

The King's Path to Glory and Greatness

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I thought I'd start this morning with a little bit of a Who Am I quiz. So feel free to call out the answer as soon as you think you know it. It's not too hard, don't worry.

So who am I? I used to be one of Australia's greatest swimmers, and I'm now making a comeback. Ian Thorpe. Ian Thorpe. I thought I'd have to go to the next clue, which is my nickname was Thorpedo.

Yeah, Ian Thorpe. Have we got a slide here? Yeah, there he is in his younger days, glory days. Now, there's little doubt that Ian Thorpe is one of Australia's greatest swimmers. But his path to greatness and glory wasn't an easy one, like most athletes.

Rather, it was one of sacrifice and suffering. For example, he couldn't eat what he wanted to eat. Rather, he was on a strict diet. He often couldn't always do what he wanted to do, hang out with his friends or mates.

Rather, he had a strict training regime. For example, from what I understand, he got up at 4.15 a.m. in the morning, and he went to the pool to do laps for several hours.

[1 : 0 1] And then he went to the gym to work out, and then he had school tutoring, or sometimes went to school, I think. And then back to the pool in the afternoon for more hours of training. It was a tough regime.

Actually, he used to train at a pool where Michelle and I once lived. And so one morning, Michelle got up early to go for a swim, and Ian was still there doing his training. And so Michelle decided to give him a race.

And she beat him. True story, yeah. I mean, Ian didn't know it was a race. Michelle just took off and paddled as fast as her little heart could cope with, and Ian was just cruising along on his millionth lap or whatever.

But she could still say she beat him. Anyway, the point of the story, though, the point of the story is that the path to greatness and glory is often one that involves suffering and sacrifice.

And it's no different for Jesus the King. Just to remind you a bit of the background, last week in Chapter 8, Jesus gave his disciples his own Who Am I quiz. He asked them, Who do you say I am?

[2 : 0 4] And Peter replied, You are the Christ, or the chosen King. And Peter and the disciples finally saw who Jesus was, that he was the King. But what they did not see was that the King's path to greatness and glory had to be one of suffering and sacrifice.

Rather, they wanted Jesus to kick out the Romans and to establish his kingdom right there and then. And so Jesus rebukes Peter. And then he tells the disciples that they too must suffer and die, take up their cross, deny themselves, deny themselves being the King of their own life and rather follow Jesus as the King.

Now, as I mentioned last week, this was a pretty big call. And so Jesus gives them some encouragement, you might remember. And it was the last verse of our passage last week. And I've included it here on our reading.

It's Chapter 9, Verse 1. Look at the encouragement he gives them. He said to them, I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.

It's as though Jesus is saying, don't worry, guys. Some of you are going to get a glimpse of the power of me and my kingdom so you know that you're on the right team, so that you know you're following the right king, so that you know it will be worth it.

[3 : 22] Now, no doubt they see Jesus' glory and power when he rises from the dead later on. But I think Jesus is referring here to what happens next. For six days later, some do see Jesus' glory and greatness at the transfiguration.

So we're at point one on your outlines in verse number two. After six days, Jesus took Peter, James and John, that's the sum of them, with him and led them up a high mountain where they were all alone.

There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.

Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He did not know what to say. They were so frightened. Then from verse six. So this event here, these couple of verses, is known as the transfiguration, which simply means that Jesus' figure or body was transformed.

It was transfigured. And in so doing, he gives some of them a glimpse of the kingdom's power, the power and the glory that are his. Now, I'm not sure how they worked out it was Elijah and Moses standing with Jesus.

[4 : 34] I doubt they were wearing name tags or anything like that. But somehow they worked it out. But the thing we're told here, well, the implication is that by standing with Moses and Elijah, it's as though Jesus is saying, I've come to fulfill the law and the prophets.

You see, Moses represents the Old Testament law and Elijah, the Old Testament prophets. And Jesus is saying, I'm here to fulfill the law and the prophets. And by the way, don't be fooled into thinking that this glimpse of glory and greatness isn't that great or glorious.

The description of Jesus here is a little understated. But we get the sense of it from the disciples' reaction. You see the end of verse six? They were so frightened.

You see, it was an awesome display. I once went surfing in Fiji. They don't have beaches over there. And so you actually surf off a reef break.

That is, there's a reef under the water and that's what causes the waves to form. And so you jump in a boat. The boat takes you out to what seems like the middle of the ocean. You jump out and you start paddling, looking for the waves.

[5 : 37] And so that's what me and some other boys did. We jumped out and started paddling towards an island in the distance, wondering where these waves were. And then we turned around and saw this huge set growing behind us.

But we paddled too far. And so we turned around and when I saw this huge set behind me, my jaw literally dropped agape and my heart started pounding and I paddled as fast as I could.

And I got over the first wave, I literally was vertical and then just made it over. It was scary. I was scared out of my life. But having made it over and now on the other side of the wave, my heart was still pounding, but I was kind of excited.

I get to ride these suckers now. And I wonder if this is a little bit like what's happening here. The disciples are getting an awesome glimpse of the one who controls the wind and the waves.

It's huge. It's awesome. They're frightened. But there also seems to be just a hint of excitement. Certainly for Peter, who knows he's on the right side now. He's on Jesus' side.

[6 : 41] And he wants, it seems, this glory to last. See, instead of rebuking Jesus this time, that's what Peter did last week when Jesus said he has to die. He said, no, you can't do that. Instead of rebuking Jesus now, he says, let's build some shelters.

Now, he doesn't really know what to say. He's so scared. But a shelter is something that helps people stay. It's a permanent, it's a kind of structure that helps them to stay somewhere. It's as though Peter wants this glory to last, I think.

After all, is this not what the Christ was supposed to be like? Come and smash the Romans with his power and usher in his glorious kingdom? That's what the Jews thought. But again, Peter is somewhat gently rebuked this time, but this time by God himself.

See verse 7? Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud, this is my son, whom I love. Listen to him.

Suddenly when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. And what does God say to them? Well, he reminds them that Jesus is his chosen king. You know, this is my son, a reference to Psalm 2, which is a psalm about his king.

[7 : 51] He reminds them that Jesus is more than just a king, but God the son. This is the son whom I love. This is my true son. And then God says, listen to him.

What has Jesus been saying that they're to listen to? Well, Jesus has been saying that he must suffer first, die, and then three days later, rise again. That's what he tried to tell them last week.

And that's what he goes on to hint at again in verses 9 to 13. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept this matter to themselves, discussing what rising from the dead meant.

And they asked him, why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first? Jesus replied, to be sure Elijah does come first and restores all things. But why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?

But I tell you, Elijah has come and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him. You see, the disciples knew that Elijah had to come first before the Lord would come.

[8 : 53] We heard that from our reading in Malachi. But Jesus says, Elijah has already come to prepare the way, symbolically in the person of John the Baptist. You see, John the Baptist acted like Elijah by preparing the way for Jesus.

John the Baptist even dressed like Elijah, wore similar clothes to Elijah. And then Herod beheaded him. And so what Jesus is saying is that Elijah has already come. And then he draws his attention to what else is written in verse 12.

He says, it is also written that the Son of Man must suffer. And it's, if what's been written about Elijah has happened, then what's been written about the Son of Man must also happen.

You see what the point Jesus is trying to make here? He's saying that he must suffer and die. Disciples, do you get it yet? Stop thinking in worldly terms about glory coming now and start thinking in God's terms about glory coming later through suffering.

And this suffering is not random. No, Jesus' suffering is a sacrificial service to us. That is, he serves us by giving himself so that we might be saved from Satan's grip.

[10 : 01] Which brings us to point two in verse 14. Have a look there at verse 14. When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.

As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. What are you arguing about with them? Sorry, what are you arguing with them about? He asked.

A man in the crowd answered, Teacher, I brought you my son who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid.

I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit but they could not. Jesus comes back down the mountain and after, you know, getting a glimpse of his glory, he's greeted by arguing an evil, an evil spirit.

And this argument is between the teachers of the law and the disciples. And so he asks them what you've been arguing about but notice, neither the disciples nor the teachers of the law answer. It's a man from the crowd who answers.

[11 : 04] And I wonder, I wonder whether they're arguing about how to drive out this spirit. You see, the Jews often use a certain formula or incantation to try and drive out demons.

But neither the disciples or the teachers of the law are able to drive this demon out. And I wonder whether that's what the argument is about. Either way, we meet here a boy who has an unclean spirit, an evil spirit.

And the fact that the disciples can't drive it out is rather embarrassing. I mean, hadn't they not long ago been sent out on mission and they drove out many demons? Remember chapter 6, Jesus gave them authority over evil spirits and they cast out many demons.

So, why can't they drive this one out? Well, I think the answer comes in part in verse 19. Verse 19, O unbelieving generation, Jesus replied, how long shall I stay with you?

How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me. Jesus calls the people around him an unbelieving generation. But who is around him? Well, there's the crowd, there's the teachers of the law, there's the father and there's the disciples.

[12 : 11] It seems as though the disciples had stopped fully believing God and started believing or trusting more in themselves. Perhaps the success of their mission had gone to their heads again. Perhaps they started trusting in their formula, their certain words, their incantation or whatever it was, rather than trusting in Jesus who gave them the authority.

And I wonder if Jesus implies this over in verse 28. Have a look at verse 28 and 29. A couple of strange little verses. Just over the page. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, why couldn't we drive it out?

He replied, this kind can come out only by prayer. You see, their formula, whatever it was, whatever they tried didn't work. They needed to pray and prayer is a way of depending on God, is it not?

It expresses our faith or trust in him. And so I wonder if Jesus is again subtly saying that they were trusting more in themselves than in God. That they had more faith in their method or formula than in Jesus who gave them the authority in the first place.

Well, it's not just the disciples who lack faith, it's also the man. Come back with me now to verse 20 and we'll pick it up there. Verse 20, back over the page. So they brought the boy. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into convulsion.

[13 : 31] He fell to the ground and rolled around foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy's father, how long has he been like this? I'm sorry about the cutting off there but I'm sure you'll pick it up.

Verse number 22, from childhood he said, it has often thrown him into the fire or water to kill him but if you can do anything take pity on us and help us.

If you can, said Jesus, everything is possible for him who believes. Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.

You see, the father seems to lack faith too but his response is a terrific one, isn't it? I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief. I don't know about you but even as a pastor it's a statement I can identify with for there have been times in my life where certain things have come up that have caused me to doubt God, to waver a little in my trust and I can relate to this statement where I've still believed, I've still trusted but I've asked God to help me keep trusting through this difficult time or as the father puts it, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.

In verse 25, Jesus defeats this satanic spirit and saves the boy from it. Have a look at verse 25. When Jesus saw the crowd was running to the scene he rebuked the evil spirit. You deaf and mute spirit, he said, I command you come out of him and never enter him again.

[14 : 58] The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said he's dead but Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet and he stood up.

Now that last phrase there where it says he stood up is literally he rose up. You see, Jesus saves this boy and raises him to new life which points to what he can do for us but it also seems to point to how Jesus saves which I want to come back to in a moment but first this event notice teaches us a few things.

First, it shows us that Jesus came to save us from Satan's grip. For the boy this meant being saved from the evil spirit. For us it means being saved from sin and hell.

You see, Jesus can raise us to new spiritual life and later on he will raise us to new physical life. So that's the first thing, Jesus can save us from Satan's grip.

Second, it shows us that the basis of this salvation is faith in him. Like the father had. That is, if we want to be saved from sin and hell we must believe in Jesus as the father did.

[16 : 05] And thirdly though, it shows us that even this belief or faith is a gift from God. The father needed help to believe, you see, and it's the same with us. You see, even our belief in Jesus is enabled by God.

It's a gift from our gracious father so that everything we have is by grace, you see. we can't even boast about our own faith. God enables us to believe, which means that we need to keep praying for those who don't believe if God is the one who enables them.

These are the big points of this event. By believing in Jesus, which God enables us to do, we are saved from Satan's grip, that is, from sin and hell. But the other thing worth noting is that it again shows us Jesus' path to glory.

You see, Jesus moves from being transfigured, shining in glory on top of the mountain, down to facing the darkness of evil at the bottom of the mountain. And here at the bottom of the mountain he defeats this evil and saves this boy through a death and resurrection.

You see, the boy was dead and then he rose up. It's a kind of death and resurrection, you see. And I wonder if the point being made here is again that before Jesus can fully enter that glory we glimpsed, he must first face evil and defeat it to save us.

[17 : 23] And the way he will defeat it is through a death and resurrection of his own. I wonder if that's subtly pointing us to that. In fact, that's exactly what he goes on to say in verse number 30.

Look there at verse number 30. They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, the son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

They will kill him and after three days he will rise. But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. You see, Jesus teaches them plainly here what it means for him to be king, that he must first suffer, die and rise again.

for this is the way he will save us from Satan's grip. That is, he is to sacrificially serve us by giving himself at the cross to free us.

See, Jesus' path to glory is one of sacrificial service. And it's the same for us. It bridges us to point 3, verse 33. Verse 33, they came to Capernaum.

[18 : 26] When he went into the house, he asked them, what were you arguing about on the road? But they kept quiet because on the way, they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.

You see, just like they don't understand Jesus' path to glory comes through sacrificial service, they don't understand what it means for them to follow Jesus, that they too must follow a path of sacrificial service if they want to be great.

And Jesus, in fact, says a similar thing in chapter 10, he says, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. You see what Jesus is saying? Both in chapter 9 and chapter 10, he's saying, if you want to be great, then you need to follow my lead and put others first.

You need to practice sacrificial service. Well, time for another Who Am I quiz. Who Am I? Again, feel free to call out. This is one of his famous quotes.

[19 : 38] Who am I? I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. Muhammad Ali, I think we've got a photo of him in his glory days as well. There he is. Does anyone know the other famous line of greatness that's right.

And many people in the world would say he is the greatest boxer of all time because they measure greatness based on success. But Jesus is saying true greatness is not based on success but service sacrificial service.

And so Jesus can truly say now I am the greatest because he is the one who is the servant of all. He is the one who sacrificially served us by going to the cross. And we are called to follow our servant king to follow his example of serving one another.

Have a look at verse 36 and 37. He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms he said to them whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me alone but the one who sent me.

Here we've got a picture of serving one another. That is welcoming one another is a way of serving one another. And we know this in real life don't we if we welcome someone to our home what do you often do?

[20 : 56] Don't you say would you like a drink can I get you a cup of tea a cup of coffee would you like to sit down so we are actually serving God.

A little while ago Michelle and I visited some friends in Queensland up in Townsville who are working at the university among Christians there. And on Sunday morning we were staying at their house and on Sunday morning Katrina was up early making some sandwiches and getting some other things together and so I assumed she was on morning tea for church that day and I said you are on morning tea for church she said oh no I just thought I could give a bit of extra to help the person who is and then at church I saw her talking to people she didn't know and encouraging them even praying with one person now would she have preferred to have slept in rather than getting up early to make extra morning tea I'm guessing so would she have preferred at church to talk to the people she knew and her friends most likely but on both occasions she denied herself and served sacrificially see that's true greatness Jesus says and I know there are many here at

Trinity who are truly great because you do serve sacrificially going the extra mile often behind the scenes to talk to people welcoming new people encouraging regulars even serving at home with the children and helping them to grow and love Jesus or serving here on Christ and so on and so on I can as I'm looking around stories are popping into my head of people who've done certain things but as soon as you mention one person you forget another one so I won't say anything except well done sacrificial service is true greatness so well done the disciples however had not served their fellow Christians see verse 38 teacher said John we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop because he was not one of us do not stop him Jesus said no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me for whoever is not against us is for us disciples see this man who is casting out demons and instead of welcoming him as a fellow believer they discourage him they rebuke him tell him to stop because he wasn't one of the twelve and

I suspect there may have been even a hint of envy there for here is someone who wasn't one of the twelve doing what they were just unable to do for the boy either way they rebuke the man and tell him to stop but Jesus says no don't tell him to stop he is on our team you should serve him encourage him welcome him for anyone who serves you even by giving a glass of water will not lose his reward in fact Jesus says if you do stop him if you cause him to lose heart and even stumble then watch out see verse 42 if anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me little ones is another way of saying disciples who believes in me to sin it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck it's a strong warning isn't it you see we are precious to Jesus because he died for us and so to cause one another or another Christian whom he died for to cause them to sin or literally it says to stumble to lose interest to fall from

Jesus then watch out Jesus says you'd be better off drowning than facing his anger because of what you've done one of the saddest things I've come across is meeting people who have left church because of the way they were treated some of these people I've spoken to are no longer interested in church or Jesus now of course some of them may come back to Christ later on and some of them may never have been genuine Christians in the first place and they may have caused trouble themselves but that still doesn't excuse the fact that Christians caused them in part to stumble and if we do that says Jesus then you're actually better off drowning at the bottom of the sea than facing Jesus because of what you've done see how precious we are to Jesus it's great news for us isn't it we are so precious he takes our salvation so seriously because we are so precious but so is the person next to you so is the person in front of you so is the person behind you and so we are to serve one another you see how important serving is and serving one another leads to greatness and reward while causing one another to stumble leads to judgment of course in the end the thing that often stops us serving others and serving

[25 : 46] Jesus for that matter is our own selfish sin and so Jesus finishes this section by saying get rid of that sin from your life see verse 43 to 50 verse 43 he says if your hand causes you to sin cut it off it is better for you to enter life maim than with two hands to go into hell where the fire never goes out and if your foot causes you to sin cut it off it is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell and if your eye causes you to sin pluck it out it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm never does not die and the fire is not quenched everyone will be salt with fire salt is good but if it loses its salt in how can you make it salty again so have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other like last week with the call to deny ourselves and sin if left unchecked can drag us from

Jesus to hell where the fire is not quenched and I wonder do we take sin as seriously as Jesus does now I think well I wonder at least whether the sin Jesus particularly has in mind here is sinful pride the simple pride that caused the disciples to argue over who the greatest was along the road you remember perhaps it's also the sinful pride that wounded them when they saw this other man casting out demons when they couldn't even do it for the boy I suspect it's the sinful pride that they are to get rid of that they might stop arguing over who the greatest is and instead be at peace with each other of course though it is not limited to sinful pride we're to get rid of all sin for sin stops us serving one another and Christ and if we persist in it we will be dragged away from Christ into hell I've seen it happen a friend of Michelle's was married not long ago she used to follow

Jesus well she said she did but her eyes longed for money and material things which is now her king materialism and so one of her favorite wedding pictures is a picture of her Jimmy choo shoes now there's nothing wrong with having Jimmy choo shoes in fact I actually don't even know who Jimmy choo is it just makes expensive flash shoes apparently but it's just a picture just an example of how her sinful desire for the things of this world above Jesus has dragged her away from Jesus and now she's in danger of hell and Michelle and I are still praying for her and there's still time for her to come back but the point is our very eternity is at stake and so Jesus calls for radical surgery we're to cut it out instead of flirting with whatever sinful desire it is whether it's materialism or greed or gossip or refusing to forgive another person or refusing to take Jesus too seriously you know I'll take him seriously on Sunday but not the other six days of the week whatever it is we're to cut that sin out of our lives for our eternity is at stake well let's wrap it up we're to get rid of sin in our lives and sacrificially serve

Christ and one another for this is the path to true greatness and glory and in case you think it's not worth it remember the glimpse of glory the disciples saw for that is just a glimpse of the glory that we will share in if we stick with Jesus if we keep believing in him and so while the path to greatness and glory won't always be easy it will be worth it and so may we be humble servants in the world's eyes so that we might be great in God's let's pray our heavenly father help us to follow Christ's example he came but to serve that we may share in his greatness and glory amen