

Angelic Support

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[0 : 00] Well, we want to take some time now to look where we were reading in the Gospel of Luke.

So it's on page 1058. Luke's Gospel chapter 22. And we're going to have a look through verses 39 to 46. And that's where we find Jesus praying with his Father, a very kind of focused in particular, an agonized prayer, where he says, Father, if you're willing, take this cup from me. You know, yet not my will, but yours be done. Now, I think it's been a pretty funny week. And I know it's been a pretty funny week because you know the world's gone slightly askew when Premiership footballers are calling the nation to prayer.

But that's what happened over the past week with the story of Muamba. And Fabrice Muamba collapses on the football pitch and Premiership footballers have been running about with t-shirts on Pray for Muamba. There's been a trend on Twitter, Pray for Muamba. I looked at one of the newspapers yesterday. They had 54 articles on Muamba in the last week. So amazing attention gone to this guy. One of the articles that I read was from somebody who was in the crowd when he collapsed. And the headline that they'd put on the article was, Everyone felt helpless, yet impaled to do something to help Francis Muamba. Now, that's not a catchy headline, but it's actually an interesting little phrase. Everybody felt helpless, yet impaled to do something to help Francis Muamba because they are just telling us how awful it felt to see this man, they thought dying in front of them and yet not to be able to do anything, to intervene and to make a difference. And I think that's why so many of them turned to prayer. And all of us, I think, know sometimes just how frustrating it is when you see somebody in pain, when you see somebody suffering and yet you don't know what to do and you don't know how to help. Now, what's Easter about? Well, Easter is about God seeing a world in pain, seeing a world where there is great suffering and deciding that he's not going to stand by and spectate, but that he's going to get involved in our world and in our lives in a way that brings miraculous and permanent change. And so at the heart of the Christian message, there is a dynamic, there's a movement, and that movement is a movement of God towards us and it's God coming to us in a real, personal way, taking the initiative to intervene in our lives in a way that brings us hope and brings about a real change in who we are.

So as we look at the passage, the first thing I kind of want us to take note of is the movement of heaven towards Jesus. When Derek, who's the minister here, asked me to preach this morning, he's away in Dundee, and he said he was going to have three sermons in the run-up to Easter and they were all going to be about angels and I thought, I don't know that much about angels, so I thought I might be struggling here. And he'd given this sermon the title, Angelic Support. So that is one of the dynamics that there is in the passage, is that there is this movement of heaven to Jesus and from heaven comes an angel to strengthen him. That's what we read in verse 43, an angel from heaven appears to Jesus and strengthens him. And so there's the first sense of movement in the passage, the first bit of dynamic, that God in heaven wants to help his son Jesus Christ and the angel comes as a messenger of

God, that's what an angel is, it's a messenger of the Lord. In Psalm 34, which we sang just a few moments ago, it tells us that the angel has a protective role in the lives of the people of God. The angel of the Lord says to Sam in camps, round those who fear him and he delivers them. And so here is Jesus in trouble. Jesus is afraid, we tell or we read that he's in anguish, he's in agony, he's really being torn apart internally. And so as he goes through this great inner conflict, an angel comes, heaven comes and comforts Jesus, because at this moment Jesus feels weak and lonely, under pressure and in temptation to turn back from the suffering, from the passion that lies in front of him. Because that's what's looming large in his horizon and that's what's causing the fear and the anxiety that he knows that following this little time of prayer in the garden on the hillside, he's going to be taken away under arrest, falsely accused, unjustly convicted, sentenced to death, executed in

a barbaric manner and abandoned by his Father in heaven. And so everything that he feels kind of pulls back from that, there's a natural recoil away from it. Sometimes we know that something's going to hurt, so if you dive into the oven to grab something out of the oven and it's really hot, you kind of bounce back instinctively. And so Jesus, his instinct is to kind of recoil to bounce back away from what the cross holds out for him and from the path it's set in front. And as God sees Jesus struggling and agonizing over this, God is moved, the Father in heaven is moved by love and compassion. He looks at his Son torn apart inwardly and he wants to come near to him and to give him comfort and so he sends the angel for this. And that tells us this, that as Jesus comes to the cross, the Father in heaven and the Son are united in their purpose. They're working together.

[6 : 49] We're being told that all the glory and the weight and the power of heaven is working together in harmony with one great purpose. Jesus says, I and the Father are one. And what we find is that heaven is united on a mission to intervene in our world and our lives to bring hope and to make a difference to us. So we see heaven wanting to help Jesus as the angel comes near. But as the angel comes near to kind of comfort and strength in Jesus and his agony, the other thing we're reminded of is that Jesus' humanness is real.

This is real fear that Jesus has. It's real drops of sweat that are dropping into the soil and making it damp. It's real gut-wrenching agony. It's real tears. It's real pleading.

His humanness is real. Joan Osborn wrote a song a long time ago. She didn't actually write the song. She sang it. Somebody else wrote it. If God had a name, what would it be and would you call it to his face? If you were faced with him in all his glory, what would you ask if you had just one question? What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home? And so that's a song that was fairly well known when I was young. And it's a song about trying to imagine what we actually met God in the real world. What would he look like? Who would he be? And where would we find him? And I don't know where you think you're going to find God. If you think you're going to find God in a church or if you think church is the last place you're going to find God. You're going to find him in a bus somewhere. Well, what we find or where we find God, of course, is here in a garden, in the middle of the night, in the darkness, on his knees in agony. We find God, in other words, in a place we really wouldn't expect to find God. God surprises us. Somebody has written this, no other religion, whether secularism, Greco-Roman paganism, Eastern religion, Judaism or Islam, believes that

God became breakable or suffered or had a body. Eastern religion believes the physical is illusion. Greco-Romans believe the physical is bad. Judaism and Islam don't believe that God would do such a thing as live in the flesh. But as Christians, we do believe that God came in the flesh and became breakable and suffered and had a body. It's an amazing thing to find God in the garden, on his knees, praying and pleading with his Father in heaven. So we see the real humanness of Jesus here, which is a very important thing, because we need to be able to find ways of connecting with God that are personal and not remote. And so as we see Jesus here on his knees praying, it helps us to understand he really is human, as well as being truly God, he is truly man. But it helps us to know too that he sees and understands what's going on in our lives and in our world. So when you feel alone, when you feel that you are being torn apart, when you feel agonized over your life, when you're struggling with what's happening to you, you know that Jesus understands that Jesus can enter into that experience and knows what it's like from the inside out. And so when you're asking God to come near to you, to help you, to be with you, you know that God is able to do that. He's able to enter in to exactly your situation and come alongside.

And so as we're looking for comfort from God, we're reassured that the comfort is there because we have a Savior Jesus who enters into our suffering and sympathizes with us, and that we find God close up and involved in our world. So heaven comes to Jesus, that's the first thing, and heaven comes to Jesus because Jesus' humanness is real and he needs help. The second thing though that we're getting and picking up on here is that Jesus comes to us. So as we look at the different kinds of movement in this passage, we've got the movement of the angel down to Jesus to strengthen him, but behind that lies the much greater movement and it's the movement of Jesus to us. He's come into our world, as we've said, into our experience, into our lives. What's going on? Why is he doing it? Well, let's look at the little prayer that he prayed in verse 42. In verse 41, he's left most of the disciples, he's gone a stone's throw away from them, and he's knelt down, he's on his knees, and he prays, Father, so he's speaking to his Father in heaven, if you're willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done. Father, if you're willing, take this cup from me, yet

not my will but yours be done. So he's asking for a cup to be taken from him, and that then begs the question, or raises the question, what is the cup? What is it that Jesus wants to be taken away from him? And the cup is really his mission. His mission, it's a mission that he has planned, it's a mission he's consented to, but it's now a mission that seems totally overwhelming. And what is that mission? How do we understand it? Well, he gives us a key earlier on. So in verse 37, so you need to track back a few verses, and there in verse 37, Jesus quotes the Old Testament, and the quote is this, he was numbered with the transgressors. Now that's a quote from where we read in the prophecy of Isaiah about the servant of the Lord. So that's written around 700 years before Jesus lived, and now Jesus is saying, well, who am I, and what is my mission? Who do I think I am? What do I think I'm doing here? And the way that Jesus understood that personally was that he saw himself as the suffering servant of the Lord.

[13:46] So he saw himself as the one who had come to fulfill what Isaiah had written about centuries before. So his mission, as Jesus understands it, is to suffer as a servant, and as it's written in Isaiah, to be numbered with the transgressors. So that's the mission to be numbered with the transgressors. What's a transgressor? Well, a transgressor is someone who breaks a law, you transgress when you break the law. And Isaiah 53 tells us that he poured his life out unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. So Jesus is not only being counted as one of the transgressors, but he is putting himself in the place of the transgressor, bearing the sin of many, as it says, making intercession for them. So in other words, he's seeing people who have transgressed broken God's law, and he's intervening on their behalf.

He becomes one of us, as Joan Osborne said, but he comes one of us not just to sit in the bus or to slob around. He becomes one of us to take the blame and to take the shame of our sin and to offer his life as a payment. So what is transgression? What is sin? What am I kind of referring to here? What's the issue we need to dig into? Well, a helpful way of understanding what Christians mean when they talk about sin or transgression is to think about the issue of idolatry. Now that's a big issue when you read the Bible.

And often the Bible is very condemning of people who worship idols, and usually those idols in the Bible are little stone or wooden or metal statues that people bow down to and offer worship to them. And that's not probably an issue for most of us here. We don't have idols in that sense. But an idol is really anything that you worship instead of worshiping God. So for some people in ancient pagan religions, those were little figures or statues. But for us, the things that we love and worship before God, our idols, they won't be those kind of statues, but they'll be similar kind of things maybe. So I was reading The Guardian yesterday, which for some people is an unforgivable sin. But anyway, I did read The Guardian and there's a guy who writes for The Guardian called the secret footballer. He's a premiership footballer and he's a guardian equivalent of the Stig, you know, so it's this person whose identity is never given away. This is what he wrote yesterday. He said, I have spent my life chasing money, material possessions and recognition, but I never stopped to ask why. I guess it was just something I thought a person should do. So I have spent my life chasing money, material possessions and recognition, but I never stopped to ask why. I guess it was just something I thought a person should do. So if you don't understand idolatry, well that's idolatry. I have spent my life chasing money, material possessions and recognition.

Those are the things that he has loved most in life and pursued and worshipped in life. And on Friday night, I got the hottest ticket in town. I went to see the Civil Wars at the Queen's Hall, which some people think was a great privilege. It wasn't that bad a concert.

It was at the Queen's Hall and Civil Wars, if you're ignorant on this matter, are a sort of folk country American act who won a Grammy recently. At the Queen's Hall, one of the interesting things, I haven't been at the Queen's Hall for a long time, when you go up the stairs in the Queen's Hall, I was going up to sit in the gallery, there's a huge wooden plaque on the wall where the gig was, and it's got the Ten Commandments on it. So I thought that was quite interesting. So I started reading the Ten Commandments.

[18:15] What's the first of the Ten Commandments? Well, the first of the Ten Commandments is this, I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. So the first, the greatest transgression, the biggest sin of all is to have a God before the true and the living God, to put anything before God. Money, sex, power, popularity, possessions, anything like that, any relationship, any possession, anything that comes before God, that's idolatry.

And so Christianity is really about restoring you to the true worship, to worship the one who deserves your worship, the living God. Christianity is saying to you, why spend your life worshipping money and material things and sexual things and so on, when you could be worshipping the God who gave you life, the God who rules over the universe. How can Jesus do this for us? How can Jesus take this cup? He doesn't find it easy, does He? He's recoiling against it. But what does He say in His prayer? He says, yet not my will but yours be done.

So what does He do? Well, He surrenders Himself to the will of His Father. So what enables Him to take the cup as love for His Father and love for us? Not my will but yours be done. He loves His Father in heaven and He loves this world. The Bible tells us God loves the world so much, He gave His one and only Son. The Bible tells us this, Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. The Bible tells us God demonstrates His love in this way, Christ dies for us while we're still sinners. So here's the cup, it's the cup of suffering, it's the cup of standing in the place of the transgressor and restoring us to the true worship and the true joy of our lives. And Jesus takes this cup, painful and agonizing as it is, why does Jesus take the pain and the agony because He loves us and because He longs for our lives to be restored to their original joy, to their original purpose. And He longs for us to know the liberating goodness of living and worshipping the true God, living and worshipping the true God, living for Him. So the second movement in the passage is the movement of Jesus towards us, God entering into your story. You know God isn't like somebody who lives down the street that you see occasionally and you vaguely recognize. God's like a family member, it's somebody who your life doesn't story, doesn't really make any sense without them. And your life story will never really make sense unless you see the place that God and Jesus have in it. And if you want your life story to have a happy ending, then you need to see the place of Jesus in it. Jesus comes to give us that happy ending, that hope.

Last thing I'm going to say is this, that as Jesus has come to us, the third movement that I want to talk about is our movement into the world around us, because as we encounter the gospel, the gospel should impact our lives in a way that moves us. And what dynamic or direction should it give us? Well, what I want to say is very simple, it's this, that the gospel should move us from being bystanders in this world and looking on at the tragedies and the traumas around us, and it should move us from being bystanders, bystanders to being right at the heart of the action. Too many Christians are spectators to the small traumas and the great traumas of life around them. And we've reduced Christianity to church going and to a religious identity when Jesus said, take up your cross and follow me. And when

[23 : 02] Jesus said, take up your cross and follow me, what he meant to say to you was this, get off the sidelines and run to the heart of the action. Where's the need? Where's the heart? Where's the pain? Where's the loss? Where's the suffering in this world? Because you better be there if you call yourself a Christian. You weren't called to watch on and harden your heart against the sufferings of this world. You were called to follow Jesus.

And that's where we find Jesus, not sitting back in heaven, flicking the channels in his TV, watching the suffering on News 24. God's there, right in the heart of it. Now, we recoil from this. Naturally, we don't want to get involved in other people's dirty, messy, hurting, wounded, broken lives. We stand back because it's costly and painful. Like Jesus, we're kind of praying, let this cup pass from me. And yet, we have to also say, yet not my will, but your will be done. All across this world, there are stories of hurting people. They live in the same block as you, of flats. You meet them in the office or at school. You see them in the streets and these are people with addictions. These are people who are lonely. These are people with all kinds of physical or mental problems. And then, as we look past our own streets, we see great pockets of misery in our own country, chaotic communities really under the grip of darkness. And then we look across the world and we see the same thing repeated again and again. Is God asking too much of you? Because what

God is asking you to do is to choose things that you might not choose for yourself. God is asking you to choose a life different from the one that you've imagined. Because what we imagine for ourselves often is just our own comfort, our own happiness and our own well-being. And what God has for us is something much greater, which is to live and die for His glory, His good and His world. And He wants us to have a real heart of compassion.

So are you ready to take up the cup and to serve God in a needy and broken world? That's the movement that God is asking from us. How can you do it? How can you take up the cup? Well, only through the love of God working in your life, giving you a compassion. How could Jesus take up the

cup only because of the power of God's love at work in His life?

How can we take up the cup only because of the power of God at work in our lives? I hope there are people here who will one day end up working in a shanty town in Latin America.

[26 : 41] I hope there are people here who will go and plant churches in the neediest housing schemes in Glasgow and elsewhere. I hope there are people here who will be a true friend to the lost and lonely person who lies in their bed soaked in their urine because of their alcohol problems. I hope that's the kind of people you are. I hope that's the heart that God has given you. You need to get in your knees the way Jesus did and give your life back to God and say, not my will but your will be done. If you're not a Christian then I just want to say to you, remember this, God is love. God is pure love and He's with us here today in love. That love is better than life itself. How can we know that love when we are transgressors? Well, we only know it through Jesus, don't we? God asks us to repent of our selfish hearts and our idolatry and to accept the love of Jesus Christ and to accept the work of Jesus Christ that He's done for us. God is kind of ringing your phone this morning if you're not a Christian. He's calling you, ringing your phone, calling ideas come up. It's Jesus and Jesus is saying, you know, pick up the phone, answer. Speak to me. How many unanswered calls have you had from God as He tries to break into your life and bring you to know His love and bring you to worship Him? And Jesus is worth worshipping.

I hope that what we've looked at tells us that. If we're going to worship anything in life, surely, it's Jesus that's worth that worship. I'm going to conclude there and we're going to pray. And as we pray, I really do urge you just to think about what God is saying to you from His Word and to pray for yourself, for your life, for your calling, for your service, for your relationship with God. Lord God, we thank you that your Word is true, it's living, it's powerful, it's active, it's given to us as a gift, it's given to us to show us who you are and what you're like. Thank you that your Word reveals to us an amazing heart of compassion and love, that your Word reveals to us your willingness to get involved in the mess of our lives in this world. And we pray that those of us who call ourselves Christians, that we would follow Jesus and that we would get involved in the mess of this world also and that we would want to get involved in loving and helping needy people, that we would have real compassionate hearts, give that to us because sometimes we are so hard and indifferent to other people and we turn away from their struggles. And we pray that you'll give us the grace and the strength that we need to love people in their brokenness.

And we pray for those who don't know you in a living and personal way, we ask that at this moment that they would answer your call and that they would respond to your gospel.

Amen.