

Title: The Glory of Jesus in the Transfiguration
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Texts: Mark 9:1-9
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The Glory of Jesus in the Transfiguration

[Proposition: Who you think Jesus is will determine how you respond to Him.]

Introduction:

Do you remember the prayer scene in Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby? If you haven't seen the movie, it's a comedy about successful NASCAR driver Ricky Bobby (played by Will Ferrell) who lives by the motto "If you're not first, you're last." One scene shows Ricky, his family, and his teammate Cal (John C. Reilly) as they say grace before dinner. Ricky prays "Dear Baby Jesus" and what ensues is a back and forth between the characters about how they like to think of Jesus. Ricky likes baby Jesus, his wife and father in law remind him Jesus grew up, and Cal likes to think of Jesus with giant eagle's wings, singing lead vocals for Lynyrd Skynyrd.

The real joke of course is not silly imaginations about Jesus, but the shallow and selfish "faith"-if we can call it that- of the characters who envision Jesus which allows them to only care about fame, money, and worldly treasures. There is a connection between who we think Jesus is and how/whether we respond to him and his commands.

More seriously, AW Tozer famously wrote in *The Knowledge of the Holy*: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." He goes on, "We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God." Again, who we think Jesus is, will determine how we respond to him.

In our passage, God authoritatively announces who Jesus is and how we should respond:

This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him.

I. You and I will only respond to Jesus's call to discipleship if we believe that he can deliver on his promise of life—and that is why he reveals his glory.

Remember that

A. Jesus has just called his disciples to take up their cross, die to self, and find life in Him

Look at v. 34-38

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

You have to die to self to follow Jesus, to take up your cross—the instrument of execution reserved by the Romans for those who had rebelled against the empire. In modern terms, forsake the ways of the world so that you are seen as a traitor, and take up your electric chair.

If you seek to save your life, to live according to your own vision of the good life, you will—in the end—lose your life and all that you were striving for. But Jesus promises that if you hear his call and follow him, there is life. True, real, full, and eternal life. The salvation of your soul and life with God—and this is of more value than the whole world (v. 36-37).

This is an unbelievably hard saying, and Jesus assumes people will be ashamed of his words (v. 38) and he warns that he will be ashamed of them when he comes in glory of his Father and the holy angels. **You and I will only respond to Jesus’s call to discipleship if we believe that he can deliver on his promise of life—and that is why he reveals his glory.**

Illustration:

Recently, our family has been watching the Repair Shop on Netflix. The show is about people who bring various keepsakes and heirlooms that have fallen into disrepair to craftsmen who work at the Repair Shop. People bring all manner of items, almost always priceless because of their sentimental and family connection. Often ordinary things that have become priceless treasures.

In one episode a man brings his grandfather’s pocket watch which his grandmother had sewed into the lining of her dress and hid for years while she was in an internment camp during World War II. You would really have to believe in the abilities of the craftsman to hand over a watch like that.

We will only follow Christ in faith if we see Jesus is able to give life, overcome any sorrow, and restore ordinary people into priceless treasures in his Kingdom.

So

B. Jesus reveals his glory to “some” of his disciples (9:1) as a sign that he can keep these promises, he is the Lord of All who gives life.

1. Is the transfiguration the fulfillment of the promise?

Now there is debate on what exactly this promise refers to (transfiguration, resurrection, Pentecost, destruction of Jerusalem, Second Coming?). As I read the Gospels (because Matthew Mark, and Luke all preserve the transfiguration immediately after this promise), and the NT more generally. The story of Jesus and all he accomplished is “proleptic” which means these events have happened out of their normal sequence. The return of God to the earth, the defeat of death and the devil, the resurrection of the righteous, were all to happen at the end of history—but in Christ they have happened in the middle of history. So too, the Transfiguration is a Proleptic revelation, out of the normal order of things, a revelation of Jesus in the Father’s Glory.

2. The transfiguration reveals Jesus in the Father’s glory.

In verses 2-9 we see the glory of Jesus, but we also see that it is one and the same glory with the Father. We know this because of how Mark tells us the story, thick with allusions to the story of Moses going up onto Mount Sinai in Exodus 24 and 34.

2 And after six days (it was after six days the Lord spoke to Moses out of the cloud) Jesus took with him Peter and James and John (As Moses took three named companions, Aaron, Nada, and Abihu), and led them up a high mountain (As Moses went up Mt. Sinai) by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white (Moses's face became radiant after meeting God on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 34), as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah (Who also met with God on Sinai, and was later transported directly to Heaven) with Moses (Moses is explicitly named), and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents (God's commands to Moses in Ex 24 concern building the Tent, the Tabernacle), one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud (A cloud covered Sinai when Moses went up) overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud (As God spoke to Moses out of the cloud), "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

And there is the crucial difference between Jesus's transfiguration and Elijah or Moses meeting God and seeing his glory—this Jesus is the Beloved Son of God. He isn't meeting God on the mountain, he is the God Moses met on mountain.

He is the very same LORD of whom the psalmist writes:

*A Psalm of Asaph.
50 The Mighty One, God the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.
2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.*

Jesus is the Beloved Son from eternity past, as we sing in the Hymn:

True God of True God, Light of light eternal
Humbly he enters the Virgin's womb
Son of the Father, begotten not created.
O come, let us adore him.

Application:

Do you see the glory of Christ? **Who you think Jesus is will determine how you respond Him.**

We weren't there on the mountain, But Christ has not left us without witnesses to his glory.

You see his glory in the Creation, and all the ordinary means of grace. You can hear him speak in Scripture of his glory and grace—what 2 Peter 1:19 calls the prophetic word more fully confirmed. You can meet him in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the glorious only begotten Son of God given for you. You can see him as he builds and fills his body the church with people from every tribe, language, nation, and tongue whose lives have been forever changed, and whose worship and works of sacrificial love shake the very gates of hell.

Here’s the thing. If you don’t see the glory of Christ in these ways, being there on the Mountain wouldn’t actually make a difference. Loads of people witnessed his miracles, were cut to the heart by his teaching, saw him with their own eyes and heard him with their ears—but they didn’t really see him. The difference isn’t in the data but depends on God to give the eyes of faith.

It’s like a man coming to an island where none of the people can see in color. Try as he might to describe blue, green, gold—the people would think him insane.

On our own we are too blind, too distracted, too busy with ourselves, and too dull of heart because of sin to see this glory. But if you will humble yourself before the Lord Christ and admit your need of his forgiveness and the life only he can give, God will shine the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” in your heart.

If your vision of Christ has grown weak, let this Christmas season be a time where you pray that Christ would show you his glory in all the ways we mentioned, and resolve to read Scripture, to worship, and to be on the look out for glimpses of glory.

You and I will only respond to Jesus’s call to discipleship if we believe that he can deliver on his promise of life—and that is why he reveals his glory.

II. You and I must listen to Jesus, because he shares not only the same glory but the same authority with the Father.

A. Jesus has all authority to command.

It’s right there in verse 7, the Father says:

*7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “**This is my beloved Son; listen to him.**”*

Again, the last thing Jesus recorded for us before the Transfiguration is this call to radical discipleship: take up your cross, lose your life for the sake Christ and his Gospel and you’ll find true life.

The Father absolutely affirms the word of the Son. There is no playing the Son against the Father, or the Old Testament against the New. Father and Son speak with a unified voice in the Spirit inspired Scripture.

B. This acclamation is a rebuke of Peter's words, and those who get stuck on the mountain.

Notice Peter's response to this experience in v. 5-6:

5 And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

Peter is terrified at the experience of seeing Jesus's glory, and what he says is understandably confused.

1. On one hand, it's good to want to be in God's presence enjoying his glory.

When he says, "it's good that we are here" he is tapping into the truth we discussed above. It is good to be there in the presence of Christ and see his glory.

2. But to suggest they build three tents is to miss who Jesus is and what came to do.

Jesus is not just equal with Moses and Elijah, he is the God who does not dwell in a house made by hands. And he came to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again (v. 31) to forgive sin and defeat death and the devil.

To stay on the mountain then would be to leave God's mission in Christ unfulfilled. It would ignore Jesus's own word about what he came to do (die and rise again), and what it means to follow him (to die for Christ and the gospel). Peter is only thinking of himself and his experience—the rest of the disciples aren't even there on the mountain—and God speaks: Jesus is my Son, listen to him!

To experience the presence and glory of God and to not live in such a way as to reflect that glory into all the earth is to fundamentally close our ears to his purposes. He made human beings as image bearers who reflect his glory to the whole earth. At Sinai the Israelites were commissioned as a kingdom of priests and holy nation—to reflect God's glory to the nations. At the end of Gospel of Matthew, the Resurrected Jesus will take all his disciples up on the mountain and commission them to make disciples of all nations.

Application:

If you have experienced the glory and presence of God, the blessings of Christ offered to you in the Gospel—forgiveness and freedom from sin—Jesus calls you to now live for Him and the Gospel.

This year has been hard to know what living for the Gospel looks like right now: how do you demonstrate and declare the Gospel to others when what you do may signal to them that you don't care for their safety and we'll bring?

We need to intentionally take time to “listen to Him” in Scripture and prayer. Ask God to show you where and with whom you can be doing Kingdom work, Ask God to give you eyes and ears to recognize whatever opportunities may come your way.

Let me challenge you to set aside in your prayers just one day a week where you pray for God’s mission in the world and your part in it.

Conclusion:

He the radiant Son of God, crucified, risen, and ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father—in his glory interceding for you and giving you life. He is able to keep his word, to preserve your soul, to give you real, true, life in the midst of a world of death and decay. And he calls us to take up our cross and follow him. Amen.