

God's Word & Our Path

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 August 2014

Preacher: Samir Massouh

[0:00] What do you think life is about? What would you compare life to? Of course, there are many, many answers to that. But one of the themes, strangely enough, that appears both in secular literature and in biblical literature is the theme that life is like a journey.

Life is like traveling from point A to point B. And so you need to get from this place to this place. And so life is compared to that in many ways.

In secular literature, you may remember the Odyssey. Homer wrote two epics, the Iliad, about the wars between the Greeks and the Trojans.

And then the Odyssey about Ulysses trying to get back home. And so we have this long journey. So that is one place where you can see that.

If you can speak Arabic, which I doubt very seriously, you would be able to read the two famous travel works of literature, Sinbad the Sailors, the travel of Sinbad the Sailors, which have become movies, and the travels of Ibn Battuta.

[1:16] Most of you couldn't spell Battuta, much less know it. But the theme of travel also shows up in other places in secular literature.

One of the most famous movies from 1939 is The Wizard of Oz. And what does Dorothy have to do? She has to follow the yellow brick road.

Follow the yellow brick road. Follow the yellow brick road. And then there is that song, which I will spare you, my voice. So why does she need to follow the yellow brick road?

Because she wants, she needs to end in the Emerald City, where she will meet the Great Wizard of Oz. And hopefully, the Wizard of Oz will help her figure out how to get back to Kansas.

So she is on a journey. George Clooney was very interested in The Odyssey, and took that and made it a very popular, wonderful movie, a lot more intellectual than it seems to be.

[2:28] But it really is deep. But it's very funny. Called Brother, Where Art Thou? That is really the Odyssey set in America in the 20th century in the South.

If you know the original Odyssey in Greek, you will see how much he borrows. The word is plagiarized, but he borrows from that Odyssey.

For those of us who love movies, science fiction movies were awful. They were B. They were, you know, second class.

And then in 1968, a director introduced a movie that was just mind-boggling. Almost everybody would think it's one of the best 10 or 20 movies ever made.

It's the one that raised science fiction into first date and in some ways prepared the way for Star Wars 10 years later.

[3:31] That movie was 2001, A Space Odyssey by Kubrick. If you think you're smart, you ought to see this movie, and that will show you quickly how smart you're not.

It's mind-boggling. You leave the movie thinking, what is it about? And there is a recurring figure there, a slab, a monolith, that emanates sound.

And human beings are following. They're going on a journey, hence Odyssey 2001, the year. It's a space Odyssey. But it is in space.

And so human beings go to the moon, and from the moon to Jupiter, and then to outer space. And the thing that Kubrick never answers in that movie is, what does this monolith represent?

And some have argued it represents God. And some have said maybe it represents evolution.

Maybe it represents human inquiry.

[4:42] Maybe it represents our curiosity about the world. But it is a movie about travel. And so I want us today to think about travel, and to see travel in the biblical context.

In the Old Testament itself, of course, there are several events that are described as travel, because they are indeed literally travel. The most obvious one is traveling out of Egypt into the Promised Land through Sinai.

So that is a theme that covers two books, both Exodus and Numbers. In the second half of Isaiah, chapters 42-66, there is a theme that Isaiah describes again and again.

It's the most prevalent theme in that second half of Isaiah. It is the theme of the new Exodus, traveling back from the land of captivity to the Promised Land.

It's the return of the exiles. And it is called the new Exodus. In Jewish circles, one of the most important things is the halakha.

[5:59] If you don't know that word, it's a Jewish word. And it is very important, because rabbis quickly realized that, as a matter of fact, not only do we have scriptures, but we have the other task of interpreting scriptures.

In most cases, in huge portions of the Bible, the meaning of the passage is self-evident. You don't need to get a PhD to figure out what the verse means.

You know, when Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life, that's fairly obvious. But there are passages that are difficult. And so, Jewish scholars, rabbis, were asking, how does the scriptures apply to our lives?

How does Leviticus apply to our lives? If I'm going to get a haircut, does it matter whether I get this kind of a haircut, or that kind of a haircut?

Do the scriptures tell me anything about my appearance? Does my appearance matter whether I'm a believer or not a believer? And so, this huge discussion about the meaning of life comes from, this huge discussion is collected in a place called the Halakha.

[7:18] The foundation of the Halakha, the basis of the Halakha, is Psalm 1. So, please turn with me now to Psalm 1. And see this important verse.

I'm sure many of you know it, but let's look at it just the same. The Halakha is trying to understand Psalm 1, verse 1.

Blessed is the man who does not, what's the next verb? Walk. Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.

So, if the blessed man does not walk in this path, where does he walk? And the Halakha is a discussion.

This idea of life as a journey shows up in Judaism, in the Halakha, but it also shows up in the New Testament. There's a verse that I want you to look at, which is like a Christian version of the Halakha.

[8:28] Look at Acts, chapter 9, verse 2. Acts 9, verse 2. Starting with verse 1.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples before his conversion. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

He wanted to arrest Christians, and Christians were called the people of the way. Ways are roads. So, the question, of course, is why are we called the people of the way? Why aren't we called the people of the elephant? Or the people of the pizza?

Why the way? I suspect we are called the people of the way because of the very important statement of Jesus.

[9:47] I am the way, the truth, and the life. And if Jesus is the way, and we are followers of Jesus, then we are followers of the way.

And so, Christianity, in some ways, is compared to somebody who is traveling from one place to another. We are on the way to somewhere.

Some of you may know that the Bible, of course, continues again and again, year after year, be the best seller of all time. There is no book, there is no work in literature that has sold more than the Bible.

You know, not even Shakespeare, not Dickens, not Austen, not Sherlock Holmes. It is the Bible. But the next question is, within Christian literature, what is the book that has sold the most? Who comes second after the Bible? You know which one it is? It is Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. And Pilgrim's Progress is about a Christian traveling on the way, on the road, from the city of destruction to the glorious city, the city of God.

[11:07] So, all of these are ways, no pun intended, all of these are ways to describe our Christian life as a journey. Now, the world has its journeys too.

Jesus isn't the only option in the world. The world has its many options. And I want to share with you a couple of those options that I saw recently.

As you know, I'm sure you remember that in basketball, LeBron James kept everybody in suspense. Is he going to stay at Miami?

Is he going to go to New York? Is he going to go to Los Angeles? Is he going to go back to Cleveland? And so, everybody was curious. What is he going to do?

During this discussion, I want to, let me just give you a couple numbers. Bosch was given a contract for \$118 million.

[12:13] Carmelo Anthony was given a contract for \$422 million. I myself would be very happy if anybody gives me \$122,000.

\$1,000. I am not even close. I'm not anywhere, you know. I may be around \$122,000 pennies, but not \$122,000.

That's not the kind of salary that I get. And yet, people like that are receiving these kinds of salaries. At the time of the Oscar, it was said that the movie Gravity with Sandra Bullock, the actress was given \$14 million salary.

Tom Hanks for his two movies about Captain Philip and Mary Poppins received \$20 million. \$20 million.

I remember when Elizabeth Taylor was the first actress in Hollywood to break the \$1 million barrier for a movie called Cleopatra in the early 60s. When entertainment and sports offered their participants millions, incredible amounts of millions, what America is saying is, what is the road that leads to happiness?

[13:48] Wealth. Wealth is the road that leads to happiness. If you ask the Bible, is it really the case that wealth leads to happiness?

The answer is, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. Meaningless, meaningless. Everything is meaningless. Emptiness, emptiness.

Ecclesiastes is saying bluntly, no, it is not wealth that leads to happiness. It is a relationship with God. Life without God is meaningless.

So, if we do not want to take those paths because they don't lead to happiness, what are the paths that we are offered in the scriptures?

scriptures, I want you to know this passage, Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 15. There are five books called the books of Moses. Exodus through Deuteronomy, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, deal with the law and the covenant and God's relationship with his people.

[14:56] And Deuteronomy is serving as the last book is, among other things, is summarizing what we have just been reading in four books. Where does all this end?

What's it all about? And please turn to Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 15. In verse 15 God is summarizing this is what it's all about.

This is the answer to the \$64,000 question. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments, decrees and laws. Then you will live and increase, et cetera, et cetera.

But there are two things. One option is a path that leads to death and destruction and the other one that leads to life and prosperity. Life and death, these are the two paths.

[16:00] You may say to me, but Samir, you know, this sounds familiar, but I don't know Deuteronomy. I don't think I've ever read Deuteronomy. Why does this passage sound familiar? It sounds familiar because Jesus paraphrases it in one of his famous passages.

So please turn to the gospel of Matthew, Matthew 7, 13. See how Jesus repeats what Deuteronomy is saying.

Enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it.

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only few find it. There you have it again. a road, a broad road that leads to destruction and a narrow road that leads to life.

Keeping that in mind, keeping that in mind, now let's take a look at Psalm 119 to see how the psalm is going to illuminate what we have just finished seeing.

[17:17] Psalm 119 verse 105 verse 106 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

The psalmist is walking. He is on a path. He is traveling from one place to another. He is on a journey. And hopefully the journey that he is on is the path that leads to life, not the path that leads to death and destruction.

the problem with the psalmist is that while most of us can travel easily during the day because we can see where we're going, what he is doing to compound his situation is that he is traveling at night.

And because he is traveling at night, he needs light to help him see where he is walking. So, if you have light that shows you where you're walking, you need to ask yourself three questions.

The first question is where does this road go to? Where is it going to lead me? Is it going to lead me to destruction? Is it going to lead me to the emerald city?

[18:40] Is it going to lead Ulysses back from Troy to Ithaca? Where is this road going to lead me? And the scripture says clearly vanity of vanities all is vanity meaningless meaningless everything is meaningless the Hebrew word is evil emptiness emptiness everything is emptiness if you do not take the path of the Lord I am the way the truth and the life you are wasting your life it's much better to realize that early in your life than when you're 60 or 65 or 70 so where is this path going well hopefully we are on the right path look we know this if you take I-43 up north you end up in Green Bay Road in Green Bay City if you take

I-94 you end up in Madison it doesn't matter what path you're on you could end up here or you could end up here in Los Angeles you take 101 you end up in San Francisco you take 55 you end up in Chicago so you have to ask yourself what path am I on am I on the way the truth and the life or am I on some other stupid path wealth popularity fame pleasure you know reputation Jesus says take the narrow path that leads to life the second thing we have to ask ourselves is how good are the road conditions how good are the road conditions let me help you look at this famous passage in the New Testament it is associated with John the Baptist but in the

Old Testament it's associated with the new exodus that Isaiah talks about look at Isaiah chapter 40 you may recognize it because it's a Christmas passage Isaiah chapter 40 starting with verse 3 a voice of one calling in the desert prepare the way of the Lord make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God every valley will be raised up and every mountain and hill will be made low and rough grounds shall become level the rugged places a plain and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it let me help you understand what this passage is saying suppose King David wants to travel from Jerusalem to Jericho what does he do he does not just jump on his horse and take the horse on a journey to Jericho that is not what he does first of all he takes body guard with him because

David did have enemies who wanted to kill him and so he needs body guard with him but the other thing that he does is he sent few soldiers ahead of the traveling party the purpose of these soldiers is to check the road the conditions of the road what if there are trees that have fallen on the road and blocked it and then you can't go that road so their job would be then to remove those trees that have fallen it's possible that there has been immense mud slide and so you have to check is the road reliable is it strong is it wobbly you have to ask yourself are there potholes on this road let me stop here for a second and remind you we are from Kenosha we are in Kenosha so for a minute do you know of any potholes we are the experts of potholes

I was a student at Trinity and I was I am a professor at Trinity since 73 41 years student and prof because we were in a town called Lincolnshire which really wasn't happy with us and weren't glad for us to move to Trinity they wished that we had gone somewhere else there is only one road that

leads to Trinity and in my years three years as a student at Trinity they never fixed the potholes once this is called passive aggressive behavior it was dangerous driving potholes everywhere but things have changed quite a bit now we now have a wonderful relationship with them they're really dear neighbors and the road in front of Trinity is fabulous it's really great so how good is this road look what

[24:00] Isaiah says make in the desert prepare a way for the Lord make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God what is low should be lifted up what is high should be lowered and then this way you make a plain road and the glory of God will be revealed so you have to ask yourself how good are the road conditions I was in Chicago yesterday visiting my family and we were at the art institute coming back we ran into a parade I had to go to go to Chicago well so do I turn white or do I turn left do I just become patient and just crawl behind the parade or do I swing around or things like that suddenly there was an obstacle that

I had not anticipated I was watching TV yesterday and I heard something I should tell you I never heard it before I mean at somebody my age you think I've heard everything I haven't there is this statement that if you are in a road construction section in Milwaukee and if you speed in that section which is road construction you know how much the ticket is it is I wrote it down anywhere from \$570 to \$940 a speeding ticket roads aren't always wide open sometimes there is construction if you're traveling by sea as

Paul was traveling you might run into a storm Acts 27 and you may end up with a shipwreck and stranded on an island so you have to ask yourself how good are the road conditions and the third question that you need to think about is this issue of light is the road well lit can you see where you're going let me again give you a passage from the Old Testament a very famous passage again associated with Jesus chapter 9 verse 2 in Isaiah Isaiah 9 verse 2 the people walking in darkness have seen a great light if the psalmist doesn't have the light to shed light on his path he would be walking in darkness it is dangerous to walk in darkness let me just give you one example one illustration from the

Old Testament and then I'll try to conclude in the temple or in the tabernacle of God there were two rooms and one was God's throne where the Ark of the Covenant was and the other one was a room where God met with his people the room had no window so it was absolutely dark and there was also a warning if by mistake you stepped into the other room you would be killed instantly so this is a serious business so the priests have to minister in this pitch black room so what do they need they need light so they can see where they're walking the light sheds light at their feet it sheds light in the space and so they know where they're walking and they won't make the mistake of entering into the presence of God so the light that was placed in the temple in the tabernacle was the menorah the lamp stand the candelabra the purpose of the lamp stand was to shed light at their feet turn to

Psalms 119 106 do you see the imagery there something is shedding light for somebody's feet so they can see where they're walking and what is that the word of God the word of God is the light that sheds light at our feet so we can see where we're walking this idea light helping us see where we're walking so we don't walk in the wrong place or fall off the road or whatever it said whatever is repeated in 1 John 1 7 please turn to 1 John in the New Testament 1 John is summarizing in some ways what I've been saying up to now 1

[29:24] John 1 7 if you walk in the light not in darkness if you walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and I don't mean just with one another but also with one another that way too but in order to have fellowship what do we need to do walk in the light you need to have light in front of your feet so you are walking in the light not walking in darkness let me let me give you an illustration from my own life I lost my mother when I was seven years old it was the day before Easter and we were traveling to her parents to my maternal grandparents home and so we were in a taxi but they lived in a very rural area the roads were not paved there was no light and that area the taxi driver didn't know anything about because he doesn't do business there so it was in the middle of nowhere bad roads bad lighting etc as the taxi

driver was driving he thought that the road curved and he started to curve because

I suspect his even his headlights were not that good and the car flipped and my mom was killed instantly why because the taxi driver couldn't see where he was going he was driving in darkness and of course darkness sometimes brings physical literal death but spiritual darkness of course leads to destruction how should we apply all of this to our lives we need to think of that important verse of Jesus I am the way the truth and the life if you translate that passage to Hebrew it could be interpreted in two ways that Jesus is saying I am three things

I am the way I am the truth I am the life but there is also a rabbinic discussion that says expressions like that can also be translated this way so let me give you the alternative translation not the one that you're going to find in your Bibles it can also be translated I am the way that leads to truth and life and of course Jesus is the way the truth and the life and Jesus leads to the way the fact that God has given us his word as light for our feet to lighten our path we should take this word of God seriously study it with devotion and we should follow this Lord Jesus because he is the way the truth and the life let's have a word of prayer thank you father for these brothers and sisters and I pray that we would increase our love for you and want to walk with you have fellowship with you follow you and obey you learn to love you and learn to love our neighbor as ourselves and father for those who don't know you may they sense in some ways the futility of life without you and may see in you the light that will dispel the darkness that surrounds them I ask you this father in Jesus precious name amen