

So we are nearly at the end of our teaching series as we have examined the incredible promises of God – he promises to save us, he promises to provide for us, to provides rest, he strengthens us, and so the list goes on. It kind of gets to me when you just begin to read out that list as to why people don't see the incredible hope that comes to those who trust in the Lord. Like there is no greater assurance or guarantee than that, and for life with all that goes on these days, it is incredible to hang on to these promises. I hope all of you are as enthused as I am.

For those that know me well, I absolutely love science fiction. It's the place I go to escape, and it's not uncommon for me to watch the same movie over and over and over again. For example one such movie that I must have seen 30 times is called The Martian, starring Matt Damon. And so it's the story of a group of astronauts who are setting up a base on Mars. Very soon into the movie, the base is hit by the most violent of storms, so much so that the risk to the crew is too great and therefore they choose to abort the mission and leave for earth. However in the scurry of getting into the rocket to depart, Matt Damon's character gets hit by debris which punctures his suit and he is left for dead while the rest of the crew have to leave him behind. Anyway, there is a breach in his suit and for those that know about Mars, it has 1% oxygen compared to earth which has 21% oxygen. So without the suit, a person will die very quickly. And so the whole film is then about his attempt to survive on this barren planet, and find a way of escaping when there is no rocket to escape in. Matt Damon has to find a way to survive.

So what's that all got to do with my talk this morning. Well for each one of us, I believe that one of the critical factors in life is survival. We need to have security that we are going to be ok, and actually we save up for approx. 40 years with a pension just to ensure in our old age will be secure. And it was exactly the same for Jesus' disciples. They needed to know things were going to work out. The film Martian makes you wonder what it must be like to be abandoned on an uninhabitable planet, all on your own. The disciples are wondering about their future, they don't want to be abandoned. And today I want you all to consider the joy that we are not abandoned folks. We have an incredible promise from God that not only will he not abandon us or leave us as orphans, but that we can be assured of being with him for eternity, far beyond our 70, 80, 90 years on this earth. And that there is one way to that promise of security, it's through the person of Jesus. So this morning as we think about this promise, **we will consider that he promises to go and prepare a place for us, that he is the way, and that we see the love of our Father God in him.**

So Jesus promises that he will prepare a place for us.

Can you imagine the fear and sense of insecurity in Jesus' followers. "Like Jesus, you can't leave us. What are we going to do? We need you" And so in our reading today, verse 1, he starts with a line that shows deep compassion. "Do not let your hearts be troubled". Another translation would say don't let yourself become worried about the uncertainty. I wonder if you can put yourself into the place of Jesus who knows he is about to be executed, and yet instead of receiving emotional support from his disciples, it's Jesus who provides the support, guidance and comfort to his followers.

But for the disciples you can imagine how uncontrollable it will feel when you are in the midst of deep fear about the future. You can't think straight, you don't know what is the right approach. And so the solution to their distress is to trust or believe in God, and therefore believe or trust in Jesus. It's not a cross your fingers moment, it's a trust in the knowledge and certainty that God is completely trustworthy - trusting that he has everything under control.

Jesus then goes on to give assurance of that control, the assurance that there is a place for us and that we will be with Jesus and our Father God. The incredible promise here is that we not only won't be abandoned, but also there's a special place for us with him. Belonging in his presence is at the centre of God's plan for us all. This place that Jesus is preparing is a place of welcome, of togetherness, of continuous worship, continuous joy, no more tears, where we are in the presence of our loving Father God forever.

It's also really important to say that the place that is prepared by Jesus is for all those that have put their trust in him. But, and it's a big but, there's a real danger at times, that people think everyone on earth will reunite in this place that Jesus has prepared for us. Scripture doesn't say that, however the inclusive thing is that Jesus is preparing it in the hope that all of creation will trust in him, surrender themselves to him as Saviour. There is room. But that room is conditional on our relationship now with the Lord. And that's what the preparation is all about – it's not that he's going off to build a place. No, the preparation that Jesus is doing relates to his need to go to the cross, to defeat death, and to rise to glory. That's the preparation that paves the way for us to be where he is. And it's there where through his death and resurrection, we will go there without any sickness, any tears, any hurt. They're all gone folks.

That's the amazing comfort and hope that comes through Jesus, and it's into that therefore that we do not need to let our hearts be troubled about the future if we have submitted ourselves to the Lord.

So obviously if we have that promise, and the disciples have heard that, then why do they say in verse 5 "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" which brings us onto the second point.

I've become increasingly lazy when it comes to getting to places. I was asking one of my colleagues Rev Ian Magowan, to remind me where the service is this Wednesday evening, and he directed me. But halfway through the directions, I'll be honest, I shut off as I thought to myself, I'll just get satnav to show me the way. And here Jesus has already told his disciples that they know the way, and yet into that, whether as a result of laziness, or stupidity, they ask "how can we know the way?"

And here we have one of the most famous statements which Jesus is known for – verse 6, "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". It makes things absolutely clear doesn't it? You can't just say well I believe in Jesus and that's it. Jesus is saying that everything about our future is determined by him. There's more to this than just thinking "If I say I believe in Jesus then that's me sorted for eternity". Wasn't it James who said that, "even the demons believe" that there is

a God. You see I think most people of a certain age in Northern Ireland will probably agree there is a God, but I don't think that cuts the mustard. And it's through the other parts of Jesus' answer that we understand more of this. You see when Jesus says that he is the way, the truth and the life, he's saying that all aspects of our lives here on earth must depend upon him. In other words, it won't matter how much you have done in this life in being a good person, it's a relationship with Jesus that is necessary; that when we look to guidance in all our decisions, we must be governed and directed in those choices by Jesus and his Holy Spirit today; and that when we think about what sustains us daily, then we must recognise that Jesus provides all that we ever need. Nothing else counts.

It also means that there's a huge mistake in thinking these days that all of the world's religions essentially point to the same thing, or that everyone goes to heaven. The term for it is called 'Universalism'. And whilst that can bring comfort to families, it's not taught in the scriptures. The truth is that if Jesus doesn't exist in your daily life, then Jesus is saying, (and that's not me), **he's** saying that you can't come to that place where God is and wants you to be also. So that has huge implications for humanity. It means that all other faith traditions must know about Jesus. And so how will they know? Well, that responsibility lands with us – if someone doesn't know about Jesus or only knows of another God, then we as his disciples need to make Jesus known. It's for this reason that we support and partner with Release International as they support those Christians in other parts of the world where their faith in God places them at huge risk. And it's not good enough to say, well other people have their faith and I have mine. Jesus says that no one comes to God except through knowing him. So are we willing to allow family and friends to walk in blissful ignorance because we haven't said anything to them? Every person in this planet must, through us as believers, come to know Jesus in order that a way is opened to the God of the Universe. Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Some people ask, well what does that mean for the people before Jesus was born? Where they saved? Well the truth is that from the time of the fall, everything in scripture was pointing to a restorative relationship with God through the Messiah. Paul explained in Romans 4 that salvation has always been and will always be by God's grace and received through faith alone. Therefore we can be assured that through the patriarchs and prophets, God's people were continually being pointed towards that trust in him. Some followed, some didn't.

Now these promises from God, whilst full of incredible hope, will also be deemed as radically exclusive. The offer is open to everyone, but it can only happen through one person and that is Jesus. People are offended by the claim that Christians seem to have the dream ticket, and that the only truth can be found in their God. Folks, that is not our making, that is God's hope for humanity that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

So Jesus promises to prepare a place for us, he tells us that to get there we must come through him and him alone. And then finally, **we see Jesus reveal the Father through him.**

And you see he reveals this through what he says and through what he does. Jesus says in verse 10, “The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work”.

The disciples knew deep down that the kinds of things Jesus was saying were the kinds of things they had never heard anybody say before. They knew, as I know, as all of you who have trusted in Jesus also know, that the words of Jesus go to the very essence of our hearts' condition. There is power in the Word of God, and the Word of God is Jesus! So why do so many deny the existence of God?

People sometimes condemn Christians for irrational belief. But what is irrational about hearing Jesus speak and feeling your heart burst at the realization that these words are so different than anything else the world has ever heard before, and continue to impact us 2,000 years later? What is irrational about hearing the teachings of Jesus and knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that the teachings of this Jesus have the capacity to reveal in us many things about ourselves? And yet those around him, his disciples needed more.

If today you have your doubts, then can I ask, are you not in awe of His astounding teachings? Be in awe of Him healing the blind, the crippled, the lame. What about His walking on water, His calming the storm, His multiplying bread and fish, never mind his work on the cross. Is it not enough that Jesus said God would forgive your sins? Then reflect in these weeks leading up to Good Friday as he dies as a sacrifice to ensure our future is secure! Is it not enough that Jesus said God loves you? Then watch Him suffer on the cross to win you to the Father!

But there is even more. Is it not enough that Jesus said He would go to prepare a place for us in the Father's house? So watch Him, when dead and buried, breathe again on the third day, live and rise and walk out of the tomb! Are the words not enough? Then watch Him rise and ascend to the Father, speaking words of mission for his followers as He ascended.

Jesus' oneness with the Father, His coming, His words and works are not intended merely to convince you. They are intended to call you and compel you to come into a relationship with the Father.

So what an amazing promise he offers all of us today.

If you know Him - if you are a follower of Jesus, then remind yourself to stick close to him every day. Remember that he has paved the way to the Father for you. Know that there is nothing in this world that can give us more hope, than eternal life with him. He gives Life. There is no greater wisdom, no higher knowledge, no greater truth - than the knowledge of God that Jesus reveals. Jesus is the truth.

If today you know in your heart that you don't know him, then I encourage you to speak to me or members of the prayer ministry team afterwards to pray with you. I want to urge you to believe in him. Turn away from living your own life. And turn to living for him. There is no place in this world that is or will be greater than being with him. There is nothing in this world that will give you more hope, than eternal life with him. You will find no greater

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wisdom, no higher knowledge - than knowing God through Jesus. And there is no other way to receive these things, only through Jesus.

What incredible promises that we have learnt today. Jesus is the way. Today may we honestly come to him and trust in Him, and through him our place and our future with him is secure.