

Last month, as we kicked off this new thing we're calling "bush disciples", I started out with every intention of focusing on discipleship. But I very quickly realised that discipleship doesn't make any sense at all, unless we know who we're disciples of. And so we were asking the question "Who is Jesus?" Because, if Jesus was just a man, it doesn't make any sense to be a disciple of a dead man. But the fact that Jesus was not just a man – the fact that Jesus is "The Christ" – the chosen one – the Holy one of God. The fact that Christ is eternal, and the fact that he calls us mortal men and women, out of our destiny of death and into His eternal life, well, when you believe that, it makes perfect sense to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

As a bit more of a recap of last month, we saw that it's not through our own cleverness, or some strange twist of fate that we come to believe in Jesus Christ – Believing and knowing in your heart that Jesus is the Christ, is not a human feat. It's a gift from God. It's a **blessing** from God. So, if you believe in your heart, that Jesus is the Christ, The Lord has truly blessed you.

We also saw that with blessing, comes responsibility. Disciples of Jesus carry with them, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven? This very faith in Jesus Christ that you and I carry, is actually the keys to heaven. God has blessed us with faith, and our responsibility, is to share that faith. Because unless we use these keys – by sharing our faith – those who are lost, will remain locked up in sin and death. And so we have the responsibility to be **active** disciples of Jesus Christ.

OK, so that was last month's message. In Matthew 16, Peter has just announced that Jesus is the Christ, and now we pick it up at v21.

Matthew 16:21-28 (NIV84)

Jesus Predicts His Death

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we encounter your word today, help us to understand it.

*Help us to have in mind, the things of God and **not** the things of men.*

Help us to see Your wisdom, and to grasp an eternal perspective, as your disciples.

Amen.

If you're anything like me, there will be times when you feel close to God, and you think "Wow. I actually did OK there. God actually used me. I think God might be even proud of me – the way I responded in that situation...."

But then, there'll be other times – it might only be the very next day, or maybe even only a few hours later, where you feel miserable, dejected, ashamed. Where you feel you've failed God badly. Where you feel that you were so wrong.... How could God ever forgive me? How could I have been so stupid? I might as well give up now – I'm not good enough....

You know what? I love God's word. The Bible is such an honest book. God's people are portrayed warts and all – there's no air-brushing of characters in the bible – At times the Bible is brutally honest as it describes God's people. Even the disciples – even probably one of the chief disciples, at one moment can speak the very word of God, and the next time he opens his mouth, out comes the words of Satan.

Peter said "You are the Christ – the Son of the Living God". And Jesus encouraged him – "Ah, Peter . Spot on fella. You're blessed....".

But then, as Jesus began to explain what it means to **be** the Christ, Peter's very next words: "**Never, Lord!**" "**This shall never happen to you!**" "

And in return, Jesus chastised him.

And this honesty that we find in the Bible gives me hope. You and I are not the **only** ones who have ever let God down. And I've got news for you – the last time you let God down – well that isn't the last time it'll happen. It'll happen again. But that's the amazing thing about God. In His grace and His mercy – Every time we fail Him, He picks us up again. We learn from our sin and our failures, God forgives us, and we follow Him again.... Don't ever give up on yourself, because God hasn't given up on you. God didn't give up on Peter. Even when Peter denied Jesus on the night that He was betrayed, God still didn't give up on Peter. And He hasn't given up on you.

So, if you've let God down, pick yourself back up again, and keep following Him. That is the way of the disciple. It's always been the way of the disciple. So you've let God down – maybe you're just as bad as Peter – Get on with it.....

So, why was Peter chastised? Well, it was because he was thinking in the way of men, instead of the way God thinks. He was thinking of a fleshly, temporary blessing, rather than God's eternal purposes... Let me explain:

Matthew is a very Jewish gospel. It was written for the Jews. And that shouldn't be surprising for us, because Jesus was a Jew – well actually He still is a Jew. If Jesus' body still bears

the scars of the cross, He still bears the marks of His circumcision as well. Jesus is a Jew, His 12 disciples were Jews....

And the Jewish expectation of the Messiah – (by the way the words Christ and Messiah are interchangeable – one is Greek and the other is Hebrew) – their expectation of the Christ – was a conquering King - one who would set them free from their oppressors. That was their expectation. But Jesus Christ came to set them free from something much more sinister than the Romans. The Messiah came to set them free from sin and death. And rather than a crown of jewel encrusted gold, the Christ came to wear a crown of thorns.

But Peter didn't know that. When Peter discovered that Jesus was the Christ, he would've thought "Woo Hoo. Here I am. I'm on the winning side... God's Messiah. Victory! Yay for us!!!!" God's blessing us right here. Right now.

And so, when Jesus began to explain what it actually **meant** for Him to be the Messiah ... When Jesus started actually dismantling the long-held image of what Messiah was – When Jesus began to teach them that He would suffer and die, and be raised to life again, Peter rebuked Him "Never. It'll never happen to you"..... And that was Peter's Human response – It was not a Godly response...

And there are churches today, where if someone was to say, exactly what Jesus said, "God's calling me to this ministry, and in it, I'm going to suffer a lot, I'm going to be persecuted, and I'm actually going to die".... There will be sure to be someone in the congregation who will jump up and say "*I cut off those words in the name of Jesus – all that negativity, and I*

“speak life and health and prosperity over this person, and I rebuke those negative words in the name of Jesus....” (have you ever heard something like that?) Well, it’s pretty much what Peter did to Jesus. And what did Jesus think of that? He chastised Peter for thinking like that.

Peter’s response, is the first example of what we today call a “prosperity theology”. It’s where someone seeks first health, wealth, and a good life. Where as Jesus says, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

And it’s a very popular teaching. If I were to stand up today and preach, “Come to Jesus and all your troubles will be gone”. “Come to Jesus and you’ll be safe”. “Come to Jesus and all your financial worries will be dealt with”. That’s a pretty appetising sort of a message isn’t it? Well, it might be appetising, but what is it appealing to? It is an appeal to the flesh.

Jesus never promised us a bed of roses – He promised us a cross of nails. Yep – a prosperity teaching might be popular, but it’s not Godly – it’s a lie. And if you build your faith on that, when your world comes crashing down, so will your faith. And most people’s life experience will prove that teaching to be a lie. Jesus firmly rebuked Peter because of it.

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Jesus can be brutally honest. He was brutally honest with his disciples – that to follow Him, was not the easy road. And

I'm here today to say to you, Christianity is not for the faint-hearted. If you're going to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you're going to have to be tough. This is not the easy road. Satan is against you. Prevailing culture is against you. Peer pressure is against you. Your fleshly desires are against you. The values of the world are against you. It is not the easy road.

And we've got to be honest about this. *Why do so many people go to a Christian concert or something, make a decision for Jesus, and then in a short time, slip right away from Him?* I'll tell you why: It's because nobody told them to expect hardship. Nobody told them to expect persecution. Nobody taught them that following Jesus is actually the hard road – a road that sometimes leads even to physical death.

Whenever I hear somebody give a testimony that, when they came to Jesus, all their troubles were over, I wonder "Which Jesus are you following". Because for most people, when they begin to follow Jesus, that's when life actually gets tougher.

I have here a little clip from the movie called "the mission".

The movie then follows another priest who brought the gospel to the same group of natives, and he was actually martyred by the Spanish.

Why do they do that? Why do Missionaries today, leave their homes and loved ones, risking danger and their very lives, to tell other people about Jesus? Why do they choose a life of poverty to do that?

What about me? Why do I choose to work part time, and bear the hardship of what I'm doing with bush disciples? This isn't an easy road – I can tell ya.

What about you? Why would you choose to follow Jesus as His disciple. Why would you choose hardship and troubles? Why would you make Jesus your priority instead of your bank balance? Why would you be willing to appear strange and different in a world that rewards uniformity.

Well, we do it when we've begun to understand God's wisdom – when you begin to see things from God's perspective rather than the world's perspective. God turns everything up-side-down.

Jesus said: **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** Why? ²⁵ **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,**

If the most important thing to you, is your life now – is enjoying everything the world has to offer, you'll miss out on real life – eternal life.

but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

That all sounds up-side-down doesn't it? Even if your life is taken away, you haven't lost it, because Christ gives us life that doesn't end.

26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Paul describes it as treasure in jars of clay.

2 Corinthians 4:⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

What Paul is saying, is there's 2 things we count on. We can count on God being with us and giving us hope and strength, **through** the trials. And the second thing we can count on is the resurrection. All this bad stuff and tough stuff might be getting thrown at us now, but the reward is coming. Just as Christ, who suffered, was then raised, so too, **we** will be raised. What this is, is a challenge to shift our mindset, from thinking in the temporary, fleshly experience, to thinking in the eternal, resurrected hope that we have.

God has blessed us, with this huge blessing of faith in Jesus Christ. I don't know if you realise just how big that blessing is? What can you give in exchange for your soul???? Nothing. You can't buy it. You can't barter it. You can't fill your life up with good works in exchange for it. It's a blessing from God. Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Clive Palmer, Gina Reinheart, combined, could never hope to buy what we receive freely from God.

This life is short. If you're young, you might think you've got a lot of years ahead of you.... You don't know that. You might expect it, but it might not be so. Even if you have another 80 years in front of you – that's a short time. On God's clock, which is the clock of eternity, a human lifetime is like (a snap of the fingers).

Jesus is returning. Peter expected, that when the messiah came, He would come as the victorious king. What Peter didn't realise, is that Jesus' schedule includes 2 visits to planet Earth. He came once as the suffering servant. But Jesus is coming back a second time. We don't know the day or the hour, but when He comes this time, it'll be very different to the first time. **²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.**

What have you done? What are you doing? Are you living for this life or for the next? Are your values eternal values or are you just as caught up in today as your neighbour is?

Do you desire what satisfies the Spirit, or what satisfies the flesh?

Friends, maths was my thing at school. And for those who understand mathematics, here's an equation:
Discipleship = Present Cost + Eternal Reward

That is why we choose to follow Jesus. The challenge for us, is the biggest challenge that any of us can really face.

The challenge is to shift your thinking, your life, your philosophy, your experience, to an eternal perspective. The challenge, is to take up your cross and follow Jesus. The challenge, is to put yourself out there – to get active as a disciple of Jesus.

So, how can we trust this? How can we be sure that Jesus is coming back? Well, Jesus told the disciples, that some of them wouldn't taste death before they saw **the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."**

And they caught glimpses of it. 6 days later, at the transfiguration, they saw Christ in His glory. In the cross, they saw the coming of His Kingdom. In the resurrection, and the ascension, they saw the beginnings of the Kingdom. When the Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost, so that God in His Holy Spirit can live in your life and in my life, this was Christ coming in His Kingdom.

And it is because Christ has already started breaking into this world with His Kingdom, that we can have every confidence,

that He will return in Glory, and we pray, “Lord hasten that day”.

So, the question for us, is this, “His Kingdom is coming, but am I living for His Kingdom? Am I living in expectation, always awaiting the coming of my king?”

Be bold. Live for Jesus. Share the good news of Jesus, never fearing the consequences, because your eyes are fixed on eternity.