

## The Glory of Jesus

Transfiguration Sunday  
February 2020

### Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>3</sup> Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” <sup>8</sup> And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. <sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Message

The Glory of Jesus

### Intro

The big question pulsing through the first half of each Gospel is a question every Christian needs to have an answer for: Who is Jesus? What do we make of him why?

*If you want a one off topic for your next cell group why not share on this. Who is Jesus in your own words?*

Our Christian faith and our hope hinge on this.

The Big Question

Who is Jesus?

Matthew’s gospel gets specific and focused on the big question of who Jesus is in chapter 16. This then flows into today’s passage on the transfiguration in chapter 17. I will look at this as the moment when the glory of Jesus was revealed.

### Context

The focus on the identity question picks up at Caesarea Philippi when after some initial discussion Jesus drops the question that Peter answers: <sup>1</sup>

<sup>15</sup>He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

That statement now becomes the open secret among the disciples and the gold standard of faith. With that established at some level of awareness Jesus begins to talk about his mission that will involve

‘... going to Jerusalem and suffering many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and being killed, and on the third day being raised.’

Peter now protests to the point of rebuking Jesus and Jesus then rebukes Peter with harsh words:

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

<sup>1</sup> An earlier sermon examines this closely: <https://trinitychurcheindhoven.org/sermons/sermon-20190922/>

This seems like one huge step forward followed by a step backwards.

Chapter 16 comes to close with Jesus making this path of suffering the way he calls people to:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

And ends with the promise that those present would see Jesus in his true identity as the Son of Man:

<sup>28</sup>Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

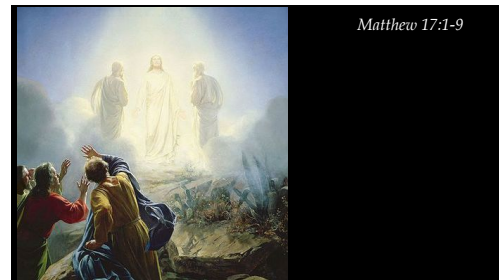
That is a great deal to grasp in 15 verses. I think those involved needed some digestion time so on to today’s account of the transfiguration in chapter 17.

### Story and Text

Matthew is unusually specific and begins his account saying it was ‘six days’ later when Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain.

You heard what first happened on that mountain:

*Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup>And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.*



Towards appreciating this as a revelation of the glory of Jesus I want to stress that Jesus did nothing here. This story of glory is about Peter, James and John seeing something that was there all the time but was beyond their normal perception.

Back in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had affirmed that Peter declared Jesus as the Christ, not through intelligent deductive reasoning but through revelation from Jesus’ Father in heaven.

On that mountain something similar was now happening as eyes were opened to see the glory of Jesus and what has happening at that moment in the spiritual realm.

What I mean by glory here is the biblical sense of the true nature or essence of being. Jesus was really with them as the dusty rabbi from Galilee, eating, sleeping and ministering with them, but at this moment they saw something more. Light was streaming from him. In truth Jesus was much more than what they had seen and this beauty that was revealed is a revelation of glory.

So the first way the disciples perceived the glory of Jesus on that mountain was his beauty.

Beauty is a revelation of glory

Beauty = Glory revealed

That is something we might understand. Imagine the day you recognized the beauty of an aspect of creation, a piece of art, a person you met or one you fell in love with? Something about those moments impressed you as beautiful. In biblical language you saw the glory and it touched you. That's what beauty does.

Jesus was seen as if his face was shining like the sun and dressed in clothes of dazzling white. He was thus magnificent even before Elijah and Moses were recognized as being with him.

Peter was dazzled so he had to do something. Last time he had a revelation he opened his mouth and professed Jesus as the Messiah the Son of the living God. This time he thought to say:

“Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

That was as far as he got when a bright cloud overshadowed them as can happen on a mountain but is apparently rare in Israel where clouds are fewer than here. A voice was heard saying over him:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

Somewhere in that phrase Peter, James and John had fallen to lie face down on the ground. They were terrified.

This was a second experience of glory and one that came at them like a freight train.

The Hebrew word for glory is *Kavod*. This is a word rich in meaning. One thing it refers to is the weight, glory and terror that is part of experiencing God. *Kavod* recognizes that being in the presence of the holy is a heavy and can be too much to bear. The glory of God is experienced as heaviness.

*Kavod* = Weight of glory

I personally know this in moments when I perceive God’s closeness. That has happened in deep silence. It happens at times during our worship here on Sundays. I feel it at times when I am being prayed for. It’s as if gravity increases but is at work more inside me than upon me. It’s a physical experience.

Last year June it came instantly and strongly for me when our guest speaker Gulshan from Kazakhstan began to pray in Russian. It was as if gravity doubled in an instant. When that happens I think of *Kavod*. Something of the weight of God is being experienced.

So when I read this account of Peter, James and John falling to the ground in terror as a voice speaks to them about Jesus, I see it as a case of glory as weight/*Kavod*.

This does not happen every day but it does happen where people encounter the glory of the Lord.

We may empathize with Peter, James and John who have just had revelations of the glory of God: First the beauty of Jesus in his essential nature was revealed to them to see then something of the awesome, terrible and overwhelming weight of God was felt as a voice spoke from the cloud.

Meeting Jesus as he really is or experiencing a small measure of the Father’s presence will not be forgotten.

### **So what now?**

The message heard while they were face down is worth considering.

“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

Having Moses and Elijah on hand was amazing to Peter but the voice from the cloud points to Jesus as God’s beloved son and says: “Listen to him!”

Give him your attention and your obedience. Get past Moses and Elijah to focus on Jesus. We could replace Moses and Elijah with a whole host of distractions and competing voices, Listen to Jesus!

The account ends with two more details:

<sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” <sup>8</sup>And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus.

It was over and I think that instead of the gloriously beautiful Jesus or the gloriously affirmed Jesus they were back with the normal everyday Jesus they were used to.

Whatever was going through their mind on the way down the mountain Jesus closed down the conversation

“Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

However they understood ‘being raised from the dead’, they were not to talk about this day until then.

### Conclusion:

As long as Peter, James and John lived they would remember and perhaps wonder about this. What happened? I know what I remember seeing and feeling that day but what actually happened?

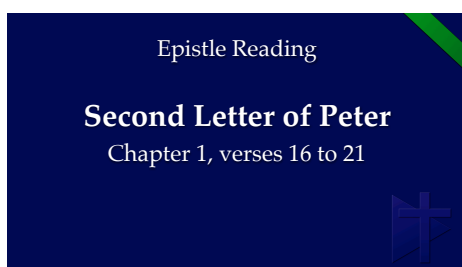
In those moments they saw and felt the glory of the Jesus in ways that informed the words already spoken:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

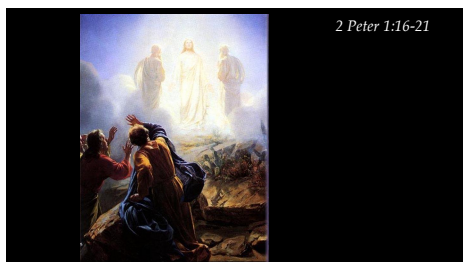
Those words implied a beauty and a weight that had been revealed to them and would be forever imprinted on them.

Since about the middle of last century many scholars have assumed that these accounts of Jesus in spiritual glory were written as myths or perhaps imaginative support for the claims of the church. You may meet people who say: You can’t believe!

Listen to what 2 Peter says to this: 2 Peter 1:16-21 (ESV)

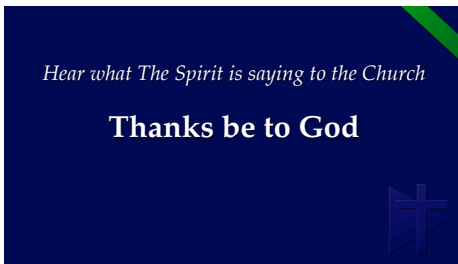


### Christ's Glory and the Prophetic Word



<sup>16</sup>For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup>For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” <sup>18</sup>we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup>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, until the day dawns and the

morning star rises in your hearts,<sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

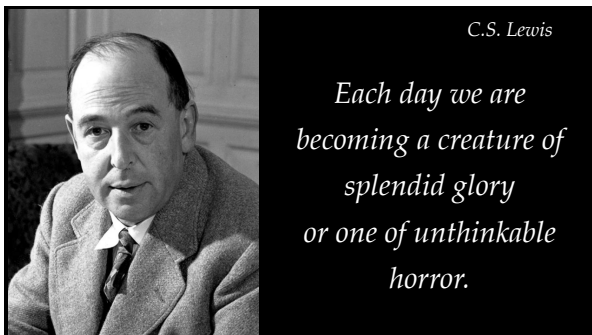


## Epilog

Jesus did not change on the mountain. The Father did not change either, but Peter, James and John had a moment of perception and revelation that would change them. What was normally hidden from them was available to their senses. They saw the glory of Jesus and felt the glory of the Father.

Meanwhile each of us are on a journey of glory. Our true selves are developing one way or another. St. Paul celebrates this in 2 Corinthians 3:18 saying with the Moses story in mind:

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.



This quote is worth remembering:

Each day we are becoming a creature of splendid glory or one of unthinkable horror. C.S. Lewis

As we attend to the glory of Jesus, our beautiful saviour and embrace our baptism into his death and resurrection we will be drawn to share his glory, even if that is not always obvious to us.

For those who reject the glory of God in whatever way, they reject a sharing in the glory of God revealed in Jesus.

However you may have been privileged to perceive the glory of God, in beauty or weight, hold on to that. Hold it dear.

At the same time, be open to a revelation of Jesus' glory. Seek him in the Gospels. Let him surprise you.