

# Are You Hurting?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Mark chapter 14 and we're going to read from verse 32 to 42.

They went to the olive grove called Gethsemane and Jesus said, Sit here while I go and pray. He took Peter, James and John with him and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. He went on a little further and fell to the ground. He prayed that if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by.

Have a father, he cried out, Everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.

[ 1 : 18 ] Then he returned and found the disciples asleep. He said to Peter, Simon, Are you asleep? Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray so that you will not give in to temptation.

For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Then Jesus left them again and prayed the same prayer as before. When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open and they didn't know what to say.

When he returned to them the third time, he said, Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But no, the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here. Amen. This is God's word and we pray that he would bless it to us all.

In a moment, Derek is going to come up to lead us into God's word together. Before he comes, we're just going to pray for a moment. Let's pray. Dear God or Father, we thank you that we can come to you and pray just as we are, knowing that even before we speak, you know us, you know our situation and you know our needs.

[ 2 : 41 ] We want to especially pray tonight for people who are hurting. We know that everybody coming in here tonight will be carrying different burdens. Maybe pressure at work, maybe worries at home, maybe concerns about health and maybe the pain of the loss of our loved one.

We pray for everyone who's hurting and for everyone who's struggling and we come to you, Lord, because we really need you and we really need you in every part of our lives.

We pray also for the people around us in this city and in our whole nation who are hurting, people who have been let down by others, people who've been treated badly, people who've found themselves in desperate situations, people who are gripped by addiction, people who are homeless, people who feel lost and people who feel like they're worthless, people who struggle with their own mental health, people who carry physical pain and suffering.

We pray for our hurting world and ask that you have mercy. And we remember also people across the nations of the world, places of suffering and pain and sorrow, places of war, places of chaos.

We think of the Middle East, we think of Venezuela, we think of so many of the nations in Africa.

[ 4 : 23 ] And even our own towns and cities, our schemes, places where there's so much brokenness and hostility. We just want to pray for people who are hurting.

And as we turn to your word now, we pray that you would just give us ears that can hear what you're saying, give us minds that understand it and that can apply it to your lives and give us hearts that will burn with love for you.

And so we ask that you would just be with Derek as he opens up your word now and be with us all so that our hearts would be open to hear what you're saying.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Derek. Thanks, Thomas.

Over the next few weeks we're doing this series, unbelievable. It's a great graphic. Take a look at the shadow. It's good.

[ 5 : 37 ] And we're doing different themes in the morning and in the evening. And Thomas this morning looked at the question of, is Jesus real? Which was a great study into the person of Jesus and a great challenge to us.

And this evening I'm looking at the theme of, are you hurting? So next week we're looking at, is Jesus a bigot? And then the evening, are you empty? And then on Easter Sunday we're looking at, is Jesus good?

And in the evening, are you hopeless? So there's a kind of a balance between what we're doing. And I'm going to look at the passage in a little while that we read, that Thomas read to us earlier. But I just want to put it into context and why we're doing that because we really do want to introduce people to Jesus. We are Christians.

We come together to worship every Sunday. We are community believers. And we really want other people to know who Jesus is and to share in the good news that we have come to know for ourselves.

[ 6 : 45 ] Now, most of the guys here in the church know that I'm a bit of, I'm a football man. But generally rugby seems to be a good, seems to provide a good illustration for life, I think.

There's lots of bruising encounters and there's a great deal of seemingly meaningless pain. It's a strange game.

And it's a long, long time since I've been at Murrayfield, which is the home of Scottish Rugby. In fact, the last time I was in Murrayfield was in 1995. And that was, actually not for a rugby game, it was where a very different kind of hurt was the theme.

It was an R.E.M. concert and obviously one of their greatest songs has this introductory verse, when your day is long and the night is yours alone and when you're sure you've had enough of this life, well, hang on, don't let yourself go.

Because everybody cries and everybody hurts sometimes. I wasn't going to sing that, okay. But it sounds really terrible when you just read it, but it's a great song.

[ 7 : 57 ] So in this series of talks, really what we're wanting to do is to invite you to consider the Savior, Jesus Christ, who we've come to know and love as our Savior.

And we really want to do that by explaining the Jesus of the Bible and letting Him to speak for Himself. We kind of themed these set of sermons for skeptics or for maybe people who are doubting or for people who are not Christians, who are maybe thinking about Christianity or maybe interested in Christianity or who are maybe not.

But whoever you are this evening, if you're visiting with us this, we're so delighted to have you. It's really great that you're here this evening. And I hope you haven't been made to feel too uncomfortable by anything that we've done so far in our worship.

But Jesus Christ is someone who's changed our lives forever. And we do recognize, we know that often He's misrepresented in the media or the press or generally in society.

We probably also have misrepresented Him ourselves at different times by what we've done or what we haven't done. But we also know that Jesus speaks for Himself.

[ 9 : 12 ] We believe He's a living Savior that He rose again on the third day that He's in heaven. But that His Word is living and that He, through His Spirit, can come and He speaks to us.

His claims are radical. They're very strong. And they challenge and have challenged our thinking to its very core. He claims to be the author of life, the just and the loving one, to whom we're all accountable as God.

And that's a really uneasy, uncomfortable truth. And so often God talk is a conversation stopper, isn't it, for people?

People don't like when we start talking about God and they get uncomfortable unless maybe sometimes it's to criticize or to blame and to reject. I mean, I get that. I get why people feel like that. Just, you know, if you're getting your, I know this might sound strange, but because it doesn't look like I ever do that. But if you ever go and get your haircut and the hairdressers always like to make conversation, if you want to stop that conversation when they ask you what you've done at the weekend, just say that you've gone to church or you've read your Bible.

[ 10 : 23 ] And that'll generally be a real good conversation stopper. And they'll probably not speak to you for the rest of the time that you're getting your haircut. But you may be someone who's genuinely questioning matters of life and death, and you may be questioning, especially when we talk about a God of love or a God who loves people.

You know, why then is there so much pain? We've talked a lot about pain because the theme for this evening is suffering, or, you know, this is a, you know, if you're hurting this evening, why is there so much hurt?

Why is that the case? If God is sovereign and powerful, if God is loving, as we say, is, then why is there so much hurt? And it may be not so much for you a kind of philosophical question about the meaning of life, but maybe much more personal for you.

There may be a great deal of emotional hurt or hurt in relationships or because of illnesses you were being told earlier on, or it may be through isolation or difficulties at work or being let down. And if there is a God, you're saying, well, if there's a God, well, what's the game? You know, why is this happening? Why is that the case? Why is there so much hurt in my life? You say He's a God of love.

[ 11 : 44 ] You say He's a God who's powerful. If He's loving, He's a Father and He's powerful, why would you let anything like this happen to His children? Why? Well, can I just throw it, throw in a little wobbly here, maybe a little mischievously, and say, if there isn't a God, then is it the case that that question is redundant?

If there's no God at all, then can we even ask that question? Then we look, in other words, for any answers to the why questions.

If there is no ultimate meaning, or if there is no purpose behind life of God, isn't the Creator of the world. If the universe, Thomas was mentioning this morning, if the universe is simply material, what we see, the things we see, if everything has happened, has happened just through chance and random choices, then really, can we ask any of these why questions?

Because there is no ultimate reason, and there is no purpose behind life. But we do ask these questions. We relentlessly ask the why questions.

And this evening, if there might be a God, can I ask you to consider wrestling both with the comfort of that, and also the challenge of that, the challenge that there is a God and that there is suffering, and that there is an answer to that suffering in the Gospels.

[ 13 : 24 ] So we say that hurt is our common experience, okay? Even the people you might be tempted to ignore or to dislike, they're probably going through a lot of hurt as well.

There's a commonality about it. They just call another musician, some of you will know him here. He actually worshipped with us for a while when he was in Scotland.

He's an American kind of alternative country rock singer, Drew Holcomb. And he's got a song called Another Man's Shoes, and he says, everyone's got their own set of troubles. Everyone's got their own set of blues.

Everyone's got their own set of struggles. Walk a mile in another man's shoes. And it's that sense of a commonality that we all recognize and we all see and we all suffer.

And I do wonder sometimes when thinking about the society we live in, the world we live in, whether we share a common sympathy. I'm not sure if you sense or not that maybe in the last few years, people are hurting just as much as they ever were really in their communities and their societies and their families among our friends.

[ 14 : 33 ] But I wonder whether the community and the society as a whole cares less. You know, despite all the talk that there is about inclusion and about respect and diversity and commonality, I wonder if the society in which we're living is becoming more polarized, more isolated, more hurt and more segregated than it ever has been.

I grew up here in Edinburgh. I went to school here. My dad was a minister here and obviously I grew up going to church.

I would like to think I was not an unpopular child in school, but I was always ribbed for going to church and for being a Christian.

So much so that I would kind of avoid telling people what I'd done at the weekend or what my dad did for a job, because the reaction was usually laughter, sometimes shock and a little bit of disbelief.

And that hasn't really changed that much. Still have that response and that reaction to the profession that I'm part of. Definitely a conversation stopper.

[ 15 : 41 ] And that sometimes would make you feel a little bit on the outside and a little bit hurtful. But generally speaking, I don't remember it being particularly malicious in any way.

But I do sense today a much deeper malevolence and menace towards particularly the Christian faith. There's a more powerful intolerance in the society in which you live.

Whose hurt is more meaningful? Whose offense is more justifiable? Can we justify ignoring some people's hurt and caring about others?

And it seems that personal offense is trumping all other kinds of hurt, because we live in a society which is suffering in old age, suffering in loneliness, suffering in illness, and suffering in loss.

And yet there seems to be less concern. Who's to blame? Do we blame other people for that? Of course that's easy to do. Do we blame God even when we don't believe in Him?

[16:44] Do we blame religion? Religion? Can we still blame religion in this secular society when only one, two, three percent of people maybe even go to church in our city?

Do we blame life itself in a kind of giving it a moral responsibility? Whoever we blame or whatever we're blaming or thinking about, there seems to be that dissatisfaction with regard to the why question, these why questions still plague us.

So as Christians, our hearts and our minds have been transformed by the person and the work of Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Now it's not the case that we have all the answers, and we still have to say in a lot of things, well we don't know. We still suffer. We still face inexplicable, evil, hurt, and we struggle with all kinds of failure and doubt.

But we have definitely come to know His love and His forgiveness and experience a perspective and a hope and a meaning that's changed everything, even the hurtful and difficult things we go through in life.

[17:59] And just for a moment I want to share what we know, a little bit of what we know about Him, because I believe that's for every person, not just for Christians, not just for people who go to church or have that culture or background, but there's a reality that Jesus has come and is effective and significant and important for every single human being.

But is it all unbelievable? Is it all unbelievable, I hope, and pray that you recognize that that's not the case?

I want to say two things about Jesus, just from this story about Jesus. This story was written, it was recorded very shortly before Jesus was crucified.

So it's coming in, this is coming into Easter, towards Easter in the next couple of weeks. And Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane very shortly before He went to His crucifixion.

So it's really part of the Passion Week narrative and the events leading up to His crucifixion. I just really want to say two things about this story. First is He knows and understands your heart, and Rowan made reference to that.

[19:13] And then in His suffering and in His death, He rescues our heart. So I just want to say these two things about it. He knows your heart.

Because when we're hurting in life, when we're going through difficulties and trials and suffering and sadness, one thing that's very important is empathy, isn't it? Empathy is a very important thing to know that somebody else understands or appreciates or is sympathetic or empathetic towards us. Indifference and apathy is grim, isn't it, when we're going through these times? And what we do recognize and know that that is something God is often accused of, whether suffering or difficulties or trials or hurt, where is God?

Why doesn't He care? Why isn't He answering my prayers or why doesn't He change things for me? So what we recognize here that in this account of Jesus Christ, it's a kind of window, it's a picture into who He was.

We believe in His claims to be the unique person that Thomas was speaking about this morning, both a human being but also God. This is God in the flesh.

[20:25] In other words, when we see Jesus, we see God in a way that helps us to understand Him. And that's really very important because a lot of people will say, well, who is God and what's He like and how can we ever know Him?

Well, we begin to see who He is in the person of Jesus Christ, and that's really great because God as God, as the Creator, God is very difficult and almost impossible to grasp or understand.

So and when we see Jesus here, particularly and on towards the cross, we recognize that He does understand and appreciate and has experienced the deepest hurt Himself.

He's been there. He's suffered incredible pain, particularly heading towards His crucifixion. And it does seem very paradoxical for us when we think about Jesus and we think about who He is as God in the flesh.

We're told in verse 33 there that He was deeply troubled and distressed. In one of the other accounts, in one of the other gospels, we're told that at this point the distress and the trouble was so deep that He was sweating drops of blood.

[ 21 : 44 ] The capillaries were bursting inside His forehead with the strain and the press mixing with His sweat to make it look as if He was sweating drops of blood.

This is God that we have here, described going through this great hurt. Sad within an inch of His life, He said, I'm crushed with grief, with grief to the point of death.

I'm not sure if any of us have ever been crushed with grief to that point where, to within an inch of His life. This is God, the author of life.

He prays here as it were into the darkness. Please He says, Abba, Father, He says, everything's possible. Please take this cup of suffering away from me, yet not your will be done but mine.

The complexity and the confusion and the fear of what lay ahead for Him as He prayed into the darkness, into the suffering and into the hurt that He was experiencing.

[ 22 : 55 ] And through all His friends just didn't get it. There wasn't much empathy or sympathy from them. Each time He went to pray, they all just fell asleep.

And the third time He comes back to them and said, look, just go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. My time has come. So there was this great letdown from those who had been closest to Him for such a long time that He was going through this intense suffering.

But they didn't seem to understand and didn't seem to be terribly bothered by it. And this is God that we have in the picture of God here in Gethsemane.

And He's about to be betrayed to His death on the cross. And this is God. Why would He allow Himself to get into that situation?

Why would He experience such hurt? And why would He go through what He was going through, whether it was physical and it was about to get much worse with crucifixion, whether it was relational or situational and spiritual?

[ 24 : 01 ] There was hurt in the deepest intensity. There's an Old Testament prophecy of Jesus that says He was a man of sorrows and He was familiar with suffering.

And so the picture we have of Jesus is not of a distant Creator God or of God in Jesus, not a distant Creator God who kind of wound up the universe and has let it just unfold with all the chaos that has transpired, nor of a disinterested or a distanced God who is powerless to change anything.

What we do see is a God who intervenes in our situation and is interested in our situation and comes into our situation and experiences our hurt.

We can't, whatever else you may be tempted to accuse Jesus, our God of it, isn't disinterest and isn't distanced. But if He is God, oh, why on earth would He do this?

That is the point of what He goes through in Gethsemane, but more than that, in His life that He lived for thirty-three years and the death He died. And that leads us to the second point that I want to make briefly, which is in His suffering, His hurt, suffering, and on into His death, which is very much a theme of Easter for us, He rescues our hurt.

[ 25 : 29 ] So He takes and He rescues our hurt. The story of the gospel is that God and Thomas explained this very beautifully this morning.

God Himself has been wronged. We have withdrawn ourselves from Him. We've turned our backs on God. The Genesis, the very beginning of hurt and darkness and pain and evil and death comes from that, a broken relationship between ourselves and God.

All our hurt comes from that. The reality of all the dark things that we experience and know, it stems from that. And from our end, it's an unbridgeable gap.

We can't reach up to God and put that right. We can try, we can do our best, we can be good, we can be religious or whatever it happens to be, but none of it can bridge the gap that exists between ourselves and God because of what the Bible calls sin and what we've turned away from.

We're powerless. A hugely, a really hugely uncomfortable truth. The worst thing to feel, isn't it, is powerless. I really hate feeling powerless.

[ 26 : 48 ] But that's what sin, that's what the Bible says, that we're powerless to reach up and again be in relationship with God, but the remarkably unique thing about the gospel and about Jesus

Christ is that God has come down to reach out to us, that we don't need to reach up to Him, that we don't need to earn that right to be friends with Him again and to deal with the hurt, the pain and the sin and death and the separation.

He has come down Himself to put the problem right. And that's really the message of Easter and the message of the gospel and the Bible is that in His love and in His grace and in His concern for the people of this world that He has made, He is the one who takes the consequence and the guilt of our rejection of God, the Father, He takes on Himself.

He makes the move. He's the one who does it. And the Son is the one who bridges the gap by paying the price.

And it's a really challenging thing because even sometimes I'm not sure if I fully understand that, I'm not sure if I grasp that, I'm not sure if I think that's just that He's paying the price and I get to be forgiven.

The claim of the gospel is that's what God says is the only way and that's what He's come to do and He pays the price.

[ 28 : 19 ] He's motivated by love for us. He says this is the only way and He rises on the third day to show us great victory over sin and grave and death and hurt, ultimately, that it will go.

It will be gone in eternal life when we go to be with Him. He made us, He made you, He wants you back and He says this is the only way.

Says it's like coming home. And there's something very special about coming home, isn't there?

If not in reality for us, certainly in our dreams. The whole idea of coming home is hugely significant, especially when you're not well, especially when you're ill, you're hurting.

I just want to finish with this, which is that three years ago, those of you who are in the congregation will know this story because you were all involved in it, but three years ago we were in Holiday Abroad in Lanzarote in Katrina.

[ 29 : 27 ] My wife had a brain hemorrhage when we were there. And there's nothing worse, well, there's very little worse than that anyway, but there's nothing worse than experiencing that when you're not at home, when you're away from home, you're in a foreign country, you don't know the language, you don't know what lies ahead, you don't know how to put the problem right, and you're in hospital and you don't know what they're saying.

And worst thing of all, of course, was that for whatever reason we'd forgotten to get insurance. So, yeah, the thought of this massive, massive bill in the days that lie ahead to pay the price to maybe be made better again.

So amazingly, with a huge army of people praying as well, we managed to get Katrina home to A&E; in Edinburgh, the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh.

And even to get there, you felt like you were home, and you felt things weren't nearly quite so bad. And God bless the NHS, because the treatment was free at the point of contact.

And that was hugely significant, because there was a massive amount of brain surgery to be done. And yet for us, the point of contact in our home country, it was free.

[ 31 : 03 ] Now, it's not that it didn't cost. It costs a great deal. But to us, at the point of delivery, it was free.

And we felt at home at that level, and safer. And it's a little, I think maybe not a very good illustration, but it's a little illustration of the beauty of the gospel, is that when we come to Jesus Christ, we recognize that He simply asked us to put our trust in Him.

We don't pay anything. There's no cost. We don't have to make ourselves right with God. We simply accept what He's done freely offered to us, because it was great love and it's great grace.

But we know behind it, there is a great cost. It was great cost to providing the salvation which is free to us at the point of delivery, as it were.

It was the cost of His own life, the cost of unspeakable separation within the trinity of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[ 32 : 06 ] And a great cost is He bore the wrath of God and bore the punishment, the just punishment for our sins. Great cost that He takes.

But for us, He simply wants us to trust because it's an effective salvation that He's worked and it's free to us. And we, in our hurting, can go to Him.

We can recognize that He strengthens. As Rowan was saying so much, it's not random. There's reason behind these things. We entrust Him to know that our hurting and our pain is not

meaningless, but also that it will come to an end one day as we go to be with Him forever. And we recognize that and we see that. And we rejoice that He is one, the victory over death and the grave. And that when He returns, as He says He will, He will usher in a world that's free of hurt as He says Himself a day when He will wipe away every tear.

So we have experienced that as Christians. It's not that our lives are hurt free or pain free or that we don't care or think it doesn't matter that there's suffering and pain and hurt and sorrow.

[ 33 : 22 ] But we do recognize where that is channeled and we recognize the greatest suffering and the greatest pain that this world has ever seen has been inflicted on Jesus Christ on our behalf.

And that it is through the perspective of seeing and knowing and understanding Jesus. And trusting in Him for our own forgiveness and hope and future that our lives are transformed.

I do hope that you'll consider and think about some of these things we've been saying. There's also lots of little booklets at the back which we'd love you to take away, which explain better and explain in more detail some of the things that we'll be talking about leading up to Easter.

So I'm just going to pray very briefly and then we're going to sing our last song together. Lord God, we thank You for the gospel of Jesus. We thank You for the fact that we have this amazing written record, which is not just a dry and dusty account, but a living and relevant word that speaks into our own hearts like a mirror that shows us what we're like and what we need and is honest and realistic and sometimes challenging and frightening, but also amazingly comforting and redeeming and full of good news as we think about Jesus Christ and what He has done for us, how much He loves us, the extent of His love that He would do this, even though very often we don't think about you or appreciate you or consider the amazing gifts of life that you've given to us.

So pray and ask that you would bless us as we've thought about today, about Jesus being real and also Jesus speaking into our lives when we are hurting so often and that you're not a distant, careless God who is far away, but you're a God who has come to us and into our experience in order to redeem us and to rescue us and to give us new hope and forgiveness.

[ 35 : 33 ] So bless us, we pray and help us as we sing together to be able to praise you in song for Jesus' sake. Amen.