

Following Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Last Sunday morning, I was preaching about becoming a Christian. I'll not hold it against you if you don't remember that.

But becoming a Christian is something truly special.

I finished this sermon last week by quoting a verse from an old hymn. It is a thing most wonderful, almost too wonderful to be, that God's own son should come from heaven and die to save a child or a wretch like me.

[1 : 35] Well, we said it is wonderful. And it is true. And if by God's goodness, you have put your trust in Jesus for your salvation.

Now, I want us to think together of some of the consequences that follow on from that great decision.

It's a life-changing experience to become a Christian. And I want to highlight today, I want to highlight four things that you ought to know, which will help you on your journey of faith.

As I tell you the first thing I want you to know, don't be put off when I say that the first thing is that there is a cost in following Jesus.

In our home, the months of July and August are months when insurance policies have to be renewed.

[3 : 08] The house in July, the car in August. And it's quite amazing the number of different insurance companies who seem to know exactly when these insurances become due for renewal.

And they all highlight in bright letters, big letters, what we might call the cherries that they have to offer.

Special things. But of course, these are not the things you really have to look at. It's the small print. It's the small print where the detail is. Or as sometimes people say, the devil is in the detail, in the small print.

In a sense, though, Jesus doesn't do small print. He is up front about everything in the Christian life.

[4 : 26] Look what he says here. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross.

That's a daily experience. Take up his cross and follow me. That is serious stuff.

Indeed. It goes against our grain to deny ourselves. But it's very strong language that Jesus uses here.

It is as if we have to disown our very selves and to put Jesus in the driving seat of our hearts and our minds.

And it is an action that we take once and for all in life.

[5 : 42] That's what the grammar of the verse tells us. It's as decisive and life-changing as that. And then we take up our cross and follow Jesus.

And this can be costly in terms of maybe friendships. Friendships that you once had and would feel uncomfortable with as a Christian.

And they would feel uncomfortable with you as a Christian. We can lose popularity. We can lose maybe promotion at work.

There's a whole list of possibilities. There's a whole list of possibilities. Simply because people out there in the world just do not love the Lord Jesus Christ.

And they don't love the followers of Jesus Christ either. But our Lord points out the alternatives to following him.

[7 : 00] Losing our soul. What will it profit a person if they gain the whole world and forfeit or lose their soul?

That is a cost too awful to contemplate. Following Jesus, though it can be costly. But it leads to a glorious end.

It's worth everything. So that's the first thing. There is a cost to following Jesus.

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Benjamin Franklin. He was a man who hated slavery. And one day he witnessed a slave market in which a young woman was being auctioned.

[8 : 24] And he bought that young woman. And as he was walking home with her by his side.

He said to her, Now you are free to go. She didn't understand what he said at first.

But he told her again, You're free to go. I bought your freedom. But she stayed.

And she worked for him as a free woman. Our salvation has been purchased for us at a great cost. But to us it is free. So that we too are free. Free to serve the master who bought our freedom.

[9 : 34] Free to please him. And free to serve in love. And gratitude. We no longer wander off after our own pet desires.

But we let Jesus lead our lives. And we can trust him never to lead us into anything that is bad.

He's the best of all masters. And to be a Christian is to have Jesus as the Lord of your life.

Because remember, he is God. He is to be adored. He is to be worshipped. He is to be praised. As well as to be obeyed.

There is a cost to being a Christian. But we have a great master. And the third thing I want to tell us about.

[10 : 45] That we are given a guide when we become Christians. A guide to help us to live the Christian life.

Just imagine starting a new job. Something you had never done before. And when you went to work on a Monday morning.

The boss said, Hi, okay. I'll just leave you to get on with it. And you would think, But where do I start?

What do I do? Where is everything? A bad deal, you might think. Our Lord Jesus doesn't treat us like that.

When he left this earth, After the crucifixion. After his resurrection. And after spending a time with his people.

[11 : 55] He ascended to heaven. And he said that he would send another person to be with his people.

Another just like himself. And that other person is the Holy Spirit.

And when we become Christians, The Holy Spirit comes to be with us. Indeed, to be in us.

And he will help us. He is our guide. And the Holy Spirit has many ways in which he does help us.

And perhaps the first thing we should remember about the Spirit. Is that he is the Spirit of holiness.

[13 : 01] We are told this in Psalm 51 and verse 11, for example. And that gives us the clue. That the Spirit will never lead us.

Into anything. That is bad. Again, in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus, In chapter 28 and verse 3, The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of wisdom.

And that's surely an encouragement. When we are looking for help. He is called, also in the New Testament, He is called our comforter.

When we encounter sadness and hurt in the school of hard knocks in our lives as Christians, It's wonderful to have the Spirit as our comforter.

And He is also called our advocate. Whom we can turn to for help. When we go wrong.

[14 : 23] When we do something that we know is not right before God. He helps us before the Lord.

And puts things right. So that we are on good terms as it were once again. With our Lord and Savior. And He is the one who helps us to develop Christian character.

And He does this by what is called in Galatians chapter 5, The fruit of the Spirit.

He develops this fruit within the heart and the life of each Christian. It's an ongoing thing. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Shaping a Christian character in us. And so making us more like Jesus Christ Himself.

[15 : 48] And the Holy Spirit gives us what we might call protective clothing. We hear a lot about that these days.

But He gives us protective clothing. And also battle fatigues. As we were reading in Ephesians in our Bible reading this morning.

So that we fight against the devil and his evil minions. He gives us the whole armor of God. And the Spirit also gives us gifts.

These are abilities to do different tasks that He wants us to do. Not every Christian is good at doing the same thing.

If everybody in the congregation wanted to make the tea. But nobody wanted to clean the church. Or to welcome people at the door.

[17 : 00] Or to teach Sunday school. Things wouldn't work properly. But in the scriptures we read. Especially in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

In chapter 12. He gives a whole list of different things that the Spirit gives to Christians.

To each one differently. As He wills. He says, But to each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

And that big word manifestation simply means a means of helping. So that when we all work together as Christians, the whole church is strengthened.

And everyone is encouraged. And of course the Holy Spirit uses the Bible all the time to build up the life of the Christian.

[18 : 14] Helping us to understand and apply God's will for us. We read that all scripture is breathed out by God.

And the Holy Spirit is the breath of God. We have a wonderful, wonderful guide.

So we see that there is a cost. There's a master. There's a guide. But last of all, I want to tell us that there is a goal that is set before us.

The climax of the Christian life. And it is quite simply going home to our Heavenly Father.

In the Gospel of John, in chapter 14, verse 2, Jesus said to His followers, In my Father's house are many rooms.

[19 : 35] If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself.

That where I am, you may be also. In my Father's house. It's another beautiful expression.

And it's a great prospect for us to have as Christian people. For some, getting there to the Father's house can be a long and difficult journey.

Recently, I saw on Facebook a picture of a Chinese pastor who was all trussed up, tied with ropes. His face showed signs that he had obviously been viciously beaten. What did he do to bring that upon himself?

[21 : 05] He was just a Christian pastor trying to protect his people from the godless ideology in China present.

For some Christians, God has mapped out a different way. Maybe given them positions of political influence, economic influence, civic importance, with all the temptations as well as opportunities that such positions involve.

But for the majority of us, ordinary Christians, life also has its temptations and its challenges, but also great opportunities as well.

we are here to reflect the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To give to people around us the reason for the hope that has been given us in Christ. And for all of us, if we are Christians, there is the blessed hope of a prepared room in our Father's house.

[22 : 49] You have Jesus' promise of this. If it were not so, would he have told us? When we grow a bit weary and tired on our way with Christ, just fill your mind with thoughts of heaven.

I'm sure that is what Paul did when he wrote the words, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

he makes these things known to us by his spirit. There's a beautiful verse in Hebrews in chapter 11.

You may remember I was speaking to the children about Peter, how Peter liked the word precious. Well, if Peter liked the word precious, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews just loved the word

better.

It's the epistle of better things. And in Hebrews 11, where the writer is telling us all about the Bible heroes who went on before, and in verse 16, in one translation, it says, they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland.

[24 : 36] That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them, a better place.

The goal before us in that glorious city, in the rooms prepared for us by the Lord, for Jesus has gone ahead to prepare them.

And he said, if I go, I will come again and receive you to myself. So these are four things I would like you to think about as you take up your journey in the Christian life, and of course, if you are far along that journey too.

And there are many, many more things, but these are worth remembering. The cost, the master, the guide, and the goal.

And may it be an encouragement to each of us today to think about these things. But let me remind you that it is a lifelong learning experience in Christ's school of discipleship, life.

[26 : 17] But what an exhilarating place to be. What an exhilarating life to live, following Jesus on the way home.

Let me close by quoting some words of Robert Murray McChain. When he wrote, when this passing world is done, when has sunk the radiant sun, when I stand with Christ on high, seeing all life's history, then, Lord, shall I fully know not to them how much I owe.

When I stand before the throne, dressed in beauty, not my own, God, when my fullness, Lord, I see, when my heart from sin is free, then, Lord, shall I fully know not till then how much I owe.

that will be the testimony of every one of us who goes to be with Christ and will stand before the throne of God in heaven above.

May it be so for each of us. Amen. Let us join together in prayer. Our dear Lord, we thank you for your word, we thank you for the Savior, for the Holy Spirit, for all that we are given to help us in the Christian life.

[28 : 12] And if there are any who have not yet started on that life, bring them to yourself, we pray, that they too may know the thrill and the joy, glory, and also the peace that comes with God when we confess our sins and seek your grace and mercy at the cross.

So be with us all this day, we pray, and enable us to live to the glory of your name. for Jesus' sake, amen.

Amen. Amen.