

A Vision of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 May 2022

Preacher: Malcolm Hazell

[0:00] All I once held it, build my life upon, all this world revealed, and was to all, all I once thought game I have counted, Lord, strength and wealth just now, come back to Him.

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.

Now my heart's desire is to know you more, to be found in you.

And no man's note to possess by faith what I could not earn, all surpassing Him of righteousness.

[1:29] Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.

Oh, to know the path of your risen life, and to know you in your sufferings, To become like you in your death, my Lord.

So with you to live and never die. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.

[2:55] Knowing you, Lord. Knowing you, Lord. Knowing you, Lord. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord.

I love you, Lord. Well, good morning, everybody.

And a very warm welcome to Union Baptist Church this Sunday morning. And a special welcome if you're visiting us for the first time, either in person or online.

It's great to see you all here and to enjoy the sunshine today. My name is Sheena, and I'm the Deacon for Community Ministry, and I have the pleasure of leading our worship today as we come together before God.

[4:04] Today we're marking the start of the month of prayer and social action for Love Wickham, and we'll say a bit more about that shortly. Our senior pastor, Malcolm, will be continuing our sermon series on the life of Jacob.

But first, as we prepare to worship our God, let's still ourselves and lift our hearts to God in prayer. Let's pray. Let's pray.

O Lord, our God, we gather together today to worship you and give you thanks. We rejoice in you, our maker. We praise your name for you, our people.

We do not deserve to come into the presence of the holy God of the universe, but you have crowned the humble with victory. You picked us up out of the miry clay and clothed us in your own robe of righteousness.

You cleansed us of our sins and will wipe away every tear from our eyes. You give strength to the weak, help to the oppressed.

[5:12] You give food to the hungry and comfort to those that are suffering. We come before you with confidence, not based on ourselves, but based on your saving love for us.

You promised that you will never leave or forsake us. Be with us in our service today as we worship you in spirit and truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Let's continue our worship by praising God for who he is and by singing, Come people of the risen King. Let's stand and worship. Come people of the risen King.

Come people of the risen King. We delight to bring him praise. Come all, and turn your hearts to sing to the morning star of grace.

From the shifting shadows of the earth we will lift our eyes to him. The steady arms of mercy we reach to God the children.

[6:34] Rejoice, rejoice, let every time rejoice, one heart, one voice, O Church of Christ, rejoice.

Come, verse, this joy is born in sun and see it through the night. Come, verse, you tell of battles won and of striving in the fight.

For his world and love will never change and his mercies never cease. But follow us through all our days with a certain hope of peace.

Rejoice, rejoice, let every time rejoice, one heart, one voice, O Church of Christ, rejoice.

Rejoice, rejoice, let every time rejoice. Come, Lord, I love, come every life, come and wear the love of pain.

[7:55] Come, verse, with hope for empty hands, find the riches of his praise. Come, verse, with hope for empty hands, find the riches of his praise. Come, verse, with hope for empty hands, find the riches of his praise. For for all the love of his people, sing to joy, we never know.

Be hope for empty hands, find the riches of his praise. Come, verse, with hope for empty hands, find the riches of his praise. Come, verse, with hope for empty hands, and the glory of his praise.

Rejoice, rejoice, let every time rejoice.

Rejoice, rejoice, one heart, one voice, O Church of Christ, rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice, let every time rejoice.

One heart, one voice, O Church of Christ, rejoice.

Please sit down. We're now going to see a video of Love Wycombe. Love Wycombe has a vision to build unity across the churches of High Wycombe.

[9:13] And over the last eight years, we've gathered over 40 churches for various events in the town centre to pray, to worship, and to celebrate the goodness and the love of God.

And this year, we want to gather people around three big themes. Prayer, social action, and celebration. Firstly, we want to pray for every single street in the Wycombe area.

That God would bless the businesses, schools, hospitals, and houses in these places. To help us to do this, for five weeks from May the 6th, Love Wycombe will be providing a web-based app that has all the streets marked on them.

We will provide simple guidelines for you to help you walk your local area. Bless those who live and work in each street. And simply mark on the app that you have prayed for that street.

Secondly, we want to demonstrate God's love for our town through practical acts of service. Each local church will be asked to find a way of serving your local community in your own unique way.

[10:25] This may be simply serving cream teas or litter picking or car washing. It might be decorating a room for a struggling family or clearing a garden. Each church can decide what will work for you.

Love Wycombe will provide guidelines about how to do this safely and efficiently with publicity that links all of these acts of service together. We want to encourage churches to do this throughout May and early June.

Leading up to our town centre celebration. So on Sunday the 12th of June, we booked the High Street. And we're going to have a stage right here in the town centre.

So we're going to gather to pray, to worship, and to point people to the firm foundation that is Jesus Christ when everything else has been shaken.

So join us to pray, to worship, and to celebrate together as one church as we Love Wycombe in 2022. Brilliant. Well, good morning everyone.

[11:38] We're going to hear a lot more about Love Wycombe and what we're doing as a church as part of Love Wycombe later in this service. But part of that Love Wycombe initiative is about loving our town, loving our neighbour.

And we're going to think about that. And I need four people, I need four volunteers to come and help me to think about that. And all you need to do is come and sit in the chairs up here. So I need four volunteers who can come and sit in the chairs up here.

Okay, Nick, well done. You come on down. Yeah, JJ, up you come. Okay, Nick, can you sit in the first seat here? Okay. JJ, well done. Can you... Yes, there's a hand.

Yep. Yep. Up you come. Is it Brandon? Yes. Okay, well done. Up you come Brandon. Okay. I need one more person. If you're a leader of the church, if you're a deacon of the church, then you're not exempt from volunteering.

I'd just like to point that out. If you're a member of my own family, you're not exempt from volunteering. I'll just... I need one more volunteer. Just... Oh, well done. Well done.

[12:37] That's loyalty, that is. Well done. Okay. Now, safety first. Can you just sanitize your hands? Can you just do that for me? You'll see why in a minute. That's great. Can you just rub your hands together? There we go.

There we go. Just do that properly. Brilliant. Okay. Now, I told you it's going to be easy. What I'd like you to do, please, can you put your hand on the shoulder of your neighbour where you're sitting? Put your hand on the shoulder of your neighbour. Yeah. Well done. Okay. Yeah. And you can just about stretch across there. Okay. That's brilliant. So, let me come and ask.

So, Nick, can you put your hand on the shoulder of your neighbour? Okay. So, who is your neighbour now? I've got his name. He's Jameson. It's Jameson, isn't it? Okay. Jameson. You've got a hand here. His name's Nick.

It's Nick. Okay. Brandon, you're doing some good stretching there. Who's your neighbour here? Jameson. Jameson and? Well done. Miriam, who's your neighbour? Brandon. Okay.

[13:33] Brilliant. Okay. You can let go now. That was easy, wasn't it? Who is our neighbour? It's an easy question. And there was a guy who asked Jesus that question. He thought it was an easy question. He actually came to Jesus and said, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus answered, you might remember this, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself. And then the man said to him, well, who is my neighbour?

But you know, when the man said that, I think he had in mind who his neighbour was and I think he was thinking, yeah, that's alright because I already served my neighbour, that's OK. And Jesus surprised him because he didn't give the answer he was expecting.

Instead, Jesus told a story. And Jesus told a story about a man who got beaten up. And very sadly, lots of people went past this man and they didn't do anything.

They just walked past. But then there was a man from the enemy country who was called a Samaritan, you probably know this story, who went to help the man. Made him, gave him some first aid and got him the help that he needed.

[14:39] So that was the way that Jesus answered that question. OK. OK.

Now I'm going to ask the question again. Who is my neighbour? OK. With that in mind. Nick, who is your neighbour? I've got a neighbour, but I've got so many.

You've got so many. So many. OK. One neighbour I've got so far in this country is all the family I've got in the church.

That's brilliant. That's a great answer. JJ, who is your neighbour now? Any ideas? Have a look around you. Does everyone look happy?

OK. Well come on. Brandon, who is your neighbour? Everybody. Everybody. OK. Miriam, who is your neighbour? I thought it was Brandon. You thought it was Brandon. Oh, look at that. That's very kind.

[15:41] I'll tell you what. I'll tell you what. I did play a trick on you. I did have one. Thank you. Brandon. Oh, look at that. That's very kind. I'll tell you what. I did play a trick on you. I did have one.

Thank you. So, yeah. Brandon, you were a neighbour to Miriam then, weren't you? Because what did Brandon do? He gave Miriam something that she needed. She was in need. She's the one that didn't have one. I needed chocolate. She needed chocolate.

I could tell that. But that was the point that Jesus was making. Because, you know, the guy who asked the question, he thought, I know who my neighbour is. It's the people who I'm kind of close to anyway, and it's quite easy to love them. But actually, Jesus' point was, the person who is our

neighbour is actually the one who is our neighbour.

And it's quite easy to love them. The person who is our neighbour is actually the one who is our neighbour. And it's quite easy to love them. But actually, Jesus' point was, the person who is our neighbour is actually the one who needs something. And we're going to be hearing a bit more about that, about how, as this church, and as part of Love Wickham, we can love our neighbour and go a little bit further than we would normally to serve and to show God's love to people who need it. Okay. Let's give a round of applause to our volunteers. Thank you very much. Okay. You can go and sit down now. Well done. Well done. Okay. And we're going to... You can keep that. Yeah, well done.

[16:50] We're going to sing about showing God's love to our neighbours. It's called Shine From The Inside Out. I'm hoping that Judy and possibly Becca, yes, good, are going to help us with the actions for this. So let's stand and we're going to sing about how we can show God's love to our neighbour and where that love comes from.

Let's stand and sing. Thank you, yeah. Shine from the inside out, let the world will see you live in me.

Shine from the inside out, let the world will see you live in me. You know me and you love me, you build me, you just send me.

Shine from the inside out, let the world will see you live in me. Shine from the inside out, let the world will see you live in me.

You know me and you love me, you build me, you just send me. You know me and you love me, you just send me.

[18:07] You know me and you just send me. You know me and you just send me. To shine from the inside out, let the world will see you live in me.

Shine from the inside out, let the world will see you live in me. You know me and you love me, you just send me. You know me and you just send me.

You know me, love me, you just send me. Love me, send me. Love me, love me, love me, send me. Love me, love me, love me, send me.

Shine. That's great. So we've been thinking today about loving our neighbor.

And we have the opportunity to do just that. As a church, we're taking part, as you've been hearing, in Love, Wickham, which, as we heard, has three big themes to what's going to happen this month. Prayer, social action, and celebration.

[19:14] We'll hear about the prayer aspect later in the service. Just now, I'm going to tell you about what we're planning for social action and celebration. Social action just means loving and serving our local community.

And we plan to do that in two ways. Firstly, through the Do One Thing project, that Helen introduced us to last week. And secondly, through an action day on the 11th of June.

So Do One Thing is a month of taking small actions that make a huge difference in people's lives. Last week, we heard that One Can Trust, Food Bank, has seen the need for their services double in the last six months.

They're now giving out over 1,200 food parcels every month. But behind those numbers are people who are feeling overwhelmed by life.

Doing what just one kind thing can give someone an extra boost that could make a huge difference to them. So what can we do? Well, we might have a neighbour that we could bless with an act of kindness.

[20:24] It could be mowing their lawn, taking them shopping, helping with decorating a room, babysitting their children, baking them a cake, sending an encouraging card, whatever their need might be.

Also, the Love Wickham team at Union will be working with One Can Trust to identify families and individuals from our community that would welcome a helping hand.

Then we can do one thing by selecting a small project that could be done by maybe one to three people and that could fit with what you're able to offer and the time that we have available.

And if you're interested in helping with that and haven't already signed up, Helen France and I will be available after the service to help you to sign up and to answer any questions that you might

have.

And now I'm going to hand over to Judith, who's going to tell you what we're going to do once we've done our projects, a bit more about our wall. Morning.

[21:27] Good morning. I need you to use your imagination. This is a wall. Now walls are built to keep things out or keep things in. This is not that wall.

This is a celebration wall. This is a wall which celebrates acts of love. This is a wall about the action, not the person who does the action.

It's not about the person who receives the act of love. It is the act of love. And what we've started here on this wall is to give you an idea of what you're all doing right now in this church to show love to each other and to the communities that you live in.

And as you go to coffee or whatever, take a look at the wall. There are some amazing things happening. There are people who are helping each other with finances.

There are people who are helping others in their gardens. There's One Can Trust. We have people helping with that, donating to that. We have the Child Contact Center.

[22:35] So please take a look at the wall. But what I want you to do for the next few weeks is when you do one thing, just one thing, I have this heavy bag of bricks for you to build your wall.

They're beautiful bricks. Absolutely beautiful bricks. I want you to come, take a brick, and write the act of love that you've done.

It has an adhesive strip on the back. Peel it off and stick it on the wall. And I want to see that wall, a mosaic of love. Every act of love.

Now, there are about 100 bricks in the bag. That's why it's so heavy. So my challenge is consume the bricks. Use them up. Let's transform High Wycombe with love by building a wall.

Thank you. Thank you, Judith. So that's do one kind thing.

[23:49] The second aspect of serving our community is the Action Day. And that's going to be on the 11th of June. Now, I have here a paintbrush and a garden fork.

Because what we're going to be doing is to be helping Hannibal School on Saturday, the 11th of June, by painting a fence. This is a good brush for painting a fence. And digging their garden. So we'd love you to join us on that morning.

Or perhaps, we don't know how long this will be yet. And to help us with digging and painting. It's a wonderful way to come together as a church and to bless our community.

So more details will be coming over in the next couple of weeks. Now, to round all of this off, there'll be a celebration, as you heard in the video, on the following day, on the 12th of June, when we'll be joining over 40 churches in the High Street for a service at 11am.

The High Street will be blocked off, as you heard. There'll be a big screen, a worship band, and 20 minutes of activities before the service starts. It's all age.

[24:55] And there'll be activity packs for the children. There'll be charity stalls to explore. And I would encourage you all to come and join us that morning. The Love Wycombe HQ would welcome offers of help with stewarding, hosting, helping to set up and take down, and BSL language interpreting, if you can.

So if you would like to help them with that, please go to the Love Wycombe website. All the links are on the This Week sheet. So this is going to be an exciting month for us to join with other churches to show God's love to Wycombe.

Let's pray. God our Father, we thank you that we are your handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We lift to you the Love Wycombe project, and pray that you will transform High Wycombe through your loving, serving, and worshipping church. Amen. Now let's stand and sing, Build Your Kingdom Here.

Come search your role and pray, In our hearts again, In Christmas we pray, On men and why we're made, From set of hearts, We're faced with hope, Like world-wired and all weary souls, Lord is with God, And beat us now.

[26:49] We are your church, We need your power and eyes, We seek your kingdom first, We honor and we trust, Refuse to waste our lives, For you're our joy and prize, To see the haunted parts released, The hurt, the sick, the poor, and peace, We lead our lives, We lead our lives, For heaven's cross, We are your church, To sin in Lord, And light bystop, We hear our purple

Change the atmosphere, build your kingdom here, we pray.

Unleash, unleash your kingdom's power, recharge them here and far.

Your force of love can stop your beauty-changing heart. You made us for much more with this, a way to keep the speed in us.

Fill us with the strength and love of Christ. Fill your kingdom here, let the darkness fear.

[29:05] Show your mighty heart below streets and lots. Set your church on fire, bring this nation back.

Fill the light of spirit, build your kingdom here, we pray. Amen.

Do please sit down. In just a moment, the children, young people are going to go out to their groups. If you haven't already registered, then please, when you go through this door on my left, the registration room, please register your child or young person there before they go on up.

Let's pray for our children and young people. Father God, we thank you so much for the gift of children and young people. We want to pray for the children and the young people now. We also pray for WOW that are going to be meeting later on this afternoon.

Pray for all the leaders, that you will bless them, anoint them, give them a fantastic time together.

And may they draw closer to you as they spend this time together. We pray that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Okay, so children, young people, we're going to go through now.

[30:14] 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.

[31:50] Thank you. Now, it's super easy to use. You can do it on your computer or on your iPad. It works even better if you have a smartphone.

And the idea is that you choose a street that you are going to pray for, that you are going to blanket in prayer, that you are going to pray for God's kingdom to be built there.

And if you go onto the app, you can then register the street that you have walked on. And there's a how-to instruction within it so that you can walk and then register where you've been.

Now, it could be you go on and you already see that it's in red. So as we see up here, that means somebody has already prayed for it. Now, it's great because no prayer is wasted.

But can I then encourage you to think, oh, OK, where can I now go that hasn't been covered?

Because if someone's already recorded, it won't be recorded for a second, third time.

[32:51] But we would love to see the whole of High Wycombe covered in prayer. Wouldn't that be great? Every street, every street, every building prayed for that we would build God's kingdom.

So in the coming month, can we encourage you? Can we challenge you to walk the streets where we live, where we worship, and commit it to God that his kingdom can be built here?

And as we do that, we're also going to continue in prayer together. And to do that, I'm going to start with the prayer they use on the Love Wycombe website, which is from Psalm 67.

And it says this, God be merciful to us and bless us. Look on us with kindness so that the whole world may know your will, so that all nations may know your salvation.

May the peoples praise you, O God. May all the people praise you. Let's continue in prayer. Father God, thank you that we have a vision to see High Wycombe transformed by you and by your loving, serving, and worshipping church.

[34:28] Lord, we want your kingdom to come. Father, for each of us to do our part that it may come.

Our heart's desire is to be a community of Christians who love you, who follow Jesus and share the hope we have in you.

We pray that you would embolden us to proclaim your name and to speak of your glorious majesty and your wonderful works.

Open new ways of service for us all and help us to see new ways in which we can serve you best. Lord, give us the power to witness to you in our home, in our work situations, with family or friends, and on the streets where we live and worship, so that all around us may come to know you as their Lord and Saviour.

Father, we praise you for the work we've already seen. Thank you for the recent Epic Holiday Club. We pray that you would continue to be at work in the lives of all of those children that came.

[36:01] Thank you for those who continue to come each Sunday to learn more about you. And we pray for those who do not yet know you. For those that work in our children's ministry, we pray that you would inspire them as they lead the children, strengthen and equip them to reveal your love to those they work amongst.

Father, we thank you for the continuing ministry of the Cap Job Club, for the eight people that came to the new course that started this week. We pray for them to gel as a group, that they would be open to the gospel in the Food for Thought sessions, that they would participate well in the course, and that you would be at work in their lives.

Father, we lift to you all those in our congregation and the local schools with exams coming up, whether it's SATs this week or GCSEs and A-levels.

We pray for them as they revise that they would trust in you. We pray that as they study in the coming weeks, you would be renewing their minds and strengthening their spirits.

Help them to persevere and fix their eyes on you. As they take each exam, we pray that you would blanket them in your peace and they would be comforted by your nearness.

[37:36] Above all, that they would know that their worth is in you alone and not in the exam results. We pray for the lost, the hurting, the lonely, the sick, the bereaved, for those who are imprisoned, both behind visible and invisible walls.

Father, send your comfort, your peace, and your calming presence to those who are without hope. Protect the defenceless and hold them close to your heart. Father, we lift to you our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

We ask for peace for those who need peace, reconciliation for those who need reconciliation, and comfort for all those who do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Lord, may your kingdom come in Ukraine too, and may your will be done. Lord God, we ask for you to be with all, especially children who are suffering in the crisis.

[38:57] We pray for those who are anxious and fearful, for those who have been bereaved, injured, or who've lost their lives. Draw near close to them, Lord.

Father, we have so many needs, but we know that you are sufficient for every need. Your name is powerful, and your power is great.

We end our time of prayer as we began with Psalm 67. May the people praise you, O God. May all the people praise you.

Amen. So shall we do that? Shall we stand and praise him as we sing, Take my life and let it be. We stand to sing. Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee.

[40:26] Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move At the apples of the Lord.

Take my feet and let them be, Swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing, Always, only for my King.

Take my lips and let them be, Fill with messages from thee.

[41:41] Take my silver and my gold, Not of I to die with gold, Take my intellect and use every promise, Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine, It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart and let them be, Take my heart and let them know, It shall be thy royal throne Take my love, my Lord, my poor And thy feet its treasure store Take myself and I will be Ever, only, only For thee Our reading this morning is from Genesis chapter 28, verses 10 to 22, and it is page 30 in the Pew Bible.

And it's entitled, Jacob's Dream at Bethel. Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

[44:21] There above it stood the Lord, and he said, I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.

Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, How awesome is this place!

This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. Early the next morning, Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar, and he poured oil on top of it.

[45:31] He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Lutz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God.

And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me, I will give you a tenth. May God bless his word to us. Amen. Well, it's lovely to see you all, and thank you so much to Sheena and the community team and Andrew for such a brilliant introduction to Love Wickham and the response that we can give to that.

Are these here for me to fill out while I... Sorry, sorry, I'll just put those down. What a wonderful wall there as well. I don't know, do have a look at what's already happening within our church.

So many exciting, loving actions already taking place. Let's spend a moment now in prayer as we ask God to help us to worship him as we come to his word.

Father, we want to worship you in every way. We want to respond to you aright, and we thank you that you speak to us, and you speak to us through your word in the Bible.

[47:01] May it be for us this morning, as it was for Jacob, to actually encounter you through your word and hear you speaking to us directly.

Hear our prayer. Amen. Judy, do you mind closing this door here for me? I'm just getting a bit cold. A bit of a draft going through here. Well, friends, last week we started our Jacob series.

We were amazed and thrilled that God would choose an utterly dysfunctional family through which he would bless the whole world.

It was like this unblest or apparently dysfunctional family God was going to use to confound the wisdom of the wise. It was a glorious vision. And then, through the actions of Jacob, his scheming with his brother, he is now fleeing for his life.

It's a bit confusing. You've got this amazing promise, and yet the reality seems so very different. Let's have a look then at the context of the journey that Jacob is now taking.

[48:18] This you'll find as you keep your Bibles open in verses 10 and 11. In this text, we see Jacob presented as a lonely fugitive on the run.

Jacob, of course, was a home-loving lad. He was always close to his mother, Rebecca. But now he's exposed to the elements without a tent or anything to give him protection.

And night draws in, and he finds himself, I don't know whether he stamps his foot or whatever, on a lump of rock, but he stops because it's just getting too dark.

He's tired, and he's traveling pretty light because he uses a stone for a pillow. I'm not sure I would do very well with that. Has anybody here ever had a stone for a pillow?

No, I didn't think so. Sounds pretty tough. And as we look at Jacob sleeping, we see a lonely figure in a nowhere place with nothing.

[49:27] It looks hopeless. Have you ever been in one of those places? Alone, with nothing, just perhaps a few fears to nurse.

And as Jacob sleeps, he looks as vulnerable as a baby. God alone is watching over him. And it's a relief, really, in some ways.

I don't know. I found it pretty disturbing, the narrative that we read last week. Such tension and upset within a family. At least now he's sleeping.

Maybe he's got a bit of peace. Are you listening to the quiet breath of Jacob breathing in and out in this place?

I wonder if you can identify with Jacob. Perhaps the busyness of a day, the stress of a day, and you get to the end of the day and you lay your head down on your soft pillow and you have a bit of peace.

[50:35] That's what we see, I think. And the fascinating thing is that God chooses to speak to Jacob when he's in this helpless state, like a little baby.

Perhaps he's in the fetal position, I don't know. This grasping, scheming Jacob, maybe it had to be done in this way. When he's helpless, that God chooses in that moment to speak a word, to reveal a vision to him.

I wonder what's on your heart when you look at a child sleeping. How many of you have gone into your own child's or a grandchild's bedroom as they're sleeping, just to check they're okay?

How many of you have done that? Ever done that? Yeah, a few of you have. Okay. I want you just to remember, think about it, get it in your head. Just watch it so you go in. I don't know, I can remember times when Dawn and I were like, oh my word, I'm just so tired.

Please just go to sleep, please. And then eventually they do. And it is glorious. And you go into the room and you've been a bit annoyed with them.

[51:50] You know, they haven't gone to sleep and you're really tired, you've given your life. And then you go in and they just look lovely. And suddenly, this frustrating little thing, you find love in your heart and you find yourself praying for them.

I remember going into our children's bedroom, sometimes praying in words and sometimes I didn't know what to pray. I prayed in tongues. Just God's blessing be upon this one. And I think that's a picture of what we see here as Jacob is sleeping.

And God speaks a word of blessing over this man and reveals a vision which changes his entire perspective on life.

Let's have a look at it in verses 12 to 15. Get it in front of you if you haven't already opened your Bible in front of you. God reveals himself in a dream in the night, in the darkness.

And what he sees is gloriously impressive. Please note that this dream is no mournful account of a shameful past for Jacob.

[53:16] No, none of that. Far from it. It's a hope-filled presentation of an entirely alternative future. What can Jacob see?

Have a look in verses 12 and 13. He sees a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching right up to heaven. And the angels of God are ascending and descending and there above it is the Lord God Almighty himself.

This is no man-made pride-filled creation like the Tower of Babel. This is a creation of God himself. A stairway that connects heaven with earth created by God himself.

And the stairway shows that earth can count on the resources of heaven. Does that sound exciting? This earth can count on the resources of heaven.

This is gospel good news for us this morning. Jacob had assumed he was traveling alone. Do you ever do that? You think you're alone.

[54:25] Where he would have to eke out an existence somehow by the sweat of his brow. But now he realizes the earth is a place of possibilities because God has not cut himself off from his people.

the rule of God still is at work in this world. Is that exciting? We may look and wonder where? How? But this is the vision that Jacob sees.

As we look at the stairway which Jacob sees, he sees angels doing God's bidding. The stairway is full of promise and introduces a new previously hidden reality to Jacob and friends I would argue to us too.

And then the Lord speaks. It's not just a glorious vision. There are words that God speaks. Verses 13 and 14. This is what he says. Have a look in your text. I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. These fugitives lying on a bit of dirt and God's going to give him that land.

[55:42] Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west to the east to the north to the south and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring says the Lord.

He thought he was a fugitive but even the land he's lying on belongs to him says the Lord. He thought he was in a deserted place but do you know what the Lord the Lord is near.

He thought he was fleeing for his life without hope or promise but he hears the word of the Lord and the Lord makes available to him an entirely new future vividly shown to him in a vision.

Wow. Verses 13 14 are a repetition of course of the promises that have been given to Abraham and to Isaac but now he's personally being told and they're for you Jacob too and not just for you Jacob but through you to be a blessing to the whole world and then in verse 15 it gets personal and we find that here God speaks directly to Jacob with a statement that is not repeated to Abraham and to Isaac.

He says this I am with you. Have you ever had somebody say that to you? I'm with you.

[57:20] I'm backing you. It's a beautiful thing to say if a human being says that. When I sense that my lovely wife is with me I am strengthened.

As elders as we gather together and listen to the Lord and stand in prayer we know that we're with each other but with the Lord. But the Lord says to you this morning as he says to Jacob I am with you.

Can you hear that? Can you hear that being spoken over you? It made all the difference for Jacob. And he goes on I will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land.

I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised. Jacob hears I am with you. Truly heaven has touched earth. The Lord is near.

The fugitive has not been abandoned. as Jesus says to us in Matthew 28 verse 20 Behold surely I am with you can you help me?

[58:35] I am with you always. How long for? Even to the end of the world. I am with you always.

Wow. Friends we like Jacob are promised promised God's presence.

Jesus promises I am with you always. Can I make a small appeal? When you pray could you thank God for his presence?

You don't need to ask him for his presence because he has promised his presence. Do you follow me? Can we get into the habit of saying thank you Lord that you are with me.

You are with us. Help me to be more aware of it. Help me to live in the light of it. They're great prayers. But to say please can we have your presence can you see that doesn't quite make sense?

[59:38] Jesus says I promised it until the end of the age. God has promised Jacob not only his presence he's also promised his bountiful provision and protection I will watch over you wherever you go like a shepherd watching over rather wayward sheep and we often are aren't we?

Jacob is not left with his own resources God's going to provide God's going to protect now Jacob may be a wayward sheep and he is and we we are too but the Lord will watch over you he is a good shepherd he says to you I am with you I'm watching over you I'm watching over you just get that picture when you look at a child sleeping he is watching over you beautiful wonderful and finally Jacob is promised a homecoming I will bring you back to this land he says I'm going to bring you to the promised land and friends all those promises are ours in Christ hallelujah he promises his presence he promises provision he promises protection and he promises a glorious homecoming have you meditated on those promises recently have they filled your heart with thanksgiving I pray they might this morning so that you like Jacob have a different seen future and not just looking back at a difficult day or a hard past wow what a dream what a vision what glorious promises what will Jacob do how will he respond this comes in verses 16 to 22 in our text Jacob receives the promise of God in a dream but he responds fully awake he receives the promise of the

dream but he's awake as he responds in the morning and Jacob finds the world of the dream far more convincing than his old world of fear and of guilt isn't that wonderful the dream is vivid the vision is clear the word of the Lord has spoken and in his wakefulness he embraces a new reality of God's promises his presence and it turns his fear into assurance in the

Lord now let's see exactly how Jacob responds in verse 16 he says this when Jacob awoke from his sleep he thought surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it as Christians we too have discovered that God has met with us through his son and we know his personal presence with us by the spirit because God has dealt with our sin that barrier that kept us apart from God and has now given us the gift of his presence the gift of his Holy Spirit and it's good when we recognise and wonder the joy of this gift the gift of the presence of God with us friends I've noticed at funerals and bereavement services particularly people saying things like this I felt helped it was somehow really wonderful it wasn't all right but it is now somehow all right it's almost like a shalom a sense of peace has come in one sense nothing's changed the loved one is gone well gone from sight and yet everything has changed because that one has experienced the presence and comfort of God can you relate to that

God promises to those who mourn that he will comfort them and he does that's what happens Jacob didn't expect to meet with the Lord but he did perhaps you can recall going through a terrible time in your life and wondered where is the Lord in this and then you've looked back some years later and you could see where he was you could see how people were his instruments or suddenly you realise how did I get through that without the help of God he did help me he was near now commentators describe Jacob's stairway in the Old Testament as a vision of what Christ has done we see the stairway connecting heaven to earth and of course that is what

[65:05] Jesus has done he has connected reconnected us to the living God and this vision I think is a good one for us to use it's so vivid that it helps us to see what Jesus has achieved for us and then it's fascinating to see how Jacob responds what does he do so he said a few words and now in verse 18 let's see what he does early the next morning Jacob took the stone he placed under his head and he set it up on end as a pillar the pillow becomes the pillar and he then pours oil on the top of this pillar and he called the place Bethel he gave it a name this nowhere place receives a name Bethel meaning the house of God where he met with God himself how beautiful he does the appropriate thing doesn't he he realizes has a revelation of

God and what does he do he worships God this is the reaction of the believer you have a revelation of God you realize he is in this place and what do you do you worship him and you find a way of doing so on Friday Dawn and I visited the wildlife photography exhibition in the National History Museum I think it's ages since I've been in a museum it was great the pictures were stunningly beautiful utterly stunningly beautiful some of them were a bit sad because they showed the horrible things that we've done to the earth but most of them were just beautiful what did I find myself doing as I looked well I thanked God for his amazing creation and the bigness of it and the smallness of it and I worshipped him and I laughed at the funny things that animals do it was wonderful God is great the evidence of his presence is for all to see in fact it's just sometimes we get caught up in our worries and fears and these things are somehow blotted out from our sight now

Jacob didn't just worship God he made his own promises in response to God we see them in verses 20 to 22 have a look at them and Jacob made a vow saying if God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return to my father's household then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth friends Jacob is saying if you do what you promise Lord which the Lord always does then the Lord will be my God the Lord will be my God I wonder when the last time you made a declaration like that the Lord the Lord will be my God not my fears not myself the Lord will be my God and what a glorious statement of belief and trust in God this is a key turning point in

Jacob's life our grasper has become a worshipper of God the self centred just focusing upon himself he's de-centering looking to the Lord again do you ever get fed up when you realise your life has become very small and you've just been focused upon yourself and then you realise actually my life makes sense only when it's focused outwards seek first his kingdom and his righteousness

and then do you know what happens all those other things are added unto us says the Lord Jacob's response is a response of kind of yielding himself to God reorientating his whole life even his finances of all you give me I will give you a tenth says Jacob so we can see Jacob claiming God's presence his provision his protection and the promise of a return to the father's house it's as if he's saying a prayer

I wonder if he's saying a prayer a bit like this Psalm 23 verses 1 to 6 see if this makes sense just imagine Jacob saying this the Lord is my shepherd I lack nothing he makes me lie down in green pastures and he watches over me he leads me beside quiet waters he refreshes my soul he guides me along the paths for his namesake even though I walk through the darkest valley the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me your rod your staff they comfort me you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you anoint I may have anointed that pillar but you anoint my head with oil my cup it overflows surely goodness and love will follow me chase after me all the days of my life you kind of get the impression that

[70:51] God caught up with him in a dream he was always worrying and scheming and now the Lord has caught up with him surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I'm going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever hallelujah through Jesus these promises of his presence of his protection are for us through Jesus his death and resurrection the doorway of heaven is open wide hallelujah so my question to you and to myself is how are we living how are you living perhaps you get us on to the last slide how are we going to choose to live God has set out before us a glorious vision wonderful promises admittedly there are difficulties that we face in this life but which way are we going to live are we going to live a life of fear or a life of faith in the certain promises of God just a few questions for you to reflect on are you living as if you are alone nursing regrets of the past and worries of the future that's living in fear isn't it it's understandable not helpful though or will you do a work of repentance and turn away from that pattern of living which is

I think is what Jacob is doing in this text and turn towards an alternative vision embracing a new future filled with promise turn away from the dead end and instead yield your life to Jacob's vision which is for us too of a world where heaven touches earth I wonder as you heard about these bricks were they bricks of love or burdens that you heard in the context of God's promises and if heaven touches earth and we respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting this is exciting this next few weeks as we particularly together listen to his prompting how might God work through you by his spirit where God's promises are certain and dependable and you can shape and overturn a shameful past this is the gospel friends and Jesus opens up this gateway to heaven how will we choose to live in fear or in faith of the vision and promises that God has set before us shall we turn to him in prayer now oh loving father you know us so well you know everything about us you watch over us you see our foolish deeds our needless worries which don't add a day to our lives and you love us and speak blessing over us we thank you forgive our foolish ways renew our minds with a vision of all of your promises for us as your people help us to live in the light of your glorious future of heaven breaking in on earth we pray for this

I pray father that you would help us each one to say this morning the lord is my god he will protect me he will guide me and he will bring me home hallelujah may this be our vision this be our song this be the way we live our lives for your glory and that this world might know that the lord is good his love endures from one generation to the next hallelujah amen amen let's stand and respond to god as we remember how this this stairway to heaven was built when I survey the wondrous cross when I saw there the endless cross on which the prince of glory died my richest in my count but rose and more untempt follow for all my pride for bid it

Lord that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God love love and things that show me most I sacrifice them to his blood love love and love see from his head his hands his feet sorrow and love flow mingled down did such love and sorrow meet all thorns compose so rich a crown love love the love of nature kind and what an offering are too small love so amazing so divine love to my demands my soul my my my my own and my own and my soul and my own and my own and my own and my own thank you everyone for joining us today and we would love to welcome you for a

cup of tea or coffee just through this door here and remember that Helen and I will be available to sign you up if you haven't already done so if you'd like prayer please look out for someone with the leadership team anyone wearing a pray hands badge and they would love to pray with you and now a final blessing amen eternal God and Father by whose power we are created and by whose love we are redeemed guide and strengthen us by your spirit that we may give ourselves to your service and live this day in love to one another and to you through Jesus Christ your son our Lord amen amen