

Real Success & Failure

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[0 : 00] Duck and cover was a safety drill practiced in the United States in the 50s and 60s as the Cold War started to heat up. It was thought that in the event of a Russian nuclear attack, citizens could protect themselves by ducking under the desk and covering up their face.

I don't know what good that's going to do with an atomic bomb, but anyway, there it was. Duck and cover, they're taught in schools. It's also, James, when I tug my earlobe, that's it.

There you go. There's a children's sort of ad for it. And the turtle, he's the right animal to use, isn't he? Because when the turtle gets attacked, he ducks and covers, goes into his shell.

Thank you. And that's fine. And duck and cover reminded me, or I was reminded of duck and cover as I was preparing this passage, because today is the teaching about what Christians should do when they're attacked for their faith.

You see, for two weeks now, the Pharisees have begun to oppose Jesus. And every time they attack, their objections become more and more unreasonable.

[1 : 12] To show you what I mean, I made a very scientific piece of equipment. And here it is. This is the Pharisee-o-meter. I think it's on the screen as well, James.

Thank you. There it is. The Pharisee-o-meter. And it works like this. Two weeks ago, they challenged Jesus when he ate lunch with Levi and the tax collector.

They said, why does this man eat with tax collectors and sinners? And that, according to the meter, is not unreasonable. It's a fair question.

Why is holy Jesus hanging out with unholy people? But Jesus said, actually, I am the physician, the doctor. And doctors should be amongst the sick people.

And so the Pharisees were wrong. Then they challenged him on the issue of fasting. Why aren't your disciples fasting? We're waiting for a Messiah, you know. Hello, Jesus is the Messiah.

[2 : 17] He said, wedding guests can't fast while the bridegroom is with them. And so now I think the meter says they're getting a little bit into the silly territory. And in every episode of this opposition, we see how good Jesus is compared to these Pharisees.

And it all came to a head last week at the very end. You see, they wanted to see if Jesus would heal a man with a withered hand. And what they did is they set a trap that only God could fall into. Only God can heal a man with a withered hand. And when Jesus showed them that that is exactly who he is, instead of worshipping him, they, it says the end of last week, they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

The meter, it says they are now barking mad deep into the red territory. They totally missed the point, Andrew said. They have no idea who God is or what he is like.

They can't even recognize him when he's standing in front of them. And so the context of our passage today is opposition to Jesus.

[3 : 32] He's under attack. How do you think Jesus will respond? Should gentle Jesus, meek and mild, should he duck and cover? At least till the temperatures cool down.

And we here in this room, we're his disciples, aren't we? What should we do when we're opposed for our faith? It's an important issue to think through because we're not exactly in safe territory.

And maybe you think that I'm overcooking that a little bit because there aren't any government agents knocking on our doors in Australia the way they do in Nigeria and China and North Korea.

Because in Australia, being a Christian is a peaceful life. Right now, we're perfectly safe. But on the other hand, just try living out your faith a little bit more publicly and see what happens.

Try telling your colleagues or your friends that you don't want to speak about that other person behind their back because you're a Christian. And watch to see if they start distancing themselves.

[4 : 38] Why don't you tell other parents at your children's school that your kids aren't going to play sport on Sundays because you want them to prioritize a sense of going to church on today.

And see what happens to your friendship. Just try publicly agreeing with Jesus views on marriage and money and sin and judgment and see what happens.

We are at peace now, but I don't think you have to stick your neck out too far to feel the temperature rise and to see the seeds of what at least one day may be a barking mad, maybe even violent opposition one day in this country.

But right now, because we're not in Nigeria or North Korea or a Chinese situation, now is the right time to train our thinking.

How do true disciples think about opposition? That way, we can cope with it and react and make sense of it when it arrives.

[5 : 46] Duck and cover. Keep our faith to ourselves. Water down our Christianity. Just blend with everyone else. Or do we walk in the footsteps of Jesus the way disciples do?

For the next few weeks, it's about discipleship. Specifically, how disciples think about opposition. In two weeks' time, as Harry said, we're going to have questions on this talk and the next two talks after this because they're very tricky.

Why not write your questions down if you've got them? Two weeks' time, that'll be the chance to ask them. The first point, be bold. So can you all look at verse 12 in your printouts there?

One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.

You see, in Luke's gospel, whenever there's a crisis, Jesus spends a lot of time in prayer.

It shows that even he doesn't treat opposition lightly. Even Jesus is dependent on God for help. And maybe he's praying that God would take away the hostility.

[6 : 55] I know that's what I would pray for. But I think his prayer is that his ministry would grow regardless. Because in verse 13, he chooses 12 apostles.

That is a very random event to insert at this part of the story. But I think it's a mark of boldness. You see, it's a sign that Jesus wants his ministry to continue.

That even if they kill him, if the hostility gets to that stage, there are 12 captains or area managers, if you like, to carry on this expansion of the gospel.

And expansion is the picture you get in the next few verses. Verse 17. So, yeah, halfway through verse 17. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon.

Large crowds now. Great numbers, it says. The gospel is expanding and growing. Tyre and Sidon are mentioned. The gospel has gone international.

[8 : 03] And in verse 18, Jesus boldly continues. A business as usual, even in the face of opposition. It says, They all had come to hear him and be healed of their diseases.

Those troubled by impure spirits were cured. And all the people, sorry, the people all tried to touch him. Because power was coming from him and healing them all. It seems that duck and cover is not an option for Jesus.

Rather, he prefers the kingdom to grow. And don't we do a kingdom growth night here? We had one just last Wednesday.

It's a time when we spend time in prayer. We pray for CMS missionaries, for AFES workers on the local university campus, and for the ministry of Holy Trinity and St. John's.

I can't remember ever seeing a prayer point asking for someone to duck and cover and lie low. But just lots of bold prayer asking that the kingdom would keep growing.

[9 : 08] That gospel ministry would continue so that souls can be saved. A question for you, which I put at the bottom of your handout when you're driving home. What will it look like for you to be bold when it comes to living out your faith?

True disciples, they're bold in the face of opposition. Point one. Point number two, they see opposition as a blessing. Verse 20.

From verse 20 onwards, there's this repeated idea of a blessed, a blessed, a blessed life. And if you want to have a blessed or happy life, there's no shortage of ideas out there.

I wonder what you said in that question time. The key to a happy or blessed life. I went to the internet to find the answer, which is never a good idea. But anyway, the internet says this.

The key to happiness is good relationships and to eat well. I think that sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Makes you happy. It said, one tip, make the most of each day and try out new things.

[10:13] For me, that means finally trying cheesecake to make me happy, which is never going to happen, let me assure you. Here's one slide I found. One of the keys to happiness is a bad memory.

I don't know what you make of that. But anyway. Thanks, James. But I bet none of the self-help out there agrees with Jesus in here.

Blessed are you who are poor. Blessed are you who hunger now. Blessed are you who weep now. I did my auntie's funeral on Wednesday.

And there was lots of weeping. And happiness is not how I would choose to describe the event, actually. And so a couple of caveats first.

He doesn't mean that being poor or hungry is a happy time. Obviously, they are sad things. Nor is he saying that just because you're poor, you automatically earn a ticket to heaven.

[11:16] The Pharisees have come. Jesus is opposed. That is the context. Being poor and hungry refers to suffering for the gospel.

Verse 22, it says, People hating you because of the Son of Man. Because in some parts of the world, being a Christian might mean you're excluded from government benefits and pensions.

And so you'd go poor and hungry. Here in Australia, it might mean that we're the butt of the jokes. Or targeted by secular lobby groups. Or slowly excluded from the center of public life.

Before my auntie was saved, she used to mock me for going into full-time ministry. Every time she saw me, she'd make a comment. One Christmas, I had to sit next to her at the Christmas dinner table.

And she told me that I was an idiot for giving up an accounting salary. And ask anyone. There's nothing fun about the snippy, snide comments from family and friends year after year after year.

[12:21] There's a gentleman here, Siavash and Mariam. We know them. Siavash and Mariam, they're from Iran. And they converted from Islam.

Siavash's mother passed away a few weeks ago. And COVID notwithstanding, he wasn't able to travel back for her funeral. It's very sad.

There are many ways to experience opposition and suffering for the sake because of the Son of Man. But the fact that we're willing to suffer, to walk in Jesus' footsteps, that is a mark of true discipleship.

Verse 22 says, When people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil. And isn't that just how the Pharisees have begun to treat Jesus? Verse 23 says, That is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

And we saw one of those prophets in our Old Testament reading, which Teresa read. It was Jeremiah. He said, The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.

[13:30] And if you want to make it go away, all you have to do is duck and cover. Keep quiet. Lie low. Keep your faith private.

Follow the world around you. The opposition will end in an instant. But a heavenly perspective will change how you think about suffering.

Verse 23, Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Why? Because great is your reward in heaven.

Having eyes on a future glory enables endurance today.

Consider it a blessing. That's the idea. The promise for true disciples. Jesus says, Your poverty will become the riches of the kingdom of God.

Your hunger, fully satisfied. Your weeping. Will be laughter. It is suffering now. Let's not be flippant. But it is glorious later.

[14:34] And I think that is a very powerful way to stare sufferings in the face and consider them happiness or a blessing. Be bold.

Be bold. Be heavenly minded. Finally, be careful. Our final point. Verse 24 onwards. Verse 24 onwards. These verses, they're the opposite side of the coin to the blessings.

The four woes. The four woes match the four blessings. But just a few caveats first. These woes are not saying that being rich and well fed is a sin or that it's bad.

Heaven is described as a place of richness and banquet feasts. The context. Nor is this saying that just because you own a house or have money in the bank, that that is all the reward you're entitled to from God.

The context is opposition. Jesus is being attacked. Blessings if you're willing to follow Jesus down that path. But woe if you're not. Woe if you're not willing to suffer for the Son of Man.

[15 : 45] If the blessings encourage us to remain true, the woes are warning us not to be false disciples. The mark of the false disciple is that when push comes to shove, you choose comfort instead of choosing Jesus.

It's not hard to understand. Very hard to apply. Someone said to me earlier, the fact that it's so easy to understand makes it all the more hard to apply.

When opposition comes, verse 24. Woe to you who are rich. That is, woe if you choose the comfort of riches rather than suffering for Jesus' sake.

The warning? You've already had your comfort. Very clear. Very tough. And as I was studying these verses, I realized all the ways that I failed to be a true disciple.

And I was unnerved about, you know, that opportunity when you're put to the test, whether you'll have the courage and the faithfulness to remain true to Jesus.

[16 : 57] But he says this on the next slide. When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, that is, when you're tested, do not worry about how you'll defend yourself or what you'll say.

For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say and how you should act. Thanks, James. And this doesn't mean that every time we fail, you fail the way I do, that suddenly you're automatically a false disciple.

A false disciple is a settled, consistent, deliberate action to choose comfort rather than choosing to suffer for Jesus.

You see, the equal and opposite of the blessings and woes mean we're supposed to read them together like a which would you rather. They're a framework for our decision making.

And so to wake you all up, I want to do an exercise, a little game of which would you rather. So we're going to do verse 21 and 25. Which would you rather?

[18 : 05] Be hungry now or well fed now? The answer is obvious. Food, please. But what happens when we include a heavenly perspective?

Because in the future, there is, I guess, a reckoning of both choices, a heavenly reversal of fortune. So hungry now for the sake of the gospel, you will be satisfied.

Well fed now, forsaking the gospel, you will go hungry. Do you see how that works? Very clear, but very difficult.

Let's do it again another time. Which would you rather? Let's do verse 22 and 26. Which would you rather? When people hate you, exclude you, insult you because of the Son of Man or verse 26?

For everyone to speak well of you. The answer is obvious. I want people to think well of me, please. But when we include that heavenly perspective, we're insulted now.

[19 : 09] But verse 23, great is your reward in heaven. Or verse 26, woe to you now because Jesus considers you a false prophet.

It's encouraging and difficult in equal measure, I think. And when we feel the sting of being distinct for Jesus, we can either be bold and choose Jesus, or we can duck and cover and choose our comfort instead.

The peaceful life. If that's the case, the warning, that's all the reward you're getting from God. Today is suffering in opposition.

That's the context. But we could easily apply this framework of thinking to every aspect of Christian discipleship. The words we say, the actions we use, all those sorts of things.

The framework works for all of it. But I don't think they're telling us that we're to go out and look for a fight, you know, like some sort of Christian martyr.

[20 : 17] Nor do I think it's saying that if I'm suffering, it's because of Jesus. Sometimes I suffer because my mouth is too big and I'm just a bit too irritating and I behave badly.

For you here, if you wouldn't say that you're being opposed for your faith at this moment, now is the time to train your thinking so that you'll make a good decision when the time comes.

If we're not being opposed now, it might be worth checking just how public you are about living for Jesus. Opposition, attack, it was the regular experience of Jesus and the apostles and the prophets.

You don't have to stick your neck out too far to feel the temperature rise. Maybe for you, you don't have a Pharisee ometer. Maybe you have a family ometer or a colleague ometer or a boss ometer or a friend ometer.

In all opposition, there is at least the seed of what will one day become a barking mad hostility. Maybe even violence one day in Australia.

[21 : 33] Our passage today, the one next week, they give us a framework for our thinking. That is whether to suffer or duck and cover.

Whether to choose Jesus or to choose comfort. A logic of which would you rather. True disciples, they're bold.

They choose Jesus. He says, choose me. Don't choose your comfort. It may be suffering now. But it'll be a glorious reward later.

Choose me, Jesus says. Please go away and have a think about where you can feel the Holy Spirit prompting you to, I guess, be more public about your faith.

To live for Jesus more. And then work through the logic of which would you rather so that you can make a good decision. Please write down questions for a couple of weeks time as well.

[22 : 35] Right now, we're going to do what Jesus did and pray when opposition and situations like this arise. Please join me. Lord Jesus, help us make a good decision.

Please would we choose you and not our comfort. Please put it deep in our hearts that our suffering for you will be gloriously rewarded on that last day.

Please help us. Please forgive us when we make a bad decision and choose comfort. Please convict us by your spirit. We want to be true disciples.

Please help us when we're nervous. When our faith is tested. Please help us think through what it would look like to be bold and stand up for you.

So that your gospel would grow and continue. We ask all these things in your name. Amen.