

SESSION 6: THE WAY OF THE CROSS

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

Jules Mazarin was the first minister of the seventeenth century French king, Louis XIV. In serving the king, he also amassed a huge personal fortune. He lived in a great palace on the banks of the River Seine , across from the Louvre, where the king lived. Mazarin filled his palace with every imaginable luxury and the most beautiful artworks money could buy. (BTW, Mazarin, as well a politician, had also trained to be a priest!)

On his death bed, surrounded by all his wealth and possessions, he is reputed to have said, “Aah, that I must leave all this.”

What is our ‘all this’? Where might we be guilty of storing up treasure on earth? In contrast, what heavenly treasures are we storing up for ourselves?

We have already said that following Christ is something we can only do together. How can we encourage one another to live in heavenly hope?



READ

Every generation sees the world through a particular lens. It is important to remember that

when we come to read the Bible, our minds have already been programmed to understand it in a particular way. This *can* be of great benefit. For example, in our age we tend to focus on the teachings which emphasise God's love for us. This is because every day we are reminded of the importance of our own happiness and well-being. Hence, it is quite natural for us to concentrate on the everlasting, unbreakable power of God's love and everything He has done for us because of it. This is a very important teaching and one that our society desperately needs to hear.

HOWEVER, if we are going to multiply healthy disciples, we need to hear the *full* counsel of God and sometimes our view of the world gets in the way of this.

Peter's letter is a good example of this. We tend to emphasise the comforting aspects of the letter, such as 'love covers a multitude of sins' or 'Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.' These are great teachings and of course should guide us in our relationships with Him and one another.

HOWEVER, if we only concentrate on these, we will miss the deeper message of Peter's teaching, which is far *less* comfortable.

READ

As well as emphasising our heavenly citizenship, Peter also reminds his readers that because our home is in heaven with the Lord, this makes us 'strangers and aliens' in this world. Therefore, we should look, speak and act differently from those around us. Other people may not like this, perhaps it will make them reflect on their own lifestyle, so we need to remember that others may be looking for any opportunity to criticise, accuse or condemn us. Consequently, Peter tells us that we should live lives that are blameless before God **and** other people.

Peter's first letter was written to help his readers respond to these challenges in their daily lives.

Discussion: Where are we (as individuals, communities and a church) most open to criticism from non-believers? How do we ensure that we are living 'blamelessly' in the eyes of the world. How should we respond when following the Lord makes us less acceptable to others?



READ

There are many helpful ways of studying the lifestyle that Peter is advocating, but one is to concentrate on five 'S's:

Salvation and sanctification, which lead to *submission, service and sacrifice* (which lead back to salvation and sanctification!)

Again, these five 'S's may all prove to be very challenging but this is the way Christ commands us to follow. This is how we become 'healthy disciples'.

READ

In Session Four, we looked at how Peter's own experiences may have informed his teaching,

Read together Matthew 16: 24 -28

It is hard for us to understand just how challenging or even offensive this would sound to Jesus' contemporaries.

A cross only meant cursing and death: a terrible end. Yet the Lord tells His disciples to pick theirs up and follow Him. This could only mean one thing.

From the time of a person's decision to follow the

Lord, their ambition should be to lose their life, to 'deny' ('refuse', 'reject') their own interests and desires and follow Him.

Crosses are heavy, painful and burdensome and always have the same meaning. HOWEVER, they do not fall out of the sky. Each of us has to 'pick up' their own particular cross and carry it. The same word for 'pick up' is used in John's Gospel, when John the Baptist describes Jesus as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away (picks up) the sin of the world'. Christian suffering is always chosen, never accidental.

Nevertheless, not only did Peter hear the Lord's words, he also saw the immense sacrifice He undertook to put His words into practice.

Discussion: There seems to be an endless reserve of suffering on the world. Terrible things happen every day to innocent people. What is the difference between this and what the Lord is teaching us here? What examples from other Christians (past or present) inspire you to pick your cross and follow the lord?



On occasion, the Lord requires us to make huge, life changing decisions in order to follow Him to the cross, at others our 'denying' can come in the smallest details of everyday life.

Discussion: Do you have any experiences of picking up your 'cross' which might be appropriate to share with one another.

Now take a minute to think further about these things. Be open to the Lord challenging you about your attitudes and way of thinking.

Discuss with one another how these challenges affect you. Are there any particular crosses the Lord is waiting for you to pick up now?

HOWEVER, before we decide to pick up a new cross, we should always seek advice from the people we trust.

Finally, in the light of the Lord's command to follow the way of the cross, how does our understanding of 1 Peter change?

For the next session

Read Peter's letter again. What examples are there of Peter encouraging his readers to 'deny themselves and pick their cross'?