

The Path of Discipleship

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[0 : 00] How about I pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word.! We thank you that it speaks the truth to us about you at a time when you've had all the information and still gotten it wrong.

Maybe starting a new job after a degree or some other training. Head filled with info, but no experience. You might find that doing the job is more than just knowing the technical details.

What about dating or attempting to? You know, you've gathered all the information, even had their friend fill you in, but when it came time to chat...

When I was going for my driver's licence, I thought I knew everything you could possibly know.

I read the book, I knew all the things that you were and weren't supposed to do. I had three siblings who'd gone through it before me and tell me about the test.

[1 : 36] There's no way I could have failed. But all that knowledge didn't help me in the moment. I was complacent.

I thought I knew everything, but it didn't actually make me a good driver. In the last few weeks, we've seen Jesus show his disciples his true nature.

The shepherd who satisfies, the only God who protects, who sustains, comforts, controls, heals, saves.

The disciples have seen Jesus up close and personal and he has spoken plainly to them about who he is. And today in our final passage for this series, after all their hard-heartedness and misunderstanding, we'll see an astonishing declaration of faith from Peter about who Jesus is.

And in true Peter's style, it's a big swing and a miss. The passage starts with Jesus and his disciples walking through Bethsaida.

[2 : 55] But before Peter's proclamation, a blind man is brought to Jesus. Have a look from verse 22. They came to Bethsaida and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.

He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, Do you see anything?

He looked up and said, I see people. They look like trees walking around. Once more, Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes.

Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. I wonder what you thought as you heard this read.

Jesus attempted to heal someone but didn't quite manage? I mean, has Jesus ever only half healed someone?

[4 : 00] Let's take a look at the last few healings if we go back. In chapter 7, you'll see on the screen, I hope you can read it, there was the deaf mute. Jesus looked up to heaven and said, Be opened.

And the man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosened. He began to speak. The daughter of the Syrophenician woman, before that, for such a reply, he said, You may go, the demon has left your daughter.

And she went home and found the child with the demon gone. The dead girl took her by the hand and said, Little girl, I say to you, get up.

And immediately, she got up and started walking around. The bleeding woman, she thought, If I just touch his clothes, even without his knowledge, I'll be healed.

Immediately, her bleeding stopped. The demon-possessed man, they begged Jesus, Send us into the pigs. And he gave them permission and they went.

[5 : 00] The storm, he rebuked the wind and the waves and it was completely calm. Jesus doesn't miss, does he?

He controls creation. He raises the dead. But in this passage, it doesn't seem to work.

After first attempt, Jesus asks, Can you see? And he's like, Well, yeah, but no. I can see people, but they look like trees.

What's going on? Is he just having an off day? You have off days, don't you? I have off days. Maybe Jesus does too. Well, no, it's not that.

We know Jesus has power over sickness and death and much more. And he eventually did restore this man's sight. Instead of failing, Jesus is teaching something important about those who follow him and their ability to see clearly and understand.

[6 : 19] Let's read on from verse 27. Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way, he asked them, Who do people say I am?

They replied, Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others one of the prophets. But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am?

Peter answered, You are the Messiah. Over and over, we've heard that all people did in response to Jesus' teachings and signs was talk about it, despite what he told them.

And so Jesus decides to ask his disciples what people think about him. You might remember Herod discussing this same thing back in chapter 6.

He thought that Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead. And the others with him said he was one of the prophets from long ago. And that seems to be much along the same lines as what the disciples had been hearing.

[7 : 30] But now it's their turn. He says, But who do you say I am? I can imagine feeling a bit stressed if I was a disciple in this situation.

The last passage, you might remember, left them clueless, not to mention Jesus' pretty accusatory comment. Do you remember? Do you still not understand, he said?

And now they're on the spot, aren't they? Forget about all the chatter. Who do you say I am? Well, Peter, of course, knows he's wrong.

He steps forward to respond. Thank God for Peter. He'll know what to say. He says, you are the Messiah.

Yes, finally, that's it. This is such an important moment. He's been watching and listening closely.

[8 : 37] And finally, now they understand who Jesus is. God's promised king. The one who would rescue God's people, who would save Israel and defeat its enemy.

Finally, he gets it. He sees and understands the truth about Jesus. Or does he?

Point two. Peter is correct. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the one to come who will save Israel and defeat the enemy.

But like the blind man, after Jesus spat on his eyes, Peter's view is obscured. Look at verse 31.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the teachers of the law. And that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

[9 : 55] The disciples knew that Jesus was special. Not just a prophet greater than John the Baptist. They've seen him do things that no one can do.

They knew that he'd come from God. They believed that he was the one the law and the prophets had spoken about. Just like we heard in Psalm 110.

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion saying rule in the midst of your enemies. This is about a king coming to rule.

It goes on to say in verse 5 the Lord is at your right hand. He will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

and Israel were oppressed weren't they? Under Herod under Rome and then along comes Jesus with the power and authority of God repelling evil with his words.

[11 : 04] Just imagine how excited they must have been. The king is here. Liberation must be at hand. And then seemingly out of nowhere Jesus starts this crazy talk.

The son of man talking about himself is going to suffer. The chief priests, the elders, the teachers of the law, the ones who he showed he had complete authority over, they'll reject him and he'll be killed.

and after that rise again. I wonder if the temperature among the disciples dropped in that moment.

This wonderful declaration about Jesus and then this. He must be having an off day. Two attempts to heal a person and now the son of man must die.

Well, Peter wasn't having it and so he took him aside to rebuke him. Have you ever rebuked a boss or a leader?

[12 : 25] It's not easy. It takes confidence and care. Easy to get wrong. It doesn't tell us what Peter said but do you wonder?

You can't talk like that, Jesus. Look at all these people following you. They look up to you. You're the Messiah.

You're going to be king. You can't say that you're going to die. You're not going to die. Peter and the disciples has gone from thinking Jesus' warnings about sin and unbelief are about bread to thinking he understands Jesus' identity and mission better than him.

And so we should be too surprised when Jesus turns to rebuke Peter. Peter says to Jesus, we do know what Jesus says.

Verse 33. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan, he said.

[13 : 52] you do not have in mind the concerns of God but merely human concerns. Get behind me, Satan.

What a full-on comment. And let's not let the over-familiarity of this comment obscure what Jesus is really saying, which essentially is, keep your satanic opposition out of my way.

In his attempt to declare Jesus as the Messiah, Peter completely misunderstands the path the Messiah must walk. People were expecting a king, one who would sit on David's throne and rescue them from their enemies, but people like Peter didn't really get who the Messiah was and what he must do, that is, die, and in three days rise.

On another occasion, after teaching the crowd, Jesus had to hide himself because the crowd wanted to make him king by force. These, like Peter, don't have the concerns of God in mind, but merely human concerns.

Jesus was God's promised king. He would defeat the enemy, but not a physical enemy like an army or an empire, but a spiritual enemy like evil itself.

[15 : 38] Jesus had come to rescue them from sin, from Satan, and even from death. a far more significant and long lasting rescue, and Peter didn't understand that Jesus' path to the throne would take him to death first.

He believed that Jesus would be king, and rightly so, but not that death was the way to get there. What about you?

do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised king? Do you believe that Jesus' path must lead him to death?

Well, you might say, yes, of course. But you might also say, what does it matter? It's in the past. He's already done it.

but it does matter because he goes on to say that a disciple of Jesus, someone who believes in him, must walk his path too.

[16 : 54] Let's read from verse 34.3. And he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, whoever wants to be my disciple, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Being a disciple of Jesus isn't just for the twelve, but for anyone. And so he calls the crowd and he lays down the challenge for anyone who will listen.

And what is the challenge? Three things he says. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.

Jesus is challenging those who want to be his disciple to walk in his steps. And what does that mean? Not that every follower of Jesus is on a pathway to a throne, but that every follower is on a pathway to death.

death. Now it doesn't necessarily mean that every disciple will die as a result of their devotion to Jesus and the gospel, though plenty have.

[18 : 14] But it does mean walking a self-denying, cross-bearing path, a life of utter allegiance to Jesus.

followers of Jesus aren't simply detached observers of the life and works of this impressive man, rather than, oh yeah, I could learn a few things from his teaching and his character, you know, to improve myself, to become a better person.

now instead followers of Jesus ought to grow in faith and understanding through participating in his suffering.

Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 4, he says, we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. Walking Jesus' path doesn't have to mean dying, but like Jesus says to Peter, to cast off human concern and instead become entirely concerned with the will of God and what he says is good and right, whatever hardship that might mean for you.

[19 : 56] What did it mean for Paul? What did it mean for Jesus? What might it mean for you? following Jesus is utter self-denial, a refusal to establish your own life on the basis of worldly good.

He also says, take up your cross. This would actually be quite a horrifying image to those listening.

those who carry their cross were literally walking to death, and a horrifying one at that. Just picture those people, guards and crowds on either side, nowhere to go but onward to death.

It's a sobering image. image. And for the follower of Jesus, who is not literally walking to their death, it's a call to willingly follow.

Not turning aside, not fleeing from what God has prepared, but like Jesus, walking the path of sacrifice and trusting God even to the point of death.

[21 : 24] life. What a life, eh? Who would choose it? Well, God's kingdom is coming, he goes on to say.

And if we're caught up with gaining as much of the world as we can because we can't bear the shame of the cross, then when that time comes, we won't see it.

Look from verse 36. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with his holy angels.

Jesus' path was one of pain and hardship, opposed at every turn, misunderstood, even abandoned by friends.

[22 : 35] And Jesus asks us to follow him. I mean, who would do it? Well, we have a choice, don't we?

Save life now but lose it later? Or lose life now and save it later? But which one is right? Is it the same as play games now and do homework later?

Or homework now and games after? Well, it's similar but not the same. Instead of games and homework, it's the world and your soul.

But remember, Jesus didn't come to destroy a physical enemy but a spiritual one. Choosing life now means handing over your soul to that spiritual enemy.

That's why he says, what can you give in exchange for your soul? If a person refuses to lose their life for Jesus, there's no gift or trade that can win back your soul.

[23 : 46] Either Jesus saves or nothing does. I hope the choice is obvious.

Jesus gave his life to save our eternal souls, from sin and evil. Don't reject this wonderful gift.

Whoever does will forfeit their soul. will know a person can know a lot about Jesus and the Bible.

They can know all about what he did and said but still not choose to follow him. Or maybe worse, they can let all their knowledge about God and their desire to find out all of the things become a barrier to the kind of humility that Jesus expects from his followers.

I knew lots about what was in the driving test but I was a bad driver and I failed my peace test three times.

[25 : 06] eventually I got it but I had to change my attitude. Peter had a big swing and a miss didn't he?

He thought he could see but he only had half the picture. Eventually he did see clearly didn't he? And when he did see what did he choose?

He chose Jesus and the gospel didn't he? He walked Jesus' self-denying cross-bearing life. He very clearly had God's concerns in mind.

Have you recognised Jesus as the Messiah yet? Have you seen the whole picture? Jesus is the only one who can save your eternal soul.

And Jesus doesn't say whoever wants to be my disciple must know all the details about the Bible. Whoever wants to be my disciple must have a thorough understanding of medieval theology.

[26 : 28] Whoever wants to be my disciple must be a fantastic Bible study leader or preacher. you may want those things and they might be good but Jesus says his disciples must deny themselves.

If you're wrestling with the desire to be seen and heard, to be a great leader, to be spoken about fondly, to gain worldly recognition even among believers, then maybe spend some time cleaning up.

Try some service out of sight. Give your time and energy to the people who are not your buddies.

Love and encourage and look out for the people that you find hard to love. That's the cross-bearing life.

Lose your life for their good. Sacrifice your desires. Let God lead you with Jesus to death.

[27 : 49] really hear and grapple with Jesus' challenge to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him.

I've been reflecting on this challenge during the week, wondering if I've heard it, if I'm doing it. death. Sometimes I'm tempted to think, well, I must have, I must be, because, you know, I gave up my job.

I'm working for the gospel. I've obviously given up my life to him. But thinking like this is dangerous, isn't it?

Because like anyone else, I can pretty easily hide sin in my heart. I can put myself first. I can shy away from being a public Christian.

I can make my ministry all about me and what people think of me. This might sound like it applies to many of you, but maybe it does.

[29 : 03] Something like, I'm a Christian. I go to church and Bible study every week. I give. I go to BSF, campus Bible study, Blackburn Market.

But without understanding this discipleship path that we're on, it can be easy, can't it, just to carve out our comfortable little Christian life groove.

live. Yeah, we do all these things, but come on, abandon all my hopes, all my plans, my plans for work, travel, for future, family, kids.

come on. I mean, you only live once, don't you? These good things are all very human concerns, and they can very easily become satanic opposition, to a life of following Jesus.

And without critical reflection, and intentional confession, and repentance, we can trick ourselves into trying to follow Jesus while gaining the whole world.

[30 : 54] Jesus didn't die to give us a good life now. He died to rescue us from the death that that good life ensures.

Well, Easter is next week, and we're going to look again and remember Jesus' remarkable sacrifice. sacrifice. So, over this week, let's reflect again on this single-minded focus that led Jesus to the cross, that horrifying sacrifice, and reflect on his challenge for us to follow him on that path.

How would I pray that God would help us do that? Heavenly Father, thanks for Jesus who willingly went to the cross to save our eternal souls from sin and death.

Help us to clearly see and believe what Jesus has done for us. Help us to take up the call to walk his path, even if it means losing what we hold dear.

help us to fix our eyes on the eternal life you have waiting for those who trust you. Amen.