

How Do We Follow Jesus?

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[0:00] Good morning everybody. Be great if you had your Bibles open at page 988 in the church Bibles.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we pray very simply, like those beggars, that today that we would see, that we would see you. Ears to hear, eyes to see.

Open up your word to us now. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Now if you had one wish, and that one wish could change anything about yourself, a bad personality trait or whatever it might be, what would you change?

Now you're probably, lots of you have probably got one thing, the forefront of your minds, that you know that you need to change.

[1:29] And you've probably tried to change it before, haven't you? This is how life works. How did it go?

Well change is really hard, isn't it? I bet that was really hard to change. Maybe you haven't conquered that thing that you want to change.

And let me tell you, the Christian experience is just like that, isn't it? Because over the past few months, we've seen in Matthew's eyewitness account of Jesus, what it's like to be with Jesus. What it's like to be with Jesus. And part of what it is to be with Jesus is following Jesus on the way. This is Jesus' own summary of what it is to be with him. It's from Matthew 16.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. That is self-denial. That is sacrifice. Lose your life now to save it later.

[2:30] Not our way, his way. Again, how's that been going? How's that been going for you this week? Self-denial, sacrifice, following Jesus.

It's not easy. I was talking to someone a few weeks back and they said that following Jesus just feels like a bit of a grind. Do you ever get that?

It just feels like the daily grind. Bit of progress, you fail. Three steps forward, two steps back. Maybe it's the other way around. Maybe there's just one thing.

There's one thing that you can't give up. One way you just can't see yourself serving. One person that you can't forgive. How do we do this following thing?

How do we do it? Well, today we get an answer. True disciples are beggars.

[3:35] Begging for mercy for our failures. And begging for sight of Jesus. To see our expectations.

We're going to be looking at sight for quite a lot of this talk. So when we've done point one and we get to point two, then we've still got a little bit of way to go. Firstly, we need to see that becoming a beggar is exactly the right position to be in.

It's exactly who Jesus came for. Let's start in verse 29. Now that sounds really good.

They're following him. But actually we see it's all for the wrong reasons. Have a look at this. Verse 30. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside. And when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, Lord, son of David, have mercy on us.

Look at what the crowd do. The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet. You see that? I'll just ignore them, Jesus. You were above them.

[4:50] But they shouted all the louder, Lord, son of David, have mercy on us. Be quiet, will you? Jesus is trying to get to his victory parade.

King Charles comes to Farnham. Imagine that. King Charles comes to Farnham. He's with his entourage. And they see two hooligans going by on their BMX bikes. And they're trying to meet him. They want to say hi to him.

And they entourage. They talk to him. Have we got time for this? Oh, no, no, no. He's got more important things to do than that. Let's keep going. It's exactly the same with the crowd in a way. They think Jesus will have nothing to do with beggars. Because beggars aren't greatness. They aren't greatness. Remember last week the disciples thought Jesus, was all about worldly glory and worldly greatness. Position and power and prestige.

[5:57] But he really isn't. Look at verse 32. Jesus stopped. He stopped. You know the shortest verse in the Bible, don't you?

Jesus wept. What about these two words? Jesus stopped. He stopped. Doesn't that tell you everything you need to know about Jesus?

He stopped. He stopped. He didn't stop for the winners. For the accomplished.

The got it together people. But for the societal losers. The power less. The position less.

Beggars. So that tells you exactly the sort of followers Jesus wants, isn't it? Jesus. And we are to be like beggars.

[7:02] Firstly, begging for mercy. For mercy. And when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.

And they shouted all the louder, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us. Can you hear the desperation, the persistence? We know we're nobodies. We know we've got nothing to offer. We need help. We're just lowly sinners. We need mercy. We need forgiveness. We need forgiveness. Is that you?

Not pretending you've got it together. Not self-sufficient. Not proud. You know you've got nothing. You've got nothing to offer. But someone who knows they're helpless, desperately crying out for mercy like them.

Die for me. Lose your life for me. Suffer for me. You're the ransom for me. Jesus stops to give people like that mercy.

[8:05] He stops. And listen, if you've been here the last few weeks, this is really a recap. It's kind of summing up this whole section between Matthew 16 and Matthew 20.

The discipleship section. A few weeks back, we saw Jesus say to the rich man, if you remember, seeking salvation by human doing, that is impossible because you're not perfect.

You've got other loves. You don't love me. We need saving. We're sinners in a ditch. But the way of the kingdom is such good news, isn't it?

The people in the ditch are the people who Jesus stops for, isn't he? People who are in with Jesus are people who recognise by nature they couldn't be more out.

And isn't that so encouraging when you feel like a failure in your Christian life?

[9:07] When you feel a bit inadequate? When you're in a mess. When all you can offer Jesus is just this long list of failures from the past week.

Isn't this so encouraging? The kingdom is for you. The kingdom is for you. Jesus stops for you. And like we said a few weeks back, this just needs to be our general posture, doesn't it? As disciples. We know that we need mercy. And we beg for it.

Here's where we spend the rest of our time. We're also people who beg for sight. Who beg for sight. Have a look at verse 32. Jesus stopped and called them. What do you want me to do for you, he asked. What do you want me to do for you? Now how would you answer that question?

[10:12] It's a good question, isn't it? What would you want Jesus to do for you? How would you think the beggars might answer that? Remember in Jesus' time, there's no benefits.

There's no blue badge. They're just left to rot on the side of the road. So you can imagine that, oh, I want a house please, Jesus.

I want some friends. Lord, they answered. Verse 33. We want our sight.

We just want to see. We just want to see. Then verse 34. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.

And immediately they received their sight and followed him. This is the key verse. They recovered their sight. This is how it goes. They recovered their sight and then they followed.

[11:16] He recovered their sight and then they followed. Now this really is a real miracle. It really happens. Two blind men really received their sight.

And Jesus really showed compassion to them. Okay. But the big point here is about spiritual sights to follow Jesus. That's been the whole theme of this section.

Actually, throughout Matthew, we've seen people who physically see Jesus, but they don't truly see him. They don't understand who he is. Matthew 13 is a really good example. If you want to check this out later.

I'll read what it says. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand. Though seeing, they do not see. And that's a quote from Isaiah.

So, you know, this is a Bible thing. This is Jesus fulfilling this whole theme. Now that's the crowd today. That's the disciples the last few weeks. They cannot see Jesus suffering as a great thing. [12:21] They see it as a weak thing. And they both are separate times. Then they rebuke Jesus. Because he wants to go and suffer. But how ironic is it that these blind men, they're the only ones who see.

Eyes opened. Following him in his pattern of self-denial. That's worth it. They think that's worth it. To follow Jesus, you need to be unblinded to truly see Jesus.

Now we all need this unblinded. By nature, we're all blind.

Scraping around the dark. It's the human condition. We don't want to follow Jesus. We can't see how good he is.

When you become a beggar and you cry at the top of your lungs, I want to see. I want to see. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes.

[13:33] Immediately, they received their sights and followed him. To follow a suffering saviour. A saviour who calls you to make some hard life sacrifices.

Who calls us away from worldly greatness. To the cross which just looks weak and it's blood everywhere. And that doesn't look like greatness.

You need eyes to see that that is great. That that is something that you want to walk in. You want to share in. Why would anyone want to follow in those footsteps to that king?

Well, only when you've seen him as good and better than your sin. Now the other day, I could feel myself wanting to sin. And I knew it was wrong.

And I gave in. And my first reaction afterwards was, I need to do better. I need to do better. What are you doing?

[14:37] Come on, James. It doesn't feel natural as the first instinct to go, I need to see Jesus more. I need to see him as better than my sin.

But let me tell you, this is the key to discipleship. This is the whole engine of it. Think about it. Why don't we want to sacrifice? Why do we find it hard to follow?

Why is that sin so stubborn? Why does serving myself feel so much better? Because in that moment of sin, we're blind to the goodness of Jesus, aren't we?

If you were here a few weeks back, you would have met the rich young ruler, like we said, chapter 19. And his big problem, when faced with a choice, follow Jesus or get rid of your stuff.

His big problem is that he couldn't see, no matter how much willpower he had, that Jesus was better than his stuff. He treasured his treasure and not Jesus.

[15:43] His idols were his gods, not Jesus. But like he's every kid, every toddler at Christmas, right? We wrap up a present for them, we save up a bit of money for it.

And they open it and they look at it and they go, oh, thanks. And then they go back to the wrapping paper. Because it's all shiny and nice. So true. Without spiritual sight, Jesus, the shiny wrapping paper of our sin looks so much better.

But it's so silly. Because it's just the wrapping paper, it's not the real thing. It's a change. We need Jesus to look better.

A new affection. I'll spell this guy's name wrong. Thomas Chalmers. He puts it really well. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.

Jesus needs to be that new affection for us. And he objectively is. But first we need eyes to see him as that. Look, he looks like a killjoy sometimes.

[16:56] He looks like the one who's going to ruin your life and mess it up. The inconvenient one. When we cry out for sight, he puts those gospel glasses on, doesn't he?

To help us see. As someone that we're to love and adore. He suffered for me. That suffering is amazing because it's for me. He forgave me.

That is greatness. I want to follow in that. And please believe this. This really is a miracle, isn't it? This is a miracle. Anything that happens in a Christian life where we sacrifice and we follow.

From a missionary giving up their life here to serve somewhere else. To us. Just any time that we love Jesus instead of something else. And we say no to sin. Every single time of that is a miracle. You've been unblinded. Your eyes have been opened. So if you are struggling, if you are grinding away in the Christian life, you don't need to ask for just a little bit of help.

[17:57] A little bit extra strength. You need a miracle. You need a miracle. Don't you? You need a miracle. And we need to beg for one.

Cry out for one. I want to see. I want to see you. I want to see who you are. That you're good. That you're worthy of worship.

Lord, they answered, we want our sight. Jesus had compassion on them. Touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. And I think the application here to kind of keep on going is actually we need to keep asking for sight.

Because we're still visually impaired. We're still visually impaired spiritually. I went to an optician's a few months back. I sat kind of in front of one of those screens where you have to look at the letters. They put these, it's something a bit like that in front of your eyes. To kind of give you the sort of the right lens for you. You know what I mean? And, you know, you can't see anything. You can just see this blurry mess of letters.

[19:06] And they put that first one in front of you. They go, number one or number two. And you go, uh, two, I think. Next one, one or two. Oh, I think that's got a bit less clear.

Can you make it a little bit clearer, please? Okay. One or two. Oh, it's actually got even less clear. Can you do it again? A bit clearer, please. One or two.

Two. That's a bit better, yeah. That's a bit better. We don't have perfect sight of Jesus. Or we'd never sin again.

We only sin because Jesus is blurry in that moment of sin. And we need to keep asking, just like when we're at the opticians. Could you make it a little bit clearer?

Just make it a little bit clearer for me, Jesus. Of who you are and what you've done. And how good you are. Obviously, you're not a helpless beggar at the opticians, right?

[20:08] But you are with Jesus. So we need to beg. Here's a question.

Why do you still need to beg for sight? Where do you still need to beg for sight? I think this is a really powerful message.

Particularly when something literally looks better than Jesus. Like lust or greed. Now, would your pattern of self-denial literally be more attractive than that person?

But this is the key to saying no to anything. Here's a random example, right? Here's a random example. I thought of, right? Discontentment at bad news.

Right? The usual way, you grit your teeth. Be happy about it. Be happy. Feel bad that I'm not as joyful as I am over there. The Jesus way, the better way.

[21:19] Lord, I don't thank you enough. I need mercy. Forgive me. I'm not perfect. I can't do this perfectly. Lord, let me see you clearly enough so that I can be content in you.

No matter what my circumstances, I want to see. I want to see you as better. So that I can content in you. Whatever it may be.

I want to forgive limitlessly, but I just can't. I feel called to serve in that ministry, but I just can't bring myself to do it. It's going to be too hard for me. You call me to deny myself and take up my cross and follow.

I just can't do it. Lord, they answered, we want our sight. Jesus had compassion on them. And he touched their eyes and immediately they received their sight and followed him.

But Jesus is the great mercy giver. He's also the great sight giver. And God has stopped for beggars like us.

[22:32] Begging for mercy, begging for sight. We just need to approach him and ask to see. I just want to give us a time to reflect on this.

About a minute or so. And maybe just think of this question in quiet. Maybe you might want to pray and actually beg for sight. Maybe think about this. Where do you need a clearer sight of Jesus?

Where do you need a clearer sight of Jesus? Why don't I, I'm just going to leave a minute, then I'll pray. And then I'll hand over to Ian. Thank you.

Lord, following you feels really hard sometimes, Lord Jesus.

And your core is a high bar. Lord Jesus, we can't meet that bar. We need mercy. We can't be perfect. Lord, thank you that you enable us to truly follow you.

[24:20] Not perfectly, but truly. Lord, thank you that it is possible with you to walk in your footsteps. Lord, we just pray that we would ask for mercy and that we would ask and beg for sight.

And we would keep asking that. Help us to be convinced that that is the way. Not doing, but seeing. Lord, we love you.

We thank you so much that you died on the cross for us. Lord, that is great. We want to see more of you. In your name. Amen.