

Following Jesus means losing our lives

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[0 : 0 0] Being a Christian is fantastic. If you're not a Christian, just become a Christian. Just give your life to Jesus. You'll have forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and you'll live forever in paradise.

But sometimes being a Christian stings a little bit, and that's what today is. There's sort of a health warning with the passage, as Andrew said, not hard to understand, very difficult to do.

And so I'm going to do a bit of teaching, but we're also going to do a few practical exercises to help us narrow down on what Jesus is saying.

Only seven or so verses are very difficult to put into practice. So that's for you. And you'll see there on the back of your printout of the verses, you've got an outline which will show you where we're going today.

There was a movie that came out about 10 years ago. The movie's called 127 Hours. There it is on the screen. It's about an adventurer in America called Aaron Ralston.

[1 : 0 4] Aaron, he was an adrenaline junkie. He loved all that sort of adventure type stuff. He was hiking in America, but slipped and fell down a crevice, which I think you can see that's him sort of resting his legs.

He fell down there. And while he was down there, his arm was pinned by that boulder, which you can see on the screen. He was trapped there for 127 hours, as the title of the film suggests.

But Aaron was able to free himself by chopping off his own arm. And so lose your arm, you'll save your life. Save your arm and you'll lose your life.

I've thought about that a lot for about 10 years now, which is the reason you won't find me hiking in America. You know, you first, not me. Thank you.

But in our passage today, Jesus lays out a very similar choice. It's there in verse 24. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

[2 : 0 8] And on the screen, what I've done is apply those verses to that picture. There's a now and a later, save life, lose life.

Particularly take notice of the red arrows, the direction that the boxes go. Jesus is going to tell us how to save our lives.

The question is, how far are you willing to go? And on one hand, that's quite a silly question, isn't it? Because if your life was in danger, you would do anything to save yourself. But I wonder if you'll still agree with that by the end of this sermon.

These passages are some of the clearest in the Bible of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. They're not hard to understand, very hard to put into practice.

You'll remember last week we played a game of multiple choice. Who do you think Jesus is? That was the question. And everyone in the crowd had a go at answering. And he turned to his disciples and says, what about you?

[3 : 09] Who do you say I am? And Peter said, you are God's Messiah. And that is the correct answer. You need to be clear who Jesus is when you realize what following him looks like.

If you're going to lose your life for his sake, you really need to be certain that he is the special one. And in our passage today, Jesus calls himself the Son of Man.

That's his name from Daniel chapter 7, our Old Testament reading. You see, the Son of Man is God's king. He'll come in glory and power and put to death or put an end to all the beastly kings.

Daniel says that his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. And today Jesus says, yep, that's who I am.

But then what he says in verse 22 in your passages makes almost no sense. He says, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

[4 : 18] And he must be killed. It makes almost no sense because suffering and being killed, that's what Jesus will do to the beastly kings, not the other way around.

It says that he must suffer, that he must be killed, not I will do it. I will do it. And because we've all been Christians for years and years, we know why Jesus must suffer and die.

Because we know the Easter story. We know what he's referring to when he says being rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law. But if we put ourselves into the story, we've only just figured out who he is.

If we insert ourselves into chapter nine, all we know is that the path of God's Messiah is one of suffering now, but glory later.

That's what verse 22 says. And I put, please Tim, I put Jesus, verse 22, I've put it on the framework there that we're working with.

[5 : 26] Jesus must suffer, be rejected, but then on the third day, raised to life. It's lose life now, save life later. But what happens when Jesus applies that idea to his followers?

And this is for us, our second point. Look at verse 23. Then he said to them all, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

These verses are about discipleship and following Jesus. And notice it involves suffering now, just like him. And on the screen, what I've done is put verse 23 to 26 against the same framework.

I think I also put it on your handout as well. Verse 23, have a look. It says, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily. Now, we're in the season of Lent, aren't we?

Some people, they deny themselves chocolate during Lent. I've no idea why, but anyway, they do. Some people deny themselves alcohol. You know, they have a dry July, things like that.

[6 : 39] I deny myself sugary foods so I can look tip top. I don't know if that's working. Anyway, but Jesus doesn't say that, does he? He doesn't say, deny yourself this and that.

He says, deny yourself. That is, you give up being you. When it comes to sitting in the driver's seat and running your own life, he says, you must deny yourself.

And he follows it up with take up your cross daily, which does not mean, oh, the in-laws are coming around for lunch today. Oh, I've got to work for that terrible boss.

Oh, I've got to go into lockdown. We've all got our cross to bear. It does not mean that. In the ancient world, the cross was the means of your execution.

Jesus says, if you want to follow me, you have to put yourself on death row too. You have to kill your inner lawyer. You know, your inner lawyer is always objecting and protesting that you don't have to go that far.

[7 : 47] Put to death your right to run your own life. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. He says, take up your cross daily. Not just in the big decisions of life, but in the everyday ones too.

The smaller ones that not everyone sees. Verse 24. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will save it.

In other words, if you try to save your life on earth, you will lose your real life. When the son of man returns. If you want to save your real life, your soul, you have to be prepared to lose everything else that you call life.

You see, all he's doing is applying the down up, lose life now, glory later. All he's doing is applying that idea to people who want to follow him.

And at this stage, the suicide bombers amongst you, not that there are any here today, but they will be nodding in agreement, won't they? Yes, lose life now, lose life now.

[8 : 55] That's what we're always on about. But verse 24 says, lose life for me. This is about following Jesus. He would never condone hurting anyone.

He adds some logic to those arrows. Can you see the arrows? They're really important. He adds some logic. Verse 25. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet lose or forfeit their very soul?

And that verse reminds me of Shane Warne, who passed away recently. As I was listening to all the tributes that flowed in, I realized that in almost every estimation, Shane Warne gained the whole world, didn't he?

He was an international superstar, loved by men and women. He was adored by cricket fans and proud Victorians. He was wealthy and famous and could throw the arm over like no one's business.

In fact, they're actually renaming the Great Southern Stand at the MCG after him. By almost every estimation, Warne gained the whole world.

[10 : 03] On the 4th of March this year, he passed away, tragically, of a heart attack, aged just 52. And I hope I'm wrong, but I don't think Shane Warne was a Christian.

I hope I'm wrong, but I don't think he was. What will all his achievements profit him when he's before the Son of Man and forfeits his soul?

It's quite chilling, isn't it? There are two realms. There is a now and a later. It will not profit you to treat this life like it's all there is.

You will forfeit your soul when Jesus comes in glory. And so he lays out in the clearest way possible how to get this real life, how to save your life later.

And it's the very difficult choice of losing your life now. It is down and up, suffering now, glory later.

[11 : 04] He gives another warning, just kind of like an example, verse 26. Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Being ashamed of Jesus' words, I put it in blue in the top left box. It's like trying to save your life. Now, it's the opposite of following him. It's picking and choosing the parts of Jesus' teaching, the parts of the Bible that you want to apply into your life.

Are we ashamed what Jesus says about needing a savior, about repentance and the need to have forgiveness of our sins? Are we ashamed what he says about hell, that there really is good moral people in there?

Are we ashamed what Jesus says about money and human sexuality or that he really is God's Messiah? You see, if you want to save your skin now, just don't publicly agree with the things that Jesus says quite clearly.

The warning, though, verse 26. There really is a now and a later.

[12 : 27] It's this world versus the kingdom of God. The warning is if we use this life to follow ourselves, Jesus will take life from us when he comes in glory as the undeniable son of man.

You see, he must suffer. He must be killed. Surely being his disciples means we must follow in that same path in his footsteps.

And this is really important because there are literally hundreds of millions of people who claim to follow in Jesus' footsteps, who claim to be his disciples.

There are lots of Christian religions, even many individual denominations inside. Each of them has a different emphasis on what it looks like to follow Jesus.

And I guess that's OK. As long as their discipleship involves what Jesus says today, a denial of self.

[13 : 29] As long as it involves losing our lives for his sake. As long as it involves not being ashamed of Jesus' words.

You see, being a Christian, it doesn't mean a little bit more Jesus on a Sunday. It means he can ask me anything, even my life, and I would give it.

Because that's what following him means. It means my career, my sexuality, my money. They stop being mine and become Jesus'.

Why? Because I'm denying self and putting Jesus in the driver's seat of my life. You see, with people like Aaron Ralston at the start, saving his arm, losing his life.

Chopping off his arm and he'll save his life. Not a difficult decision to get your head around. Massively difficult to do. You know, you first. Rather than me.

[14 : 29] But Jesus gives us a much bigger decision. When it comes to following him, deny your whole self. Your whole self. And take up your cross daily.

And one of the reasons I think this is so difficult. Is because almost everyone around us will think that we are crazy. And we've lost our minds. You see, if you could do an exercise for me.

If you can take your right hand and place it over the later. Sorry to treat you like kindergarten children. But if you can take your right hand and cover up the later.

You see, all you're left with if you do that is this life now. And your family and friends are out there busy getting their best life now.

And as far as they're concerned, they are making the right decision. Because this life is all there is. But by the spirit, you can see what they can't.

[15 : 27] That there really is a resurrection. On the third day, Jesus really did rise. That there really is a glory to come. And that means you're the one making the good decision.

You're right to following him. Even if that means losing life now. Because these boxes, these verses, they show us that there really is a glory later.

Perhaps if you were the son of man, you would have organized the universe differently. Do you know that there are churches that teach that you can have it all now. And have it all later.

That the arrows don't go down and up. They go from top to top. Straight across. You can save your life now. Have everything in this world. And have glory when Jesus comes.

But that is not what these verses say. They're very clear, aren't they? They're not hard to understand. You might want to talk to myself or Andrew afterwards. If you question whether the universe is really organized this way.

[16 : 36] If that's the first time you've heard this or heard these verses taught. If this is not the Christianity you were sold. Please come and talk to us later.

What I'd like to do now, just to get really practical. Is to do an exercise which I've put at the bottom of your handout. And so what we're going to do. Is we're going to pick a few areas of life.

And we're going to think about what it looks like to save our life now. Or to follow Jesus in those areas. To lose life now. So just a few areas of life. This is my stab at it.

There's lots more to say on each box. But I'll just. I put a few on your handouts to start us off. So money. What does it look like to save your life in terms of money? I think essentially it means.

Using your money for this life alone. And for yourself. That is. You being in charge of your wallet. There will be lots of ways that that works itself out.

[17 : 37] In your lives. What would it look like to follow Jesus with your money? It looks like putting Jesus in charge of your bank accounts. Jesus.

Sorry. I don't think it means giving all your money. Entering your bank accounts. And handing it over to the church. Although for some people. Who have got pay rises. And haven't thought about.

Reflecting that in their. Giving to the church. It will mean revisiting your financial giving. In Luke's gospel. Jesus prioritizes. The kingdom of God.

And that's what we do in this church. We try to grow. And mature. Members of the kingdom. And so in your money. It will look like prioritizing.

The kingdom of God as well. Just following Jesus. His priorities. Our priorities. They should align. Even when it comes to our wallets. The idea there is.

[18 : 35] Prioritize church giving first. All other aid agencies. And charities second. The idea is. Jesus is in the driver's seat. One thing he said.

Is pay your taxes. Very un-Australian isn't it? Pay your taxes. But that's what Jesus says. And so we. We want to follow his words. Right. That's money. More to say on that.

But we'll. We'll keep moving. Relationships. Human relationships. What does it look like. To save life now. So I put. Selfishness in relationships. Not loving your enemies.

Jesus said that. He said love your enemies. So I suppose the opposite is to not love them. Disregarding how other people. Feel. Not having a consideration. To have. How our behavior.

Reflects on our family. That's all putting ourselves first. I think. More to say on that. The idea is take this away. And expand the boxes. You know yourself better.

[19 : 32] Than I do. So fill in more things. In those boxes. What would it look like. To lose life now. In terms of human relationships. Well. Jesus said to honor.

Father and mother. So. There's any number of ways. That that will play itself out. He said to love your enemies. To pray for those who persecute you. Very un-Australian stuff.

But that's what following. Jesus is. Jesus. Put other people first. And so. It would look like that as well. In our human relationships. All we're doing.

Is walking in his footsteps. The last one. Romantic relationships. What does it look like. To save life now. It basically looks like. Me in my 20s. Which is. Me in the driver's seat.

So I do. What I want. With who I want. When I want. How I want. On my terms. It's basically. I think. The culture of Melbourne. When it comes to sex.

[20 : 27] And relationships. As long as nobody gets hurt. No harm. No foul. That's what it looks like. To save your life. When it comes to sex. I think. What does it look.

To lose life. Well. Jesus says. That sexual relationships. Are for one man. And one woman. For life. That all sexual behavior. Is confined.

To the marriage relationship. Married people. Are one flesh. And so. Any diversion. Of that. For married people. Even in your thought. Life. Will be a tearing.

Of your flesh. Which is why. Even for married people. Pornography. Is a sin. And I hope that none of that. Is a shock. To you. That's.

Romantic relationships. When it comes. To the lose life. Now column. Which is on your right. It's not about. Finding the hardest thing. Or the most boring thing.

[21 : 21] Or the most difficult thing. It's just about. What would Jesus do. What does his word say. He's not asking us. To do anything. That he wasn't. Prepared to do himself.

I've written some other areas. Of life. Church life. Spare time. Future goals. You could go on. And on. And on. Every area of life. And when you get to the bottom. The right hand column.

Lose life now. That is what it will look like. For you. To follow Jesus. That's what it is. But here's the thing.

This is the important bit. Notice what you can't say. You can't say. It's not the right time. Or I'm too afraid of people. Or that the sacrifice is too costly.

Or that I'm not brave enough. And I might get persecuted. If I make that decision. He is not asking us to do anything. That Jesus will not do himself. In a few weeks.

[22 : 19] He will quite literally. Deny himself. Take up his cross. And die. Die. He'll do that. For all the ways. We fail. To deny ourselves. And take up our cross.

Maybe I. Could just. Do the hard thing. And try and lose my life now. Our passage today. It comes after nine chapters.

Of seeing Jesus in action. Is there anything about Jesus. That we can't trust. With our whole life. The idea is. The more certain you are. About who Jesus is.

The more. You'll want to follow him. Even in the difficult areas. Where we need. The spirit's help. Next week. We're going to see.

How following. What following Jesus. Looks like. That it's. Not all difficult. It's. Suffering. This week. It's all glory. Next week. It's not all bad. But the main thing today.

[23 : 19] Lose life now. And so. Join with me. As we pray. For this. Really difficult thing. Father God.

Thank you for your word. Thank you for how clear it is. Thank you that Jesus. Wants us to follow. In his footsteps. And so. By the power. Of your spirit.

Please would we do that. Would we deny ourselves. And take up our cross. Every day. Help us. Not to be afraid. Help us to.

Have our eyes. Fixed on the glory. That will come. That there really is. A resurrection. That there really is. A later. Please father.

Help us. To deny ourselves. Help us to think through. What that would look like. In all the areas. Of our lives. The areas that. People don't see. The areas of life. We really struggle.

[24 : 20] That we. Attempted to fall into sin with. Please. Help us to follow. Jesus. We ask this in his name. Amen.