

## Week 6

### What does true faith look like?

If the evidence for the resurrection is really so compelling, why does it make no difference to the lives of so many?

Many have never considered the evidence. In 1930, Frank Morrison wrote a book called *Who Moved the Stone?* It was a different title than the one he had planned when he first set out on the project. His intended title had been *Jesus – the Last Phase*. That title implied a Christianity on the way out. If Christianity stood or fell on the resurrection, well, who in the twentieth century could believe a thing like that? Morrison began his book with the intention of demonstrating the resurrection to be a myth. Instead, he became convinced that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. In more recent times, a Chicago journalist, Lee Strobel, set out on a similar endeavor. In 1998 his book *The Case for Christ* was published, in which he outlined how as a skeptical journalist, he became convinced of Christianity after considering the evidence.

With these examples, we might think that if more people set out on serious quests to consider the evidence for themselves, then it might be that more people would become Christians. However, Luke records one man who met Jesus and did not follow him. The reason for his rejection was not because of lack of evidence.

And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.<sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.’”<sup>21</sup> And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.”<sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”<sup>23</sup> But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.<sup>1</sup>

As a ruler, this man was to some degree an important and significant person in his community. In Matthew’s gospel we’re given the additional detail that he was ‘young’. He asks Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” As the man wants to *‘do’*, Jesus reminds him of some commands – do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal etc. A theme in the New Testament is that knowing God’s commands teaches you that you need forgiveness. A knowledge of what God commands men and women is not intended to give positive affirmation and a sense that all is well. Rather, it is meant to do the very opposite. Knowing God’s commands exposes our failure to obey them and teaches us how all is not well and how we need forgiveness. The apostle Paul puts it like this:

**Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ.<sup>2</sup>**

God’s Law teaches us something. It teaches that we are sinful and therefore in need of Jesus Christ. But this rich young ruler does not get it. He thinks, “All these I have kept from my youth.” Jesus says to him, “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come,

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 18:18-23

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3:24 NASB

follow me.” Jesus gets to the heart of true faith. Having true faith is the acknowledgement that you can do nothing to help yourself, knowing that you must be helplessly dependent on Jesus alone. The heart of real faith is expressed in saying, “Yes, I’m a sinner. Therefore, my only hope is in Jesus. He offers me his life. My life is sinful. His life is spotlessly clean. If my hope is in him and not in me, God will think of that spotlessly clean life as if it were mine. My only hope is in Jesus because I know my life deserves God’s just punishment. My only hope is Jesus because at the cross, he took God’s anger for sin upon himself.”

Do you see the point? Jesus exposes the rich young ruler. True faith is being completely dependent on Jesus and not on what you can do, or have, or can offer. Therefore Jesus challenges him to demonstrate his true faith by giving away everything. The man is unable to say, “I trust Jesus alone.” His lack of faith is evidenced in his response to Jesus –

**But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.**

### **Counting the cost of following Jesus**

However, perhaps there’s something else here too. Many people realise that Jesus calls us to leave particular things behind. We’ve used the word *repentance* a lot. Repentance is that turn, or change of direction. We were going in one direction and Jesus calls us to turn and go an altogether different way. He calls us to repent of our sin and follow him.

Alice Cooper was the rebellious man of rock music. A number of years ago, he claimed Christian conversion. He said these words in an interview with *The Sunday Times Magazine*.

**It's the most rebellious thing I've ever done! Drinking beer is easy. Trashing your hotel room is easy. But being a Christian – that is a tough call! That's real rebellion.<sup>3</sup>**

His point is simple. Sin is easy, but Christ calls us to repentance and that's hard.

Some have described Christian conversion in a way that seems anything but a joyful experience. C.S.Lewis, the mid twentieth century Oxbridge academic, has been quoted a few times over the weeks. He wrote this:

**You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?<sup>4</sup>**

Another name that's been mentioned a few times is that of another academic, Rosaria Butterfield. Her description of Christian conversion, like that of C.S.Lewis, does not conjure up images of skipping in the aisles.

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<sup>3</sup> As quoted by Mike Mellor, *The Pursuit: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism*, Bryntirion Press, 2017, p23

<sup>4</sup> C.S.Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*

**When I became a Christian, I had to change everything – my life, my friends, my writing, my teaching, my advising, my clothes, my speech, my thoughts. I wanted to go back to bed and draw the covers over my head. Conversion put me in a complicated and comprehensive chaos. Conversion overhauled my soul and personality. It was arduous and intense.<sup>5</sup>**

She highlights how every aspect of her life had been rebelling against the authority of God in some way. She describes an overwhelming awareness of how many things she would have to change to follow Jesus.

Don't misunderstand this. The message is that Jesus saves us. We're not saved by our efforts to change. But, Jesus does call us to follow him, and following him means we're to leave our old life of sin and sinful habits behind.

Jesus said:

**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.<sup>6</sup>**

You may find yourself wanting things that are sinful. Jesus calls you to self-denial. There might be parts of your life that you discover to be sinful as you follow Jesus and read the Bible. Rosaria Butterfield wrote:

**I prayed for the strength of character to repent for a sin that at that time didn't feel like sin at all – it felt like life, plain and simple...The Bible told me to repent, but I didn't feel like repenting.<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*, Crown and Covenant Publications 2014

<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:23

<sup>7</sup> Butterfield p??

There were aspects of her life that didn't feel like sin, but, in the word of C.S.Lewis, 'God was God' and therefore things had to change. The Bible calls Christians to a lifetime of repentance. We're never going to attain any kind of moral perfection in this life, but whenever and wherever we see in our attitudes or actions sin, we're to turn away from it.

The call of Jesus is self-denial – and cross carrying. The Roman cross of Jesus' crucifixion was a symbol of pain and suffering. You might think that Jesus would not have had a great career in advertising. He says, "Come follow me. It's going to be really tough. It will be pain and suffering." He even said that following him would cause division in families:

**Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. <sup>52</sup> For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup> They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.<sup>8</sup>**

All of this should not be misunderstood. The point being made is that many people do not follow Jesus because they prefer life without God. They understand that Jesus calls for repentance – something they're unwilling to do. He tells us that following him will often cost and therefore, despite the compelling evidence of the resurrection, many people opt out.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 12:51-53

To avoid misconception and for the sake of balance, it should be emphasized that Jesus held out many promises for those who followed him. In John's gospel he said:

**I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.<sup>9</sup>**

Jesus calls us to repent of sin, but the life of following him is *real abundant joyful* life. It is significant that although C.S.Lewis described himself as 'the most reluctant convert in all England', the book in which those words appeared was called *Surprised by Joy*. As a Christian he knew the real joy of the Christian life. Real joy and meaning is found in worship, obedience and submission to God.

Jesus also encouraged his disciples to look forward. In John's gospel again, he said:

**In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?<sup>[a]</sup><sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.<sup>10</sup>**

Jesus told them to look forward to the special place that he was going to get ready for them. The apostle Peter was looking forward to it as he described his future inheritance that is 'imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John 10:10

<sup>10</sup> John 14:2-3

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 1:4

Jesus also promised his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel:

**Behold, I am with you always<sup>12</sup>**

The greatest promise those who follow Jesus have is that he is always with them. He is a friend who promises to be with us and the friend who can never let us down. He is with us in all situations and circumstances. At times, it might feel like that's not the case. But he's always there. Rosaria Butterfield, who described the weight of repentance in her life could write:

**Jesus can equip anyone, no matter how lost or broken – for godly living. I'm living proof of that.<sup>13</sup>**

He is with us in all that we need to change.

So this is the Christian life – self-denial, cross carrying and repentance. But it's also real life and purpose, an indescribable future and a promise that through battles with sin and the harshness of life, Jesus is with us.

What's your response to all of this? One more paragraph from Luke's gospel:

**Now as they went on their way, Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.<sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup> but**

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>13</sup> Butterfield p107

**one thing is necessary.<sup>14</sup> Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”<sup>14</sup>**

Jesus is welcomed into the house of two sisters. Martha appears busy and anxious to serve. You can picture the scene. Her frustration grows as her sister Mary does nothing to help but instead, sits listening to Jesus. Martha takes her frustration to Jesus. Jesus replies, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary.” Jesus is telling Martha that there’s only one thing that really matters in life. The only thing that really matters is *hearing* and *responding* by *following* the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is seeking. He is seeking those who have wandered away in rebellion. He’s come to save and rescue sinful rebels. He gives them all they need. The evidence of the truth of his message is seen in the resurrection. Now, the only thing that really matters is his voice. Life is full of stuff. Jesus says only one thing really matters – hearing and responding to him.

Have you done that?

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 10:38-41