

The Importance of Seeing Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] I don't know how closely you maybe follow some things that go on in the world of politics.! There's some really big things that are very hard to ignore that happen. They affect everybody.

! It's been another one of these weeks, I think. Last week there was a really interesting exchange in Parliament where a Roman Catholic member of Parliament had voted for the assisted suicide legislation that had gone through, reached its final reading in the Commons. And the following Sunday his parish priest refused to give him mass. And his MP was somewhat outraged by this and took to Twitter to complain about how unfavourable this was. And the thought has been with me for some time now over these last days, how do we assure ourselves that we can have Christian politicians, Christians in public life, Christians in positions of any authority and influence, whether that's in our schools and industry and local authorities, whatever it might be. But how can we be sure that Christians will take a biblical worldview seriously?

This MP thought, and said in fact as much on Twitter, that his Christian faith could be put in a box and have nothing to do and no influence on his public fulfilment of the office of a member of parliament. That his faith could be detached from that. And I wonder, you know, when you read these passages where Jesus says, if anyone honours me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, him also will the Son of Man honour. But if anyone is ashamed of me, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him. How is it that we can get to the point where Christians can conclude that it's okay to keep your faith in a box? And I have been wondering about that and I don't get it. Clearly, there is a fear element. People are scared of what the masses of the electorate will do to them if their Christian faith is somehow worn to the fore.

And what had occurred to me was this comes down really to discipleship. This is about how we as Christians are discipled and encouraged to live and to walk as followers of Jesus every day in our lives.

And so this is not just a message for people who are members of parliament. This is a message for all of us who are Christians to hear the words of Jesus. The context here is really important because Peter has made this incredible profession. We didn't quite read as far back as this in Mark 8. But Peter has made this incredible profession of who Jesus is. He is the Christ. And after that, Jesus begins to explain what being the Christ will mean. And for Peter, perhaps he was thinking the Messiah, the Christ was someone who was going to come and deliver Israel from Roman occupation, who was going to free the people from Roman rule. The Messiah would restore the kingdom of David and everything would be wonderful for the Jewish nation once again. And Jesus says, no, no, no, that is not what the Messiah is about. The Son of Man must be put to death. And so we're going to go to Jerusalem and that's what's going to happen. And Peter is outraged. He's just said, you are the Christ, you are the Messiah.

[4 : 0 0] But now he's saying to Jesus, but you're not going to go and die. And Jesus says, but I must. And he very strongly rebukes Peter, he says, get behind me, Satan, for you're not set in your mind and your heart on things of God. You're thinking earthly. And Jesus then goes on, and this is an incredibly strange statement for him to make, one which in our ears is lost. He says, if someone will come after me, then he must take up his cross and follow me. And that expression, take up your cross, was a statement really about the cost of following Jesus. Because in his context, taking up your cross did not simply mean doing something that was a little bit uncomfortable. It was really living out a death sentence. The only people who carried a cross were people who were going to be crucified.

So Jesus does it at the end when he is beaten by the Roman soldiers and condemned by Pontius Pilate. The soldiers make him carry the cross from the barracks where he has been beaten and abused to Golgotha's hill. And he's not able to, and that's why they have to compel someone to help him carry the cross.

That's what carrying your cross entailed. It was a death sentence. And when we think about discipleship in these terms, what we're really seeing is it's a call to come and die.

It's the way Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it in his book called The Cost of Discipleship. Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran theologian, lived in the 1930s, and was put to death by the Nazis.

But he thought that the church in Germany at the time was compromising, had a shallow faith, a shallow, cheap form of grace that allowed them to compromise with Nazi ideology.

[6 : 0 3] And he thought there was no place for this. And he stood against it. And he talked about costly grace. The cost of discipleship, of radically following Jesus, is extreme.

Because it puts you at odds with the world. And that's what Jesus meant when he said, take up your cross and follow me. Being a disciple of Jesus will put you at odds with the world.

Because you cannot keep your faith in a little box and somehow think that things can go on. That as a Christian, your faith can be secure.

Your conscience somehow can be clean. But actually how you live day by day is compromised. And so it takes, the answer for some might simply be that that takes great boldness.

That sometimes we have to just work ourselves up to be obedient enough. Just to really work hard at being good enough disciples. That we can live up to this standard.

[7 : 1 7] But I want to tell you today, that is not the way of Jesus. See, Jesus is a teacher. And we are his disciples. We follow him. But a good teacher does not simply tell you the truth.

And say, that's it. Go and put it into practice. A good teacher will also show you it. They'll demonstrate it. They'll show you what you need.

And give you what you need. To complete the task. This is one of these great rules for you if you're a Christian. To live by. It is that if God calls you to do something.

He will also equip you to do that. You know, sometimes when we're young Christians. We look at the world in front of us. And we think, it's really daunting. Perhaps it's a call to the ministry.

And you're thinking, there's just no way that I can do that. There's no way that I can put myself forward for that calling. Even if I think God really is calling me. I just don't know how it would be achievable.

[8 : 1 7] Well, be assured. God never calls without also equipping. So God, if he calls you.

Perhaps it's calling you. Some of you may be scared. You're thinking, I'm getting married soon. I don't know how I'm going to get through that. God calls. He'll equip you. Those of you who maybe recently become parents.

And you're thinking, how on earth do I bring up my kids? In this day and age. It's quite daunting. It is. But the wonderful thing is that God who calls will offer to equip you as well.

He will help you. Some of you who are older Christians, you're thinking, how can I pass on wisdom and instruction to younger Christians today? I don't speak their language.

I don't understand their world. I've no idea how to convey to them the wisdom that God has allowed me to grow into. How do I do it? Remember, God who calls also equips.

[9 : 19] He will equip you for the calling that he has given you. The same is also true when it comes to salvation. Some of you maybe today are thinking, I would love to be a Christian.

I would really love to be a follower of Jesus. But I'm worried that if I take that stand, if I begin on that road, I won't keep it. I won't sustain it. I won't get to where I'm going.

I won't be able to keep up the standards. Remember, God who calls also equips. When we come to faith, as I was saying to the kids this morning, it's like a packaging label is put on us.

That God will take us to the destination. And we have to stay in step with the Holy Spirit. We have to keep in keeping with God's ways. But the Holy Spirit will help us and enable us and equip us to keep going.

And so Jesus, as the teacher who also shows and equips the disciples, tells them that this is about to happen. Because very often when we're talking and listening to sermons that are preached on the take up your cross and follow me part of this passage, we stop and we don't read into the next chapter or the next few verses.

[10 : 39] And so we would miss what's at the beginning of chapter 9. And we think, well, all we need to hear is take up your cross and follow me.

That's not what Jesus said. Similarly, actually, some people will perhaps approach the transfiguration passage and view it in isolation and think it's all about the glory of Jesus, which it is.

I mean, Jesus is showing his glory. But it's to an end. It's got a purpose in it. And the context of the discipleship, that the courage and the enduring patience and growing faith of the disciples is what Jesus is seeking to bolster.

And these two passages, therefore, they have to go hand in hand. And the reason I say this is because in all of the synoptic gospels, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, every single one of them has these two passages in direct connection.

And the connection between them is chapter 9, verse 1, where Jesus says, Some of you will not taste death until you have seen the kingdom come in power.

[11 : 52] And so this morning, as we go on, I want to think about what the transfiguration means really for discipleship. What does it mean for us in our walk? I mean, what is Jesus actually showing Peter and James and John?

What is he saying to them in showing them his glory and meeting with Moses and Elijah? And the trick of it is really to understand who the people who meet with Jesus are.

So there's two men up here talking to Jesus, Moses and Elijah. They're figures from the Old Testament. And in fairness, you would probably have to be coming at the Old Testament completely afresh, not to really grasp who Moses and Elijah are.

Moses is the lawgiver. He's the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of the Torah, the books of the law. And so when the Jews think about Moses, they think Moses is up there as the pinnacle of law giving.

He's the pinnacle of God's law being given to the people. He's the one who led them out of Egypt, brought them to Mount Sinai. He's the one who interacts between them and God. He's the one who they hear about God's law from because God speaks to them just once.

[13 : 07] Remember, God only speaks to the people once when he gives them the Ten Commandments. And the people at the end of that, they say, Moses, Moses, look, that is never happening again. It's absolutely terrifying when God speaks to us.

So you go up onto the mountain, you speak to God, and when you come down, tell us what God has to say. And we would much rather hear from you what God has to say than ever hear God's voice again. So Moses is the lawgiver.

He's up there as the pinnacle of God's word given to the people. And then you've also got Elijah. Elijah, again, is really famous because he's the first and the greatest of the sort of what are called the covenant fidelity prophets.

The prophets who are calling Israel back into a relationship, a pure relationship with God once again. And the high point in Elijah's life comes right at the beginning of his ministry where Ahab has come to the throne.

He's married Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel have constructed an entire new priesthood of Baal all across the nation of Israel. There are thousands of priests of Baal. All of the true followers of God have kind of melted into the woods and disappeared.

[14 : 16] And Elijah walks into Ahab and says, there'll be no rain until you repent. And Ahab's like, who are you, you troubler of Israel? And then a few years pass. There's been no rain.

Ahab is beginning to realize this has been a disaster. We can't find the guy. We need to deal with this. And Elijah reappears and says, summon all the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel. We'll have a showdown.

We'll see whose God is the real God. And they have all of their prophets and all of their priests of Baal all gathered together. And they set up an altar. And the rule is there's no fire going on the altar.

The God who is real will send fire. And so Elijah is there waiting for the prophets to do their thing. And so they're all dancing and they're cutting themselves and they're rejoicing and all sorts of different things. Huge celebration.

No fire from Baal falls from heaven. And at the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah gets up and says, let's build an altar here to God. Gets 12 stones. Slaughters Abul and puts it on the altar.

[15 : 11] And then drenches the altar with water. And then he simply prays to God. He says to the people, you're halting between two opinions.

Who's the real God here? And as Elijah prays, fire falls from heaven and consumes the sacrifice and the water and the stones and everything is just inflamed.

And the people realize God is the true God. And so Elijah is up there as the greatest of the prophets.

The greatest of the ones who are calling the people back. And so you kind of think of the transfiguration. You've got the law and the prophets which symbolizes the whole of Jewish history and revelation from God.

And all of that's talking. You know, they're there as representatives of all of this. And they're talking with Jesus and they're showing, therefore, the glory of Jesus over everything that's in Jewish tradition.

[16 : 15] And for some people, that's it. That's the transfiguration. That's what's happening. But there's much, much more going on here. Because Moses is an interesting guy.

Moses is kind of interesting because the story of Moses is one that begins with failure. Remember, Moses was born of a Hebrew.

He was placed in a basket in the river Nile to shield him and hide him from the Egyptian authorities who wanted to kill all of the Hebrew babies. And a princess of Egypt finds him in the river.

And Moses is raised within the Egyptian royalty. He's given all the privileges of life. And one day when he's 40, he goes out and he's wandering around and he sees some of his own people, some of the Hebrews.

And he says, I'm not having any of that. And he thinks to himself, I'm going to intervene and free my people. And he does in his own strength.

[17 : 18] And he kills the Egyptian. And he buries him. And he thinks he's got away with it. And the next day he sees two Hebrews arguing amongst themselves. And he tries to intervene.

And say, come on, sort it out. And they say to him, are you going to kill one of us like you killed the Egyptian? And Moses is terrified. He's been found out. And he flees. And he runs off to the desert. And he's out in the desert for 40 years.

Troubled. Guilty conscience. Failure. He wasn't able to redeem his people. He wasn't able to free them. And there out in the desert, he has his first meeting with God in the burning bush.

And God says to Moses, put off your sandals for the place where you stand as holy ground. And Moses is in awe and wonder at this. And he says, what am I going to do here?

And God says, you're going to go back to Egypt. And you're going to go in to see Pharaoh. And you're going to say to Pharaoh, God says, let my people go. And even then, Moses is saying, I can't do this. I'm not effective.

[18 : 16] I'm not a good speaker. I stutter. And God says to him, I'll send your brother Aaron with you. But you're going to do this. And Moses, in all of his weakness, says, I can't.

I'm not able to. And God takes weak Moses. And God, by his sufficiency and by his grace and by his help, takes Moses back to Pharaoh, takes Moses into the royal throne room and says, the God of Israel says, let my people go.

And the rest, you know, is history that Pharaoh refuses. Pharaoh declines. He wants none of it. There's the plagues that follow. And then Moses eventually is, after the last of the plagues, Moses leads the people out of the land of Egypt.

They're brought to the Red Sea. God says to Moses, stretch out your rod across the sea and the sea parts. And Moses leads them to Mount Sinai. And Moses goes up onto Mount Sinai and meets with God in his face, shines radiantly and everything else.

But the point of all of this is Moses was not great in his own strength. Moses, when he tried to take up his cross and follow God and do what he thought was God's plan, was an abject failure.

[19 : 46] And it wasn't until he met with God. It wasn't until he received the presence of God in his person. It wasn't until he met God and savored God's goodness and God's holiness and God's marvel and God's grace and God's redemption.

It wasn't until Moses discovered God as an atoning God that Moses was effective in doing the work of God.

Don't you see? He had to see God. And Elijah's kind of interesting because his story is almost the opposite. Elijah's story starts on a high, Mount Carmel.

And you'd think after experiencing such a marvelous moment of God's transformative work in an entire nation, the nation, it would seem on the face of it, is about to be revived.

He's hugely, you almost think he's riding the wave of popularity, having overthrown the prophets of Baal. And yet a few days later, he is terrified of the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel.

[20 : 55] And he goes off to hide. And when he goes off to hide, he actually says to God, I just want to die. Things are so hard.

There's no true followers left. He's seen the amazing work of God. Fire fallen from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. And a few days later, I want to die.

Things are so hard. I mean, Elijah, when you actually look at his life, in his own strength, in his own ability, in his own reliance, he's nothing.

He's useless. And yet God comes to him and nourishes him and feeds him. And he says to him, take and eat this food. And Elijah eats. And God gives him the strength to go to Mohoreb, to Mount Sinai, down in the desert.

And when he goes down there, he experiences amazing things. What you think is God. There's an earthquake. There's a mighty rushing wind. There's a flaming tempest.

[21 : 56] But then there's just a still, small voice. And Elijah hears the still, small voice of God. And it's that that transforms his experience.

He meets with God. He's transformed by a meeting with God. And so in Moses, you've got, I think, perhaps a model there for the Christian who's feeling weak.

You think, I'm a weak disciple. How can I possibly take up my cross and follow Jesus? And there's Moses. A failure for two-thirds of his life.

And God uses him to deliver the people. And give the law. Or maybe you're like Elijah today. Maybe you have.

Maybe in your past, in your youth, perhaps, you had amazing experiences of God's miraculous work. You were seeing God do great things. And since then, maybe things have been a bit quieter.

[23 : 05] Maybe a bit distressing. Maybe you've actually watched culture in Scotland abandon its Christian heritage and roots. And you feel a bit displaced. And you think, how on earth do I fit in this world? Maybe, God, it's just time you took me home.

Maybe you're not suicidal. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying, maybe you just feel your time's up. Your work is finished. There's nothing more to do. And today, God is saying to you as well, take up your cross and follow me.

Take up your cross. And follow me. And the reason you're able to do that is because you hear the still, small voice.

Because you hear the redeeming word of God. The words of Jesus. And say, I'm going to die for you. I have died for you. And I've been risen for you.

And I hold out to you the promise of everlasting life. And glory. My glory shared. Because you will reign with me in the new heavens and the new earth.

[24 : 09] And the context here is everything. Jesus is saying to his disciples, take up your cross and follow me.

But he's giving them examples of people who were enabled to do that. And he's saying to us today the same thing. You can be bold if you see me.

That's what we need. That's why these two passages have to go together. We have to know who has saved us.

Who has redeemed us. Who has brought us to salvation. So that we can serve him with that confidence and boldness. And go on. And the transfiguration, it shows us that.

It shows us just how wonderful Jesus is. But equally, sometimes you get Christians who are just a bit top heavy. They see the wonder of Jesus and they do nothing with it.

[25 : 14] Because they forget the marvel of Jesus is an inspiration to us to serve. To go into this world with his gospel.

And to make him known. And so today, we simply need to see Jesus. And we can ask the question, where?

Where do I see him? There's an obvious answer, I think, in the word. Because John tells us, The person of Jesus reveals the glory of God.

He is the word made flesh who has come and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory. Glory is of the only son from the father. Full of grace and truth. And John is telling us, actually, the reason that he writes his gospel.

And it's true for the synoptic gospels as well. The reason we have the gospels is so that we will see Jesus. And the rest of the Bible fits around that and shows us how that matters.

[26 : 19] Why it matters. Why Jesus has the authority to command our allegiance. What Jesus calls us to. How his pattern for human flourishing and thriving all fits together.

But it's all found in the Bible. So read the Bible. Major on the gospels. And you will discover Jesus. Do so prayerfully.

I mean, do so prayerfully. Pray that you will see the kingdom of God come in with its power. And that will come off the pages to you.

Because the Bible presents to us the majesty of Jesus. That's what the book of Revelation is finally about. It's about the authority of Jesus over all of human history.

Even the really difficult things that have happened. The difficult things that are happening in our day. The way our country has really turned away from biblical worldviews and thinking.

[27 : 20] Jesus is still sovereign. He's still in control. And he's still working out his plan and his purposes. Do it in fellowship.

It's interesting. When Jesus takes the disciples up onto the mountain of transfiguration. He doesn't just take one of them. He doesn't just say, right, Peter, you come up with me. And then you can tell everyone else. He takes Peter and James and John. And when they're coming back down the mountain.

They're talking to each other. Jesus has charged them. Don't tell anyone about this. Until the Son of Man rises from the dead. And Peter and James and John are coming down the mountain saying. The Son of Man is going to rise from the dead. And they're questioning each other.

What is this? How is the Son of Man going to rise from the dead? What is he talking about? And it's not until afterwards that they begin to make the connections. And everything flows together. And they realize that actually the victory of Jesus.

Is over death. And over sin. And over everything in fact. Because he is Lord. And their fellowship grows. Because they've spent the time together.

[28 : 17] Reflecting on this and learning. And so be in fellowship. Talk to one another about the gospel. And you will see Jesus.

Be encouraged today. Because the God who calls you to discipleship. Is earnestly seeking to equip you. For his service. And he will.

Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father. We desperately need to see the glory and oppression of Jesus.

And so we ask today that you would help us in this. Help us to see Jesus in the word. As we read it. As we listen to it being preached. As we share it with it.

One another in our lives. In our fellowship. Help us Lord to approach the Bible prayerfully. Help us to remember that what we're reading in the Bible. Is not detached from real life. But is full of your blessing.

[29 : 19] Conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit. And so help us in this today. And may you have the glory. In all things in our lives. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

And we're going to sing in conclusion in Psalm 72. And this is in the Scottish Psalter. Second half of the psalm book.

Page 314. And we're going to sing from verse 17. His name forever shall endure. Last like the sun it shall. Men shall be blessed in him.

And blessed all nations shall him call. This is again one of these psalms that looks to the revelation of the glory of the King of Jesus. Jesus in his majesty. And it is in him that all blessing flows.

So let's stand and sing the concluding verses of the psalm. His name forever shall endure. His name forever shall endure.

[30 : 24] Last like the sun it shall. And shall be blessed in him.

And blessed all nations shall him call. Now blessed be the Lord our God.

The God of Israel. For he alone the wondrous works.

In glory our God. Now blessed be the Lord our God. Unblessed be his glorious name to all eternity.

The whole earth let his glory fill. Amen. So let it be.

[32 : 04] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and always. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Amen.