

## **Suffering and Glory**

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“Renewing Your Spiritual Passion” Series

Mark 9:1-13

I have recently been really struck by the idea that there seems to be in this life an inescapable connection between suffering and glory. We’ve seen it in the wake of the September 11 WTC attack. These two themes of suffering and glory run side by side with each other. Heroism and the very best of humanity requiring the biggest price that anyone could pay – the laying down of people’s lives.

You see this all the time – these twin themes of suffering and glory with people who are real heroes. I think of someone like Jackie Robinson, the first black man to officially play big league baseball in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jackie Robinson once said that no life is important except in the impact that it has on other people’s lives. By the standard of impact, there would be very few people and no professional athlete, whose life impacted more lives than Jackie Robinson’s. The way that he was able to impact other people’s lives was by sacrifice, by going against his natural instincts, by dying to everything that was in him.

Jackie Robinson was by temperament and nature an aggressive guy who stood up for his own rights and was outraged at injustice. When he was in the Army in WWII, he refused to move to the back of the bus and was court-martialed for his courage. He was eventually acquitted after a court-martial. But Jackie Robinson’s natural instinct was to fight back, not to hold back.

But in 1945 the President of the Dodger’s organization, Branch Rickey, picked him to be the first African-American ball player to play in the major leagues in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Branch Rickey said to Jackie Robinson that he was going to face some of the most ugly racial taunts that any man has ever faced, if he was going to break the color barrier in major league baseball. Rickey, in a famous conversation, said to Jackie Robinson, “I know you are a great ball player. What I don’t know is if you have the guts to handle what you are going to have to face.”

Jackie Robinson said, “Mr. Rickey, are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?”

Rickey said, “Mr. Robinson, I’m looking for a ball player who has guts enough not to fight back.”

Jackie Robinson debuted for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, a year before President Truman desegregated our military; and seven years before the Supreme Court desegregated our school system.

Sports Illustrated ran an article about him on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his breaking the color barrier. They wrote, "Robinson was the target of racial epithets and flying cleats, of hate letters and death threats, of pitchers throwing at his head and legs, catchers spitting on his shoes. But he learned how to exercise self-control, to answer insults, violence and injustice with silence. He eventually earned the respect not only of his teammates, but also of the opposition."

There's no glory without suffering. One of the things we Americans are facing right now is the possibility of a very tough ground campaign in Afghanistan. I was thinking back the other day to another battle – perhaps the toughest ground campaign that we've had to wage as a nation – the battle of Iwo Jima in WWII. In 1945 Iwo Jima was considered to be crucial for America finally achieving victory over Japan. It is an island off of Japan and it was going to be used as a base of operations for conducting bombing runs. Prior to the invasion, the island was bombed more heavily than any other island in the whole Pacific Campaign.

On D-Day 450 ships cast off for Iwo and finally on Feb. 19, 1945, the first wave of Marines hit the beach. They didn't know what they were going to encounter. Every Japanese soldier had tunneled underground. Iwo Jima was like Afghanistan. It was a series of mountains and caves and the Japanese were dug in completely belowground, impervious to aerial bombardment.

### **PPT – Beach Slide**

When the Marines hit the beach, they were pinned down by machine gun fire. It was an absolute blood bath. The Japanese had made a commitment to never surrender, but to all die fighting on the island. In the end, nearly 21,000 Japanese defenders, almost all of the defenders on the island, died. Nearly 7,000 Americans died. Historians have described the American attack against the Japanese defenses as throwing human flesh against reinforced concrete.

Perhaps what Iwo Jima is best known for by Americans today is the famous photo of six Marines who charged up Mt. Suribachi and planted a huge American flag on the top.

### **PPT – The Flag**

This photo of the six Marines planting the flag won numerous prizes including the Pulitzer Prize and was immortalized in a bronze sculpture that sits in the National Mall in Washington DC. There are six flag raisers on the photo – four on the front line and two in the back. The front four are Ira Hayes, Franklin Sousley, John Bradley and Harlan Block. The guys in the back are Michael Strank and Rene Gagnon. The leader was Mike Strank.

### **PPT – Mike Strank**

Mike Strank was the sergeant who got the orders to climb Mt. Suribachi. Mike picked these boys and led them to the top. Their mission was to plant a huge American flag on

the top of the mountain so that every single Marine, no matter where they were on the island, could see it.

Mike gave the orders to find a pole, attach the flag, and put her up. Mike's right hand is the only hand of a flag raiser not on the pole. His right hand is around the wrist of Franklin Sousely. He helped the young man to push the heavy pole up. He was one of those guys who was there to help his boys.

Mike died on Iwo Jima a few days after the flag raising. He was hit by a mortar as he was diagramming a plan in the sand for his boys. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Harlan Block was a natural athlete. He was a great football player who led his high school football team to a conference championship. He joined the Marines in 1943. He was Mike's second in command, and he took over the leadership when Sgt. Mike was killed. Harlan Block was killed several hours after Mike Strank at the age of 21.

When his mother saw the flag-raising photo, she yelled, "That's my boy, Harlan. I know my boy." No one, not her family, not her neighbors, not the government had any reason to believe her. But 18 months later, a congressional investigation revealed that it was Harlan in the photo. His mother, Belle, knew her boy.

And then there is Franlin Sousley, a red-haired, freckled face, Opie Taylor looking kid, raised on a tobacco farm. He lost his dad at age 9. He became the main man in his mother's life. He enlisted at age 17 and sailed for the Pacific on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. He once wrote a letter home to his mom saying, "Mother, you said you were sick. I want you to stay inside the house and out of the fields and look real pretty when I come home. You can grow a crop of tobacco every summer, but I can't sure grow another mother like you."

Franklin was the last flag-raiser to die on Iwo Jima at the age of 19. When word reached his mother that Franklin was dead, one reporter said, "You could hear her screaming and cries clear across the tobacco fields at her neighbor's farm."

Suffering and glory. You know, I've been doing a series on Renewing Our Spiritual Passion and it is impossible to talk about connecting your life to the life of Jesus without talking about both sides of the equation – suffering and glory. That's what I've called today's talk. Let's pray.

*Mark 9:1-13 – And 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." After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John 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 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.*

*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 the 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. 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.”*

In v. 2 we read, *After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.* This story is called The Transfiguration. The word “transfigured” in v. 2 comes from the Greek word “metamorphothe” where we get the word “metamorphosis.” We are talking about a change in form. When we say that Jesus was transfigured, we mean that he was changed in form – not just in appearance, but there was a radical change from the form of a man, who they were looking at, to the form of a divine being. They were looking before at the man Jesus; now they are seeing God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Peter, James and John are looking at divine glory.

It is important that we understand that this metamorphosis, this change, this transfiguration in which Jesus reveals his divine glory, was framed by Jesus’ prediction of a cross for himself and suffering for his followers. If you look back with me just for a moment to chapter 8:31, Jesus predicts his death. We read: *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* And then we read in v. 34 where Jesus said, *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

We are talking here about suffering—the suffering of Jesus and the suffering that Jesus calls his disciples to in following after him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship* opened the book this way. He said, “When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die.” That’s certainly a different way to preach the gospel, isn’t it? Not, “Come to our fellowship potluck, our chicken dinner, to our jazzercise class,” but “come and die.”

And then we read at the end of the story of the transfiguration in 9:11-12: *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. 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."*

The point is, following Jesus is about both suffering and glory. That it is never just one or just the other, but both inextricably intertwined. Paul echoed this in Phil 1:29 when he said, *It has been granted you on behalf of Christ that you not only believe on him, but that you also suffer for his sake.* See, the Christian life is not just believing, checking some boxes, agreeing to some statements. It is not just going to a really nice church building and fellowshiping in someone's home with a slice of pie on your knee as you talk about abstract biblical concepts.

The Christian life is not just about worshipping God, listening to great worship music, going to Christian concerts. The Christian life also is about suffering.

The whole NT points this out. It's only we middle class Americans that have a blind spot to this consistent theme of biblical teaching. Romans 8:17 says: *If we are children, then we are heirs. Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

The message throughout the NT is suffering, pain, struggle, sacrifice, dying to self, saying "no" to what you want and saying no when your whole body is screaming yes. All of this is the way to glory.

You know, Jane Fonda used to say, "no pain, no gain." That's the basic idea – no suffering, no glory. No cross, no crown. There's no resurrection without a crucifixion.

Here's the way I see the transfiguration. I see the transfiguration being like the planting of the American flag on top of that mountain on Iwo Jima. In the middle of this horrible fighting below, all the men can look up and say, "Hey, that's what we are fighting for. That's why we do this – for freedom, for our country, for our families in America."

And the transfiguration is like that. We look up from the valley below, we see this glory and we say the reason why we are going to pay a price to stay faithful in a difficult marriage, to endure and not throw in the towel, to fight through reconciling a relationship with someone you would rather just write off and give up on, to be willing to sacrifice career, financial ambitions for the sake of the Kingdom. The reason we do this is because we see at the top of the hill Jesus, the glory of Christ, and Christ's willingness to share his glory with us.

Let's look at his glory for a moment. We read: *After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John 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.*

John Piper in his wonderful little book titled, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, said that the universe is all about glory. The deepest longing of the human heart and the deepest meaning of heaven are summed up in this: the glory of God. The universe was meant to show it. We were meant to see it and savor it. Nothing less will do, which is why the world is as disordered and dysfunctional as it is. We've exchanged the glory of God for other things.

In other words, there is something inside of us that aches to be in the presence of Christ's beauty, Christ's loveliness, and Christ's glory. There is something incredibly healing and satisfying about being in the presence of great beauty, to stand in front of a beautiful painting and just savor it, to listen to beautiful music, to smell a beautiful flower, to watch a beautiful sunset, to stare into the eyes of a person you find enchanting. There is something so satisfying, so fulfilling, and so healing for our souls to be in the presence of great beauty.

But to be in the presence of divine beauty, to see Christ clothed with the loveliness that he has as God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, that's what this story of transfiguration is all about. These men see the blinding splendor of the Son of God. It's like he is wearing clothes made out of lightening. His face is shining like the noonday sun. Until that moment, the glory of the divinity of Christ was concealed by his humanity. But for a few moments, the curtain of his flesh lifted and the disciples see the glory.

It was such a memorable moment that years later both Peter and John comment on it as one of the defining moments of their lives. Peter in 2 Peter 1 writes this: *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him, from the majestic glory saying, "This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

John in John 1 echoes this saying: *We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father full of grace and truth. We have seen his glory. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* This vision of glory is promised to the pure in heart. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." There is a reason for you to keep your heart pure. There is a reason for you to keep yourself from being bitter. There is a reason to learn to quickly forgive people when they offend you and to not allow yourself to judge someone else – to wash your heart of envy and lust. The reason is that without a pure heart you won't have any intimacy with God now or see his glory later.

You know, I believe that we are living at one of those defining moments in world history. Not every time, not every historical period, not every moment is filled with monumental significance. But this is a time that the ancient Greeks used to call a "kairos" moment –

a critical moment, a defining moment, a moment full of meaning and significance for our nation as a whole, for us as individuals. Indeed, this is in many ways a defining moment for our planet. As a result of the Sept. 11 WTC attack, we now live in a world where anonymous haters of all that America stands for, mail anthrax spores to complete strangers trying to create panic and kill as many people as possible.

We live in a world of potential bombings and chemical attacks and germ warfare and God only knows what else. We live in a world that has heightened the importance of the choices you and I make. After Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, it seems to most Americans that the stakes regarding our decisions has been raised exponentially. Everything seems more important now, doesn't it? The time you parents spend with your kids. The decisions you make about dating and marriage. The choices you make about career and ministry. At times like this, it just doesn't seem to be very important if you are having a bad hair day or if you've put on a little weight, or what color fabric you pick for your new sofa, or whether you get the custom rims on your SUV.

But fundamental decisions about what you are going to do with your life, about your future life direction, about your closest relationships – it seems to me that the importance of choices has been profoundly raised. Does it feel like that to you, friends? That the choices you make matter a lot more now? I mean there seems to be times and seasons where it feels like (it's not true, but it feels like) God is letting you skate by with minimal devotion, very little passion, minimal repentance, minimal prayer. But this seems to be a time when God is not letting us as Christians in America just skate by anymore. It just simply will not do to sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend outside of marriage, or to play around sexually any more.

Sin is always a big deal, but in a time of national crisis, where we stand with God becomes a matter of life and death. There is an urgency about our relationships now...an urgency to get right with God. What you are choosing in the nitty-gritty of life makes an enormous difference. And friend, no choice you make is as important as your decision regarding Christ.

I mentioned a few weeks ago that I'm increasingly concerned that Americans are regularly confusing a love of diverse people with a love of diverse truths. We live in an increasingly diverse country. And in the wake of the Sept. 11 WTC, virtually every media outlet as been celebrating America' diversity as one of our great strengths.

But what does that mean? What does it mean that diversity is one of our great strengths? Does it mean that our strength is found in the diversity of our people? That people from every part of the world with their different looks, different ethnicities, their different dress, their different music, foods, tastes, customs, have all chosen for one reason or another to come and make America their home? That people celebrate diversity do they mean that we celebrate, we are thrilled by the diverse people that make up our country?

That's what is meant. And this is, indeed, America's great strength. But a lot of people don't mean that when they talk about our strength being diversity. They mean that there is no particular truth, no particular opinion, and no particular viewpoint that can claim any priority over other truths. When people celebrate diversity now in the wake of the September 11 WTC, what I hear folks saying is that all of our truths are a matter of personal preference and perspective. If someone says that they have the truth then they are being intolerant of others with whom they disagree. They are all saying that all truth is a matter of personal perspective. If someone comes along and says, "No, this is the truth and you are being intolerant." Friends, tolerance means a love of diverse people. It means opening yourself up to learn from, to love, to care about people who are different than you.

Tolerance doesn't mean that every truth claim is just as valid as every other truth claim. If I say that the Yankees beat the Oakland A's 3 games to 2 in this year's baseball playoff, I'm not being intolerant to the Oakland A's fans. They may not like the fact that the Yankees won, but they can't say, "Well, how dare you assert that the Yankees won the playoffs? We love the Oakland A's. We are just as sincere in our devotion to the Athletics as you are to the Yankees. I can't believe that you would be so intolerant to another group's loyalties and devotion just because they don't agree with you."

My response would be, "I'm not questioning your devotion. I am not questioning your loyalty or sincerity. I'm not saying that everything about the A's is worthless, that the hotdogs that you sell aren't good; that the Yankees hotdogs at the stadium are better. Or that your stadium isn't good, where you go to practice your devotion is bad. I'm just stating a simple fact. It is a matter of a truth claim. The Yankees won the playoffs."

We Christians are not being intolerant when we assert certain truth claims. We are not demeaning anyone when we say that Jesus uniquely rose from the dead. There is an amount of evidence to support this claim.

Now, this text is asserting a truth claim. It is claiming uniqueness for Jesus. It's saying that there is a glory in Jesus of Nazareth that isn't present in other great men – not Moses, not Elijah, not Peter, not James, not John. If you read the gospels honestly, you quickly recognize that the gospel writers are not at all subtle in their truth claim that Jesus Christ is in a category of one. That he is absolutely unique.

John Stott, a Christian writer, once said that our claim then is not that Jesus was one of the great spiritual leaders of the world. It would be hopelessly incongruous to refer to him as "Jesus the Great" comparable to Alexander the Great, Charles the Great and Napoleon the Great. Jesus is not "the great", he is *the only*. He has no peers, no rivals, no successors. The NT teaches that Jesus is the only Savior, there is only one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. The NT teaches that failure to believe in the one and only Son results in eternal condemnation. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. But whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son. John 3:16.



Now, there is no more important choice, friend that you will ever make than the choice of whether you will believe in the unique glory in Jesus Christ. For some of you, you are still weighing this. You don't know why believe this book that I'm teaching out of, the Bible, versus believing the Koran. Or why believe in Jesus versus believing in Allah or Buddha. Let me recommend a couple of books, if you are really interested in finding out more about the Christian faith and why we Christians believe what we believe and say what we say. Let me point you to a couple of books by a former legal affairs correspondent for the Chicago Tribune. He's a Yale Law grad, and a great legal mind. His name is Lee Stroebel. He wrote two books that we have available in our bookstore, "A Case for Faith" and "The Case for Christ." I strongly recommend that you pick those up. They are great.

And if you are convinced, but you don't know how to express or articulate your faith to answer some of these tough questions, you ought to pick these books up. It is incumbent upon us, Peter says, to be able to give a reason for the hope that's within us.

There is a unique glory in Jesus. And Jesus in a unique way is the very center and the climax of biblical revelation. We read in v. 4: *And there appeared with him Elijah and Moses who were talking with Jesus.* Here Jesus is talking with Elijah and Moses, the great lawgiver of the OT and the greatest prophet of the OT. And around them are the inner circle of the disciples, Peter, James and John. Jesus is standing in the center and he is surrounded by the OT people of God and the NT people of God. A lot of people read the Bible as if it were two separate books, almost entirely unrelated. They say, "Well, that was the OT and we don't need to bother with that. We are a NT people." Or you hear folks say, "Well, that was the God of the OT; but we worship the God of the NT."

Do you know one of the earliest heresies in the church's history was one that tried to separate the OT and the NT. To make Christianity a religion simply based on the NT and not the entire Bible, including the OT. Do you know you can't understand the NT unless you see how the entire message and ministry of Jesus is rooted in the story of Israel and the OT. Jesus is the fulfiller, the culmination of everything that the OT pointed to. The apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 1:20 says, *No matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ.* In other words, all the promises of the OT have found their fulfillment in Christ. Jesus said the same thing in John 5:39 in talking with the Pharisees. He challenges them saying, *You diligently study the scriptures because you think by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me.* These OT scriptures talk about me. After Jesus' resurrection he talked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus and we read in Luke 24: *How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and the Prophets he explained them and what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.*

Here is Jesus with the two great representatives of the OT – Moses and Elijah; and the three great representatives of the NT's people of God – Peter, James and John. And Jesus is in the center. Jesus is in the center of the Bible. Whether you are reading in

the OT or the NT, the Bible is a book about Jesus. Jesus is the Temple that the OT points to. So many people are excited about some new archeological dig at the Temple site in Jerusalem and the possible building of the OT Temple. Jesus is the Temple. We don't need a new Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus is the place where we meet with God. As the glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the OT Temple, John tells that the glory of God dwelt and remained in Jesus. Jesus is our Holy of Holies.

Jesus is the great high priest who intercedes for us before the throne of God. We don't need a priest today to confess our sins to. Jesus is our priest. He is our mediator. Only his priesthood is eternal. His priesthood is perfect. Jesus is the final sacrifice that the OT sin offerings and guilt offerings and burnt offerings pointed to. Only his sacrifice doesn't need to be repeated every day. It is a once for all final sacrifice. God is not looking for another sacrifice from you to pay for your sins. We have our only needed sacrifice in Jesus.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's purpose for Israel. But unlike unfaithful Israel, Jesus is the faithful Son who chooses to love and obey God. Jesus fulfills Israel's national destiny to be light to the world and to bring all the nations in the world to God. Jesus is Noah's Ark that saved God's people from destruction. Jesus is the ram caught in the thicket that God supplied in place of Isaac. Jesus is the patriarch Joseph, loved by his father, rejected by his brothers, sold to the Gentiles, unfairly punished, but eventually becoming the right hand man of the king, who accomplishes the salvation of many.

Jesus is Jonah in the depths for three days, but raised. He is Amos warning us about a coming judgment. He is Jeremiah weeping over the nation as he sees judgment coming. He is Ezekiel prophesying the Temple's destruction. He is Isaiah preaching comfort and good news to those in captivity. Jesus is the wisdom of the book of Proverbs. He is David's Lord in the Psalms. He is the Passover Lamb, the Day of Atonement, and the Sabbath Rest. He is the exodus from Egypt, the end of the Babylonian exile, the Kinsmen Redeemer. He is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and the mighty God of Isaiah 9.

Do you get it? Everything – every prophet, every prophesy, every sacrifice, every bit of the law, every promise, every symbol – it all points to Jesus. Jesus is the center. Jesus is the meaning. Jesus is the climax. Jesus is the culmination.

And so God says, *Listen to him*. In v. 8 we read that Elijah and Moses fade from view. *Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus*. Jesus transcends. He goes beyond Moses and Elijah and everyone and everything in the OT. Everything fades in the light of Jesus' coming. I love the way the Message version of the Bible puts it in Mark 9: *The next minute the disciples were looking around, rubbing their eyes, seeing nothing but Jesus, only Jesus*.

Let me ask you a question. What does your life center around? What is at the very center of your existence? Your kids? Your marriage? Your job? Golf? Jogging? Some hobby? What is at the center of your existence? The disciples looked around

and saw no one except Jesus, only Jesus. This passage is about the glory of Jesus. Our lives are to be centered around Jesus. Anything else – anyone else will disappoint you. When you open the Bible, you should be saying to God, “God, in whatever passage I’m reading, show me Jesus. I want to feed upon, I want to savor, I want to find Jesus in this text. Show me Jesus.”

All day long, it’s “What are you saying, Jesus? What do you want for my life, Jesus? What are you leading me to do, Jesus?”

Now, as I said at the beginning, the Christian life is not just about glory, it’s about suffering. It is not just about seeing the glory of Jesus Christ, or wonderful spiritual experiences. The Christian life is not just about healings and fellowship and worship. It is also about suffering. It is about persevering in the face of opposition. It is about enduring and not throwing in the towel when you are tempted to quit. It is about saying the tough thing when it is easier to compromise. It is about paying a price. It is the hard road, the narrow way.

We don’t like this message of suffering. Peter didn’t. In chapter 8 after Jesus gets done telling Peter that he is going to have to suffer, we read, *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* And here in ch. 9:5 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.*

I believe this business of setting up camp on the mountaintop is more of the same. Let’s just settle here and bask in the glory. Let’s pretend that we didn’t hear what you said, Jesus, about rejection and pain and suffering and the cross a week ago. Jesus, let’s stay up here where the sun is shining and God is present forever. You know that one? Why can’t we just go from one Christian conference to another? We’ll get prayer and have great worship bands and hear great teaching and invite God’s presence. Can’t we just live life that way? Can’t we live like we are in a continual renewal service, or one big Promise Keepers Conference or women’s conference?

And if we can place these conferences in Hawaii or on a cruise ship in the Caribbean so maybe I can catch some rays and get in a little snorkeling and have a great dinner and do some shopping. That’s all the better. All this and Jesus too.

But that’s not the way of the Kingdom. The way of the Kingdom is a way of suffering that leads to glory. No cross, no crown. No resurrection without a crucifixion.

The other day I wrote a congregational email to many of you. By the way, if you still aren’t receiving our emails, just take the little insert and tear it off. You can bring it to the information counter. But in my email I told you that after 27 years of ministry here at Vineyard Columbus, our associate pastor, Danny Meyer, and his wife, Penny, who is our women’s ministry pastor, feel led by God to go up to the Delaware/Sunbury area and plant a new Vineyard church up there.

I can tell you that this has been personally hard for me. Not because I don't believe that God will bless Danny and Penny. I believe God will bless them. And not because I don't believe that God won't bless us or supply in the place that they have left. I believe God will supply for us. He always has in the past. But Danny and I are the dearest of friends. I guess in my heart I always believed that we would minister together for our entire ministry lives. I've been told more times than I can count, and Danny has as well, how perfect a team we make, how much we complement each other. But Danny and Penny really feel strongly from God that the Lord is calling them to plant a church and I support that. And our leadership team supports that.

I want to tell you eyeball to eyeball what this decision is not about. You might have read it in the email or not, but I want to tell you straight up with me looking at you that there is not any relational problem between Danny and me or Danny and the other pastoral staff or with Penny. We enjoy at this moment the closest relationship we've ever enjoyed. We are still the best of friends.

This church planting is not the result of a shift in vision or a shift in philosophy or a shift in values. Danny is not going to plant a church in reaction to the Columbus Vineyard. He said that if people are going to come up thinking that this is going to be radically different, they are going to be sorely disappointed. They love this church. They are going to work out of these values – the values they helped to establish for the last couple of decades here.

Why do we do this? Years ago the Lord said that if we wanted to see the Kingdom of God spread in the world, we were going to have give away our best. No suffering, no glory. And God has tested us about giving away our best over and over again as we sent out church planters: John Moriarty to the Eastside; Rick Evans to Cleveland; Mark Tindall to Philadelphia; and Jay Pathak to Denver; and many others. The Sapersteins and the Parkhursts halfway around the world to Central Asia; and now the Meyers.

It is easy to say in the abstract, "Lord, I'm willing to sacrifice that your kingdom will be expanded." But sometimes God holds us to that. Jesus said in John 12, *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it abides alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.* If we are going to bear a lot of fruit for the kingdom, some things and someone must die. Somebody at your job has to die of embarrassment, the embarrassment of being a Christian if other people at your job are going to be saved. Somebody in your family is going to have to die, maybe experience rejection or misunderstanding, if the members of your family are going to be saved. Career dreams sometimes must die, some middle class aspirations for what you thought your life was going to look like must die. Some relationships must become more distant.

Danny and Penny are planning to hold a couple of interest meetings in November for those who currently live in the Delaware/Sunbury area. They are trying to recruit people who live in that area who have a heart for Delaware/Sunbury. They are going to host a couple of interest meetings. And they will gradually be working toward a church plant, which they hope to open up on Easter Sunday 2002.

Of course, me and we as pastors here need wisdom regarding who will fill the roles that Danny and Penny have here on staff. We are praying about that right now. Will you pray for our church? As I said earlier in the talk, I think this is such a crucial time for our nation, for us as individuals in our decisions and for the Columbus Vineyard.

Let me close with a couple of questions off of this theme of suffering and glory. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, what sacrifice is Christ calling forth from you to expand his kingdom in these days? What is Christ asking of you to expand his kingdom in these days? Is God asking you to be willing to experience rejection, some level of hostility, or embarrassment perhaps with family members or with coworkers or with someone at school as you attempt to share your faith? Is he asking you to experience rejection from your parents or someone else whose opinion you care about in order to choose a course that you know is going to be unpopular? Is God asking you, friend, to hang in there in a difficult marriage to not throw in the towel. Is he asking you to not give up and walk away, and to demonstrate his covenant faithfulness? It would be easy to quit, to give up on people who have hurt you, to walk away from the church, or to walk away from God. Every day thousands of people quit school and refuse counseling. What they get out of this is no pride in graduating, no marriage in old age, no endurance, no glory.

Where is God asking you to be willing to suffer, to give something up in order to experience glory? Is he asking you to make a radical change in your life? To believe him for something that you've had a hard time believing God for?

The men at Iwo Jima ran up the hill to plant an American flag that was a rallying point and inspired all the rest of the Marines on the island. Jesus went on top of a mountain, showed his glory, to be a rallying point, a light at the end of the tunnel for those of us who have been called to follow in his steps. What price are you willing to pay to share his glory? Let's pray.

## **Suffering and Glory**

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Rich Nathan

October 20 and 21, 2001

“Renewing Your Spiritual Passion” Series

Mark 9:1-13

- I. Jackie Robinson and Iwo Jima
  
- II. Jesus Christ and His Disciples
  - A. Jesus and Suffering (Mk. 8:31-37; 9:11-13)
  
  - B. Jesus and Glory (Mk. 9:2,3)
  
  - C. Jesus and the Old Testament (Mk. 9:7-8)
  
- III. Jesus Christ and His Call to Suffer (Mk. 9:5-7)