

The Cost of Discipleship

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[0 : 0 0] Let us now call upon the name of God in prayer. Amen. Gracious and ever-blessed God, we seek grace today to approach a throne of grace together as a worshipping people, mindful that we draw near to one who is infinitely high above us, one who is the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, the one who is worthy of all glory, all honour and all praise, and we seek, therefore, to come with reverence and with godly fear before one who is holy, one who is high and lifted up, the lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose very name is holy, and we seek to come with humility, knowing what we are, not only creatures of the dust, but those who have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

we seek grace to confess our sins together, to confess what we are, to say with the psalmist, my sins and faults of youth, do thou, O Lord, forget, after thy mercy think on me, and for thy goodness great.

And we come confessing our sins with that great promise, that if we do so, that our God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And so, Lord, we pray thee today to meet with us here as we worship. That is our great desire, not in the first place to receive, although we know that thou art a God who is bountiful, and one who gives freely.

But our first desire is to give, to offer the sacrifices of praise, the calves of our lips, and to give to God the glory that is due to his name.

[1 : 5 7] We come giving thanks that there is a new and living way for us to approach, and through the blood of Jesus Christ, through his Persian and finished work, that we are able to draw near to a throne of grace with boldness, that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

And so, as we seek reverence in our own hearts, grant that we would know something of the boldness of sons approaching a father as well, knowing that the Lord of hosts upon our side doth constantly remain, the God of Jacob, our refuge, as safely to maintain.

And so, Lord, bless us together today. Bless the children as they go to their classes, and their teachers. Bless their parents, be mindful of them, raising children in these days, and give them grace, and give them strength, and give them determination to raise them in the Lord for the glory of Christ, and for the eternal good of their own undying souls.

And so bless us now, Lord, as we continue in thy presence. Grant that all would be done not to the glory of man, but to the glory of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And we ask these things in Christ's name, and for his sake. Amen. Well, boys and girls, I've been asked to say a few words to you now.

[3 : 2 6] I wonder if any of you know what a martyr is. Well, a martyr is somebody who was put to death because they were a Christian.

Now, I'm sure you think of being a Christian, you think of yourselves as Christians, but you don't ever think of being put to death for being Christians. But you know, if we look at history, if we look at history throughout the nations of the world, there were actually many people who loved Jesus so much that they were willing to be put to death to die for Jesus.

And I don't know if you know this, but you might hear about it sometimes, but in many countries in our world, even today, across Africa and Asia, different parts of the world, there are Christians being put to death because they refuse to deny Jesus.

And you think to yourself, and rightly so, well, that would never happen in Scotland. And we hope that it never will happen again. But you know what? Many times in our history, even in Scotland, people were put to death because they were Christians.

And I want to tell you a wee story about a girl called Margaret Wilson. And in these days, there were different types of churches. And there were some churches which preached Christ and which held to the truth.

[4 : 49] And there were other churches which didn't. But in these days, the king wanted people to go to his own churches and not to the churches that preached Christ. And there was this girl, Margaret Wilson.

She was 18. And her sister was 13. And they wanted to hear the truth. They wanted to hear the Bible preached. And they wanted to hear about Jesus Christ. So instead of going to the main churches, to the buildings, they went out to the fields and to the moors. And there were ministers who would preach out there. And it was actually illegal for them to do so. But it was so important for them to preach Christ that that's what they did. And that's where Margaret Wilson and her sister went.

But something terrible happened. And the police caught them. And they were sentenced to death. Margaret, who was 18, and her sister, who was 13.

Now, her father went to the police and he said, Now, they're only young girls. Please let them go. And the police let one of them go, Margaret's wee sister, who was 13. But they didn't let Margaret Wilson go.

[5 : 51] And Margaret Wilson was sentenced to death on the 11th of May, 1685. That was about 340 years ago. And she was sentenced to death in a very awful way.

Herself and another Margaret, called Margaret McLoughlin. You've maybe heard the story, The Two Margarets. This is where it comes from. They were tied to bits of wood on a beach.

Okay? And they waited for the sea to come in. And bit by bit, the sea was getting higher and higher. And they put Margaret Wilson, the younger girl, they put her nearer the shore.

And what happened was she could see Margaret McLoughlin, the older woman. She could see the waters going over her head. And Margaret McLoughlin died.

And Margaret Wilson saw that. And when she saw that, the soldiers came to her, the policemen came to her and said, Now what will you do? Will you deny Christ? Will you give the oath to the king?

[6 : 52] And she said, No way. I love the Lord Jesus Christ and I'm not going to do that. And bit by bit, the waters came higher and higher until Margaret Wilson drowned as well.

Imagine that. She was only 18, a few years older than some of you, maybe the same age as some of you. And that's how much she loved the Lord Jesus, that she wasn't willing to deny him.

Now I hope that you'll never be asked to die for the Lord Jesus. But you will be asked to deny yourself, to make some difficult decisions and to do some hard things. And I hope when you're asked to do these hard things for Jesus, to stand up for him, to speak for him, to refuse to yield for him, I hope that when you do so, you'll think to yourself, Well, this is but a very small thing.

Compared to what that girl, Margaret Wilson, did. And it's a really, really small thing compared to what Jesus did in dying for her sins. That the Lord would bless these thoughts to you.

Well, I've been asked now to lead you in the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

[8 : 04] Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen. Amen.

Well, as the children make their way out, we're now going to sing again, this time from Psalm 49. Psalm 49 in the Sing-Sams version of the Psalm.

And the tune is Sussex. From verse 7, that's page 65, verse 7. There is no one who is able to redeem a soul from death.

None can pay to God the ransom to prolong another's breath. To redeem a life as costly none sufficient price can pay. So that one should live immortal, free forever from decay.

[9 : 12] That's saying, no matter how much money you have, you're going to die. You can't pay your way out of that. For we all can see life ending, wise and foolish, all will die.

They must leave their wealth to others, none can death's demand defy. So for endless generations in their tombs, they will remain, though they owned while they were living lands to which they gave their name.

Man, despite his wealth, is mortal. Like the beasts, he fades away. Thus the self-assured will perish, though renowned for what they say.

I'm going to sing then these verses, Psalm 7 to 13 of Psalm 49, to God's praise. There is no one who is able to redeem a soul from death. Amen.

There is no one who is able to redeem a soul from death.

[10:15] none can pay to God the ransom to prolong another's breath.

To redeem a life is costly, none sufficient price can pay, so that one should live immortal, free forever from decay.

For we all can see life ending, wise and foolish all will die.

They must leave their wealth to others, none can death demand, defy.

So for endless generations in their tomb they will remain, though they own while they were living lands to which they gave their name.

[11:50] Man, despite his wealth is mortal, like the beast he fades away.

Thus the self-assured will perish, though renowned for what they say.

Well, let us now read God's Word as we find it in the Gospel according to Mark and chapter 8, picking up our reading from verse 22.

Mark 8 from verse 22, and we're reading together down to the end of the chapter. And they came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.

And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spat on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, do you see anything? And he looked up and said, I see men, but they looked like trees walking.

[13:14] Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he reopened his eyes. His sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home saying, do not even enter the village.

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. and on the way he asked his disciples, who do people say that I am? And they told him, John the Baptist, and others say Elijah, and others one of the prophets.

And he asked them, but who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, you are the Christ. And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[14:29] And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, if anyone 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 and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of whom will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Amen. And we pray that the Lord would bless his own word to us. And to his name be all the praise and all the glory. Well, let us again call upon the name of the Lord in prayer.

Let us pray. Gracious and ever-blessed God, as we have read the living and breathing word together, we pray that we would have grace to receive it and wisdom to take it to heart.

[15:49] Help us to be not hearers of the word only, but to be doers of it also. Help us, when we hear it, not to harden our hearts, but to yield our hearts and indeed to yield our whole lives to it, knowing that the word is good and that it is for our good, that it is for our instruction in righteousness.

And so, Lord, we pray for humility and not to stand over the word and judgment, but to sit under it as humble disciples, even as Mary of Bethany sat at the feet of Jesus and chose that good part which could not be taken from her.

And so, Lord, we pray today as we gather in worship that our hearts would be lifted up in praise to the God who is good and who does good, the God who is love, and that we would remember as thy people that herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the

propitiation for our sins.

And so, we pray, Lord, now as we continue that all would be done to the glory of the great name of Jesus Christ, that the people of God might be strengthened in their faith and enabled to go on in the truth, and that those who are yet outside of Christ, some perhaps sitting on the fence, others entirely unconvinced, that the Holy Spirit might challenge them, that the sword of the Spirit might pierce their very hearts and minds, and that they might be convinced that there is a God in heaven, a God to whom we are all accountable, a God before whom we will all stand, and that as the prophet of old has told us, our great responsibility and duty in this life is to prepare to meet our God, and so prepare us, we ask.

Bless this congregation, we pray for them, asking thy blessing to be upon them, help them to be faithful in their worship and in their witness, grant that the truth that is proclaimed from this pulpit week by week, that it might yield fruit, and that it might do so for eternity, we pray for the inter-moderator, we pray for Mr. Smith as well, the assistant minister, asking thy blessing to be upon both of them, and the office bearers here, and all of the congregation, we give thanks that we have seen so many young ones worshipping the Lord, and we pray that they might grow up as trees planted in the house of the Lord, that they might in the future, and even in these days, bear fruit.

[18 : 49] We pray for a new generation, a generation which will be faithful, indeed, which will be more faithful than our own generation has been, and so we pray for the Church of Christ, throughout our island, and throughout our nation, regardless of denomination, where Christ is preached, and where holiness is exhorted.

Oh, we pray that the Church might increase, that the Word might go forth with power, that the Holy Spirit might be poured out upon us today, and upon other congregations throughout our land, for we are mindful that it is the Spirit that quickens and gives life, and the flesh profits nothing, that without Him we can do nothing, and so, Lord, meet with us and bless us and draw near to us, that Christ might be in our midst, that we might hear His voice, that we might feel His presence, and that we might know Him dwelling richly in our hearts.

Remember our nation and those who rule over us particularly, our King and Royal Family, our Prime Minister, our First Minister, our Members of Parliament in Westminster and Holyrood, and our Councillors, we ask Thee to be mindful of them, to give them wisdom, because the truth tells us that righteousness exalts a nation, and that sin is our approach to any people, and so we pray that iniquity might be restrained, and that righteousness might flow forth, and we know, Lord, that the Church will be central to that, indeed that the pulpit will be central to that.

And so, Lord, protect our pulpits, raise up faithful men of God, who will preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and who will seek to obey God more than men.

And so bless us now and go before us and forgive us graciously for all of our sin, for Christ's sake. Amen. Well, we can sing again to God's praise, this time in Psalm 37, and the tune is Moravia, we're singing from verse 25, sorry, verse 35, Psalm 37, verse 35, page 255, I saw the wicked, great in power, spread like a green bay tree, he passed, yea, was not, whom I sought, but found he could not be.

[21 : 16] Speaking of those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ, and they look so strong and so powerful, but in a short time they are gone. Mark thou the perfect, and behold the man of uprightness, because that surely of this man the latter end is peace.

There is the great distinction between the two types of men, the two types of women. But those men that transgressors are shall be destroyed together, the latter end of wicked men shall be cut off forever, but the salvation of the just is from the Lord above.

He in the time of their distress, their stay and strength doth prove. The Lord shall help and them deliver, he shall them free and save from wicked men, because in whom their confidence they have.

Psalm 37, verses 35 to 40, to God's praise, I saw the wicked great in power spread like a green bay tree. I saw the wicked great in power spread like a green bay tree.

He passed, yea, was not him I sought, but found he could not be.

[22 : 48] Mark thou the perfect and behold the man of a rightness, because that surely of this man the latter end is peace.

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He in the time of their distress, their stay and strength doth prove.

The Lord shall help and deliver, He shall them free and save from wicked men, because in him their confidence they have.

[25 : 01] Amen. Well, now with a view to God's blessing, if you would turn back with me to the portion of Scripture, which we read together in the Gospel according to Mark and chapter 8.

We want to consider together verses 34 to 38, but we can take our text from verse 36. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

Well, at the center of Christianity is the theme of sacrifice. And when we think of Christianity and sacrifice, we naturally think about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and rightly so, of Jesus' sacrificing himself, of denying himself, and going through the agony and the awfulness and the horror of Calvary in order that atonement might be made, being wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.

So we think of his sacrifice and the life and the forgiveness and the glory that is ours if we are in Christ as a result. And that is given to us freely.

We do not earn it. It is not of works, Paul tells the Ephesians, lest any man should boast, but it is of grace. That is, it is a free and undeserved gift.

[26 : 35] And yet it's been said, and you've heard it said, I'm sure, that although the Gospel is free, it will cost you everything that you have. And you know there is truth in that as well.

Sacrifice is central to Christianity. And that speaks of Christ, but it speaks of his people as well.

Being a Christian is being somebody who has sacrificed and who does sacrifice.

And today I want us to consider what that sacrifice looks like. And I want to consider why we ought to make that sacrifice.

What the alternative to that sacrifice is. And the first thing that I want us to consider, to consider really three headings. And the first is the nature of discipleship.

When I speak of discipleship, I just mean of the Christian life, of being a disciple. Christians in Jesus' day were called disciples. They were those who sat at his feet, who learned from him.

[27 : 41] They were those who went with him wherever he went and who sought to obey his commands. So the nature of discipleship. What does it look like to be a Christian, to be a disciple of Jesus?

Now, here in this section, we have arguably the clearest description from Jesus' own lips of what it means to be a disciple, what it means to be a Christian.

And we read in verse 34 that he calls to the crowd with his disciples. So he's not just talking to the twelve. He's talking to the crowd, those of them who are disciples and any of them who would become a disciple.

And he says to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Now, just briefly, I think that there are four things there that we should consider.

Four things that are true of the nature of discipleship, of what it means to be a Christian. And the first thing is perhaps quite basic and we could skip over it.

[28 : 46] And it is this, there is willingness there. There is a willingness. If any man would, I think in the authorised version, it was if any man will. We speak of if any man is willing.

And when we read would or willing, it is talking about the will. It is talking about the man or the woman volitionally. You see, Christianity doesn't just affect your intellect.

It's not just about learning things and keeping things in there. It's not just about being convinced of certain truths, that certain things are true and certain things are false. Now, that is in it and that is important.

But there is more than that to being a Christian. You can be convinced of the truths of Christianity and not be a Christian. So, there is the intellectual element. There is also the emotional element.

Your affections are moved. Those who are Christians are those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. They are those who hate sin. The affections are moved.

[29 : 50] And as Christians, there ought to be times when we are moved. Moved by what the Lord has done for us. Moved in our affections. Moved in our feelings. Moved about our sins.

And yet, you can be moved. We all know people who have sat under sermons and they have been convinced of the truth. And they have been moved by it. And like Felix, their knees have trembled or they have wept knowing that there is truth in this.

That this is important. That this is urgent. That this is life and death. And yet, they have gone away and they have never become Christians. Why is that? Well, because although the intellect was persuaded and although the affections were moved, the will remained unmoved.

But Christianity affects us volitionally as well. We become willing to follow. You see, Jesus doesn't drag anybody kicking and screaming into the kingdom of God.

You don't become a Christian despite yourself. You don't become a Christian saying, well, I really don't want to do this but I'm just going to do it anyway. That's not the way it works. We read in Psalm 110 that the Lord will make his people willing in a day of his power.

[31 : 07] That he doesn't drag us kicking and screaming but he calls us with an effectual call with irresistible grace so that before we know it, our own mind is changed, our own will is altered and the things that we didn't want to do.

I mean, most of you can remember a time when you didn't want to be a Christian. Not all of you but most of you. And something changed and then you found yourself wanting to be a Christian and then you found yourself thinking, well, the most important thing in all of life for me is to become a Christian.

You see, friends, those who follow Jesus, those who are disciples are those who are willing to do so. And if you turn that on its head, then this is true also.

That if you're not a Christian here today, well, it might be that there are certain things that you're not fully persuaded of. And let's be honest, that was true of all of us.

And you have to search the scriptures and you have to be in company with the Lord's people and you have to do it all prayerfully because you want to be persuaded. And that might be the case. It might be the case that you've never been moved under the gospel.

[32 : 13] But this is certainly the case that if you're not a Christian, it's because you don't want to be a Christian. It's because you don't want to be a Christian. Now, I don't mean to be harsh to anybody there because you might be there here today and you're thinking, well, I'm not a Christian but I really do want to be a Christian.

I really do. Well, there are promises for you too. Jesus says, seek and you shall find. Ask and it shall be given to you. And if you really want more than anything else in life to be a Christian today, then the chances are that you've already taken the first steps to becoming a Christian, that the Lord is already working in your life and let that be an encouragement to you.

But if you're not a Christian, the central thing won't be a lack of intellectual persuasion or not having your feelings moved. It will be this, that you just don't want to be.

That there are other things that are more important to you in life than giving your life to Jesus Christ. Christ. And so those who are disciples are those who are willing to follow.

The second thing, and let me try to move through them quickly, if anyone would come after me, if anyone is willing to come after me, let him deny himself. There is self-denial. And of course, we've touched on this.

[33 : 27] This is a great characteristic of our Lord. Though he was equal with God, yet he made himself of no reputation. He humbled himself. He emptied himself of his glory.

He became obedient to suffering and to death, even the death of the cross. He tells us about it.

That is a context. He said plainly to the people that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed.

This is the Son of God. He didn't need to go through any of this. But he had entered into a covenant to do so. He had promised to do so. And part of that was self-denial.

And when you look at the Lord, that is what jumps to you off the page, that he is one who denied himself. But here he's telling us to deny ourselves, to be Christ-like in this way as well.

And you know, friends, by nature, we want to do the very opposite, don't we? We don't want to deny ourselves. We don't want to deny ours. We say, I will not have this man to reign over me.

[34 : 35] If it means doing things that aren't easy for me to do, doing things that I don't want to do, doing things that are going to cost me, that are going to entail sacrifice for me, then really, really, I would rather not.

And yet, that's what Jesus calls you to, friend. He calls you to self-denial. To live no longer for yourself, but for him. You remember that that's what the apostle said in 2 Corinthians 5, that the love of Christ constrains us, constrains us or compels us to do what?

To live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us and who rose again. And so being a Christian means denying yourself.

It means putting the Lord first, denying your own desires, denying your own will, denying your own way, your own aspirations, and saying, Lord, lead me.

Lord, guide me. Show me thy ways, O Lord, thy paths, O teach thou me. And do thou lead me in thy truth, therein my teacher be. So there is self-denial in the Christian life and there will be self-denial in your life if you're a Christian.

[35 : 53] The third thing is that if any man's going to come after Jesus, that he must deny himself and take up his cross. Now, you hear people saying that we've all got our cross to bear.

And yet, we know what they mean, but this isn't speaking about general afflictions or trials. The cross was what a criminal carried to the place of his execution.

Jesus had to bear his own cross. And other men and men who were sentenced to death in these days, they would carry their own cross on the way to the place of execution.

And when people saw them, well, they knew what was going on. They would say, well, that person's bearing his cross, he's on his way to be executed. He's on his way to die. The cross was a symbol of death.

That's what it was. And what Jesus is saying is this, that if you're going to follow me, that you must be willing not only to deny yourself on the smaller things, but you must be willing to lose your life.

[36 : 56] To lose it metaphorically in giving it to me so that I can be the master of it and the king of it. But also, he goes further and this is a thing. He says, you must be willing to lose it physically as well.

Physically. And this is the very fulfillment of self-denial. You cannot deny yourself further than this to give your life, to breathe your last breath like Margaret Wilson did, like Margaret McLaughlin did, like what people are doing all over the world today, dying for Christ rather than denying him.

And you know, friends, Jesus was speaking to the disciples here and these very disciples who would be apostles, many of them experienced this. They paid the highest price.

We know, well, we read in the scriptures that James, the brother of John, was beheaded. And that for Christ's sake, tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down, that Paul, the apostle Paul, himself was put to death.

History is full of instances, friends, of people giving their lives. And you know, we're not living in that kind of country today and we're not living in that kind of time.

[38 : 15] But be under no illusions. Christians, there is a cross to bear as well today, in different ways, but there is a cross to bear. To be a Christian is to lose your life and that's becoming increasingly evident in a society which is not just post-Christian but is becoming increasingly anti-Christian.

And the world today, the word of God today isn't just unpopular, but it seemed to be actually dangerous. And services of worship like this, where people take the word of God seriously, they're seen to be dangerous.

Prayer is seen to be dangerous. And so if you're going to live out the Christian life, if you're going to live it out in your workplace, if you're going to live it out in the school or in the hospital or in the surgery or in the office or whatever it might be, then you will find yourself being increasingly marginalized.

You will find that. And you know, that cross doesn't sit well on our shoulders. Because our inclination, our natural inclination, is to shun that, to run from it.

We can even see that the natural inclination, human inclination, of Jesus was to shun it. If it be possible that this cup would be taken from me, Jesus said, but not as I will, but as thou wilt.

[39 : 36] Even Jesus felt that horror at what he saw in the cup, at what the cross would entail. And we do as well. And yet at the same time, as it was what Jesus was called to, it's what we're called to.

To give our life. To give all of our life. To give it metaphorically. And whatever that might mean, might not mean losing your life, we hope not. It may very well mean losing your reputation.

It may very well mean losing many other things. We'll come to that. But that's what you're called to. And fourthly, and finally here, the nature of discipleship is just a general term.

He says that you're to deny yourself to take up your cross and follow me. To put it very simply, the Christian is somebody who follows Christ.

Not the whims and the fashions of this world. Christ is king. The word is truth. That is law.

[40 : 35] And to follow Christ is to submit to him. To submit to his will. To submit to his word. And to do that at whatever cost. And you know, friends, the cost can be high.

I've touched on it. But even in our day, you know that there are lines of work which really are closed to many Christians. Certainly Christians who are going to be faithful. Certainly Christians who aren't going to bend on things like the Lord's Day.

There are lines of work that are closed to them. And being a Christian in different parts of our country can lead to joblessness. It can lead to being ostracized and mocked.

We've all known a bit of that if we're Christians. It can lead to losing acquaintances and friends. It can even lead to breakages in the family. Jesus himself speaks about father being divided against son and mother against daughter and so on.

It can lead to suffering. It can lead to isolation and loneliness. And yet, yet you know that and yet you continue to follow the Lord Jesus. Because Christ also suffered for us, as Peter says, leaving an example for us that we should follow in his steps.

[41 : 47] You know, friends, we read this and I hope we haven't in any way embellished it or misexplained it. But we read the very words of Jesus and we can say this.

Jesus doesn't lead us down the garden path, does he? He tells us up front what Christianity is, what it's going to mean. He doesn't say that it's going to be easy. He doesn't say that there's going to be no cost.

On the very contrary, he says the very opposite. He says it's a costly thing. It's a sacrificial thing. It's a difficult thing. Jesus tells us that. And you know, friends, we shouldn't as churches try to deceive people into the kingdom of God, deceive them into membership by not telling them really what's expected of them and what the Christian life means if it's lived, if it's lived as the word calls us to live it.

That's what Jesus calls his people to be. And let's be honest. We want a strong church. We want a church which will leaven society and have an impact and have an influence in our own workplaces, in our own families, in society at large.

And these are the kind of Christians that we need. These are the kind of leaders that we need.

These are the kind of men, friends, that we need. Men who will be strong, who will be leaders, who will guide their families, who will guide churches, who will guide societies.

[43 : 14] These are the kind of men who we need, who will deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Jesus regardless of the cost. These are the kind of women that we need, the kind of mothers in Israel, the kind of women that we need in churches, that we need in workplaces, that we need in homes, that we need throughout society.

That is what Christ calls us to be. And friends, if we were living this out, what a difference we would see. Devoted, selfless, faithful Christians, that's what Jesus calls us to.

That's the first point. Let us see, secondly, we've seen the nature of discipleship, the alternative to discipleship. Verse 35, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

Now, we've seen that being a Christian is in many ways to lose your life or to lose it as you want, you would naturally, let me say sinfully, want to live it. And the alternative to that is just to take Jesus' words with a pinch of salt and to keep your life.

And you can do that if you're not a Christian here today and not a member of the church. You could say, well, thanks, but no thanks, I'll leave it. But you can also do this if you are a member in the church.

[44 : 35] You can be a member, you can sit at the Lord's table and you can hear many of the commands of Jesus and you can feel him and know him speaking to your heart and to your mind and you can say, well, no thanks.

Not that kind of Christianity. To not lose your life is to not surrender it to Jesus Christ. And what I want us to consider just for a moment is why.

Why would we not surrender our lives to Jesus Christ? Why would we not be willing to go through all this pain and agony and all this suffering and self-denial? Should it lead to that or at least be willing?

Well, the answer that Jesus gives us here is that that people will not make these sacrifices because they hope to gain the world. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world?

So that is the context here. And that is often what stops people becoming Christians or being faithful in their Christianity. Again, not that they're not persuaded intellectually and not that they're not moved under the truth but that they're just not willing.

[45 : 38] And you know, nobody expects to gain the whole world and you don't expect to gain the whole world but we expect to gain parts of it, to annex parts of it to ourselves, to claim things, people, places, as our own.

And for these things we live. We live for family, for friends. People live for comfort, for power, for wealth, for success.

People in our day, friends, they live for the holidays that they go on. They just plow their way through the rest of the year and then they've got these times of holidays that they look forward to and they think of little else and then oftentimes before they've even come away from their holiday they're booking and planning their next one.

People live for beauty, for reputation, for acclaim, for praise. All parts of the world that we seek to annex for ourselves.

And that's where people today, and there are things I've missed out, I'm sure, but generally speaking that's where people are seeking their satisfaction. It's where they're seeking their fulfillment in life.

[46 : 45] That's where people are looking for happiness. And many people will tell you that this is what life is all about. These things. And of course they look for happiness in these things and they don't find it.

I was reading not that long ago an article an article about why rich people aren't happy. And studies had been done and surveys had been taken and there was a man called, he was a, I think he was a Jew living in America but Russian by birth and he's a novelist but for one of his novels he did a great amount of research into rich people and whether they are happy or whether they're not happy. And he said at the end of it he said here were people who could purchase anything they wanted and whose wealth was widely envied by others and yet even they weren't content.

They weren't content. And he went on to say that at the end of the day I was just happy to end this research because it was quite depressing. People who had it all who had all the things that perhaps we would like for ourselves who had the money to buy them who had the time to do them and yet who weren't happy.

And there was another survey done around the same time with billionaires and with millionaires to see how happy they were and they were told to give an answer out of ten and most of them were around four some five.

[48 : 18] Very famously I can't remember his name but the man who founded Phones for You a billionaire he said that often he was at one or two. One or two out of ten.

Many of us don't remember it if we're young enough but we've all heard the song by the Rolling Stones I Can't Get No Satisfaction. What's interesting about that song is that here were a people on top of the world here were a people who were rich who were again envied by many other people who had everything that the world teaches us to think that we want and yet they were singing this song I can't get I'm not satisfied by it everything that I have it doesn't satisfy me and what was even more interesting is that everybody sang along to this they weren't thinking what on earth are these people talking about they've got everything that they're not satisfied no they sang along they knew what it meant they knew exactly what they were talking about and yet they and indeed we to an extent continue to chase after these things in the world to think that the world can fulfill us that if we just try harder and try things a little differently that we can get the world to work for us and you know that's why it's all consuming because it's always promising us more always promising us better and yet never delivering there was another another survey done by a guy called

Michael Norton who's a professor in Harvard in America and he's done a lot of work on wealth and happiness and he asked people a question and again it was millionaires and billionaires how much more if you're not happy how much more would you need to be happy and he said basically everybody in that survey whether they had a million dollars to their name or whether they were billionaires basically every single one of them needed two to three times more than they already had in order to be happy and then they thought well I'll be happy I'll be fulfilled I'll be satisfied then and do you think they were do you think that this is what life is all about and I'm just not talking about money I'm sure there probably aren't many millionaires in here today and yet we have our own goals aspirations desires perhaps even idols do these things make us happy outside of Christ

you know you sometimes you may be sitting in a sun lounge if you're on a holiday or you're maybe out for a walk in the castle grounds or you're sitting before the fire at night or you're out in the garage and you're doing what you want to do and you sit back and you say to yourself well this is the life this is the life but is it is that the life really sitting in a sun lounge working in a garage out for a walk now these things are good they're all very good but is that what life is all about do you really think that is what life is all about you remember what Jesus said in his high priestly prayer in John 17 he said this is life eternal in other words this is what life is this is what life is all about that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent that's what life is to know God to know Jesus that is what life is all about that is why we have been made that is a purpose for which we have been made to glorify God and to enjoy him forever and so to live for the world and bear in mind that living for the world and living for Christ are mutually exclusive to live for the world instead of living for Christ isn't the life it's to miss out on life it is to miss out on the point of life and it is to remain unsatisfied unfulfilled unhappy you know we have seen that the nature of discipleship takes in hard things but I don't mean to paint a dark picture there is joy in self-denial there is joy in taking up your cross there is great joy heavenly joy and peace in following Jesus even when that means that there are hard decisions to be made but let us notice this too at the flip side of living to gain this world is that you must lose your soul and that's what we read Jesus says for whoever would save his life will lose it and what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life or as it's put elsewhere to lose his own soul what will it profit you at the end of the day if you gain this whole world and yet lose your own soul but what does that mean I remember once speaking to somebody somebody who was working in the service industry and this woman was slightly annoyed living in this town and she was annoyed with the amount of Christians who would say to her how is your soul and she didn't like this she didn't like being challenged in that kind of way and she made a flippant kind of remark about her soul about she didn't even know where her soul was and I remember asking her do you know what your soul is and she stopped and she said well well actually no I don't really know what a soul is the soul friends is your personality it is your consciousness it is your thought process it is you that's what the soul is your body will die and yet your soul is the part of you which shall be conscious throughout all eternity it is a part of you which is immortal it is a part of you which never dies and so to lose your soul if your soul is immortal isn't for you to have no soul anymore that's impossible and so what does it mean to lose your soul to lose your personality to lose your thought processes what does that mean well it doesn't mean to cease to have them to cease to have a personality to cease to be a person we're actually told in the context what it means verse 38 for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of whom will the son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels what

[54 : 52] Jesus is saying is this life will shortly end for each and every one of us and we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ revelation chapter 20 tells us that we shall stand before a great white throne and the books shall be opened and everything that we have done and everything that we have said and everything that we have thought even the secrets of our hearts will be laid bare before this great judge and then we shall be judged and we shall be judged on the basis of what we did with Jesus and what we did with his words what a response was what was the response of your heart did you believe what was the response of your life did you live it out did you respond with faith or did you respond with unbelief that's what you will be judged on the deeds done in the body Paul says whether they be good or bad and the reality of it is this if you have disregarded your soul and the needs of your soul if you have been ashamed to own

Jesus Christ as yours to deny yourself and to take up your cross and to follow him then your soul will be lost eternally and it will be lost eternally we read in the rest of scripture when you lift up your eyes in hell as the rich man in the story of the rich man and Lazarus the rich man who had it all the rich man who lived in the nicest house and who ate the best food and who wore the nicest of clothes we're told that he died and that he lifted up his eyes in torments that's what it means friends to lose your soul the rich man was conscious in hell and yet it was to him a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth a place of outer and utter darkness that's what it means friends to lose your soul that's what it means and so I want to to just wrap this up with one final and very brief point and that is the choice of discipleship because we read in verse 37 what can a man give in return for his life or what can a man give in exchange for his soul what is your soul worth you know we we live in a day when people are used to exchanging things to buying and selling

I think that's even changed in the last few years many people now use things like vintage and ebay they see a pair of trainers or a pair of trousers whatever it might be and they think well I could sell that and they put it on for say ten pounds and hopefully they'll get that and the money they get and they can use that money to buy another many people that's what we're used to and the important thing there is that you get what it's worth that you get what the trousers are worth and that what you buy with the money that is worth at least as good as what you sold or hopefully even better but the great question here the great exchange question here is what is your soul worth is your soul worth is anything so valuable as your soul is anything more precious than that because what

Jesus is saying here and bear this in mind and never forget it he's saying that your soul is worth more than this world what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul your soul is worth more than the world and he made the world and he knows what the world is worth and he knows that your soul is worth more than that because the world is fleeting its gold and silver will perish its treasure will rust and corrupt And all of it at the end of the day will be consumed by fire and as we read in Psalm 49 as we sang you will die and you leave all these things behind you and you don't know who's going to get them you don't know who's going to live in your house when you die you might have an idea but you don't know who's going to inherit your money who's going to spend your money who's going to drive your car you don't know any of these things and neither do I it's all fleeting but what is the soul worth well Genesis 1 tells us that your soul to buy it back what did it cost we were redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold but with the precious blood of

Christ that's what your soul was worth and who can put a price on the precious blood of Christ you know friends compared to your soul this world as Daniel told Belshazzar is weighed in the balances and it is found wanting it is nothing the two things are incompatible let me ask you just finally what would you really love in this life we've all got things in our lives which we wish would change what would make you happy perhaps it was it's better health maybe it's beauty maybe it's just to be a bit more comfortable to be a bit more secure to get a promotion at work or to be respected at work more than you are to have more time off to have more time with the family maybe it's that the family circumstances would be better maybe there's some sort of breach in the family that there might be a reconciliation that's what you want maybe it's riches maybe it's a new car a new barn

[60 : 53] I don't know what it is you know what it is but imagine that you got all of that and that it all from tomorrow morning you get up in the morning and it all just started to fall in place you got an inheritance the family situation just sorted itself out you got a clean bill of health everything just went as you wanted it to go every wish was fulfilled and that for the rest of your life and then down the line say you're 88 years old you've had a good life and you die peacefully in your sleep and yet that out of Christ not a Christian do you think that would have been a life well lived people are walking down Francis Street behind your coffin and they're all speaking well of you and how good a person you were is that a life well lived or is it a life wasted because you see now that all of these things are gone are they really worth it were they really worth the exchange of your soul were they really worth if they meant denying

Christ was this perfect life having all that you had for that beautiful family round about you and all men speaking well of you was it worth eternity in hell as Jesus says what shall it profit a man what shall it profit you friend if you gain the whole world and get all these things that you're seeking after and yet lose your own soul you know the pleasures of sin are but for a season but the soul is eternal and it will live on and the question that I want to leave with you is where will it live on where in heaven or in hell what are you investing in in this world or in the next world you see what Jesus is saying to us he's saying and he doesn't beat about the bush he's saying Christianity if you're going to live it as I want you to live it it's going to cost you and it's not going to be an easy road but in the long run not becoming a Christian and not following me and not denying me and taking up your cross is going to cost you infinitely and eternally more and so friend the choice is yours amen let us pray gracious and ever blessed

God as we come under the solemn teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ help us to follow him closely and help us to count that cost and help us to yield ourselves into his arms knowing that he is the one who will uphold us and who will give us grace to help in time of need and cause his strength to be made perfect in our weakness go before us and we pray forgiving sin for Christ's sake amen well we conclude our worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 37 the same psalm that we had but reading from verse 3 Psalm 37 verses 3 to 7 the tune is free church set thou thy trust upon the Lord

and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food delight thyself in God he'll give thine heart's desire to thee thy way to God commit him trust to bring to pass shall he and like unto the light he shall thy righteousness display and he thy judgment shall bring forth like noontide of the day rest in the

Lord and patiently wait for him do not fret for him who prospering in his way success in sin doth get psalm 37 verses 3 to 7 to God's praise set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shall dwell and they really have food delight thyself in God and in thine heart's desire to thee thy way to God commit him trust it bring to pass shall he and like unto the light he shall!

[66 : 06] thy righteousness display! he shall display and he thy judgment forth like!

bring forth like loontide of the day rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him to not fret for him to for him who prospered in his ways success in sin not care not may the Jesus the love and the the Holy Spirit be with you all amen!

voy voy voy voy voy voy voy voy voy voy voy voy voy!

voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! voy! voy Thank you.