

Loneliness

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[0 : 00] Great, thanks very much, Albie. Good evening, everyone. It's really good to have you with us, whether you're here in the building or watching on Zoom at home. I think for many people, the most difficult part of the last year has been loneliness.

Now, some of us are blessed with loving families around about us, and we perhaps haven't experienced that to the extent of others. But particularly during the first lockdown, when there was no bubbling, but even after that, many people who were on their own have found things really, really difficult.

And perhaps particularly so if they were suffering, people suffering from physical illness or from mental illness, or perhaps in hospital or a nursing home, and not able to see family and friends for very long periods.

And if you've been in that position, you might say to someone like me, well, you can't really understand what it's been like for me. And there's some truth in that we can understand to some extent.

We probably can't fully understand what those who have been on their own are going through. But one thing we can be sure of, whatever circumstance we're in, is that Jesus understands.

[1 : 12] And as I've been thinking about the events of Easter over recent weeks, I've been really struck by the way in which Jesus went through them largely alone.

That he was suffering alone as he took our place on the cross. And I want just very simply and briefly this evening to go through at a very high level the key events leading up to the death of the Lord Jesus and his cross.

And to think about how he faced them alone. We'll also take some time to think about what the gospel writers, what the spirit through the gospel writers is teaching us from each of them.

So let's start in the upper room. Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. Now you might say, he's not alone, is he? He's with his closest group of friends. But although he was physically with his disciples, although his friends were there physically with him, yet in terms of understanding what was happening and what he was going to suffer, he was very much alone.

As we read the gospels, it seems that the disciples spent some of the time squabbling about which of them was the greatest. But a lot of time asking questions which, from our viewpoint, knowing the answers from scripture, seem a bit naive and insensitive.

[2 : 44] And rather than receiving support and help from his disciples, Jesus was giving support to them. And he was bearing the burden of what was about to happen to him alone.

They were no help to him. Now we might ask, why was it that Jesus put himself through that? That evening, in some ways, you might think was unnecessary.

He could have spent time perhaps by himself or in prayer to God. Why did he choose to spend the evening with the disciples, knowing that there were going to be no help at all to him in his troubles? Well, it was partly because he was obeying the law. It was Passover time, and as a Jew and in obedience to God, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples.

But I think as we read the accounts in the gospels, and we're a little bit from Matthew, but in the other gospels as well, what we see is that in the upper room, Jesus was preparing his disciples for what was to come.

[3 : 54] Preparing for the 72 hours before they would again be in an upper room and would see the risen Lord Jesus. But preparing them and us for the next 2,000 or so years, who knows how long, until the Lord comes back again.

Being very honest about the difficulties that they and we would face, but also explaining the great resources that we've been given, particularly the gift of the Holy Spirit to be our friend and our

counselor and our guide and the very presence of Jesus with us.

And of course, he gave us what we will be celebrating later. The cup and the bread, bread and wine, reminding us of the Lord's body and blood.

He was thinking, how could we, 2,000 years later, how could Christians right down through the ages, be supported in their remembrance of him and their celebration of all that he has done? And so he chose to spend that evening with his disciples and to teach them and to encourage them and to teach and encourage us as well.

[5 : 14] But in a real sense, he was doing it alone because the disciples didn't understand and there really weren't any help to him.

We move then to the garden, the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus goes there with 11 disciples, Judas having left by this time.

He leaves eight of them behind sitting in the garden, takes three with him, and then he leaves them as well. He leaves them to pray, but they go to sleep and he goes a little bit further and he engages in prayer to his father.

And what we see here is a really unique insight into the relationship of Jesus with his father. As he is alone physically for the only time during his sufferings, all other times there were lots of people round about him.

The only time he was physically alone. We see his heart and we see the dread with which he looked forward to the cross.

[6 : 21] As he prays to his father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but yours be done.

And as he is alone with his father, we see the very heart of the Lord Jesus. A heart that at one hand looks forward and recognizes all that he's going to suffer.

And it's not the physical suffering that was the worst part for him. It was taking our sins on himself. He sees that and he shrinks away from it.

But at the same time, he says, Father, it's your will, not mine, that needs to be done. And I suppose that these verses are in our Bibles so that we realize that Jesus fully understood what was about to happen.

He didn't go to the trial and then to the cross with some kind of idea that he might get off or it might not be as bad as he might think it would be. He fully understood what was about to happen to him.

[7 : 28] And he chose to go through with it. He chose to be obedient to his father, God. He chose out of love for us to go to the cross and to take our sins.

And there alone in the garden is the moment when Jesus finally makes that decision. I am going to do my father's will.

Now I am going to go through with what I came into this world to do. Alone in the garden. And then we see Jesus alone in the courtroom.

Actually, we see Jesus alone in a number of courtrooms. Because if we piece together the four Gospels, he's in a courtroom before Annas and then before Caiaphas and then before Pilate and then Herod and back to Pilate again.

And in each of these courtrooms, we see Jesus facing mockery, lies, physical abuse, flogging a crown of thorns forced onto his head.

[8 : 34] And he does it alone. Do the disciples follow him? But one of them, Peter, disowns him. No help at all in the moment of crisis.

He has no defence solicitor. No one to stand up for him. He is absolutely alone in these trials.

And the Gospel writers, all of them, talk at some length about the trial of Jesus. As I've said, they focus on different things. But all of them see this as something that is really significant and important to record.

And what in particular do we learn from it? I think we learn that Jesus went through these trials with great dignity and with grace.

But more than that, he went through it in full control of the situation. He wasn't there just as a helpless victim.

[9 : 37] He was there as someone who had decided that he would be obedient to God, that he would take the punishment that was due to us. And at no point in the trial do we find him pleading for his life or desperate to be let off or to have his sentence reduced or anything like that.

He knows what is going to happen and with dignity he goes towards it. And what a contrast that is with those who were judging him. The high priests who couldn't even find witnesses who could agree among themselves what it was that Jesus had done that was wrong.

Pilate, who was so vacillating and weak, knew that Jesus was innocent and yet gave in to the crowd. They weren't in control of the situation.

But Jesus, standing there alone, was in full control. And he was going resolutely to do his father's will and to take our place on the cross.

And so we come to Calvary. And again, Jesus is alone. Now we saw in the readings that there were some friendly faces around.

[10 : 56] There were women who stood at a distance. His mother was there too. And John, his disciple. But massively outnumbered by the crowd, who were some of them hostile, some of them just probably curious and watching the spectacle that was happening.

But at the key moment, in the key hours when Jesus took our sins on himself, he was utterly alone. It was dark round about. There was no one could see him or see what was happening. And even his father had forsaken him.

That gut-wrenching cry, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some people think that maybe he went on to quote the whole of Psalm 22 that that verse comes from, which is such a graphic depiction of the Lord's suffering.

At that moment, in these hours, even his father God wasn't with him. For the only time in eternity, Jesus was separated from the father.

[12 : 10] Why was that? Well, I think we get a clue from a verse in 2 Corinthians 5, which says that God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

Christ became sin for us. I don't know if that goes beyond saying that Christ took our sins in his body on the cross.

But it does bring out to us the awfulness of what Jesus bore at Calvary. And because he became sin, God, who couldn't even look on sin, had to leave him.

And he was utterly on his own. Forsaken by men. Forsaken too by God, his father. Bearing our sins on the cross alone.

Taking that burden, that punishment that should be ours, and taking it without anyone there to support him. And then, and then, the Lord Jesus dies.

[13 : 19] He's buried. And he rises gloriously on the third day. And of course, we'll be thinking about that as we come together on Sunday. And there are two great consequences of what the Lord Jesus did.

When he suffered alone. The first is that we need never be alone. Jesus can always be with us as our helper, as our guide, as the one who is with us through life and through eternity.

And if our trust is in him, if we've recognized our sin and committed our lives to him, believing that he took the punishment for us, then when the judgment day comes, he will be there to stand for us and to be able to say, I took the punishment that was due to Ian or whoever you are.

I took that punishment when I suffered alone. And we will never, if we're trusting in the Lord Jesus, we'll never be separated from him. We'll be with him for eternity.

And the second great consequence is that the Lord Jesus too is never alone now. He's at the right hand of his father.

[14 : 42] The father who had to leave him as he took the punishment for sin has exalted him to the highest place in heaven. As John sees in the vision and revelation, there is a great multitude who are singing the praises of the lamb who died for them.

And one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The one who suffered alone, alone in the upper room, alone in the garden, alone in the courtroom, alone on the cross.

Now as a great multitude surrounding him, singing his praises and for eternity, those of us who know him and go to be with them will worship him and rejoice at being in his presence.

Hope all of us today have our faith in the Lord Jesus. I put our trust in him as the one who took our punishment on the cross and is our only hope for eternity.

[15 : 58] And if we do, there's a sadness as we think about his death, a sadness as we think about our sin that took him there, that he had to bear on the cross.

But a rejoicing to today that his work is now done and he is in the place that he deserves. He is getting the honour that is due to him.

Gazing on the Lord in glory, while our hearts in worship bow, there we read the wondrous story of the cross, its shame and woe.

On that cross alone forsaken, where no pitying I was found, now to God's right hand exalted, with thy praise the heavens resound.

Did thy God even then forsake thee, hide his face from thy deep need? In thy face once marred and smitten, all his glory now we read.

[17 : 04] Gazing on it, we adore thee. Blessed, precious, holy Lord, thou the Lamb art ever worthy.

This be earth's and heaven's accord. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your suffering for us.

We thank you that you were willing to go through these hours of agony alone. Separated from those whom you had associated with for many years on the earth.

But even more, separated from your own Father as you took our sins on yourself. As you became sin for us.

Help us to understand this Easter just a little bit more of what it meant for you to suffer for our sins.

And as we do that, help us to ensure that our trust is in you.

[18 : 11] And help us to worship you as we should for what you are, for who you are, and for what you have done for us. We pray you'll be with us now as we move into a time of communion, as we remember you in the way that you appointed.

May we do that in a way that is worthy of you. We ask it in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.