

Beholding Glory

Luke 9:28-36

Introduction

Mountaintop Experience: Have you ever had a mountaintop experience? One of those moments where you were so overwhelmed by beauty, awe, or clarity that you didn't want it to end? (e.g., St. Thomas, clear water, I could live here, etc.; birth of a child, etc.)

- Today, we are talking about a *literal* mountaintop experience, the famous story of Jesus' transfiguration.
- The climactic moment in the chapter's long question, "Who is Jesus?" (e.g., final answer, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?).

Valley: God didn't make us to live on the mountain. The clarity and inspiration of the mountaintop are meant to fuel our journey in the valley. When we **see** the **light** of Jesus clearly on the mountain, it's meant to sustain us in the **darkness** of the valley.

We behold the glory of Christ so we can follow the way of Christ.

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.¹

1. Revelation of Glory (vv. 28-29)

¹ ²⁸ Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τοὺς λόγους τούτους ὥσει ἡμέραι ὀκτῶ [καί] παραλαβὼν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην καὶ Ἰάκωβον ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι. ²⁹ καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ προσεύχεσθαι αὐτὸν τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἕτερον καὶ ὁ ἱματισμὸς αὐτοῦ λευκὸς ἐξαστράπτων. ³⁰ καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο συνελάλουν αὐτῷ, οἵτινες ἦσαν Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἡλίας, ³¹ οἳ ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ ἔλεγον τὴν ἐξοδὸν αὐτοῦ, ἣν ἡμελλεν πληροῦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ. ³² ὁ δὲ Πέτρος καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ ἦσαν βεβαρημένοι ὑπνω· διαγρηγορήσαντες δὲ εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς δύο ἄνδρας τοὺς συνεστῶτας αὐτῷ. ³³ καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ διαχωρίζεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἀπ' αὐτοῦ εἶπεν ὁ Πέτρος πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν, Ἐπιστάτα, καλὸν ἐστὶν ἡμᾶς ὧδε εἶναι, καὶ ποιήσωμεν σκηνὰς τρεῖς, μίαν σοὶ καὶ μίαν Μωϋσεῖ καὶ μίαν Ἡλίᾳ, μὴ εἰδῶς ὃ λέγει. ³⁴ ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ἐγένετο νεφέλη καὶ ἐπεσκίαζεν αὐτούς· ἐφοβήθησαν δὲ ἐν τῷ εἰσελθεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν νεφέλην. ³⁵ καὶ φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης λέγουσα, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐκλεκτός, αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε. ³⁶ καὶ ἐν τῷ γενέσθαι τὴν φωνὴν εὐρέθη Ἰησοῦς μόνος. καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐσίγησαν καὶ οὐδενὶ ἀπήγγειλαν ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις οὐδὲν ὧν ἑώρακαν.

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

Up to the Mountain to Pray: ²⁸ Now about eight days² after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

- A week after these sayings: **what sayings?** I.e., Peter's confession and Jesus' promise of his future path of suffering (and their invitation to suffer along with him).
- The **cliffs** of difficulty and doubt, suffering and sin, threaten to obscure our vision of Jesus. For the disciples, he knows the challenges that they will face as he is betrayed, rejected, and crucified, so he gives them a sneak peek of his eternal glory to reveal his true identity and remind them of his ultimate victory.

He Leads Us: Jesus took them. This was his initiative. They didn't know what they needed, but he did. **This whole event is for them.** Jesus knows his true identity; he knows who he is. Every revelation from God, every word he sends, is a gift of grace to us. That's why every word of the Bible is a gift to be received and treasured.

- Our knowledge and perception are limited. We can't find our way to God; he makes his way to us. This is the essence of salvation: we don't find God, we don't figure him out. He seeks and saves us; he pursues us. In his grace, these disciples don't uncover God, and he unveils himself to them.³
- This does not mean that they understood it fully, but it was a crucial step in their discipleship, and it confirmed fully that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Prayer: They went up on the mountain to pray... and all this happened as he was praying. "In Luke, when prayer is present, something significant usually follows" (Bock). At his baptism, the HS descending and the voice from heaven happened as he was praying (3:21). Prayer indicates a desire for and sensitivity to the revelation of God.

- One important reason we pray is it forces us to focus on Christ and demonstrates our desire to see and hear from him clearly.

Glory Revealed: ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. The more famous description comes from Matthew⁴ where it says he was "transfigured" (μετεμορφώθη) "and his face shone like the sun."⁵ In Luke, his

² 6 days in Matt, "about 8 days" in Luke. ὡσεὶ is a marker of approximation. "Approximately 8 days later" = "About a week later." Possibly inclusive counting (e.g., first and last day) or theologically pregnant use of "eight" as new beginning (e.g., 8 days circumcision in temple), but just as likely a simple estimate from a different source. Matthew and Mark have more verbal similarities. Luke uses unique vocabulary. Though shorter, he goes into more detail about the content of the conversation between Jesus and the prophets.

³ "As [these disciples] would come to realize, they were being privileged to glimpse something of [Jesus'] preincarnate glory and anticipate his coming exaltation (2 Pt 1:16-18; Rev 1:16)... The contrast between [Jesus' prediction of his death] (Matt 16:21) and this glorious sight would one day prompt [his] disciples to marvel at the [humility] that brought him to the cross" (Carson).

⁴ Matt 17:1-13.

⁵ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος

clothes dazzle, and his face changes (lit. “the appearance of his face was other”; τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἕτερον).

- The Bible has prepared us to see what is going on. When Moses was in the presence of God, it says his face shone because he had been talking with God (Ex 34:29).
- The description of God in Daniel 7:9a: “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.”
- “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23). “And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5).
- “It is as if the ultimate identity of the eternal Son is allowed to peep through; the three disciples become ‘eyewitnesses of his majesty’.⁶ It is hard not to see here also a foretaste of the glory of the exalted Son⁷, of whom ‘every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’⁸” (Carson).

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the **radiance of the glory of God** and the **exact imprint of his nature**, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Heb 1:1-4).⁹ In what may be the most exquisite prologue in the NT¹⁰ the writer of Hebrews demonstrates the beauty of Jesus.

- God spoke before in a preliminary way, but now he is revealing himself in direct and personal terms through Jesus. He is the sovereign Lord of all creation who rules from the heavenly throne. He “continually radiates the ineffable light of the glory of God, whose essential nature he shares” (Black). He is the exact representation of God. He is not a reflection of glory (i.e., Moses) but its source.
- This greater revelation of God’s glory has been **anticipated** from the beginning...

2. Anticipation of Glory (vv. 30-33)

³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory

⁶ 2 Pt. 1:16

⁷ cf. Rev. 1:12-16

⁸ Phil. 2:10-11

⁹ ¹ Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ² ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας· ³ ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμόν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, ⁴ τοσοῦτω κρείπτων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφανώτερον παρ’ αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.

¹⁰ The prologue of Hebrews is possible the finest in the NT rivaled only by the prologue of Luke (Black). E.g., measure and balance, artistic unity, skillfully coordinated clauses.

and the two men who stood with him.³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.

Look Who’s Talking:³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, Look who shows up. **Moses and Elijah. Why them?** The whole scene is full of callbacks to these prophetic forerunners (both received revelation on a mountain, Moses at Sinai and Elijah at Horeb).¹¹ Even the way Jesus carries out this mission is following the pattern of Moses. Moses took three from his inner circle (Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu). God spoke from a cloud in both instances, etc.

- “As we read through the Bible, we find gold coin after gold coin on the pathway of biblical promises. These gold coins appear to have been minted in the same place, and as we examine them, we notice... there is a definite relationship between them. The later ones assume the design and impress of the earlier.” There is no way to understand the latter without the former. These are “the promises God makes about the coming Redeemer who will set things right.” The growing pile of promises create expectations for fulfillment. When we start thinking in this way, we begin to expect and anticipate that what *happened* is a pattern for what *will happen*.¹²

So, when Moses and Elijah show up, the disciples are remembering all that God had done through them, and they see how Christ is acting in a similar but greater fashion.

- But here’s the kicker: Jesus is *like* Moses and Elijah **but better**.¹³

Content of Their Conversation:³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. There’s a visible glory surrounding these three during their conversation. **What do they talk about?** Jesus’ departure. Generally, we get the sense that they are talking about his impending trip to Jerusalem where he will die and rise again.

- But the Greek gives away the significance more directly: this is his “exodus” (τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ).
- The great salvific event of the OT culminates in the great salvific event of the New.
- As the Israelites were freed from slavery to the Egyptians through the waters of the Red Sea, we are set free from slavery to sin as Jesus passes through the waters of death.

Heavy Sleepers:³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Peter and the others were sleep (heavy with sleep). Their sleepiness threatened to cause them to miss this

¹¹ Ex 24; 1 Kgs 19.

¹² Hamilton, *What is Biblical Theology?*

¹³ “Moses was the model for the eschatological Prophet (Deus 18:18) and Elijah for the forerunner (Mal 4:5-6; Matt 3:1-3; 11:7-10; 17:9-13). Both had strange ends; both were men of God in times of transition, the first to introduce the covenant and the second to work for renewed adherence to it. Both experienced a vision of God’s glory, one at Sinai (Exod 31:18) and the other at Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Now, however, the glory is Jesus’ glory, for it is he who is transfigured and who radiates the glory of Deity (rather than Moses or Elijah). Both suffered rejection of various kinds (for Moses, cf. Stephen’s summary, Acts 7:35, 37; and for Elijah, cf. 1 Kings 19:1-9; Matt 17:12). Together they may well summarize the Law and the Prophets (the Hebrew Bible). All these associations gain importance as the narrative moves on and Jesus is perceived to be superior to Moses and Elijah and, indeed, to supersede them (vv.5, 8)” (Carson).

revelation of God (cf. Garden of Gethsemane, Lk 22:45-46). Their sleep is certainly literal but hints at a spiritual unawareness. How could you sleep at a time like this? What happens when you sleep through your alarm and miss work? Different consequences if you are watchman in WWII (i.e., life or death).

- Once they woke up they were able to see Jesus' glory. ↻

Glory: This is Moses' request Please show me your glory (Ex 33:18). Please reveal yourself to me. The word glory literally means "heavy" (כבד). The word can be used to mean honor, weight, wealth, value, etc.¹⁴ E.g., a large man is heavy, thick hair is heavy, etc. It can also mean valuable. **Literally more valuable**, e.g., more gold or silver is heavy; money is weight; pounds. **Figuratively more valuable**, e.g., "He or she carries a lot of weight" (power).

- This word can be positive or negative. Sin can be heavy (i.e., burden), idols can be heavy (i.e., weigh you down), or **God can be heavy** (i.e., honored).
- Too many of us are blind to God's value. In 1867, the U.S. bought Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million at the prodding of Sec. of State William Seward (only 2¢ an acre, 1/8 size of the rest of the U.S.). Most Americans and members of Congress thought it useless (e.g., "Seward's Folly," "Seward's Icebox," "President Johnson's Polar Bear Garden"). Little did they know it would be a strategic geopolitical location and contained vast natural resources, including gold and oil.
- **We need God to be heavy in our lives**, heavier than the things of this world. We need to feel the weight of it all. We need to appreciate the value of God. We need to see God's importance in our lives.

Peter's Misunderstanding: ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.

- You have to love Peter, with bluster and passion, this section might as well be called "**Peter's Big Mouth**" (ever-ready to be the self-appointed spokesman). He senses they are seeing *something* great. This is Peter's m.o. He knows something big is happening but misunderstands what it really means — not knowing what he said.
- John Ewart sign: "Never miss a good opportunity to shut up! (Brian Regan, "When's the baby due"). We spend so much time talking at God (telling him what he should do) that we often miss an opportunity to listen, learn, and be changed. There are just times when we need to be quiet. Speak less and listen more.
- He suggests building three structures (τρεις σκηνάς), some sort of temporary shelter (tabernacle or tent). The "tent" harkens back to the Tabernacle in the OT and some think it has a connection to the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths; *סוכות*; *sukkōt*; look for temporary structures Oct 16-23, 2024).
- At this moment, he knows it is a big deal (disco-ball Jesus) but somehow wants to build three **similar** shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He entirely misunderstands the significance of the presence of Moses and Elijah.

¹⁴ Cf. Ex 20:12, "Honor your father and mother"

- Peter thinks Jesus is being elevated to *their* great stature. He is putting Jesus at the same level as these great prophets. But the prophetic presence of these two witnesses is meant to show that the law and the prophets bore witness to Jesus, they point to him!
- Jesus so far outpaces Moses and Elijah that, when they are put next to him, the disciples are commanded to listen to Jesus. Moses and Elijah are here in this story in a supportive role, to confirm Jesus' authority. Let's not get it backward. The OT looks forward in **anticipation**. Jesus is not trying to prove that he is on the same level as Moses. Moses and Elijah are there to demonstrate Jesus' supremacy. Jesus doesn't just get another exhibit in the prophet hall of fame.

True and Better: His transfiguration is truly in the pattern of Moses and Elijah but it is escalated. Moses **reflected** God's glory. Elijah **proclaimed** God's glory. **Jesus is God's glory.**¹⁵

- Moses delivered God's law, but Jesus fulfilled the law (Mt 5:17).¹⁶
- Elijah proclaimed God's word, but Jesus embodied the Word of God (Jn 1:1, 14).
- Moses was God's faithful servant, but Jesus is God's chosen Son (Heb 3:5-6).
- Elijah pointed to the coming Messiah, but Jesus is the Messiah who has come (Lk 24:27).
- Moses was mortal, but Jesus is eternal (Jn 3:13).
- Elijah called on God's power to raise the dead, but Jesus is he resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25).
 - In this sense, Jesus is truly the new and better Moses, come to fulfill the law and the true and better Elijah as the Word of God made flesh, bringing the fullness of God's glory and redemption to the world.

3. Validation of Glory (vv. 34-36)

³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Little Bit Cloudy: ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

- God interrupts Peter (as he was saying these things) with his presence. God's presence manifested in a glory cloud should sound familiar from **Exodus**. It was with a cloud he led them through the wilderness by day (Ex 13:21). It was a glory cloud that descended on Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Law (Ex 24:15-18), from which the voice of God speaks his commandments to his people. In the Tabernacle, the cloud of God's glory filled the Holy of Holies (Ex 40:34-38), symbolizing his dwelling with his people.
- In Exodus, no one can see the full glory of God, or they will die (Ex 33:20). Moses can only see a partial or veiled revelation of God's glory from the cleft of a rock.

¹⁵ Jn 1:14-18.

¹⁶ In Exodus, Moses' garments hide the light of his glory; in Matthew, the light of Jesus' glory penetrates through his clothes.

- Yet here, in Jesus, the full glory of God is fully manifest (Jn 1:14).

Voice: ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” Reminiscent of his baptism (Lk 3:22), God the Father validates Jesus’ identity as his unique son, Jesus is the Chosen One, the promised son who would save the people from their sins, promises all over the Hebrew Bible now come to pass (cf. Ps 2:7, Is 42:1).

Identity and Authority: Because Jesus is Chosen Son of God, the manifest glory of God, God in the flesh, then we must listen to him.” His identity demands a particular response.

- A direct fulfillment of Deut 18:15: The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.¹⁷ This is the one greater than Moses for whom God’s people have waited!
- When the Father looks at the Son, he cherishes what he sees (*we should do the same*). He tells them to listen to him (*we should do the same*). We are called to see, hear, and follow Jesus.

Conclusion

Behold and Become: This powerful scene challenges us to see Jesus for who he really is, in all of his beauty and majesty and to worship, obey, follow, and trust him.

- This is the beauty of worship. **We become like what we behold** (“We become what we worship”). Children imitate (for better or for worse) what they see in their parents (e.g., KBC deacon: repeated word, “that d*mn cat sh*t on the floor again”).
 - The more we study, listen, or watch someone, the more we begin to emulate them (that’s why we need to be careful about the kind of content we fixate on).
- That is why the more you behold Christ, the more you fix your attention on Christ, the more you worship Christ, the more you become like Him. “And we all, with unveiled face, **beholding** the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).
 - God uses our worship of Jesus to transform us, by the power of his Spirit, more into his image (**e.g., radically Christ-focused worship**).

Hiding in Plain Sight: Hide and seek with little kids (Jackson, Abby, and Joshua). When they’re little, they aren’t great at hiding (saying, “I’m here” or jumping out of their spot). All they really want is to be found. When you open the door or pull back the curtain, they’re full of joy and laughter. The real joy is in being found. Jesus is meant to be found. He is not hiding from you, he is revealing himself to you (“seek [him] and you will find [him] when you seek [him] with your whole heart”). We see Jesus most clearly in Scripture, which is **radically Christ-centered**: We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:18b-19b). *Challenged you last week to read through a gospel (or listen to one read) if you never have. That challenge remains.

¹⁷αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε (Lk 9:35); αὐτοῦ ἀκούσασθε (Deut 18:15);

- **Stop and focus on Jesus.** See him clearly. Grasp his majesty. Feel the weight of his glory. *Where is your attention? That's what we're doing when we pray, read his word, worship in song...* We're catching a glimpse of the glory of God.
- Do see in Jesus the radiance of the glory of God, the unveiling of the majesty of God, the embodiment of the word of God? See him, listen to him, follow him.
- **What can you do this week to focus your attention on Jesus?**
 - How can you incorporate specific daily time in Scripture and pray, focusing on the character of Jesus (not vague CCM, but rich meditation)?
 - What one area of distraction (e.g., social media, unnecessary screen time, etc.) can you replace with focused time in Scripture and prayer?