

Death & Glory

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[0 : 0 0] of a passage of scripture or of a verse that runs more directly against our kind of common cultural values than that verse right there. Like I said, it has this really high offensive omitor potential there. I was recently, from time to time, when I interact with people, they find out that I'm a pastor and usually that ends all conversation right there. It's amazing what that'll happen at cocktail parties. That'll put a downer on things. But from time to time, people find out that I'm a pastor and then it gets them talking. And from time to time, they tell me all about kind of what they think about spirituality. And usually they talk a lot when they start talking. And it's always interesting. One time I was talking to a realtor. We were looking at a potential apartment and she found out that I was a pastor and showed me her favorite book. And the book, you may have heard of it, is called The Power of Intention, subtitle, How to Co-Create Your Reality Your Way. And I found it rather interesting.

And the thing that struck me about it, we had a little conversation about it, not a whole lot, but the thing that struck me about it is how perfectly it describes the kind of basic Vancouver, it's not just Vancouver, but it's particularly here, Vancouver type spirituality. It's all about me.

It's, you know, it's kind of I live for me kind of spirituality. And I frankly can see why it's incredibly attractive. But it's the very opposite, almost precisely the opposite of what Jesus tells us tonight. Tonight, Jesus says an audacious thing. Tonight, Jesus comes in and he says that kind of spirituality, that kind of spirituality, it all orbits around me and who I am, that kind of spirituality looks attractive, but it ends in death. And on the other hand, Jesus is going to tell us that true life, the life he frankly designed us for is a life that radically sets aside ourselves and lives for

Jesus as our highest aim. And so tonight, I want to look into this audacious thing that Jesus claims. And I want to do it by asking two questions. They're really important questions. Who is Jesus, first of all? The question that Eric just led us through. And then secondly, based on who he is, what does it mean to follow him? So first, who is Jesus? I hope that you've been looking through Luke and kind of following along. If you're in a home group, at least several of the home groups are looking at Luke. And you'll have noticed that if you read through it, Luke keeps mentioning this question. And it's the question of who is Jesus? I mean, who is this guy? He heals people. He forgives people. He calms storms. He casts out demons. Who in the world is Jesus? And that question kind of hits a pinnacle in verse 18. Jesus has been ministering with his disciples for some time and he takes them aside to pray. And in the middle of the prayer meeting, Jesus stops the whole thing and he looks at his disciples and he takes up the key question of the book of Luke. He looks at his disciples and he says, who do the crowd say that I am? Now, I wasn't there. Just be clear on that.

But I can imagine at that moment you could hear a pin drop. And I imagine that they kind of looked at each other and they said, well, Jesus, some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, some say one of the old prophets. And then Jesus says, no, no, no. Okay, okay. Let me clarify the question here. Who do you say that I am? And at that moment, again, I wasn't there, but I can imagine some shifty eyes and some nervous smiles. Who's going to do it? I mean, they've been expecting it. They've been talking about it behind his back. Who's going to go for it? And finally, Peter, because he always makes the big play, comes in and he says, you're the Christ of God. Now, the moment he said that, it turned the world upside down. Because it's one thing if Jesus is a prophet. I mean, that's what everybody was saying. That's the safe play. It's one thing if Jesus is a prophet, but it is something entirely different if Jesus is the Christ of God. You know that Christ is not Jesus' last name, right? We need to be clear on that. It wasn't Mary and Joseph Christ who had a little boy named

[5 : 31] Jesus. No. Christ is a title and it's a job description. So let me give you a little bit of background and hopefully this will help you see what a big deal this is that Peter said this.

In the Old Testament, the concept of the Christ or the Messiah, same word, just one's Hebrew, one's Greek. It's a concept that develops slowly, but a really important passage comes out of Daniel chapter 7. And in Daniel chapter 7, Daniel sees a vision. And he sees a vision of, he says, one like a son of man. Now, note later on Jesus uses that phrase. Daniel sees one like a son of man.

And the son of man, by God, is given two jobs. On the one hand, he's given the job to be the king. He's given a kingdom. And his kingdom is one that, he's to rule the whole world and he's to rule it in righteousness and justice. But he has another job. And the other job that he has is that he is to be judge.

It's in the context of the great judgment at the last day when we see the son of man. And the son of man is part of God's plan to come and judge all the injustice of the world. And so the son of man is to come and to bring God's judgment on those who have consistently aligned themselves with evil.

Now, that's what Peter has in his mind. Those two job parts of Jesus's job description. And Peter is elated because in his head, he's thinking of Herod and Pilate and Caesar and all the other Hitlers of his day groveling before the feet of Jesus. And again, I wasn't there. I don't know what was in Peter's head, but I bet you in his head, right? He's thinking, I'm going to be right behind Jesus. And I'm going to you get him, Jesus. You know, I mean, he is ecstatic to see these guys grovel before him.

[7 : 35] And then Jesus bursts the bubble. Look at verse 22. Jesus knows all this is going on in his disciples' head, but he comes and he says, guys, you don't have a clue what the Christ is all about. So don't talk about it because you don't understand it yet. Let me tell you about the job of the Son of Man and of the Christ. The Son of Man has to die. The Son of Man has to be executed. And we've got to appreciate how ridiculous that must have sounded in the disciples' ears. I mean, you know, they would have said, Jesus, okay, we're really excited that you're the Christ. But if you are the Christ, and if you are the Son of Man, and if you are the King and the Judge, then you can't talk about dying. Dying is what, getting killed is what criminals, that's what happens to criminals. You're supposed to be the King. You're supposed to be the

Judge. You're supposed to be the one who gives the sentence upon the guilty and punishes them. You're not supposed to receive punishment. And we find out later that that's exactly the point.

The disciples don't get it yet. But God's plan that Jesus was just, in this passage, just beginning to unveil, is that Jesus, yes, he is the King, he is the Judge. But before he comes into his glory, the Judge has to be judged. The Judge has to die. The Judge has to be sentenced to death and executed as a criminal. And we find out later, it's because the Judge voluntarily offers himself to be judged, to die as a criminal on behalf of you and I. And Jesus says, it's after that execution and death that then I will enter into my glory. I will be, I will raise again, I will rise again, and I will ascend, and I will indeed be the King and the Judge of the living and the dead. Now, here's the deal. The first question we've got to figure out is, who is Jesus? The second is, what does it mean to follow him?

And they're related questions. Because, think with me, if Jesus indeed is the King and the Judge, but not just the Judge, the Judge who himself receives the penalty of our guilt so that we can be pardoned and come into his kingdom as free citizens, if that's who Jesus is, then he has ultimate claim over your life and my life. And that means that to follow Jesus means we are to live for him alone. And that means we have to die to the world.

And that's where it starts to get offensive. Look at verse 23 again. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

[11 : 00] Now, let me illustrate this. It might be a bit confusing so far. Let me illustrate this from the life of Herod. We'll think about Herod for a minute. And Herod is the perfect contrast to what it means to follow Jesus. And so, by way of contrast, what it means to be a disciple will become more clear. Herod is a guy who lives utterly for himself. We talk about him a little bit in the beginning of the first reading. Herod pops up kind of like a prairie dog all the way through Luke and Acts. And he's a guy who lives, he designs his whole life in order to convince himself and those around him that he is a god. He lives in a Herod-centered world where he seeks to maximize pleasure, minimize suffering, and continually protect his own self-interest.

And all through the story, whenever Herod comes up, he's this anxious, compulsive drive to protect himself and to look after his own interests. And it all comes to a head in Acts chapter 12.

You don't have to turn there. I'll just kind of tell you the story. It's at the end of Herod's life and it looks as if Herod has finally arrived. Everything is as he would want it. His enemies have been suppressed. He comes into a stadium full of thousands of people who are literally worshiping him. They are proclaiming, Herod, you're a god. You're a god. And Luke, who's the author of Acts, says right at that moment, he dies. And then Luke adds a wonderful little detail that his body was eaten by worms, which I found helpful in understanding Herod. Look at verse 24 in our reading.

Jesus says this, and think about Herod. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Verse 25, for what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? Here's the deal. Think about Herod.

Herod. He lived for this world. He did everything in his power to save his life. To gain everything, to collect all the glory he could for this world. And I tell you, when you think about Herod's life, there's a sense to which, if, oh come on, isn't it, doesn't it kind of sound good?

[13 : 43] Doesn't it sound a little plausible that Herod's path in life would be a reasonable one for us to pursue? Isn't it kind of intuitive that we want to maximize pleasure, minimize suffering, and protect our own self-interest as kind of the orienting philosophy? It does to me. I think it does.

I think it does deep down to all of us. But Luke's tells us that it ends in worm food. But Jesus's path is completely counterintuitive. To follow Jesus is to follow a king who is not from this world. And so it requires us to die to this world and to follow him. Herod's path is entirely plausible. But it ends in just the grave. It just ends. And after maybe 80 years, that's it. And then worm food, Jesus's ends in eternal glory, which is eternal is a lot longer than 80 years, just so we're clear. Friends, the question is this, what does it mean to follow Jesus? And the thing that it means is it will always include dying to this world. And first, it will mean dying to this world by living for the life that is to come, the life of Christ, the world, the kingdom of Christ. But secondly, following Jesus means dying to the world by not being ashamed of Christ.

Not being ashamed of Christ here and now. Think about Herod again. Look back at verse 9. Herod says, what does he say about John? John, I beheaded. And then he says, and I'd like to see Jesus.

And then in chapter 13, we find out that the reason Herod wants to see Jesus is he wants to kill him. And in the book of Acts, Herod ends up killing John the apostle and he tries to kill Peter.

You see, the point is when you follow Jesus, you will be a threat to this world. And this world will despise you. And the world will put its pressure upon you to be just a little embarrassed to Jesus.

[15 : 54] I was speaking with a group of people recently and none of the people in the room, it's about, I don't know, 20 people, none of the people in the room were Christians. And we were talking about our different understandings of who God is. It was a very interesting conversation, actually rather enjoyable.

But the whole time, I found myself praying under my breath, God, Lord, help me not be ashamed of you. Help me not apologize for you.

And the reason that I felt this kind of pressure to be ashamed of Jesus is the whole time, every time I said anything, I realized that the gospel of Jesus is so out of step with our culture and so unpopular that everybody looked at me like I was from Mars.

And there was a subtle temptation for me just to be a little apologetic. But then I think of what Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

You see, if we were to follow Jesus, then that means, by definition, dying to this world. And the first way we die to this world is by living for the next. The second way we die to this world is by not being ashamed of Christ in this world.

[17 : 17] And the third way is the hardest. And it's by dying, denying ourselves. Back to verse 23. Let him deny himself, Jesus says.

And I think this is the centerpiece. I think if you can die to yourself, if you can deny yourself, the other ways of dying to the world come rather naturally.

Again, it's helpful to think about Herod. The reason Herod lived for this world, fundamentally, is because Herod was preeminently concerned with himself.

The most important thing in Herod's life was Herod. And the minute I say that, we've got to think of ourselves. I mean, isn't that the way you're wired? It's the way I'm wired.

I live in a gym-o-centric world. And naturally, my desire is to maximize pleasure, minimize suffering, and protect my own self-interest at every possible opportunity.

[18 : 19] But if Jesus is the Christ, and if Jesus is the King, and if Jesus is the Judge who took my penalty upon Himself so that I can be a citizen of the Kingdom, then He's the center of things.

Then that means that His honor and pleasure and glory are far more important than mine. And actually, that I will find my highest joy in giving Him highest glory.

Now, let me be clear. It doesn't mean that pleasure is bad, or that suffering is good, or that our self-interests don't matter. That's not the point. The point is, Jesus is to be the highest priority in our lives, and is to take precedent over every other competitor.

Now, let's wrap this up. If that's who Jesus is, and if following Him means denying, dying to the world in various ways, then the question is, how do we do it?

And I want to assure you that you can't. You're inadequate to do this, and so am I. I mean, we can try to deny the world and live entirely for Jesus.

[19 : 34] We can try, and we will fail, and we, all of us, have failed a lot. But that can actually be a source of encouragement. Let me tell you why.

Because it brings us back to the first question. The first question is, who is Jesus? And the only way our hearts can be reoriented to Jesus, the only way we can die to this world and live for Christ is for our eyes to turn off ourselves and look at Him.

Just look at what He did upon the cross. Because when we look at the cross, we realize that we have been hopelessly guilty of living very, very self-centered lives, and this world-centered lives.

And that we deserve, we're guilty. We deserve God's condemnation for it. But then we look at Jesus and what He did upon the cross.

We sang a song. When every unclean thought and every sinful deed was scourged upon His back and hammered through His feet, the innocent has cursed, the guilty are released, the punishment of God on God has brought me peace.

[20 : 50] You see, when we come back to the cross as guilty sinners who are freely forgiven, then our hearts cannot help but be captivated by Jesus.

And that process of being forgiven and reconciled to God is the very mechanism that reorients our heart to Jesus so that honoring Him, glorifying Him, and praising Him becomes our joy.

And that is precisely the heart condition of one who is dying to this world and living for the world to come. And so I invite you to the cross.

I invite you to the cross to look at Jesus and for Him to be your highest joy as you find your greatest forgiveness in Him.

And then we will live for the world to come. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, You indeed are the Christ.

[21 : 57] You are the King, You are the Judge, and You were judged for us. Lord, what a mystery that is. We don't understand it. Oh, but we would desire to receive it.

And will You grant us to receive it with such reality, with such palpable reality, that it would distract our hearts from our addiction to ourselves, that it would distract, that You would distract our hearts from the addiction to this world, and that we may die to this world, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow You, and we may taste that joy that You know now, and the whole world will see when You come in the glory of Your Father and of the angels.

and we pray this in Your name and for Your honor. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.