

There is a certain brand of Christianity that says if you follow Jesus Christ, you'll experience success in all that you do. This brand of Christianity sells. It fills stadiums. People naturally gravitate to this message. We want it to be true. We want God to give us glorious lives today—and it's easy to assume that if things aren't good and glorious, then something's wrong with either me or God. But is it right to assume that?

When you're disappointed or even heartbroken about the way things are going in your life, you need to go back and look at the life of Jesus. Let God's Word speak to you about Jesus and the pattern of His life. The pattern of Jesus' life will change your expectations about life with God. And that's key; because sometimes our faith in God is shaken because we have expectations of God that are rooted in our own wishful thinking, and not in His promises.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is a perfect place to examine the pattern of Jesus' life. During the teaching phase of his ministry, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain to pray. During this prayer time, Jesus' appearance was transfigured. His figure was transformed. He started to shine. Moses and Elijah, who ordinarily would be in heaven, come to have a conversation with Jesus about the actions he would take in Jerusalem. The voice of God the Father Himself rings out: "This is my Son my Chosen One; listen to Him." And Peter responds to all this by wanting to prolong the experience. He wants to build tents so that the visitors from heaven can stay. Peter doesn't want this glory to end.

But it has to. Jesus was not born into the world to transform and shine and sit on a mountaintop in a little tent. That's not the pattern. He has work to do. That's what He was talking about with Moses and Elijah. Thanks to Luke's gospel we know "they spoke of [Jesus'] departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." In the original language, the word "departure" is literally the word "exodus." I'm assuming that it was Moses who talked about Jesus' work this way. Soon Jesus was going to suffer terribly and go through crucifixion. Then He would rise from the dead. By doing those things, he would free us from slavery and lead us on to the promised land of life in heaven. This "exodus conversation" is extremely important. First, it is a summary of the saving Gospel. Second, it reveals the pattern of Jesus' life. And the pattern is not "Only Glory In This Life With More Glory To Come." Instead, the pattern of Jesus' life is: "Glimpses of Glory Mixed With Significant Suffering In This Life With Great Glory To Come." The pattern of Jesus' life is: pain and heartache mixed with love now; and then an entrance into full glory. Or to really bottom-line it: The pattern of Jesus' life is: first, suffering; then glory. That's the pattern of Jesus' life, and that's the pattern of life for those who believe in Him.

Jesus was very up-front about this. To those who wished to follow Him He said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." He guaranteed: "In this life you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world." If we walk in the way of Jesus Christ, we will still experience trouble, loss, grief, sadness, pain and suffering. Despite what some claim, Christianity is not a vaccine against such things, nor can you will them away by having "more faith" or "believing harder." What Jesus offers you is peace in the

midst of problems. When He died on that cross, He paid for all of your sins in full. That means when bad things happen to you, you never have to wonder, “Is God punishing me?” The full punishment for your sins was handled by Jesus on the cross.

Because the Son of God died under the weight of that punishment, God counts no sin against you. We face turmoil in our lives because sin has infected everything and because evil is real. It’s no joke. We must pass through the valley of the shadow of death. You could argue that we do that every day. But we do not go alone. Your Good Shepherd goes with you. He knows how to use that rod and staff to protect you. Most importantly, He’s been this way before. He’s already taken this path. He knows where it comes out.

It comes out in true glory—the glory of heaven. The glory of perfect joy in the Lord who is with His people forever. The glory of endless light and love. The glory of worship alongside angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, sending perfect praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Obviously, we’re not there yet. But you will be, as certainly as Jesus endured his time of suffering and then entered the glory of resurrection. Jesus offers you not only peace in the midst of problems, but also a future home in heaven. Remember, as a believer, the pattern of Jesus’ life is yours. Heaven is your Promised Land. Jesus is leading your life right now. It may seem like wandering in the wilderness at times, but think about what you’ve left behind. You’ve left behind slavery to sin! You’ve left behind the living death of a self-centered, Godless life. You’ve left behind the death of the soul in self-imposed exile from God. Jesus has brought you out of that. You need never go back. Yes, there will still be suffering and sadness, but it is temporary, and it will pass away. You will not. Your life continues with Christ, because that’s the pattern. First suffering, then glory.

And to encourage you, you get glimpses of that glory along the way. You glimpse our Lord Jesus Christ in the pages of Holy Scripture. You catch a glimpse of Him as you are given His body and blood in the sacrament. You get a glimpse of the activity of heaven when everyone is singing to the Lord from their hearts. You glimpse His compassion when someone performs even the smallest act of grace for you, and you’re touched by their kindness. God lets you catch these glimpses because He loves you. He knows we need His strength, because we are so easily discouraged. He knows we cannot stay on the mountaintop, because that’s not the pattern. There is still work to do and much to endure. But thanks to Jesus, you can endure. Thanks to Him, the pattern will hold, and one day you will enter into the full glory of God. And you will enter to stay. May the Holy Spirit give you contentment and courage as your life traces the pattern of Jesus’ suffering and glory.

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