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## THE GLORY OF CHRIST

Luke 9:27-36

By

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Luke Lesson 45

## The Glory of Christ Luke 9:27-36

In attempting to speak on the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in His transfiguration, I identify with Peter, who felt that he needed to say something, but really didn't know what he was saying! What can anyone say to describe or explain an event like this?

Peter referred back to this awesome spectacle when he wrote, "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 Pet. 1:16-18).

So what can I add to this glorious event which one commentator describes as "the most significant event between [Christ's] birth and passion" (Walter Liefeld, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Zondervan], 8:925)? I can only pray that God will be gracious in helping us to see the Lord Jesus in a clearer light so that we will follow Him more closely!

We've all heard the expression that someone is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good. I suppose that there are people whose heads are so much in the clouds that they don't accomplish much in practical terms. But the truth of the matter is, most of us are so *earthly minded* that we are of no earthly or heavenly good. The Bible is clear that if we want to walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord, we must set our minds on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-2). There is nothing quite so practical as gaining a clearer vision of the glory of Christ. Like Peter, John, and James, we must come down off the mountain to deal with difficult situations, but we will deal with them more effectively if we have seen the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To understand the transfiguration, we must see it in its context. Luke has been gradually revealing to us the identity of Jesus Christ. People had different views—He is John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets come back (9:19). But by divine revelation, Peter acknowledged that Jesus is the Christ of God (9:20; see Matt. 16:17). But immediately after Peter's confession, Jesus told the disciples of His impending death and resurrection. This jarred them and they did not understand what He was talking about, in spite of His repeated references to it (9:44-45; 18:31-34). They understood Christ as King, but they did not yet understand that He first must suffer and then enter into His glory (24:26).

Jesus also has made it plain that those who follow Him must follow in the way of the cross (9:23-26). Jesus did not come to please Himself, but to do the will of the Father, which supremely included the cross. Those who are His disciples must also deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him, even if it means persecution or martyrdom. Jesus concluded that discourse with a difficult verse: "But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God" (9:27).

There are various interpretations of what Jesus meant by this. Some liberals say that it was a mistaken prediction that Jesus would come back before some of the apostles died. We can dismiss this as the stupid ramblings of irreverent men. Others relate it to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but it is difficult to see why that event represented the coming of God's kingdom. Others interpret it as a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the rule of Christ through His church. But it seems to me that Jesus is referring to something more spectacular than that. I agree with many of the early church fathers who believed that Jesus was referring to the event that immediately follows, namely, His transfiguration. Three of the disciples there got a glimpse of what Jesus will be like in that coming kingdom, when He comes in the glory of the Father and His holy angels (9:26).

Jesus' comment about not tasting death refers back to verse 24. He is saying that although some of those who follow Him will lose their lives for His sake, some of them would see a manifestation of the coming kingdom before they faced martyrdom, because

to see Jesus in His glory is to see a preview of that day when He will return to reign.

Thus in the context, the transfiguration served to encourage the three disciples by showing them that even though their Master would suffer and die and though they, too, must follow Him in the path of the cross, the future glory of Jesus and of all who follow Him is certain. The disciples' understanding, like their sleepiness and the cloud on the mountain, was foggy at first. But later this unforgettable experience came back to them with clarity and insight. Their experience teaches us that ...

We all need a clearer vision of the glory of Christ.

#### THE GLORY OF CHRIST:

While this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that not even all the apostles shared in, it is included in Scripture for our instruction. When I say that we need a vision of the glory of Christ, I am not suggesting that we should sit on a mountaintop and try to conjure up some mystical vision of Jesus. We can know Him only through His Word, where He has been revealed to us, and through the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ in the Word and discloses them to us (John 16:14). The Christian life is centered on coming to know Christ in an ever-deeper way. While I strongly believe in learning sound doctrine, we need always to keep in mind that the aim of knowing doctrine is to know the glorious Savior better. He is like a beautiful gemstone, where you see different facets of His glory as you view Him in the light of the Word.

1. The glory of Christ is a glory of His perfect humanity and His undiminished deity in one Person.

Luke alone tells us that it was while Jesus was praying that "the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming" (9:29). Why would the eternal Son of God need to pray? Because He took on human flesh, yet without sin, and He lived in perfect dependence on the Father to show us how we, too, should live. In the incarnation, Jesus' glory was veiled and He voluntarily limited the use of certain of His divine attributes as He took on the form of a servant and became obedient to death on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8). He did not surrender any of His divine attributes or He would have ceased to be God (which is im-

possible), but He took on the limitations of our humanity, apart from sin. As a man, Jesus needed to pray.

Yet it was while as a man in dependence on the Father, Jesus was praying, that His glory burst forth like the sun coming from behind a cloud. This was the intrinsic glory of Jesus that He shared with the Father before the creation of the world (John 17:5). It is the glory He now possesses as He sits at the right hand of God. When the apostle John later saw the glorified Jesus, he fell at his feet as a dead man (Rev. 1:17). Jesus is undiminished deity and perfect humanity united in one person forever.

In His classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Eerdmans, 1:198], Alfred Edersheim writes,

It has been observed, that by the side of every humiliation connected with the Humanity of the Messiah, the glory of His Divinity was also made to shine forth. The coincidences are manifestly undesigned on the part of the Evangelic writers, and hence all the more striking. Thus, if he was born of the humble Maiden of Nazareth, an Angel announced His birth; if the Infant-Savior was cradled in a manger, the shining host of heaven hymned His Advent. And so afterwards—if He hungered and was tempted in the wilderness, Angels ministered to Him, even as an Angel strengthened Him in the agony of the garden. If He submitted to baptism, the Voice and vision from heaven attested His Sonship; if enemies threatened, He could miraculously pass through them; if He was nailed to the cross, the sun craped his brightness, and earth quaked; if He was laid in the tomb, Angels kept its watches, and heralded His rising.

So to see the glory of Christ, when you read the Word, look for His humanity and His deity closely juxtaposed.

2. The glory of Christ is a glory of His superiority to and fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Scholars debate the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Christ, but it seems to me that the natural connection is that Moses represents the Law and Elijah the Prophets. As such, the entire Old Testament (the Law and the Prophets) bears witness to Jesus as Lord and Christ. Beyond this association, Moses also

had a mountaintop experience where his face shone (Exod. 34:30). In the exodus, he led the people of God out of bondage. Our text states that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about the exodus (literal Greek transliteration of "departure") that He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (9:31). Elijah is associated with the future coming of Messiah, when he would appear to turn the hearts of the people back to God and to prepare the way of the Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:4-6; Matt. 11:9-14).

It is also interesting that both Moses and Elijah had unique departures from this earth. Moses died on the mountain and God buried him (Deut. 34:6). Elijah was carried to heaven without dying in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). Jesus also had a unique departure: angels guarded His tomb and then, after His resurrection, He ascended bodily into heaven.

But even though Moses and Elijah were two of the greatest men of God in the Old Testament, Jesus is far superior to them. We see this in Peter's inept comment and the response from the heavenly voice. Peter, perhaps to prolong the glorious occasion, suggests celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles by building three booths, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he meant well, Peter's comment was off because it put Jesus on the same footing as Moses and Elijah. The voice from heaven corrects this by removing Moses and Elijah and by stating emphatically, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" (9:35). These words also fulfill Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses predicts that God will raise up another prophet and commands, "You shall listen to him." Thus, the glory of Christ shows His superiority to and fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

3. The glory of Christ is a glory of His atoning death, resurrection, and ascension.

The conversation about Jesus' "departure" probably included His death, resurrection, and ascension. Moses and Elijah were discussing these foreordained events with Jesus as they stood on the mountain. Wouldn't it have been something to hear their actual words! Moses and Elijah both had an interest in Jesus' approaching death and resurrection because their salvation depended on it! Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, those who hope in God had looked forward to the promised seed of the woman who

would redeem them from their sins (Gen. 3:15). The sacrificial system, pictured by God in clothing Adam and Eve with animal skins and instituted formally in the sacrificial system under the Law, pointed ahead to the Lamb of God who would offer Himself in the place of sinners.

Our hope of salvation from the penalty of our sins rests entirely on the shed blood of the sinless Son of God who took on human flesh to be our substitute. His mighty resurrection from the dead verifies that the Father accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. His bodily ascension into heaven was coupled with the angelic promise that He will return in the same manner to reign in glory.

Thus the glory of Christ is a glory of His perfect humanity and undiminished deity. It is a glory of His superiority to the law and the prophets. It is a glory of His atoning death and His bodily resurrection and ascension.

4. The glory of Christ is a glory of God's sovereign purpose.

The best manuscripts support the reading in 9:35, "This is My Son, My Chosen One" (some later manuscripts follow the other synoptic readings, "My beloved Son"). Luke shows that Jesus is the One whom the Father sovereignly chose to fulfill His eternal purpose of redemption. This is further underscored by the fact that Jesus often predicted His own death and resurrection (9:22, 44), as well as His coming again in power and glory (9:26). The word "accomplish" in 9:31 means to fulfill. It emphasizes what Scripture often teaches, that the death of Jesus was not an accident that spoiled the divine plan. Rather, He knowingly and willingly laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:11, 17-18; Isa. 53:10-12). And yet, those who killed the Lord of glory were responsible for their own heinous sin (Acts 2:23; 1 Cor. 2:8).

The sovereignty of God from start to finish in our salvation should give us great hope. It assures us that we are not saved because of our feeble will, but because of God's mighty will, which He purposed in Christ before the foundation of the world. It shows us that although evil men rage against God and His servants, they cannot triumph. Even in the death of the Savior, wicked men were merely carrying out the divine purpose, while at the same time increasing their own condemnation, all to the glory of God! As we

think about this mystery, with Paul we should exclaim, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33).

So we need a greater and greater vision of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we get it?

#### HOW TO SEE THE GLORY OF CHRIST:

1. To see the glory of Christ, we must spend time alone with Him.

It was as Peter, John, and James were on the mountain with Jesus to pray that they got this vision of His glory (9:28). If Jesus had invited them to go with Him and they had said, "Not this time, Lord—there's a great game on TV that I don't want to miss," they would have missed this life-changing glimpse of His glory.

Why did the Lord pick these three disciples and not at least the rest of the twelve? I'm not sure. He chose the same three to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter and to draw apart with Him in Gethsemane. If we had been orchestrating this event, we would have done it in front of the whole multitude with the TV cameras running. But He just chose these three, who were especially close to Him. I'm glad Peter was there, since it shows us God's grace. Jesus had recently rebuked Peter with the strong words, "Get behind Me, Satan" (Mark 8:33). Jesus knew that Peter would later deny Him. Yet His grace prevailed in Peter's life. James and John clamored for first place among the twelve. James wouldn't even live long enough to have much of a ministry, since he was killed by Herod. But the Lord picked them.

But while God is sovereign in His choice, we have a choice about whether we spend time alone with Him. We're all busy, but we can make time for the things that are important to us. You may need to put on your calendar a half day to meet with the Lord. I can say for certain that if you don't spend consistent time alone with God, you will not gain a greater vision of the glory of Christ.

2. To see the glory of Christ, we must shake off our spiritual lethargy.

It seems incredible that the disciples would sleep through an event like this, but at first that's what happened (9:32). But then, "when they were fully awake, they saw His glory." The same thing happened later in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the disciples were sleeping when they should have been praying. Jesus warned them, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

I often feel spiritually sluggish and lethargic. My quiet times sometimes are *real* quiet, because I fall asleep! My mind wanders to other things as I try to pray or read the Word. I am too easily distracted from seeking the Lord. My only counsel is to keep fighting off spiritual lethargy and do what you have to do to be alert. I find that praying while I walk helps. I've got to fight off distractions to meet with the Lord.

3. To see the glory of Christ, we must exalt Him above all else.

The disciples rightly feared as they entered the cloud, which was the Shekinah glory of God. We need reverent fear if we would see His glory. Then God proclaimed, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" (9:35). After this, they saw Jesus alone (9:36). Even though Moses and Elijah appeared in glory, which must have been impressive, Jesus alone is to be the disciples' vision and ours.

It's easy to get distracted with good things that fall short of Christ. Paul mentions men who had become inflated with self-abasement, worship of the angels, and visions they had seen, but who were not holding fast to Christ (Col. 2:18). We can get caught up with spiritual experiences rather than with Christ Himself! We can get enamored with our theological knowledge and miss Christ. We need to exalt Jesus alone and keep our eyes on Him.

4. To see the glory of Christ, we must obey Him.

That is the meaning of God's command, "Listen to Him!" The reason the disciples did not go down the mountain and start telling everyone what had happened was that Jesus had commanded them to be quiet until after His resurrection (Mark 9:9). That would have been a difficult command to obey, especially when they saw the other disciples! But they obeyed.

The path of obedience, as we have seen, is the way of self-denial and daily crucifixion of our sinful desires (9:23). It means continually losing our selfish lives for Jesus' sake (9:24) and seeking

His kingdom above the things of this world (9:25). It means confessing Him openly in this evil world (9:26). In thus losing our lives for His sake, we gain eternal life with Him.

Moses and Elijah, who appeared here with Jesus, give us a glimpse of the truth of His promises. Moses had considered "the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). He had been dead now for 1,500 years. Elijah had boldly confessed God before the wicked Ahab. He had gone to heaven over 800 years before. Yet here they were in glory with Jesus! We don't know how the disciples recognized them, but they did. They show us that although we may suffer as we obey Him in this life, we will enjoy the reward of being with Him forever! If you had asked Moses and Elijah, "Was it worth it to endure hardship for Christ's sake when you were on earth?" they would look at you as if you were crazy. "Worth it? To know the eternal glory of Christ?"

### Conclusion

At the end of World War Two, a man named Murdo McDonald spoke to his American colleagues through the fence of a German concentration camp, where they were prisoners. He had to speak in Gaelic, since English was forbidden. He told them the news that the war was over. Germany was defeated; the Allies had won. It would still be three days before the Germans learned that news for themselves. During those three days, the Americans were still prisoners. They still suffered the poor food, the mistreatment, the confinement, and all the other hardships of being in a prisoner-of-war camp. Nothing had changed except the news that the war was over. But that news spread throughout the camp and transformed the response of the prisoners to their situation. Suddenly there was hope! Germany had been defeated. Victory was assured. They could endure the trials because of the truth that they were on the winning side.

The transfiguration of Jesus gives us a preview glimpse of the fact that He is the victorious Lord who is coming again in great power and glory. Jesus will reign and His truth will triumph over evil. If we can gain a vision of the glory of Christ, it will enable us to follow Him in the way of the cross.

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you feel if you had been one of the nine excluded from the transfiguration? What lessons can we learn from this?
2. What part do spiritual experiences have in the life of faith? Should we seek such experiences?
3. Is sound doctrine essential to sound Christian living? Why/why not?
4. Discuss: Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to say that the main problem of the church today is that we do not really know God.

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