

# Following Jesus

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 14 June 2026

Preacher: John Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you very much indeed for reading that. In case you didn't catch it, my name is John Ross.

! I'm a member here at the Church. And for reasons that are completely only known to the gods above, I get asked to preach every now and again. In the free Bibles, which you can take, we're on page 683.

We're at Matthew 16. It'd be lovely if you had the text open in front of you. Then we'll comment on it together. I wonder what you say to somebody when you meet them for the very first time.

Just think about that for a moment. You meet somebody who you haven't talked to before. Maybe you say, I don't think we've met yet, have we?

What do you say next? What do you say to somebody who you've never met before? I don't think we've met yet, have we? What would you say next? Let me tell you what I say.

[ 1 : 07 ] I may be completely wrong and bonkers, which is probably true, but this is what I say. And it's usually to a fellow. I say, I'm John. Nice to meet you.

I'm hoping they would say, and I'm St. Peter. I'm very pleased to meet you too. But I haven't been to glory yet and I haven't received that. But usually, and if it's a man, if it's a man, I usually say, whether right or wrong, oh, Peter, what do you do?

What do you do? What do you do? And those two things are highly significant. Who the person is, their name, who they are, and what they do on earth.

What do they do? Now, the same is true for Jesus Christ. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to know who he is. And then we have to know what he's come on earth to do.

Last week, we saw in Matthew 11 that Jesus called all weary and burdened people to come to him and to find rest. But who is he? Come to Jesus and find rest.

[ 2 : 20 ] Yes, who is he? Who is he? Well, look at the text carefully and just come to Matthew 16, 16. This is the most crucial text in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is with his disciples and he asks them in verse 15, what about you, you disciples, who do you think I am?

And Peter answers, you are Messiah. That's the word Christ. The Greek word is Christ. The son of the living God.

And Jesus says to him in 17, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, by human beings, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you're Peter and on this rock I'll build my church and the gates of hell or Hades will not overcome it.

Peter said, you are the Messiah, the Christ, the son of the living God. These are Jews. For Jewish people, and Matthew is writing as a Jew to a Jewish audience, this is blasphemy.

You are the son of the living God, Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one. You're the one sent from heaven. Nobody would ever say that to any other human being if you were Jewish, neither then nor today, unless they were absolutely certain that this was the Messiah, the son of God.

[ 3 : 50 ] Well, that's the conclusion that Peter's come to. This really is the son of God. This really is the Messiah. This is God's anointed one. I wonder if you've come to that conclusion.

That's who Jesus is. He's God in the flesh. He's God walking on earth. He's divine God, being human God.

Now you see, it's one thing to be God on earth, but it's another thing to grasp what he's come to do, what his job is. Do you know what his job was? His job was to die as the son of God.

That would be completely outside the radar of any other Jewish person, both in the first century and even today. God doesn't die. He can't.

He's eternal. He's God. But now notice what Jesus says at verse 21. From this time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things at the hands of

the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, that's all the Jewish hierarchy, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

[ 5 : 11 ] Must. Must. Must. Twice in the text. Must. He must suffer and be killed. He must be raised. Must go to Jerusalem. Must be raised again to life.

Must. Must. Now Peter can't take this in. He could understand his person. Yes, yes, yes. He knew who he was or he thought he was. He wasn't sure what he'd come to do though. Look at Peter's reaction.

Look at his reaction at 22. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Never, Lord, he said.

This shall never happen to you. Peter turned and Jesus turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan. You're a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns.

Oh yes, Peter saw he was Messiah. He was sure he was the Son of God, the living God. But he didn't understand the mission that Jesus was sent on earth to do.

[ 6 : 09 ] The mission was death. And that was completely outside his range. He just couldn't see it. That's what it says in 22, isn't it?

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Never, Lord. Never, never, never. This shall never happen to you. You're the eternal Son of God. You're never going to die. He couldn't see it.

I don't know if you've ever been in that position. When I started following Jesus, I was in that position. It took me some time to recognise that the person of Jesus is one thing, who he was. He was Lord of life. But die? A man came to die? That was beyond me. I couldn't understand that. And maybe you don't get it either.

You recognise this person? Yes, he's a good man. My mother was Jewish. She recognised he was a good man, a good teacher, she often said to me. But ever we talked about the cross, she shuddered.

[ 7 : 11 ] She couldn't take that in. Death? No, no, no, no, no, no, no. By the way, have you noticed that communion, how the two things are combined? I don't know if you've thought about this like this. When we take bread and break it, it's his person.

It's him, as it were. When we take a cup of wine, it's his work. It's what he's come to do on the cross. You ever separated communion out like that? You get his person, his body, which is given to us. You take him to yourself and you get a cup of wine to remember his suffering and death. The cross is absolutely crucial.

That's a key word, isn't it? Crucial is from cross. It's crucial to his plan. So crucial that Satan dreaded Jesus going to the cross and Satan did everything he could to deflect him.

Look how he uses Peter here in verse 23. Look at this. Peter takes him aside, says it should never happen to you and Jesus turns to Peter and says to him, get behind me, Satan, who, as it were, is in Peter's body.

[ 8 : 24 ] Get behind me, Satan, he says. You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, concerns of God, but merely human concerns.

Now I want us to pause at this point and I want us to think about the must of the cross. Must. Must. Twice it said. Twice it said must in the same verse.

I want us to think about the must of the cross. Oh, that's my first heading. I want to click a thing here and it does something. Can you see that? No, you can't. It's too dark. Is it all right? You can see it? I'll read it out to you again in case your sight is as poor as mine. I understand the must of the cross. The must, must, must. You see, it's one thing to think of God, Jesus as God in the flesh, but it's quite another thing to see that he's sent down to earth to do something, to do something, and what he's called to do is to die.

Every Jewish person will say, well, that's not in the script. God is an eternal being. God doesn't die. God's lived forever. Or to put it in theological language, if you don't mind, it's one thing to understand Jesus' person.

[ 9 : 40 ] It's quite another thing to understand his work. And if we fail to understand Jesus and only see him as a wonderful divine man, which he is, but fail to see the specific mission that he's come on earth to do, to suffer and die and rise again for his people, then we haven't got hold of Jesus.

And the Bible makes a huge amount of his suffering and death. It calls it all sorts of language, a toning sacrifice, a propitiatory death.

It's a death with a purpose. It's not random. It's not bad luck he got lynched just because he claimed he was God. No.

To use Luke's language, he set his face to Jerusalem. Or to use this language, I must go to Jerusalem. Did you see the must? From that time on at 21, he explains to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem.

suffer and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised alive. Must. Must. Now, Jesus seems to take it to himself that he must explain this core reason for him coming to earth.

[10:59] He was a man born to die. We don't think that, you see. We think we're all born to live, don't we? I mean, I've got up to 70 plus years.

I'm thrilled to bits. I've only promised 70 in the Bible. I'm at 78 already. Fantastic, isn't it? I don't know if many of you are up there with me, are you? No, no, I'm looking around. Might be one or two in our ages here.

No, no, no, no, no, no. Good, an oldie like me. Don't think it's remarkable? I've been ill recently and I've been allowed to live a bit longer.

What do you make of that? That the NHS allows you to live. It's fantastic, isn't it? Fantastic.

Because I think we're born to live, don't you? I don't think when I was 10 years old and I went to school and told my classmates I've been born to die, you know.

That would be nonsense, wouldn't it? But Jesus knew that and that's where he'd come from. Not that we have. We're born to live. So this is the first time after Peter has worked out his person, this is the first time straight away Jesus says that he has come to die.

[12:10] There are going to be two more occasions when he's going to say this. In fact, you might want to look them up while we're here. Look at 1722. Might be on the same page just across. Look at 1722.

When they came together in Galilee, that's the disciples, he said to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him. On the third day he'll be raised to life. And the disciples were very upset.

They were filled with grief. And the third time, 20 verse 17. 20, 17. These are crucial little texts in Matthew's Gospel.

Now, Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. He always went up to your capital city. On the way, he took the twelve aside and said to them, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man, that's the favourite phrase for himself, the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priest, the teacher of the law.

They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged, the Gentiles of the Romans, and crucified. And on the third day he'll be raised to life.

[13:15] Three times. Three times, he has to say. They don't get it. And they never get the fact he's going to rise again. They never get that at all. It's almost beyond their comprehension. Maybe it's beyond yours and mine.

Oh yes, he's a nice man. He's a good man. I like his teaching. Turn the other cheek. Really good stuff. But die? A man come to die? We all come to live. Now why would God the Son come to earth just to be killed?

And it wasn't a particularly nice death. It was suffering. And it was at the hands of the leaders, the religious leaders. And it was done by the Gentiles. It's a horrible, horrible kind of death that's coming on him.

Why would he come to earth for that? What's the value in his death? Don't we want a leader who's victorious? Don't we want, as the Jews wanted, someone who would take them into the promised land?

Someone who is sure that we Jewish people are no longer downtrodden in the first century. We rule the world. Some Jews think like that today as well. Wasn't that the Old Testament plan all along?

[14:23] No, no, no, no. Jesus, the Messiah, God's Son, came to earth to suffer and die. Must.

Must suffer and die. You see, this is the heart of Christianity. We're getting to the number of things here. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ does two things.

It both satisfies God and it ensures that we are eternally safe. Jesus died to deal with the justice or what we call the wrath of God against all human sin.

and he dealt not only with the consequences of sin but he died for us. I didn't get this first of all when I started following Jesus.

I understood his person but I didn't get this. It took me some time. In fact, it blew my mind. Why would God go to such lengths to suffer and die?

[ 15 : 22 ] I just couldn't see it. What did his death have to do with me at 20 year old in London? You might be asking the same. What did it have to do with you here in Farnham? We must see the purpose of his death and its achievement.

He died, he tells us, as a ransom. That's the payment price to release somebody from bondage to ourselves and bondage to sin.

He died so that God and justice would be satisfied. The Jews knew all about sacrifice. Yes, it was always a lamb, wasn't it? Always a lamb. Never a person.

Never a person. When I realised that it was for me that Jesus suffered and sacrificed on the cross, it was for me that he rose again so that I could have new life, I was blown over by that.

And since my 20s, it's been the driving force of my life. I hope it has of yours too. Jesus, the son of God, came to earth so that you and I could stay in relationship with him and go to heaven.

[ 16 : 30 ] Death wasn't the end. In fact, the Bible calls him the saviour, the rescue of the world. Would you say he was your saviour? You see, there's no one comparable to Jesus, is there?

There's no one else who could stand in for you or me. There's no one else who could open heaven's door and let us in. That's why we love him. That's why we sing about him. That's why we marvel at his grace and his mercy.

That's why we praise him in our songs. I really hope you love Jesus like that because of all that you see that he achieved at that cross and because you've embraced his completed work on the cross. But, as you well know in life, there's always a but, isn't there? There's always a but. Look at the but in verses 24 to 26. Then Jesus said to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple, follow me, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Oh dear. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good would it be for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit or lose their soul?

[ 17 : 48 ] Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? Oh yes, to follow Jesus means to put him first. Sure, it means to follow his agenda. Yes, it means that self must be decreased and Jesus must be increased.

Yes. But there's a cost. There's a very, very big cost and we need to know this before we start to follow him. If Jesus Christ, the Son of God, went to the cross, I too must follow him and take up my cross.

See, central in my life must be Jesus Christ. Yes. I'm to live for him. Yes. But that might mean I should die for him.

Are we up for that? You know, anybody in the first century walking through the streets of Jerusalem carrying a cross meant that they were heading for their own crucifixion.

That's what the cross meant. We had a chap here, didn't we? Someone, bless it, who wandered around carrying a cross. I wonder if people realise that that cross meant death.

[ 19 : 01 ] That cross meant death. That's what it meant. I'm walking to my own death. I'm prepared to die for the sake of Jesus Christ. Well, think of it like this.

Selfishness leads to unhappiness in the end. Not to start with, but it does in the end. Selfishness leads to unhappiness, doesn't it? But self-giving does us all good. We give ourselves over to exalting our Lord Jesus.

It's his honour that's at stake, not ours. And if we want to hold on too tightly to our life, to run it, to be our own saviour, well, we chance our luck on the last day. And actually, you'll lose your life on the last day.

But if you freely, out of love for Christ, give your life over, to Christ, and lose it to self, then you'll actually find life. That's what Jesus says at 25.

Look at this. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul?

[ 20 : 09 ] Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? That's the example, isn't it, at 26? What if you gained everything? What if you gained everything this world desires?

What if you were at the top of everything? Top of your career, top of your sport, top of school. What if you did 100% of everything? You were just, everybody clapped you all the time wherever you went.

You had fame, you had money, you had a wonderful family, but you had no soul. You had no soul.

You had no peace. You had no depth of satisfaction in your being. You were empty inside. Fame, money, family, they only go with this life, don't they?

Eternal peace, ultimate forgiveness, life with God. You can't measure that in worldly terms, can you? It's worth far, far more. Michael Rada, a sustainability expert, said, sometimes the richest people become the poorest because their lives revolve only around money.

[ 21 : 22 ] So we have to lose our lives for Christ's sake. Look at 25 again. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me, says Jesus, will find it. So our second point is, the must of the cross, have you counted the cost of following Jesus?

The cost, taking up your cross. And then there's two more verses here, which might seem a bit of a puzzle to you. 27 and 28.

For, because, this is the reason, the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels. And then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. The implication of verse 27 is that if you truly follow Jesus, it will be a glorious, glorious day.

[ 22 : 28 ] Indeed, if Jesus returns soon, he says, you may not even die, you may just be transported into his presence. You have to understand the end, says Jesus.

you have to understand the end, on the last day you will stand before the Son of God. Because when he returns as the Son of God, he not only welcomes those who love him, those who have given their lives over to serve him, but he'll also judge those who have turned their back on him. Those who thought they knew better. Those who were indifferent to him. Those who just coasted along calmly, taking the easy route of earthly comfort.

Those who said, one day, one day, one day in the future, when I'm old. I'm not old, am I, at 78? One day when I'm old, when I'm really old, really, really old. I hope before dementia set in, then I'll think about it.

Then I'll think about it. Isn't that too far, isn't that far too big a risk? Far too big a risk, isn't it? Now, follow me with the logic of the text here that we've seen.

[ 23 : 39 ] Matthew starts with Jesus at 21. Matthew starts with Jesus telling us what's going to happen. From that time on, Jesus begins to explain.

He starts with Jesus. He shows us that Jesus must go to the cross. Everything begins there. But Satan, through Peter, wants to deter him and take him off the rails.

Jesus says, you're too earthbound. You're too concerned for earthly safety. And then he calls on all his followers to have a cross-shaped life.

We are to follow him to death. Think of our persecuted brothers around the world. But he says, if you do follow me to death, I'll meet you on the other side.

This is my language now. It'll be a grand reunion you'll never have anything like it. It'll be better than all the pizza parties you've ever been to. It'll be fabulous.

[ 24 : 40 ] But only, only if you take up your cross. So let's do a rain check on ourselves this morning. Have you humbled yourself? Do you know that you are the rebel for whom Christ died?

Is his death your death? And by the way, is his resurrection your resurrection? Have you counted the cost of following him? Will you really take up your cross knowing that one day we are all answerable to King Jesus?

Maybe you've never started to follow him properly. Or maybe you're a bit stuck on the journey. Pray with me to become an active follower of Jesus whatever the cost.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you so much for making it clear what you had come to earth for. Ghastly though it must have been, the suffering, the torture, the blackness of judgment, let alone your father turning his face away, you were obedient unto death.

[ 25 : 49 ] And as you please your father and gave yourself for us, for me, undeserving though I am, please forgive me and turn me round.

Please set me on the path to eternal life. I am so fickle I need to repent every day. Thank you that you gave your Holy Spirit to come alongside and help me.

Thank you for all the people around me who encourage me and keep me going following you Lord Jesus whatever the cost. Thank you that I have a Bible to read as instructions for me.

Please accept me this morning. I'm worthy as I am Lord Jesus in your holy name. Amen. Amen.  
Thank you.