

A BRIEF GLIMPSE OF ETERNAL GLORY

By Terry Jones, February 17, 2008

Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

Matthew 17:1-13

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Jesus' transfiguration, which shows His glory before He was born and after He ascended, reveals Jesus as the divine Son of God and our Savior.

INTRO. - When God has a great task to accomplish, God empowers the men He calls. For example, Moses comes down from Mt. Sinai after a summit meeting with God. He holds in his hands two tablets of stone on which are written the commands of God. Upon his arrival at the Israelite camp, he hears his fellow Israelites chanting and dancing. He learns His people are worshiping a golden calf. Moses is so distraught he throws the stone tablets to the ground breaking them. Due to Israel's sin God is ready to destroy Israel but Moses intercedes for them. Moses now realizes he will need Divine help in leading this difficult group of people.

In Exodus 33 he begs God to be with him. God promises to be present with Moses and the Israelites. Moses wants assurance God will help him. He requests a glimpse of God's glory. God agrees to the request. God puts Moses in a crack in a rock, covers him with His hand, and passes by. God removed His hand for Moses to see the glory of God's back. That partial vision of God sustained Moses for the rest of His life.

Paul (Saul) persecuted the followers of Jesus Christ. For Saul Jesus was a false prophet. No logic would correct his conclusion that Christians were following a blasphemer. For that reason Paul wants to rid the earth of every Christian. Paul is traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute followers of Jesus. Suddenly a bright light appears before him with a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Paul saw a vision of Jesus in the form of a brilliant light. This vision leads to his conversion to Jesus. Paul later becomes the world's greatest missionary for Jesus Christ. When defending himself for preaching Jesus as the Christ, he said, "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision." This vision of Christ revolutionized Paul to the extent a persecutor of Christians became a Christian messenger. The vision caused the change.

The Bible is almost completed. The last book will be called Revelation, written to encourage persecuted Christians to remain faithful to God. John, the last of the Apostles, receives a vision in his late 90's. He receives this vision while exiled to the island of Patmos. He and his fellow believers need encouragement while

suffering for Christ. How does God encourage John? In Revelation chapter one John sees a vision of Jesus. Jesus is clothed in a robe, golden colored sash across his chest, white hair, eyes as bright as fire, and glowing feet. His voice sounded like thunder. John fell at Jesus' feet. John must have thought during all the persecution he experienced, "If I could only see Jesus again! I think I would make it if I could speak to Him." John sees a vision which keeps him faithful until he dies.

Jesus is pleased Peter confessed Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter is confused along with all the other disciples about the meaning of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus interpreted His divinity to include dying on a cross. The Apostles held a different view of the Messiah. Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to suffer and die in Jerusalem. Jesus severely corrects Peter to the extent He called him Satan. Jesus uses another approach to teach Peter, James and John about His role as the Savior of the world. He will use a vision, the transfiguration.

All of us want our faith in God to be growing stronger. Our faith is only as strong as our vision of God. The issue is how big is our God? I need to continue to expand my vision of Jesus Christ. Once we believe in Him we want to know Him better in order to believe. Faith is strong because God is strong.

Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James and John. We benefit from their experience with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. We too desire a glimpse of God's glory. How big is our God? He is so big a written record of other people's vision will increase our vision of God.

I. OBSERVE A BRIEF PORTION OF JESUS' GLORY, Vv. 1-3

A. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up to a mountain to pray.

1. Suddenly Jesus is changed into another form.
2. His face was as bright as the sun.
3. His clothing radiated brilliant light.
4. This new form of Jesus' appearance is His Transfiguration.

B. Jesus is showing a portion of Himself to these Apostles as He pre-existed.

1. Jesus belongs to the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. Jesus gives these disciples a brief view of Himself before He was born and after He returned to Heaven.
3. Jesus appears in different visions in the Old Testament.
 - a. Ex. - God spoke to Moses in a burning bush in Exodus 3. Jesus was in the burning bush.

- b. Ex. - When God's people were in Babylonian captivity, King Nebuchadnezzar decreed everyone would bow down to a golden image. Three Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to this idol. As a result they were thrown into a fired furnace. God protected them from death. The king said he saw four men in the furnace. The fourth man was Jesus.
 - 4. Jesus gave Paul a vision after His ascension.
 - a. 2 Cor. 13 - Paul was caught up into the third Heaven and heard inexpressible words. Paul refused to boast of this experience. To keep Paul humble God gave him a thorn to show God's power through his weaknesses.
 - b. Illus. - Years ago, Billy Graham appeared on a TV late night talk show. The host asked him, "If Jesus came back today, would we crucify Him again?" Graham said, "No. When He comes the next time, He will come in glory and power."
- C. Applic. - We come to church for two reasons; a Word from God for our needs and to experience God. I believe we first need to experience God in worship.
 - 1. Ralph Seager became caught up in the glory of God and wrote:
 - God's glory is:
 - More sky than we can see,
 - More seas than we can sail,
 - More sun than we can bear to watch,
 - More stars than we can scale.
 - More breath than we can breathe,
 - More yield than we can sow,
 - More grace than we can comprehend,
 - More love than we can know. Ralph W. Seager
 - 2. God's glory helps us know who we are.
 - a. John Piper has written, "*The goal of preaching is the glory of God reflected in the glad submission of the human heart.*"
 - b. Illus. – Dr. Henry Augustus Rowland, a professor of physics at Johns Hopkins University, was an expert witness at a trial. During a cross-examination a lawyer demanded, "What are your qualifications as an expert witness in this case?" This usually modest professor replied, "I am the greatest living expert on the subject under discussion." People were surprised at his rather arrogant answer and a friend asked why he gave such an answer. Dr. Rowland, "Well, what do you expect me to do? I was under oath." Contrast a different view of one's self.

- c. Illus. – The great missionary, Taylor Hudson, spoke at a large church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator introduced him in eloquent and complimentary terms and listed his accomplishments in China. He called the missionary ‘our illustrious guest.’ Taylor stood quietly and opened his message saying, “Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.”
 - 3. Psalms 19:1 - The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
 - 4. Lk. 2:14 – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”
- D. God will give us a few of those special times with Him.
- 1. The music may sweep us into God's presence.
 - 2. A prayer may become our prayer to God but be better said.
 - 3. A Scripture reading can sound as though God is speaking to us.
 - 4. A lesson or sermon may be custom made for our life.
 - 5. A realization of God's great creative power can overwhelm us.
- E. Ex. 15:11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

II. LISTEN TO GOD'S AUTHORITATIVE VOICE, Vv. 4-8

- A. As Jesus appears in His glory Moses and Elijah appear with Him.
- 1. Immediately the Apostles believe Jesus is in good company.
 - 2. Moses and Elijah are two of the greatest people of the Old Testament.
 - 3. Peter wants to honor these men with a permanent memorial.
 - a. He wants to build a tabernacle for each one.
 - b. Maybe they could return to this mountain to recapture this vision.
 - c. Peter is confused about the meaning of the vision.
 - d. Matthew's readers were confused about Jesus' identity similar to Peter's confusion.
 - 4. A voice spoke from a cloud that overshadowed them.
 - a. The cloud is like the Shekinah cloud that led the Israelites through the desert during their 40 year sojourn.
 - b. The voice is the same one they heard at Jesus' baptism - This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"
 - c. Moses was the great lawgiver but he relates to Christ.
 - 1). We are all lawbreakers before God, Rom. 3:23
 - 2). We need someone to pay for our sins.

3). Illus. - Dispatcher: 9-1-1

Caller: Yeah, I'm having trouble breathing. I'm all out of breath. I think I'm going to pass out.

Dispatcher: Sir, where are you calling from?

Caller: I'm at a pay phone at North and Foster.

Dispatcher: Sir, an ambulance is on the way. Are you an asthmatic?

Caller: No.

Dispatcher: What were you doing before you started having trouble breathing?

Caller: Running from the police.

d. Elijah was the great prophet who did not die but rode a chariot of fire into Heaven.

1). Jesus would die once but never die again.

2). Jesus would be swept into Heaven.

e. God the Father said to the three disciples, "Listen to Jesus now and not to Moses and Elijah."

B. Why did God use divine intervention to command the disciples to listen to Jesus?

1. Matthew's readers were using Moses' writings and the prophets' speeches to reject Jesus.
2. Moses predicted someone greater than he would come - Jesus.
3. The prophets predicted a Savior would come.

C. The disciples fell to the ground and were terrified.

1. 2 Peter 1:16-18; For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"-- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.
2. Ex. - We can know the glory of God without a vision like the Apostles had. Christian song writers have told about their struggles and pain that led them to write some of our best Christian music. We, who do not write and compose music, can benefit from their experiences and what they write. The Transfiguration was a terrifying and overwhelming event for these three disciples. We benefit from their experience.
3. Jesus is full of glory.

III. ACCEPT JESUS' SUFFERING FOR US, Vv. 9-13

- A. After they came down from the mountain, Jesus and the disciples discussed what had happened.
1. He told them to not speak to anyone about the vision until He had been raised from the dead.
 2. The disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say Elijah must come first?"
 3. Jesus answered, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things but Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him but they did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."
 4. They understood Jesus had spoken about John the Baptist.
- B. The transfiguration was to show that Jesus would have to suffer.
1. Jesus had to die to reveal sin.
 - a. Judas practiced dishonest greed in his betrayal.
 - b. False witnesses who told untruths led to His death.
 - c. Herod's and Pilate's political power polluted their justice.
 - d. Jealousy and envy caused the religious leaders to hate Jesus.
 - e. Jesus' death cries out against these sins.
 2. Jesus had to die for sin.
 - a. Illus. - In a church I served some of the members asked the leaders to invite a former preacher back for a series of services called a revival. We conducted services from Sunday morning through Friday evening for a week. This minister was highly respected in the church and community for his Christian character. His preaching was about as weak as I have ever heard. One night he made a lasting impression on the church. He asked us to find the mistake in his Scripture reading. He read from 1 Cor. 15 - Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. What mistake did this preacher make when he read this Scripture? He left out the statement; for our sins. It should say, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

- b. In Luke's account of the Transfiguration, he tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus, "of his departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31 RSV). The word which is used for *departure* in the Greek is very significant. It is the English word *exodus*.
 - c. We can let Jesus pay for our sins or we can pay for them in an eternal Hell.
 - d. Jesus wants to pay for our sins but He desires our permission.
3. Jesus had to die to reform us.
- a. Rom. 12:2 – Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
 - b. The grace that saves us is the same grace that changes us.

CONCLUSION - About 200 years ago the world feared an ambitious conqueror more than we fear terrorism in our world. Napoleon Bonaparte set a goal to conquer the entire world so he could be the first world ruler. We are thankful that justice caught up with him before he reached his goal. Before he met his fate he made an accurate prediction about the future. Legend says he met with his top military advisers to map out some military strategy. With his index finger he traced the borders of China. He points to the map of China saying, "There lies a sleeping giant. Let her lie. For when she awakens she will shake the world!" This giant is now awaking out of her sleep and is shaking our world.

I imagine the Devil gathers his chief demons for a strategy meeting. With his chief mischief makers surrounding him, Satan points to the church of our present time saying, "There lies a sleeping giant. Let her lie. For if she awakens she will shake the world." We are a sleeping giant. How will we awaken the sleeping giant of God's church? We will wake up when we catch an overwhelming vision of who God is!