

Take up your cross

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, everyone. So our scripture reading is taken from Matthew chapter 10, 24 to 42, and that's page 975 in your Bibles.

It reads, the student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like their teachers and servants like their masters.

If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household? So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight. What is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your father's care.

[1 : 18] And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my father in heaven.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn.

A man against his father. A daughter against her mother. A daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

[2 : 23] Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it. And whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet, a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

As a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. Well, thank you so much, O'Brien.

Good morning, everyone. For those of you that don't know me, my name is Andrew. I'm pastor here. And it's a privilege to come and share God's word with you this morning.

[3 : 36] Let's just pray as we come to God's word together. Father God, I thank you for the gift of your word. Some of it is encouraging. Some of it is challenging.

But we know that all of it is good for us because it is your word to us. And I pray that your word would speak clearly to us by your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would open up our ears and our minds and our hearts to receive from you and to be able to respond in faith.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So since Christmas, we've been studying some pretty challenging parts of the Bible. We started a series on the cost of living Christ-like just after Christmas, looking at what Jesus says about the cost of following him.

And we looked at some passages in Matthew chapter 5 and Matthew chapter 10. And then we spent a few weeks in the book of 2 Peter, which addresses a specific type of opposition to the gospel, that of false teaching from within the church.

And now for one week, we're going back to where we left off in Matthew chapter 10 with Jesus talking about the cost of following him. Next week, we're starting our preparations for Easter. It's

Palm Sunday next week. And we're going to be welcoming a special guest preacher next week, a friend of ours called Peter Dunn, who's involved in a disciple-making ministry all over Europe.

[4 : 54] And he'll be sharing with us then. So for today, we're in Matthew chapter 10. And it'd be great if you can have that passage open in front of you. Grab a Bible. And it's on page 975.

So just to recap what's happened already, because we did the first part of this chapter several weeks ago, probably five or six weeks ago. So Jesus is talking to his disciples.

He's sending them out on a little kind of mini mission. And he's giving them instructions for the mission. He pointed out in the first part of this chapter that they would be like sheep among wolves. Yes, it will be scary, but he will be with them by his spirit. And we've seen that whenever Jesus talks about the difficulties, the hardships, the costs of following him, it's always accompanied by wonderful promises of what we can expect from him and what we can hold on to to keep us going. And that's true in the passage today as well. So here in the passage that we're looking at, starting at verses 24 to 25, Jesus is saying here, if we embody his message as his followers, if we act like Jesus, then we can also expect to be treated like Jesus.

[6 : 01] And Jesus was being accused of being called, he was being accused of being Beelzebul, that's a demonic figure. Obviously, that's not true. So we can also expect to be called things of us which are not true if we follow Jesus.

Now, in the next section in verses 26 to 31, Jesus' key message is do not fear. He says it three times in verse 26, 28 and 31.

Why does he emphasize this so much? Well, because fear is powerful and it has the capability to consume us and to cripple us. And very often, it stops us from being obedient to Jesus and sharing the good news.

So there's three things he tells us about this. First of all, don't be afraid of what people might say. Don't be afraid of what people might say. That's in verses 26 to 27.

In our day, as Christians, if we're faithful to the message God has given us, we might be called a number of things. We might be called narrow-minded. We might be called bigots. We might be called fundamentalists.

[7 : 05] We might be called extremists. That's been a bit in the news this week if you followed that. But Jesus is saying, if you're called names because of me, you don't need to be afraid.

And actually, if we're called names because of Jesus, those names bind him together with us. He says, verse 27, what I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight.

So Jesus was speaking here at a time early on in his ministry when the full extent of God's plan for him had not yet been revealed. Now, we live in a time following Jesus' death and resurrection when the truth that Jesus came as God's son to die for us and he rose again is now to be made fully known.

These are the times that we're in. And we were reminded by O'Brien last week as he was sharing on 2 Peter chapter 3. Jesus is coming back as judge and one day that will be fully known.

One day, nobody will be able to deny who Jesus is. Every opponent will be silenced. But for some, it will be too late. So we need to proclaim the message from the rooftops.

[8 : 10] But this is what we tend to fear most because we might feel comfortable about talking about our faith behind closed doors. We might feel comfortable talking about our faith with other Christians or perhaps only when someone else asks us directly about our faith.

But we're not to fear speaking clearly, speaking openly. Speaking in the light, speaking on the rooftops, even when that speaking might get us into some kind of trouble. So the next thing that Jesus tells us not to be afraid of is people who can harm us physically in verse 28.

Now, I think we should be thankful that, for the most part, this isn't a current reality for most of us in this country at this time. It may be in the future. I think we should be prepared for that.

But this is a reality for many, many Christians around the world. Now, I'd like to commend to you a great resource from an organisation called Open Doors. We watched a video from them a few weeks back. And we've shared a link to this in the This Week sheet.

It's called the World Watch List. Where you can pick up the profiles of the hundred countries where Christians face the most persecution around the world. And you can look into the situation so you can be informed, so you can pray for people in those situations.

[9 : 19] But Jesus here says, don't fear them because the worst they can do is kill you. John Patton was a missionary who went to the New Hebrides in 1858.

That's what is now Vanuatu in the Pacific. The native people were cannibals who practised infanticide and widow sacrifice. John's wife and young baby died of illness within months of arriving on the island they went to.

Patton had courage to overcome criticism he received from respected elders in the church here in the UK who told him that he shouldn't go. One critic, Mr. Dixon, told him, the cannibals, you'll be eaten by cannibals.

But to this, Patton responded, Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now. And your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I'm eaten by cannibals or by worms, and that in the great day my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

Over and over, his faith sustained him in the most frightening situations. At one point, he and his native friend Abraham were surrounded by residents of the island who were set to kill them. They kept urging each other to strike the first blow.

[10:40] And Patton wrote in his diary of that occasion, My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus. I saw him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God.

I realised that I was immortal till my master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me as if a voice out of heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevailed to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held, vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in heaven and on earth.

So friends, we should remember that we are immortal until Jesus calls us home, because he is sovereign. Jesus goes on in verse 28 to give the antidote to these fears.

He says, Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and the body in hell. What he's saying is, Allow greater fears to trump lesser fears. Now, imagine that you're taking a hike out in the countryside and you come across a mouse in the path in front of you, and you have a bit of a fear of mice.

You're going to feel quite scared, quite anxious at that point, looking at that mouse in front of you. Now, just imagine for a moment, use your imagination as far-fetched as it is, just imagine at that moment that behind the mouse, along strolls a lion.

[12:08] What do you now fear the most? You fear the lion, right? The mouse is no longer your biggest fear. You don't care so much about the mouse at this point. Your concern is rightly about the lion, because that's much more dangerous.

God is like the lion. He is the one who is sending Jesus on the final day to judge everyone, as we reminded last week. He determines the eternal fate of every person.

So we should fear him in a good sense. I found it so helpful a couple of weeks ago when Maria Bond was here from Gold Hill, speaking on the first part of 2 Peter 3, talking about what it means to fear God.

And if you remember, she used an illustration of the sea. The sea is something that we should rightly fear because of what it can do. God does what he does because he is good. He has to stand against that which is not good.

And there is a good fear, a right fear, of knowing that he is good and just. But Jesus says we should be assured. In verse 29, he says, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

[13:11] Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside of your father's care. Now, why did he talk about sparrows? Well, he was just using an example of just about the cheapest commodity that people in his day could buy in the market.

And he was saying, Think of sparrows. They're so cheap, they're worth nothing. But God cares for them and is sovereign over their fates. And he knows everything about you.

He knows how many hairs are on your head. Just think how hard it would be to count the number of hairs on your head. Now, before anyone says it, I know that I've got a slightly easier task here. But even so, it's an impossible task to know how many hairs are on my head.

But God knows. And he knows how many hairs are on your head. God's ultimate knowledge of everything about us points to his wonderful fatherly concern for us.

And this is one of those times when Jesus holds together these two beautiful, very contrasting truths. He holds them together. God is the one who is sovereign over the universe.

[14:16] He judges us and our eternal destiny is in his hands. So we should rightly fear him. But the other side of the coin of fearing God is that he is our loving, heavenly father.

And he knows everything about us. And he cares about every aspect of our lives. He cares about sparrows, the least significant of creatures. So he cares so much more about us.

He says it there in verse 31. You are worth much more than many sparrows. You are worth much more than sparrows who are sold for two a penny.

You're worth so much more to God. You're worth so much that he paid the ultimate price for you to save you so that you could be free from an eternity of darkness.

Because he sent Jesus to pay the price for our lives which we should have paid ourselves but which we couldn't pay when he died on the cross and he paid the price for our rebellion against him.

[15:17] And we celebrate that today and that's what we're going to celebrate today in a moment as we come to the communion table. So we're going to continue now looking at that passage in Matthew chapter 10 and pick up where we left off.

It's on page 975 if you've closed your Bibles in the meantime. We'll follow one together. And the question I want to ask now as we come from celebrating communion is when we've been reminded of what Jesus has done for us is how do we rightly respond to that?

How do we rightly respond to what Jesus has done for us? And verses 32 to 42 of this passage in Matthew chapter 10 help to answer that and there's four things that I want us to look at here briefly.

So first of all number one is being ready to acknowledge Jesus. Verse 32 says whoever acknowledges me before others I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

Now this is a great encouragement to us when we acknowledge Jesus to other people. So maybe when somebody asks you this week what are you going to be doing for the Easter weekend?

[16:36] Are you going to say oh yeah I'm going to do some gardening do some shopping meet up with some friends go to church and then go to church and then spend some time with my family? Or are you going to say I'm going to celebrate with my church family the most amazing news ever that Jesus is alive that Jesus is risen and this is something that we love to do on Easter Sunday.

You know two things happen when we speak openly about Jesus. Firstly it helps us build confidence because even if the person says absolutely nothing or sniggers or gives us a strange look or there's an awkward silence we will survive I can promise you that and it will be 100% easier the second time.

But secondly what we learn here is this is what happens in heaven when we acknowledge Jesus he acknowledges us before his Father in heaven. He says that Judy she's one of us that Linda she's on our team isn't that wonderful?

you know the flip side of this is however sobering for us verse 33 but whoever disowns me before others I will disown before my Father in heaven.

This is uncomfortable reading for me this is uncomfortable reading I'm sure for most of us whoever disowns me before others I will disown before my Father in heaven is what Jesus says here. So I need to repent of the times when by my actions and by my words and by my lack of words I have disowned Jesus.

[18:09] Think how incredibly hurtful it is when someone you're close to won't acknowledge you. Now I'm sure we've all experienced this at some point back in our childhood think back to the days in the playground when somebody who you thought was your friend doesn't invite you to their party or doesn't choose you for their group on the school trip.

It's heartbreaking isn't it? That's how Jesus feels when we don't speak about him. Secondly we need to be prepared for pushback in verse 34 do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

So we need to be prepared that Jesus' message if we share it will cause some pushback it will cause some opposition it will cause some negative reactions. Now we have to balance what Jesus says here with what he says elsewhere about bringing peace because he did also come to bring peace.

he is the prince of peace even in verse 13 of this chapter the disciples are sent to bring peace to the households that they go to visit. So this is best understood as Jesus saying I did not come to bring just peace but a sword as well.

Jesus wasn't coming to carry out a military exercise as some expected that he would but his message causes a social divide. If you remember a few weeks back we thought about the analogy

of a magnet.

[19 : 32] Magnets attract as well as repel. So when we're faithful to Jesus in sharing the message some will be attracted to that and some will be repelled so therefore there's a division going on.

His message includes the uncomfortable truth that we have made ourselves enemies of God and we can't fix that ourselves. The only way that we can be forgiven is by surrendering to God's sovereignty which we all naturally resist.

Now he goes on to describe how this may divide families in verses 35 to 36. Now this is a reality for many people who become Christians in the Middle East or in Southeast Asia.

It's a reality for some people here in our own town too. Jesus is saying expect fullness of life but also fullness of hostility. You will gain a new peace and also a disruption of peace in your life at the same time.

This is what we should expect. The third thing is be devoted. In verse 37 Jesus calls for a radical level of devotion. If he is who he says he is if he does know everything about us if he paid the ultimate price of his own life to redeem us then he is worthy of our utmost love and devotion and commitment.

[20 : 49] And that means that we should love him more than our spouses our parents and our children and anyone else who is close to us. But you know that doesn't mean that we end up loving those people less.

In fact when we put Jesus first we end up loving our families better because we get more of Jesus love for them and we grow to love them as Jesus loves them.

He goes on in verse 38 whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

In our world where the cross has become a religious symbol and often worn as jewelry we have a somewhat sanitized view of the cross. But think of the time Jesus was speaking before he'd gone to the cross it was really stark what he was saying here.

It meant shame. It was a cruel and barbaric form of execution for slaves and criminals. That's what it meant. Jesus took up his cross and he carried it through the streets of Jerusalem to the jeers and insults of the crowd.

[22 : 05] And he bids us to take up our cross to come and die to die to ourselves to die to our ambition to die to the lie that we are in charge of our own destiny and when we do that we will find life the life that we were designed for.

What level of uncomfortableness or awkwardness or hardship or going out of our comfort zone or inconvenience are we actually prepared to go through for the sake of Jesus?

You know if we follow Jesus he wants to use us as part of his plan and that means that he will give us work to do according to our passions according to our giftings things that bring us life things that bring us enjoyment things that bring us pleasure that's part of it but also there will be things that he calls us to do which are difficult and which make us feel awkward which make us feel uncomfortable and which are inconvenient to us are we prepared to respond to Jesus even though it might inconvenience us I was really inspired a couple of weeks ago I spent some time with a Brazilian friend of mine a guy called Fred Silver who's the director of Emmanuel International in Brazil and he was over in the UK for a few days and came to visit me and he was sharing about their work and he was telling me about the work that Emmanuel International was doing with the Tarina people in a remote corner of Brazil and these people missionaries went to plant churches among this people group several years ago started a church and it changed the life and it changed the culture for this group of people and Fred was there with the church and a visitor arrived and this visitor had come from another tribe another group from 1500 miles away and this man stood up in the gathering and said

I've heard about how you've got the gospel of Jesus and how this has changed your life for the better and how it's changed you and we want that for our group for our people and he said please would you send someone to come and teach us about Jesus so that we can experience this as well and there was a young couple in that group and the next day that young couple packed up all their belongings and their four children and got into a pickup truck and were driven 1500 miles back with that guy who'd come and they spent the next four years with that other group teaching them the gospel and that had a transforming effect there as well that is devotion to the gospel that's the kind of devotion that I want and finally Jesus says be hospitable in verses 40 to 42 and I find it fascinating that he talks about this idea of hospitality here in this context but he's saying that

faithfulness which receives a messenger of Jesus is rewarded just as surely as being the messenger of Jesus the smallest courtesy in Israel was a cup of cold water it was taken for granted that you would do that for anyone who needed that when he says little ones there it doesn't necessarily mean young children it refers to the least important people in society so

Jesus takes the least significant gift and the least significant people and he puts them together to show that the God who controls the sparrows fall and the number of hairs on our head knows and honors the slightest deed done for his glory these small acts of hospitality count a lot in the kingdom of God and every time we do something like this Jesus is honored you honor Jesus every time you say hello to somebody that you don't know before the church service here or afterwards you honor Jesus every time you invite somebody for a cup of tea at your home or to a coffee shop or out for a walk and a chat you know I think part of the reason Jesus mentions this here remember he's been talking about people who've had to leave their family people have been shunned by their family for following Jesus so people who are cut off from their natural families you know these people need a family still and that's what church is all about it's being family to people who don't have family and as a church I think we need to be family to people who don't have family in the way that many of us understand that who don't perhaps don't have children don't have spouses don't have parents around we need to be family to each other many people here don't have the kind of family that we might have been blessed by but we can be family to them as a church and when we do that Jesus is honoured you know

[26 : 53] Jesus he calls us to a number of things here some of them are quite easy some of them are small steps some of them are quite hard some of them are big steps some of them are bold steps about sharing our faith what Jesus calls us to is hard but we're not meant to do it alone and that's why I think the hospitality thing is so important that we can support each other in obedience to Jesus and God honours it God honours the on he honours that the big steps of obedience that we take which seem really big to us it might be talking to our non-Christian neighbour about our about our faith that we haven't done before and he honours us for the little steps might be just saying hello to somebody that we that we see regularly or somebody that we don't know here and he promises a reward for us when we meet him in glory let's just spend a moment to reflect and then I'll pray Lord God we want to thank you for what you've done for us thank you for the truths you've reminded us of today that we are so precious to you that we don't need to fear what people might do to us because we have you and you care so much about us and you are sovereign our destiny is in your hands and because of

Jesus we know that our destiny is secure if we've put our trust in you but we pray Lord that you would help us to respond to you to be ready to acknowledge you not just in a secret way in a in a subtle way in an implicit way but in an explicit way in a in a bold way from the rooftops in the light just be ready to start the conversation with people who don't know you Lord and we pray that we will be prepared for negative reactions it might be just people ignoring us it might be people turning away it might be people being rude to us but help us be ready for that Lord and not be and not be ill prepared for that Lord help us to be devoted help us to be ready to take up our cross whatever that means I pray that you would show us what that means for us what is the what is taking up our cross what what is the difficult thing that you might be calling us to do that you want us to take that step of faith trusting in you and that you would use us and you would you would glorify us and help us to support one another to do that help us to be family to each other to be hospitable to each other knowing that that honors you

Lord and that your name is exalted when we take these small steps and when we build up to these big steps as well help us to be ready to share the wonderful good news that we've been reminded of today I pray that in Jesus name Amen thank you Andrew so we have some notices there are some slides coming up on this Tuesday on the 19th of March there is an annual church meeting for all church members are encouraged to to come along and attend at 730 p.m. there are three little bits of meetings in the evening all of which are important so please do come if you if you're able to and the fall so in two weeks time it's Easter Sunday as we said there are Easter services there's one on Maundy Thursday in the evening on Good Friday in the afternoon and then Easter Sunday celebration and we'd like you feel free feel open to thinking who you could invite to come along to any of those services but particularly on Easter Sunday at time of celebration as Andrew was speaking of that we can share our joy of the day and what we're celebrating and invite friends neighbours family to come along so please pray about that and have a think of who you might

