

On the Way to Die

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Preacher: Tim Patrick

[0 : 00] let's pray father god thanks for your word pray that tonight nothing i say would misrepresent you or displease you and pray that your message wouldn't fall on dead ears but that we'd hear it and respond to it in jesus name amen please do keep your bibles open uh you'll need to be looking at that as i'm speaking luke chapter nine that we just heard read to us um i used to work at the csi ro and when i worked there a few of us had a saying and the saying was a little bit of knowledge is a very dangerous thing there were some people who had a little bit of knowledge who acted as though they had a great deal of knowledge an example was a scientist in my group a senior scientist and he used to talk with a great deal of confidence and authority he used to use big long scientific words and put up graphs and pictures and lots of data and it seemed that he had a great deal of knowledge but i worked with him for many years and it became apparent after a while that he didn't actually really know what he was talking about all his technical talk and complex language was really not grounded in much substantial knowledge sure he had a little bit of knowledge but not a lot but he presented to us as though he knew more than he did now if i'm feeling generous i think perhaps he was deluded perhaps he didn't really understand how little he actually knew although if i'm more cynical i think perhaps he was trying to make himself feel important or the people around him feel less important and less learned either way it wasn't a very good situation it wasn't very helpful for the people he worked with there would have been a solution to this problem the solution would have been if this guy was more humble and more open to listening to the views of other people if he was deluded and just thought he knew more than he actually did then listening to other people would have helped him because he could have been challenged he could have been fed if he was being deceitful or having an attitude of humility may have softened his heart may have softened his resolve to promote himself but it's interesting it's unlikely that without being humble that this guy would ever actually become the great scientist that he tried to present himself as a little bit of knowledge blown up dressed up shown off can be a very dangerous thing can delude you and deceive others now it's very sad to find this in the professional scientific community but this kind of behaviour also exists in other places not least of which is the Christian world is in our churches

I'm sad to say that I've known Christians who do know some good and true things about Jesus sure but who come across as though they know a lot more than they actually do Christians who come across as though they know everything there is to know about Jesus they know what it means to be a disciple they've got it all figured out already you might have met people like this maybe you've been this way yourself sometimes speaking beyond your knowledge well this is actually the issue I think that is being addressed by our text today when you first look at our passage when you take a look down your Bibles you'll see it's actually broken up into four bits with four headings but I think that's not actually the way it falls those headings aren't particularly useful in this case what I think we have is two major sections the first one is this story of the demon being cast out by Jesus and then Jesus going on to teach you about his betrayal and the second section is this argument the disciples have about who's the greatest and then the discussion about the other person who's been casting out demons but not in the name of Jesus

I think they're the two sort of parts that we have here but they're all tied together they're both tied together rather by the one idea that you mustn't say you mustn't be you mustn't present as knowing more than you actually do it's a great risk the key to actually understanding how these verses work lies in their context now we haven't been working through Luke's gospel systematically here at the moment so what I'm going to do is just take a moment to give you a little bit of background and hopefully that will help you see how this idea comes out of this passage in Luke what happens from chapter 4 up to chapter 9 is Jesus is in Galilee and he's doing lots of teaching and in this time there seems to be one major question that's on the agenda the question is who is Jesus?

Jesus' identity is really on question and what happens in chapter 9 is this all comes to a head and we find out we get the answer to this question who's Jesus? well in verse 20 you know it well Jesus says to Peter who do you say that I am?

it's a key moment and Peter answers the Messiah of God so this question that's been asked for these last few chapters this Galilean ministry is answered here and then following that we have the transfiguration where Jesus goes onto the mountain and he's transfigured before them he's standing there with Moses and Elijah and God you hear God's voice saying this is my son my chosen so chapter 9 only brings to a head the identity of Jesus and it really resolves that question for us but then immediately after having this question resolved we have our passage and as I've said already I think what this passage is telling us is that you know something about Jesus we've been asking his identity and now we have it but before you rush off and get too excited about that don't think you know more than you do you have a little knowledge that can be a very dangerous thing there's lots more to learn about Jesus and what it means to be a disciple under him well let's have a look at it in a little bit of detail the first part from verse 37 through to verse 45 is the story of Jesus casting out the demon and teaching about his betrayal

[7 : 09]

Jesus comes down from the mountain and a great crowd meets him there and he's approached by a man whose son is possessed by a demon and the demon causes him to shriek and convulse the mouth it throws him on the ground all kinds of terrible things and the man begs Jesus to take a look at his son now if you read back through Luke's gospel you'll see that Jesus has done this kind of thing before he's cast out demons it's something in a way that isn't really surprising if we're reading Luke we think oh yeah this is the kind of thing Jesus does guy comes and asks him he'll do it but it's not actually the key point of what's going on here you see the bite in this story is the fact that the man had already asked the disciples to do it and they couldn't see verse 40 I begged your disciples to cast it out but they could not now in chapter 1 I beg your pardon in verse 1 of chapter 9 what does it say just look across the page with me then Jesus called the 12 together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases so Jesus has come down from the mountain a man says can you please look at my son

I asked your disciples and they couldn't help me and Jesus is angry and this is why he's angry he's given them authority to do this to cast out demons they have seen who Jesus is they know whose power they should be drawing on to do this work and yet they couldn't and Jesus is angry it's a lack of faith that Jesus rebukes the disciples for you faithless and perverse generation they've failed because they lack faith faith and faith is all about our relationship with Jesus you need to know who Jesus is to have faith in him and I think the disciples here have missed the connection between Jesus and their work of casting out demons you see they may have thought we hang out with Jesus we're Jesus mates we're close to Jesus we'll cast this demon out and they failed because they've been acting if you like based on their own identities rather than on the basis of the identity of Jesus that they've just found out about or they've just had confirmed to them you see

I think if the disciples had realised that they had a little knowledge and rested securely on what they had rather than speculating beyond it they would have been in a much better position it's the same remedy that would have helped my friend at the CSIRO so what should they have done what should they do now rather well the way that the disciples get themselves out of this predicament is by listening to Jesus you see what happened when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain wasn't just that God said this is my son the chosen if you notice there in verse 35 God says this is my son the chosen my chosen one listen to him listen to him you know who Jesus is but we obviously don't know enough yet because we need to keep listening to him the disciples have failed through a misunderstanding of the nature of faith and the remedy to this problem is to listen to Jesus and you'll notice what does Jesus say immediately following this event well in verse 42 beg your pardon in verse 44

Jesus says let these words sink into your ears but notice the flow of events here if you imagine that heading's missing from your NRSV and it's one long block Jesus comes down the man begs him to look at his son Jesus is angry at the disciples because they should have known better in verse 42 Jesus casts out the demon no problem returns the boy to his son and then while everyone's astounded at the greatness of God while everyone's amazed at all that he's doing he says listen to me let these words sink into your ears it's perhaps even better would be better written put these words in your ears a more active sense you see on the back of a failure Jesus says put these words in your ears learn more about me well put these words in your ears

Jesus says you failed I'm angry while you're amazed at the things I'm doing it's not enough just to see you need to put my words into your ears so what is it that Jesus goes on to tell them if there's so much more to learn what is it that he says well he says put these words in your ears the son of man is going to be betrayed into human hands the son of man is going to be betrayed into human hands this is what else you need to know about the Messiah God's son the chosen one is that he's going to be betrayed into human hands now to us this isn't really major news I suspect even if you're not a Christian believer you have heard that Jesus was betrayed into the hands of people of human beings but think about it from the disciples point of view they've been following Jesus seeing amazing things asking themselves who is this guy

[13 : 06] Peter says you're the Messiah God says this is my son Jesus says I'm going to be betrayed it doesn't really add up it's a very different picture that you get of Jesus when you have more of the information put these words in your ears the son of man is going to be betrayed into human hands it's an important thing for us as Christians to have a balanced picture of Jesus you need to affirm Jesus as the Messiah as the son of God as the chosen one but you also need to be very well aware that this chosen Messiah was also the one who was betrayed into human hands you can't have an exalted glorious picture of Jesus alone you need to have that but also a suffering betrayed picture of Jesus to give you a full picture a one dimensional picture of

Jesus is rather disastrous and can lead you into all sorts of trouble like it did the disciples and will again we'll see in a moment please note the implications of this for us I think it's easy to read this and kind of roll our eyes at the disciples and go oh yeah how silly are they I know that's good I hope we do do that to some extent they're meant to be a counter example this is what not to do this is how not to fail and I hope that we do have that kind of disappointment in them but be careful lest we think we've got Jesus worked out and we never make such a silly mistake because that's exactly what our passage is talking about we live on the other side of the Easter story we know what it means for Jesus to be betrayed into human hands we have the Bible to explain that to us the disciples didn't if you don't know what it means for Jesus to be betrayed into human hands then don't leave tonight without knowing come and talk to me afterwards

I'd love to talk to you about it but even so believers today may even run a greater risk of falling into the same trap you see we can now go back and sort of do it all over again if you like roll our eyes at the disciples and say oh we know who Jesus is we know he was going to be betrayed into human hands though it's so silly for getting it wrong we've got it right be careful be careful lest we think we know more than we do I'm not saying those things are wrong I'm just saying are they sufficient are they enough to say I can now switch off and no longer listen to Jesus no longer put his words in my ears I've met many Christian believers as I said who have a very clumsy picture of God and of Jesus and yet many of them think they've got him well worked out ever been in a Bible study where someone will sit down open the

Bible and know what the passage says before they've really even studied it oh I know what this is about yeah and it's this notion that I know I've had God revealed to me I don't need to listen anymore be careful Christian know-it-alls who don't actually know that much a good way I think that we can test ourselves to see if we have this problem is to ask this question when was the last time you learned I learned something new about God from the Bible when was the last time you opened up read the Bible and thought wow I never knew that that changes what I know of God that changes the way I think of God some of you may know Peter Adam who's the principal of Ridley Bible College that's a heretical word Peter's been a Christian for some 40 years and in ministry for more than 30 years and one thing that really impresses me about Peter is that he can still say to his students at college I learned something new from the Bible today I found out something about God that I didn't know before you see after all this time he can still tell us new things of God and he's still a humble man despite all of his experience doesn't come professing to have all the answers and acting as though he has all the answers now I need to say please don't mistake what I'm saying here

I'm not for a moment saying that we can't know anything about God and everything we know is kind of not really trustworthy I'm not saying that at all we can know many clear and great and right things about God we can learn them from the Bible and we can be confident in them all I'm saying is don't think that because you know something you know everything we need to be humble we need to keep listening to God listening to Jesus if we don't then we may end up deceiving ourselves deluding ourselves deceiving others well the second part of our text tonight goes on to tell us the same kind of thing happening happening again we've got this question arising among the disciples of who's the greatest well just as the disciples failed to understand what it was for Jesus to be humbled in the world's eyes the son of man is going to be betrayed into human hands you notice in verse 45 they didn't understand this saying just as they didn't understand that neither did they understand what it meant to be humble followers of Jesus an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest and Jesus aware of their inner thoughts took a little child and put it by his side what Jesus doesn't do you notice is say I will resolve this argument for you

[19:15] John you're the greatest Jesus tells them who's the greatest but what he says is as ever for Jesus kind of paradoxical the greatest among them is the least the least among you is the greatest see just as Jesus humbled himself and was later exalted which you'll read about many places in the Bible take Philippians chapter 2 for example same too for Christians those who humble themselves will be exalted that's a great theme of scripture the least among them will be the greatest well the question is how do we know who is the least like many Christian virtues the way you find out is through behavior as much as belief the one who welcomes a child in the name of Jesus welcomes Jesus and the one who welcomes Jesus welcomes the one who sent Jesus so how do you know who's the greatest the one who welcomes the child in order to make sense of this you have to understand how children were viewed in Jesus day see today everyone welcomes children I go to the shops with my daughter and strangers walk up make friends with her squeeze her cheeks and do stuff like this I take her to church and I get completely ignored people love welcoming children but that's not the picture that he's painting here at all he's not saying that he's not saying whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me as if to say whoever's really enthusiastic and bubbly over children like you always are in Jesus day children were effectively the lowest of the low in terms of they had no rights no freedom they couldn't do anything for you they're the lowest kind of rank of citizen children slaves kind of worthless people really not to say that their parents didn't love them but to say in the eyes of society you met a kid just a kid so what Jesus is saying is profoundly counter-cultural you see he's saying the ones that no one cares about that you're not interested in they're the ones you need to welcome if you want to be the greatest imagine this maybe this will help us get a picture imagine you're in the city one day at

Federation Square getting a cup of coffee or whatever people get there and you see a couple of people walk out of the cathedral which is just opposite and it's a bishop and he's with he's with Paul Barker wow yeah that's good I know they might have a conversation isn't that nice my friends are here and I can schmooze you know you realize it's a bishop and Paul Barker as they walk towards you so what you do is you stand up you stride over you walk straight past them and you kneel down next to the guy who's sitting in the gutter with one of those signs that says please can you help me I need food and he's got filthy clothes and dirty hair and hasn't shaven for weeks and you say to him Jesus loves you and I'd like to help you that's the kind of thinking that's the kind of living that Jesus is saying Christians need to follow we need to seek out those whom society doesn't value because they're the ones that God loves of course by now talking to this guy Paul and the bishop will be with you and this guy will be having set up for a great lunch hopefully even a bed for the night I don't know if that makes you feel uncomfortable it's something we talk about a lot it's not something to tell you the truth I see a lot of

Christians doing I've been in groups of Christians going out for a meal and we have walked past people like that I think then if I said to Jesus who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven he would say not you but this is what it means to be a disciple of Christ please don't think that just because we have a close relationship with Jesus because Jesus our friend is a majestic glorious king that we can walk around above the riffraff of the world it's exactly the opposite one of the glorious things about our God is that he cares for these people and he'll measure us by how much our minds and our lives follow his it's a tough teaching I think you'll notice in the last two verses of our text John in fact takes it to challenge straight away it's from a different angle but what John says is this master we saw someone else casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he doesn't follow with us what John's effectively doing here is he's heard Jesus say welcome the least and John's saying just let me tell you about someone I didn't welcome I just want to kind of feel okay I want you to validate my turning someone away not the least but if we have to welcome the least maybe at least we can shun those people who aren't the same as us in their Christian convictions but no of course not Jesus says don't stop him for whoever is not against you is for you you see John has made the kind of mistake that Christians in big healthy churches often make it's not only the worthless the children the poor the valueless people of the world that

Jesus says not to marginalize but it's also other people who doing ministry in Jesus name I think evangelical Christians are sometimes quick to write write-off Pentecostal Christians Roman Catholic Christians because their ministry isn't like our ministry often we can be unwelcoming to these people now I'm not saying again that there aren't times when we won't need to engage and critique and sometimes even disagree with people from different Christian backgrounds must sure they're good things we need to do them for example if someone's ministering but not in the name of Jesus we might want to ask him about that but where there are people working in the name of Jesus we mustn't be quick to criticize whoever is not against us is for us we need to remember that especially when ministry that they're doing is reaching out to people who we're not and you'll notice that of course the irony here is John says master we saw someone casting out demons and we tried to stop him and it's exactly how the disciples failed earlier the disciples were begged to cast out a demon and they couldn't who's John to criticize please don't be too hasty in judging other Christian ministry that's not like ours and please don't be too hasty to ignore the poor and the worthless person because that's not the fellowship that we have in

Jesus and if you do those things it may be an indication that while you do know some good and true things of Jesus while you can say he's Messiah he's son of God it may also be that you're not acting out of a full picture of what Jesus would have you be and who he wants you to be in your life you might have a kind of half gospel I hope we've seen that despite the fact we've got lots of moving around here lots of different stories lots of different things happening that we need to understand them in the light of this statement about who Jesus is and then this continual getting it wrong of the disciples and if you take something away I want you to think what do I know what don't I know how am I going to live humbly or overconfident as we head towards Easter I'd like to encourage you to think carefully about that paradox of the Messiah God's son the chosen one dying we know it it's easy for us to switch off and go oh I know it I was here last Easter but I bet you don't know it as deeply as it can be known please keep listening to Jesus listen to him put his words in your ears and please let these things that you know and learn be reflected in a continued growth and maturity and service of the

[28:13] Lord let me pray father God thanks for how much you've revealed to us thanks that we're not in the dark thanks that you saved us from our ignorance thanks that we can know Jesus the Messiah the son of God the chosen one thanks also that we know that Jesus was betrayed into human hands and that he died for us help us remember the things we know and to live by them but help us to be humble and thoughtful and not to presume more than we know please help us to live and act with integrity and humility before you that we don't delude ourselves and deceive others in Jesus name amen