

Today's the second week we're spending on this reading. Last week, we heard some really tough stuff... Jesus wasn't joking around, when He said, ²⁵ **It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."**

And it was extra confronting for us, because we began the message by scrapping any illusions that we might carry about our wealth – By world standards, we Australians are extremely well-off...

And the lesson for us was, "We don't **need** to be rich by world standards, and we certainly don't need to be wealthy by Australian standards."... As disciples of Jesus, let's always be generous, and always be sacrificial in the way we give (we can afford it)...

But, as is often the case when we take on a difficult topic, it was a rather lengthy message last week. And we ran out of time before we got to talk about the encouraging stuff... I'm sorry I did that to ya – I left us hanging for a whole week – we took on some of the most challenging words of Jesus, but we didn't get to focus at all, on the **blessing** that follows it up...

Today's topic, is about "The **benefits** of discipleship" – the benefits of being a disciple of Jesus... Yes, we will also hear a little bit about the **cost** of being a disciple of Jesus, but the focus for today, is on the immense **blessing** that it is, to follow Jesus...

Alright, so last week, Jesus was talking about what we have to **give up**, to follow Him... Becoming a disciple of Jesus, doesn't mean we just tack 'a little bit of Jesus' onto our lives – we don't just graft a bit of 'the Jesus thing' into who we are, or what we do... Becoming a disciple of Jesus – becoming a Christian, is a **radical** transformation... Jesus described it as being born again...

And it is so radical – it is such a complete turn-around in our thinking, that people of the world, probably won't even comprehend the blessing **as** a blessing.... As we hear about these blessings today, people of the world might probably go, "So, what's so great about that???"... You see, these are blessings for disciples of Jesus – these are blessings, for people who have ditched their worldly perspective, and Jesus has given us an eternal perspective...

A worldly perspective, can only understand worldly blessings, but when you've been reborn, worldly blessings aren't near as exciting, as the spiritual blessings of the Kingdom of God ...

So, Peter said, "Look, we've left everything to follow You...." Now, doesn't mean they sold-up everything, and gave it all away, but they did leave everything...

- homes;
- families;
- livelihoods...

That was the cost of discipleship for them...

The cost of discipleship for us, may be different – it'll always be **significant**, but it'll be different... And the cost of

discipleship for me, will probably be different to the cost of discipleship for you... There's a cost for **all** of us, but it depends on what Jesus calls us to, as to what that cost actually is...

And so, the cost can be significant,,, but so are the rewards.

29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Righto, these blessings – the benefits of being a disciple of Jesus, speak to us about:

- Provision
- Fellowship
- Community
- Family
- Connection / a sense of belonging / a place to call home
- Salvation

But, there are 2 errors that people **commonly** fall into, when it comes to how we view these “blessings”.

Some people get stuck-in-the-rut of worldliness – It's so easy, to get all fixated on worldly stuff ...

I've visited many different types of churches,,, and I have often heard it said (& usually, just before the offering is taken up), "What you give, will be multiplied back to you" ... 100 fold... You give \$100, and God will repay to you \$10 000... Alright, and the whole motivation for giving, is "I give, so I can get back more" – Putting it crassly, "it becomes an exercise in greed" ...

*But I do hope you understand, that when you give, whether it be to support the ministry of Bush Disciples, or whether it be to provide for the poor, the **last** thing we should see it as, is a 'get-rich-quick scheme'.*

Alright, we don't give because we want to get something out of it – we give sacrificially – we actually sacrifice by giving... And we do it because we can see that it's a valuable ministry that God is using in the world...

And yet, there continues to be, a lot of people in the world, who follow the line of thinking, "I give, so that I can get back..." And that's a real problem...

But the opposite of this, is also a bit of a problem – It's to come to the point of missing the blessings of today – or even **despising** the blessings that God gives us in this life... Some people get so focused on the afterlife, they actually don't live the life that God has given them to live today – they're so focused on tomorrow, they forget about today...

So, what do we learn from today's reading?

1. Blessing begins with sacrifice...

Discipleship without sacrifice, isn't discipleship at all, and these are blessings for disciples of Jesus – these are blessings for followers of Jesus, who have left something, to follow Jesus... But we don't sacrifice, just for the sake of sacrifice...

It's

2. **Sacrifice for the sake of Jesus ; and it's Sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel**

The Gospel, is "Good news"... To make a sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel, is to give something up, so that we can either **tell** the Good news ourselves, or so we can help someone **else** to tell the good news... Alright, so you might give up something, so you can support a ministry. Or you might give up something, so that you can be **involved** in a ministry...

To sacrifice for the sake of **Jesus**, is to sacrifice because we love Jesus,, and to sacrifice for the sake of the **Gospel**, is we sacrifice because we love others, and we want them to be able to hear the good news, so they can also love Jesus.

So, what does this look like???

- What does sacrifice for the sake of Jesus look like? And
- what does sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel look like?

In some countries of the world, it is very dangerous to be a Christian. *According to Open Doorsⁱ, every day, 11 Christians are killed for their faith...*

In some Muslim countries, under Sharia law, Islam is the only religion allowed... And anyone who converts from Islam to Christianity, is punished.

- They may be killed;
- They lose their homes;
- They lose their businesses;
- They're not allowed to be employed;
- They lose everything...

Sometimes Christians are given the option, “Renounce Jesus, convert to Islam and live,,, Or if you don't renounce Jesus, we'll kill your children in front of you.”... What a dreadful position for a parent to be in... And whole families have been killed, because they refused to renounce Jesus... Why did they refuse? Because they love Jesus...

Now, we don't have that level of persecution in Australia, but even in our land, we sometimes have to give up something, for the sake of Jesus...:

- A news agent who refuses to sell pornography or gold lotto, loses a lot of business;
- An employee who refuses to lie for his boss, loses his job;
- A doctor who refuses to refer someone to an abortion clinic, can be disciplined;
- A teacher who teaches the merits of creation in a science class, gets disciplined;

But we continue to honour Jesus, no matter what the cost... That's what sacrifice for the sake of Jesus looks like...

- Choosing to honour Jesus;
- Refusing to deny Jesus; and

- Openly acknowledging Jesus before men...

What about sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel?

- A missionary leaves their home; their culture; their family, and goes to another country, for the sake of the Gospel;
- You might give up your weekend, so you can intentionally visit people, to talk to them about Jesus;
- You might give up work time, so you can teach RE;
- You might give up your savings, to support a missionary, or even a local ministry;
- You might have the choice – to take the time to do some additional training, and you'll get promoted in your job, or you could do some biblical training, so you can better share your faith, preach the Gospel...

These are all costs, for the sake of the Gospel...

Blessing begins with sacrifice, and we sacrifice for the sake of Jesus, and for the Gospel...

3. Blessings aren't usually possessions we keep for ourselves – **Blessings are shared**...

When Jesus said, "You'll receive 100-fold", did He mean, that when Robyn and I sold our home (that we were still paying off) , so I could leave work; and pack up our whole family to move into the city, so I could go to Bible College,, did Jesus

mean, He'd give us 100 homes, and we could live in one, and rent 99 of them out??? No, not at all...

When we sold our home, so I could go to Bible College, that was just before the real-estate boom... If I'd stayed working in the job I was in, we would've had our home paid off by the time I was 35/36 ... But here we are, (I turn 50 this year), and I still owe more on this home, then what our first home cost us...

Does that mean Jesus failed in His promise??? No, not at all – it just means “I’ve misunderstood the promise”...

When someone leaves their house for the sake of Jesus, and the for the sake of the Gospel, their Christian family, provides them with accommodation... *While I was at Bible college, some Christians provided a house for us to live in, at very low rent... When we were called to St George, to be a minister of a particular church, the local church provided a really nice house for us to live in – it was the nicest house we'd ever lived in...*

When someone leaves their home, for the sake of Jesus, and the for the sake of the Gospel, their Christian family, no matter where they are in the world, welcome them into their homes...

You see, this is what we were getting at last week – are we going to be tight-fisted with what we have???; Or open-handed... You see, the blessing of being a disciple of Jesus, means that sometimes we're the ones being blessed, and sometimes we're the ones who do the blessing... And what a privilege it is, to be able to bless someone in the Name of Jesus...

Robyn and I enjoy opening up our home for others – Sometimes people are passing through town (on their way further out west), and they're going out there, to share the gospel... And sometimes they ring (or just pop in) – sometimes they're people we've never met before, but although we don't know them, they're family... Their Heavenly Father, is our Heavenly Father...

- They've left their home;
- They've given up stuff;
- They've given up their time;
- They've sacrificed for the sake of Jesus, and for the sake of the Gospel;

and here they are, they stop over in our town, planning to probably pitch a tent at the local caravan park, ,, No way... If you're our family in Jesus Christ, come and stay at our place...

As an ex-farmer, one of the biggest things I had to give up, was my dream of one day having my own farm,,, But now I know countless Christian farmers, who welcome me onto their farms – and if I ever have to just get away from town for a bit, (for a bit of rural therapy), I can go to any number of farms...

So, the blessings aren't usually possessions we keep for ourselves – blessings are shared... And this works both ways: Sometimes we'll be the givers of the blessing; Sometimes we'll be the receivers of the blessing...

Some of us are really good at giving blessing, but not so good at receiving it... *Robyn and I are a bit like this with staying at somebody's place... As I said, we have an open-home policy. We welcome complete strangers (who come in the Name of Jesus), into our home for meals and to stay a night or 2 or 3...* But it's a bit harder for us (at times), to receive that from somebody else – but it's really important that we do...

I know that there's people here, who, when they know a brother or sister in Christ, is doing it a bit tough financially, are quick to give anonymous financial support,, But sometimes it's hard to be the receiver of that sort of gift (our pride gets in the way)...

You see, for God's method of blessing disciples of Jesus to work, we can't be tight-fisted...

- If God has blessed us with finances;
- Possessions;
- Homes

They're not just for us – they're for us to share...

Even our lives, are to be shared...

Do you know what I reckon is one of the most attractive traits to discover in a church? Welcome and hospitality... When a church functions as it's supposed to, it becomes a place where we have a sense of community – a sense of belonging – a sense of family.

Remember I said before, that to people in the world, these blessings probably won't even seem like much of a blessing...

- “I leave my home – big woop – I can stay in somebody else’s house.”
- “I leave my land – big woop – I can visit someone else’s farm”
- “I leave my family – big woop – I can connect with other families”

From a worldly perspective, we’ll never understand the blessing...

The blessing is, to be a part of something amazing... The blessing, is to experience the community of the family of God... If we shut ourselves off from God’s family, we’ll never experience it...

The blessing, is when we give up something for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of the Gospel, the church envelops us...

Robyn and I hate moving towns... And yet, very time that we’ve moved town, we connect with the church, and instantly, we’re surrounded by Christian family...

I remember we moved to a community once, and we’d been there for about a year, and we were talking to somebody who’s not a Christian, and they’d also arrived about the same time, and they wanted to know, “How come you’re so connected? How come you’ve got people who’ll support you? How come you’ve got such good friends already???” And of course, the answer is, we might’ve shifted localities, but we know that wherever we go, we’re going to a place we’ve got family... And we can instantly connect with our brothers and sisters in Christ....

When the church is functioning as it should, what a blessing it is:

- To experience God's provision;
- fellowship
- Community
- Family
- Connection / a sense of belonging / a place to call home

It's wonderful... We love you guys so much... And we thank Jesus for fellowship & community & family...

Do you know the greatest blessing God has given us in ministry??? I might take it for granted sometimes, but it's fellowship with you guys.

Let's move on:

4. With these blessings, come persecutions.

While ever we live on this earth, don't expect the persecution to stop... We'll talk more about that next week...

5. Eternal Blessings

Where would the benefits of discipleship be if we ignored the eternal blessing???

Yeah, there's blessings in this life; but there's also persecutions...

But the great hope that disciples of Jesus have, is eternal life with our Lord...

I'm not sure why, but I sometimes get asked to conduct a funeral for someone who's openly rejected Jesus for their whole life... What hope do I have to share with the family? What words of comfort can I offer them? Not much... But what a joyous event the funeral of a committed Christian is...

- What a hope we have;
- What a joy...

To be with Jesus in His eternal glory...

What a blessing it is, to be a disciple of Jesus;
What a blessing it is, to live as a disciple of Jesus;
And what a blessing it is, to die as a disciple of Jesus...

And I'm not even being 'morbid', am I... Morbidity is to do with death, but the blessing for a Christian, is eternal life.

In Jesus Christ, we are truly blessed.

In this life, followers of Jesus may indeed get down-trodden and do it tough, ³¹ **But many who are first will be last, and the last first."**

Amen.

¹ <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/11-christians-killed-every-day-for-their-decision-to-follow-jesus/>