

# No Cross, No Crown

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today's passage is from Matthew chapter 16, starting in verse 21 we read, From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

This is the Word of God. Great. Thank you, Karen. Well, good morning once again. It's great to be back with you and to continue going through Matthew's Gospel.

[ 1 : 45 ] If you were here last week, Alan did such a good job of opening up Matthew chapter 16. And we're going to continue with this for a couple of weeks until September, and then we're going to go into the book of Ephesians.

Why don't you join me in prayer? Let's pray and ask God to speak to us from his Word. So, Father God, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, the one true God, we come before you this morning and we thank you, God, for the songs that we've sung, that you are God and God alone, that you are God over all things.

You rule, you're God most high. You rule and you reign supreme. And yet at the same time, Jesus, you were a man of sorrows, not acquainted with grief and suffering because of the cross.

Lord, as we look at this passage, won't you speak to us? I pray for every one of us in the room. God, you know where we're at. You know the joys and the celebrations. You know the heartaches and the struggles, God.

Some of us this morning are mourning. Some of us are rejoicing. God, we pray that you will meet each one of us and you will call us to follow you this morning. For those of us that are Christians, help us to follow you more closely, more dearly.

[ 2 : 54 ] For those of us, God, that are not Christians, I pray you call us to yourself and show us the wonder of the gospel. We pray this in your wonderful and your powerful name. Amen.

I'm not sure about you, but for me, clarity is one of the greatest gifts that I think God has given. Clarity of expectation solves so many problems, right?

Just think of how many marital conflicts could be avoided if there was clarity of communication, clarity of expectations, right? So, guys, your wife, her birthday is coming up and she's dropping hints about something that she really wants.

And you completely misread all the signs. And you think she's hinting about something else. And you completely miss each other. And on the birthday morning, she opens up the present, very excited.

And suddenly her excitement levels drop. And she says, wow, thank you. I've always wanted another vacuum cleaner or something like that, right?

[ 4 : 04 ] Mixed expectations, lack of clarity can be confusing. Or think about an exam sitting. I once had this at university. I sat down my first year to sit down to my exam.

I opened the exam booklet and I didn't have a clue what the question was asking me to do. I didn't have a clue. No clarity at all. I thought they were going to ask about this. I'd studied this section.

And they asked about that. Or think about maybe at work, right? Your boss gives you an assignment or a project. Maybe a client gives you a project. And there's no clarity about what's actually expected.

You don't know what are they really asking you to do. Lack of clarity, lack of clear communication can be very frustrating. It can actually be life-threatening at times.

Well, in our passage today, Jesus doesn't want us to experience that. He wants us to have crystal clear understanding about who he is and what it means to be his follower.

[ 5 : 03 ] However, Jesus in our passage this morning kind of clears away all the fog and the white noise. And he says, come and listen to me. And he's going to give us two things that will give us clarity on who he is, what the gospel is, and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Okay? So, let's dive straight in. The first thing Jesus is going to tell us is that he is the crucified Christ. The crucified Christ. Look at, I think it's verse 21 with me.

Now, the context here is key. And the context is everything that Alan preached about last week. Remember, last week Jesus goes to his disciples and he says, who do you say that I am?

And Peter says, step back everyone, I've got this one. And he says, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. Peter gives the gold standard answer.

This is like the most amazing thing he has ever said. Peter, as you know, throughout the gospels always says really dumb things. But this is one time he's got it spot on. He's absolutely right.

[ 6 : 11 ] You are the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus says, blessed are you, Peter. This wasn't revealed to you just by natural observation. This is by God's revelation.

Well done. And so, as Alan explained to us last week, what does it mean that Jesus is the Christ? It's not that Mr. and Mrs. Christ had a baby called Jesus Christ. The word Christ is his title, his designation.

It means that he is the long-awaited Messiah King. The one who hundreds of years ago God has spoken to his people, even thousands of years ago, saying there will be a king, a Messiah King, who will liberate you and deliver you from all that is broken and frustrating in the world.

One who will get rid of the enemies of God's people, who will drive out wickedness and evil. There will be a Messiah King who will be seated on the throne, who will restore righteousness and justice.

And your enemies will be vanquished. And infidels will be driven out. And those who pretend to worship God but don't really will be destroyed. I will bring my Messiah King who will reign on the throne.

[ 7 : 21 ] Much of the Old Testament looks forward to this king who will be like David. The true king who will be seated on the throne. In some ways the king that the Old Testament spoke about was meant to bring a measure of heaven on earth.

Take God's people back to Eden. The place of peace and prosperity. And so the disciples now find they found the Messiah.

Here he is. You are the Christ. The long-awaited Messiah King. The son of the living God. And so the question is this. Now that we've got the king, Jesus, when are we going to establish the kingdom?

Let's get on with this kingdom work, right? Let's destroy those horrible Romans. Let's drive out the Pharisees. Let's get the kingdom going. But look at what Jesus does.

He takes all their hope-filled expectations and he turns it on his head. Verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples just what kind of Messiah King he was.

[ 8 : 26 ] That he would go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. This is the first of three times in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus tells his disciples that he's the Messiah, but he's the Messiah that's going to go to Jerusalem and die on a cross, be crucified.

The disciples wanted and expected a conquering king, a vanquishing king, a victorious king, one who will crush their enemies. And Jesus says, I've come to be a crucified king.

Now when Jesus foretells his appointment with Calvary and with the cross, he's not foretelling events like we predict the weather, right? We look at existing patterns and conditions and say, oh, it's a bit cloudy, it's a bit foggy, it's red at night.

I guess it's going to rain later today. Or we pull out our iPhones and we predict the weather. When Jesus talks about his appointment with Calvary, he's talking about his predetermined definitive plan that God, Father, Son, and Spirit had established before the world began.

I don't know if you remember in the book of Isaiah, written 700 years before Jesus was ever born, it talks about the suffering servant and the suffering servant who would be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

[ 9 : 52 ] And it goes on to say, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. Jesus' appointment with Calvary is not just the unfortunate end of a political conspiracy.

It was the definitive plan of God before the world began. Jesus says, I must go to Jerusalem not to gather followers to my side, but to be pierced in my side.

Yes, I will go and wear a crown, says Jesus. But it's a crown of thorns. It's a crown of nails. It's a crown of bits of bone that have been shoved in there to inflict my suffering.

Friends, you know why Jesus is the Messiah King, the crucified King? Jesus came to show his disciples, to show us, that yes, he will vanquish his enemies.

Yes, he will destroy all those that oppose God's rule. But the enemies that Jesus has in mind is not the political enemies. It's not Rome or Caesar. It's not those that are in office.

[ 10 : 54 ] It's not only the Pharisees and the corrupt ones out there. Jesus says that the enemies that we face, the greatest enemies that we face, is not the government or COVID or my parents or the economy that's all over the place.

It's a far more sinister enemy. It's the enemy that resides in my heart. It's the self-centeredness, the selfishness of my own heart. It's the enemy that wants me to be king and sets myself opposed to God and say, I will be on the throne of my life.

You step back and wait there. And so Jesus comes to displace that enemy. The evil and the injustice that's not up there on the streets that's in here.

Jesus says, I have come to destroy that. See, friends, a conquering, vanquishing, raw, raw king that comes on his white horse, going to smash all the enemies, we can sometimes get caught up in the euphoria of that, the hype of that.

Yes, Jesus, you go and get them, right? You sort out those guys. But actually, that kind of king can leave the enemy of my heart still intact.

[ 12 : 06 ] It can leave the idols of my heart still in place. And Jesus says, no, that's the enemy I've come to destroy, the enemy that rules in your heart. Friends, Jesus says that you and I are so sinful, so depraved, that Jesus had to die for us.

He had to drink the poison, the toxicity of our sin that our sin deserves. And yet Jesus says that we are so loved, so unbelievably loved, that even if you were the only person in all the world, he would have gone to the cross for you.

Jesus went to the cross. Yes, our sin demands it. But yes, his love compelled him to get there. As Sally Lloyd-Jones famously says, it wasn't the nails that held him to the cross.

It was his love for us. Jesus, the crucified king. Yes, Jesus is the Christ. But what kind of Christ is he? He is the suffering Christ, the cross-bearing Christ.

Friends, this is who Jesus is. In the previous chapter, Jesus says, I am the Christ, the son of the living God. But what kind of Christ is he?

[ 13 : 14 ] He is the crucified Christ. He is the sin-bearing Christ. He is the love pouring out Christ. This is Christianity. This is the gospel.

And so friends, let me ask you this morning. It's great that you have been coming to church. It's great that you know Jesus is the Christ. Maybe you, 18 months ago, searched on YouTube and you worked out, is God really real?

What proof is there? And you've been convinced. He is the Christ. But do you know he is the crucified Christ? Do you know that he went to the cross for you? Do you know that he loves you so much that he went to the cross for you?

That Jesus took your sin and your shame that we sang about this morning? Friends, you can't truly be Christ-centered without being cross-centered. Now, let me quickly deal with two implications of this.

What does this actually mean for us? Well, it means many things, but one of them is this. For those of us that are parents, if you're a parent here this morning, one of your responsibilities is to raise your kids in the ways of Christ, okay?

[ 14 : 19 ] To know Christ and to love Christ. As a parent, our job is not just to give them a good education or provide food on the table or a roof over the head. That's good.

But as a parent, your job is to help your kids know Christ. But don't just tell them that Jesus is God. Teach your kids about the cross. Teach your kids about the wonder of Jesus and what he did for us.

Teach our kids about the problem of sin. But teach our kids about the wonder of Christ's love that Jesus went to the cross for us. Friends, those of us that are parents, let's help our kids to know the wonder of Jesus the crucified Christ, not just Jesus the Christ.

Here's a second implication. Unfortunately, we are in a season where many people are moving cities and countries. In fact, later today, we're going to say goodbye to a couple of people that are going to be moving from Hong Kong in the next few months.

And over the next couple of months, many others are going to move and relocate for work or various reasons. Friends, when you move to a new city and you look for a church, don't just look for a church that says on their website, we are a Bible-believing church.

[ 15 : 34 ] It's good to be Bible-believing. In fact, if they say they're not Bible-believing, that's a problem. You might want to steer away of that. It's good to believe the Bible. But you can be Bible-believing and teach the Bible in a very moralistic way.

You can say, the Bible says this, therefore do this. Sort yourself out. Be a better Christian. You can teach the Bible and not teach the wonder of God's love. Friends, you can even find a church that says we are Christ-centered.

That's good. It's good to be Christ-centered. But you can teach Jesus the Christ as just a good example to follow and miss the wonder of the cross. Friends, as you move overseas and you look for a new church, find a church that is not just going to teach the Bible, tell you about Jesus, but it's going to preach Christ and Christ crucified.

That Jesus went to the cross for your sin because He loves you. Find a church that's going to drive the gospel deep into your heart and proclaim to you the glory of Christ and Christ crucified.

This is the heart of Christianity. Jesus says, I came not to be served, but to serve and to lay down my life as a ransom for many.

[ 16 : 46 ] Do you remember the words of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 2? He writes about his ministry and says, This is the apostle in 1 Corinthians 2.

This is the message of the Bible. Well, if that was shocking to his disciples, they're in for another surprise.

Because look at what happens in verse 22. Jesus tells his disciples, I'm going to Jerusalem to die on the cross. And Peter, having just 30 seconds before, nailed it with saying, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Peter now reckons that he is the chief prosecuting officer for the theology department. And so he decides it's up to him to sort Jesus out.

Jesus' theology has obviously got a bit wonky. And so he needs to correct Jesus. So he says, Hey, Jesus, come aside. Let me just help you here with your theology. And he says to him, Far be from it, Lord.

[ 18 : 15 ] In other words, over my dead body. Right? Modern paraphrases. Jesus, God loves you, and he's got a plan for your life. And it doesn't involve suffering or death.

Right? Far be from it. Far be it from you, Lord. This will never happen, says Peter. Well, what does Jesus think of Peter's theology?

Look at what Jesus says. He very gently turns to him and he says, Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Now what's going on here? What does Jesus mean when he tells his most loyal disciple, Get behind me, Satan? Well, remember, when Jesus starts out his ministry, before, actually just before he starts out, he goes into wilderness to fast.

The Spirit leads him there. And while he's there, Satan comes and tempts him. And he gives him a number of temptations. And do you remember what the temptations were about? What Satan was tempting Jesus to do was to grab glory without the cross.

[ 19 : 26 ] Remember, he comes and he takes him to a high mountain. He says, Jesus, look at all the kingdoms of the world. I will back off and you can have all these kingdoms. And you don't even need to go to the cross.

You can have all your glory and you can avoid the cross. Just honor me. He takes him up to a high building and he says, why don't you throw yourself down?

Because God has said in his word that angels will fall down and rescue you. You'll perform this great miracle. All the people down there will be stunned by your brilliance. You'll draw a crowd and you can establish your kingdom and you don't even need to go to the cross.

Just do this simple miracle and you will get the following that you want and you can avoid the cross. Satan is tempting Jesus to grab glory and avoid the cross.

And what does Jesus say? He says, Satan, be gone. Now, do you see what Peter's doing here? Now, Peter's got the best of intentions, right? He's doing the exact same thing as what Satan did in the wilderness.

[ 20 : 28 ] He's saying, Jesus, why don't you just grab glory, establish your kingdom, vanquish your enemies and avoid the cross. Jesus, far be it from you that you should suffer and go through difficulty.

You are the Christ. Life should all be rosy now. Life should just be easy and comfortable. And Jesus says, get that thinking away from me. That is from the pit of hell.

Do you know what that means? Friends, when our hearts are set on self-preservation and the glory of our own kingdoms, it may just be that we're acting and thinking more like Satan than Jesus.

Now, here's another implication from this passage. I got this from my friend, Douglas O'Donnell. He's not actually my friend. He writes these brilliant commentaries. I wish he was my friend, but anyway, he says this.

One of the implications of this is this. Don't try and pastor Jesus. Follow him. Peter's pretty sure that Jesus has got his theology all very confused and muddled up.

[ 21 : 39 ] And he decides to help him out. He says, listen, Jesus, listen, just come and take a seat here. I know that, you know, your childhood was difficulty. Herod was trying to kill you and you had to flee. I know there's some stuff, some baggage from there, but just take a seat and let's talk about this.

Jesus, haven't you read Jeremiah 29? For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans to make you prosper. Plans for your good, to not harm you or encounter any difficulty.

Jesus, haven't you read the Old Testament? Friends, sometimes, even as modern 21st century Christians, we can tend to think that we know better than Jesus, both for our own lives, but also for Jesus' own kingdom.

Jesus, surely the church should operate like this. I mean, welcome to the 21st century, right? Friends, let's not pastor Jesus. Let's follow him.

Let's listen to him. Let's obey him. The crucified Christ. Friends, this is Christianity. Whether you're worshipping in a billion dollar cathedral, or you're worshipping under a tree in the sub-Saharan Africa, whether you're worshipping in a house church in outer Mongolia or in a school hall in Hong Kong, whatever your worship looks like, don't get confused.

[ 22 : 53 ] Don't get overwhelmed by all the Christian things. Keep this front and central in your minds. Friends, do you know that this is Jesus?

He's not just a man who lived thousands of years ago and gave good advice. He's not just a wise man. Yes, he is wise. He's not just a miracle worker. Yes, he did miracle work.

He did do great miracles. He is the Son of God who came to die on the cross for you, to save you, to rescue you, because he loves you. Christ, the crucified one.

Secondly, the cruciform life. Look at the second thing Jesus wants us to see here. Not only is the cross central to everything Jesus is and does, it's the pattern for the Christian life as well.

For Jesus, it was cross and then the crown. When I mean crown, I mean glory. Cross then crown. And for the Christian, Jesus says it's exactly the same.

[ 24 : 20 ] In other words, the Christian life is a cruciform life. It takes the form or the shape of the cross. Look at how Jesus says this in verse 24. Then Jesus told his disciples, To us, after 2,000 years of Christianity, that might not sound too wild because we're very familiar with crosses and steeples and around our necks and all sorts of things.

But in the first century, that was radical. That's like Jesus saying, if anyone wants to be my disciple, grab your hangman's noose and come and follow me. Strap yourself to the electric chair and come and be my disciple, says Jesus.

Friends, the cross wasn't a symbol of inconvenience. It was a symbol of death. And after telling his disciples that he's going to go to the cross, Jesus doesn't say, kick back, go to church and just be a good person.

He says, pick up your cross and follow me. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian, he opposed Adolf Hitler in 1945 and he paid for it with his life.

He was assassinated on the 9th of April, 1945, just weeks before the end of World War II. He writes about this passage and he says, when Christ calls a man to follow him, he bids him to come and die, to lay aside his own self-sovereignty, his own autonomy, his own right to be his own king and master.

[ 25 : 52 ] If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Now, what does this mean? What does Jesus mean when he says, take up your cross?

You know, all of us live in a broken world, in a fallen world, and we all endure hardship and difficulty. Maybe COVID, you haven't been able to travel for three years. You haven't been able to see your family. Maybe you've recently lost a job or work's really going tough.

We all live in a broken world. And sometimes people say, we've all got our cross to bear. It's part of life. But that's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about the deliberate, willful decision to lay aside the things that we might feel entitled to if Jesus were not real.

Jesus says, lay aside your comforts and your conveniences, your safety and your security, and follow me. Friends, maybe you're here this morning and you're not a Christian.

Jesus actually says elsewhere in the gospel, before you become a Christian, sit down and count the cost. If you're going to start a business, you're going to work out the cost, can you actually start the business?

[ 27 : 06 ] Jesus says, before you become a Christian, know what it's going to cost you. It's going to cost you everything. Pick up your cross and follow me. And look at his language here.

He says, if anyone, not just the pastors or the CG leaders, not just Amelia, you know, missionaries to Taiwan or North Korea, no, anyone, any follower of Jesus, anyone who would want to follow me, if anyone would come after me, that means make up his mind, make a decision to be my disciple, to be a Christian.

What then? Well, let him deny himself. That means lay aside our own kingdom, our comforts and our convenience, and take up our cross, to so identify with Jesus, that all that he is, shapes our lives, to embrace the suffering and the hardship of being a Christian, and to follow him.

The Greek there is the continual present tense. In Luke's gospel, Jesus says, let him take up his cross daily and follow me, every day to follow me.

Friends, Jesus' call to discipleship is not asking us just to give up chocolate for lentil, social media on Sundays. He says, pick up your cross, die to your own kingdom, and come and follow me.

[ 28 : 29 ] For some of us, that may mean giving up a prestigious career, in order to do something else with our lives. For some of us, it may mean letting down those that have expectations of us, maybe our parents, or those who are a boss, or a mentor, someone who wants us to go in one direction, to follow Jesus.

For some of us, it may mean curtailing a certain lifestyle, that we're used to, because we're all in to follow Jesus. Friends, for all of us, it means saying no to the sinful nature of our bodies and our lives, in order to honor Christ with our bodies and our lives.

Now, to the modern mind, that sounds heretical, because avoiding suffering is our highest priority as moderns. We tend to think that the pursuit of happiness is a constitutional right.

So, why should we listen to Jesus? Well, look at what Jesus says in verse 25. Jesus actually, of the next three verses, gives three reasons. He says, whoever would save his life, will actually lose it.

Jesus said, if you're trying to manage and control your life, you're going to see life slipping through your fingers, like trying to grab sand on the beach. But whoever loses his life, whoever opens up his hands and says, Jesus, have your way, will actually find that you find it.

[ 29 : 55 ] Verse 26, Jesus says, what will it profit a man if you gain the whole world and forfeit your soul? Jesus says, all the treasures of earth, all the pleasures of earth, even if all the stars aligned and you get everything you want, in a hundred years from now, a thousand years from now, a million years from now, how valuable is that corner office going to be to you?

How valuable is that entrance into the club, or that new Maserati going to be to you, when you're separated from Christ and hell for all eternity? Jesus says, for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, 44 billion dollars, if you buy Twitter, and you forfeit your soul?

Friends, Jesus says, you want to follow him? Pick up the cross. Christ, the crucified one, Christ, the cruciform life. Now, as we come to close, why should we trust Jesus?

Jesus makes this radical call to us. Jesus says, I ask you of nothing less than everything. Come and center your life around me. Why should we follow him? Well, there's two very brief reasons.

The first one is very obvious, because just in a few weeks after saying this, Jesus is literally going to pick up his own, cross. Jesus is going to allow himself to be nailed to the cross for you and I.

[ 31 : 19 ] Friends, has anybody else loved you like that? Has anybody else proven their faithfulness to you like Jesus? In the words of that song, you could search for all eternity long, and still you would find no one like Jesus.

Who are you going to bank your life on apart from Jesus? Who else has gone to the cross for you? Jesus has proved his trustworthiness. He's proved his faithfulness to you.

When you were his enemy, he laid down his life for you. Friends, you can trust him with the decisions you've got to make today. You can trust him. But here's the second reason. Because of God's great patience.

In this passage, like in many of the gospel passages, we see Peter really putting his foot in it, right? I mean, Peter, once again, says some pretty dumb things.

And here, Peter's trying to save Jesus' life, as if Jesus really needs saving, right? He says, no, no, far be it, Lord, over my dead body, you'll never, this will never happen to you.

[ 32 : 22 ] Just a few weeks later, Peter's going to try and save his own life, by denying that he's ever known Jesus. Remember, somebody comes to him and says, hey, aren't you Peter, aren't you one of his disciples?

And he says, I have no idea what you're talking about. Never met the man, right? And even a few years later, you think Peter should have finally got it, and Paul rebukes him, because Peter is acting hypocritically to one group of people, he's acting like this, and then some others walk in the room, and he suddenly changes face, and he acts completely differently.

So Peter, this great apostle, really messes up, right? But you know what? He gets some stern words from Jesus, he gets a pretty sharp rebuke, but you know what he doesn't get?

He never, ever gets Jesus' rejection. Jesus is pretty strong with him, but Jesus never says, that's it, I'm done.



Do you know how we know that? At the end of the New Testament, the apostle Peter writes two letters that are included in the Bible, and at the end of his life, he eventually gets it, and he really gets it.

[ 33 : 38 ] And he writes, that Jesus is the one who had to die, but rather than being like Satan, he writes to these Christians, who are really suffering, they're going through a really difficult time, and rather than acting like Satan, and saying, oh you know, God just wants you to have a happy and comfortable life, he wouldn't want you to suffer, he writes to him, this is what he says, he says, for to this suffering you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his footsteps.

When Christ was reviled, he didn't revile in return, when Christ suffered, he didn't threaten in return, but he continued entrusting himself, to him who judges justly.

Jesus himself bore our sins, in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin, and live to righteousness. Friends, Peter eventually gets it, and later on, even later on in his life, he writes this, and he writes of the patience of God, and he says, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises, as some count slowness, but the Lord is patient, not wishing any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

As Peter sits at that desk, writing with that scroll, the Lord is patient, I'd love to know, what his facial expression was like.

As Peter reflected on his own mistakes, and his own stupidity, and his own dumb words, and his own faults, and failings, and foibles, and years later writes, the Lord is patient.

[ 35 : 18 ] I wonder as he reflected, on all the times, that Jesus was patient with him. Friends, you know what this means? If God is patient with Peter, he'll be patient with you.

You've messed up this week. Have you denied Jesus? You haven't wanted to pick up your cross, you've just wanted to live the comfortable life? God will be patient with you, but he's still calling you to follow him.

Friends, let the gracious patience of Jesus encourage you. Let me encourage you to hold on to Jesus this week, to embrace the cross, knowing that as you hold on to Jesus, there too will be a crown waiting for you, on the other side of that cross.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you, that you are the Christ, the glorious one, the one who, died and rose again, the one who is coming back in glory.

You will come, God, riding on a white horse, and you will utterly vanquish your enemies. But Jesus, we are so grateful, that you didn't do that, at your first coming, because that would have included, all of us.

[ 36 : 34 ] God, rather than destroying your enemies, you laid down your life for us. And for that, we praise you. Lord, I pray for each one of us, here at Watermark, or those that have been here for many years, those that are visiting for the first time, won't you help us, to see the wonder, of the cross, the wonder of the gospel, that it was our sin, and our shame, that held you there.

And it was your profound love for us, that held you there. Jesus, I pray that you will help us, God, this week, to live the cross-shaped life, the cruciform life, to center our lives on you, to deny ourselves, of our comfort, and our convenience, and to pick up our cross, and to follow you, knowing that as we do so, we will find life.

Jesus, come and help us, I pray, in your wonderful name, Amen.