

Walking with Jesus

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[0 : 00] So, we're going to take a little while now and think about Luke chapter 22, which was read for us earlier. Beth read part of it, but there's a longer printed section in pages 4, 5, 6, 7 from the Gospel of Luke.

Right, there was a really, really bad film, quite a long time ago now, I think it was called Ghost, with Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore.

Didn't do any research before, I didn't go and check, but I think that's who it was. And there's a really corny scene in it where they have clay and they're doing some pottery together and they're sitting at the wheel, making the potter's wheel, and he's holding their hands and they're shaping this pot.

Now, I have been to potteries, mostly with my children, when they were very little, and we have some misshapen clay objects in our house, sort of mugs and things that kids made when they were little.

So, pottery is difficult. Making something out of clay, shaping it into something good and beautiful and useful isn't that easy.

[1 : 15] Now, the Bible tells us God's the potter and you and I are the clay. God is going to give a shape to your life.

God is going to form you into something both beautiful and useful and good. So, what form will your life have?

What shape will your life take? Well, the Bible's really clear about that. It says that if you're a Christian, the form of your life is what we would describe as cruciform.

Okay? The Christian life is fundamentally a cruciform life. It takes the shape of the cross.

God forms us through the process of death and resurrection. It is death for the Christian that leads to life.

[2 : 29] The call of the believer from Jesus is, if you're going to follow me, take up your cross and come after me.

So, the Christian way, the Christian life is essentially cruciform. It is the way of crucifixion and resurrection, of dying to self and living for Jesus.

For the Christian, the way down is the way up. We are brought low so that God can lift us high into his presence. The Bible tells us to humble ourselves under the weight of God's mighty hand so that he can lift us up in due season.

The Bible says this, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. It's as we lose our self-importance that we find out how precious we really are.

It's as we lose our self-reliance that we find out how we can truly be free. It's as we lose our self-confidence that we find how confidence in God allows us to live without crimpling anxiety or self-doubt.

[3 : 42] Now, the cruciform life is not an easy life. It doesn't sound like it should be easy, does it? It's painful. It is dying to self.

It is taking up the cross. But it's the way of Jesus, which means that although it's often the hard way, it's always the good way.

That it is the way to life and joy and beauty. He died and rose again so that in him we die to ourselves and live a new life in him and for him.

Now, that's a difficult message for lots of us, isn't it? It's not a kind of message that we naturally warm to because often the ego, the self, is at the center of our lives.

In a man-centered age, in a self-centered age, that's never going to be a popular message. But it's a really important question.

[4 : 45] If you're going to follow Jesus, if you're going to be a Christian, you need to know what that's going to look like for you. You need to know the shape of life that God will ask you to live.

You need to know what kind of path it is that God invites you to walk. I've met lots of really fascinating and amazing people in my life.

I used to have lunch every Friday with a man who'd been captain of Rangers and England football teams. And every time he saw me on Friday, he would shout the same joke, pasta for the pastor. So his name was Terry Butcher. He was a well-known footballer many years ago. So I met lots of great sports people in my life and writers and musicians. And then I've met some amazing people who nobody will ever hear of.

A friend in Fife that I met through the church there grew up in care, had lots of psychiatric problems, was a drug addict, had seven children of his own in care, and yet was an amazingly thoughtful, kind, wise person.

[6 : 00] Really, really somebody I'll never forget spending time with. I used to see him every week for years. So in life I meet lots of great people.

That's one of the privileges of my job. But I have never met anyone like Jesus. Nobody is kind. Nobody is good.

Nobody is lovely. Nobody is beautiful. Nobody is generous. Nobody is wise. Nobody is humble as Jesus. Nobody is good. Nobody is good. So in life.

And I want you to understand when you've been invited to come in the way of the cross, when you're being asked to follow the cruciform life, what you've been invited to do is to walk that way with Jesus.

us. That's what Jesus is really doing. He's saying, I want you to walk with me in life. I want you to come with me. Jesus says to you, I want you to come my way because my way is the way of the cross. And so as Jesus invites you onto this road and into this life, he's not sending you off to walk alone, but he's saying, this is the way I'm walking. And I want you to walk this road with me. So I've got just two simple things because this actually, we're almost finished this service and I'm just beginning the sermon. So it's kind of, I'm in a dilemma here, but two simple things. One, will you walk with Jesus all the way? And then secondly, how do you walk when the way is dark? Okay. So will you walk with Jesus all the way? And how do you keep walking when the way is dark? Because Jesus is inviting me and you to walk with him, this beautiful, good Jesus, on a very difficult journey. Because what he's inviting you to do is to walk with him on the road to the cross. So over the next few weeks as a church, we're going to follow our way through the last few chapters of Luke's gospel to see what it meant for Jesus to walk the road to the cross and resurrection so that we can learn what it's like for us to walk with Jesus on the road to the cross. Because that's what Jesus is inviting us to. For the disciples, that's very literal, isn't it? These disciples here with him that evening before he's crucified, he's saying,

[8 : 48] I want you to walk with me to the cross. I want you to come on this path with me to the cross, very literally. I want you to stick by my side tonight in the darkness of the night, no matter where it leads or what the cross costs. Only Jesus will suffer crucifixion that night.

But he invites all his disciples to share in the fellowship of suffering. You're not asked to walk literally to a cross with Jesus, but you are asked to walk with him as he goes to the cross and to trust him as he dies on the cross. And you are asked to be part of the fellowship of his sufferings, that you will be ready to die to yourself and live for him.

And so sometimes Jesus is asking us to walk a dark and a difficult road. And sometimes that doesn't feel like something we want to do, does it?

So will we walk with Jesus all the way? All the way, no matter where it takes us. For some of these disciples this night, as we read in Luke chapter 22, that call is way too hard.

In verse 4, at the beginning of the chapter, Judas can't take the pressure. The heat is too much, and so he gets out of the kitchen.

[10 : 26] He goes to the chief priest, the officers of the temple guard, and discusses how to betray Jesus. Judas betrays Jesus, and he goes after money.

Money has a power to lead us away from Jesus. One of the things that will stop you walking with Jesus all the way is a desire for wealth.

Simon Peter, later in the chapter we read, Jesus telling Simon Peter, Beth read it for us, Jesus tells him that you will deny me. Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you, all of you as wheat, but I've

prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.

So, Simon Peter will deny him the approval of others and the comfort of his own safety. Have a power to lead him away from Jesus.

You see, there's so many things that will lead you away from walking with Jesus. It might be wanting other people to like you or approve of you. It might be a desire for comfort.

[11 : 33] It might be a desire to make it in life and have money and do well. An old Victorian bishop wrote this.

Bishop Ryle says, Subtle diseases. That's what these are. Subtle diseases that are often far nearer to us than we suppose. Those kind of temptations.

The disciples will all run later in the night when Jesus is arrested. The heat of opposition, the fear of suffering means that as a community of friends, they will fragment and run in 12 different directions. Because this night is going to be deeply and unforgettably painful. They have personal ambitions that Jesus is not indulging. They have desires that they want to be fulfilled.

And Jesus is saying no to those desires. And so we read about them in verse 24. They're arguing with each other. Which of them is going to be considered greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

[12 : 36] And Jesus is going to shatter their ambitions in the darkness of the night. I used to run a lot when I lived in Fife.

So that's a long time ago now. I lived in Kirkcaldy and there was a long promenade which was very flat. And so running was easy when I started running. I just used to run along the promenade a couple of miles flat.

No problem. Anyway, I decided to take up running again over the past summer. And I found out there are no flat places in South Edinburgh. It's just very, very frustrating. I'm trying to work out all these routes so I don't have any hills in them.

And it's like... And so jogging up Blackford Hill or the Braids or whatever, a lot of time I just really want to stop. Because I think this is too hard. And that's the question.

How do we walk with Jesus when it's too hard? And we just want to give up and turn back and take it easy. So this is the second question then is, will you walk with Jesus all the way or are you going to be one of those who turns back?

[13 : 46] And then the second question is, where is our hope when the night is dark? There's a psalm, isn't there? Psalm 1 that talks about bearing good fruit in life when you're a tree planted by the river.

You probably might know that if you've been brought up in church. If you've not been brought up in church, you might never have seen that. We also find a prophet in the Old Testament, Jeremiah, talking about this.

So a tree planted by a river. How do you bear fruit in the desert? That's the kind of question. How do you bear fruit in the desert? If you're a tree. Okay, so imagine you're a tree in the desert. How can I be fruitful? You need to stay planted by the water. How do we bear fruit in the desert when things are hard?

How do we bear fruit? How do we thrive when the way feels dark? We plant ourselves in the river of God's truth. You see, you've got two different things happening in this chapter, don't you?

[14 : 47] You've got incredible tension. A lot of pressure. The heat. The darkness. The sorrow. The sadness. The fear. The anxiety. And the disciples scatter.

They go in all these different directions. But who's under the most pressure? Jesus. Who's the one who's going to be crucified?

Jesus. Who's the one who's going to be betrayed? Jesus. And who's the one who keeps walking the path? Jesus. Is it because he was Superman and he didn't feel any fear?

No. He's truly God, truly man. His humanity is genuine. He knows fear and fragility. He knows anxiety and despair.

But he keeps going. And in the desert, in the heat, he bears good fruit. He tells us in verse 27, I'm here to serve.

[15 : 49] He truly is the greatest, but he tells them three times, I'm here as one who serves you. He uses the word for a table waiter. Somebody who's in the lowest rung socially and economically.

Jesus says, that's me. Faithful service in lowly places is itself true greatness. Jesus goes ahead and enters the process of being made the Passover lamb.

So we read in verse 7, this is the day of unleavened bread in which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And so then they have this supper together, which preparations are made for in secret ways so Judas can't betray him too early or hand him over too soon.

And Jesus longs to eat this Passover meal. The Passover was an eight-day festival that commemorated the Exodus. The freedom of the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery and death. And Jesus is saying, I am your Passover lamb. All the Passovers of 1,500 previous years pointed towards this one Passover.

[16:57] Where Jesus lovingly lays down his life as the lamb of God. The substitutionary sacrifice. Taking the wrath of God for sin. And allowing us to enter the presence of his father.

Later Paul, the apostle, will write, Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. His death on the cross is the life of our soul.

He transforms the Passover and gives the Lord's Supper in its place as a way to remember his death. And how he lovingly lays down his life.

He gives a new covenant to his church. That we come to the Father through him. A new way of approach. The old covenant of sacrifice and ritual gone. The new covenant is in his blood.

He gifts himself to the cross. He dies for his people. So that they can come freely to the Father in heaven. He tells his disciples that he is going to confer a kingdom on them.

[18:01] And in verse 30, that they will feast, eat and drink at my table in the kingdom to come. So you see, what's he doing in the heat of the night?

He's been lavish. He's been generous. He's been self-sacrificial. He's been kind. He's been thoughtful. He's been loving. He's been considerate. All the beauty that we see in Jesus stays in Jesus even when things get so hard.

How is it that Jesus bears good fruit in the darkness of the night? What's the difference between Jesus and how he reacts and how the disciples react?

It's because Jesus' life, this is really simple, is rooted in the Word of God. Isn't that, okay? Maybe we thought I was going to tell you something incredible right there.

And it is incredible, but it's also simple. His life is rooted in the Word of God. How does he navigate his way through all this confusion and darkness and fear and suffering? Well, if you look at the end of the passage, he's got a grip on it because of the Bible.

[19:08] He says in verse 37, It is written, he was numbered with the transgressors. I tell you, this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment. Isaiah chapter 53.

That's where Jesus goes to make sense of what's happening. He goes to the Bible to make sense of his circumstances, his life, his suffering, the darkness of the road. He is rooted in the plan and purposes of God.

That God has appointed this, the Son on the cross, as the way of saving his people. He has a significant scripture which is relevant to his situation that helps him to understand what's going on so he doesn't turn back.

He was numbered with the transgressors. This must be fulfilled in me. In verse 22, he says, So our hope, as we walk in the way of the cross, is found in the Word of God, in the Gospel, in the promise of Jesus, as the way, the truth, and the life.

In the promise of Jesus, as the sin-bearing Savior. In the promise of Jesus, as the light of the world. What kind of fruit is there in your life?

[20:42] Anger, jealousy, insecurity, fear, deceit, addiction, conflict. That's what we see as the fruit of sin.

We see it in the life of the disciples that night. If you follow Jesus in the way of the cross, the way will often be difficult and hard.

You're called to the fellowship of his suffering. How can you bear good fruit in hard places? By allowing the Word of God to take root deep within you. The Word of God is living and active.

Jesus uses a relevant, significant scripture to navigate a minefield of misery. That means that to be a Christian, you need an open Bible.

A Bible that you read every day with prayer and tears. So that you can navigate the road that Jesus leads you on.

[21:43] Then you can bear good fruit in the darkness of the night. If you don't know where to go when the hurricane hits, you're told to run to the safety of the Word of Jesus.

It is manna, it is light, it's heavenly wisdom for earthly consumption. It's water in the desert, it's light in the dark, and it's life for the dying.

To walk with Jesus, you need the Word of Jesus. You need the book of Jesus. And it needs to be an open book that you eat and drink every day.

We all go through different stages of life, changes of life. Some of you are leaving home right now, going off to uni. Some of you are going through different transitions in life.

How do you keep walking with Jesus through all the different stages and phases of your life? By keeping God's Word living and active in your life.

[22 : 54] Because as you keep the Word in your life, do you know what the Word does? It preaches the Gospel to you. It preaches Jesus to you. And it's Jesus that you want to walk with.

And Jesus wants you to walk with Him. It's a personal journey in the company of Jesus. I'm going to pray and then we're going to sing our last song.

Lord Jesus, help us to hear the Word of God clearly today. That we can't just be people who know about the Bible. We need to know the Bible.

We can't just be people who have read the Bible. We need to be people who are reading the Bible.

We can't just be people who've got a Bible. We need to be people who live in the Bible and in whom the Bible lives.

God, you have called us to follow the way of the cross. We can't make it unless you live in us by your Word and Spirit. We pray for those who are going through times of change.

[23 : 53] For those who are leaving Edinburgh and going off to uni to study. We pray for Rebecca and for Martha. For others who are heading on. Lord, may you bless them richly as they go on in life.

And be with us all in the different stages of life. To know your grace and presence with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.