

A Glimpse of Glory

- I. To Affirm Christ's Identity
- II. To Prepare Us for Our Future

(Luke 9:28-36) About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. {29} As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. {30} Two men, Moses and Elijah, {31} appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. {32} Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. {33} As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, 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 he was saying.) {34} While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. {35} A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." {36} When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen

Tell me, have you ever gone to a very high place that gave you a breathtaking view of the scenery around you? Maybe you hiked to the south rim of the Grand Canyon or rode an elevator to the top of the Empire State Building or climbed the fire tower at High Cliff State Park. And when you got to the top, the view was spectacular. I remember when I was in college, some of my buddies and I made a road trip to Kansas City, Missouri. While we were there—and I don't remember quite how we did this—somehow we climbed out onto the roof of the Crowne Plaza Hotel. (It's like 28 stories high.) And I don't mean we were just looking out the window. We were outside crawling on our bellies to the very edge of the building and looking down at the

lights of the city below. You want to talk about a breathtaking view. I mean, literally. It took our breath away. It was more than a little scary, the view we had from up there. Obviously it's a view I haven't forgotten. It's made an impression on me to this very day.

In our Bible lesson for today we're going to hear about three men who also found themselves in a high place with a breathtaking view, even more breathtaking than the view from the roof of the Crowne Plaza Hotel. For there on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus' three disciples received what we might call,

A Glimpse of Glory

And the glory they saw in the face of Christ, served two purposes for them and for us.

I. It affirms Christ's identity.

II. It prepares us for our future

It's important to note where this account of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration fits in the life of Jesus. We're actually in the last third of that three-year span of Jesus' earthly ministry. Whereas early on in his ministry, Jesus was very popular with the crowds, by this time, the opposition was beginning to grow. In fact, in the verses immediately before our text, Jesus told his disciples for the very first time, *"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."* (Luke 9:22).

In other words, Jesus is now beginning to point his disciples to what lies ahead for him. Unfortunately, the disciples weren't ready to hear or believe what Jesus told them about his future. In fact, Peter goes so far as to rebuke Jesus with the words, *"Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"* (Matthew 16:22). But not only did Peter not realize that Jesus would have to suffer. He didn't realize that as a follower of Jesus, he would have to suffer too. In fact, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples exactly what being one of his disciples would mean for them. He says, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life for me will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."* (Luke 9:23-24) In other words, Jesus is saying that being one of his disciples would not be an easy task. Notice, Jesus does not say "take up your pillow and follow me." He says take up your cross. Crosses are heavy. Crosses are rough. Being one of Jesus' disciples means making sacrifices—maybe even the sacrifice of their lives. Tradition tells us that all but one of Jesus' disciples ultimately gave up his life as a martyr for Christ.

The question is, how would Jesus prepare these men for all the nasty things they were going to see in his life and theirs? The answer: he would give him a glimpse of his glory. Jesus takes three of his disciples, Peter, James and John up onto a mountain and gives them a vision they would never forget. Luke tells us, *As Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.* Mathew's parallel account says that *Jesus was transfigured before them.* (Literally, Jesus underwent a metamorphosis.) (Matthew 17:2)

The natural question for those disciples, and really for you and me as well, is: what was going on here? Why is this happening to Jesus? The answer? On that mountain, God intended, first of all: I. To Affirm Christ's Identity. What does that mean? Well, think about it. If you were to look at Jesus walking up that mountain, you'd say, he looks like any one of us. Is huffing and puffing just like we would be. He's not Superman, flying up to the top of the mountain. He's walking, just like any other human being. It would be very easy to conclude that Jesus is a human being just like you or me. But that would not be the whole truth. Jesus is not just a human being. What does Scripture say? *In Christ, all the fullness of the Godhead lives in bodily form.*

(Colossians 2:9). In other words, Jesus, who is true Man, is also true God, with all the glory that God possesses. It's just that from the time of his conception in the Virgin Mary, Jesus largely kept that glory under wraps. He covered it up with human flesh. But on the Mount of transfiguration, Jesus let that divine glory shine through. He gave his disciples a glimpse of his absolute holiness. You might say that he lifted the veil and gave him a peek at his godliness. And in so doing, he affirmed that his true identity has not only true man, but also true God.

But it wasn't just the blinding light from Jesus' face that proved his true identity. There was also the voice from the cloud that said, "*This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.*" Who could that voice be other than God the Father, identifying this Jesus of Nazareth as his very own Son? Just as he did at the time of Jesus' baptism, here the Father once again clearly affirms Jesus' true identity.

And why is that so important? Why is it so critical for Jesus' disciples do you know who Jesus really was? To know that he possessed all the glory of God? Well, the answer to those questions is found in the second reason the Jesus gave his disciples a glimpse of his glory. And that is, to prepare them, yes II. to prepare us for our future.

Really, that brings us back to the part of the mountaintop experience that we kind of skipped over. The part where two other men appear next to Jesus. Luke identifies them as Moses and Elijah, two of the most prominent prophets from the Old Testament. Luke says they were talking to Jesus. And what are they talking about? Luke says, *they spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.* With those words, these men were referring not only to Jesus' death, but also to his resurrection and ascension into heaven. You see, these Old Testament prophets knew what was in store for Jesus. They knew that his upcoming death would be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

But while they knew what was coming for Jesus, Jesus' disciples did not have such a clear view. The disciples we're still a bit confused about exactly what Jesus was coming to do. Restore the glory to Israel? Throw off the Roman rule? Seat them at his right and left hand? What they were not expecting him to do was to be treated like a common criminal, to be tortured and left to die on a Roman cross. Those events had the potential to rock their faith to the core.

But you see, that's why Jesus brought them up the mountain, namely, to prepare them for their future. In effect, Jesus wanted to front load them with some information that they could draw on when things looked the bleakest. When they saw Jesus bloody and beaten, when they saw him hanging on the cross, when he didn't look like the all glorious Son of God, they could still think back to what they saw on the mountain and say, "But we saw his glory. The Father identified him as his Son. Even if we can't see it with our physical eyes right now, we know it to be true in our hearts." Granted, it may have taken a little longer to sink in. But in the end, they knew that their faith was not built on mere hopes and dreams. It was built on what we heard and saw with their own eyes. In fact, isn't that the point that St Peter makes when he writes, in

2nd Peter 1:16,18: *We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. We ourselves heard the voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.*

You realize, those words still apply to you and me. Even though we weren't physically up there on the mountain with Jesus, we still get a glimpse of God's glory, through the pages of God's holy and inspired Word. And what we see about Jesus there on the mountain helps prepare us for our futures, as well—in two ways.

First of all, the Lord's Transfiguration teaches us that even though Jesus was and still is the all glorious Son of God, still, for most of his life he didn't look like the all glorious Son of God. For the most part, his glory was hidden. You realize, the same thing is true for you and me. Even though God gives us a new identity in Christ, even though God declared us to be as children, even though we are holy and precious in his eyes, still, in the eyes of the world, we look pretty ordinary. Like Jesus, we look pretty much like everyone else. In fact, like Jesus, we may face the same kind of hardships and persecution he faced. How did the Prophet Isaiah describe our Lord? *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3)*. As people who follow in Jesus' footsteps, we shouldn't expect that our lives will be all that easy either. How did Saint Peter put it? *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-12)*.

“When his glory is revealed.” You might say, that's the second way that Christ's Transfiguration prepares you for your future. On the mountain, Jesus gave you a glimpse of his glory. But he also gave you a glimpse of your glory. For you see, Christ's glory is your glory. What does St. Paul say in Colossians 3? *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:4)*. Paul is talking about the glory that will be yours on the Last Day. The glory that is yours by faith in Jesus Christ. The glory that guarantees that your body which is riddled with sin and is gradually wearing out, will one day be just like Jesus' glorified body. How does St. Paul put it? *[Christ] who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:21)*.

My friends, that's the glory that will be fully yours some day. The glory that our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus are already enjoying. It's the glory that we get a little glimpse of when the body of believers gathers to worship and praise our glorious God. It's the taste of glory that we receive when we kneel at his altar and receive his body and blood to assure us that we are his children. It's the glory that puts all of our earthly trials and tribulations into perspective. St. Paul said it well when he wrote, *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18)*.

My friends, you and I may we may not have seen the glory of Jesus on the Mountain. But that's okay. Because one day we will, when we see Jesus face to face. God keep us in his grace, until that glorious day. Amen.