

The Sin That Destroys Us From The Inside

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Date: 19 April 2026

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[0 : 00] Father God, as we come to your word this morning, your word is infallible, perfect. My words are not. So God, we want you to speak to us from your word.

Won't you give us your spirit? Help us to see the things that you want us to see. Lord, we want you to speak to us on this journey of faith. And so help us, we pray in your great name. Amen.

Let's listen to God's word. The scripture reading today comes from Numbers 11 and 12. Please follow along on your Bible.

If you don't have your own Bible, you can find them at the two sides of the stage or at the back. You can find the passage on page 111 in the church Bible.

Hear then God's word to us today. And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes. And when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled.

[0 : 56] And the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died down.

So the name of that place was called Tibera because the fire of the Lord burned among them. Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving.

And the people of Israel also wept again and said, Oh, that we have meat to eat. Remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing.

The cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up. And there is nothing at all but this manna to look at. Now the manna was like coriander seed and its appearance like that of bdellium.

The people went about and gathered it and ground it in hand mills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil.

[2 : 04] When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it. Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans. Everyone at the door of his tent.

And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly. And Moses was displeased. Moses said to the Lord, Why have you dealt ill with your servant?

And why have I not found favor in your side that you lay the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people?

Did I give them birth that you should say to me? Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing child to the land that you swore to give their fathers. Where am I to get meat to give to all these people?

For they weep before me and say, Give us meat that we may eat. I am not able to carry all these people alone. The burden is too heavy for me.

[3 : 08] If you will treat me like this, kill me at once. If I find favor in your side that I may not see my righteousness. Then the Lord said to Moses, Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.

And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them. And they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

And say to the people, Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat. For you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, Who will give us meat to eat?

For it was better for us in Egypt. Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils, and becomes loathsome to you.

Because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why did we come out of Egypt? But Moses said, The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, I will give them meat that they may eat a whole month.

[4 : 42] Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them? And the Lord said to Moses, Is the Lord's hand shortened?

Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not. So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord, and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and placed them around the tent.

Then the Lord came down in cloud, and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him, and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the spirit rested on them, they prophesied.

But they did not continue doing it. Then the wind from the Lord sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side, and a day's journey on the other side around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground.

And the people rose all that day, and all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail. Those who gathered least, gathered ten homers, and they spread them out for themselves, all around the camp.

[6 : 00] While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck down the people, with a very great plague.

Therefore, the name of that place was called Kibrath Hathava, because there they buried the people who had the craving. From Kibrath Hathava, the people journeyed to Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth.

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, because of the Cushite woman who he had married. For he had married a Cushite woman. And they said, Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also? And the Lord heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.

And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting. And the three of them came out.

[7 : 08] And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both came forward. And he said, Hear my words.

If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make myself known to him in a vision. I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses.

He is faithful in all of my house. With him, I speak mouth to mouth, clearly and not in riddles. And he beholds the form of the Lord.

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and he departed.

When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous like snow. And Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

[8 : 11] And Aaron said to Moses, Oh my Lord, do not punish us. Because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away, when he comes out of his mother's womb.

And Moses cried out to the Lord, Oh God, please heal her. Please. But the Lord said to Moses, if her father had put spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days?

Let her be shut outside the camp seven days. And after that, she may be brought in again. So Miriam was shut outside the camp seven days, and the people did not set out on the march, till Miriam was brought in again.

After that, the people set out from Hazeroth and camp in the wilderness of Paran. Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word.

Great, Anastasia. That was a long reading. Thank you for doing so well. And some difficult Hebrew names you did so well. Thank you, Anastasia. And thank you for staying with us.

[9 : 30] It's great to have you here. Now, let me start with asking you a question. Friends, what, or maybe more pertinent, who, causes you the biggest frustration or irritation in life at the moment?

You don't need to shout the name out loud. Just, you can think about it. Friends, what, or who rubs you the wrong way? Who has the ability to turn a good day into a bad day?

A good week into a bad week? What causes your heart rate to rise? Or maybe your blood to boil? Or your anger to spill? In life, has recently caused you to ask the question, why does this always happen to me?

Or what did I ever do to deserve this? All of us are going to go through many things in life that cause us to ask these kind of questions and to respond like this.

Some of us maybe have been in a relationship that you really thought was going to go the distance. And it ended. And your heart has been broken. Friends, maybe some of us have been overlooked at work again and again.

[10:31] And that promotion you are hoping has been given to somebody else. Some of us maybe have been a victim of a financial scam. You've had your savings taken from you. And there's no way of recovering it.

Some of us have been disappointed by leaders, maybe church leaders, family members, friends. And we feel our heart is growing a little bit cold, a little bit bitter, a little bit protective towards those of us that we previously trusted.

Friends, how do you respond when life is hard, when life does not go your way? When maybe you feel like, I've been sold a lie. And this joy and confidence thing is not really real.

A little while ago, Claire and I went through a season where it felt like we were hit by all these tsunami waves from every angle. We got some news that was very difficult news to receive. It felt like a tsunami's way hit us.

And just as we were kind of coming out of that and feeling like, okay, we can see some light at the end of the tunnel, another wave from a completely different angle hit us. And I remember saying to Claire, it feels like my legs have just been wiped out from under me.

[11:38] I feel like I'm about to fall over at any moment. And just as that was kind of happening, it felt like another wave from another angle hit us. And for a few weeks, life was so disorientating, didn't know which way to look, which way to stand.

Friends, how do we respond when life doesn't work, turn out the way that we hoped or expected?

All of us are going to go through many times like this. In the journey of life, sometimes in the journey of faith, life is challenging and difficult.

And for those of us that are Christians, I know not all of us here would be Christians, but for those of us that are Christians, being a person of faith doesn't inoculate us against the difficulties and the tragedies of life.

Being a person of faith doesn't mean that they won't, come your way. And so the question we need to grapple with is, how do we keep our hearts healthy, our hearts pure, when life doesn't go our way?

How do we survive the trials of the wilderness and still come out the other side in one piece? Now, as a church, we're looking at the book of Numbers. Neil started it last week.

[12:41] Numbers is a wonderful book. It's an amazing, amazing book of the Bible. It describes the journey of faith that the people of God go on as they leave Egypt, travel through the wilderness for 40 years, and make their way towards the promised land.

And it's a deeply relevant book because the Bible says that the journey of faith that the Israelites went on is so many ways as a picture of our journey of faith. If you're a follower of Jesus, Christ has rescued us from the Egypt of hell, and he's brought us, and now we are pilgrimages and sojourners through the wilderness as we make our way to the new creation of glory.

And so Christians, too, are on this journey of faith. And the issue that this passage wants us to think about is, how do those of us that are followers of Jesus respond when life doesn't go our way?

When we're disappointed with the reality of life? How can we be those who pass through the trials of the wilderness rather than be those who perish along the way?

That's the question that this passage wants us to grapple with. And so we're looking at chapters 11 and 12 as Anastasia read to us. Now just to recap, last week very briefly, the first 10 chapters, Niel said 10 chapters in one week, which is pretty amazing, and he did a great job at it.

[13:55] The first 10 chapters are kind of setting up the journey. And at the end of that, God says, I've given you everything you need for this journey. I've given you leaders. I've given you my word. I've given you my instructions.

I've given you my directions. I've given you most importantly, my spirit, my presence, my cloud will go with you. I will lead you. I'll tell you when to go and when to stop.

I've given you everything you need for this journey. And so what could possibly go wrong? Here they are. Everything is set up and they're about to go.

And yet we are told three days into the journey, things start to go wrong. Look at how chapter 11 begins. Verse one, And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes. And when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled against them. Now the word misfortune here can mean disaster. So there's some disasters that befall them, or it can just mean discomfort.

[14:51] Things aren't really the way that they hoped they would be. And either way, things are not working out the way that they thought. There's a gap between their expectations and the reality. And that gap seems to be a mile wide.

And so they start to complain. And in these chapters, we see three kind of cameos, three incidences or stories of the people of God complaining. Verse one to three, there's a short little instance.

We're not told too much about it. Verses four to the end of chapter 11, the people complain about the food that they've been given. They don't like the manna, the bread from heaven. It's so boring. Why can't we go back to Egypt and eat the amazing food we had there? And they're complaining about the food. And Moses hears this, and Moses feels overwhelmed and burdened. And he starts to complain, not about the food, but about the people.

And so the people and Moses complain to God and grumble. And then there's a, then there's a third instance in chapter 12, where Moses's own siblings, Miriam and Aram, his sister and his brother, they complain and protest.

[15:52] And they say, God, what's so special with Moses? You speak to him. Why don't you speak to us? Is there something special about him? Why don't you, why doesn't God also speak to us in the same way?

And there's this grumbling complaining. So these three chapters about how God's people, grumble and complain because things aren't going their way. Now, for most of us, grumbling, complaining, being a bit critical, moaning a bit, doesn't feel like such a serious problem.

Really? I mean, Ian Duguid says this, there are no 12 step programs called grumblers anonymous. Nobody goes to a counselor and say, help me. I'm addicted to grumbling.

Friends, nobody has come to me ever in 15 years and said, pastor, I was alone in my bedroom last night. And one thing led to another. And I ended up grumbling and complaining.

Help me. We kind of think about grumbling and complaining, much like we think about eating too much chocolate, right? It's not super healthy for us. Probably shouldn't do too much. But at the end of the day, Hey, it's not really going to kill us.

[16:58] Right? But actually God says something else. Look at the scripture here throughout the scripture. God tells us that this grumbling, this complaining, what we may call a critical spirit is actually deadly serious.

In all three instances, people end up dying or almost dying because of what it does to us, but also because of what it reveals about us, what's going on in our hearts.

And so look at this passage, look at a couple of things about the picture that God paints for us.

Notice firstly, how contagious it is. Look at verse one and verse four. It says, it kind of starts out with the rabble.

It's such a great word in the Bible, the rabble, the riffraff, those that are on the outskirts of, of the camp. And then it moves in verse 10. It says, now everyone who is standing at his door of his tent, the flap of his tent, it's kind of every household is being infected by it.

And then in chapter 12, Aram and Miriam, who are key leaders, a prophet and prophetess in Israel, they are grumbling, complaining, and then we see even Moses himself, the leader is infected with this.

[18:03] And there's this picture. It's kind of like gangrene or septicemia. It's kind of the poison. And then the toxicity is spreading throughout the camp. And it's, it's deadly virus is spreading, taking over the population.

And I'm sure we've all seen this, right? In any kind of organizational group of people, one person's a bit discontented and things aren't going well. And they talk to a friend and, and they say, yeah, yeah, that's right.

Actually, the new CEO, yeah, she's not that great. And then it kind of spreads and spreads. And before you know it, this culture has taken over and it happens in schools. It happens in

communities, it happens in churches and sports clubs, apartment blocks.

And actually this kind of discontentment spreads throughout until it's the culture of the whole organization. And it doesn't just spread horizontally to others.

It also grows outward, but also grows inward because what we see here is what starts out as a little bit of frustration, a kind of difference of opinions of we should, is that really the right way to do it?

[19 : 03] What starts out like that actually grows until it becomes hard heartedness, bitterness, anger, and resentment. In chapter 11 and 12, there's kind of just this complaining, this, this moaning and groaning.

But by in chapter 13 and 14, it's grown into full on revolt and rebellion and mutiny and things get really horrible. And so it kind of grows in us.

And, and the point is, as I'm sure we've all witnessed, what seems so innocent can take on a life of its own and it starts to spread. Notice also how deceptive it is.

I'm sure we've also all seen this before. You have a conversation with someone and their heart is a bit angry, a bit bitter, and they kind of can't see reality. Everything they look at is filtered through the lens of justifying the narrative.

And so no matter what you say, nothing gets through to them because their worldview is kind of twisted to must conform with their narrative. Right? And so it actually ends up deceiving us.

[20 : 04] And look at how this happens in verse five. Look at what they say here. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost us nothing. And the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic.

But now there's nothing to look at, but this manner. Right? Friends, if you know anything about the Bible, God saved his people from Egypt. What was Egypt like? Egypt was a hell hole.

Remember when they're in Egypt, they crying out to God, God have mercy. God, don't you hear our cries? God, why, why are you abandoning us? In Egypt, they are worked as slaves to death.

In Egypt, Pharaoh seeks to kill their children in the genocide, in the infancy. In Egypt, their complaints are met with increased workload and no mercy.

Egypt is an absolute hell hole of a place from which God has saved them. But now in their minds, Egypt is starting to look pretty good. And they can't see what has come before them.

[21 : 07] Again, Ian Dugood says this, grumbling distorts our vision. It reimagines the past as a golden land. It despises the good gifts that God surrounds us with in the present.

And it completely ignores God's promises for the future. That is so true. And the reason for this is because this kind of discontentment, this grumbling, complaining is so self-centered, so self-focused.

We, it's a bit hard to see it in the English, but in the Hebrew Bible, as scriptures in verses 11 to 15, where Moses is complaining about the people in these five verses, Moses references himself 20 times.

I, I, I, I, I, I, me, me, me, me, me, my burden, my responsibility, my difficulty, my heartache. Life is so hard for me.

And there's this, it's not coincidental because faith turns us outward to God and outward in love and service to others. But grumbling and moaning, complaining and unbelief turns us inward in on ourselves.

[22 : 13] And all we can see is our little world and how our world is not conforming to our expectations. And so Moses here starts to think about himself.

But friends, here's the worst part. That this kind of discontentment, this kind of complaining at its heart is actually accusatory. At its heart, it's charging God with wrongdoing and injustice and incompetence.

It says to the God that created the entire universe, the cosmos, just think of how we had those astronauts recently go around the moon, right? And what a big deal. They went further than anyone else has ever gone before.

But in the grand scheme of the cosmos, I mean, their journey was like this, right? I mean, think of a hundred trillion light years away. This, the God that brought all that into being with simply a word, they shaking their fists at him saying, you are not just, you don't know what you're doing.

If I was in charge of the universe, my life would be so much better than this. And they're shaking their fists at the sovereign God of all creation. Say, God, you suck.

[23 : 20] You don't know what you're doing. Look at verse 20. God says, you have rejected the Lord, your God, who is amongst you saying, why did you bring us out of Egypt?

Friends, see how, how big they've become in their own eyes and how small God has become. And here we see, in a sense, some of the ugliness, the sickness of heart that has taken over, has turned in on itself.

And so they're so self-absorbed, self-focused as they shake their fists at God and say, we don't deserve this. We deserve better. How can you treat us like this? We see something of the ugliness of this.

Now, friends, I do want to be very clear here. What we're talking about and what the book of numbers is going to talk about again and again, again, is not the natural godly response to the brokenness and the suffering of heartache in this world.

The Bible does give us the resources to lament and to grieve and to mourn. When real heartache comes our way, we are both saints.

[24 : 27] Those of us that are Christians are saints in Christ, but we also sufferers and we do live in a broken world. And the reality is that sometimes unbelievable heartache does come our way. And the Bible says that it's appropriate to lament and to mourn and to grieve.

Things like losing a loved one, things like being treated unjustly, suffering a terrible medical condition, experiencing the breakdown of a marriage, the trauma of abuse, the horrors of war. Friends, these are unbelievably difficult and it is right to grieve and lament and to mourn when these things happen. But the difference is this. There's a difference between lamenting on the one hand and complaining.

There's a difference between grieving rightly and groaning wrongly. And the difference is this in how we relate to God. So in lamenting and grieving, we are pushing into God, into the relationship of God.

We are casting ourselves on His grace and say, God, I'm hurting. I don't know how to turn. I need you. And we're throwing ourselves onto the grace of God. In grumbling and complaining, we are shaking our fists at God and pushing God away and saying, you are not treating me fairly.

[25 : 40] You see the difference? One's leaning into God and the other one's pushing Him away and distancing ourselves away from God. And then one, in our agony, our heart is softened. In the other, in arrogance, our heart is hardened.

And that's the difference. And so what we see in numbers is not the honest lamenting of people that are seeking God's grace, but the self-righteous accusations against the sovereign God saying, you don't know what you're doing.

Friends, as we said, the wilderness is an apt picture, analogy for the life of faith, the life of a Christian. Because God calls us as pilgrims and sojourners in this world, as we journey towards a new creation.

But the wilderness is not easy. In the wilderness, you experience many dangers. You experience bandits. You experience droughts. You experience sandstorms. You experience lack of food. And all sorts of things can go wrong, just as in the journey of faith.

And the point is, of the wilderness, is that there are going to be many occasions when you and I are tempted to shake our fists at God and say, God, what are you doing? But the life of faith that Christ calls us to is not like that.

[26 : 48] The life that Christ calls us to is a life of faith in the midst of the difficulty, in the midst of the hardship, persevering in hope and anticipation. The writer of the book of Hebrews says this, We are not those that shrink back and are destroyed.

We are those who live by faith and preserve their souls. Well, as Niels reminded us last week in Corinthians 10, Paul writes and says, We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, nor grumble, as they did and were destroyed.

These things happened to them as an example and were written down for our instruction. But God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability that you may be able to endure it. So friends, the question is this, how do we endure the hardships of the journey of faith? How do we persevere in the wilderness? How do we get through when our expectations and life's reality don't quite match up?

Where do we find the resources to keep our hearts soft that we can be those who pass through the wilderness and into glory? In this passage, God wants us to see the answer is found in Moses.

[28 : 00] The answer is found in Moses. Moses is the leader of God's people. He's the one who is tasked with bringing them out of the hellhole of Egypt into the glories of the promised land.

He's the one who's endowed with God's spirit. But more than that, he is God's chosen vessel. You could say he's God's anointed one. And he is the one that's called by God to bring God's people home.

God is with him. God has chosen him. God has anointed him. If they will just trust him, if they will just listen to him, if they will follow him, he will bring them through the wilderness and into the promised land.

But at the same time, Moses is a bit of a conflicted character, isn't he? Because on one hand, he's God's chosen one. But on the other hand, he's very far from perfect. Just look at the way that he grumbles and complains himself in verse 11 to 15.

When he doubts God, when he says that, when God says he'll give the Israelites food, he says, seriously, God? How are you going to feed 600,000 people? I mean, come on. He doubts God's goodness.

[29 : 04] And Moses says, he's not a perfect person by any means, but there is something special about him, isn't there? Because remember in chapter 12, when Miriam and Aaron are kind of protesting against his leadership, God says, listen, there are lots of prophets, and I speak to prophets and visions and dreams, but Moses is special.

I speak to him face to face, mouth to mouth, that the man speaks to his friend. There's something, but even more than that, there's something unique about Moses, but even more than that, look at how our chapter begins and ends.

Look what Moses does when God's anger is kindled against his people. Look at 11 verse 2. It says, the fire of the Lord burnt amongst them and consumed some of the outlying parts of the camp.

Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. And look at the end, right at the very end, when Miriam has leprosy, it's a form of judgment on her.

What happens? Verse 13, Moses cried to the Lord, said, Oh God, please heal her, please. What's Moses doing? He's interceding. He's praying for the people that have come into God's judgment.

[30 : 14] He's standing in the gap, as it were, between God's judgment, or God's justice, and God's mercy. He's standing in the gap, and he's restraining God's judgment for those who deserve it, and he's pleading for God's mercy to come upon them, for them not to receive what they rightly deserve, and to receive mercy instead of judgment, to receive favor instead of the fires of hell.

Friends, does Moses remind you of anyone? That's right. Not me, right? If you thought this was going to like, you should listen to your pastor, that's not where this is going, right? Of course it reminds us of Jesus, right?

Friends, Moses is God's mediating, burden-bearing, spirit-giving leader like Jesus. A Christ-like leader, who's been given the task to lead his people out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the land that the Old Testament describes, as flowing with milk and honey.

And if the people would simply trust him, and simply listen to him, and simply obey him, when life is hard, and things aren't going their way, rather than hardening their hearts to Moses, and saying, who are you to lead us?

What do you know about this journey of faith? If they would simply keep their hearts soft, and trust him, Moses will lead them through. Through the mountain passes, and the steep ravines, through the long, dark days, and the long, hot days, and the cold, cold nights.

[31 : 35] If they will keep their hearts open to him, and listen to him, and respond to his counsel, and reject the notion, that they know better than him, he will bring them out of the wilderness, and into the promised land.

He will bring them home. And friends, the point is that as Christians, we also are on this journey of faith. And this wilderness journey is dangerous. And there will be dangers, and challenges, and faith testing moments.

But we too have been given, a mediating, burden bearing, spirit giving leader. One who gives us himself, far better than tempestuous Moses.

We've been given the person, of the living, risen, Lord Jesus Christ. And he gives us his spirit, his very presence. Friends, Jesus is not like Moses, who gets flustered, and frustrated, and loses his cool, in a moment.

Jesus is not like Moses, who gets overwhelmed, and needs help, bearing the burden, of leading his people. Friends, Jesus is not like Moses, who doubts the father's goodness, and questions God's ability, or wisdom.

[32 : 42] Jesus is one, who is perfectly acquainted, with the struggles of life. With the struggles, that you and I face. He knows what it's like, to be abandoned. He knows what it's like, to have everyone turn on him.

He knows what it's like, to suffer agony, all alone. Jesus has gone through, the agonies of hell, and come out the other side. And friends, the most fundamental thing, about Christianity, is not a principle, not a philosophy, not a rule of life.

The most fundamental thing, about Christianity, and therefore, the secret to Christianity, and the secret, to coming through, through the wilderness, now at the other side, is a person.

A person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And friends, Jesus Christ himself, the sovereign Lord, who spoke the galaxies, and the stars, and the universe, into space.

The Lord, who is majestic, and merciful. Who is great, and gracious. Who is all powerful, and tender. invites you and I, to walk with him.

[33 : 47] To trust him. To be guided by him. To be protected by him. To be led by him. Through the wilderness, and out the other side.

As John Stott said, we are to be those, who are in Christ. Under Christ. Through Christ. For Christ. With Christ.

Christ. Friends, Christianity, is not a set of principles. Not a rule of life. How to make it in this world. It's about a person.

The person of Jesus. Do you know him? Do you trust him? Is this true of you? The journey of faith, is not an easy one.

And some who start it, don't end it. They fall away, through unbelief. As we're going to hear next week. And scripture tells us, there are a thousand different ways, to do that. We don't have to be experts, in the faith.

[34 : 44] We don't have to understand everything. We don't have to have, a perfect moral track record. We just need to hold on to Jesus. The founder, and the perfecter of our faith. To trust him, and follow him.

To keep our hearts, soft to him. To yield to him. And he will bring us through. When I was growing up, many, many, many, many years ago, I was part of a very wonderful church, in South Africa. And in many ways, it was a very special church. We had a great senior pastor. And when I was about 18 years old, he left, to actually, to move to Singapore. And he's still in Singapore, these years later.

And so the church, had a change of leadership. A new senior pastor came in. And the new senior pastor, was quite corporate, in some ways. And he, brought lots of changes. And one of the changes, that he did, was he kind of dismantled, the leadership team.

Asked most of the elders, to step down, and kind of re-brought in, his own leadership team. Which is quite corporate, but not a good way, to lead a church. And for those leaders, it was quite hurtful.

[35 : 44] They were kind of like, cast aside. These were godly men, and couples. They were kind of told, we don't really need you anymore. And it was quite hurtful. It was disorientating. It was a very challenging time, for the church.

And I remember watching, two couples in particular. One of those couples, knew that Jesus is sovereign. He is God over all things. And knowing that the Lord Jesus, is the one who determines, their steps.

They refused to get angry. They refused to get bitter, and hardened by this. And they stayed in the church, and they determined to pray, for that leader. They decided, we will not get bitter, but we will serve this leader, and do anything we can, to help him.

And so they prayed for him, and they stayed, and they served. And then a few years later, quite out of the blue, they were a business couple. Out of the blue, God called them, they felt God speaking to them, to leave South Africa, and move to Asia.

And to help church plants, and do ministry here. And so for 15 years, they lived in Asia, ministering, pastoring a church, helping a couple of new church plants, get established. And if you ask them now, they will say, that those 15 years, were the best years, of their entire life.

[36 : 52] As they experienced the joy, and the hardship, and the challenge, and the faith, of journeying with God. God led them through this difficulty, into a season, that was wonderful. They let Christ lead them, through the difficulty, of wilderness, and into the glory, of a new hope.

But there was another couple, another couple, that were also leaders, in the church. But they responded, very differently. They got hard. They got angry. They got bitter. They resented the church, and they resented the pastor.

And they left the church, and for the next 20 years, they bounced around, from church, to church, to church. And for the next 20 years, as I watched, these friends of ours, become more bitter, and more frustrated, and more angry.

Their lives, and their faith, their friendship, and their community, their joy, and their purpose, shrank, until they became a shell, of the people, that God had called them to be.

Friends, they wasted, probably the 20 best years, of their life, in angerness, bitterness, grumbling, and complaining. Self pity, and unbelief.

[37 : 55] Friends, we don't need to do that. Hebrews tells us here, take care, brothers and sisters, lest there be in any of you, an unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away, from the living God.

But exhort one another, every day, as long as it's called today, that we may not be hardened, by the deceitfulness of sin. As it is written, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as they did, in the rebellion, in the wilderness.

Friends, in this journey of faith, when life is hard, when misfortune falls us, when doubts arise, and the idols of the heart, tempt us away, friends, let's look to Christ, let's hold on to him.

So, as we come to close, practically, what does that look like? How can we do that? Well, as we come to close, let me give us four very simple things, to do. Imagine tomorrow morning, you go to work, your boss calls you in, and says, you're not going to get a bonus this year.

I know we, you expected it, I know you're hoping for it, we're passing you over, no bonus for you this year. Imagine tomorrow morning, you go to the office, and your boss calls you in, and says, I know we spoke about that promotion, but actually we're giving it to somebody else.

[38 : 59] You're going to be passed over for the fourth year in a row. Well, friends, maybe tomorrow morning, someone in your CG lets you down, or hurts you, or embarrasses you, says something about you on social media, and you feel hurt, or hard, or upset.

How are you going to hold on to Christ, and let him lead you this week? Here are a couple of thoughts. Firstly, be honest. Be honest. You don't need to be a hero, or pretend that you've got it all under control.

It's okay to admit that you're not doing okay, that you're struggling, and you're feeling overwhelmed, but you can't receive grace, if you closed off to admitting that you need grace. And so give yourself permission, to be honest with yourself, honest with God, honest with those around you.

Secondly, be open to community. Friends, as we said earlier, cynicism and grumbling is contagious. It grows, and it spreads. But you know, the opposite of that is also true.

Faith is also contagious. Faith also grows, and spreads. And so as you're going through hardship, and you're finding, I'm finding it hard to trust God, to obey God, to follow him.

[40 : 01] Speak to a friend. Let somebody else's faith, grow your faith, and encourage your faith. When your trust in God is low, when your faith is weak, who is it that God is putting you in your life, to point you to Jesus?

To say, come, let's go through the wilderness together. Friends, who is it that can remind you, that Jesus has not abandoned you? When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and the shadow hides his face, to remind you that he has not abandoned you, just because you can't see him.

Friends, thirdly, be prayerful. Be prayerful. When darkness hides his face, here's how you can pray. Lord Jesus, you are sovereign and in control. Help me to remember, that I don't need to be in control.

Lord Jesus, you are glorious and good. Help me to not question or doubt your goodness in this trial. Lord Jesus, you are gracious and merciful. So help me to trust you in this place, knowing that I don't need to prove myself or earn your love.

And then finally, friends, meet him in his word. Each day, each day, friends, the risen, living, breathing, speaking, Lord Jesus Christ, wants to meet you, in his word.

[41 : 15] Friends, imagine that, as you go through this wilderness, you're about to go on an epic journey. And someone comes to you and says, here is a pill. Take one of these pills, every single day, and you will get through the wilderness.

But neglect it, or forget it, or throw it away, and you will die. Would you take that pill? Of course you would. Friends, in this journey of life, God has given us a resource.

Take it every day, and you will get through the wilderness. Won't always be easy. There'll be challenges. You will get through. But neglect it, reject it, cast it aside, your faith will shrink, and you will die along the way.

And so meet him. Meet him in the pages of scripture. Meet him in community. Meet him in prayer. Meet him on Sundays, as you come and worship with your family. But meet him, and let him lead you through.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we come to you, and we praise you, and we worship you, because you are not a principle, or philosophy. You are not a rule of life.

[42 : 17] You are a living person, seated on the throne of the universe, and in you we find hope. God, I pray for all of us, every single one of us, from those of us on the stage, to those of us that maybe just arrived, or struggled, or rolled in late.

God, we need your faith. Be with us. Help us to hold on to you, and to trust you. In your great name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.