

Is Jesus Worth it?

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to see you. My name is Graham. I'm the pastor here of the church. It's been wonderful to meet some new folks this morning. You are so welcome with us. Let me encourage you to grab a Bible. Come with me to Acts 14. And let's pray just as we begin. This is the most important thing we do today. We ask that the God whose word this is would speak to us this morning and change us. So let me pray.

Paul would write this, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead. And so, Father, it's our prayer simply this morning that you would help us to know something more of the glory of your son, Jesus. Whoever we are, whatever we think of him today, oh, gracious God, would you help us see something more of how just brilliant he is. And this is our prayer in Jesus' worthy and in his precious name. Amen.

Amen. Right. A new story you might have missed a few weeks ago. 107 years after it sank, did you see this? A group of scientists in the Antarctic found the Endurance. So the Endurance, the ship that Ernest Shackleton and his men, they took to the Antarctic. And the ship that was, eventually it was crushed by the ice. And there they found it at the bottom of the Weddell Sea in pretty good nick for something that's 107 years old. Here's the interesting thing I found. If you don't know this, the story of the Endurance isn't like the story of the Titanic. Do you know the Titanic, right? 16 lifeboats they had on that thing, which was less than half of the number they needed for the amount of people that were on that boat. Because they thought, well, we don't need that number of lifeboats. It's just taking up weights, taking up space.

What do you mean this thing's going to sink? No one saw that iceberg coming. Flip it around, the Endurance. You signed up to go on the Endurance. This is the kind of thing that was pretty much guaranteed to happen. What do you mean there's ice? Everybody knew there was ice. In fact, the story goes that to recruit people to come and join them, Shackleton placed an advert in the Times that read, men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success. So his approach, if you're going to come with me, let me tell you about the reality. Here's the thing, way before Shackleton did it, Jesus did it. You want to follow me? You need to die to yourself, you need to take up your cross, and you need to follow after me. And here's the paradoxical thing you realize as you come to

Jesus. Death is the way to life. That to follow him, to die to yourself, to find your all in all in him is the place where life and meaning is to be found. In what the Bible describes, Paul read the words at the start there from a man who says, I've found everything because I've found Jesus Christ. Die to live.

[3 : 52] You want to follow me? That is the reality. That's how it's going to go for you. My life's going to end on the cross. That is how your earthly life is going to go as well. That's the shape of it. And following in the footsteps of Jesus, Paul and Barnabas in our passage today are going to play the exact same game.

Now to get what's going on here, let me get my geek on. We need to get back in the map, okay, back in the map and see where we are, where they're going. So having sailed from Paphos, found it in the map, Cyprus there, sailed from Paphos, they've docked at Perga. They've traveled to Pisidian Antioch. Well, this week, verse 1 of chapter 14, they get to the city called Iconium. Then verse 8, they flee to Lystra. And then verse 8, sorry, verse 20, they eventually get to a city called Darby. And yet, despite all the troubles that they experience in these places that we'll come on to see in a minute, despite all these troubles, do you see verse 21, they go on a return tour.

They go back again. They want to see how those who have believed the gospel in these places, how they are doing. Because they know it's going to be hard. And they love these people.

They really, really love these people. In fact, Paul, you read Galatians. This is the region, Galatia. You read Galatians, which is the letter to these people. Paul talks about his concern for them. He says, I'm in the pains of childbirth as I think about you, right? I really care.

I really care. I want to know how you're doing. Because it's been hard in all these places, right? It's not been exactly Prince Ali from Aladdin's street parade as they've waltzed in there with the gospel, has it? Right? People have not been celebrating from the side, cheering, chucking confetti, tell us again, tell us again. It's been the exact opposite as the muse of the risen Jesus hits these places. And these disciples, I imagine, are no doubt asking themselves, because remember, they've stayed behind. They haven't moved on. They've stayed. Those are the words that Chris Martin and Copeland wrote all those years ago. Nobody said it would be easy, but nobody said it would be this hard. So what is Paul and Barnabas' pastoral heart in all this? What do they want to see?

[6 : 26] What do they want for the people they love? Verse 22. What's the purpose? It's to strengthen and encourage the disciples to remain true to the faith. That's what they're doing.

What are they saying? Take it, Luke, summarizing the kind of substance of their message, that we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. Now here's the reality. Sorry, here is with that reality. Here is where I hope and I pray that this connects with us this morning.

If you're here today, and maybe at the back of your mind, you've given up on Jesus. Or you might be here, but you've long ago checked out of Hotel Jesus, because following him is just getting really, really hard. I want you to see in this passage that Jesus is worth it.

Maybe you're here, you don't know Jesus. I want you to see that this Jesus is worth it. And here's what I want you to do as we think corporately about this. And again, I hope this is where this lands. Just have a wee glance to your right and to your left.

And see this whole strengthening and encouraging thing. Love for brothers and sisters in the church. I take it that's to be the aim of the game for us as we move forward as a community.

[7 : 59] Even now that we plant that seed up top, it's where we're going to end. I'm surprised, okay? Who here needs strengthened and encouraged? Who here do you need to put your arm around this morning? God's Spirit laying them on your heart and saying, I want to get alongside because I know that life is really hard right now.

Here's the reality, says Paul and Barnabas. This is what to expect. I think there's four things that Paul and Barnabas in this passage look brings out that they experienced as they traveled around living and speaking for Jesus in these cities. And I take it these four things are the realities for the disciples as they stay behind. And I take it they're going to be the reality for the disciples of Jesus ever since, right? We're going to rattle through these. But here's the question. Is Jesus worth it? Firstly, verse 2 of chapter 14, here's the reality. People will turn it down.

So in Iconium, follow with me because this is really exciting, right? There's a reason that a man called Luke has taken the time to write down this narrative that we 2,000 odd years later would have this in our language, which is pretty cool when you think about it, isn't it? So in Iconium, they go to the synagogue, chapter 14. And despite the signs which confirmed their message, and Luke there so tightly brings those things together, the Jews just didn't want to know. So do you see the language there at verse 2? It's really strong. The people they stirred up, what does Luke say? What did they do? They poisoned their minds. So there's an iron curtain, if you like, in the hearts and the minds of some of the Jews, and not just the Jews, but some of the Gentiles, just non-Jews, who hear this message about Jesus as well. You know, we walk around our community in Libertine, signs up everywhere, no ballgames here, right? You know that kind of thing, no ballgames here. You go to farms where the farmers say, get off my land, the big sign, right?

Just don't come near me. You're not having your antics here. That's the reaction, isn't it? No ballgames here, no gospel spreading here. Let me just say, it's a hugely discouraging thing, is it not, when that happens. When somebody that you care deeply about, your friends, your family, they just don't want to know. Your children, your parents, they've just decided to walk away, not up for it anymore. I know for so many of you, and you've told me this, that one of the most special times for you pre-COVID was meeting with others in this church family who feel that pain for friends, for children, for family who've walked away, and how you got together. You shared how you're feeling about that, and you just prayed. How special that was, some of you told me. I take it we want to be about that as a church. See these little cards about people to pray for? That's the hope of this.

Praying for people that we love. Let's do more of that. Notice the encouragement to keep you going. A great number of the Jews and Greeks believed. So gospel goes out. Again, we've seen it.

Hunger, hostility. You know, most encouraging story I heard this week. It's part of Passion for Life. It's our friends down the road at Cornerstone. They had an evening at the Black Ivy over there. I know some of you love that place, okay, the Black Ivy. And they just called it Think and Drink. So I think it was 25, 30 people just turned up with their friends. Half from the church just brought some friends.

[11:40] And the subtext was, it's just a chance to talk about life, right? So somebody from the church stands up and says, here's the question for tonight. Are we better off today without religion?

Sits down. You know, just that kind of small question to kick off. They're talking for hours, people. Just talking, talking, listening, listening. And after the evening, almost every single person that came said, when are we doing the next one? It's cool, isn't it? Just because we encounter hard soil in our lives. Let's never think that the hunger is not out there.

And so do not be discouraged. But we've got to see the reality that people will turn it down.

Secondly, what's going on? People will stir it up. Because what did the Jews do? Verse 5, they hatched plans to kill, to ill-treat. They plotted. That's the word. They plotted. Now, in the Bible, that is Psalm 2 language. Psalm 2, the Psalmist. Why do the nations rage, right?

Why do the peoples plot in vain? Against whom? Against the Lord and against His anointed. Why do people rebel against Him? His King. You see, that's who people are plotting against.

Now, we might not face plotting as we live our lives for Jesus in this country. But we do so well to remember that for countless brothers and sisters across the globe, this really is a daily reality.

[13:13] that people will stir it up. False accusations will come. It's a reality. Thirdly, people will get it wrong. So verse 8, Paul and Barnabas are smuggled out of Iconium and they travel to this city called Lystra. You following with me? They're in Lystra. Now, the Lystraans are a... I think that's how you say it.

I've just called them that. The Lystraans are a different group of people to the people who live in Iconium. Now, track with me. We're not told. What's not there? A synagogue is not there. No mention of a synagogue. So the locals seem to be a lot more superstitious as they... do they live their lives.

And so Paul goes in and as he's speaking, and in a remarkably similar fashion to Peter as he healed the lame man in Jerusalem back in chapter 3, Paul heals this lame man in Lystra. And this man begins to walk. Again, God confirming the message that Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming. And check out the reaction of the locals in this scene. They don't think this is the work of the Greek gods they worship. Nor do they think that those gods have come to visit them. They think that Paul and Barnabas are those gods. All gets a bit comical, doesn't it? But pause for a second here. Paul and Barnabas, had they so wanted... I was thinking about it this week. Could have so easily just chucked it and become local celebs. And not just local celebs. They could have been local deities. Guests of honor at every party. Never paying for a drink again. Everybody wants to be not just your mate, but everybody wants to worship you. If you're on the ball, it's the kind of thing that Herod's just done.

A few chapters earlier where the locals heard King Herod speak and to kind of... to get on his good side, I take it. What did they say? These are not the words of a man. These are the words of a god. And Herod is just sitting there lapping it up. What does God do? God strikes them down. Because there's only one true God. Are these guys going to do the same? Not a chance.

[15:38] Why are you doing this? That's the question. Verse 15. Why are you doing this? So they're asking people lovingly, I take it. Why are you doing this? Compassion for people. Why are you doing this? Let me just ask you just... Come off the road just a little bit. Let me just think in your life. Let me just ask you the things that you're plowing yourself into just now.

Right? Your job prospects. You're getting on the property. You know, all these things that we plow ourselves into. Let me just ask you just straight from this passage. Why are you doing it?

Because these things we think give us a sense to and purpose for our lives. Why are we doing it? Stop worshiping these worthless things is what Paul and Barnabas say. These things that... These idols that will not hold the weight of our lives. If they go wrong, the whole game is off in our lives.

This God won't do that. Some of you might have seen that interview that Jim Carrey did this week commenting on that Will Smith, Chris Rock thing. And about how... I don't know if you noticed this. He said, as he watched it, he said, I was just a number of... one of a number of people who started asking. This whole Hollywood pretense, this whole glitz and glamour, this whole heart that wants to be seen and known in the right circles. And it might not be Hollywood, but if you bring it down, do

we not all want that? What did he say as we watched it? He said, I just looked at it and realized it was spineless. It was empty. Stop worshiping these worthless things.

Not bad things, so much of what we do, but it's not the ultimate thing. And help them to help them understand in this city. I guess it's really interesting. Where does...

[17 : 43] Where do Paul and Barnabas take them? They take them to creation. They trace it right back. This God made the heavens and the earth. Do you see the phrase there? He has not left himself without testimony. In other words, you can look up and you can... in your logic, you can say, how did this get here? How did the food on my plate get to be here? We didn't pick it up from Tesco. Tesco picked it up and you trace it all the way back. Where do we trace it? We trace it to our creator. That's what they're saying. Oh Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made.

I see the stars. I hear the rolling thunder. Thy power throughout the universe displayed. This is what they're saying. Would you look up and would you see the God who created all things? This God who's kind. The rain, the crops, the seasons. Where did they come from? Do you see how that's a wonderful evangelistic example of meeting people where they are at? What do these people understand?

What do my friends... what lingo do they speak? What are the things that they're chasing in their hearts? How do they operate? What do they love? You ever done that today? What is it? So much of the things that people are chasing, happiness, purpose, identity, justice. And as a Christian, we can come at these things. We can connect saying, I understand you're longing for these things. But ultimately, as a Christian, I don't just believe Jesus has got something to say about these things. I believe that Jesus is the ultimate answer and the ultimate substance to these things. The one that said, I've come that they may have life and life to all the fool. That doesn't sound like an unhappy life to me.

But despite all of that, verse 18, the people were still set on giving glory to the creature and the things that made sense to them rather than stopping and thinking before recognizing and honoring the God who made all things. You see how people... and that's the thing, isn't it? We're all worshipers.

The question is just, what are we worshiping? And Paul and Barnabas come in and say, do you see how you're worshiping in the wrong direction? People will get it wrong. And fourthly, I take it people will take it out. Verse 19. As you have some of the Jews who plotted and didn't get the job done, they come all the way over from Antioch and Iconium, which is some trek if you do the geography on it.

[20 : 27] Verse 19. And they stoned Paul and dragged him outside. And what did they think? They thought he was dead, which describes to us, doesn't it, just how hard a beating they gave him.

And again, this is a reality for brothers and sisters all over the world, all over the world. And people in this room will have stories about people they know who've gone through things like this. And here's what I love, though. What happens? The disciples gather around Paul, which I take it is just their way of saying, we're standing with you. And what does Paul do?

He gets up and he goes back into the city. Oh, people will turn it down. People will stir it up. People will get it wrong. People will take it out. And that's the reality for following this Jesus and living for him and speaking for him. Now, if any of that is clicking with where you're at today, and I pray that God's spirit, as the word goes forth, it does. Here's what I want you to see.

The shape of whose life are we resembling as we experience those things. The one who said to his disciples in Matthew 16, we're going back to the city. We're going back to Jerusalem.

But Jesus, why are we going there? Those guys want to kill you. Do you not know who's there? But I'm going back to the city to lay my life down on the cross.

[22 : 17] Like Jesus. People turned it down, turned him down. Jesus' people stirred it up. Jesus' people got it wrong. Jesus' people most certainly took it out.

It's the things we're going to be thinking about as we move towards Easter. The innocent Jesus treated in the place of the guilty. Why? Because of his heart to win his people for himself.

And so if you're experiencing any of these things that we've mentioned here, even if it's in the smallest way, know that your life is resembling the cross-shaped pattern of your king.

And from four things the disciples will experience, I just want us to see, as we work towards a close, five words that he gives them at the end to keep them going.

Through many hardships, we enter the kingdom of God. And that's what's ahead of us.

[23 : 28] You see, Paul and Barnabas, do you see their pastoral heart in this? We want you to keep going. We love you so much. Our concern we have for you.

That you would keep on going with this, Jesus? I take it this is why, verse 23, they appoint elders. I found this a huge challenge this week, and to the fellow elders, church leaders out there, feel the weight of this.

I take it that's why they appoint leaders in the churches, verse 23, who will keep doing this work long after Paul and Barnabas are gone. It's a challenge, isn't it, to elders?

What is the role, as it's described here? That we will give ourselves to serving Jesus' people. That we will be those who strengthen and encourage those who are struggling to keep on going in the faith.

That's the job. And I take it that part of the job as well is to equip others to join us in this task.

[24 : 34] We should be doing this to one another. And look around again at the start. Look to your right. Look to your left. Who needs us to gather around them today?

Who needs us to stand and say, we're with you today. We know it's difficult. We know what you're going through. We're with you. Who needs to be strengthened? Who needs to be encouraged? Who needs to be loved? Who needs to be cherished? Notice what happens when Paul and Barnabas, when they complete their work and they get back to Antioch.

Notice they're sending church, verse 27 and 28. It's the flip side of this. They gather the church. They report what God's done. But what happens at verse 28?

And they stayed there a long time with the disciples. Now, can I make an educated guess as to what they were doing, what happened in that long time? I take it the same strengthening and encouraging work that Paul and Barnabas had been pouring out to others.

[25 : 39] They go back to their church and the church did it for them. Don't have time on this today, right? But all sorts of links there about how we treat and love our missionaries.

Don't have time to do that. You can talk about it in your home group. But it's thinking about how we can strengthen and encourage those who we send out. But who needs it in their life just now? Strengthening and encouraging.

I've got to wrap it up. Just as we close, let me tell you about someone who I remember when I first came to Bruntsfield 10 or so years ago.

Some of you remember this. One of my first Sundays here, and I'll try and keep this as generic as possible given that this is online and you shouldn't understand it, okay? Three Asian girls who were in Edinburgh for a short period of time right here got baptized.

Some of you will remember that, right? It was one of the most joyous Sundays I can remember. Standing up and saying, we want to follow Jesus. I remember speaking to John who was the pastor before me who I worked with.

[26 : 44] He's a good friend. Asking him, tell me how it happened. Tell me what happened. Right? And he starts telling me about how they just, they got interested in Christianity, interested in Jesus and they just started reading the Bible together with John.

And slowly as they started to meet Jesus as they met him in the Gospels, they started to click what it was going to mean for them to follow him, right? In terms of their relationship with their family, in terms of their job prospects, what it was going to mean to go back and to live for Jesus.

And so they read more and more about him and the conversation kept circling back to this one question. Can you guess what it is? Is Jesus worth it? Is he worth it?

It's another question you're sitting here asking this morning as you think about what tomorrow's going to hold. Right? You're at school thinking if you're going to go to the SU group tomorrow or not at your school. Is Jesus worth it?

Go into your work. Your colleague's going to ask you what you did yesterday. Is Jesus worth it? You go to school, whatever it is that you do, you go to uni.

[27 : 54] Pals ask you to experiment with things that they're into at the minute. Saying no, is Jesus worth it? That relationship that you're in that's just not helpful. Breaking it off, is Jesus worth it?

We could go on for ages, is Jesus worth it? Let me just say a side note to the parents this morning we've done this thing. The one thing we want for our kids more than anything else is that they'd look at us, all our faults, all our failings, and they would conclude that we lived a life in front of them that said Jesus was worth it.

It's what we want, is it not? Is Jesus worth it? Anyway, John gets an email from one of the girls a few years later. Just says, my husband and I are going to Bible college, going to be missionaries. End email. Is Jesus worth it? Is it worth the many hardships to enter the kingdom of God? Let her testimony.

She's on the other side of the world now, living her life for the glory of Jesus. Didn't know him when she came to this city. Is Jesus worth it? Absolutely, he's worth it.

[29 : 00] If you want to explore that this morning, if you want to get in touch and read the Bible, it would be my delight to do that with you. Is Jesus worth it? Is the kingdom of God worth the many hardships? Absolutely, it is.

So here's what I want us to do. I just want us to pray, be really quiet. And I want you just to bring before the Lord the hardships that are going on in your life just now. Bring them to him and I will close in prayer.

to her. It's a very nice deal. I want you to stop moving to Pisces.

It's a very nice day. I want you to keep ■■■'en in cash with you. All right? So move into your life in the protection? I want you to hold in love. I want you to hold yourself here. And so, Heavenly Father, I pray, particularly for those who here are struggling, that following Jesus is just really, really hard. Maybe even questioning, is he worth following? Father, I pray that you would help us to know how to respond to strengthening and courage.

[30 : 26] Lord, I pray that you would put it in our hearts by your Holy Spirit, that line of Paul that we thought about right at the start, that to know him and the power of his resurrection, sharing and participating in his sufferings, that is where life is to be found.

Father, we just thank you for your love for us. Oh, Lord, help us to have our eyes fixed on who Jesus is this morning.

And it's in his worthy name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, we're just going to, before we move into a short time of communion, we're just going to sing one song.

We're starting to sing this song that talks about what it is to follow Jesus, to love his people, and the fact that the shape of our lives, it is the cross before the crown.

So why don't we stand and sing this, just reflect on the words, and then we'll come back and we'll remember the Lord together by taking communion. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[31 : 35] Amen. Amen. Amen.