

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## HOW ARE YOUR RESOLUTIONS?

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06 APRIL 2021

How are your New Year's resolutions going? You may think it's strange to be saying this in April, but actually, it's the most important time to ask the question. The joke is that New Year's resolutions are thought about at New Year, because that's where most people leave them...and don't touch them again for another full year.

It's funny. We're prone to return to our default settings aren't we? Like sitting on worn in sofa, we'll slide right in to the part that's been sat in the most. Like changing the big gears on your bike down to second after it's sat in third gear for years, you move from slick to rusty and unused, and then decide to click the gears back again because it's just too much trouble adjusting to the new gear. If you play games like me, you might try a few new ones, but after a while you return to the old favourites. And even within the old favourites, it's likely to be on the same settings you've always played (Skyrim, stealth archer build). We are creatures of habit, who tend to return to the most well-worn paths and those that are easiest for us to walk. Our paths may seem maverick and creative to people around us who are different, but to ourselves, they are often the easiest way to live. Someone might be a go-getter and a trailblazer, but the chances are, they've always been a go-getter and a trailblazer.

More than that, we are shaped by the culture around us – our family, friends and work. This helps ingrain certain basic settings in us about the way that life should function. The places we inhabit give us a living picture of what life is like and the kind of things we aspire to. The kind of things we should or shouldn't like. The type of things we should have accomplished by a certain age. When we add these things up, they total the kind of person that we think we should be. What do you think has made you the person you are today?

These thoughts came into my mind the other night when I thought about my ambitions. Many of them were quite neutral and normal: get as much leisure time as possible, get married, buy a house, start down a better paying career path etc. etc. These things aren't wrong, but something felt off. I think that like the culture surrounding me, these ambitions were all about, well... me. What could I get for myself, make of myself, market about myself? More significantly, what if I reached the end of my life and those were the things to show for it? At the end, would I still think all those things were meaningful, or would I find myself missing out on something more and something better?

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**“..if we're following Jesus, we can be sure we're heading in the right direction and for the right destination...”**

What does Jesus have to say about life as Christian? A lot, obviously, but Mark 8:34-37 addresses the way that we think about our lives on earth. I'll read it here in full because of how important it is:

***“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life[b] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”***

It's countercultural, but it's also piercingly logical. Jesus had just rebuked Peter, one of the key disciples, because he refused to accept that it was Jesus plan to die and be brought back to life again. It was all too much too him. Peter was understandably concerned about Jesus' life – people weren't any more accustomed to the dead coming back to life than they are today! In response Jesus says the above passage to the crowd and entirely redirects their priorities.

Verse 34 is the main idea, and the next few verses explain it in more detail. “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” It is describing the picture that a Jesus follower, or disciple, or Christian, should be modelled after. It should fit this pattern. The opposite of this passage would say something like: “whoever wants to be my

disciple should live for themselves, avoid suffering and difficulty, and follow whatever their hearts desire".

To be honest, it would look a lot like the default stance of our culture, and often ourselves as well. Naturally, we ping back like elastic to our original shape. What does this passage mean for us? We can't literally take up a cross and we're probably not literally going to die for being a Christian. So how is it relevant? Generally, it means we should follow Jesus even when it means leaving our preferences behind and facing all sorts of difficulties along the way.

But what could possibly be worth all the effort? In other words, what could possibly be so valuable that we turn our whole lives upside down for it?

Our own souls is the answer. Only with Jesus do we have a life, soul and vitality which endures beyond death – the meaning of the word 'life' in this passage encompasses all these things. We leave all else behind. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? The answer is nothing. Ironically, the best self-preservation strategy, the best long term investment, the best look-out-for-number-one attitude is actually to deny ourselves and follow Jesus. With him, he gives us fullness of life here on earth and beyond, and all the more as we entrust ourselves to him. With him, we have life beyond death with him in eternity.

When I reflect on these things, it reminds me of what is truly valuable in the eyes of God, beyond what I think, and beyond what contemporary culture thinks. Rather than drinking in the standards we see all around us, it's good to return to Christ for a reality check. The beauty of this Christian 'scheme' of 'self-preservation' is that it's for everyone. Jesus' words are not secret and hidden away for a select few, they are open for all people who put their trust in him, whoever they are, whatever their position in society, whatever their past may contain.

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**"..only with Jesus do we have a life, soul and vitality.."**

We will suffer and face opposition as Christians. Life is not guaranteed to be materially successful as Christians here on earth. We may steer far away from the standards that our cultures and families hold up as important, and may not

achieve our earthly goals. But, if we're following Jesus, we can be sure we're heading in the right direction and for the right destination. This Beacon just offers a small snippet of what it means to follow Jesus, I encourage you to find out the rest in experience, prayer, reading and with others who are following Jesus too.



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## JONNY KNIGHT



*Coach House Church*

leadership@coachhousechurch.org //

0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn