

His Journey, Our Journey

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight we are going to turn back together to Romans chapter 8. As I mentioned this morning, I went this afternoon to a special service in Stornoway to mark the 100th anniversary of the departure of the Metagama. The Metagama was a boat that sailed from Scotland to Canada, and it took with it 100 years ago 300 people from the island, 300 young people emigrating from Lewis to Canada. They were explaining this afternoon how there were 280 men on board, 20 women, and the average age of those who left was 22. So it's a remarkable and important moment in the history of our island where a huge proportion of a new generation left, and they left for the opportunities that they hoped would come on the other side of the Atlantic.

They took an incredible journey, and I cannot imagine what it must have been like to either have got on that boat and left or to have stood on the pier and watch your children or your siblings depart. It was an amazing journey and it's right that it has been marked with many different aspects of commemoration over the past few weeks. Tonight I want to think about a different journey, and as we do so we're going to focus our minds on the magnificent verses of Romans 8, 38 to 39, but I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present or things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our title this evening is His Journey, Our Journey, and what I want us to think about is the fact that Jesus embarked on an incredible journey for our benefit. He left heaven, He became one of us, and He took that journey in order that we could embark on an amazing journey of our own as well. And so we're going to just unpack these two headings together tonight and I just hope they'll help us see more of just how incredible the gospel is.

So starting off thinking about His Journey, the journey that Jesus took in order to become one of us, in order to become a flesh and blood human is often described by theologians under two great headings, His humiliation and His exaltation. We often speak about Christ's journey as His humiliation and His exaltation. Now when we say humiliation we don't mean in terms of being embarrassed, we mean in terms of being brought low. And so I've drawn this diagram many times before but it's worth doing again. When we think of Jesus' journey it's one where He is brought low. Exaltation is the opposite of that where He is lifted high. And so you have this contrast between a downward journey as Jesus left heaven as He was conceived in the womb of Mary, born and grew and experienced all the sufferings and hardships of life in a fallen world. And then you have this upward journey and that upward journey comes as a result of what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection. And for that reason at the centre of this journey is the cross. Jesus' humiliation culminates in His death on the cross. But from that point the journey of exaltation begins as He rises, ascends and is now exalted at the right hand of God. And this is described so beautifully and so powerfully by Paul in Philippians 2. And I want to just read these verses to you because they capture everything that I'm trying to say in terms of the journey that Jesus took.

Have this mind amongst yourselves which is used in Christ Jesus who though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. That's all the downward journey of His humiliation. But then the exaltation begins. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And that's the great culmination of this journey the fact that now Jesus is Lord He is Lord exalted over all. That means several important things in terms of understanding who

Jesus is. It emphasizes the fact that He has authority. That's really what the word Lord means. He is master and ruler over all. It means that Jesus is sovereign. His reign is not limited. It is universal. Jesus reigns over every inch of the universe over every second of time and over all the realms of eternity. He alone is king and ruler. That's why the Bible can speak of Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And that rule is supreme. He has the name that's above every other name and it's at His feet that every knee shall bow and every tongue is going to confess that He is Lord. And that's the incredible journey that Jesus took. A journey that began in all the glory of being the eternal Son of God. But all of that was set to one side as He embarked on that pathway of humiliation all the way to the cross. He did not hold on to that glory that He had from all eternity. Instead He came down and He came down alongside us. Born in poverty and obscurity.

[6 : 57] Laid in a manger and from there He went further down to the agonizing depths of Gethsemane and all the way to death on the cross. From there He's risen, ascended and is now exalted in total supremacy. But what I want us to recognize is that this journey that we have of humiliation and exaltation, it begins here with the incarnation. And the crucial thing I want to emphasize is that at that point Jesus became one of us. Jesus became flesh, flesh and blood like we are. That's what incarnation means. He became flesh. And what we have to recognize is that that incarnateness, that flesh and bloodness, that humanness of Jesus extends right through to the cross. I'm running out of space in my picture here. Extends right through to the cross but it doesn't stop there.

It continues right through to His highest exaltation. So He doesn't just die as a human. He rises again as a human and He ascends as a human and He is now exalted at the right hand of God as a human. And so you have this incredible fact that Jesus has taken His humanity with Him along every step of this journey. He took all the reality of being a normal human and in doing that He comes alongside us. He took all the responsibility of a failed humanity and on the cross He carried the sins, the implications of the sins and their implications, their punishment that we deserve.

He died in place of us all. He rose again a resurrected humanity and in doing so He's the forerunner that brings new life, new resurrection life to us all. And now He's here exalted at the right hand of God as exalted humanity. And what that means is that the Lord of the universe, Jesus Christ is one of us. He's the risen exalted Lord, God the Son, fully human, one of us. And what that tells us is that as He's gone through that journey and as He now stands at the right hand of God, He's done that and is doing that as one of us and for us. And that's where you have this amazing description here that Jesus is interceding for us. That that incredible journey culminates in the fact that He can now intercede for us at the right hand of God. And that's where we must remember that I'm jumping all over the place but if we go back to Jesus' work, it doesn't end here at the cross. It continues. Jesus' work is ongoing, not an ongoing work of sacrifice and suffering. He's done that but His work now is a work of interceding for us as Paul describes so beautifully here in verse 34. Jesus isn't just our high priest on the cross, He's our high priest forever. And what that means is that if you're a Christian or if you become one, then it means that today, tomorrow and forever, Jesus is interceding for you. And what that means is that He is now at the right hand of God and He is constantly declaring that His work on the cross is effective for you and for me. That means that your debt has been paid. He's declaring that your sins have been totally dealt with. He's declaring that no accusation against you can ever threaten you.

Jesus is interceding for you forever. And that is why if you want assurance for your salvation, the answer is not to try and find some incredible experience in your past. It's not to be able to say, oh yeah, this amazing thing happened all those years ago and that confirms to me that I'm a believer. You don't need that. What you need to recognize is that right now you have a great high priest interceding for you. You have Jesus at God's right hand for us. When I was starting back from Stornoway this afternoon, I was listening to one of my favorite preachers and a guy called Mike Honeycutt. You won't have heard from him but he's a minister in North Carolina and he's an excellent preacher. If you google Mike Honeycutt's sermons you'll find his church's website and you will be able to listen to him. I didn't realize that he would be talking about this. It was a different sermon. It was an Easter Sunday sermon that I picked to listen to while I was dying back. But he started talking about this, about how Jesus is interceding for us. He told a very funny story and I thought, well I must tell this story tonight. He was saying that apparently when he was three years old, he said he couldn't remember this but he did it and he was told that he did it. When he was three years old, he was at his grandpa's house I think or his grandpa was at his house. Anyway, he was the same house as his grandpa and his grandpa would always pray for his children and his grandchildren every day. So he would pray by name for his children and for his grandchildren and he was so committed to doing that and he said that there was this day that his grandpa was in his room praying and he was praying through the names of his children and little three-year-old Mike who was now the preacher was saying that whilst his grandpa was praying, he was trying to get his attention. So he was obviously hearing all these names and so he was trying to get his grandpa's attention and of course his grandpa wasn't going to stop. He was very committed to praying and he was just praying focused and his little Mike couldn't get his grandpa's attention. However, he did manage to get his grandpa's attention in the end and he said he did it by biting him. So he went to grandpa and he bit him and what was even funnier was where he bit him because his grandpa was kneeling down and he bit him on the point which in English is your bottom. So it was very very funny story and I laughed when I listened to it but what struck me even more was when Mike Hanik had explained why he was telling this story. He says I'm telling this story because he said you know I think back now and I think what an incredible privilege that my grandpa was praying for me. He was interceding for me, praying for me by name and he said you know it would be amazing to just hear that again to hear my grandpa praying for me and then he said do you know what's even more incredible? That's what Jesus is doing for you right now. Praying for you at God's right hand.

Interceding for you at God's right hand. Standing there for you and he is doing that at every single second that the clock ticks. Jesus interceding for all of his people. Interceding for you. And this is where we think you know a couple of times already in the sermon I've said you know it's amazing that he's one of us and you know you think about that that's amazing you know at the right hand of God Jesus is exalted he's taken this incredible journey of humiliation and exaltation he's now at the right hand of God and he's one of us but the really amazing thing is that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian the Jesus who is at the right hand of God is actually looking at you and is saying she is one of mine. He is one of mine. And that's the incredible reality of the gospel. When

[16:17] Jesus became one of us he went on that journey and the climax of that journey is that he is now the risen exalted Lord at the right hand of God. But what about our journey? What about our journey?

How does this all relate to our lives? And there's loads we could say and we're only stretching the surface as we always do. What I want to focus on is the fact that at the end of Romans 8 Paul talks about the fact that our journey can actually often encounter things that threaten us. And there's two aspects to this that I want us to explore because first of all Paul describes in verse 35 some of what we could call the day-to-day threats that we face in our lives as Christians. And he speaks about that when he says who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall tribulation distress persecution famine nakedness danger or sword. Now when you look at a list like that you can kind of think to yourself well I can see why Paul wrote that he lived in a dangerous setting he was sometimes attacked for his faith sometimes his life was put at risk very different for us now we live in a much more kind of secure and stable environment and even though there are other parts of the world for Christians that openly persecuted thanks be to God we don't experience that but because of that we can look at verses like this and think well well I think if we look at the words a little bit more closely I think we'll see that they're actually a lot more relevant than we might think.

I'll go through them one by one briefly tribulation that can seem like a strange word for us today and you know I've asked you know today I've met several of you and I've asked you know how was your week nobody replied by saying well there was loads of tribulation we don't tend to use that kind of language we don't tend to think in those terms so if I asked you did you feel under tribulation last week I think you're probably going to say no the interesting thing is that that word basically means pressure if I ask you did you feel under pressure in the past week many of us will say yes pressure is a huge issue that we face in life and it can come from so many points at work at school I can come among our peer group it can come to do with in relation to money it can come to do with decisions so often we feel under pressure and in our bodies in our lives it can feel like we're like a debacle under that pressure the word distress let me rub it pressure I won't have room for everything if I scribble all over the place the word for distress that literally means narrowness and so I think we can think of that in terms of feeling trapped or being forced into a corner so often life does that to us so often we can feel forced into having to deal with a difficult situation at work so often we're forced to face a bad diagnosis so often we're faced with decisions where it's one bad option or another bad option and and we can feel trapped in circumstances or even maybe in habits that can hurt us all of that causes distress in our lives

Paul then speaks about persecution again you know at a kind of general level we see that as the kind of open opposition that people face for their faith and for many Christians that is a reality that they face in a way that we don't at all we are so blessed with the freedoms and the protections that our society gives us but again it's interesting to think about the word it literally means to be pursued or to be chased and and when we think about it in those terms it touches on something that we can relate to in terms of how we feel and that might not be directly in terms of our faith as Christians it might be but it might not be but it could be it could be anything in life that leaves us feeling harassed as though as though we're being chased badgered bothered and it can happen in loads of ways it can happen with a difficult colleague at work it can happen with someone at school who's giving you a hard time it can happen with people who are talking about you behind your back it can even and tragically happen with an abusive member of your family for some people day-to-day life is one where you feel like you're being hounded famine again at a sort of surface level is not something that that many of us will have experienced but yet it does speak to us of being in need and it's interesting you know we we enjoy our our provisions every day but there are sometimes in life when you get glimpses and you see actually how how vulnerable we actually are and that was that was very powerfully said before us in lockdown when there was times when there were shortages of certain things that we were so used to just having available all the time and sometimes even in an old island and it's never got too serious but there are times when the ferry's off for a few days everyone goes bonkers buying all the milk and bread and we're left short and that's a glimpse into how many people feel and and again we also have to recognize that actually there are many people in our society for whom week-to-week food is a huge struggle and we'll definitely learn more about that next week when we hear from safe families nakedness that's again on the surface can seem like a strange threat for us to experience and I don't think any of us expect to have to deal with that in the coming week but of course it's not really necessarily talking about about nakedness in its most basic sense it's speaking more in terms of being vulnerable of being exposed of being unprepared and we can feel we can feel vulnerable in so many different ways either physically or emotionally. Danger that speaks about the idea of being threatened about being at risk. Sword that speaks to us of the idea of violence and again we might live in a society with a very good level of law and order and yet at the same time violent crime still happens and because of that you know if we were walking at midnight in a city or a town there's always part of us that doesn't quite feel safe. So all of these are just day-to-day threats that we can experience alongside them are what we could call cosmic threats as described in verses 38 and 39 and all these big realities big spiritual realities life and death angels rulers things present things to come powers height nor depth or anything else in all creation there's just that description of the fact that whether it's in the physical realm of day-to-day life or in the spiritual realm with principalities and powers there are many many cosmic forces that can threaten us spiritual

realities that leave us feeling exposed all of that means that on our journey whether it's at a very normal day-to-day level or whether it's in in the big bigger picture of spiritual cosmic powers we all face threats and that might be physical challenges mental distress spiritual conflict or most likely a combination of them all and ultimately all of these culminate in the brutal reality of death and when we think of that when we think of death all of us know how vulnerable we are on our journey through life we know that we are very very vulnerable and Paul captures that really powerfully when he speaks of being killed all the day long regarded as sheep to be slaughtered

[25 : 17] I'm gonna jump a slide because I've got the wrong there's a slide I left in a slide from the morning that's from the morning service so my apologies about that it's this verse I wanted to get to just that image of how you know we are exposed you think of all the chaos in the world you think of the pressures around us you think of the struggles that are within us it's so easy to feel vulnerable and explode exposed as we continue on our journey together so I want to bring all of this together in the last couple of minutes Paul is giving us two great images for us to think about we have Jesus risen exalted the Lord the one who reigns over all and then you have us and we're down here and we feel like sheep exposed vulnerable and we are facing all of these threats pressure distress danger nakedness famine sword principalities powers all these things and it can leave us feeling so exposed and so vulnerable and a good way of diagnosing whether or not this is a reality is to ask yourself a very simple question do you worry about stuff do you worry about stuff and the answer is we all do and that worrying is a symptom of the reality of the threats that we face on our journey and so we've got Jesus up here exalted as Lord us down here like sheep and all of these threats are pressing in upon us and the incredible thing about this is that we are being taught that absolutely nothing can separate us from Jesus and so as we think about what this verse is speaking about we have immovable boundaries placed between us and the threats that we feel exposed to Paul is telling us that these threats are real but absolutely nothing can separate you from Jesus and that's incredible because it's telling us that all these threats that we have listed before us all these things that Paul mentions are powerless to separate you from Jesus in fact they can only do one thing these threats famine distress nakedness or all the rest of it they can only do one thing they can only move you closer to Jesus and that's because ultimately the biggest thing that the threats outsiders can do is to take our life away and they will do that but when they do they are just sending you straight into Jesus's arms and the reason that nothing can separate us from Jesus is because his journey of humiliation reaches us right where we are in all the depths of our vulnerability our sin and our brokenness and his exaltation takes us with him to where he is going to be forever and he brings us with him to the place where he reigns where death is crushed where we have eternal

life in him and all of that is because we are united to Jesus that's what lies at the very heart of Christianity the fact that we're united to him in his death in his humiliation and we're united to him in his exaltation in other words he just comes and gets us and he comes and grabs us and he takes us with him and he is never ever going to let you go and the most incredible thing to see and discover is when we ask the question why why is Jesus doing that why did he take his journey and why is he taking us on this journey and the answer is because of the love of God why humiliation because he loves you why exaltation because he loves you why intercession because he loves you why no separation because he loves you why did Jesus do it all because of how much he loves you and that is why his journey can bring us onto the most incredible journey that we can ever experience and this has got to shape the way we think and the way we live our lives and

I'm running out of time so I'm missing out a wee bit I'm just going to jump to the very last thing I wanted to say you think of the week ahead you think of the realities that we've considered between Jesus's humiliation his exaltation the fact that he's exalted the right hand of God the fact that he's now interceding for us we think of everything that we've learned think of the week ahead is there going to be a single moment when Jesus isn't Lord is there going to be a single moment when you are not united to him if you're a Christian or if you become one is there going to be a single moment when he's not interceding for you is there going to be a single moment when you aren't his not this week not ever because that is how amazing Jesus is nothing