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**Sunday 14 January 2024 to**

**Sunday 21 January 2024**

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Sunday 14 January 2024

**Finders keepers**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me' (John 1:43).***

Read [John 1:43–51](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A43-51&version=NRSVUE)

The day before Jesus called Philip, Philip had been with John the Baptist in Bethany beyond the Jordan. This was over a 24-hour walk from Philip’s home, which was in the north. So, Philip must have been a long way from home. We don’t know which way he was travelling. We don’t know what occupied Philip's thoughts as he journeyed. Perhaps he was away from home for business or family matters. Maybe he wanted to see what all the fuss was concerning John the Baptist. When he woke that morning and slipped on his sandals, he had no idea that, within hours, his life would be turned upside down. Something profound would happen to him that God had been planning before the foundation of the world.

Strange things happen when God is in town – think about Moses walking in the desert, minding his own business, when he suddenly sees a bush on fire and meets God. Or Zechariah, going into the temple (‘called up by lot’ – like the throw of dice) just expecting to do his job, and, suddenly, God is there in all his terrifying presence. Think about that.

Imagine, today, a pastor goes into a church to set up for the morning service, turns on the lights, and actually sees God. He would come close to dying of fright. God in church! The poor bloke was just there trying to get the PowerPoint to work and find a replacement guitarist. God finds us.

God found Philip. He found Abraham. He found Zechariah and gave him good news. He finds prostitutes, prisoners, parishioners, pastors and sometimes even politicians. My husband says I’m a keeper. Well, let me tell you – God is a finder. That’s what he does and who he is. Even when we don’t know we are lost.

**Thank you, Father, for meeting us where we are, whether we are near or far from home. Even before we call or know our needs, you come to us. Thank you for coming to this world to seek and save the lost. Amen.**

Kirsten enjoys working as a Medical Rural Generalist in the remotest part of Australia – from Warruwi to Ramingining and Ltyentye Apurte to Lajamanu, to name a few. Her favourite thing is showing her husband, Noel, around the communities and coming home to him and their two ragdoll cats (Courage and Perseverance). Kirsten says she does not like flying sideways in a tiny Cessna in bad weather or having to run away from grumpy buffalo, red-belly black snakes or crocodiles.

Monday 15 January 2023

**A word to be read, remembered, heard and believed**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near (Revelation 1:3).***

Read [Revelation 1:1–8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1%3A1-8&version=NRSVUE)

We cannot find the truth of God in the way we discovered Antarctica or how Watson and Crick discovered the secrets of DNA. It is a mystery, but not of the Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple variety. The truth of God belongs to God, and he has given it to Jesus Christ to show his people what will soon take place. Prophecy is not just foretelling but forth-telling. It reveals the truth of the way things really are, as well as how things will be.

We are told that the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy handed from Jesus to John will be blessed. It is not a superstitious or magical blessing. Studies have shown that reading aloud involves multiple different areas of the brain and helps get words into long-term memory. This sounds very much like ‘letting the word dwell in you richly’ (Colossians 3:16). For much of history, texts were read aloud rather than silently to oneself. Over 4000 years ago in the Middle East, the commonly used words for ‘to read’ literally meant ‘to cry out’ or ‘to listen’. Reading aloud to one another is even more beneficial because it strengthens emotional bonds between people.

In his other letters, John says there is something special about speaking the gospel face to face – that it brings a joy not known just through reading words on a page (2 John 12; 3 John 13). In his book *Life Together* (1954), Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke beautifully of the communal act of reading aloud and worship. He reminds us that our lives do not belong to us as individuals but to ‘the church of the triune God, to the Christian family, to the brotherhood’. God’s word comes by revelation. It is his gift. His word is intended to be heard, with faith, and especially, where possible, read and heard in the company of believers.

***Lord, thank you for giving us the gift of time to read your word. Thank you for the gift of reading aloud, and we pray for those who cannot read or hear – especially those unable to hear the word in the fellowship of believers. Help us to reach out to them. Give us hearts ready to receive your word,  submit to the truth of your revelation and be patient in hearing even when we don’t yet understand. Amen.***

Tuesday 16 January 2023

**Hold on and look to Jesus**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 1:9).***

Read [Revelation 1:9–16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1%3A9-16&version=NRSVUE)

As I write this, cats purr at my feet. From the café, I can see million-dollar houses encircling a marina filled with million-dollar boats. People sip organic lattes, and a pug prances in his diamante collar. Mangoes and frangipanis scent the air and the birds nest in the boughs of well-watered trees. Someone complains that the coffee is too cold, the weather too warm, and fuel prices are too high.

None have been imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. We live far from North Korea, Ukraine, Israel, and the Gaza Strip. None has recent memories of being in Changi or Ravensbrück.

The Apostle John, who wrote Revelation, suffered for his faith. As a frail old man, he was exiled to Patmos, a small barren area where criminals were sent to work in the mines. Our hardships are never likely to come close to these experiences, but as sure as night follows day, we will have our own desperate trials.

There is no formula to help us cope, but we can learn some things. Firstly, wherever we find ourselves, God is there. Secondly, we do not suffer alone, but we have brothers and sisters who are experiencing terrible tribulations – whether known to us or not. Thirdly, suffering comes even to those who believe and follow the word of God. Fourthly, we do not have a high priest (Jesus) who is unfamiliar with our sorrow – but one who has suffered and died and is alive forevermore.

We can look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Hebrews says through the battle of the cross, he despised its shame and looked to God and the joy set before him. We are driven to avoid the hostility of others and the experience of shame. Only something (someone) greater than these can carry us through. We can give up our attempts at virtue signalling (you can look that up) and running away. God will carry us through. The joy Jesus saw before him was us. He saw us, his beautiful children, his brothers and sisters – his inheritance. He saw us loved in the arms of the Father, and that was his joy! Let us look to him in times of need. In times of persecution, let us wait for his word to come and set us on our feet.

***Dear Father, in times of trial, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross and great hostility and yet despised its shame. Let us look to him, who is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God, where he makes prayers and intercessions for us. Where he knows our needs and loves us more than we can imagine. Amen.***

Wednesday 17 January 2023

**The Living One exposes our deadness**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died and behold I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of Death and Hades (Revelation 1:17a,18).***

Read [Revelation 1:17–2:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1%3A+17+%E2%80%93+2%3A7&version=NRSVUE)

Something happens when mortal man encounters the Living Man.

Knowing Christ is not simply a matter of becoming a nice person. Nor just believing by rote that God sent Jesus as a ‘substitute’ to die for my sins. We are not nice people made nicer by going to church. We may be walking, talking, cappuccino-drinking, rotary- and CWA-attending people, and still be dead. People are not just ‘stunned’ or ‘resting’ as the dead parrot in Monty Python.

The Bible says that when sin came, we died. It says we were dead in our trespasses and sins. In our love of ourselves and self-esteem, in our love of money and dependence on things other than God, we became as dead a hundred-dollar note. As dead as the face on a glossy magazine. As dead as a new four-wheel drive, a boat cruise, or the sound system or scones at church. We are as dead as our idols; we have eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear, and lungs that cannot breathe (Psalm 135:15–18).

On the cross, Jesus battled us and our deadness. He battled our deafness to his word. And in slaying us, he brought us to life. (This means that our physical death, when it comes, will have no power over us because we are unchangeably alive.)

Even John, a Spirit-filled prophet, fell like he was dead at Jesus’ feet when he saw him in all his pure and holy glory. He was in good company – the same happened to Joshua (Joshua 5:14,15), Abram (Genesis 17:3), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:28,3:23), Daniel, Peter, James, John and Saul (Paul). Perhaps none of us have had a vision of God as a consuming fire. Fire in the Old Testament is often a symbol of judgement. A vision of God’s judgement – when we see it – is a terrifying thing. God knows this, so he speaks a word of reassurance. This word is that he has judged us in the cross, killed our deadness and brought us to himself. We are raised to a new hearing in that word of motherly comfort (Isaiah 66:13) and fatherly love (Psalm 103:13).

***Dear God, thank you for the revelation that you are here now. You find us in the desert places. You find us in our terror and under the weight of accusation. Thank you for slaying the idols and setting us on our feet in you. You find us in death and raise us up to life. Amen.***

Thursday 18 January 2023

**God knows your suffering: do not fear**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).***

Read [Revelation 2:8–17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+2%3A8-17&version=NRSVUE)

God knows our suffering more intimately than anyone. Even ourselves. When trials and torments come to us, we need to know that our suffering has an endpoint. And that it is not without purpose.

In the midst of suffering, people seek something to believe in. They entrust themselves to large bank balances and good reputations (or bad ones, as the case may be). Anything that can be put on Instagram or get us recognised at the pub, in church or at work. We don’t care much for poverty unless it gets attention.

In Revelation, as well as in Hebrews, we hear about another sort of believer. Those who believed that there was a hope yet to come. A home beyond this home. These believers were tortured, flogged, and suffered mocking, chains and imprisonment. They went about homeless and were put to death with the sword. These people, though poor in the world’s eyes, were rich. They are called ‘those of whom the world was not worthy’.

Riches in the world’s eyes are foolishness in God’s. We come to the world with nothing, and we leave with nothing. Imagine being taken to a toy shop (perhaps the leisure-cruise-and-gold-bullion sort of toy shop) where we can play with anything until the sun sets – then we must go home. Some fight and squabble and fool themselves that this is all there is. They forget they have no power. When the sun sets, it is all gone, and we must account for our time, for where we have put our hope.

Certainly, God has given us many good things in this life, and we have known many wonderful promises to come to fruition. We have been given the promise of life in Christ, yet fully entering into this is still to come. In this in-between time of waiting, we experience suffering. God promises to give the crown of life at the end of it all. In the midst of trials, we do not run to more comforts in the toy shop, nor even to temporal promises the Lord has given, but we flee for refuge and find strong encouragement in the hope set before us. In the tossings of our lives and the waters threatening to drown us, we have a sure anchor for our souls.

***Thank you, Father, that we have Jesus, who has gone before us into your presence on our behalf and sent his very own Spirit to comfort us. He has been faithful unto death, and we are in him. He has won for us the crown of life. Cause us to fix our eyes on him and lay aside anything that might hinder our looking to him. Amen.***

Friday 19 January 2023

**Eyes like a flame of fire**

by Dr Kirsten Due

Read [Revelation 2:18–29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+2%3A18-29&version=NRSVUE)

Fire is an important symbol in the Bible. The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire. In the Old Testament, fire was a constant reminder of God’s power and purifying presence (see Deuteronomy 4:24 and Malachi 3:2,3). Fire reminded the Israelites that salvation was only from him, atonement could only be made through him, and his judgements led to a beautiful place of restoration.

2 Samuel 22:7–10 makes God’s presence sound terrifying:

Then the earth reeled and rocked;  
the foundations of the heavens trembled  
and quaked, because he was angry.  
Smoke went up from his nostrils,  
and devouring fire from his mouth;  
glowing coals flamed forth from him.  
He bowed the heavens and came down;  
thick darkness was under his feet.

But his presence in devouring fire is on behalf of David, who was in distress. His fire came to consume David’s enemies. God’s fire is for his people, to save them from death and destruction.

The prophet Daniel had an almost identical vision of God to that described in Revelation. ‘His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude’ (Daniel 10:6).

Daniel’s response was the same as John’s in the first chapter of Revelation: He fell on his face in fright, almost unconscious. The word that came to him was one of reassurance and love. ‘O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright … Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel ...”’

For the believer, the fire of God ultimately brings blessing. So, amid difficulties, hold fast to the one who has conquered on your behalf and holds fast to you (Revelation 2:25).

***Lord, you are the one who searches the mind and the heart. Because of Christ, your searchlight finds nothing hidden within by which we can be accused. You have penetrated our deepest darkness with your eyes of flaming fire. You burnt up our sins for all time, and now, in Christ, we are raised to newness of life. With your flaming eyes and feet of burnished bronze, you are our comfort and great defender. Amen.***

Saturday 20 January 2023

**Up the creek**

by Dr Kirsten Due

***Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion, in the balances they go up … If riches increase set not your heart on them (Psalm 62:9a,10b).***

Read [Psalm 62:5–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+62%3A5-12&version=NRSVUE)

In front of us is an antique set of measuring scales. The thing we want to measure is placed on one plate and the standardised weights on the other until an equilibrium is reached. Imagine on one side we put the weight of a single breath. Scientists tell us that a single breath weighs about 0.5 to 5 grams, depending on your definition and the size of your lungs. Enough to say it is exceedingly light. The other side of the scales is piled with the weight of all those of ‘low estate’. Variations of that word are prolific in the Old and New Testaments. It can mean humility (as in the opposite of arrogance) but also a low social, emotional or financial state.

When weighed in the balance, those of low estate are almost nothing; they weigh the same as a breath. People of high estate are less than nothing, and ‘in the balances they go up’. Putting our hope in riches is foolishness. And should our wealth increase, we are stupid to trust in that to make us happy. Neither state is better than the other. Trust in God alone and his steadfast love. When we look in the mirror, can we honestly say that the bent of our lives is not towards earning more, increasing our status at work, on Instagram or at the pub – or avoiding shame and ridicule perhaps by spending hours practising our golf swing or getting our kids into the best schools?

God says, ‘Unless the Lord builds the house the labourers labour in vain’ (Psalm 127:1). Whatever state we are in, it is the Lord’s doing. Have a look at this from the *King James Version*, which is particularly vivid: ‘The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill … For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's … by strength shall no man prevail’ (1 Samuel 2:6–8).

We don’t hear the word ‘dunghill’ anymore, but it’s a powerful image of being up the creek without a paddle. Rich or poor, without Christ, we are all up that same creek. Let your work be trusting him and his strength, fleeing to him for refuge, pouring out your needy heart to him.

***Dear Lord, only your steadfast love can bring us to a place of rest, refreshment and security. Everything else is chasing shadows. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. May the work of our lives be the rich and weighty vocation of being in your rest and living in your love. Amen.***

Sunday 21 January 2023

**Let’s get going**

by Pastor Tim Klein

***The time has come! God's kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God and believe the good news (John 1:15)!***

Read [Mark 1:14–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A14-20+&version=NRSVUE)

The older I get, the more aware I am of the need to not just believe but also share the good news. I wonder, is that true for you too?

For around 30 years, Jesus had grown up and participated in life as a son, brother, fellow worshipper and member of his local community. He lived and learned all about life and faith as a person. Inevitably, Jesus listened to and observed how life was for all those people he encountered. He also experienced and learned about relating to other people. He grew in his knowledge and understanding: Jesus grew in wisdom, stature and favour with God and all the people (Luke 2:52).

All this, so far, was Jesus’ time of preparation. When ‘the word took on flesh’, it meant Jesus had to be fully prepared as a person for his task as God’s Son. That meant knowing and understanding what it meant to be human – as well as what it meant to be the Messiah and Saviour for all humankind.

Finally, the preparation was over! It’s time! Time to get going. Time to put faith, knowledge, experience and wisdom to work. Time to focus now on telling the world about the imminent presence of God’s heavenly kingdom.

So, Jesus goes about choosing his team and getting on with his life’s mission.

You and me – we are part of his team. We share his mission to bring the good news of the kingdom of God into the hearts and lives of all people around us.

Our preparation time is over. Now, it’s time for us, like Jesus, to get going and share the good news of Jesus.

***Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for those who shared your kingdom with us. Thank you, too, for preparing us for your purposes. Use us. Use me now to announce the imminent presence of your kingdom. Amen.***

*Tim has served as a pastor for over 30 years in Australia and New Zealand and is currently at Faith Warradale in South Australia. Husband to his wife, father of three and grandfather of more than nine. Tim says he is living in hope. He enjoys gardening (especially his orchard of over 60 trees, succulents and flowering plants), making music (he loves to sing), beekeeping and taking photos.*