

Seeing God's Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] I wonder when you last experienced a moment of glory. You know, when you saw or heard something leaving you just in awe and wonder, speechless, and maybe even a shiver running down your spine.
- Well, for some of you, that may well have been last weekend, when you finally met Ed Sheeran in person. And you got to hear him sing to you, telling you that you look perfect tonight.
- But hearing him say he sees his future in your eyes, and so darling, just dive right in and follow me. Of course, the fact that he's been singing that to the same thing to thousands of others, that may detract from the moment, but hey, it's still a moment to savor, right?
- Alternatively, if you're a Tigers fan, then your moment of glory was last October, when your beloved Richmond finally won a flag. And the sound of that siren, that final siren would have sent, tingles through your body.
- Well, as for me, well, my moment of glory came two years ago, when I was standing on top of Hawaii's tallest volcano. And I saw the sun as it rose over the horizon, bathing the lunar-like landscape before us in glorious light.
- [1 : 2 4] Now, all the other fellow tourists with us, we all collectively gave out a wow, even as we tried to capture the moment with our iPhones. Well, these moments of glory last a lifetime, don't they?
- They're etched in our memories, and we relive them over and over as we recount them with one another, and particularly with those we've shared them with. Well, I'm not sure whether Peter, John, and James ever got a chance to reminisce, maybe in a pub in Jerusalem, many years after their time with Jesus.
- But if they did, then I'm pretty sure this incident tonight, which we just read, might have come up quite often. Remember that time when Jesus was on the mountain, all glorious.
- This, for them, would have been one of their moments of glory. Except what they saw wasn't the glory of the sun, as I did, S-U-N, but of the sun, S-O-N, the sun of God.
- Now, verse 28 tells us that it happened about eight days after Peter had confessed Jesus as Messiah. At that time, Jesus taught them to take up their cross and to deny themselves for him.
- [2 : 4 3] And even though that instruction would have been hard and the pressure would have been great, Jesus urged them not to waver. For if they do, then look a couple of verses earlier to verse 26.
- Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, Jesus said, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory, and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.
- Don't deny me, Jesus says, because there will be glory afterwards. And as if to give his disciples a glimpse of this glory, Jesus transfigures himself on the mountain.
- And so, verse 29, while Jesus 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.

Jesus lifts the veil of his humanity, and we catch a glimpse of his divinity. But as we now will see, this glory is actually the same as the glory of his Father, which his Father revealed to the people of Israel many years ago, during the time of their exodus.

[3 : 55] That's why in verse 31, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus speak about his departure. And if you look down at the footnotes, in the Greek, departure is exodus.

Jesus was talking about his exodus, which he's about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. What they're speaking, of course, is his passion, his journey to the cross.

And this is something Jesus has already taught his disciples. So, last week, again, in verse 22, he said, the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and then eventually be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.

But what's interesting here, of course, is that Jesus describes it as his exodus, because for him, it's the spiritual equivalent of what God achieved for Israel in the first exodus, when God rescued them from slavery.

Except now, Jesus' death and resurrection secures freedom from slavery to sin, and the promise of eternal life, not just the promise of land.

[5 : 02] And that's, in fact, how Jesus has been describing his ministry ever since the start. So, if you remember, when he first stood up in the synagogue, he read from Isaiah 61, didn't he? So, in Luke chapter 4 and verse 18, which I've got on the slide, he declared that the Lord's Spirit is upon him to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and release for the oppressed.

And if we look at his ministry thus far, there are actually many parallels between what he's done and the exodus. So, his temptation, for example, mirrors Israel's testing in the desert.

Except that where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds. Likewise, many of Jesus' signs and wonders mirror the ones God did when he brought Israel out of Egypt.

And now, Jesus displays his glory on the mountain, just as God did on Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai, which is the reading that we saw from Exodus 24, God appeared not only to Moses, but to Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and 70 other elders as well.

And not only that, they got to eat and drink before him. Just get this, sinful men fellowshiping before a holy God.

[6 : 21] And it says in the text there that amazingly, God didn't raise his hand against them. Now, that incident would have been etched in their memories, in Israel's collective memory.

It would have been a great assurance of God's presence with them. But the trouble is, that was many, many, many, many years ago. And in recent times, these moments of glory have been far and few between.

Again, it's like Richmond supporters, not winning a flag for decades, and sort of wondering when it'll ever come again. And thankfully, it came. And that's the promise as well that God had given to the people in Malachi, that the glory drought would come to an end.

And so in Malachi 3, in verse 1, the Lord promised that one day he would send a messenger to prepare the way when suddenly the Lord they seek will come. And then the messenger of the covenant, he repeats, whom you desire will come.

And then right at the end of Malachi, we read again, chapter 4 and verse 5, remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

[7 : 37] See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. And it's this prophecy, I think, that accounts for why it's Moses and Elijah that appear with Jesus.

Moses was a reminder of Israel's encounter with God at Horeb, which is just another name for Sinai, where God revealed both his glory and his laws. And Elijah is a sign that the day of the Lord is near.

Of course, John the Baptist also fulfilled that role in real life. He was the latter day Elijah. But in this heavenly appearance of Elijah, what he does is bring confirmation that Jesus is the Lord of Malachi, who was coming on this great and dreadful day.

Now, it does seem odd at first because we all think that Jesus comes to save, don't we? Why then is his coming a dreadful day?

Well, the reason is because Jesus is the one that saves by taking the punishment for sin. He takes upon himself the judgment that we deserve.

[8 : 51] And so, when we see him hanging on the cross, we are meant to actually lament for our sin, lament at the dreadfulness of our rebellion.

That's why it's a dreadful day because sin, the punishment for sin is being poured out on Jesus. Now, all this occurs while Peter and his companions are asleep, a bit like me, actually.

I often fall asleep before, actually, the climax of a TV show. You know, when they unveil the murderer on Criminal Minds. I'm asleep when that happens.

And then I wake up and, like, there's credits. So, who died? Who, you know? Or match point, particularly on a final of the Australian Open.

I wake up and they're shaking hands. Who won? Well, thankfully, Peter, he does awake in time even though they're all very sleepy. And when he sees Moses and Elijah about to leave, he says to Jesus in verse 33, Master, it is good for us to be here.

[9 : 56] Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And then Luke immediately pooh-poohs what Peter has said by saying that he didn't know what he was saying.

And so the question is, what did Peter say wrong? Now, if you read Mark's account, he tells us that Peter spoke because the disciples were afraid. afraid. But why did he, but why did what he say, why was that wrong?

Well, I think, I think he was mistaken to want to prolong the encounter. He says, it's good for us to be here. And he didn't want Moses and Elijah to leave.

He wanted to prolong the encounter of what he's just seen. And indeed, the glory of Jesus would have been something to behold. And if I were Peter, I would want to keep going, wouldn't I?

But by saying that, Peter was wrong because he did not understand what God's plan was. Peter was wrong because he wanted to hang on to that moment of glory.

[11 : 03] And that was not part of God's plan. And God immediately makes this clear to Peter in verse 34. For it says that while he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them.

And this is exactly what occurred on Mount Sinai as well with Moses. And as they entered the cloud, the three of them with Jesus and Moses and Elijah and the disciples being afraid, God speaks.

A voice from heaven says, this is my son whom I have chosen. Listen to him. So there are three phrases there, aren't there?

And with each phrase there is an allusion to an Old Testament passage. And by putting all these three allusions together, God points out the full significance of what is happening.

So let's look at them. First, when God says, this is my son, it's a reference to Psalm chapter 2. When God's Messiah is anointed as his son.

[12 : 02] Again, these were the same words that Jesus spoke at Jesus' baptism. But now God speaks to his disciples. But in both cases, the intent is the same, to confirm Jesus as the anointed king of Psalm 2, the one who will crush his enemies and rule as God's Messiah.

So Peter's expectations and all of the disciples of a victorious Messiah wasn't wrong. What he got wrong, however, was how that would be achieved.

And that is revealed by the second allusion that Jesus is the one God has chosen. Now here, the allusion is to Isaiah chapter 42, verse 1, which I've got on the slide again.

And again, it's not a direct quote because there, the chosen one is actually called the servant. He's the one, as we saw last week in Psalm 53, who will be pierced and wounded for our sins.

But here in Isaiah 42, notice what the fate of the servant is. it actually isn't one of disgrace, even though he suffers, but of glory.

[13 : 09] He will be the one to bring justice to the nations. And later on, in verse 6, he will bring light to the Gentiles. If we look to another servant song in Isaiah 49, this is even more explicit because in verse 7, it says, to the servant of rulers, that is referring to the servant, kings will see you and stand up.

Kings normally sit, and when someone more important comes along, they stand up. Princes will see you and bow down because of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.

And so, glorious though Jesus' transfiguration is, Peter is yet to understand that what awaits, the greater glory that awaits Jesus, is actually not up on the mountain, but down at the cross.

That is a departure that Jesus was speaking of, that he had to go. He had to fulfill and bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem. And that's why Moses and Elijah had to leave, and that's why Jesus had to head down the mountain.

So, no, Peter, it's not good for them to remain here. Finally, God finishes his sentence with, listen to him. And here, the third allusion, the final one, is to Deuteronomy chapter 18 and verse 15.

[14 : 33] Again, I've got it on the slide. In this verse, Moses himself foretells that at the end times, God will raise up another prophet like him, an end time prophet who will be God's mouthpiece.

And so, God, having revealed who Jesus is, the Messiah, and showing the disciples what his mission is, will be, to suffer as the servant, now bids Peter and his companions to listen to Jesus, God's prophet, God's mouthpiece.

And so, having said all that, God departs, or the glory of the cloud departs, and with that, Jesus is left alone with his disciples, and together, they head down the mountain.

And what they encounter when they do, in our second half of the passage, shows us why Jesus' exodus was necessary. Now, the story of the demon-possessed boy is, I guess, quite familiar, similar to many of the other accounts in Luke.

But what we have here in the one incident, I think, is a microcosm of what is wrong with the world, and why it was that Jesus had to come down, not just from the mountain, but from heaven, in order to rescue us, in order to save us.

[15 : 50] So, if you look at the outline, in verses 37 to 40, we see a world in bondage. In verses 41 to 43, we see that, despite our bondage, we're still prone to rebellious unbelief.

And in verses 44 to 45, even Jesus' disciples, the so-called true believers, have to be rescued from their ignorance and fear.

Now, we don't have time to look at that passage in much detail, but let's consider each in turn quickly. First, when Jesus comes down from the mountain, he finds a demon-possessed child.

His symptoms are actually typical of, I think, epilepsy, but because of the way Jesus rebukes the spirit in verse 42, I think you have to say that it's the evil spirit who is using epilactic symptoms to torment the child.

And so I want to hasten to say that it's not always that the cause of epilepsy, particularly today, is due to evil spirits.

[16 : 50] But it was for the boy. Now, why were they unable to heal the boy? Especially as Jesus had already given them the power to do so. Well, again, Luke doesn't say, but if you read Matthew's account, Jesus says it's their lack of faith.

In Mark, it's because these demons can only be cast out through prayer. Luke is silent, of course, but I think both of these reasons are actually related.

They show a failure to depend on God. And I think this is what is happening here in Luke as well. Still, in Jesus' mercy, he heals the boy anyway.

Nowadays in Australia, I guess we don't see a lot of manifestations of demon possession, do we? And yet, I think we mustn't therefore conclude that as a society we are no longer under spiritual bondage, that we are no longer under the grip of sin and evil.

You only have to turn on the nightly news to see that that's not the case. You know, where examples of violence and abuse abound.

[18 : 03] Whether it's in the Northern Territory where, you know, there is still widespread child sexual abuse in communities or there's addiction to ice and alcohol in the big cities which leads to crime and assaults.

Sadly, just on Friday, I heard a story, I think it's gone to court, that's why I was in the radio, I heard a sad story of a year 12 international student who was stomped to death in the city, in Chinatown.

his skull was fractured. And do you know why? It was all over a quarrel about a girl in a love triangle. That's sad, isn't it?

But the signs are all there if we care to look, aren't there? That we live under the bondage of sin. I mean, even the rich have shown they're under the grip of greed.

Banks exploiting their customers as we're hearing in the Royal Commission. Politicians rorting travel allowances. And we often think, you know, the powerful and the rich, they should know better.

[19 : 05] They should be doing the right thing. But that's not the case, is it? In reality, they can't. And we can't. None of us can't without Christ. Without Christ, we're all under the sway of sin and evil.

And yet, in spite of that, we have to say that people, by and large, refuse to turn to Jesus or God. But they persist in their rebellious unbelief, just as in Jesus' day.

Jesus laments over them in verse 41, you unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Now, I don't think Jesus was singling out the child's father or even the disciples who can't heal.

No, he's talking about the entire generation, isn't he? All of them, many of them who would have seen Jesus' powerful deeds, they would have heard his message and yet, they would have failed to believe.

They were there for the spectacular miracles, but few were moved to genuine faith in him. And again, there are parallels with the Exodus because remember when Moses came down from Sinai, what did he find?

[20 : 22] he found them making a golden calf for themselves to worship, didn't they? And God called them a rebellious, a stiff-necked generation, people, even after they had just seen God's miraculous wonders by bringing them out of Egypt.

And he said too as well, how long, I'm no longer willing to put up with you. How long will I put up with you? I'm going to make Moses a great nation instead.

And judging by the way Australians react today, I wonder, would Jesus say the same of us if he came? Because by and large we all seem capable of seeing our problems, don't we?

Or the problems with society. How many times have you heard someone say, the problem with society today is blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And yet, and yet, how often do you hear people then say that the most important thing to do, the first thing to respond is to repent and humble ourselves before God.

You don't hear that, do you? There are lots of problems, but no, we're not going to turn to God. In fact, we dare even to blame God for some of our mess and to doubt his existence because we think he hasn't acted quickly enough.

[21 : 40] We too, I think, stand accused of being a perverse and unbelieving generation, don't we? And then finally, we see Jesus' disciples, who even though faithful still need Jesus to rescue them from their ignorance and fear.

Jesus wants them not to be taken in by the crowd with their adulation in verse 43 because it was going to be fickle. So in verse 44, Jesus says, listen carefully to what I'm about to tell you.

Listen to me, actually, the servant son whom God has chosen, because very soon, these very people will betray me and deliver me into the hands of men. But the disciples couldn't understand, could they, what Jesus was saying?

They couldn't see that the way of glory for Jesus was not in the might and power or the signs and wonders, but at the cross. And yet, in spite of their ignorance, what does it say?

They were too afraid to ask. Now, why would that be? Why would they be too afraid to ask? I think it's for the same reason that I would be too afraid to ask.

[22 : 51] Why is it that we fear putting up our hands in class? Some of you may not, but I do. Because we think that our question is dumb, right? Or that we'll be made to look foolish by what we say.

And I have to say that the root cause of that is actually pride, isn't it? We want people to think well of us. Better to say silence, so the proverb goes, and be thought a fool, then open your mouth and confirm all doubts.

But pride is sin, isn't it? And so Jesus had to go to the cross even for his disciples, the so-called good guys, the so-called true believers.

Friends, there is in all of us a deep desire for glory, for a taste and experience of it. That's why people head to the mountains, that's why they go to deserted island beaches, to experience somehow the spiritual or the sacred.

Stephen Hawking, the renowned physicist, he died this week, he looked into the heavens and because he couldn't see God, he concluded that God didn't exist. But he was looking in the wrong place, wasn't he?

[24 : 07] Because as Christians, we know that God and his glory is found in his son, Jesus. it shines most brightly at the cross. And we know that if we wanted to find him, we don't need to go up to any mountain or any other place for that matter, because we can find him in his word.

In the testimony of the apostles, who themselves saw his glory, witnessed his death and resurrection, sat under his words, and then recorded it for us, for our benefit. I know it may seem such a feeble thing, how can reading an ancient book like this give us an experience of God's glory?

But I have to say from personal experience that that is indeed what does happen when we come to the Bible. And I'm sure many of you would have experienced the same thing as well, experienced moments of true glory when God by his spirit opens our minds and our eyes as we read his word.

And we see in it his glorious son, the chosen one, the one whose words have life giving power, words which sustain our faith, words that strengthen us for our challenges in life, words that guide and guard our path and keep us from sin and temptation.

Brothers and sisters, I know that sometimes when life gets tough and weary and we are sailed by doubt, the temptation is to want something tangible, isn't it? Something like the transfiguration that Peter experienced, some audible word maybe or a vision, just something for me, something that speaks to my specific situation.

[25 : 50] Well, there are times when God might do that but all the time, what God has provided is his word that we can read it and trust in the promises that he's already given to us.

Now, don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong in wanting to seek and see Jesus in the flesh, to see his glory physically but the time is not yet, is it? But I say one day, as we sung in that song, Glorious Christ, we will see him in the flesh as God's promise.

One day, Jesus will again appear in glory and then we will see him forever. But in the meantime, God has given us his word so that we can hang on to it.

We can hold on to the glory that's found in it and found at the cross. And as we do, we point people to him in his word and be witnesses of him just as his disciples did.

You know, after the resurrection, the disciples did see Jesus in glory again. They saw it when he ascended to heaven in glory from surprise, surprise, another mountain.

[27 : 03] But do you remember what happened after that? Acts chapter 1 verse 10 and 11. They kept looking intently into heaven. They were doing the Peter thing again, weren't they?

Wanting to stay there. But two angels appeared and told them to stop looking in the sky, that Jesus will come back again, but in the meantime, there are to be his witnesses bringing good news about Jesus to the ends of the earth.

So, friends, we will certainly have our moment of glory again if we believe in Jesus. A lifetime of glory actually. But in the meantime, let's be witnesses for Jesus.

Let's point people to the true glory that's found in his word. Let us bring the good news of Jesus to the world so that others like us can listen to him, the glorious son whom God has chosen.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for showing us your glory in your son Jesus and how at the cross we see the full extent of that glory.

[28 : 05] We thank you for your love and grace for us and for the humble majesty of your son Jesus. Help us to keep listening to him, to put our trust in his promises and to point others to him.

We pray and ask this in his glorious name. Amen.