

Walking Back

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[0:00] Twenty, twenty-five is coming to an end. I realized, I don't know what this year has been like for you, but for me it's just been just one thing after another.

And even as we were just worshipping, I was like, I don't even know if I had a chance to stop and just catch a breath. And so why don't we do that now? Just for 30 seconds.

The introverts, I know you'll love me for this. Just no talking, just sit there and just reflect and go, what's 2025 been like for you? Just, if you need to close your eyes, whatever it is, just spend a moment now.

It's been a crazy year. Struggled to compute how these 12 months have really kind of passed us by. So I relied on Wikipedia to help me.

And I searched for 2025. And Wikipedia tells me this. In January 2025, Donald J. Trump becomes president again. There's an earthquake in Tibet that kills 126 people.

[1:22] There are the wildfires in LA. The South Korean president is arrested. In February, there's a China versus US trade war that starts.

In March, the Filipino president is arrested for crimes against humanity. Justin Trudeau of Canada steps down. In April, Santo Domingo, there's a concert where a roof collapses and kills 231 people. In May, the India-Pakistan conflict begins. In June, the protests in LA begin. And there's also an Air India flight 171, London-bound, kills 229 people.

In July, there's a flood in central Texas that leads to 135 losing their lives. In August, there's an earthquake in Afghanistan. 2,200 lives there.

On the very same day in Sudan, nearly 1,000 are killed by heavy rain and landslides. In September, Charlie Kirk is assassinated. There is an earthquake in Cebu that kills 71.

[2:19] In October, Israel and Hamas agree to the first phase of the Gaza peace deal. In November, there's a typhoon that swipes through Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, kills 288.

There's a cyclone in Sri Lanka that kills 647. There is the fire in Thaipo that kills nearly 170. This month, the Bondi Beach shooting, killing 15, including a 10-year-old.

That was Wikipedia. I don't know how that hits home for you. I mean, it's not all bad. There are good things that have happened this year, too.

There's medical advancements that have led to progress in dealing with brain tumors. Apparently, this is the year that peak emissions... Actually, emissions in China have peaked and plateaued.

And from here on, it should be getting better and better. We're making changes for climate change. That's a good thing. There's a global ocean treaty. 79 nations signed on to this in October, protecting the high seas.

[3:22] Hopefully, the oceans will get better. We will protect the world around us even more. And in December, one country, Australia, started to make changes for smartphones and social media use to protect the young people growing up in this next generation.

There are good things. But there are so many bad things. And even during the pre-service prayer, we were just praying and going, wow, how do you even approach this next year while still hold on to the grief from this last year?

We were at a beautiful wedding. Actually, there were two couples that got married in our church yesterday, the same day. Okay, I need to get these names right. Honestly, it was the thing that gave me the most anxiety yesterday.

Arrow and Janice got married in TSC. And then Jeremy and Luana got married in Tai Po. And as we were driving past, I was like, what a beautiful day.

And what a horrific sight that I just drove past. And so as Christians, how do you hold those two things in tension? And if we're going to look forward into the next year, then how do we also look

back?

[4:35] I was talking to a dear friend, actually, within this congregation. I won't bring him back. He was like, 2025 has been a bad year. Not just for the world, but for him personally. And he was like, I can't wait to get rid of 2025.

But it makes me think, as followers of Christ, those of us who truly said, Jesus, we put our hope in you. What does that look like? How do we approach this next year and go, I have excitement. I have joy. I have hope. I have peace. But I also won't let go necessarily of that grief. And I'll lean into that because there is pain. There is sorrow. There is loss.

We were devastated when the fires happened in Taipei last month. And yet, even as I read out the list, there's so many places in the world that have gone through loss, still going through loss. And this is only on the global macro scale. What about just even in your own lives? The loved ones that you've lost. The losses that you've had in your work, in your studies, in your family, in your friends.

[5:39] My goodness. How do we still have hope? How do we still have hope? That's the question that I want to try and answer today. It's a tough question to answer.

But I think a lot of it comes down to how you perceive the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you understand the lens of, through the lens of actually what Jesus did, who he is, and the consequences of that, then that will change the way you live.

And then you can hold grief and gratitude hand in hand and still move forward with hope, with joy. But also, any moment, still break down in tears because you're like, this is not right. There is something that is not right in the world.

And it is okay. Can we be people who have that kind of heart, who can be both? Simultaneously. Together. Together. Because if you don't, then actually all we see is just heartbreak.

In December, we went through the series on Advent, which is why Jesus came. He came to give life. He came to give truth. He came to allow us to live abundantly. He came to save us.

[6:40] And so this day, I wanted to, as we walk back into the year before that's just passed, I want us to be able to walk and go, well, actually, how do I cope with that frustration?

How do I cope with that almost disillusionment of just looking back at the year as well? And conveniently, in scripture, there is such an example.

There are people who actually, as they navigate this life that is on earth, that they struggle. And they sometimes walk in the wrong direction. They sometimes are completely disillusioned, completely just giving up, disappointed, discouraged, deflated.

And yet something happens to them that completely turns them around. And I wonder whether that will happen for us today. And the passage I'm talking about is in the end of Luke, Luke 24, where there are two people who walk on this road to Emmaus, away from Jerusalem.

And it's a fascinating account. It's a fascinating story. I want us to be able to really understand and really enter into the story today. So as is our usual arrangement, we're going to read the word of the Lord.

[7:43] I'm going to invite you to stand because we want to just keep reminding ourselves to be filled with reverence and awe. And we have two wonderful friends who are going to come and read for us today. Luke chapter 24, verse 13 to 35.

That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, what is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?

And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them named Cleopas answered him, are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know these things that had happened there in these days?

And he said to them, what things? And they said to him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in the deed and word before God and all the people.

[8:54] And how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to condemn to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Yes, and besides all of this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.

They were at the tomb early in this morning. And when they said they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of the angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it. It was just as the woman had said, but him they did not see.

And they said to them, oh, foolish ones, and the slow of heart to believe all that the prophets has spoken was not necessary that the Christ should suffer.

[9:52] These things enter into his glory, and beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures and in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if they were going farther. But they urged him strongly, saying, stay with us, for it is towards everything, and the day is now far spent.

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road?

While he opened to us the scriptures, and they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, the Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.

[11:16] Then they told what happened on the road and how he was known to them, the breaking of the bread. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, girls. Please take a seat.

Thank you so much. You did really well. It's a fascinating story. Because you've got these two people.

The greatest miracle the world has ever seen has happened on that day. And that day, two people, Cleopas and someone who's unnamed. So, I mean, there's different ways to look at this, but there's different guesses that we don't really truly know.

But we're going to guess where the husband and wife. Let's just go with the husband and wife today. Husband and wife, on the day, this is Easter Sunday. Okay? And they walk.

And they leave. That very day is what it says here. And it's really interesting because as they're walking, they're debriefing on what's just happened. And what's just happened in the last three days. What's happened in the last week?

[12:15] What's happened in the last two, three years? And so they're just walking and just discussing. And it's a fascinating account. The resurrected Jesus shows up. And we're going to follow this story.

And we're going to see, actually, how when you understand the death and the resurrection of Jesus, it will change the way you look at everything. It will change the way you look back at 2025. And it will change the way you look into 2026.

And so here's what happens. So verse 13. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. It would have been maybe a three-hour walk. If they were Hong Kongers, it would have taken two hours.

And they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. Debriefing. They were disappointed. And then Jesus approaches them.

But they don't recognize him. And he walks by, and he always does this. He's a bit of a troll. And so each time he shows up and people don't really see, he'll be like, hey, what's up? What are you talking about? And then Cleopas, I think it's Cleopas who says it, said, are you the only visitor?

[13:16] Are you the only one? Were you born yesterday? Did you not hear what had happened? And so you can sense the sarcasm. And you can sense just the frustration that Cleopas has as they're talking. And Jesus, of course, well, what did happen?

What things? Such a troll. And they said to him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty indeed. Are you the only one who didn't hear about Jesus? Did you not hear what happened?

How annoyed we are? How frustrated we are? It's interesting. They didn't say Messiah. They didn't say Savior. So they stopped short of that, which shows you that actually they didn't truly, truly understand who Jesus was. They called him a prophet. They said he was mighty indeed.

So they said, did you not hear about this man who told us incredible things, who showed us, did incredible things? But they stopped short of saying that he was the Messiah because they didn't

know.

Well, of course, at that point, if they didn't believe that he had resurrected, they were also like, well, I guess he was just a good guy. I guess he was just a good guy that did good things. But sadly, now he's gone. They've killed him. Have you not heard about this guy?

[14:18] A man who was a prophet, mighty indeed, and word before God and all the people and how our chief priest and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped, but we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Interesting. So actually, that reveals why they didn't understand, because they got Jesus all wrong. When he says that we had hoped, they were saying, actually, just actually many Jews at that time, still under Roman oppression, had hoped for one thing.

Political freedom. Freedom from the power of the Romans. That was all they were thinking about. So any Messiah that would come, the Old Testament, when it talked about the Messiah, they hoped it would be the person, the chief, the commander in chief that would lead them to defeat the Romans.

Defeat every other nation so the Jews would be back in power and experience freedom again.

That's what they were thinking. That's what they were hoping. We had hoped. Well, that hope doesn't really work out, because that commander in chief is now gone.

So they're walking away. On that very day, they're walking away. Disillusioned. Also delusional, because they had hoped in the wrong thing. Discouraged.

[15:24] Deflated. They were deserting the fellowship of believers in Jerusalem, because they were like, we had hoped for this, and we didn't get it, so we're walking away. Can you imagine walking away on the day of the greatest miracle that human history has ever experienced?

And that's what they were doing. But then they carry on. But we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning.

So it's still Sunday morning. And this tells you something even more crazy. Some women in our company amazed us. What does that tell you?

That they were actually part of the inner crew. They were in the circle of people who followed Jesus. They would have known the disciples. They would have known the apostles. They would have known Mary. They would have heard about all this.

And so that morning, they heard Mary come home, screaming, going, Jesus is gone. The tomb is empty. So they would have been there to hear all that. And yet they still didn't get it. Isn't that interesting?

[16:23] Some of those who were amongst us. So these were close followers of Jesus. What does this tell you? That even on that very first day, there were still people who didn't understand the resurrection.

And when you don't understand the resurrection, when you don't understand what Jesus actually did, then it will make you look at life in just this heartbreaking way. It will make you walk away. And it happened then and it still happens now.

The resurrection is the key piece. It's everything. 1 Corinthians 15 says this. Paul says, that's the only thing you need to think about. Did he die and rise again? If he did, that changes everything. If he didn't, then everyone go back to normal.

Live your lives. Climb the corporate ladder. Do everything that you need to do. Eat, drink, be merry. It really doesn't matter because you'll do all that and then you'll die and then you'll disappear. But if he rose again, if there's something beyond the grave, then you must change the way you live.

What does this tell me? These close followers, this husband and wife, who were well-meaning, they were close followers, they got into the inner circle and yet they left. What does this tell me? It is possible to spend three years in the presence of the Messiah and still completely miss the point.

[17:28] What does that mean for you? You could spend three years with us at the gathering. You can spend your whole life in church. You can even have done a BSF for two years and you can completely miss the point of who Jesus is.

You could be sat here and having done church. You could have gone to St. Paul's DGS and gone to Christian church and done all the things, know all the stories, and yet you completely miss out on who Jesus is.

Isn't that terrifying? Isn't that such a time waste for you? That you sat here and you do not know the living hope. These two didn't.

And it's sad. And so they walk. But the question really is, why is this account even in here? Actually, it's funny. I don't know what your journey is in the church and you've all probably gone to different kinds of churches or never at all.

And you all have known people who have been de-churched. People who maybe grew up in the church who have then left. Look at this account. These are the OGD church people. These are the first people to walk away from the church.

[18:32] They are the original first group. The left. Why is this account here? You see, there's this interesting thing that we have about Christianity, which is that, again, I talked about this last week.

Every other religion has a God that has his arms crossed saying, you work your way up to me. You do the best you can. Rack up your good deeds. And you can come to me.

And you can work your way up to heaven to me. Christianity is the only one where there's a God who says, actually, you'll never be able to get there. You're not good enough. Every attempt that you have is flawed. Every desire you have, although on the surface it looks like it's good intention, it's still one of selfish desire.

And you won't be able to get to me. So what will I do? I will come to you, is what the Christian God says. I think this passage is in the account because we have this idea that those who really care, who really want him, will get him.

Which is true, because they will get him. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. And yet, it also says in scripture, he came to preach peace to those who were near, but also those who were really far off.

[19:36] This account is here because it's saying, even if you're disillusioned with the church, even if you're disillusioned or even delusional about what you thought God was supposed to be for you. Even if you are de-churched, walking away from church on the biggest day of humanity, God will still come to you.

God will still walk beside you. Isn't that crazy? I don't know whether we truly understand that. Because I think we always think that we have to claw our way to Jesus, when yet here we have two people walking away.

And Jesus says, I'm just going to walk alongside you. I'm just going to be a little bit of a troll. And I'm just going to be a talk to you. Hear you out. Hear your story. Hear your hurt. And then tell you the reason for it.

And tell you and open your eyes to something different. It tells me that if you are de-churched, if you are disappointed, deflated, discouraged, Jesus comes to you. And he walks with you.

And he's willing to walk with you in the wrong direction for a little while. He's willing to talk with you, spend time with you, ask you questions. He knows that they've missed the point, obviously.

[20:48] But yet he still does it. I don't know what your perception of who God is. But this, I hope, shows you a different side to God. This is the very first thing he does in the account of the Gospel of Luke.

After he resurrects, he goes to find two people who have missed the point. And so what does he do after that? He gives them a Bible study. And he says this. O foolish ones, verse 25.

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

What he's doing is he opens up the scriptures. And these two probably knew the scriptures, the Old Testament, of course. And he said, do you understand? Can I walk you through this book and show you why, how actually all the lines converge towards me?

Everything is about me. The whole Bible is about me. I am him. I am he. I am the one that this is all about. There's a quote that Martin Luther says, the Bible is the cradle in which Christ is laid.

[21:54] The Bible is the cradle in which Christ is laid. This whole book. Now, not every single verse is about Jesus. But every storyline, every event, every account, all the lines converge towards Jesus.

Towards that moment where he invaded earth and was in the stable. And by the way, just shout out to Vincent. This is still alive and well. As a Chinese church, Chinese people, we try to maximize effort and money that we spend on things.

And so this is staying here until it's completely deflated. He says, it's all about, it's all about me. And then he goes through and he begins with Moses and he goes through all the prophets. Scripture doesn't lay it all out here, but I will attempt a little bit. It's interesting here because Augustine says this, the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New Testament.

Okay. The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New Testament. See, what they had hoped was a political savior.

[22:57] That's what they had hoped. They had hoped that he would save them from suffering, which is what we all hope. Some of us who have left the church, who have given hope in Jesus is actually because somewhere along the way, it didn't work out for you.

Something didn't work out for you. Something that you had hoped that Jesus would do for you. He didn't do. So therefore now you're walking on your road to Emmaus. Because you're like, we had hoped. I had hoped that he would help save my relationship.

I would hope that he, I had hoped that he would help give me the job that I wanted. I had hoped that he would have given me the lifestyle that I wanted. Yet he hasn't. So because of that, therefore I shall walk away. And that Jesus comes to you now, walks to you and goes, hey, how are you doing?

Why are you walking away? Oh, you thought I was here to save you from suffering, but you may have missed the point. Because actually I have come to save you through suffering. It's through me suffering on behalf of you, you will be delivered.

That is what he's saying. And so what he's saying is this. Hey, do you, Moses and all the prophets, it could be the whole Old Testament. He's saying, do you remember the, do you remember the first Adam, Adam and Eve, where he chose to say, hey, actually, I don't know if I trusted you, God.

[24:04] I don't know if I believe in you. I'm going to eat the apple. The apple seems very nice. It's a Fuji apple. It's tasty. It's crispy. It's sweet. And I'd like to know, and I'd like to be the judge of what I should be doing.

So let me have, Jesus is saying, hey, do you remember the first Adam? Well, I'm the last Adam. The first Adam allows sin to enter into the world. I'm the final. I'm the last Adam that is taking the sin away from the world. That's what he's saying.

He's saying, hey, do you remember Isaac? Do you remember Isaac, the boy who followed his father up to the mountain where his father said, hey, we're going to go worship pump into the mountain. And Isaac didn't know anything.

And he was about to be sacrificed. He said, hey, I am the beloved son. I am the only son who was sacrificed. I am the lamb that was put in your place. Do you remember Moses?

Do you remember that time? Moses was the prince of Egypt, but he stepped down from his throne to help another person, to deliver his people. Hey, do you remember that Moses? I am now the one who is saving my people.

[25:00] I am the one that stepped down from my throne. Do you remember when Moses went to the wilderness and it was in the desert and he would beat on the rock to get water to come out? Do you remember that? Well, guess what? I'm the rock that was beaten so that you can have life.

Do you remember the tabernacle? Do you remember the tabernacle that you would carry to hold God's presence? Do you know who that is now? It's me. I hold the presence of God. If you want God, then you come to me because I am the way, the truth and the life.

Do you remember the high priest? The holy of holy place, that tent that one person can go in one time a year? Well, guess what? I tore the veil. Now everyone can access into that place. Do you remember after Moses died?

Do you remember Joshua? Do you remember Joshua that led the people into the promised land? Guess what? I'm the one that is now leading you into the promised land. That's what he's saying. He's going through time and time again.

He's saying, do you remember David? King David? The man after God's own heart? The shepherd king? Well, guess what? I come from his lineage and I am now the good shepherd and I am now the king and I am now the high priest.

[26:01] That's what he's saying. Do you remember Jonah? Do you remember the three days that Jonah spent in the belly of the fish? Guess what I did? I spent three days in the depths of Sheol, in the depths of hell and now I've come back. He's going through this Bible study and you would have just been like, what?

Again, interestingly, these people would have spent time with him already and they hadn't got it. And so he's patient and he goes and he walks with them through it again. Do you remember Isaiah 53? Do you remember that passage that talks about the suffering servant? The one who would take on the sin of the world? The one who would be pissed? The one who would suffer?

Guess what? That was me. What an incredible Bible study. We've been unpacking why Jesus came. Can you imagine being, having that Bible study with Jesus himself?

Hey guys, this is why I came. And so they listen. And so they walk with him. He walks with them for these three hours. And suddenly the Bible becomes something else to them.

[27:08] All these stories that they would have heard in Sunday school. That they would have studied in BSF. Now they're like, whoa. This stuff is real. But still, they don't quite get it.

Verse 28. So they drew near to the village. Again, it's three hours walk to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly saying, stay with us.

For it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. It's getting late. Strange man who knows the Bible better than anyone.

It's been good chatting to you. Why don't you just stay? Why don't you just hang out for a little bit? It's interesting. Can you just, don't be mistaken here. Jesus isn't acting here. I think that actually if they didn't invite him in, he doesn't go in. He will keep walking.

[28:12] Why? Because this savior of ours is a gentle savior. Do you imagine the complaints we'd have about God if he just barged into our house and say, that's it.

You are going to worship me. You are going to follow me. I'm going to move everything in this house. Change up the furniture. It's going to be my house. Do you know how much complaining we would do? Aim towards religion and rigidity and all these kinds of things and legality.

See, no, that's not God. This God just goes, hey, I'll only come in if you let me in. It's Revelation 3 says, behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Of course, the passage before that is, hey, you've been lukewarm. You're neither here nor there. You're neither inviting me out or you're not in or you're kicking me out. You're just kind of in between. You're just leaving me hanging in the foyer.

That makes me sick. But guess what? I still do stand at the door and knock. And so if you would allow me to come in, I will come in. It's the mindset of Jesus. And these two people who still don't truly know who he is, they go and say, Jesus, why don't you come in?

[29:15] And it's only then that they have the moment where their eyes are open. It's interesting. They have the most incredible Bible study, intellectually mind blowing. He would have taken them through the Greek and Hebrew, the context of it would have been the best expository sermon they would have had.

And yet they still don't truly, truly get it. Until when? Until the moment he sits at the table with them and breaks bread. And the moment they break bread, it goes from head knowledge down into the heart.

Their eyes were opened when communion was taken. Their minds were opened. Their hearts were opened when the word was opened. So you need both. But the moment they broke that bread, they recognized who he was.

And their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight. And they said to each other, did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? Now it all makes sense.

My goodness. We just have the Bible study from the king himself. Were our hearts not burning? What does that mean? It was an uncontrollable desire for this person. What did they just have? They had a personal encounter with Jesus because you can spend your whole life in church and not encounter Jesus.

[30:30] You can know every Bible story there is to know and not know the love of God. Until there's that moment where he comes to you and says, hey, I'm here to walk with you.

I'm here to sit with you. And it's in that moment. Their eyes are open. Their hearts are open. And what happens after that? And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem.

They walked for three hours to Emmaus. And by then it was dark, right? They have dinner. It's getting later.

Let's just say 9 p.m. And they realize who he was. And that same hour, they're like, you know what? We have to go back. And so they walk in the dark for three hours back to Jerusalem.

What a drastic turn of events. This is what happens when you actually meet Jesus. When you actually meet him, you won't really worry about the cost anymore. You won't really worry about the practicalities of what you're going to do anymore.

[31 : 35] How are you going to make the journey anymore? You just know that you have to. Once you've gathered and you've actually encountered him, then you feel as though, I must go. It doesn't matter what time of day it is. I'm going back. That's the impact of Jesus.

That's what happens when you encounter him. So they go straight back. They find the 11. That shows you how close they were. Because at this point, the 11 were probably still in hiding. So they knew exactly where they were staying.

So they went back to find the 11. The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon. Then they told what had happened on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of bread.

When you meet Jesus, those of us who have met Jesus, you will know that moment where he turned sorrow into joy, where he turned despair into hope.

That moment changes everything. It changes the way you look at 2025. In light of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. I want you to have a think now, just for a second.

Your life. Just the one minute that we had time just to reflect on your year. Look at it again. Look at it again. But now look at it with the lens that Jesus is not dead.

[32 : 44] That he's actually walking with you. That he's actually at the table with you. Go back and just see, wait. That moment where I was at my lowest and that moment when I was at my highest, Jesus was there.

Even when I was walking away from him, he was still walking with me. Just spend a moment now. Just recount and go, wow.

Wow. Wow. My brother recently sent me a podcast that he listened to by Stephen Colbert.

He talked about grief. Of course, he, again, like all of us at one point. I mean, I don't know whether I'm just too morbid, but I think about this often. That every single person in this room will die.

Every single person that I know and love will die. And he was talking about grief. And he was talking about how actually it's important for us to keep thinking about those moments.

[33 : 53] To go back to those moments where you were at your lowest, where you lost the people who were most nearest and dearest to you. And for him, of course, he's a devout follower of Jesus.

And so he was like, actually, we have to go back to those moments. Because it's in those moments where you then start to see that actually the fingerprints of God. That actually you see him. You trace it.

And you may not like that that moment happened. You may not like the fact that you lost that loved one. But yet in some strange way. And those of us who have suffered experience loss will know.

And yet somehow you still give thanks for it. Because they form you to be the person that you are right now. And I took this journey myself a few years ago. As once we came to Hong Kong, back to the place where our parents grew up.

And I actually walked that journey. Walked that journey and going, wow, he was there. My brother and I, we've spent time just almost reliving and re-encountering those moments of deepest hurt and loss.

[34 : 54] When we sat at the dining table. And then one moment he's there and one moment he's gone. When you approach an aging grandparent and you realize this might be the last time that you see them. And as you recount those events.

Something interesting happens if you remind yourself of the lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And you realize that actually Jesus has been there in every single one of those moments.

He's been patient and kind.

He's been gracious and compassionate. He's been there. Suffering with you. Being there in that moment with you.

And then it's really interesting. This grief never leaves. But then gratitude grows out of that grief.

Right? And then you start to feel both. And that's exactly what I'm talking about.

That's how we approach looking back and how we approach looking forward. You go, wow, this year may have been terrible. But there were such good moments because God was there. Because if you look at it from that lens.

[35:56] If you look at it from that vantage point. You're like, everything that he's doing is going to be for our good. Romans 8.28 when it says, all things work together for those who love him. That just feels so nice.

You put it on a fridge magnet. You put it on a car sticker. And you're like, oh, that feels so nice because God's got my back. Well, then we have to remind ourselves verse 29. Which is, what is he doing? He's conforming you to look like his son.

And that hurts. But you can hold that grief with gratitude. Because you're like, praise God. I am through this problem. Through this challenge. Through this suffering. Through this loss.

You are making me more like him. Conforming us to the image of his son. Creation is groaning, longing, waiting for these children, us to be revealed in our final form.

To look like him. We're not there yet. But we will be. And that's how we have hope. That's how we approach every day. So then you can go to work.

[36:54] Those of you who work in the hospital, when you see loss and when you see pain, you're like, okay, I can lean all the way into this pain. And I can come all the way out and still have hope and joy. You can lose your job.

You can lose a loved one. And you can be, I can lean all the way into that loss. And yet I can still come out with joy. That's what the death and resurrection of Jesus does to you. And you may be walking away from him.

But because you encounter him, you will walk straight back to the place where you know there are people gathered who know and love the resurrected Jesus. We're all walking somewhere.

The question is, will you invite him to walk with you? Even if it's in the wrong direction. Honestly, if you are on your journey and you're like, I don't even know if this God stuff is real anymore. Or I've never really understood this God stuff.

Then actually, an interesting thing for you today is to say, is actually, Jesus, would you walk with me? I know I'm heading in the wrong direction. But if you're really that big, then walk with me. Show me.

[37:51] If you have walked with him, then maybe your next thing is actually just like, Jesus, would you come and sit at the table with me? Jesus loves sitting at the table. Jesus loves eating. If you look at the gospel of Luke, Jesus is either going to dinner, at dinner, or leaving dinner.

He is always eating. So he would very much love to sit with you. Would you just say, hey, come and sit down. I have questions.

I have doubts. Can you imagine a God who is too small to take all of your questions? To take too small to who is too afraid of all of your doubts? No, no.

Jesus comes to seek out those who are lost. Seek out those who are deflated, who are discouraged, who are deserting the church, walking away. He doesn't really mind. He desires you. He desires us. And for those of us who are followers of Christ, we're going to enter into a time of communion. Usually we do it on the first Sunday of the month, but I've asked him, why don't we do it on the last one?

[38:51] Why don't we finish this year in the way that we want to start the next year? And so we'll do it again next week, too. Well, Jesus does say, just do it as often as you can. So here is us doing that. And I want you just to look around.

We have put the chairs in a way where you get to see each other's beautiful and ugly faces. Spend that time looking and going, wow, I'm sat in a room in Hong Kong on the fifth floor with people who believe that someone died and rose again.

And that that fact changes the way they live, changes the way they think, changes the way they talk, changes the way they live. We're not alone.

People who have committed to inviting not only each other, but God into their lives. I don't know about you, but that encourages me.

That fills me up. I think that's why God says, come do that as often as you can. Remember me because it's in that moment where you break bread, where you will see me. And so here we are.

But before that, I'd like to ask you to one final time, just to reflect and examine your own heart.

[39:57] What kind of year you've had? I hope I've told you enough to kind of go, well, for you to feel assured that if you've had a terrible year, you've not been close to God at all. In fact, he's been non-existent in your life. I want to tell you it's okay.

Because it's never too late. Because he still stands at your door and he still knocks. All I ask you to do is just to open it. Ask him the questions.

Walk with him. Talk with him. Dine with him. If you've had a really good year with him and your heart is just burning as these two people are with this uncontrollable desire to want more.

Well, guess what? There is more of him for you to take. There are so many levels for him. The prayer for you would be, God, I've let you into these doors, but there's a few more that I'd like to let you into.

Can you come and take over every aspect of my life? If in any way the Holy Spirit is going to you, well, actually, there are some things that are not right in your heart right now.

[41:03] I ask you just to release it, to surrender it, to repent of it. The word repent, which is such a Christian-y, hardcore, religious term.

I grew up in Birmingham in England where there was a guy every week, every weekend, would wear the whole wooden board that said, repent, for the kingdom of God is here. And he would shout so loud.

And I'd just be like, oh, no, oh, no. But the word repent really just means one thing. Turn around. Turn around. Turn around.

I am slow to anger. I am quick to forgive. I am abounding in steadfast love. That's me. Every parent with a child who has run away or rebelled in some way will know that feeling.

Run back into his arms. Repent of it, release it, and run back in. Invite him in. I invite you just to spend a moment now to examine our hearts before we take communion.

[42:34] Amen. God comes as a humble stranger, a companion on the way who listens to our story and then slowly and carefully explains to us the meaning of the story.

God comes as a humble stranger, a companion on the way who listens to our story and then slowly and carefully explains to us the meaning of the story.

Jesus, as the bread and the wine is passed around, we thank you for walking with us.

We thank you for sitting with us. Even when we've been walking away, even when we've ignored you. We're sorry, Lord.

But if you truly are real, if you truly did come and live and die and then resurrect, and that you're right here now, would you show yourself to us?

[44:07] Lord, we are a simple gathering in a complex time.

We are an imperfect people gathering to worship a perfect God. Can you help us review this last year?

All the despair and all the loss, whether it's to ourselves or to those around us or to this world.

Would you give us the strength to lean in, to grieve?

But then that we would turn around and run towards you and bring hope, joy, peace, love. So, Jesus, we commit to being a people who live with the truth of the resurrection in mind.

Not just in mind, but in our hearts. Not just in our hearts, but in our actions. May we live as people who have hope. May we live as people who have you right beside us. Real, broken, flawed people.

[45:24] One who grieve, ones who cry, who weep. But not ones who also have joy. Who every time when we look at something in the news, then it just looks and sounds and is bad.

That we don't stay in that place of despair, but then we give thanks because you came to save us for those very reasons. And that just, Jesus, that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And that you are here. Thank you, Lord. Jesus, we...

We know that Christianity is the only one that offers us a intellectually, morally satisfactory solution to the problem of sin and suffering. It's the only one that can give us the answers, and that answer is you.

And, Lord, we hang our hearts on that. That you came to live, you came to die, and then you rose again. And that there is an empty tomb to prove it.

[46:37] We only ask now that you would become alive in our own lives. In our church, in our body. That we would be people of hypocrisy, but be people of integrity.

That we would not be people of judgment, but of grace. That we would be people of compassion, selflessness. That we would look like you.

That we would think like you. That we would talk like you. We would walk like you. That is all we ask. The one thing we ask and one thing we seek for this next year is that we would dwell in your house all the days of our lives.

To continue to gaze upon your beauty. To inquire in your temple. To be like you. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for being with us. Even when we were far off. And it's in your name we pray. Amen. Amen.