows and they're petrified.

And so they cried out, it's a ghost. And you know something, I believe that if the disciples' hearts hadn't been hard and if they had understood and considered the miracle, they would have known this was Jesus.

But because their hearts were hard, they didn't see, they didn't understand, they didn't know. And you know, so often we miss the presence of Christ. We miss seeing his hand because our hearts are hard.

Jesus can be present, Jesus can be working, Jesus can be doing things and we're missing it because our hearts are hard and we're not recognising that it is him.

[32 : 11] But anyway, into the darkness, out of the darkness comes this voice, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. And here is a voice that thrilled their hearts because the raging sea is but a pathway for the Lord.

And I don't know how it is with you today any more than how it is really with myself. but we're living as we say in strange times with this unseen enemy that is causing so much pain and distress.

We're all saying, oh, I long to get life back to normal. But the thing is that for many people, for thousands of people, thousands of people in this country, thousands of people worldwide, life will never be back to normal because they've lost loved ones.

There's been so much pain and hurt through this and so much uncertainty and it's still so uncertain. But I want us today to hear the voice of Jesus saying it is I, do not be afraid.

I don't know, neither do you, what the future holds. But the one thing I do know is who is the future? Just as Jesus is the past, he is the present and he is the future.

[33 : 35] and he has all things in his hand and he is saying just as we were saying earlier, take my hand and we pray that we might look to him and realise that he is still God of heaven and earth.

When Jesus said don't be afraid, he didn't say don't be afraid, man up, come on, stiff upper lip, come on, just pull yourself together.

No. You see, Jesus has an antidote for irrational fear and that is himself. When Jesus is going to the cross, the last thing in a sense that he bequeathed, that he gave the legacy that he gave his disciples and gave all his followers is his peace.

My peace he said I give you, not as the world gives, give I unto you. This is a peace you can't work up on your shelf, you can't buy. It's a peace that comes through having Jesus.

And I would ask you today, Lord, say to the Lord, Lord, come into my heart, come into my life, because when he does, he is that peace. He is our peace.

[34 : 47] He's termed the Prince of Peace. So that into all the troubled, uncertainty, and fear that's around, to know the tranquility that he can bring.

in the face of danger, even in the face of sickness, you and I might succumb to this illness. We don't know. But what we do know is that the Lord is still in control.

And even in this, he will grant us his peace. And he says, don't be afraid. It is I. I'm in the middle of this. So may today, in our uncertainties and in our fear, may we cast our all upon the Lord and trust in him and that we may indeed know that peace, the peace of God that passes all knowledge and understanding.

We're going to conclude singing from Psalm 43. And this is from Sing Psalms at verse 3. O send your light forth and your truth. Let them direct me in your grace.

And bring me to your holy hill, into your sacred dwelling place. Then to God's altar I will go, to God my joy and my delight. And I will praise you with a harp.

[36 : 02] O God, you are my God of might. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed in me? Trust God, for I will praise him yet, my Saviour, and my God is he.

O send your light forth and your truth. Let them direct me in your grace.

And bring me to your holy hill, into your sacred dwelling place.

Then to God's altar I will go, to God my joy and my delight.

And I will praise you with the heart. O God, you are my God of might.

[37 : 20] Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed in me?

trust God, for I will praise him yet, my Saviour, and my God is he.

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. Son.

Son. Son.

Son. Son. Son. Son. Son.