

# Work Out Your Own Salvation in Jesus Absence

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### Thinking of Others

Brothers and sisters, I wanted to talk to you this morning, about two well known sayings in the world today, one says: ‘absence makes the heart grow fonder’, and the other says: ‘out of sight, out of mind’. That’s two contrasting and conflicting, sayings that we can apply to various aspects of our life.

### Those we don’t see

Let’s think, first of all, about our brothers and sisters. Does absence ‘make the heart grow fonder’. Think about brothers and sisters who don’t get to the meeting, brothers and sisters who live in isolation, brothers and sisters who live in different countries. Some we may not have even met, we know about, we’ve heard about. How do we remember them? How often do we remember them? And when do we remember them? Why? Well, do you even have to ask why we need to remember our brothers and sisters? And in this day and age, there’s so many different ways that we can communicate. I mean we know that elder brother Paul and Peter and those others, they could talk to those around them, and they could write letters that perhaps would take months to get to their destination, whatever that town or city or even individual was, and then likewise it would take months for a response to get back. Today we can send an email or a text and get a response within seconds. There’s also social media, and we still *have* letters, if we care to write one. So there are many ways, the phone being another, of course, where we can remember, and where we can get in touch with those brothers and sisters who either we haven’t seen for a long time for whatever the reason or those, perhaps, who we’ve never even met. What could we do for them? For our brothers and sisters in other countries? Could we perhaps write a letter from our ecclesia to their ecclesia, wherever it be, in India or Africa, just introducing ourselves and sending our loving greetings and our blessings to them? Just an idea.

We reminded that Jesus said,

for whoever will give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you are Christ's, most certainly I tell you, he will in no way lose his reward

this is just a reminder that our actions don't have to be grandiose. We don't have to charter a jet and fly off to far flung corners of the world, on a whim, on a moments notice to go and say hello to our brother or sister in Australia. It can be little things, just that little word of encouragement, that little text message or email that will brighten up somebody's life in ways that we may not even know when we send it.

### **Those we do see**

What about those who do get along to the meeting? Perhaps they struggle in, and for some, straight away we can see what's wrong. They've got a sprained ankle, they've got a very arthritic hip, they've got something else which is physical and is very visible, and straight away we're thinking: oh do they need a stool for their leg? Do they need extra cushions? You know, how can we help? Because we can *see* and therefore we can comprehend perhaps, and we can acknowledge it and immediately act to help. But what about the *invisible* things? What about the depression and anxiety? All those other things that we *cannot* see and perhaps we cannot feel, we cannot say that it comes into our consciousness because it's invisible to us, and to be fair, some brothers and sisters are quite good at hiding those kind of things and therefore we're not as aware as perhaps we could be or should be. Something to think about, perhaps

### **Is God's Word Absent?**

Thinking about it absence again, I want to think about our life in the truth and meetings is one thing, and we've sort of addressed that really, but what about the Scriptures, what about God's word? Are we ever absent from that? Do we ever leave it on the table or on the shelf for extended lengths of time without touching it? Never mind what the reason is, but absence from the Scriptures. Now possibly, if we were imprisoned and we weren't allowed to have a Bible, we would really yearn for, we would long for the chance once again to read God's Holy word, and we might console ourselves with some scriptures that we had managed to memorise over time, that could be recalled to encourage us, but we would yearn for the time when we could once again pick up God's word and read His message to us again. We all have Bibles. We all have them close to hand perhaps, so is there any reason why we don't refer to it constantly? Again, there's maybe underlying issues, but we do have that book readily available to us.

Scriptures say, in Psalm 119

I will delight myself in your statutes. I will not forget your words.

And now the Word is the 'lamp to our feet', so we can't really neglect it unless it does us harm, and the meetings, we've talked about those who perhaps struggle for whatever reason, they struggled to get here, once they are here, they still struggle. But we nevertheless try to follow the guidance that is being provided in the Scriptures, where it says we should not forsake our own assembling together as the custom of some is,

but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching 'exhorting one another', that doesn't just mean me sat at the front, it means the encouragement that we can each give to one another, we can each build one another up if we are able to get together and 'so much more as you see that day approaching', surely we are encouraged, whilst at the same time alarmed by the news from the world, whether it be Israel, or in our own country, there's so much going on that can give us encouragement.

So the question is, perhaps, it can truly be said of some people: Nothing! Nothing stops them getting to the meeting. And there's others, perhaps: Everything! Everything stops them from getting to the meeting, and perhaps most of us are somewhere in between. Something we each need to think of and answer for *ourselves*, not for others.

### Trying to Hide From God

Absence, continuing that thought. Think about our Father God, and his son Jesus. Thinking of God, can we hide from him? Can we absent ourselves from Him? He's very busy, after all, running the universe. Would he perhaps overlook us if we're quiet, if we don't make too much noise? If we just keep in the background, hide ourselves away somewhere? Well, we've got a very clear and vivid example in the Scriptures of just how foolish that idea is, when we consider Jonah. He tried to hide, he tried to run away, but he realised, eventually, he can't. God is omnipotent, he's everywhere. He's all knowing, all seeing. But the Book of Jonah starts:

Now Yahweh's word came to Jonah, the son of Amitai, saying 'Arise. Go to Ninevah, that great city, and preach against it for their wickedness has come up before me'. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, so he paid it's fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh.

Well did that plan work? Is it likely to work for us if we take a similar view? One time I was in conversation with a sister and she hadn't been around for a long time and we'd been to see her and have a chat with her. And she told me that because of her studies and the amount of time that was taking, she really had to focus on that. She had to put the truth on the back-burner. Those were her exact words. Well, sadly, that sister never came back, after one exam and one qualification, there was another one and there was another promotion and there was another, pressing need that she had where she could not give any time to the truth, and, as I say, she's never come back. How sad that is. I love these words from Psalm 139. I'm going to read a fair bit of it. So if you want turn to it and follow it. That's fine. Psalm 139, for the chief musician, a psalm by David

Yahweh you have searched me and you know me. You know my sitting down and my rising up. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold Yahweh you know it altogether. You hem me in behind and before, you laid your hands on me. This knowledge is beyond me, it's lofty, I can't attain it. Where could I go from your Spirit or where could I flee from

your presence. If I ascended up into Heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the dawn and settle in the utmost parts of the sea, even there your hand will lead me and your right hand will hold me. If I say 'surely the darkness will overwhelm me, the light around me will be night', even the darkness doesn't hide from you, but the night shines as the day, the darkness is like light to you, for you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

So that's the futility of deliberately trying to hide from God, deliberately trying to shut ourselves away. It's never going to work. But perhaps our hiding is less deliberate, it's not positive action that we've *decided* something. It's more like sliding, The letter to the Philippians says in chapter 2:

but so then my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure

and Paul was writing to the Philippians about *his* absence. But I think the words apply just as strongly if they were spoken by Jesus concerning *his* absence. But not only in the presence of Jesus, but in his absence, 'workout our own salvation with fear and trembling'.

### **Being Present**

These words are from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 12:

and the Lord said 'who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the right times? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord will find doing so when he comes. Truly, I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, "my lord delays his coming" and begins to beat the men-servants and maid-servants and to eat and drink and to be drunken. Then the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he isn't expecting him, and in an hour that he doesn't know, and will cut him in two and place his portion with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his Lord's will and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes. But he who didn't know and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whomever much is given, of him, much will be required, and to whom much was entrusted, of him, more will be asked.

When we try to apply those words to ourselves in our present life, in our present circumstances, what is the modern day scriptural comparison, scriptural parallel, with beating men-servants and maid-servants. We don't do it physically I hope, but maybe mentally, maybe spiritually, may be psychologically we beat our brothers and sisters. I'll leave that thought with you. And the other thought from that passage is that 'to those to whom much is given, much more will be asked' and let's face it, in the West, we are blessed in so many

ways and much has been given to us, so perhaps much will be asked of us, so again, we can ask ourselves: What can we do? What more can we do Matthew 13, it says:

For this people's heart, has grown calous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes, or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart and turn again, and I would heal them. For blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.

Well, we have that choice. Do we hear? Do we see? Or has our heart grown calous over the years? Again, we each need to answer for ourselves and decide which way are.

### **Being Physically Present but Emotionally Absent**

And we have another category of people which we could be: Those who are physically here, but mentally our mind may be elsewhere, our heart may be elsewhere. Again, we each of us need to think and answer for ourselves. Matthew 15, it said:

These people draw near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, and they worship me in vain, teaching as doctrine, rules made by men. And there are some who do like to make up rules, but again, all these things, each of us, myself included, has to search within us, not with others. We know how we should be, what we *should* be like. But Matthew 22 reminds us where is says

Jesus said to him 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and Great commandment. The second likewise is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself. The whole Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments'.

Luke 6 says:

'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings out that which is good. And the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings out that which is evil for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks'

and in Luke 8, those in the good ground, we're talking about the parable of the Sower, are those who,

with an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it tightly and produce fruit with perseverance. Yes fruit. Fruits don't earn us salvation, but if we have salvation, we shall want to produce the fruit. Even if it is with perseverance, we need to produce the fruit. Psalm 98 says:

Sing to Yahweh a new song, for he has done marvellous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. Yahweh has made known his salvation. He has openly shown his righteousness in the sight of the nations

and in Proverbs 3, it says:

Don't let kindness and truth forsake you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, so if you find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man, trust in Yahweh with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

And those are wonderful words of exhortation on their own. We know that in bible times the Pharisees and so on, had Phylacteries that they would tie around their wrist and on their forehead, little boxes that contained verses from the Old Testament. Didn't really do them much good, made them *feel* very pious, made that *look* very pious, so that everyone could see just how devout they were.

But don't let kindness and truth forsake you, bind them around your neck, write them on the tablets of your heart

### **Bind God's Principles to your Life**

How much closer could you be than having them written on your heart? That way, those things are always uppermost in our minds, hopefully kindness and truth will never forsake us. And Job chapter eight says:

Can the Papyrus grow up without mire? Can the rushes grow without water? While this is yet in its greenness, not cut down, it withers before any other reed, so are the paths of all who forget God, the hope of the godless man shall perish. Hopefully, prayerfully, we are like those we can read about Proverbs 3:

My son, *don't* forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.

Again as we were reading earlier, 'Don't let kindness and truth forsake you write them on the tablet of your heart' and here says, 'let your heart keep my commandments'. That's as close as close can be. And if we find the way weary and I'm sure we all do at times, the Second letter of Peter says:

But don't forget with this one thing beloved: the one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Let's be encouraged with that thought. It's not that God has forgotten us. It's not, as the Scriptures say, that God is slow in bringing about his plan and purpose. We could say, as it says in Psalm 13:

How long Yahweh, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

Or, we could echo the words from Hebrews 10:

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us for after saying. This is the Covenant that I will make with them, 'in those days', says the Lord, 'I will put my laws on their hearts. I will also write them on their mind.'

And then he says:

I will remember their sins and their iniquities, no more.

Again putting the laws and the commandments and kindness and truth in our hearts, so that everything we do displays to others just how closely we hold those things to us.

Reminded perhaps of one piece of the final moments of Jesus where he said:

Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani

saying, ‘My Lord, my Lord, why have you forsaken me?’ And of course, those of us can see that he’s pointing his listeners back to Psalm 22, so that they can see just how many prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus, even in those last moments.

### **God is Always With Us**

But we know God did not forsake Jesus, just as he will not forsake us. We are in that state of grace, we’re in that state of salvation. It is there for the taking. All we have to do is keep going. Endure to the end. Work out our own salvation in fear and in trembling. But it’s ours to lose brothers and sisters, that’s the wonderful hope that we have, through Jesus, through his sacrifice that he made on our behalf, that we remember now in those two emblems representing his body and his blood that were given for us, that we might have that sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

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