

Death & Glory

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[0 : 0 0] I know the snow is a bother to drive through, but it's still beautiful, isn't it, every time it comes. Let's turn, shall we, to Luke 9, if you'd like to follow along in the Bibles, near the back on page 65 and 66.

I recently had one of those experiences where I wish I could go back and have it over again. Do you ever have those experiences? I have them all the time. I met a guy who seemed familiar.

I couldn't place his face. And when he told me his name, I recognised him as someone who I had been in high school with. He'd been in the same year as me for six years.

He knew my family and he asked me my views on the financial crisis. And I'm an absolute expert in that area. I mumbled some things about the headlines and he nodded very seriously and thanked me.

Only later I discovered he's one of the senior partners in the big four finance companies, government policy committees. And I'd like to go back and have that conversation. If I'd known who he was, I think it would have been a little bit different.

[1 : 1 7] Well now as you read through the Gospels, particularly Luke's Gospel, the question of who Jesus is is never far from the surface. And now as we come into chapter nine, it breaks through with shocking clarity because the central question of the Christian life, the central question of life itself, there's no more important question than who is Jesus.

Everything else is secondary to it. Our identity, the big questions of life and death and future, they all boil down to this question, who is Jesus?

And there's a terrific ignorance about the basic facts of Jesus today. I don't know in conversations if you ask people, have you read one of the Gospels as an adult? I get blank stares usually when I ask that question.

If you read the first, just read the first nine chapters, one of the things you'll notice is the people who speak about who Jesus is have the most remarkable credentials.

Right from the start, when Gabriel appears to Mary, Gabriel the angel, he says to Mary that Jesus will be the son of the most high, the son of God, of his kingdom there will be no end.

[2 : 2 8] When the angels appear to the shepherds in chapter two, they say Jesus is a saviour, Christ the Lord. In chapter three, God the Father speaks audibly from heaven and says to Jesus, you are my beloved son, with you I'm well pleased.

And then Jesus casts out demons, they come out screaming, we know who you are, the Holy One of God. And Jesus himself keeps claiming to have the authority of God to forgive sins, to be the Lord of the Sabbath.

And I don't know if you've ever had any sympathy for the followers of Jesus, but I think this is such an enormous thing to take in, that even those who are closest to Jesus are utterly dumbfounded, and they just, they cannot find categories in which to put Jesus.

And as we come to these verses seven to the end, seven to 27, the question of Jesus is kind of, it breaks through in the three main stories.

And the first is in verses seven to nine where we meet Herod, and we find that Jesus is presented as the king from another world. If you just look your eyes down at verses seven to nine, it's difficult to find nice things to say about Herod.

[3 : 46] I've tried, there's not a lot to say. He built a big city, he took someone else's wife while he was still married, and he goes down in the annals of history as being famous for having imprisoned and decapitated John the Baptist and for playing a role in the execution of Jesus.

He was the king of Galilee and Perea, and like so many powerful people, he was deeply, deeply insecure. You look at the first six verses and remember last week that Jesus had sent the twelve disciples out around Herod's countryside preaching the kingdom of God, preaching another king and another kingdom, and it was having an effect.

And if you look at his words down in verse 19, Herod gets up in the morning and he says, this Jesus is worse than John the Baptist. I mean, John the Baptist crossed the line.

He would not accept my official spin on my sex life, so I had him silenced. But this Jesus is different. It seems like he is bigger than death itself.

And so in verses seven to eight, he rehearses what the crowds are saying. Some say he's John the Baptist come back from the dead. Others say he's Elijah come back from the other side. And still others say one of the Old Testament prophets risen from the dead.

[5 : 07] What am I going to do? Or better, who is this Jesus? And in verse seven we're told Herod was perplexed.

Perplexed. I am the undisputed king of my territory, he says. I take a woman that I want. No one can stand in my way. If someone stands in my way, I have them killed. But this Jesus, he seems to come from beyond our world.

And I don't think it's just his guilt talking. Until now, if you've been reading Luke, you'll know the crowds, they acclaim Jesus as a prophet and even a great prophet.

But in the last couple of chapters, he's done different kind of miracles. He's shown he's got power over the sea. He's raised the dead at least twice so far in Luke.

And the only thing the crowds can say is that Jesus, he comes from the other side. He comes from, he's like back from the dead. He's from God. We can't explain it. It's a terrible thing if you're king and trying to be king.

[6 : 13] That there's someone here who might be from God. It means that there's someone who deserves a higher loyalty than you. That if Jesus is God, or if he's come from God and from heaven, it means I'm accountable to him.

I can't just do what I want. I can't keep playing this silly role of being king. I wonder why. I think it's probably why we are desperately trying to move the baby out of Christmas.

Because the baby grows up to be the king. You may not be a literal king and you may not rule over a literal kingdom. You may not have stolen someone else's marriage partner or imprisoned a prophet.

But I think we all do play, we like to play the role of Herod. We like to play God. And for each of us this morning, the key question is, who is Jesus? Is he the son of God?

The son of the most high. Has he come from heaven to bring forgiveness of sins? Because if he has, we can't keep pretending to play God. That's the first little episode. The second episode, verses 10 to 17, is the magnificent meal.

[7 : 19] Very famous miracle. One you're familiar with. The feeding of the 5,000. What makes it different here is two things. The first is this. Undoubtedly, the miracle was absolutely wonderful for all those who were fed.

But I think the miracle is much more directed toward the 12 disciples. I mean, they had seen Jesus control the fish in the Sea of Galilee. They had seen Jesus heal many, many, many individuals.

But now they are presented with a crowd of 5,000 very hungry people. And the need is obvious.

And the need is overwhelming. And it's clearly beyond Jesus' capacity to do anything about. What do you do when you feel that the need outweighs Jesus' power and outweighs his kindness?

And it's very interesting in verse 13, if you just look down at the bottom of the right-hand side there, Jesus pushes the need onto the 12. He wants them to take an active role in this miracle.

[8 : 28] But they just cannot believe Jesus has the power or grace to supply the needs of all these people. So it's a bit of a different miracle in that he's involving the 12. The second thing to say about the miracle in Luke's Gospel is this is a kingdom meal.

Jesus is the host. Have you noticed already, and it's going to become more intense as we go through Luke, that some of the key action takes place around feasts.

And feasts becomes the one dominant picture of life in the kingdom and of salvation and of the future of those who belong to Jesus. Remember, Jesus has come to bring freedom, the freedom of forgiveness, and forgiveness leads to feasting.

That's what we're made for, to enjoy friendship with God forever. This is the first feast in which Jesus is the host.

And it's a feast of transformation and grace. Because Jesus does not barely cover the needs of the 5,000. We'll have to share little bits together.

[9 : 35] But he wonderfully and fabulously and ridiculously satisfies and there are 12 baskets left over. It's a wonderful foretaste of the kingdom of God.

And in the book of Isaiah, deep within the Old Testament, we are told that one day God is going to spread a banquet before the nations. A banquet, a feast of fine food and best wines and the most succulent and satisfying dishes.

And at that feast, God says, every tear will be wiped away and death itself will be banished. And here is a little foretaste of that meal. And do you know who the host is? Do you know who the grace of God comes through?

Do you know the one on whom this depends? It's Jesus Christ. It's showing us who Jesus is. That he is going to do for us what we cannot do. To provide what we cannot provide.

And to do it beyond our imagination. And completely from his free grace. It's wonderful, isn't it? It's a great picture. There are the disciples and all they can see is what they lack.

[10 : 42] What they don't have. We don't have the food. We don't have the resources. There aren't enough McDonald's. And in the background, Herod is lurking. Who is Jesus? And so Jesus tells them to sit the crowd in groups of 50.

He takes the five loaves and the two fish. And he gives it to the disciples to distribute. And just over the page, in verse 17, we read, Look at Jesus.

What is he doing? He's filling the hungry with good things. He's hosting a meal. He's the one through whom the blessing of God comes. And how much do you have to pay to get a meal like this?

Doesn't cost anything to us. Comes from his grace. You can't buy it. And unlike the other meals in Luke's gospel, which are hosted by wealthy or by Pharisees, everybody's welcome.

There's not one section for the worthy and one section for the unworthy. There's no group for those who've got feet washed. Thousands sitting there from all kinds of different backgrounds.

[11 : 57] It's a wonderful picture, isn't it? And I think that's why there's 12 baskets left over. It's a pretty pointed indicator towards the disciples. Now, one basket, each of you guys who didn't think Jesus could do this.

But Jesus is the King of grace. And he brings the kingdom of God, which we enter by his grace. And his grace is not just sufficient for today and for tomorrow and for the rest of our lives.

It is super abundantly, it's promiscuously over-sufficient. In Jesus, God will provide. In Jesus, God will provide.

It's a very important message for us today, isn't it? So firstly, we get this picture of Jesus as the King from beyond. Secondly, he provides as the host the grace of God beyond our dreams.

And then thirdly, Jesus is God's King who dies, verses 18 to 22. And did you notice, as we read it, that this time, Jesus himself takes the question of who he is and presses it on his disciples because he loves them and he wants them to come to confess him.

[13 : 14] You see, in verse 18, he says, Who do people say I am? And the disciples reel off the familiar crowd story from which we know from Herod.

You know, John the Baptist from the dead or Elijah from the dead or an Old Testament prophet back from the dead. But look at verse 20. Jesus says to them directly, Who do you say that I am?

It's clear that those answers in Jesus' mind are completely inadequate. They don't come close. It's not enough to say that Jesus is divine or he comes from God in some vague way.

To belong to Jesus means that he needs to be personally grasped. Something about him needs to be personally experienced. Something very specific has to be personally confessed, personally possessed, which is what baptism is all about.

And in a moment of spiritual insight and revelation, Peter, wonderfully Peter, says, You are the Christ of God. Verse 20. The King.

[14 : 25] God's King and Ruler. It is the first time, first time in Luke's Gospel, this has come from human lips and it's a massive move forward for Peter.

Only a chapter ago, after Jesus stilled the storm, Peter was saying, Who is this guy? Now where does it come from? How does someone come to the point of confessing Christ?

How do our eyes get opened and we gain this spiritual insight? And I think the answer the passage gives us is that it comes from God alone.

It doesn't come from just seeing all the wonderful miracles. Peter and the twelve had seen Jesus heal the blind and the lame and the deaf.

They knew he could heal from a distance. But that had not done it. Miracles are crucial, but they are not sufficient to see who Jesus is. The Pharisees had seen the miracles as well.

[15 : 24] What had changed? If you look down at the beginning of verse 18, it happened as he was praying alone. It's very simple.

Jesus was praying. Understanding who Jesus is, this most important of all insights, it comes directly from God himself into our hearts and it comes through prayer.

None of us have come to Christ on our own power. All of us, we're not capable of seeing the glory of his kingship apart from God working directly in our hearts and it's come about because someone has prayed for you.

If it's happened for you, thank God. And it's one of the reasons, one of the most important things we can do for others, particularly those of us who are parents of children, is to pray for them that God would open their eyes to see the glory of Jesus Christ, that God himself would work in their hearts.

And it's a very big move forward for the disciples but no sooner are the words out of Peter's mouth than Jesus says something utterly devastating. Verse 22, yes he says, I am God's Messiah but this is the way I'm going to enter my rule.

[16 : 40] The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the leaders of Israel. I'll be killed and on the third day raised from the dead.

I don't think you can read these words without having a terrible kind of sadness about them. Here is the one who has come from heaven with forgiveness of sins. You know, the divine doctor who's calling sinners to repentance.

The Christ of God who's providing the heavenly meal by grace and he must suffer and he must be killed and he must because it is the will of God because this is how forgiveness will come to us and this is how we enter into that great meal.

It is the only way. Do you not think that if God could have found another way of bringing us into the kingdom, of bringing us to the meal apart from the execution of his own son he would have found it.

It is a measure of the depth, the desperate depth of our need. It's a brilliant contrast. Herod provides for himself by killing people.

[17 : 51] Jesus provides for us by giving his life to death. And as we hold our breath I think as the disciples hear this and the wind is knocked out of them this appalling promise Jesus goes on in verse 23 and says if anyone would come after me let them deny themselves take up their cross and follow me.

If Jesus is the king of God through whom the blessing of God comes following him means stopping to pretend to play Herod and it means taking on a new kind of identity identity of radical self-denial.

Jesus says we must deny ourselves. Jesus is not saying the Christian life is no pleasure. He's not saying Christians don't enjoy good food good fun good friendship but it means a new kind of life where I place Christ first over everything myself second nor is it denying things to myself denying chocolate during a specific time of the year or denying being ascetic it means turning from the life where I keep playing God and placing myself at disposal.

I think that's what he means by taking up the cross each day. The cross is not your aches and pains and that difficult person in the office. This is a very familiar thing to the people in those days.

You pick up your cross you're on a one way journey. It's a wire it's a very close identification with Jesus. we follow in his steps. We begin to choose what pleases him.

[19 : 38] We model ourselves on him who died and rose again. I think it means being willing to suffer for him. Which is exactly what we promised in baptism wasn't it?

We signed each of those children with the sign of the cross. They're Christs forever. They belong to him. Now by now I don't think any of us I think all of us are feeling this is exactly the opposite of what we normally and naturally think, isn't it?

I mean this is the opposite of what we see around us. I picked up this magazine last night and there's an ad for retirement. Last year Americans spent 19 hours planning for their retirement.

That's in the whole year. That's about the same amount of time they spent planning their Thanksgiving dinner. And then they make this little comment, retirement lasts a lot longer than dinner.

It's good logic, isn't it? Well, Jesus uses similar logic so that we might understand something of this massive reversal. He says there is something infinitely more important than all the stuff that you can accumulate.

[20 : 56] It is your life, your soul, you. And there is something infinitely more precious than you and your life. That is Jesus Christ.

And he says eternity lasts a lot longer than this life. And so as we finish, I just want to show you Jesus gives a little threefold motivation for us to follow him.

True life, true gain, true honour. These are very intense words. I'm conscious as we read them this morning.

Firstly, true life, Jesus warns us about committing spiritual suicide. Verse 24, whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it.

He says the more you try and take a hold of life, secure your life, squeeze the best out of life for yourself. The more you live for today and for this world only, the more you will lose your life, you'll kill your life.

[22 : 04] The more you committed you are, he is saying, to your own assets and to your achievements and to your amusement, the more you will do murder to your own soul. It's very stark.

The only way to gain life is to lose our life for Christ's sake. He's not talking about martyrdom. What he's doing is he's saying, if you put all that this life can offer on one side and put Christ on the other, you cannot give your life to pursuing both.

You just can't do it. This is where true life is. Second, true gain. Jesus invites us to do a little spiritual economics in verse 25.

What does it profit a man or a woman if she gains the whole world and loses or forfeits herself? Simple fact in Jesus' mind is that you are unspeakably more precious than all the money and all the experiences and all the pleasures this world has to give.

We were created for more than 80 years of good times. You can possess all the rank and the riches and the reputation available and lose yourself, forfeit yourself.

[23 : 22] We come into this world naked, we leave this world naked, we take nothing with us. Jesus is saying if you give yourself and live for your slice of the good life, you're literally pouring your life away.

He says it's only I'm the only one who can provide what you really need. I'm the host of the heavenly feast. It's amazing, isn't it?

He's saying I am worth more than this world can give. I'm better than life itself. And if we lose him, we lose God. And if we lose God, we lose heaven and we lose glory and we lose happiness and we lose eternity.

True gain is gaining him. True life, true gain and finally true honour. In verse 26, whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the son of man be ashamed when he comes with his glory, glory of the father and of the holy angels.

He says all the glamour and the glory and the good of the world, it's passing. It's going to be burned up. And the mark of someone who has begun to see Jesus as he really is, is that he's proud of Jesus and not afraid to let others know.

[24 : 38] It doesn't mean he's a pest and a boring conversation, but in a culture and in a world which is proud of all the wrong things, riches, rank and reputation, it's so easy to be ashamed of Christ and his words.

To follow Christ he's saying is to be proud of the right thing of the king of God who provides. It's intense isn't it? So here is the question for us this morning straight from Jesus Christ, straight from this passage.

Who do you say that I am? And Jesus puts himself forward as the key to life, as the king of God and as the host of the heavenly feast.

And he says, I'm better than life, I am alone worth living and dying for because I've lived and died for you. And he invites us to follow him, that's his call to us this morning, to follow him into the kingdom that will outlast this world, and to that day where we will sit together and see him face to face.

And so the question is, have you taken your stand with Peter? Have you confessed Jesus to be the Christ? You need to go to him, we each need to go to him and follow him and ask us to save us.

[26 : 03] And his promise is that he'll provide for us more than we can imagine and bring us into the heavenly feast that he has prepared. So let's kneel and pray, shall we?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that you are the King of God, the Christ of God. And we acknowledge together there's much in this passage that is challenging to us.

we thank you for your provision, for your grace and your kindness and your willingness to die for us. Teach us what it means to follow you and to take up our cross and to deny ourselves.

Help us to think differently, to think in this way about the world, to see you above all things, to value you above all things and so to have life. life.

and we ask this in your name. Amen. Father, you have asked us the question, asking who do we say that you are?

[27 : 26] At this time of the year, we think Christmas, we think a baby, but we think of a baby born to be a king. Amen. We think of a redeemer, come to redeem us from our sins.

We think of light born into darkness. Help us at this time, Lord, to take time out from making the lists that we want to make as the world around us focuses on Christmas.

Christmas focuses on giving, giving gifts to make ourselves feel good. Help us as Christians to focus on the central message of this season, that Jesus has come, Jesus the light of the world.

And as we walk through the season of Advent and approach Christmas Day, we see the contrast between what was and what is. The darkness that was, an absence of light, total and complete as seen in the people of Israel, as well as the people of Vancouver and their ignorance of God.

The light that is, come to earth in a stable in Bethlehem, a light that banishes all darkness and reflects to us the glory of God.

[29 : 08] Let us share that light through our lives and reflect it to those around us as we walk through this world. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we think of our place in the world, we pray for our leaders, civic leaders, for the Queen, for our political leaders.

we pray for guidance in these uncertain times. None of us know what lies ahead, but we have the knowledge that our times are in your hands, and that we can trust you to carry us through the uncertainty and doubt.

We pray for the Church at this time, and thank you that your people may be bold to share what is truly and really important, the message of hope that comes from Advent.

Advent. For our Church leaders, we pray and ask for godly leaders who are not embarrassed to stand for the Bible against those who would deny it.

[30 : 13] We thank you for churches joining ANIC, and may your kingdom continue to grow, and may it continue to be an instrument to spread the Gospel.

We think of the Church in Malawi this week and pray for the election of a godly bishop in the Diocese of the Upper Shearer. The election takes place on Tuesday, and help us to continue to pray through the week for that.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. For those in our Church ministering locally, we ask your blessing. Richie with the Navigators and Kirsten with Living Waters, give them each the comfort of your spirit as they face obstacles to the spread of your gospel, and give them encouragement as they see fruit in their ministries, and help them and us to pray for strength and guidance.

For our pastoral staff, we pray for strength as they continue in their ministries, and may they feel it increase as they continually rely on you for guidance and direction, and help us all to support them in prayer and with encouragement.

And especially at this time, we pray for the music ministry in our Church, for Terry and for all who work with him, and may the music be used to bring people to church who might not normally hear the gospel, and may they realize that there is a message in it, and that is the same message of hope that we hear from your word.

[31 : 56] At this time, we also pray for those in need. Around the world, we hear stories, and we see pictures of flood, famine, war, and weather-related crises, and sometimes we don't do anything in the safety and comfort of our existence.

We see help agencies running short of money, food, and other things to help those in need. With this cold weather, there are those who need shelter and clothing. Help us to be aware of their needs and to look after them as we see those needs through your eyes.

And for those in our Church who are sick, we pray, we think especially of Paul, Rowena, Anne, Wynne, Mark, Ben, and Maureen, and others who we know in our hearts that are a part of our own families or circles.

We pray for Miran and for his ruling by the Immigration Board. We pray for our troops in Afghanistan. For those who are bereaved, and we pray especially for the family of Henry Dunn, who passed away this week.

We ask that you would be with Erica, Jenny, and Tony at this time, and may they feel the support of those around them at a time made harder in some ways by closeness to Christmas.

[33 : 20] We ask you to make us continually aware of those in the Church who have needs. And at the same time, we thank you for those who meet regularly to pray for our Church and its ministries. And thank you for those who have a ministry of caring for those who are sick and hurting.

We pray especially for Clara and Joseph as they were baptized this morning. Help them to grow in their faith as we encourage them. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the people.

But the Lord rises upon you, and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Words written to Israel and Jerusalem, but appropriate to us as we take your light from this service and go into the world of darkness.

Be with us, Lord, and help us to take up our cross daily and follow you. Amen. Amen.
Amen.