

What does it mean to follow Jesus

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Date: 14 April 2019

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[0 : 0 0] You guys are here as well, and you're especially welcome here today. The notices are on the sheets here, and I think there was one or two we were expecting on the screen, but we're having problems with the screens today, so I'm sorry about that.

But the notices that we have on the sheet here, one or two to highlight, or one or two that are not on the sheet that I highlight. First, it's Malawi Monday.

Tomorrow from 9 until 2, there will be breakfast rolls, soup, etc., available from Island Bites. All the proceeds will go to Nurse Marian, to Docus Educational Trust in Malawi.

Nurse Marian is here somewhere. Where are you, Nurse Marian? She's there. She's heading off at the end of this month to Malawi, as she does once or twice a year. And so there are various things that have been donated to Island Bites, and Island Bites also will be given of their own things to raise proceeds from Nurse Marian to go to Malawi, or not to go to Malawi, but to bring out gifts to Malawi in terms of donations.

Also, there's a cafe in Tarbert this coming Friday, the 19th of April, and that's in the community centre to raise funds for the group going to Romania on Friday 19th of April.

[1 : 2 8] That's the date of the cafe. Donations of bacon, etc., gratefully received. Please speak to Penny if you're able to help. I want to just make clear as well that the money that's raised at that cafe is not for the team and their expenses.

It's not to allow the team to buy steak and chips in the airport on the way out there. The money that's raised will be all going to Romania. So anything that's given will be gifted to the people who are in need over there.

The WFM Scalpy Community Centre, 7.30 on this coming Thursday, I presume, and all are welcome to that.

Are all welcome to that, or is that just a WFM, is that a women's meeting only? Where's Manu? No. Anybody is welcome. So that's this Thursday, half past seven in Scalpy Community Centre.

So please make a note of that. The final thing is just to say something about safeguarding. It should have been on the screen, but obviously it wasn't. So Duncan, can you come and just give us 20 seconds on safeguarding, please?

[2 : 4 5] Yeah, those of you who were here last week will remember seeing an information on the screen regarding safeguarding training up in Stornoway next week. But I'm pleased to say that I managed to persuade Donald Dickey, who's organising the training in Stornoway, to do a special one down here in Tarbert in the future.

So no need to book yourselves into that course that's on next Saturday. But Lucy and Mary will be in touch once they've agreed a date for training.

And anyone who has a PBG certificate, or equally perhaps would be interested in helping out with children's work, etc., and with vulnerable groups, you're very much encouraged to take this training to get a full understanding of all the issues that are involved and the responsibilities that we have, and also the policies and procedures of the Free Church itself.

So that will be coming up shortly. Keep your eye out for further notices on that one. Thank you, Duncan. The rest of the information is pretty much, I think, I can leave you to read at your own convenience.

The evening service tonight from 6 till 7, and please be encouraged to come to that. What isn't on this sheet, I note, is that next Sunday morning, it being Easter Sunday morning, we'll have a family Easter service.

[4 : 11] So please be encouraged to bring the children and encourage perhaps visitors and visiting children to come along to that as well.

So a slightly shorter service. We'll have the children involved, and we'll figure out the details between now and then. These, I think, are all the intimations. So let us now worship God, and let us sing to his praise.

We sing, first of all, from Psalm 98. Psalm 98, and we'll sing from verses 1 to verse 6 of the psalm.

O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he hath done, his right hand and his holy arm, and victory hath won. The Lord God his salvation hath caused to be known.

His justice in the heathen sight he openly hath shown. Down to the end of verse 6 to God's praise. As we stand to sing. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and let's draw near to God in prayer.

[5 : 21] Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your day, and we thank you for the fact that we are able to gather in this way.

We are able to open your word and to read it and to sing your word together. And we thank you that even as we have done so already in our gathering this morning, our minds and our eyes have been directed towards Jesus.

Although we sing a psalm there which dates back from the time of Christ sometime, we thank you that we see Jesus in all that was expressed in the heart of the psalmist.

The salvation which he earned for, the victory which he knew that he could not on his own grasp, the grace that he was in such great need of.

We thank you that all of that was found and was seen and is offered to all in Christ. Lord, we know that we are sinners and we are wayward.

[6 : 33] We are those who are hopeless, have left to our own devices. We know that we are weak in ourselves, but we thank you that in Christ we are offered a strength which is not our own.

We thank you for the text that says that my strength is made perfect in your weakness. God speaking into our lives as we feel our need, as we feel our weakness, we thank you that you are the God who does not leave us on our own, at a distance from you, but you have come to us in Christ.

And we thank you that his salvation and his grace and the victory which he demonstrated on the cross is not something that is remote from us, but it's offered to us.

We thank you that Jesus is our substitute. He's the one who came to this world to live a life without sin, a life that none of us could ever live. And he is the one who went to a cross to die in the place of the sinner, taking the punishment for our sin upon himself.

And we thank you that he is the one who rose. And as he cried out, it is finished. The work of salvation was complete.

[7 : 55] And as he rose from the dead, the hope of eternal life and the promise of resurrection was so clearly seen and offered to all who are given eyes to see and ears to hear.

So we ask, Lord, that you would give us these eyes to see and these ears to hear this morning. We pray that our eyes would be taken away from all that would distract us, that we would focus on Jesus, that he would be our vision.

We pray that our ears would be unblocked and that we would hear the voice of Jesus saying, come unto me and rest. And we pray that our hearts would be stirred, that the Holy Spirit would be at work among us, deep within our own hearts and amongst us.

As we look around at each other, we pray that the Holy Spirit would be active in this place, drawing those who are sinners, and that is all of us, to the one who is our saviour.

So help us, we pray, as we have sung, to know in our hearts the reality of these truths. And help us, we pray, as we have heard, not only to hear, but to come in faith to the one who is able to save us.

[9 : 08] We thank you, Father, for sending your Son. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to seek and to save us. And we pray, Holy Spirit, that you would draw each one that we may be able to sing joyfully of the salvation that is ours in Christ.

So be near to us in this morning, we pray. Lead us and guide us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Bless each one who is present with us this morning. Some who are visiting, some who have been away studying, and who are back for a period.

And we ask, Lord, your blessing to be upon each head that is bowed. We pray for the children. We thank you for them. And we pray that they would grow up to know you and to trust you.

We pray for those who are in the the busyness of the middle years of life, where there are so many commitments and so many people looking for our time.

And we ask that you would help us to be those who seek first your kingdom and your righteousness. And we pray for those, Lord, who are coming to the twilight years.

[10 : 15] Some who may be with us and others who would desire to be with us, but who are in their homes. And we ask that you would bless them where they are. Be with all those in particular need.

We pray your comfort for those who are grieving. We think especially of Joanne and for the family there. Joanne having lost her mother in past weeks. And we pray that she would know your comfort and your peace and your presence with her in a special way.

And for others, Lord, who are in hospital or who have returned from hospital, for those who are struggling with illness, we bring them to you in prayer. We ask, Lord, now that you would go before us, that you would take away all of our sin and that you would enable us to know your presence as we would look to you.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We will sing again. And we'll sing Mission Praise 272. Black Books Pages 272.

The disciples were following Jesus and they were speaking to Jesus and listening to Jesus. And we're singing now in this hymn about deciding to follow Jesus.

[11 : 31] Remember as the children are going out and praying for them. And now let's turn in our Bibles to Mark chapter 6. And we are reading from verse 14.

You can see the section before there, which we looked at two weeks ago now, I think. It's the section where Jesus sends out the twelve.

And so it says there in verse 12 that they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

And then in verse 14 we begin to read about John the Baptist. King Herod heard about this where Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying John the Baptist has been raised from the dead and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.

Others said he is Elijah and still others claimed he is a prophet like one of the prophets of long ago. But when Herod heard this he said, John, the man I beheaded has been raised from the dead.

[12 : 41] For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested and had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married.

For John had been saying to Herod it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to because Herod feared John and protected him knowing him to be a righteous and holy man.

When Herod heard John he was greatly puzzled yet he liked to listen to him. Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl ask me for anything you want and I'll give it to you.

And he promised her with an oath whatever you ask I will give you up to half my kingdom. She went out and said to her mother what shall I ask for? The head of John the Baptist she answered.

[13 : 49] At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The king was greatly distressed but because of his oaths and his dinner guests he did not want to refuse her so he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head.

The man went the head of John in the prison and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl and she gave it to her mother. On hearing this John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then because so many people were coming and going they did not even have a chance to eat he said to them come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.

So they went their way by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. The many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

When Jesus landed he saw a large crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. By this time it was late in the day so his disciples came to him.

[15 : 05] This is a remote place they said and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat. But he answered you give them something to eat.

They said to him that would take eight months of a man's wages. Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat? How many loaves do you have? He asked.

Go and see. When they found out they said five and two fish then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass so they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven he gave thanks and broke the loaves then he gave them to his disciples and set before the people.

He also divided the two fish among them all they all ate and were satisfied and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish the number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them he went up on a mountainside to pray.

[16 : 23] When evening came the boat was in the middle of the lake and he was alone on the land. He saw the disciples straining up the oars because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them walking on the lake.

He was about to pass them by but when they saw him walking on the lake they thought he was a ghost. They cried out because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said take courage it is I don't be afraid. Then he climbed into the boat with them and the wind died down. they were completely amazed for they had not understood about the loaves their hearts were hardened.

When they crossed over they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat people recognised Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to whatever they heard he was.

And wherever he went into villages towns or countryside they placed the sick in the market places. they begged him to let them even touch the edge of his cloak and all who touched him were healed.

[17 : 33] Amen. May God bless that reading of his word to us. Could I invite you to turn in your Bibles back to Mark chapter 6. Mark chapter 6 let's pray again as we go there.

Our Heavenly Father we thank you once more for your word. We thank you that we're able to meditate upon it and as we've sang we know that as we meditate upon your word and as we follow Christ we are kept on the right track the right way.

So we ask that you would help us now that you would govern our thoughts that you would guard our minds and our hearts Lord and that you would be at work in us that we may if we are not yet trusting Christ that we may trust him and if we are trusting and following Christ we pray that we would follow all the more closely as we listen to your word to us this morning and we ask this in Jesus name.

Amen. Time is short this morning somehow so I'm going to bypass the introduction and get straight to it.

This morning I'd like us to think about what it means to follow Jesus. What does it mean to follow Jesus? Some here in the congregation will be following Christ will be Christians and may have been following for a long time for many years.

[19 : 03] There may be others who are not yet following Jesus and who are hearing the voice of Jesus speaking into their lives but have not yet as we sang in the hymn decided to follow Jesus.

The reality is we can't just decide to follow Jesus. God who works in us and we can find that although in the past we may have sat in chairs or pews and everything passed us by, we fought not to go to church but we got dragged along and we heard nothing from beginning to end.

There can be different seasons in life where we find ourselves sitting there and it's as if the word that's being read is speaking directly to us. It's as if God knows our minds and he knows our thoughts because he does and it's uncomfortable because we're conscious that as we listen it seems so acutely relevant to our lives.

What's happening when that is going on? Well God is calling us. He's calling us to follow him. So let me just begin with a question this morning.

Are you following Jesus? Have you confessed your sin as the children reminded us of the need to do this morning? Have you confessed that you're a sinner?

[20 : 30] Have you come to Jesus as he's called you? Are you trusting him? And what does it look like to follow Christ as he calls us to follow him?

Well that's the context that we're in in Mark chapter 6. You can see from verses 7 through to verse 13 that Jesus has sent the disciples out on a mission.

He sent them out to serve him to teach the gospel. And so what's in my mind certainly is I read that section. It's what happened next.

How would they get on? you know when your daughter goes off for the first time with your car the L plates are on. She's off for her first driving lesson.

You know you see her taking off your heart is going probably faster than hers as you see her car disappearing. And she has her first lesson and she comes back with the car with the L plates on.

[21 : 32] The first thing you want to ask is how did it go? How did the lesson go? And we want to ask Mark at the end of verse 13 well how did it go with the disciples?

They were sent off by Jesus with their L plates on. This is the first time that they're heading out in his name to serve him on mission. So how did it go? Tell us Mark about what happened.

Tell us about how they got on. It's what's in my mind. Mark doesn't actually tell us at all. We have to wait a while for it.

There's almost a kind of disconnect between verses 13 and verse 14 and you'll find it helpful to have your Bibles open to see this.

Mark 13 is the disciples going out and Mark 14 it breaks the flow of the narrative altogether. And Mark chooses at this point in his gospel to tell us a gruesome story that involves two really unpleasant characters Herod, King Herod and Herodias, his wife.

[22 : 50] It's a story that's gritty, it's gruesome, it's ugly, it culminates in the beheading of John the Baptist. Christ. And the question I would have is why does Mark decide to tell us this story now?

And he's just finished telling us about the disciples being sent out and he changes the subject. So why the break?

Why does Mark determine that he's going to tell us this gruesome story that happened some time ago? Why bring it in now? That's the question.

And I think the answer is because God is telling us through Mark that to follow Jesus and to serve Jesus as John the Baptist did and as the disciples, verse 13, were just learning to do, it's costly.

following Jesus is costly. Lesson number one.

[24 : 06] Five lessons, hopefully, if we have the time, about following Jesus this morning. And the first lesson, which we'll spend most time on, is the fact that following Jesus is costly.

and that takes us from verse 14 right through to verse 29. Thinking about John, the Baptist, for John, following Jesus meant first of all that he lost his freedom.

He's imprisoned, he's arrested, he's thrown into the service. and the second thing about John, the Baptist, is he loses his life.

First of all, he loses his freedom, and secondly, he loses his head, he loses his life. Why? Because he believed God's word.

Because he had the courage to speak out God's word. John, the Baptist, spoke God's word to the rich people and to the poor people. John, the Baptist, spoke God's word to the nobodies of his day, as they flocked to hear him preach, and to the power brokers of his day, those who could, with one order, execute him.

[25 : 37] He spoke God's word to people like Herod. Who was Herod? Herod was the son of Herod the Great.

Think back to the Christmas story, that awful section within the Christmas story, where there is the mass execution of children in an effort to try to kill Jesus.

Herod the Great is the one who gave the order to kill all these children, and that was Herod's father, the Herod that we're reading of here. I think we should note in passing here, when a father refuses to believe in Jesus, very often their unbelief will have a negative effect on the next generation.

that certainly was the case here. The rebellion, the unbelief in Herod the Great was something that was carried on from generation to generation.

Herod was, as we find him here, he was living a sinful life. He had stolen his brother's wife, who also happened to be his niece.

[27 : 04] Take a second to think about that. He'd stolen his brother's wife, who also happened to be his niece. That was how messed up this whole family situation is.

He took hold of her, he married her. So Herod was in this position now, where he was in an adulteress and an incestuous relationship.

The Bible is so boring, people say, as they pore over their tabloid newspapers. The Bible is so dull, people say, as they flick over to watch Jeremy, Kyle.

you know, the irony of people's perception of what the Bible is, is that the scandal of sin that sells papers in the millions today was printed in the Bible centuries ago.

people. The only difference is that God in his word tells us about the problem of our sin, not in order to make money off the back of us, not in order to delight to see people fall, but in order that fallen people like us would look to him for the solution to the mess of our lives.

[28 : 50] So John the Baptist, he encounters Herod in this incestuous and this adulterous relationship and he just challenges him.

Little John, big Herod. And John is fearless because he's God's messenger. So he calls this relationship for what it is.

He makes crystal clear to Herod that he needs to repent of what he is doing, which is sinful. Verse 18 says, For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.

wife. And Herodias, who was his brother's wife, now his wife, she absolutely hated John the Baptist for all this truth that he was speaking into their situation.

She demanded in verse 17 that John be thrown into prison. She wanted to have him executed, verse 19. But Herod was resistant at that point because Herod was strangely drawn to John.

[30 : 05] The message that John preached, it bothered Herod. It puzzled him. But he liked to hear him preach.

What was happening in Herod's life? What was happening was God was calling Herod to repent.

True John. And Herod was in a state of inner conflict as he heard this message that was so compelling and yet so challenging.

And right there, I think we see what is going on in the hearts of many people, perhaps even many people in the congregation this morning. You know, there are two groups of people in this little section that we're reading here.

There's two types of hearts. There's Herod's heart and there's Herod's heart. And for those with a heart a bit like Herod's at this point, you know, we hear the word of God, we hear his call upon our lives, we hear how Jesus through the scriptures calls us to repent of sin and we see sin in us and we understand the need that we have to repent of it and it's drawing us in and it's compelling to us and we kind of want to.

[31 : 35] but we're also conscious that there's a resistance in us against this message because these sins that we're being called to give up are sins that we actually really love and we want to hang on to them and not let go of them.

That was Herod. He heard John. He heard God through John. He was hearing truth. He was being drawn. Then there was Herodias and he loved her.

He shouldn't have, but he did. He wouldn't let go over. It's one type of heart where there's a warfare going on as God is sweeping into it.

And for others like Herodias, they hear the word of God and they just hate it. And they very often hate the person who speaks it to.

Herodias hated John. She despised him. And then when the opportune time came, she made a move.

[33 : 10] It was Herod's birthday. It was a big party night in the Herod household. So Herod being the big man, he throws a party, his ego is in overdrive, the drink is flowing, there are women there, not invited, but who are performing.

And as Herodias' daughter, who would have been his grandniece, danced in this seductive way, the fire of lust was lit for Herod.

And in the heat of the moment, Herod finds himself on a slippery slope of sin that very quickly led to the beheading of John the Baptist, something he would never have wanted to do.

But in that moment, in that place, in that mindset, with the drink flowing, with his ego at maximum strength, he gives the order.

There's a lesson there, perhaps particularly for the young folks. you know, if you allow yourself to be in that kind of a scene, where the music is pumping, and the drink is flowing, and the conversation is deteriorating, then inevitably you will fall.

[34 : 57] You won't stand. You'll fall. You'll cave under pressure. Herod, here, he's under pressure.

Herod, as you could see, outfoxed by Herodias, his wife. Everyone is goading Herod to make good on this promise that he's made when he's speaking with a belly full of drink.

And so rather than looking stupid, Herod, rather than losing face, he has John beheaded. And for Herod, in that moment, his opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel, his opportunity to be saved, was gone.

John, and for John, he had paid the ultimate price for following Jesus.

There's a whole lot in that story, but the one point in application I want us really to grasp, if you think about John, is that following Jesus is costly.

[36 : 19] following Jesus is costly, and the disciples needed to know that as they began to minister.

They were likely going out with a spring on their step, full of hope. They needed to know following Jesus is costly. You need to know this morning, I need to know this morning, following Christ is costly.

I'm not going to stand here and do a sales pitch to someone who's thinking about following Jesus and say your life will be happy and healthy and trouble free. It will be costly.

There are Christians around in the world today who are still being massacred, their heads are being taken off for Jesus sake. We don't read about them in the newspapers, but there are more who are facing this than there ever has been in the history of time.

It's costly to follow Jesus. We're not being asked to bear that cost. Not at present. But you may have to step away from friendships when Jesus calls you to.

[37 : 38] You and I may have to stop going out to certain places. when the Holy Spirit makes clear to us that that is not a place that we should be in.

You and I may have to look stupid for Jesus sake on occasions. Following Jesus will cost you something.

It might cost you your Wednesday night. your time when you are called to pray with God's people.

If you're following Christ his call is to worship him. To join together with his people to call upon his name.

It can be costly. It can be something that requires sacrifice sacrifice to to be in the place and do the thing that Jesus calls us to do.

[38 : 45] But he still calls us to do it. Following Jesus is costly. And let me say if following Jesus is costing you nothing, are you really following him?

compassion. That's the first point. The second point is following Jesus requires compassion.

Have you ever been in a situation or a season in life where you're just totally exhausted? exhausted? You maybe had a few hard weeks.

You're exhausted and you're looking forward to just a wee bit of downtime. You've got it in your diary for the week. There's these four hours and one particular evening. It's your time.

It's your time just to kick back and relax and just be at peace. And you've just sat down, just taken your shoes off.

[39 : 49] And the phone buzzes. And you look at it. And you see the name. You see the call as it's coming in.

And you know if you answer this call, your day's going to be gone. The downtime that you've got fence marked for that week is going to dissolve.

You're going to be propelled straight into a messy situation. You're going to be dealing with some pretty acute needs. What do you do? What would Jesus do?

I think he'd answer the call. Why? Because he's full of compassion. Look at verse 30.

The apostles gathered around Jesus, supported to him all that they had done and taught. Then because so many people were coming and going that they were not even able to have a chance to eat, he said to them, come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.

[40 : 58] So they went away by themselves to a solitary place, in a boat to a solitary place, but many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them. because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Jesus is shattered. Disciples are tired. And yet when the crowds get there ahead of them and he sees them, he sees their need, he sees them like sheep without a shepherd.

he's compassionate on them. He forsakes his time out. And he goes to them.

You know, to have compassion is both to feel a sense of empathy for someone you know who's in need, and it's then to get alongside them. You can be walking down the street in Edinburgh or Glasgow or London, them, and you can see a man on the pavement in desperate need.

[42 : 15] Maybe he's just been beaten up and he's in a mess, and you can see him and you can feel sympathy for him. In your heart, truly, you can feel sympathy for him. And then just walk on.

To have compassion is not to walk on. But it's to stop. And see what you can actually do to help.

And Jesus, in this situation, he saw the crowds, he saw their needs, he saw their lostness, he saw their waywardness, and so he went to them. And note what he did.

It says he began teaching them many things. It's interesting that Jesus ministered to their souls. before he ministered to their physical needs.

I think that's an important point for us to note. Sometimes we think compassion is limited to things like food banks and cutting old people's grass and doing good works.

[43 : 27] These are all acts of compassion. But Jesus' focus, first and foremost, here, was about telling people who in the state of their souls were broken and lost, he was telling them how they could be saved.

If you and I have compassion in our hearts as Christians, then we are surely going to want to reach out to the people who are in our family and amongst their friends and yes, help them with their material needs.

But surely first and foremost, tell them about Jesus. In the past, everybody here knew about Jesus.

Increasingly here, in this community, there are people who know nothing and the little that they do know, if they know anything, it is so confused that it is far removed from the gospel.

If you and I are going to have the compassion of Christ, sometimes we are going to have to be willing to throw our phones away and strike off the appointments that are in our calendars that we thought were so immovable because God has made an appointment for us that he never notified us of in advance.

[45 : 01] Sometimes it involves striking off a page of the diary as Jesus did here. But always it involves us going out in Jesus' name to tell the good news about Jesus.

Following Jesus is costly. Following Jesus requires compassion. Following Jesus, and we'll move very quickly just as we come to a conclusion, it requires knowing that we can't.

Let me try and summarise this just by reading out one of the vows that you take as you come forward to profess your faith in Christ when you come to the Lord's table.

One of the promises that you make as you meet with a session is you promise depending on the grace of God to confess Christ, to serve him and to walk in his ways all the days of your life.

Now whenever I ask anyone that question, do you promise depending on the grace of God to confess Christ, to serve him and to walk in his ways all the days of your life?

[46 : 14] I will always underline and highlight and emphasise this one bit of it. Do you promise depending on the grace of God to serve him, to walk in his ways, to follow him all the days of your life?

Because if it wasn't for the grace of God, we could never say I do. See, following Jesus requires knowing that we can't.

We just can't do it. And that message came through crystal clear to the disciples. We've got no time to even glance at this just now.

The feeding of the 5,000. Think about the situation. The 5,000 men are there, likely 10,000 women and children with them, 15,000 people all gathered down, all listening to Jesus.

It's getting late. The disciples look at their watches. They say, where are they going to eat? Send them away, Jesus. Jesus says, I'm not sending them away. You go and feed them. The disciples look at each other and say, feed them.

[47 : 22] That's impossible. We haven't got the food. We haven't got the money to go and buy the food, even if there was some place we could go and buy it.

It's impossible. we can't do it, say the disciples. And yet, it's at the point that they realise that they can't do it, that Jesus really begins to use them.

The point is really simple. Following Jesus, being disciples of Jesus requires knowing that we can't do it. to become a Christian, what do we have to know?

We have to know that we can't save ourselves. Once we know that we can't save ourselves, we come to Jesus and we ask him to do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

It's not until that point that Jesus saves us. If we're trying to save ourselves by sitting in these chairs and doing good works, we're never going to be saved.

[48 : 42] It's not until we get on our knees and say, Lord, I can't do it. It's not until that point that Jesus reaches out in salvation and takes hold of us.

nothing in my hands I bring sometimes we sing. Nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

That's the prayer of the sinner seeking salvation. And then when we're following Jesus at saved people, every day we need to remember we can't do it.

We can't carry on as Christians in our own strength. we need fresh supplies of grace each day. We can't serve Jesus in our own strength.

Which is why he said to us in John 15, apart from me you can do nothing, so abide in me, says Jesus. It's only as we come to him, saying I can't do it, that he gives us the strength to go on another day, another day, another day.

[50 : 01] Following Jesus requires knowing that we can't do it. Following Jesus requires compassion, following Jesus is costly. Following Jesus requires communion with God.

Look at verse 45 and verse 46. Jesus. Jesus immediately made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd.

After leaving them, he went up a mountainside to pray. It's repetition, you might say, we've heard this from you before, I tell you something, you'll hear it from me a thousand times yet.

This is necessary repetition. Following Jesus requires communion with God. Jesus' time with his father was cut short in verse 34 and we know how that is.

We sit down to pray, we're not two minutes there when the phone's gone or the doorbell's going or the dog's having a canary or whatever. The time's gone. So we go off out and we get on with our day.

[51 : 06] We've not had that time with God, we've not had that communion with God. Note for Jesus, even though, at his time previously was overtaken by the crowds, he's determined that he is going up that mountainside and he's going to pray.

And it's an example for us to follow, it's a teaching point for us to keep on learning. If Jesus so much needed to pray, how much more do you and I follow?

Following Jesus requires communion with God. And the last point, following Jesus requires courage. Following Jesus requires courage.

When evening came, verse 47, the boat was in the middle of the lake and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them.

But the fourth watch of the night, he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost.

[52 : 15] They cried out because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately, he spoke to them and said, take courage. It is I.

Don't be afraid. Is it not true that this world says only those who have no courage follow Christ?

Is it not true that we've heard it many times from people saying Christians are the people who need a crutch? Not strong enough to get through life on their own.

So they need this crutch to prop them up as they're going along. You know, it seems to me as we finish, the disciples, those who were following Christ, needed a whole lot more courage than the crowds.

The disciples were enjoying blessings with Jesus. Yes, they were. But they were forever being propelled into uncomfortable situations.

[53 : 38] They were starting to feel the hostility of the crowds now. They were starting to feel the bite of the religious authorities against them. Already they've been through one storm with Jesus in the boat.

and now they're going through another storm without Jesus in the boat. Remember, these were fishermen.

They wouldn't be easily spooked at sea, but the wind was against them. Jesus had said, go on ahead of me. And because they were obedient as disciples, they went on ahead.

and yet still it was a struggle. They were being obedient to Jesus, but it didn't make for an easy life.

It was a struggle. Weersby says Jonah got into a storm because he disobeyed the Lord, but the twelve got into a storm because they obeyed the Lord.

[54 : 44] And it's really important that we see that. Obedience is not always easy. obedience to Christ will cause the wind of this world to blow fiercely against us.

And sometimes it will alarm us. Sometimes we will be terrified. But Jesus said to them in their terror, he says to us in our struggles, in the storms, take courage.

Don't head back to the shore. Press on. Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.

Following Jesus is not for the faint-hearted. it's not for the people who are looking for an easy life. Following Jesus requires courage.

Are you following Christ? Let's pray. Lord, we pray that you would help us.

[56 : 15] We thank you that you know our hearts. We pray that if there are hearts here like that of Herodias, who just blocked out the message of your truth and who hated it, we pray that you would break them down, that we may see and hear the truth, the gospel about Jesus and that we may respond in faith and not rebellion.

We pray if there's hearts here this morning like Herod who loved sin but also heard the call of Christ to come away, to repent of sin and to follow him.

We ask Lord that in such hearts that you would do a work, that there would be repentance, that there would be faith and that there would be salvation. And for those of us Lord who are following you, we thank you for the teaching that you give us through these passages.

We know that following Jesus is costly. We know sometimes probably we sidestep the cost much more than we should. we ask Lord that you would help us to think about the great cost that Jesus paid for us to be saved before we balk at the cost and the sacrifices that you require from us.

We pray that you would help us to know and to act with the compassion of Jesus, to reach out and to tell those who are around about us the gospel message, to seek to help those who are in need as Jesus did.

[58 : 04] Help us Lord, we pray, as we would seek to follow you. Help us to do so with courage. Help us Lord to follow as the disciples did, not always finding it easy, often finding it difficult, but persevering for Jesus sake.

Amen. We're going to sing now to finish Mission Praise 712. O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see?

There's light for a look at the Saviour, and life more abundant and free. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all, both learn forever more.

Amen.