

The Path of Suffering and Glory

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you know that our ears are often too easily clogged, clogged with other things, that our hearts are often distracted, our minds are often elsewhere.

So Father, help us today to really listen to you, to listen to your Son. Help us to listen to your Word. And may you take what is in your Word and may you change our hearts, challenge us and help us to live for you as you wish us to.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now last week I mentioned that my family went on a trip to Ipoh. And one of the things I had to ask myself while planning this trip was this.

Is it worth taking Malaysia Airlines instead of Air Asia? So I made some calculations. It would cost more or less an extra RM100 overall. The timing of the mass flights work better for us.

And since we have a train to catch, it would be good not to worry so much about flights being randomly rescheduled. And of course we don't have to worry so much about whether we'll have enough baggage space or having uncomfortable seats.

[1 : 16] So that's what we went with. And yes, the extra RM100 was well worth it. We got all that plus surprisingly good in-flight entertainment and food.

You see, whenever we try to answer that question, is something worth it? We often make calculations. We ask questions like, does the benefit match the cost?

Will this item last the distance? Is this better than all the alternatives? After all, if I had to pay an extra RM1000 for the mass flight instead of RM100, and I had to wake up at 4am because the flight would be early, then I might very well have come to a different decision.

Now, what about if we ask, is following Jesus worth it? And let's just say, at first glance, from today's passage, it sure seems as if Jesus makes it hard for us to say, yes.

I mean, there's a lot of seemingly negative verbs used, isn't there? Words like, deny, and lose, and suffer, and rejected, and even die.

[2 : 38] But Jesus says, hang on, let's do some calculations again. Let's ask, does the benefit of following Jesus match the cost? Is following him something that will last the distance?

Is this better than all the alternatives? And in fact, before all that, I think we have to ask another question first. Why does following Jesus take the shape it does in the first place?

Why does following Jesus have all those seemingly negative verbs? So again, if you've closed your Bibles, let's open them up again to Luke chapter 9, and let's explore this.

And to begin answering this question, the first thing Jesus wants us to understand is the nature of the person we follow. The person we follow.

In verse 18, we find Jesus praying. And the last two times that has happened, he ended up getting baptized and calling the 12 apostles.

[3 : 46] So, this is like a clue, a significant turning point is coming up. So, Jesus prays, then he takes a poll. Who do the crowds say I am?

He asks. Interesting, isn't it? So far, we haven't heard Jesus being so direct, but clearly he thinks it's time to pose the question openly.

And so, we discover the current state of public opinion. Some people think he's John the Baptist. Others think he's Elijah. Still, others, a resurrected prophet.

So, what's obvious is that whoever people think Jesus is, everyone realizes that Jesus is no ordinary guy. Everyone understands that if you take a good, hard look at Jesus, you're encountering someone significant.

someone powerful, even if you can't figure out who he is exactly. Now, that's what it still is like today, isn't it?

[4 : 57] True, there would be quite a number of people who have never really thought much about Jesus, apart from as a swear word. But actually, I think, even in our context today, if people do take time to investigate Jesus, they generally have a good impression of him.

Think about it. Just like back then, the majority of people living in Malaysia today see and respect Jesus as a prophet.

They believe he performed miracles. They will say, peace be upon him. According to another religious book, it is even said that Jesus spoke as an infant from the cradle, and declared himself to be a prophet from God.

In other words, this book has a positive portrayal of Jesus. And even today, those who are not religious still tend to cite some of his words favorably, even if they might not always properly understand their meaning.

So, they quote his sayings, such as, do not judge. What you wish others to do to you, do also to them. The greatest among you will be your servant.

[6 : 19] And so, they treat him as prophetic, in a sense. They like his words. So, throughout history, people have taught well of Jesus.

But Jesus isn't really interested in public opinion. Instead, he wants to get personal. And so, verse 20, he asks, but what about you?

Who do you say I am? You see, in the end, Jesus doesn't want to know what you think others think. He wants to know what you think about him.

Recently, I've just read the autobiography of a young French Christian philosopher, Guillaume Bignon. Apologies if I mispronounce his name.

Now, Bignon was someone accomplished, someone the world admired. He's a top volleyball player, he's a good student, and someone with plenty of casual, sexual relationships to boast about.

[7 : 22] But, he became interested in a girl, and, to his dismay, discovered she was a Christian. So, he hoped to talk her out of what he regarded as a stupid religion.

But, this is what he said on the screen. As I read the Bible for the first time, I was surprised by what I found. I had expected to read a series of boring platitudes, like those I had heard on Sundays in church as a child.

But, I discovered, to the contrary, that Jesus was a unique and fascinating character. I was especially intrigued by the masterful way he navigated conversations, despite the hostility of others. He was constantly in conflict with the religious leaders, and he criticised them much more pointedly than he did the sinners. But, when those leaders tried to ensnare him publicly, his answers always left them speechless.

I didn't know what to do with this Jesus. It was full of wisdom and quick comebacks, and he proclaimed his supreme authority while being humble enough to wash his disciples' dirty feet.

[8 : 36] No matter what I might think about him, he spoke with authority and seemed to know what he was doing. His incisive manner made me uncomfortable, and I realised, sooner or later, I'll have to decide who Jesus really was.

So, over to you. What about you? Now, I'm sure there are a number listening today, whether in person or online, who have been exploring Jesus for a number of months now.

That's what I gather from hearing about Christianity Explored and also some of the Connect Cards that we've received online. And perhaps you've never caught yourself a Christian. You're pretty clear about that.

Or you're someone who has caught yourself a Christian before, or you've at least been to church at some point in your life, but you've wandered away, and for one reason or another, you're now thinking about reconnecting with the Christian faith.

And maybe you've been listening to Luke for the past month or two, and like Big Neon, you're finding Jesus fascinating. But Jesus says, there is a time when you have to stop simply finding me interesting, and make a decision.

[9 : 54] Who am I to you really? A wise guy? A prophet? A therapist? Or someone more than that?

Because as Big Neon will say later, he realised that the answer he gave to that question would change his entire life. What he lived for, what he thought was important, would all have to change. And if we are still not sure, Peter now gets direct. Verse 20, he says, you are God's Messiah. You are the Christ of God.

Christ and Messiah mean the same thing. For the first time in Luke's Gospel, a human being confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. Now, what does Messiah or Christ mean? It means anointed one. In the Old Testament, the priests, the prophet, and especially the king were anointed with oil as they were being set apart for the office.

[11 : 02] And eventually, the title Messiah came to be associated with a particular person whom the Jews expected would fulfill God's covenant and establish an everlasting kingdom.

So when Peter says, you are the Christ of God, he's really saying, you are the priest who sacrifices, you are the prophet who proclaims, and above all, you are the king who will reign forever and ever. And if that's who Jesus really is, well, that's a pretty good deal, isn't it? He's a king. In fact, the king. For as Peter says, you are not just one of many messiahs, you're not just one of many religious figures, you are the Lord's Messiah.

You are the Christ of God. You are the one and only, in other words. You're not just an add-on, you stand on your own.

[12 : 12] Compared to every other person in history, you are your own category. And so the person we follow is unique, one of a kind, exceptional.

So surely being on his team must mean that you are on an upward trajectory. Which is why the next couple of verses come as a shock.

All of a sudden, verse 21, we get a twist. Jesus places a gag order on his disciples. Don't tell anyone, he says.

Now isn't that weird? Haven't the apostles just got back from a mission where they've been proclaiming the kingdom of God? So why should they suddenly not talk about Jesus, especially now that he's confirmed his identity?

And Jesus says, here's why. You might have called me by the right title, but though you identify me rightly as the Messiah?

[13 : 26] As of right now, you have absolutely no clue what being the Messiah actually means. You see, how did people think about the Messiah in Jesus' day?

Well, some saw the Messiah as an earthly warrior. Others saw him as a kind of end times prophet who would restore the temple. Others imagined a priestly kind of king, like a blend between Gandalf and Aragorn from the Lord of the Rings.

The extra biblical Jewish literature of the time tells us all this. But probably the one thing all these beliefs had in common was that they saw the Messiah as a kind of conqueror or liberator who would free Israel from their suffering, even if how exactly he would accomplish that differs slightly from Jewish group to Jewish group.

And the disciples are no different. At the end of Luke chapter 9, which we'll see next week, a Samaritan village doesn't welcome the disciples.

And James and John ask, Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven on them? And you'll wonder, wow, that's pretty bold and confident language.

[14 : 51] what makes them think and talk this way? Well, here's the reason. They are working with a framework that their Messiah is going to sweep all the enemies before them.

It's the same today, isn't it? Many people treat Jesus as a genie who will fulfill all our earthly aspirations or as the person who will get rid of all the people that we deem toxic with a snap of the finger.

But Jesus says, forget all that. Let me tell you what being Messiah is really all about. Verse 22, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

This is what it means, he says. It means instead of chasing honour and happiness and bliss and pleasure and esteem and gratification, the Messiah has come to put that all aside.

He's come to suffer. He's come, in the words of Isaiah 53, to be despised and rejected and become familiar with pain and oppressed and afflicted.

[16 : 30] And his suffering will not come at the hands of Israel's enemies but the Israelite establishment. What a shock that must be. According to just about everyone, suffering simply isn't on the agenda for the Messiah.

And how incompatible this must be with the picture of Jesus we've been getting in Luke chapter 8, of someone who calms the storm and casts out demons and cures the sick.

But Jesus says, this is the core of who I am. Miracles is not my ultimate calling card.

Going to suffer and die is. And until you get that, it's best if you don't go preaching just yet. And all this is God's plan. Did you notice how Jesus says he must suffer? This is no accident. [17:42] As Isaiah 53 puts it again, it was the will of God to crush him. For a long time, in Bolivia, there was an infamous stretch of road known as Death Road.

It's a twisty 69 kilometres through mountainous terrain, and it claims many victims each year. But many people still took it.

Why? Because it was the only way to get from the city of Coiroco, to the capital, La Paz. And Jesus now takes his death road because it is the only way to get to his destination.

It is the only way he will fulfil his mission. His mission of paying for our transgression. That's why he must go.

This is the person we follow. This is what we must get. Jesus is on a path to glory, as we'll soon see, but the only way there is true suffering.

[19:03] And now, we're beginning to see why following Jesus takes the shape it does. For the person we follow determines the path we take.

That's the next thing Luke wants us to see this morning, the path we take. You see, Jesus says there is another must before Jesus' teaching is complete.

Verse 23, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up your cross daily and follow me.

In other words, here's the good news, anyone can follow Jesus. You don't have to be some sort of special person to follow him. But here is the deal.

Following him means denying yourself and taking up your cross. And this also isn't just for special people, special Christians, you know, those who become missionaries in far-off countries or who are just somehow extra zealous.

[20:14] No, this is for everyone. If you are a Christian, this isn't optional. You see, Jesus doesn't indulge in any sort of false advertising, does he?

What he wins you with is what he wins you to. If he wins you by going on death road, surely it wouldn't be a surprise that you too will go on the same path, does it?

Now, of course, it's not exactly the same. Jesus goes on death road ultimately to atone for our sin. We can't do that, but the shape is similar.

So what does that path look like for us? Well, Jesus says it means denying ourselves. Now, Jesus doesn't mean here that you certainly can't eat your favourite food or you can't ever go on a nice holiday or you must become a monk or something like that.

No. What Jesus is saying here is that you've got to stop making pleasing yourself the main goal of your life. Your life is now all about pleasing God.

[21:39] It is to renounce our rights to go our own way and let Jesus direct us instead, even when it is hard. That means saying no to the approval of the world if what the world asks goes against what God wants.

That means being willing not to climb the social ladder of respectability if climbing the ladder means you have to ignore Jesus and his priorities.

That means being willing to risk ridicule and rejection from family and friends if that's what it takes to honour Jesus.

It means saying no to selfish ambitions and selfish acquisitions to things that replace Jesus in your heart. It might even mean saying no to things that are good in themselves but are not God's will for you at this present time, perhaps like a romantic relationship of some sort.

So today, if you're a Christian then ponder what is it in your life that you are holding onto that Jesus calls you to deny.

[23:01] And Jesus doesn't just call us to let go of certain things. He asks us to take up something else, our cross.

Now it's important to get what we are talking about, right? Sometimes when people complain about their problems, they might say something like, this is my cross to bear.

But Jesus here is not referring to difficult colleagues, or overtime at work, or financial hardships in themselves. Rather, he is speaking about the specific hardships we have to bear because we are trying to live for Jesus.

Our cross is whatever we have suffered and endured for the sake of Christ. So if you are having a hard time from the boss, specifically because you are choosing to obey Jesus, then you are doing

verse 23.

But just be careful not to claim everything that goes against your personal preference as a cross to bear. And remember what the cross is.

[24 : 17] It is an instrument of execution. It is a symbol of shame. It is not neat and tidy. And so it shouldn't come as a surprise if following Jesus can feel painful at times, shameful at times, messy at times.

That is what cross bearing is about. And did you notice that word daily? Jesus is saying this is not an occasional affair but a regular occurrence.

you see last week we said that discipleship is about multiplication, then this week we can say discipleship is about sanctification. Don't forget, why is Jesus on death road in the first place?

Because our sin means he has to go and he wants to go. And because he went for our sake and paid the price on the cross, so today if we follow him, everything Jesus hates has to go.

And so daily we fight to go his way and not our own way. So given all this, is following Jesus worth it?

[25 : 47] Well, that brings us to the third thing we want to explore today, the pick-me-up that we need, the pick-me-up we need. How does Luke lift our spirits in the face of such demands?

He does so in two ways. First of all, he tells us what the economics of discipleship look like. In verses 24 and 25, he tells us that actually, this is a great bargain in the end.

Verse 24, for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. Jesus says, look, self-preservation is a very natural human instinct.

We will do what it takes to protect ourselves. And, if we think that climbing up the career ladder or getting ahead in our business prospects is the way that we can give ourselves security, then that is what we will invest in.

And, if we think that living for Jesus will result in some harm to ourselves or cause us to lack what we need to thrive in this life, then we won't do it.

[27 : 07] And, Jesus says, well, nothing wrong in itself with that instinct for self preservation. But, what you need to realise is that following me is how you find ultimate security despite appearances to the contrary.

In fact, those who try to protect themselves by going their own way and not down death road with Jesus will actually lose their lives in the end.

They will forfeit everything. That's what verse 25 is getting at. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

In other words, Jesus says, look, you could actually get everything you wanted, whether that is the world's approval or the world's pleasure and actually end up as a loser.

That's how the economics work. So just imagine the best case scenario for your life right now. And Jesus says, whatever your best case scenario looks like, if it doesn't have him in it, it will come all crashing down.

[28 : 30] But if you give away your very lives for Jesus, as some Christians literally do in some countries, the return on your investment will be out of this world.

And it's guaranteed. You just need to be patient for the day when it matures, when Jesus comes again. So will we go for this type of gain?

Or will we trade it for shame? That's what Jesus asks us in verse 26. whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

If we decide it's better not to associate with Jesus in any way and effectively disown him, then on that final day, he will disown us too.

that's the truth. But the reverse is also true. Glorify Jesus and we'll share in his glory.

[29 : 45] And that brings us to the second way Jesus re-urges us. It's worth it because the economics of discipleship sure sound like we need more re-assurance, doesn't it? And so this time, Jesus does so visually via what we now call the transfiguration.

In verse 27, Jesus says something puzzling. He says to his disciples, you know what? Some of you will get to see the kingdom of God before you die.

Now, whatever does he mean? After all, those same disciples have been dead for 2,000 years now and we haven't seen heaven on earth just yet. The answer, of course, is found in verses 28 to 36.

Jesus is telling them, in case you are doubtful that death road is worth it, in case you're doubtful that a suffering Messiah will be vindicated in splendor, well, let me give you a taster.

And that's why we have this unique event in these verses. In verse 28, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a mountain to pray. Now, remember whenever Jesus prays in Luke's gospel, significant things happen, right?

[31 : 01] And if that's not enough to alert us that something big is about to happen, the other clue is they're on a mountain. And again, in the Bible, mountains tend to be associated with God's presence.

And so, sure enough, verse 29, as Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

What is happening here? Well, look at verse 32. We're told the disciples see his glory. So, this is Jesus in all his glory.

This is Jesus as he will be when he comes again. This is the Jesus who will not be ashamed of his disciples if they are not ashamed of him.

This is the king of God's kingdom. And this, Jesus says, is your future if you follow me. And if you need authentication, then look no further than the two figures with Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

[32 : 10] Together, they are representative of the law and the prophets. Moses is there at the beginning as the first writer of the Old Testament, whereas Elijah is actually the very last prophet mentioned.

right there in Malachi at the end of the Old Testament. And so together they span the entire Old Testament. And in fact, Moses gets a mention right at the end of the Old Testament too.

So it's as if Jesus is saying, look, at the end of the Old Testament, there are all these promises of the kingdom waiting to be fulfilled. Moses and Elijah were looking ahead to them.

but now they can see for themselves it is fulfilled. The glory of the kingdom is here. And in fact, it's not just the Old Testament because don't forget who is present as well.

Peter, James, and John. Three key figures who will write down much of the New Testament. And so look, Jesus says, do you need reassurance that following me is worth it?

[33 : 26] Well, look at the united witness of the Old and the New Testament. What do they say? Verse 31 gives us insight.

Notice, what was Moses and Elijah talking about with Jesus? They were talking about his departure to Jerusalem.

And in most of your Bibles, you should have a footnote to this verse. It tells us the word departure is literally the word exodus. In the Old Testament, the exodus was the defining moment of God's great plan of redemption.

But now, Moses and Elijah are talking about a new exodus being accomplished through Jesus as he makes his way to the cross.

And just like the first exodus was a path to glory from Egypt to the promised land, so too is the second exodus.

[34 : 31] Death road is actually glory road. The misery Jesus will undergo will not cancel out his majesty.

In fact, that is the point. Death road and glory road are the one and same road. And that is what we must get today.

In verse 33, Peter finds it hard to wrap his head around all that is happening. And in his typically impulsive way, he says this, Master, it is good for us to be here.

Let us put up these three shelters for you. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. What is he going on about? Well, one clue is that word shelter.

Literally, it actually is the word tabernacle. And what is the tabernacle in the Old Testament? It is the place where God's glory dwelt.

[35 : 35] And so it seems as if Peter wants to capture this moment, to freeze it in time, if you like. He's like, oh, all this glory, it's so amazing.

I don't ever want it to end. I'm literally having a mountaintop experience, and I don't ever want to come down from this spiritual high. So here is my feeble attempt to try to keep all this going.

Let me build tabernacles to keep the glory here. Do you identify with Peter? Perhaps you remember a moment where you felt personal revival, great emotion, a sense of truly experiencing God, and now you're desperately trying to reclaim that experience and escape the bottom of day-to-day

existence.

Or perhaps some of you might remember the heydays of the burial revival a few decades ago, and the temptation is simply to try to manipulate God and manufacture that all over again, to just keep chasing that glory, as if we can dictate to God what he should do.

But God says, that is not how it works. That is why verses 34 and 35, a voice from a cloud comes and proclaims, this is my son whom I have chosen.

[36 : 59] Listen to him. In other words, Peter and everyone else, do you remember what Jesus just said in verses 22 and 23?

The Messiah must go and die. That is what Moses and Elijah have just affirmed. So, you can't catch the glory just like that.

You can't keep Jesus on the mountaintop. If you trust Jesus, then you know you need his cross.

And you yourself must take up your cross.

Glory comes through suffering. So, listen to him. Put your faith in the suffering saviour and walk the same path.

Remember, glory road is the same as death road. The path to glorification must pass through crucifixion. crucifixion.

[38 : 05] Well, that's the lesson we all must remember. You see, what is our temptation today? Our temptation today is to redefine discipleship. We say, hey, Jesus, listen to me.

Let me tell you what I think following you should be like. Sure, it's okay to occasionally have a bit of pain here and there, but not too much, okay? Make sure it is all glory now.

Make sure it is always a mountaintop experience now. But God says, listen to my son. First, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.

And if you follow him all the way to the end, glory is definitely waiting for you. but as we end, let me offer you a little bit of encouragement as well.

Because as we undertake this journey, we are not alone. Let me just read 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18 to you. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

[39 : 30] You see, here is God's promise to us. God says, when we trust Jesus, we now have the privilege as well to behold the Lord's glory.

And paradoxically, we see that glory whenever we hear the gospel, as 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6 will tell us later. And the more we know and behold Jesus, the more we'll be transformed.

Or let me put it another way, the more we know and behold Jesus, the more we will share in his own transfiguration.

And that is something that is presently happening. Now, unlike Luke 9, that might be invisible to us now, all we might see and feel is bodies that decay and the sin that still weighs heavily on us.

But God, via his Holy Spirit, is really in us, truly renewing us day by day. And so, hang on to that, believe that, then keep walking down death road knowing it is glory road.

[40 : 51] let's pray for the strength to do that today. Father, you just told us, listen to Jesus.

And so, help us to really listen to Jesus now, when he says, whoever wants to be my disciple has to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

God, help us to take those words seriously, but at the same time, help us to take what you have done seriously as well, which is that you send your son to suffer many things, to be rejected, to be killed, and to be raised to life.

And that is the basis we have, that is the hope we have to know that we can travel this road today.

So help us to hang on to the gospel, and then help us to live in light of that gospel.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.