

A Peculiar Glory

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[0 : 00] As people, we're wired to seek and be dazzled by glory. We admire the beauty of the sunset.

We visit the mountains, perhaps we went hiking on these nice couple days to wander at the grandeur of the mountains. We are dazzled by the pomp and power of royalty and statesmen and the glamour and popularity of celebrities.

And often for people, the relentless drive to acquire more and to accomplish more are also frequently veiled attempts to find lasting glory. Yet because we're broken by pervasive sin in our lives, we often see glory in the wrong places.

And so what is truly glorious at times looks to us as inglorious. And so we see in this passage Jesus' peculiar glory, glory that maybe others would not see as glory.

And in this peculiar glory of the cross of Jesus Christ teaches us, it enables us to take up our crosses and follow him. That's the main point of this passage.

[1 : 12] And first, I will talk about the glory of the king. And secondly, I will talk about the glory of the cross. And lastly, I talk about the glory of discipleship. Read verse 12 with me.

It says, The next day, the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So Jesus, like other faithful Jews who had come to worship, celebrate the Passover feast, he's on his way to Jerusalem like them.

And because people had heard about Jesus and had heard that Jesus is coming, and now they're kind of gathering around them. And so, it says in verse 13, The Jews took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel. This is a quotation from Psalm 118, verses 25 and 26. It says, Save us, we pray, O Lord.

O Lord, we pray, give us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And the word Hosanna is just a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word that translates to save us.

[2 : 17] So that's where they get the Hosanna from. And this psalm, Psalm 118, was sung at the feast in particular for the Jews, so the feast of the tabernacle, but also the Passover feast. And so it's a psalm that all the observant Jews knew, probably knew by heart.

So it's not surprising they're able to sing this as Jesus is coming in. So the psalm was originally used by the Jews to pronounce blessing on pilgrims. So the Jewish pilgrims were coming into Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

So blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But if you look at Jewish commentary from that time, it also shows that they understood that psalm messianically. So they understood it to refer to the Messiah, the promised king who was supposed to come.

So the one who comes in the name of the Lord is not just a pilgrim, but he's the Messiah, the promised king that is supposed to come. And that's why the Jews add to the psalm at the end, even the king of Israel.

That's their real expectation. They're expecting the king to come and proclaiming Jesus as that king. And so the fact that they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him confirms this because the palm is obviously not the kind of palm that we find in Florida and California, even though those are all kind of imported as well.

[3 : 33] They're not indigenous. But this is a native palm to this region. It's the shorter palms. It's date palms. And so they're plentiful. You can still find them to this day. And so they grabbed them. And why?

Because there's no biblical command for people to celebrate the Passover feast with palm trees. But palm tree was associated with Israel throughout the Old Testament. So in Isaiah 9.14, for example, the palm tree is referred to as a symbol of Israel.

But there's much more going on than that because palm tree historically by this time has become a nationalistic symbol. And the reason being a Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, overran Jerusalem, took over the temple and desecrated it so that Jews couldn't worship there anymore.

And then some of the Jews, led by leaders, the Maccabee brothers, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon, they staged a successful military campaign to oust the Syrians and then re-consecrate, rededicate the temple.

That's what Hanukkah celebrates. And when they did that, in the first book of Maccabees, chapter 13, verse 51, it says that Simon Maccabee, one of the leaders, entered triumphantly into the temple and rededicated it carrying palm branches.

[4 : 50] So during Hanukkah, when they took over the temple again, they used palm branches to rededicate the temple. And since that time, palm tree has become kind of this nationalistic symbol.

So they kind of rally around that symbol. This stands for us, the people of Israel. This shows our power in unity. This is our might. And so that reveals, kind of betrays the people's true expectations for Jesus, doesn't it?

By carrying palm trees to greet Jesus, they want him to be like Simon Maccabee, another king to come, and this time to oust the Romans so that they can be free.

And as the crowd is getting into it, it says in verses 14 to 15, Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, fear not, daughter of Zion.

Behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt. This is likely a quotation that conflates two verses, Isaiah 49, which says, fear not, behold your God, and Zechariah 9, 9, which says, rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

[5 : 59] Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So by procuring a donkey and riding on it in his entrance to Jerusalem, Jesus is self-consciously fulfilling this prophecy in Zechariah. And as he does that, Jesus both simultaneously confirms the people's expectations of kingship and he corrects the people's expectations of kingship.

And I'll explain how he does that. So I've heard some people argue after reading this or reading a pair of passages in the gospel that Jesus is here kind of denying people's proclamation of his kingship.

That if he was trying to be a king, he would be riding on a stately stallion, and not this lowly donkey. So I've heard some people argue that. So that's, I think, a little bit too clever to be true.

Because if you look throughout the Bible and how the donkey is used, it's actually the preferred ride of royalty throughout Scripture. So if you look at Judges 10, 3, and 4, it says that Jair of Gilead, he's the judge of Israel for 22 years, he had 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys and controlled 30 towns.

[7 : 24] Riding a donkey symbolizes their rule over these towns. There are 30 sons, 30 kings, basically riding 30 donkeys. That's why also in 1 Kings 1, when King David commands Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet to anoint Solomon as his successor, his king, he puts him on his own mule.

Not a horse, not his town, his mule, his donkey, to ride around the city to indicate to the whole nation that he's the successor, the king. And finally, kind of an ancient Near Eastern parallel, this is an ancient letter that was found in Mari, which was a Sumerian city in the ancient Near East.

It says this, Verily, you are the king of the Heneans, but secondly, you are the king of the Akkadians. My lord should not ride a horse. Let my lord ride in a chariot or on a mule, and he will thereby honor his royal head.

So riding a horse befits a soldier, marching into battle, but not a king coming into his kingdom. The king rides a donkey.

So Jesus riding a donkey is not denying his kingship. In fact, he is very consciously confirming that he is the king. And not only that, just imagine this scenario.

[8 : 40] So Josephus, an early Jewish historian from the first century, records a Passover feast that he observed. And he says in it that about 2,700,000 people took part in it, took part in the feast.

Not the people that are not partaking in it because they're not clean ceremonially, but 2,700,000 people partake in the feast itself. So that's, just to give you an idea, the number of Muslims that last year did perform the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is required once in their lifetime.

All the people that did that, all the Muslims that did that last year for the Hajj, plus all the people that attended this year's Super Bowl combined is about that number. So that's a huge, huge, huge feast.

And so all these people come, and just like the people who live in the city like us know, during rush hour, you don't want to drive, right? You walk or you bike, right?

You need to, in order to avoid driving. And so people, all these pilgrims who are coming into Jerusalem knew better than to ride a donkey into the city. Everybody's on foot, invariably, right? So this, over 2 million people on foot, crowded together, coming into Jerusalem.

[9 : 57] Picture this, and there's one man in the whole crowd riding on a donkey. And you could just picture people just looking back, well, what's going on over here?

And then just spreads this murmur, this wonder. Who is this? And because Jesus was already well known by that time, because of his miracles, because of him raising Lazarus from the dead, that sign, his act, is unmistakable.

He's saying, I am the king. I am the king that was to come. So, Jesus is humble, right?

Zechariah describes him that way. He's not coming in and looking down on people. He doesn't have this elaborate entourage or is in ornate clothes. No, he is humble. He comes as a human being, right?

The God, the king of the universe. He comes humbly. And it, but it's not humble for him to deny that he is king. That's not what he is doing.

[11 : 01] That would be false humility, not true humility. And so, but so he, on one sense, he confirms the people's messianic expectations. He says, I am the king that you are expecting.

But on the other hand, he corrects the people's messianic expectations. And he does that also by riding on a donkey. Because by riding on a donkey rather than on a war horse, he is confirming that he is not come, he has not come like Simon Maccabee to deliver military victory for the Israelites, to rescue them from, militarily from, the hands of the Roman Empire.

But he has come as the prince of peace. He comes in peace, rising to the city as the king. And this truth is confirmed by the context of the prophecy that was cited by John, Zechariah 9, 9-11.

Because after it says, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you. Righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

It continues like this. It says, I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem. And the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall speak peace to the nations.

[12:17] His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. As for you also because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

So Jesus is the humble king who is coming in peace, not war. And his peace and rule will extend not just to the Jews but to all the nations. He will establish his universal reign and set the prisoners free.

But the disciples and the people following don't understand the profundity of what Jesus is doing and proclaiming. So in verse 16, it says, His disciples did not understand these things at first but when Jesus was glorified, then they remember that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

Only then do they truly grasp the significance of what Jesus is here doing. And so there's a lot of people and Jesus is very popular, right? And at this point, at least.

And so even though the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish body had already decided to kill Jesus, they don't dare incite the mob by doing something at this moment.

[13:28] And so they are exasperated and they exclaim in verse 19, you see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world, the world has gone after him. And as they say that, they speak truer than they know because it's a hyperbolic statement for them.

Oh, the whole world has gone after him. It's hyperbolic for them but it's actually a very true statement because the world, the word, the world occurs more in the Gospel of John than any other book in the New Testament.

Seventy-eight times, which is about a third of all the occurrences of the word, the world. And in the Gospel of John, it refers to the lost world, the world that Christ has come to save that includes not just the Jews but all the nations.

So when they say the whole world, the world has gone after him, Jesus is, they're speaking the truth. Yes, the world has gone after him. He has come to draw the world to himself. He is the Lamb of God, it says John 1, 29, who takes away the sin of the world.

And this truth is confirmed immediately by verse 20. It says, Now, among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. Greeks are not necessarily people who just are from Greece, but in the New Testament, throughout the New Testament, it refers to every basically Gentile, any non-Jew is referred to as a Greek.

[14:53] And so, Gentiles, people, non-Jews from all over the world have come after Jesus. And this arrival of the Gentiles kind of transitions us from the glory of the king to the glory of the cross.

Second point, in verses 20 to 36. Because the fact that the Greeks were there suggests that they were probably God-fearers, maybe converts, but perhaps not full converts.

And they reached out to Philip, and we don't know exactly why, because perhaps because Philip, like Andrew, is a Greek name. Maybe they thought, oh, maybe we'll have a better chance with this disciple. And he was also from, he lived near a Gentile region.

And so, they come to Philip, verse 21. Philip takes this to Andrew, and then they together bring this issue to Jesus. And Jesus answers in verse 23, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

So, up to this point in the Gospel of John, the hour, which refers to his, the hour of his glorification, has always been future. The hour is coming, but now, as the Gentiles have come to him, it has triggered that hour.

[16:01] Now the hour is not in the future, but it has come. And notice that during this time, the Jews and Gentiles are strictly separated. Even during the Feast of the Passover, the Gentiles, upon threat of death, were forbidden from crossing over to the Jewish inner court.

They had to stay outside in the outer court. But yet Jesus, when he is glorified, will draw all nations to himself. So now that the Gentiles are starting to come to him, Jesus says, my hour has come.

And John doesn't tell us whether he actually grants them an audience or not, because to him, that's theologically irrelevant. What's important is that the Gentiles came to Jesus. So he records that part. But what exactly does this glorification entail?

It sounds glorious, it sounds good. What does that entail? He hints that in verse 24, truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Now, that's a little bit of an enigmatic statement. That doesn't sound too glorious. What are you talking about, Jesus?

[17:06] Someone dying, a grain falling on the ground and dying. But he continues, verse 27, now is a soul troubled. And what shall I say?

Now is my soul troubled. Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I have come to this hour. The hour of his glory, his glorification, has come, but Jesus is not excited.

He's troubled, which the word communicates deep anxiety, turmoil. And so he asks himself, should I cry to the Father, save me from this hour?

And yet, he steals himself, resolves himself, and says, no, it is for this purpose that I have come to this hour. Because his desire is not to glorify himself, as verse 28 reveals, but he says, Father, glorify your name.

Jesus' glorification is tied to him unreservedly pursuing only the Father's glory. So, this will get clear in a few verses, but for now, let's keep looking at what this glorification entails in verse 31.

[18:16] Because it says, now is the judgment of this world and now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

Now, that makes a little bit more sense, doesn't it, what glorification is supposed to be like. Because if a king is going to be glorified, if he's going to ascend to his throne, then yes, of course, he's going to judge his subjects. So, he says, now is the judgment of this world.

And even though Jesus says later in verse 47 that he has not come to judge but to save the world, by virtue of him being the light of the world, he does cast judgment. Even though he hasn't come for active final judgment, because he is light, he simultaneously shines on some and casts a shadow on others.

So, he, by virtue of his presence, is separating the children of light from the children of darkness. So, he judges this world. And likewise, it says in verse 31, now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

The ruler of this world, that the phrase occurs again in John 14, 30, and 16, 11. And similar title refers throughout the New Testament to Satan. Because the true king has now returned.

[19 : 23] This is the real return of the king. The Jesus glorification. Now, his enthronement means Satan's dethronement. He's going to be overthrown because he's a pretender. He's not the true king.

So, he'll be expelled from his temporary station as ruler of this world. So, Jesus continues in verse 32, and I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

And so, his glory consists of being lifted up far above the earth, probably even hinting at his ascension here. Yet, when he does that, he will draw all people to himself.

And again, all people, of course, refers to the world that he is just talking about. It doesn't mean all individuals without exception because that would mean that every single person will be saved, which clearly contradicts this passage which talks about Jesus' judgment.

But it means all people without distinction, meaning all kinds of people, all Jews and Gentiles will be drawn to the kingdom of God, invited to the kingdom of God. So, all these details so far sound great except for that little bit about the grain dying.

[20 : 31] So, what was that about? Why was Jesus troubled and not excited? And verse 33 tells us what's going on. It says, He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Because everything he said up to this point about his glorification is about his death. Now the meaning of Jesus' glorification is revealed plainly, right?

So, John's a master of using double meaning in his narratives and the word lifted up in the Greek means two things just like in English. It can mean physical raising up as well as kind of more abstractly glorifying, exalting.

So, we thought Jesus was going to be exalted and he is. He's going to be glorified but that glorification, that exaltation is going to come in the form of him being physically raised up on the cross to be killed.

And John is quoting and alluding to Isaiah 52 and 53 which says that the servant of God, this Messiah, shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted yet in the same breath Isaiah the prophet says that he will be despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

[21 : 47] He will bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. He will be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. That's the glory that Christ seeks.

This explains what Jesus said earlier in verse 24. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. The death of the grain is the first stage of its fruitfulness. Likewise, Jesus' death is the first stage of his glorification.

His death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. Now, this is the supreme irony and peculiar glory of the cross because the world presumed that it was passing judgment on Jesus in debating his identity, in putting him on trial and sentencing him to death.

The world thought that they were passing judgment on Jesus, yet it was they who were being judged by the light of the world. Satan, the prince of this world, thought that he was triumphing over Jesus by leading him to death and killing him on the cross.

[23 : 05] Yet, the cross was the place where he was decisively defeated by Jesus. A king without subjects is no king at all, right? But in order for Jesus to get his people, in order for Jesus to come into his kingdom on earth, he must first rescue his subjects who are being ruled by the prince of this world, who are captive with sin and death.

And because eternal death is a just penalty for sin that only an eternal God can pay, Jesus goes to the cross in order to come into his kingdom. So his throne is the ancient equivalent of the electric chair, the cross.

His crown is a crown of thorns. His glorious inauguration is his inglorious, shameful death. And now is that time, John says in verse 31.

I hope that captures your imagination and fills you with gratitude because that's the peculiar glory of our king. He didn't win us over, win our allegiance by ruling us with an iron fist.

He won our allegiance through his sacrificial obedience and love. God's grace. He won our allegiance to the king of the king. He won our allegiance to the king. And let me ask you, what other kings of this world have ever done that?

[24 : 32] Subjects himself to shame to rescue his subjects. Let me ask you, what other so-called gods of this world have done that? Only one. Jesus.

And for that reason, he is the only one who deserves our love and loyalty. And that's what we call the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The crowd, however, is a little dismayed at this point.

They don't quite get the profound things Jesus is saying. They're just kind of hung up on one point that Jesus said he was going to be lifted up from the earth. So they're worried that he's going to leave. It's like, what do you mean you're going to leave?

I thought the Messiah was supposed to be here forever. They're probably, it's not clear exactly what passage, what passage they have in mind, possibly Daniel 7, 13 to 14, which says that the Son of Man, one like a Son of Man, the Messiah, would have everlasting dominion.

But they don't understand that Jesus' reign is going to last forever. But Jesus come primarily to establish a spiritual kingdom before he establishes a physical kingdom. Because he recognizes that unless the spiritual, the underlying spiritual problem is solved, the military victory won't assure blessing for his people.

[25 : 51] Because every brokenness in our lives, our lack of, just comfort under our own skin, our own psychological alienation within ourselves, our social alienation with others in our lives, with our neighbors, our physical alienation from the rest of creation, all the brokenness, all the alienation you see is just a result, the root, the cause of all of that is our spiritual alienation from God.

And so Jesus comes to fix the underlying problem. Because unless our hearts are reformed by the grace and mercy of God, we will never be fully comfortable in our own skin. Unless our hearts are conformed to the love of God, we will never consistently forgive people and love people selflessly.

Unless our hearts are transformed by the generosity of God, we will not consistently be generous toward others. and provide for others' needs. The foundation, the root of social renewal is not more programmed by us, it's transformation, internal transformation brought by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that's why he does not march to Caesar's palace in Rome, but he marches, rides into Jerusalem to die on the cross. So Jesus said to them in verse 35, the light is among you for a little longer.

Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light.

[27 : 32] Jesus is soon going to leave, and in that intervening absence between his ascent and the spirit's descent, the people who did not believe in him will be completely lost and without spiritual direction.

But those who believe in him will become sons of light, they will be characterized by light and so they will not be lost. And so he warns them, follow me now. And so we've seen that glory of the king and we see his glory of the cross, the peculiar glory, and now this turns and brings us to the glory of discipleship.

Because he says after he said these things in verse 36, he departed and hid himself from them. Because in the last moments of his life he devotes himself to his primary disciples to lead them and prepare them.

And his withdrawal from others is kind of almost an active parable. It acts out his warning, earlier warning, that once the light of the world is gone they will be lost so they must seek him.

And John knew, understood this time, so this is still actually one of the main reasons why Jews don't come to faith. And the same reason that the people here don't seem to come to faith is that they rationalize, well if Jesus really was the Messiah and there's no reason why all these Jews, so many of them who had been waiting for that Messiah would refuse to believe in him.

[28 : 58] So that's the argument against Christians and John knows this so he's writing with that in mind. And so he says so why don't they believe? Even today the Jews say the same thing. Well if Jesus really were the Messiah there wouldn't be all these Jews who don't believe in him and are still waiting for the Messiah they argue.

But John gives a different take. His explanation is this in verses 37 to 40. Though he had done so many signs before them they still did not believe in him so that the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.

Lord who has believed what he heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe for again Isaiah said he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them.

That's pretty blunt isn't it? We can't let's not rationalize this and blunt the forcefulness of what John is saying here. He's quoting from Isaiah 53.1 and 6.10 and he's saying that many of the Jews still did not believe in Jesus why?

So that Israel's prophecy about their unbelief would be fulfilled. God already knew this and he prophesied and again Isaiah said he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

[30 : 24] The reason why people don't believe is because God has rendered them incapable of belief. God has ordained unbelief.

But as I've said over and over again throughout our series in the Gospel of John whenever there's this kind of stark teaching about divine sovereignty and God's foreign ordination it's always paired with teaching about human responsibility because we always have to hold those two things together.

And so in verses 41 to 43 it says Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue for they love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

That's the reason why they didn't believe. So in the first part we get the divine perspective he knew and he foreordained and in the second part we see the human perspective they didn't believe of their own accord because they were afraid of the Jews because they love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

This is obviously hard to get our minds wrapped around and I don't try usually so I hope you don't as well. But I think about it kind of like the wave particle duality in physics.

[32 : 01] I wish Jimmy were here to elaborate. He's a physicist. And the physicists have discovered that photon which is a light particle it's an elementary particle of light is at the same time a wave.

So it's both a particle it's a fragment of matter and a wave which is like a wave of energy and they're kind of contradictory yet those two propositions are equally true. And Albert Einstein writes about this he says it seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other while at times we may use either.

We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality. Separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light. But together they do.

Only when these two contradictory pictures of reality are put together we can explain the phenomena of light. And Jesus is the light of the world and we see in an analogous way that duality at work here also.

Because on the one hand people do not believe in order to fulfill the scripture because God has so ordained that. But on the other hand they do not believe because of their own cowardice and selfishness.

[33 : 15] On the one hand the light of the world has blinded them. On the other hand the light of the world they have turned voluntarily their eyes from that light. Sometimes you need to use one to explain a situation.

Sometimes you need to use the other. But you need both to make sense of the light of the world and how humans respond to him. So this is the glory of discipleship.

Verses 24 to 25 truly, truly I say to you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone. But if it dies it bears much fruit.

Whoever loves his life will lose it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. The Jewish leaders, the Jews refused to die. They wanted to preserve themselves, their own standing, their own power.

So they fail to be Jesus' disciples. So a certain death, a type of death, a type of humiliation is necessary for the generation of life and glorification.

[34 : 28] And this is so important because that's a pattern we see in Jesus, right? Throughout his entire life, we see his incarnation and then we see his glorification. We see his death and then we see his resurrection and ascension.

That's a pattern we see in Jesus and that applies to all of us as well as his followers. And that's why Jesus says in verse 25, 26, whoever loves his life will lose it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

And if anyone serves me, he must follow me and where I am there will my servant be also. So if we're going to follow Jesus, if we're going to serve him, then we must go where he goes and that's to the cross.

And because he carried the cross, because he revealed to us the peculiar glory of the cross, now we must take up our cross and follow him and that's the glory of discipleship.

And the language of love and hate, I hope you're not thrown off by that, it's not saying you need to actually hate your life. That's not emotional hate that he's talking about, rather he's using them to refer to preference.

[35 : 32] If you love your life more than you love God and prioritize yourself over his will, then you will lose your life. But if you love God more than your life, that's what it means to hate your life, and you sacrifice everything in your life and you orient everything around your life for that purpose, to love him and serve him, then you will gain your life.

That's the glory of Christian discipleship. In his book, Miracles, C.S. Lewis very eloquently describes this pattern of descent and re-ascent in the life of Christ and the life of believers.

He says, In the Christian story, God descends to re-ascend. He comes down, down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity, down to the very roots and seabed of the nature he has created.

But he goes down to come up again and bring the ruined world up with him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden.

He must stoop in order to lift. He must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders.

[36 : 53] Or one may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay, then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping precious thing that he went down to recover.

In this descent and re-ascent, everyone will recognize a familiar pattern, a thing written all over the world. It is the pattern of all vegetable life. It must belittle itself into something hard, small, and death-like.

It must fall into the ground. Thence the new life re-ascends. It is the pattern of all animal generation too. There is descent from the full and perfect organisms into the sperm and ovum, and in the dark womb, a life at first inferior in kind to that of the species which is being reproduced.

Then the slow ascent to the perfect embryo, to the living conscious baby, and finally to the adult. And now he applies this to our emotional life.

So it is also in our moral and emotional life. The first innocent and spontaneous desires have to submit to the death-like process of control or total denial.

[38 : 20] But from that, there is a re-ascent to fully formed character in which the strength of the original material all operates, but in a new way. Death and rebirth go down to go up.

It is a key principle. Through this bottleneck, this belittlement, the high road nearly always lies. The pattern is there in nature because it was first there in God.

So often, and in my life this has been the case in every major spiritual breakthrough and growth in my life, and so often the Christians dream of wealth must first die.

She must find contentment in poverty or just middle class income and learn to give generously even in the midst of her scarcity before God prospers her.

So often, the Christians dream of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness must die. He must struggle with demoralizing and shameful sins for years on end and learn to rely fully on Christ and only in his righteousness.

[39 : 28] And then, God delivers him from his sins. So often, the Christians dream of health and strength must die. She must find contentment in chronic illnesses and suffering and learn to thank God and be joyful even in the midst of such weakness before God heals her.

So often, the Christians dream of honor and success must die. He must struggle to string together a viable career.

He must work for years without proper recognition and be rejected by many places so that he learns to boast in and glory in Christ alone. Then God honors him.

So often, the Christians dream of companionship and family must die. She must struggle with loneliness and learn to make Christ her best and most intimate companion before God provides for her a husband and a half family.

This is the law that governs the kingdom of God. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

[40 : 46] But if it dies, it bears much fruit. And if you're not a Christian, this applies to you also. You must die to your fancy of figuring out religion and then you need to take hold of God by faith.

You must die to your claim to autonomy and submit to his lordship. Then and only then will you have spiritual life. All spiritual life must first be preceded by death.

So I plead with all of you, don't leave the worship service this morning until you've seriously asked yourself that question. What part of my life is God calling me to die? Dying to ourselves is not an easy take.

It never is. But the glory of the cross of Christ, that peculiar glory, enables us to take up our cross and die to ourselves. Christ Jesus, though he was in the very nature of God, did not count equality with God's love to be grasped.

But he took on the very nature of a servant. And being found in human form, being made in human likeness, he humbled himself, he emptied himself and became obedient even to death, even death on a cross.

[42 : 08] He says, therefore, in Philippians 2, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That, brothers and sisters, that's the pattern for us.

That's the peculiar glory of discipleship we're called to. So let's let that captivate our hearts and imaginations this morning. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray. Let me pray.

Lord, what an upside-down kingdom we're in, that he who was first shall be last and was last shall be first, that it's only those who die who will live.

Lord, we want to be able to count everything in our life a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing you and following you.

[43 : 34] So please help us, Lord. Let that truth become more and more real to us each day so that we might live and live abundantly as you desire.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.