

*Seeing His Glory*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*Exodus 33:18-34:8, Psalm 24, Luke 9:28-36*

Our third Scripture reading today comes from Luke 9:28-36. Listen now to God's Word from the gospel. "About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 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.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." 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."

How can you tell who a person really is? We've all known someone who surprised us somehow...maybe a sarcastic person who became a missionary or a sweet friend who suddenly turned bitter. Sometimes people change in ways we'd never expect. Occasionally, we just haven't been paying attention. Then again, in a world where we find it hard to be honest with *ourselves*, let alone with other people, it's pretty amazing that we can really know people at all. With Jesus, though, it's a different story. Jesus is completely honest in everything that He presents about Himself. He never lies. But what the biblical accounts show was that He *was* mysterious about Himself. He didn't want everyone to know He was the messiah because He knew that He would be misunderstood. Jesus knew that for the world to know Him as the Son of God, they would have to not only hear His words and teachings but would need to see His miracles and death and resurrection and experience forgiveness through believing in Him. Jesus never physically appeared to be anything more than a man throughout His earthly ministry...with this one exception. And through this story, we can begin to understand the nature of God's glory and what it means for us.

Luke tells us that Jesus has taken three disciples with him onto a mountain to pray. Peter, James, and John are throughout all the gospels the disciples who were closest to Jesus. They are the ones He considers His deepest friends. And they get up to this mountainside and start praying, and the three friends are so weary they just start falling asleep. The only thing that keeps them from falling asleep is what happens to Jesus. Just as their eyelids are drooping, Jesus' total appearance morphs. His face changes and His garments are bright like lightning. It's so incredible that the word that describes His clothes is used nowhere else in the Bible. And not only that, Moses and Elijah show up beside Jesus and start talking to Him about what's going to happen soon – his death in Jerusalem. Now this is utterly fantastic. Moses died and was buried, the Bible tells us. Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind to heaven. Nobody's seen them since. In fact, we're not even certain how the three disciples even recognized them. Maybe Jesus talked to them by name. Maybe there was something about them that made them stand out. We don't know. But what we do know is that they stand in splendor beside Jesus.

The whole thing would have reminded the disciples of the stories they had heard in the synagogue about how Moses had seen God up on the mountaintop and how his face radiated God's glory so strongly that he wore a veil so that the Israelites weren't terrified of him. And what Moses and Elijah are talking about with Jesus, his departure, is in Greek the word *exodus*. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus will lead God's people out of death into new life.

Now what would you do if you saw Jesus and Moses and Elijah out by the side of your house glowing? You'd freak out, that's what you'd do, and that's exactly what the disciples do. Peter starts talking about putting up booths for them all...now Luke says he had no idea what he was saying, but it did make a strange sort of sense to a Jew. The Festival of Booths was a celebration that reminded the Jews of the tents their ancestors lived in while they wandered the desert before entering the Promised Land. And in that celebration, they looked forward to the end times when God would make all things right. Peter, in the midst of not knowing what to say, by offering to put up booths pretty much suggests that they get ready for the end of the world. For them, this was a cataclysmic event. Three heroes of the faith stand before them, glorified.

But as Peter is still talking about creating booths, suddenly they are swept into a cloud, and the disciples are scared. And then something they never expect happens. They hear the voice of God. What God says is simple but profound: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." And then everything's gone...the cloud, Moses, Elijah, the incredible brightness...it's just Jesus sitting with them. It's a shocking moment, one that they don't come to grips with for a long time. They have seen the glory of God and heard His voice. Their response is awestruck silence. They don't speak of it until much later. And that's where this particular story ends.

It'd be easy to see the transfiguration simply as a proof of Jesus' identity, but that's not really why it happened. If it was, the disciples would have run and told all of Israel about it. Instead, the transfiguration tells us things about God we might never see otherwise. It's about not just hearing and seeing God but knowing who He is. The first thing we learn is this: *God's glory comes from who He is and is reflected in what He does*. When Jesus appears on the mountaintop and His clothing and appearance suddenly change, it's the first time that we ever see Jesus' true glory. Though He is still human, Peter, James, and John see Him in His real state, the state that is hidden from the world. The world couldn't understand it or handle it. If the Israelites wanted to hide from Moses when they saw just the glory of God reflected off of Him, imagine the full-on glory of God! And the glory that Jesus has isn't showing off. It's not for His own sake that He appears this way. It happens simply because this is who He is. He is by His very nature God. And His very nature is glory.

Now compare this to human glory. We aren't glorious in and of ourselves. Even the best-looking person in the whole world doesn't compare to a sunset, let alone the full-on glory of God. And what defines human glory? Human glory is essentially honor, and we honor things by comparison. Nothing gets honored without something else getting shamed. One team wins and gets honor; the other loses and is shamed. (I'm too depressed to make a Redwings joke here.) How well you do at your job is defined by how well the other guy does. We have an honor roll in school because not everybody gets good grades and does well. The whole of human honor and glory is by comparison. We give honor and glory and praise to the best things around us because the best is hard to come by.

But God is different. Jesus is glorious in and of himself. He defines glory. Now it's true that He is glorious in some ways because there is nothing in the whole universe that can rival Him. If you *were* to compare Him to someone else, anyone else, He would always be the one worthy of honor and respect. But Jesus' glory is all His own. When the disciples saw Him, His appearance was like that of a flash of lightning, blinding in its glory! There's no need for comparison with Jesus because when you know who He really is, everything else slips away. You can't take your eyes off of Him. He's overwhelming.

Jesus' glory, then, is something He has as being the Son of God. It is His in His very nature. But that nature is reflected in everything He does. His sinlessness reflects His glory. His teachings reflect His glory. His decisions and actions, even submitting as a servant to death on a cross for our sakes, reflect His glory. Even when He is veiled in ordinary human flesh, His glory radiates from Him, not in a way that is easily seen but in a way that we can understand even without having to see Him. When we read the New Testament and learn what Christ did, His glory becomes apparent. In John 20:29, Jesus shows His raised, glorified form to Thomas, who doubted the resurrection. Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We believe because we have the evidence of Jesus' glory in what He did.

And that leads us to point number two: *those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ can reflect the glory of God.* Now in and of ourselves, we have nothing of glory. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Sin has brought us so far down that there is nothing good of our own in us. It's what John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian way of thinking, called total depravity. The very fact that we can have a civilized society at all is due to God's grace, what Calvin called common grace. Without that grace that sustains us, we would be truly hopeless and every last action we could take would be corrupt. God's gift of common grace means that people are still corrupted by sin and act selfishly and need salvation, but we have the ability to treat each other with basic respect. We can survive with one another, but we have no glory in and of ourselves.

When we become Christians, God gives us the Holy Spirit. And when we have that Spirit, we can start reflecting God's glory, because God has graciously agreed through His Spirit to live within us. When we allow the Spirit to take control and we start living in ways that honor God, we become like mirrors that reflect God out to the world.

This is how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 3:13-18. I'm going to read it from the New Living Translation, which explains it very well. "We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory fading away. But the people's minds were hardened, and even to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, a veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ. Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken away. Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom. And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more."

This means we have the opportunity to shine brightly for God, to glorify Him, simply by letting Him shine through us. We talked last week about Jesus' call to die to ourselves, and the reason we have to let that happen is so that the new life Christ gives us, the life that reflects Him, is what everybody sees. We have to get out of the way. But that's also a wonderful thing because it means we are free. We no longer have to compare ourselves with everyone else. We no longer have to worry about the rat race, what other people are buying or how much money other people make or all the things the world tells us to stress out about. Because when we as believers reflect God's glory, we don't need worldly glory anymore. We don't need to get our self-image from what other people say. Our self-image is wrapped up in reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ, and that self-image is never going to rust or tarnish. We turn it our rusty mirrors for the true brightness of God's glory that we reflect.

The question that we often raise is: how? What is it that is going to make us shine for Christ? There's one thing that we see in this passage, and that's prayer. Jesus is praying when His true glory becomes known. He's in conversation with the Father and the Spirit, He's asking the Father how He can perfectly show the Father's goodness to the whole world. It's in prayer that His real self is known. That is the key to being a mirror for Christ. Pray. It sounds too easy. Can prayer do that? If we think of prayer just as a time when we sit down and give God our laundry list of things we want, no. But in real, true, honest prayer with God, we're having a conversation with Him. It's in prayer that we learn who God is and who we are as His followers. It's in prayer that we let ourselves go and start really learning the heart of God. It's in prayer that we lose our selfishness and start lifting others to the Lord. And if we pray like that, with our soul tuned to God's heart and our minds focused on His thoughts and our desires wrapped up in His, our lives will reveal God's glory as we let Him show through more and more of ourselves.

So what else does this passage tell us? It reveals the third point...*Jesus is the one person on whom we must rely and to whom all glory and honor is due.* When Peter offers to set up three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, he is counting Jesus as a man among equals. This is a big step for Peter because he doesn't fully understand Jesus' position yet, but he is honoring Jesus as being equal to the two most faithful figures in all of Israel's history. He's moving in the right direction. This isn't a slight. But, that said, he's still wrong for a number of reasons. Jesus isn't among peers – He is the unique Son of God – and that's what Peter is missing.

When the Father speaks from inside the cloud to Peter, James, and John, He never once mentions Moses or Elijah. When He says, "This is my Son, the Chosen One – listen to Him," the emphasis isn't on the word *listen*. They'd been doing that for well over a year by now. The emphasis is on the word *Him*. It is Jesus who is being shown in glory here, not Moses and not Elijah. They reflect His glory, but the glory all belongs to Jesus. Jesus is the one chosen as the redeemer. Moses led Israel out of Egypt and Elijah was Israel's chief prophet, but Jesus is going to do something far beyond the borders of Israel. He is going to offer salvation to all mankind. He is the one who is being praised here.

This means two things for us. First, it means that when we look at the Old Testament, we should always see it through the lens of Christ. Jesus did away with laws that were rituals meant to keep Israel unique and separate from her neighbors because Christ reconciled the whole world to God through Himself. Those laws served their purpose but don't apply any longer. But Jesus actually strengthened the understanding of the laws that applied to interpersonal relationships, issues like divorce and adultery and violence against one another. Jesus is the ultimate interpreter of God's Word. Jesus' interpretations are harder to follow – He said things like, if you become enraged at someone, you're subject to the same judgment as if you'd murdered him. That sort of thing is impossible for us in our own human strength to accept. But with the Holy Spirit as our guide, we can accept that Jesus was right – and we can rest assured that God has not only given us the power to resist sin, but through Jesus God has provided forgiveness for us so that we can be made right with Him when we fail.

This also means that we must glorify Him by relying on Him and not on our own strength or on the teachings of anyone else. That is what makes us mirrors of His glory that reflect on Him. Now a lot of people talk about Jesus' teachings not being all that terribly different from other wise people around the world, and on a certain level that's true. Lots of things Jesus taught were unique, but the basics have been around in a lot of cultures for a long time. But what makes Jesus unique and worthy of honor and praise and glory is not His teachings but who He is – the Son of God who gave up all His rights and glory to save us. I mean, teaching is good, but teaching doesn't fix anything...it just shows us our own flaws. You can get advice from Dr. Phil or from Oprah, but they aren't going to be able to save you. And what's more, learning all that good teaching just points out how weak we are in the first place. Heck, if learning everything you could about healthy eating and exercise were all you needed to lose weight, I'd be a twig!

And that's what Paul says in Romans 8:3-4. He says the Mosaic law was powerless to save us because of our sinful human nature. It was for that very reason that God sent His son as an offering for sin so that, through the Spirit, we could be righteous the way God intended. Further on, in Romans 8:26, Paul says that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. We are powerless in and of ourselves to make things right...as the children's song says, "Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong." And we are His little ones, we are His workmanship, created for good works in Christ and through the empowerment of His spirit. When we do this, when we leave ourselves behind and stop attempting to follow the world and give ourselves over to God in our weakness, we become the perfect mirrors to honor Jesus Christ. Everyone else we might try to glorify, a rock star or an athlete or even a president or a wise teacher, that glory doesn't really belong to them. The only one who truly deserves our honor, our praise, our respect, is God.

Will you trust Jesus Christ, the Chosen One, the One to whom all praise is due, the one who is glory itself, with your life today? His true appearance was shown to his closest friends who came to understand that He was God in the flesh dwelling among us. Will you reflect His glory today? Let's pray.