

# Compassion

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[0:00] Oh, the way I'm alive, let's have a peace and peace.

Oh, Jesus, I'm being born, all that you've done for me. Oh, let's use up for me. Well, good morning, everybody, and a very warm welcome to our service this morning.

We're continuing our series on finding confidence on our front lines. We've been looking at confidence through being convinced, through community, and today we'll be doing it through compassion.

But let's start by coming to our God in prayer. Loving Heavenly Father, in a world with so many challenges, you are the source of all true and lasting joy.

We praise you for your power, which is beyond compare. We worship you for your wisdom, which is beyond understanding. You can meet all our needs.

[1:14] You are the God of compassion, who restores the brokenhearted and heals the wounded. You have revealed yourself to your people and are building your church, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

How great you are. Lord, fill our hearts with love as we respond by singing praises to you, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. So let's sing those praises to God in our first song.

Bless the Lord, O our soul. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

O my soul. Worship His holy name. Sing like never before.

O my soul. I'll worship His holy name. Amen. The sun comes up.

[2:23] It's a new day dawning. It's time to sing a song again. Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me.

Let me be singing when the evening comes. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Oh my soul. Oh my soul. Oh my soul. Worship His holy name. Sing like never before.

Oh my soul. Oh my soul. Worship Your holy name. You're rich in love.

You're rich in love. And you're slow to honor. Your name is great. Your name is great.

[3:24] For all your goodness. eses are from burning, that should going into everything. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

The Lord, O our soul. Let the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship his holy name Sing like never before, O my soul, I'll worship your holy name And on that day when my strength is failing The end draws near and my time has come Still my soul will sing your praise unending Ten thousand years and forevermore Let the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship his holy name

Sing like never before, O my soul, I'll worship your holy name I'll worship your holy name Yes, I'll worship your holy name Please sit down We've been singing that the Lord is rich in love and slow to anger Let's come before God to inwardly confess our faults and admit to our frailty And be confident of God's promise of forgiveness Lord, you've given us a world of beauty and we have spoilt it A world to feed us and so many go hungry A world of riches and we are unwilling to share A world to care for and we think only of ourselves

Forgive us, gracious God, for those times your heart is saddened by our selfishness For those times we have no thought for others No cares but our own Enable us to see this world anew as a gift from you To be shared and nurtured And those who live upon it to be loved and cared for We ask that your name be glorified Through the beauty of this world and the service of our lives Amen So let's respond to that by singing our next song Just as I come I am, rather I come broken to be mended Just as I am without one plea

But that thy blood was shed for me And that thou bidst me come to thee O Lamb of God, I come I come Just as I am Just as I am And waiting God To rid my soul Of wild, of blood To thee Whose blood Can cleanse Each spot O Lamb of God I come I come I come I come

[7:50] I come I come I come broken To be mended I come wounded To be healed I come desperate To be rescued I come empty To be filled I come guilty To be pardoned By the blood By the blood Of personal love And unwelcome We open up Praise God Just as I am Just as I am I would be lost But mercy and grace My freedom bought And now to glory In your cross In your cross In your cross O Lamb of God

I come I come I come I come broken To be mended To be mended I come wounded To be healed I come desperate To be rescued I come empty To be filled I come guilty To be pardoned By the blood Of Christ the Lord And unwelcome With open up Praise God Just as I am I come Praise God Just as I am Praise God Just as I am Praise God Praise God Well please do sit Have a seat Now all of you should have a piece of paper with like this If you haven't got one please and you won't like to have one please let us know and someone will come with you What we are thinking about is our home and what our home means to us we've all got different types of homes but there will be things in our homes that are important and really important to us but I want to think about what those things are and what it would be like if you didn't have them or you lost them so on the sheet of paper are the two columns as you can see what I'd like you to do is to think about those things and to write on them in those columns what are your favourite things in your favourite room one column and what you'd miss most if you didn't have that home I'll give you a couple of minutes to do that sorry Thank you.

Thank you.

[12:32] Thank you.

Thank you. Well, does anyone want to tell me what their favourite thing or room at home is? Big ones and little ones can tell me. Yes? TV. Yeah, good. That's your favourite thing. Anybody else? Yes, Judy?

Being safe and comfortable. Yeah, absolutely. Anybody else want to say? Yep. Yep. Books. Yep. That's my favourite too. My toys. Your toys? Yes. Yes. Can you shout it out? Video games.

[13:51] Absolutely. Yep. Yes? Your DVD player. And friends as well. Right. Okay. Good. So, what would you miss most if you didn't have your home?

Yes? Video games again. Video games again. Right. Yeah. Good. Anybody else? Lost a sense of peace. Lost a sense of peace.

Yes. Absolutely. Family. Absolutely. Yep. Electricity. Electricity. Yep. Warmth.

Yep. Comfort. Comfort. Yeah. So, there's all sorts of things that we enjoy and really, really value about our homes. It's wonderful to have a home where we can close the door and feel safe.

We can play with our family, have our friends around. But, you know, there are 99,000 families in England just now with 130,000 children.

[14:55] So, there's recent research in temporary accommodation in England. Now, being in temporary accommodation means that they don't have a proper home. And that's really very hard. Now, you may think, well, it's good that they have a roof over their heads.

But actually, it's not that easy. Often, temporary accommodation can be far from the home they started in. And some children have to commute to school from those homes and can actually lose a lot of schooling.

And recent research by Shelter has shown that average children now in temporary accommodation are losing a month of schooling in the disruption. Now, there's a picture here I want to show you.

This is actually IKEA. IKEA, in conjunction with Shelter, are putting up displays of temporary accommodation in one of their room sets in each of their stores.

This happens to be Warrington. But it's accompanied by a true story. And this is one person's true room. A lady called Channa. And she had to leave her home with her three daughters through a no-fault eviction.

[16:00] So, can you imagine four people living in that space? Mother Channa lives on the pull-out mattress on the floor. Her oldest daughter has to sit in the toilet to prepare for her exams.

She gets very cold in there and the mould makes her asthma worse. And her other daughter is really struggling at school, her 16-year-old. So, life and temporary accommodation sounds okay. But actually, it's a real challenge. And today, we've been talking about compassion. And in our town, we have a charity that I help with called Wickham Homeless Connection that helps people who either have no home or are at risk of losing it.

So, we help people to keep or find a new home. And we believe that every single person is made in God's image. And it has worth. We welcome them and help them to get back on their feet and show them that God loves them.

But now, we're going to go out to children's work in a minute. But I want to say to thank God for our homes. And to pray for people who are losing their homes. So, let me just pray.

[17:08] We pray for all who are suffering from homelessness. For those who are alone. And for those who are living in cramped and crowded conditions. We have courage to those who feel they struggle on without help.

And hope to those who despair of things becoming better. As we see Jesus, unafraid to reach out to people who have been ignored. Make us courageous, compassionate and open-hearted people. So that we may see the whole person. And offer them dignity and care. And through our small steps, help to bring alive your kingdom on earth. In Jesus' name.

Amen. And now I'll pray for our children as they go out to their groups. God, our Father, we thank you that you love each one of us. We pray for our children and young people and their work. And their leaders as they go out today. We thank you for the homes that we come from. For the comfort and protection that they give us. We pray today that they will also have a safe space. Where they can have a wonderful time together.

[18:12] Learning about you. We pray for a special blessing on the leaders who are leading and helping in those groups this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Well, just before Colin Hutt comes to bring us our intercessions, I want to just say that Margaret Gage died last night.

We're just thankful for this peaceful ending and have got to be with the Lord. Good morning.

[19:53] Just to say that I'm standing in for Rachel Dillon, and Rachel unfortunately has had to take her mother to Stoke Mandeville Hospital for an appointment that I think she should have had some while ago.

But Rachel had already prepared her prayers before she got called to look after her mother, and so I will be going through the prayers that Rachel prepared.

So these are Rachel's prayers, not mine, but they're so good that it would be a shame just to put them to one side. But before we do that, we need obviously to remember Margaret Gage and those that will miss Margaret, and we need to pray for Rachel and her mum, of course.

But I just want to mention too, I had an email yesterday telling me of the life of a young man called Seb. Now Seb, some of you who were here in 2006 may remember that I had the privilege of conducting a dedication service for Seb.

He was 22 months old, but he was only very, very small because he had been diagnosed with Mulvey-Hill-Smith syndrome, which has the effect of keeping young people abnormally small, multiple non-cancerous moles, short height reoccurring infections due to impaired immune system, impaired hearing, dental anomalies, intellectual disability, and decreased fat in the face.

[21:29] And in addition to that, Seb also had type 1 diabetes. Sadly, Seb has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and has been now only given a few months to live.

And back then, when we do a dedication service, in fact, it was a service of blessing. We prayed for Hayley, his mother, and we prayed for Seb and the family.

And as always, we promised we would support them and we would pray for them. And so I'm asking you to pray for that particular family, Hayley, Seb, and the sister Kayley and brother Ashley and that family.

And we need, I sent our support to them and I sent our message of condolence to them last night and promised that we as a church would pray for them.

So let's pray. Father, we thank you for the life of Margaret Gatch and we thank you, Lord, for all that she did for you and for us here at Union Baptist in the times when she was active and able to do so. [22:35] And Lord, we pray for those who will now miss her and we commend them to you. And we pray, Lord, that the life that she lived will have an impact upon those who knew her and as they remember her.

We pray too for Rachel and her mum, presumably now at hospital at Stoke Mandeville already. And Lord, we pray that whatever the situation is there, we pray that those that are looking after Rachel's mum will be able to diagnose and deal with the issue that is the problem.

And Lord, we just want to remember Seb and the family and we pray for them at this time. He was said with his limited understanding, but we pray, Lord, that in some way you will get through to him. And we pray for the family that they will know your comfort and your peace. And Lord, that you will draw them close to you. So hear our prayers. We pray in the name of Jesus. I now move on to the prayers that Rachel had prepared for us.

Gracious God, your love for us is revealed in your beloved son, Jesus, who was born into hopelessness and lived with nowhere to lay his head and died for us in agony on the cross.

[23:49] We lift before you now all those who are facing homelessness or fear of homelessness today. As we look at our world, we see homelessness on a scale beyond our own comprehension.

We pray for the 1.5 million people left homeless by the recent earthquake in Turkey and for comfort for those who have lost loved ones.

We ask that the churches in the region might have wisdom as to how best to help those in need in their communities and the courage to share your light in these dark times.

And we pray for hearts around the world to be inspired to give so that humanitarian aid can reach all those affected. We pray for the tens of millions of people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes through conflict and persecution.

So many of them children. Father, these are vast numbers. Yet we know that no refugee is a stranger to you. We ask for your protection for those making perilous journeys and particularly for children travelling in extremely dangerous conditions.

[24:55] Bless those who work to bring them relief. Inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts. And guide the nations of the world towards that day when all would rejoice in your kingdom of justice and peace.

And amidst the growing hostility in our own country towards people seeking safety here, we pray for a response built on compassion, justice and moral leadership.

We pray that those seeking sanctuary in the UK would be treated with dignity and justice. That our own attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers might be characterised by grace and welcome rather than fear.

And as we look to the desperate situation in Ukraine, we pray for the millions of refugees who have fled their homes, mainly women and children.

We ask that the 800 Ukrainian refugees, now settled for the time being in Buckinghamshire, might with love and compassion in their difficult and traumatic times.

[25:56] We thank you for the work of those local churches and charities which are reaching out to these families. And pray that you would bless and guide their ministry.

Father, we lift before you the housing crisis in our country. We pray for our government, that you would bring insight, knowledge and wisdom and vision, that our leaders might be equipped to bring restoration to a broken housing system.

We ask for government action to tackle the root causes of homelessness. We pray that no child will be left living in uncertainty and without the safety and provision of a home.

We pray for the wellbeing of those living in B&Bs, hotel rooms and other temporary accommodation, that they might receive the support they need with debt and benefit advice, mental health support and more permanent housing solutions.

We pray for the hidden homeless who so often find themselves in precarious situations, including sofa surfing, sleeping rough, squatting, sleeping on public transport.

[27:04] For those who are afraid and hopeless, for those who have been fallen through the cracks of our welfare net, for all these people we pray that you will provide shelter, security and hope.

And as interest rates increase and inflation soars, we pray for those in fear of falling behind on rent or mortgage payments. We ask that those tormented by anxiety about their finances might find the courage to seek help in addressing their problems before it is too late.

We pray for the work of Christians Against Poverty, both nationally and in our town, as they partner with local churches to tackle poverty and debt. And as we turn to the needs of our town, we thank you for the work of Wickham Homeless Connection.

We thank you for their dedicated staff, for the many volunteers who give their time, skills and effort to help end hopelessness, and for their good working relationships with other agencies.

We pray for the safety and protection of those sleeping rough in High Wickham, that they would engage with help to get them off the streets. We pray too for those facing threat of eviction or repossession, that they would seek help in good times, so that hopelessness might be prevented.

[28:20] We pray too for the work of Wickham Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme, based here at the Hub. We thank you for the strong relationship they have built up with private landlords in the town, and for the wealth of experience from which they support vulnerable clients.

And we pray you would give them wisdom and patience in their work. We pray for staff in the statutory agencies, the housing and homeless officers, their frontline workers striving to fulfil their duties in difficult circumstances, where the need massively outstrips supply and tempers can run high.

But with all those who work alongside the homeless, as they seek to overcome inequality and injustice, with care and compassion, wisdom and patience. We pray that those of us living in warm homes might not be lulled into complacency and forgetfulness.

Raise our awareness of how we can create a supportive and safe spiritual community, where the homeless and marginalized find generosity of heart, rather than suspicion, compassion, rather than judgment and grounded support, rather than empty platitudes.

Give us eyes to see and ears to hear, that we might be your hands and your feet in this town.

Inspire us to reach out in love, as a sign of your radical hospitality and grace.

[29:44] And as Plug-in at the Hub restarts here in this building next month, we pray that volunteers might come forward from within the fellowship to serve in this valuable work. Loving God, help us to work for a world where everyone has a home that truly meets their needs.

Give us grace to welcome strangers and refugees. Fill us with the courage to play our part. Save us from being overwhelmed by the scale of the housing and homeless crisis.

And show us, Lord, where to begin. As people of the gospel, Lord, keep us ever mindful of our obligations to the poor and the marginalized, to work in your name, to turn sorrow into joy, and to bring those who live in darkness into your wonderful light.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer, who made his home on earth, that we might have an eternal home in heaven. Amen.

And thank you, Rachel, for those prayers. The reading today is Jeremiah chapter 38, verses 1 to 14, and is on page 801 of the Pew Bibles.

[31:11] Jeremiah chapter 38, verses 1 to 14, and said, Jeremiah, son of Matan, Jedalijah, son of Pashur, Jehuchal, son of Selamiah, and Pashur, son of Malkijah, heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said, this is what the Lord says.

Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine, or plague. But whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives.

They will live. And this is what the Lord says. This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.

Then the officials said to the king, this man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them.

This man is not seeking the good of these people, but their ruin. He is in your hands, King Zedekiah answered. The king can do nothing to oppose you.

[32:28] So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern.

It had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud. But Ebed-Milek, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern.

While the king was sitting at the Benjamin gate, Ebed-Milek went out of the palace and said to him, my lord, the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern. Where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-Milek, the Cushite, take 30 men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.

So Ebed-Milek took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern.

[33:51] Ebed-Milek, the Cushite, said to Jeremiah, put these old rags and worn out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes. Jeremiah did so and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern and Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the Lord. I'm going to ask you something, the king said to Jeremiah.

Do not hide anything from me. Well, thanks very much, Ed.

Have you read Jeremiah 38 recently? It's probably not a well-trodden passage within the Bible. And thank you, Ed, for reading those names. I think I'll do a little test afterwards on how to say them. Before I begin, I just wanted to say congratulations to a couple, Kirsten and Peter, that's Sheena's daughter and future son-in-law, got engaged.

[35:02] So I think we ought to celebrate that. There's lots of challenges in life, but there's also things to celebrate, and we must make sure that we do.

Well, after preaching two weeks ago, on Romans 8, 28, that all things work together for good for those who are called according to God's purpose, we as a family have faced some big challenges. I'm sure many of you had challenges over the last few weeks. My dad has been diagnosed with dementia and one way of the blood supply to the brain, which obviously is very sad.

And my son is struggling with his mental health. This has been difficult for us as a family. And I read and preached on Romans 8, 28, and we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

So Dawn and I have been looking for good, that good that God is working in all this. And one good which I would like just to say thank you for is those who I've shared some of these things with.

[36:13] Thank you for your love, for your prayers. Please continue praying for my dear son, Michael. We've also known the comfort of the Lord.

And the NHS has come up trumps, I have to say. We often complain, don't we? But all sorts of care has now been put in place. So we're very, very grateful to God for that.

I share it with you because I think it's important to the fellowship that we share the difficulties that we're facing. And I know many of you are facing challenges at this time.

Can I encourage you to tell somebody that you love and trust and you know they love you and ask them to pray for you? Because God can work good. It's not good what the thing is, but he can work good even in it and through it.

Last week, Andrew was preaching on the importance of community if we're going to become confident in the gospel. We need one another.

[37:14] And I've been so pleased over the last few weeks to see people who haven't been back to church for over two years come again to worship.

So exciting to see that. I've been delighted to hear of people who haven't been in home groups and small groups coming into small groups again. And I was hearing last week that a group that was trying to move towards being a life group, they'd shared a WhatsApp link so they can keep in touch with each other during the week to support one another in the Monday through Saturday week as well as on a Sunday.

So I just want to be really encouraging you, encouraging the fellowship. As we are convinced of God's word and stand on God's word, we will become more confident in our gospel convictions. As we walk as a community, we will grow in confidence in the gospel. And today, we're looking at compassion. We're particularly focusing on ministries in this church and some of them started in this church.

Wickham Homeless Connection itself was born out of a conviction when somebody was found dying and dead in the stairwell of this car park next to us.

[38:27] That was the starting point where somebody said, this is no longer okay. We must do something. How can we come and worship and do nothing? And Wickham Homeless Connection was ultimately the outcome of that.

And I just want to... I don't know where Kevin's gone. He was definitely sitting there. He's out the back serving, is he? God bless him. Well, I wanted to just honour Kevin and Mike and Sheena and Mark for their ministry amongst the homeless in this community.

I'd like us to give them a clap just now. It's not easy ministry. And as you listen today, it may be that God will prompt you to perhaps help out with Plug In at the Hub, which starts on a Thursday evening, doesn't it, Mike?

At the beginning of April. Well, that's by way of background. We're looking at Jeremiah 38. And I want to give you a little bit of context to Jeremiah 38.

Babylon was the superpower of the day. And most people bowed to Babylon, including Judah. In fact, Judah was like a vassal state of Babylon.

[39:43] And they'd appointed a puppet king, King Zedekiah, to do their bidding. The problem came that King Zedekiah, this puppet king, had decided he was going to hedge his bets.

He wanted to see if he could get some better arrangements with Egypt, another power of the day. This deeply, deeply upset Babylon.

It upset them so much that they went back to Judah and said, you're not going to carry on as a little puppet state. We're taking over. And the text you're hearing here in Jeremiah 38 is the situation after two years of them being under siege.

Now, if you look at the situation in Ukraine, and is it Bakhmud, that town? That's under siege at the moment. They've had two years in Jerusalem under siege. Things are not easy.

Can you imagine a lack of food, morale terribly low? And into that context, the prophet Jeremiah has been speaking.

[40:47] He's been saying to the people of Judah, you are in this mess, not because you went to see Egypt, although that was a daft thing to do.

You're in this mess because you've been breaking the covenant that I made with you. You've been following other gods. There is no social justice in your nation.

And even worse, you've been making child sacrifices. And it's all on your watch. That's why this is happening. Now, the king and the officials aren't very happy about this prophecy, you can imagine. Can you imagine that? It doesn't really, it's not like a, feel good? Hey, you're doing really well, guys. No. You brought this all on yourself, says Jeremiah. Now, because he said that, what do you think they did?

They put him under house arrest. That's what happens, doesn't it, in states like this. And under house arrest, he hasn't learned to remain silent. He speaks again.

[41:45] And we hear him speaking in verse 2. Just imagine the impact of these words if you're under siege in Jerusalem. Let me read the verse to you from Jeremiah 38.

You might want to turn to it if you haven't already done so. He says this, verse 2. This is what the Lord says. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague.

But whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life. And this is what the Lord says, just in case you didn't get it, verse 3. This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon who will capture it.

Now, the officials of Judah are absolutely enraged by Jeremiah saying this. Can you imagine? He says, this is going to ruin the morale of the people.

It's pretty low already. And so they go to King Zedekiah and say, we've got to intervene. And in verse 4, you hear what they say to King Zedekiah. Have a look at verse 4.

[42:53] Then the officials said to the king, this man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in the city. I wonder if some of those soldiers have actually been thrown out.

Oh, not thrown out. Have left, have already given up because they are so worried. As well as all the people by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people. And he's going to result in their ruin. Can you see the situation? It's a pretty tough situation. And what happens is the king says to the officials, he's in your hands.

You can do with him what you like. It's a little bit like Pilate with Jesus. You know, when the crowd, the religious authorities, come to Pilate and say, what are you going to do with this troublemaker, Jesus?

And he washes his hands, doesn't he? And he says, you do with him what you like. And so that's what happens. And what happens to Jeremiah is he is lowered down into a cistern for good, for him to die there.

[43:58] I wonder if you can imagine what it would be like for Jeremiah in those circumstances. Just imagine being lowered down. You're already under house arrest and now things are getting worse.

You're doing what you believe God has told you to do and things just seem to get worse. I put these words together. Just imagine this. Perhaps he could see the circle of blue above him as he sits in the darkness.

And as he goes into the mud, his toes squidge as the mud fills the gaps between his toes. And he wonders to himself, Lord, I was doing this for you.

I was doing this to save my people. It's not easy being a prophet, is it? Well, that's not in our text. That's just me imagining what he might be thinking.

That, I hope, tunes you into the narrative. I want us to look at two characters in this narrative. We're going to look at King Zedekiah and this man called Ebed-Melech.

[45:06] We're going to look at both of them and we're going to see what we can learn from these characters. One is going to illustrate to us faith-filled compassion that results in confident action.

The other one is going to reveal fear-driven fickleness that leads to confusion. We're going to start by looking at King Zedekiah.

I think Zedekiah was chosen by Babylon because he was easily manipulated. He was a man who didn't seem to stand for very much and they thought that he could be their puppet.

But he was a man who liked to hedge his bets and so he tried to see if he could get a better deal with Egypt. This angered the Babylonians. Also, Zedekiah seemed to draw around him yes-men who did what seemed good to him and so they were always trying to please him.

You know, if they heard Jeremiah saying something nothing, saying something bad, they tried to silence Jeremiah so that the king looked better. Also, the king, we don't see it in the narrative we've got here, but in other parts of Jeremiah, we see the king, King Zedekiah, meeting with Jeremiah to see if he can hear another word from the Lord, hoping for a better prophecy.

[46:32] And he would do that in sort of quiet so that nobody knew that he was actually meeting with Jeremiah. His officials perhaps didn't know. Again, trying to sort of see if he could get a better outcome.

Always hedging his bets. He was a weak man, I guess, easily swayed with very little conscience. Some have described it as a marshmallow man. Just push and he will change his shape, but when you stop pushing, he'll go back to the shape he was before.

I quite like that imagery. We're a marshmallow people. A fickle king sailing under the wings of popular opinion. So what does he do when under pressure from his officials to deal with this troublemaker, Jeremiah?

He washes his hands of the situation, as we've heard. You see, Zedekiah is driven by fear, fear of the most recent pressure that is coming against him, be it Egypt, Babylon, or his officials themselves.

[47:45] I wonder, are you ever tempted tempted to go with the crowd to make it a bit easier for you? Even if it doesn't fit with your Christian

faith, you're going the way of Zedekiah if you do.

And it leads to confusion. Do you ever try to hedge your bets? You know, backing both sides, awaiting to see which way the wind is blowing.

I think if that's you or me, we need to repent of that. Jesus said this in Matthew 7, verses 13 and 14. Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction. And many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life.

And only a few find it. So I think Zedekiah teaches us to stand on God's truth even when the world around us thinks it's outdated or in a modern Britain.

[48:53] And we need to choose the narrow way that leads to life. So we have a look at Ebed-Melech. Now, the name Ebed-Melech is obviously a Hebrew name.

Ebed means servant and Melech means king. So servant of the king. Does that make sense? Ebed-Melech. Let's have a look at this Ethiopian servant in the courts of King Zedekiah.

And you'll notice that this man sees Jeremiah down the cistern and has compassion on him. Now, I wonder what other people in the palace thought as they noticed Jeremiah drop down into the cistern.

I wonder what was going through their mind. These were the thoughts that came to me. I wonder if they reflect what you might think. I feel really bad for Jeremiah down that cistern.

Must be horrible down there. That would be a logical thing to think, wouldn't it? Or how about, I really think he brought this on himself. He could have been more careful in what he said.

[50:03] Surely, didn't he realize this would upset the king? Or how about this one? I wish I could do something. But you see, the king is very powerful and the officials are backing his line.

What can I do? Does that sound kind of things that we sometimes find ourselves saying about situations? I want you to notice how Ebed-Melech responds.

He may well have looked at Jeremiah and thought, gosh, this is really difficult. And he may have thought all those thoughts that we've just mentioned. But he didn't just offer sentimental empathy. Oh, you poor thing down there. Must be very cold. He didn't pass the blame. You should have known this was going to happen. He didn't pass the blame.

He could have said he could do nothing. After all, he's a servant of the king. How can he break what the king's allowed? Instead, he does the scary thing. He goes to the king and he says it as it is.

[51:14] Verse 9. Have a look in your books, in your books, in your Bibles. Verse 9. My lord, the king, he says, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet.

They have thrown him into a cistern where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city. Presumably somebody's dropping a bit of bread down the cistern to keep him going.

A double-minded king remarkably agrees. He goes along with what Ebed-Melech says because I guess the pressure is coming on the marshmallow and he's moving to the shape again.

And he responds in verse 11 to 13. Have a read of it. Verse 11. So Ebed-Melech took the men with him. Oh, sorry. So basically, the king agrees and then this is what Ebed-Melech does.

Ebed-Melech took the men with him, the 30 men that the king suggested, and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn out clothes. What is he doing?

[52:19] He's going to some car boot sale? I don't know. From there, he let them down on ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, put these old rags and worn out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes.

Isn't it lovely? He's worrying about rope burn. Isn't that amazing? Jeremiah did so and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern and Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

What happened was that Ebed-Melech acted by faith in God. He acted compassionately and confidently and his compassion even went as far as to being worried about rope burn.

I think it's amazing, don't you? When all the pressure is on this guy, he's thinking, oh, how can we avoid him getting some sort of soreness under his arms? Because I was just thinking, if you try to pull somebody out of thick mud, can you imagine the pressure that's going to be on his arms as they pull him out?

Now, Ebed-Melech was servant to King Zedekiah. But can you see that he isn't simply a servant of the king? He is a servant of the king of all kings.

[53:41] He knows he's got higher orders even than King Zedekiah and he is acting on them. He trusts those higher orders that are stirred in his heart by deep compassion.

Sometimes in life, friends, we see something and we kind of go, somebody's got to do something about this. This can be the voice of God, the call of God on your and my life.

And that's what happened to Ebed-Melech. And do you know what? We're not told ever so much about this guy but in chapter 39 verse 18 we discover that he truly is a man of faith because what happens is the Babylonians come in as Jeremiah predicted and as they come in obviously every person in Jerusalem is likely to be killed.

And this is what is said by the Lord to Ebed-Melech in chapter 39 verse 18. I will save you says the Lord to Ebed-Melech.

You will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life because you trust in me declares the Lord. This man is a man of substance who's put his trust in God and that has resulted in his life being filled with compassion for this prophet this prophet Jeremiah.

[55:05] And of course this servant of God is a foretaste a pointer a signpost to a servant who would come many many years later who would come and serve the king of all kings down here on earth.

He would leave his glory of heaven his palace if you like and come and humble himself being born in a dirty muddy stable in order to come and walk with us to heal us to save us.

And eventually on Good Friday we'll be remembering this he went down to the depths of our sin and depravity he got muddy not just between his toes right up right up to his head for you and for me.

He was filled with compassion it was the joy of saving you and me that was set before him that meant that he despised the cross and went to the cross for you and for me.

Now Ebed-Melech was a beautiful saviour to Jeremiah wasn't he? But he still lived in fact the Lord checked on him and the Babylonians didn't hurt him but this one this servant of the Lord this son of God this Jesus Christ he died in fact he went down and down and down to the depth of all the awfulness of human life you may look at human life and see some bad stuff we all do don't we?

[56:43] He saw the worst and somehow took it into himself to redeem it and he died but three days later he rose from the grave and on Easter Sunday we will be celebrating his victory won't we?

over sin over death hallelujah this is the man who will stir our hearts who will move us with compassion to go and save others it's the compassion of Christ in the hearts of believers that will make all the difference and fill us with confidence to act and I believe Jesus would want to say to you and to I this morning behold I am with you even to the end of the world I am with you I can imagine him as he spoke to his disciples remember he he breathed on them his spirit he says receive the spirit my spirit my compassion my strength receive that allow it to fill your life be confident not in you be confident in me recognise that I am your king of all kings

I am the one that you serve and you and I are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this hurting world that's our calling lots of different callings upon us each one of you will be called to do different things but that's what we're called to be we're called to follow the example of Ebed Melech but supremely follow the example of Jesus and we too can reach out with compassion and kindness where we are to see those restored and born again around us so friends don't go through the broad gate and try to hedge your bets and keep everybody happy it's impossible frankly try instead to be following the example of Ebed Melech who understood who his king was and was filled with his compassion and trust in God Amen shall we turn to God in prayer and ask him to work in our lives

Loving Lord we want to thank you for your servant Jeremiah for your servant Ebed Melech but supremely for the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ who for the joy set before him came and showed such compassion to us we are filled with gratitude and we pray Lord that you would fill us afresh with your spirit of love and grace and compassion and you would strengthen us so that we can be confident in this strange world in which we live and wonderful world in Jesus name Amen now we're going to sing our next song which is Beauty for Brokenness thank you beauty for brokenness hope for despair hope for brokenness hope for despair

Lord in your suffering love this is our prayer  
bread for the children justice joy peace sunrise to  
sunset your kingdom your kingdom in please shelter for fragile lives cures for their ills work for the  
craftsmen trade for their skills left for the dispossessed rights for the weak hope for despair hope for  
despair for despair for despair of those who can't speak God of the poor friend of the weak give us  
compassion we pray melt our gold hearts let tears fall like rain come change our love from us come  
to a flame refuge from cruel wars maidens from fear cities for sanctuary freedoms to share peace to  
the giving fields scorched scorched earth to bring

[62:15] Christ for the bitterness his cross for the pain rest for the  
ravisher of oceans and streams blundered and poisoned our future our  
dreams Lord in our badness carelessness and free make us content with the  
things that we need Lord of the poor and forgive and suffer country From  
a smoke to a flame

Lighten our darkness, breathe of this flame Until your justice burns quietly again Until the nations  
burn all your ways Seek your salvation and bring you their praise God of the old, reign of the weak  
Give us glory, we pray Melt our gold hearts and tears fall like rain Come change our love from a  
smoke to a flame Please sit down

Earlier we were thinking about home and what home means to us And what it's like not to have a  
secure home We're going to see a very short video now About one person's experience of what that  
was like It was made by Wickham Homer's Connection in 2019 And whilst one or two things have  
changed since then Most of it is still relevant now As soon as the bedroom tax kicked in That's  
when things started going out of control I had two spare bedrooms Because my children were  
growing up The more rooms you have, the more tax you have to pay The debt was just mounting up  
I was looking forward, like they said, to downsize the property I had two bedroom houses, flats  
People were coming to see it but they just didn't want it People didn't want to move from their flat to  
a bigger house Because the bedroom tax People actually told me that as well

That went off a while some time It was very stressful at the time All the callers coming through The  
eviction, Bailey's and things like that So out of desperation One day I was walking on Castle Street  
And then I saw Simon becoming a little disconnection And I thought, well, there's no harm I'll go  
inside and see what they say I've had quite a few roadblocks I say a few but I haven't been in  
roadblocks anyway The stress, the sort of, it was quite considerably high To deal with everything It  
wasn't just one time going to court It was quite a few times A week, just a week before Christmas  
And I was quite frantic Went with a letter to Homeless Connection This is what's happened I hit a  
low point because the teeth are just coming down my face So they were very sympathetic And they  
came to court with me

They supported me Professionals knew what they were doing It was a happy ending I moved finally  
in May this year, 2019 In a one bedroom plan That's suitable for me My cat was very scared of her  
But yeah, she's got used to it now She's got her little hiding place Yeah, she loves it Mind you, she  
ran away For a week I came home from work one day About a quarter to twelve And now I can hear  
this funny noise That sounds like my cat I opened the back door And there she was Very  
malnourished But she, yeah, she came back Now she's not running away She's staying here Happy  
ending to that, yeah Preventing homelessness is much more better than becoming homeless It's for  
both parties It's less stress

[67:29] All they do is just get the court paper ready And that's court  
costs and fines It's not really worth it When one can move into a  
suitable property And pay them out I just want to let everybody know  
Letting people know People are going through facing eviction,  
homelessness There is an association out there Which can help And that's  
become a homeless connection They can deal with it I'm going to have a  
question and answer session You can have the pink one I'll have the blue  
one Okay Okay No sexism there No, none at all None at all First of all,  
lovely to talk to you about something I know that you and Mark are  
absolutely passionate about But I wonder, could you let people know here  
We talked about Jeremiah being caught down a cistern, down a well

And he got stuck down there How can people get stuck in our community here? Well as you saw in  
that video It's a bit indistinct But Josna was stuck for years in her situation And there are all different  
kinds of situations people get stuck in And they're all unique to each person But a form of being

stuck is sleeping rough And we typically think of people as homeless as sleeping rough But they're the people that don't qualify for council help So they don't get temporary accommodation like the ones we saw earlier But you know, the national figures for rough sleeping have just come out in the last week or so There's been a 26% increase year on year this year of people sleeping rough And Buckinghamshire hasn't escaped that And one of the sorts of reasons that are The commonest reason for people ending up in that state is poverty You know, it's a simple fact People just don't earn enough rent

Money to pay the rent Rents are going up by 20% last year Local housing allowance has been frozen since 2020 So in a housing crisis Cost of living crisis All people's Everything's going up But the means to pay their rent is being stuck So they are very much stuck So what can you do about that?

We know there's lots of problems Yeah, well in fact as an organisation We've actually asked our MPs to think about campaigning Or asking the Chancellor in his budget To unfreeze local housing allowance That's one thing we've been doing The other thing is to try and help people who are sleeping rough To mitigate that Currently you won't see many people on the street at the moment Because they're all in winter accommodation provided by the council With government funding But that all comes to an end at the end of this month So you will see people back on the street again very soon And that's an issue So We help people in this church You heard this mention plug-in earlier And plug-in was started by Wiccan Homeless Connection But the church runs it Downstairs Mike Mailing's in charge of that And there we Once a week we offer people who are on the street The chance of a shower A hot meal A chance of getting their clothes washed Some friendship Some

Just some People who will be good to them And talk to them And to try and mitigate some of the effects of rough sleeping As it happens If any of you would like to help or volunteer with that Please do talk to Mike afterwards He'd love to hear some more people to volunteer from the church with that A great team of volunteers Many of whom aren't Christians Who I think is a wonderful place to kind of hear from us about what God is doing Yeah, brilliant Now we talked about Jeremiah getting totally stuck And needing someone to come and pull him out Yes With kindness and with rags or whatever I wonder if you've got any examples like that Yeah We There are a few people who are incredibly stuck Who no one can seem to help And we took the decision this year to put a lot of people who are stuck We took the decision this year to put some real effort into it We've called it our Truth and Grace project Because it requires a huge amount of effort The numbers involved aren't very many There's about five in Wickham They are people who have no recourse to public funds [71:59] That means they can't get benefits They can't rent a house They can't get temporary accommodation They are absolutely stuck Without our help And so we have done some really intensive work with a few of them Either helping them to go back to their country of origin Or to try and find some way of moving them on I've got one example of a picture of a chap called Alfie Alfie, as this says here, originally came from Namibia He came here 19 years ago And for 10 years he worked here, paid his taxes, paid his national insurance Had a partner, had a son And life was going fine Until his son, who had Down syndrome, died And everything completely went pear-shaped after that His relationship fell apart He then discovered he hadn't got the right to stay But he didn't want to go back to Namibia Because his life was here And he was hovering between the two for the next nine years With no stateness And his idea had all gone as well

So when he came to us He was in a real state And he's a lovely guy And so Helen, our services manager Spent ages working with him intensively And it's a fact that if you are here 20 years However you get here If you can manage to stay here 20 years You will automatically be allowed to stay So if he can get to February next year He will have an automatic right to stay in Britain So now we've managed to get him into an Emmaus community Which is in Gloucester He'll head there In fact this is him heading off to Emmaus Where he'll stay And they help people who are homeless Who are stuck And help them to rebuild their lives He'll go into the community And be there till February Until he can get the right to stay Wow You've had many challenges I'm sure As you've been working in the ministry to the homeless We've talked about that when we act out of

compassion We can see, and faith

That confidence can flow Have you seen in this ministry I imagine some people out there are saying Gosh if I engage in this my confidence is going to plummet Have you seen your confidence in the Lord increase during this time?

Oh definitely I mean we often talk about compassion fatigue And I think compassion fatigue happens when you can't do something And you see the desperate need But it's really really great to be able to do something And when you see things happening, things changing And we do see people's lives changed Then it just gives you confidence to keep going And a passion to do more And I just set a light by it I think it's brilliant And as an organisation We are rooted and grounded in our faith in God It's the petrol that drives our engine And whilst we don't evangelise It definitely drives what we do And we pray every day And we bring all our issues to God in prayer And we do see answered prayer Fantastic Well should we pray for the ministry of Wicke and Homeless Connection just now?

Let's pray Loving Father We thank you for all the partners Organisations in this town That reach out to the least The last and the lost And we thank you for the ministry of Wicke and Homeless Connection Please anoint and bless those that we know And those we don't know working in this ministry We pray for those who are helping at Plugin Who both know you all and those who don't We pray Lord that your light would shine brightly through them We pray that some of the volunteers would see the light of Christ shining in the Christian volunteers And be intrigued And we pray Lord your kingdom come Your will be done Amen Amen Thank you Thank you Well we're going to sing a song now Longing for light we wait in darkness Thank you Longing for truth Longing for truth

[76:15] Longing for truth We turn to you Make us your own Your holy people Light for the world to see Christ be our light Shine in our hearts Shine through the darkness Longing for truth We turn to you Longing for truth We turn to you Make us your own Your holy people Light for the world to see Christ be our light Christ be our light Shine in our hearts Shine through the darkness Christ be our light Shine in your church Gathered today Lord your church Shine in your church Gathered today Lord your church Gathered today Lord your church Gathered today Longing for peace The world is troubled Longing for hope Many despair Longing for hope Many despair Longing for hope Many despair Your world alone has power to save us Make us your living hope Christ be our light

Christ be our light Shine in our hearts Shine through the darkness Christ be our light Shine in your church Chilling your church Gathered today Longing for food Many are hungry Longing for water Many still thirst Make us your bread Broken for others Shed unto all our flair Christ, be our light Shine in our hearts Shine through the darkness Christ, be our light

Shine in your church Gathered today Longing for shelter Many are homeless Longing for warmth Many are cold Make us your building Shelter in others Walls made of living stone Christ, be our light Shine in our hearts Shine through the darkness Christ, be our light Shine in your church Gathered today Many the people

Many the people Many the hearts that yearn to belong Let us be servants to one another Making your kingdom Making your kingdom come Christ, be our light Shine in your hearts Shine through the darkness Christ, be our light Shine in your church Gathered today Please take a seat Please take a seat Just got some notices for you As mentioned earlier We have the bereavement service This afternoon at three o'clock And that's for anyone Who has recently bereaved

Or would like to spend some time Reflecting on a loved one We've also got a youth service This evening The youth will be leading the service And playing the instruments They would really value your support Next week Sorry, next week Sorry And then also our church meeting Is coming up on the 21st of March It's our annual meeting And we would really like As many of you to come Who are members as possible There are some really important things To do that night Like vaulting in some new deacons Talking about living stones And a whole range of other things So please do come and support that And lastly Our holiday club Is starting on the Between the 12th and the 14th of April So bring along your children And your friends' children And come and support that too Thank you Now our final song is Who Breaks the Power of Sin and Darkness This is Amazing Grace Who Breaks the Power of Sin and Darkness

[81:53] Whose love is mighty And so much stronger The King of Glory The King of all kings Who shakes the whole earth With holy thunder Who gives us gladness In awe and wonder The King of glory The King of all kings This is amazing grace This is our fading love That you will take my place And you will bear my cross You will lay down your life But I will be set free For all Jesus I sing for all And you turn to be

Who brings out chaos Back into order Who makes the orphan A son and daughter The King of glory The King of glory Who resonates with truth and justice Who shines like the summit All of its brilliance The King of glory The King of all kings The King of all kings This is amazing grace This is our fading love That you will take my place That you will bear my cross You will take my place You will take my place You will take my life That I will be set free

Jesus, I sing for all That you've done for me Bloody is the love who was slain Bloody is the King Who has called in the grave Bloody is the King Who has called in the grave Bloody is the King Who has called in the grave Bloody is the love Who is the eight Bloody is the lady Who was slain Bloody is the king Who has called in the grave Bloody, bloody, bloody Guten Bloody in the shocking grace and grace This is our failing love That You would take my days That You would bear my cross You'd live out your life That I would be set free Oh, Jesus, I'm safe through all that you've done for me.

And now a final blessing. May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within your heart.

[85:42] May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace. May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen.