

Luke 9:28-36 About eight days after he said these words, Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹While he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰Just then, two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him! ³¹They appeared in glory and were talking about his departure, which he was going to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem. ³²Peter and those with him were weighed down with sleep, but when they were completely awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let’s make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not realize what he was saying. ³⁴While he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. They were afraid as they went into the cloud. ³⁵Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” ³⁶After the voice had spoken, they found Jesus alone. They kept this secret and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

There was a very famous movie in the early 90s that was nominated for all kinds of awards. The movie was entitled “A Few Good Men.” It was all about a trial where two U.S. Marines were facing court martial. It followed the defense attorneys as they prepared their case. In an iconic scene Tom Cruise who was playing one of the defense attorneys demanded, “I want the truth!” Jack Nicholson’s character forcefully and chillingly replied, “You can’t handle the truth!” Apparently that line was made up on the spot and became one of the greatest lines in cinema history.

It reminded me of when Moses was speaking with God in the book of Exodus. God promised that he would be with them and guide them on the way to the Promised Land. That promise made Moses bold enough to ask, “**Please show me your glory.**” So God did. Sort of. He could see God indirectly because “**You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live.**” No sinful human being can handle it.

That gets us to this text. Jesus takes his three closest disciples—Peter, James, and John—on a mountain where they get to see his glory as true God for a brief moment. He didn’t do that to scare them, even though that’s the effect it had. He wanted to enable them and us to Get Ready for Lent by seeing Jesus’ glory, by seeing our glory, and by listening to Jesus.

At the beginning of this text Luke writes, “**About eight days after he said these words.**” Normally Luke isn’t terribly concerned with chronological order, but here he is. About a week ago Peter made the beautiful confession that Jesus is the Christ. Right after that Jesus told them what was going to happen to him. “**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law. He must be killed and be raised on the third day.**” He wanted to prepare them for that.

During most of his life on this earth, Jesus looked like any other Israelite at that time. So often in art they like to picture him with a halo over his head. That really didn’t exist. It is just the artist’s attempt to draw your eye to the one who is most important in the scene. If you had been there in first century Israel and saw Jesus and his disciples walking along, you wouldn’t have given them a second thought. Isaiah foretold this about him, “**He had no attractiveness and no majesty. When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him.**”

On rare occasions people got to see that Jesus was more than just an average person. Time after time the people were impressed with his preaching because he was preaching with authority. That makes sense since they were hearing the Word of God from the one who is the Word made flesh. The Gospel writers call his miracles “signs” because they revealed his power and glory as God.

On the mountain of Transfiguration we get to see Jesus as he truly is. I always like how the inspired authors fall all over themselves trying to describe this. Luke writes, “**the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became dazzling white.**” Matthew writes, “**His face was shining like the sun. His clothing became as white as the light.**” Mark, who probably learned about this from Peter himself, wrote, “**His clothes became radiant, dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them.**”

Now I think you can begin to see why Jesus hid his glory throughout his ministry. People simply could not handle the truth. Luke says that the disciples were afraid. Matthew and Mark tell us that they were terrified. That is how sinful people must react to being in the presence of the holy God. His appearance makes it very clear that he is sinless and cannot tolerate sin in his presence.

Jesus didn’t use this as a scare tactic. He wasn’t trying to teach his disciples or us that if we don’t obey, this is the powerful God who is going to come after us. No, this appearance is pure Gospel for believers. It shows us that the God who has this power and glory is willing to put it aside for a time so that he can be the perfect Savior that we need. No other God does anything like that.

During the Lenten season which will begin on Wednesday there will be times when everything in the world seems to be conspiring against Jesus. That's because everything was. Satan thought that killing Jesus would thwart God's plan of salvation. The Jewish religious leaders thought that killing Jesus would preserve their positions of authority and the safety of Israel as a nation.

Throughout it all Jesus is in control. He could have escaped if he had wanted to. But he knew that his escape would mean the death sentence for all of humanity—the eternal death sentence. So he went and he died in our place. Not only that but he rose in triumph on Easter Sunday, proving that sin, death, and Hell had been conquered. This same powerful Savior lives and rules over everything for us.

Get Ready for Lent by seeing Jesus' glory and also by seeing our glory.

Jesus was not alone on the mountain of Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John suddenly came to the realization that they weren't alone. Luke writes, ³⁰**Just then, two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him!** ³¹**They appeared in glory.** The interesting thing to me is that they didn't need to be introduced. It was immediately apparent to the disciples that they were looking at two of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament.

The other interesting thing is that they are appearing in glory just like Jesus is. That doesn't mean that they have become God like Jesus is. The Old Testament records their sins and failures too. The reason why they are appearing in glory is because of the one they are speaking to. They trusted in the Savior who was coming. Now they can see their faith about to be proven correct.

Sometimes people ask what we are going to look like in heaven, how old we will seem to be, and on and on. The Scripture doesn't tell us specifically because once again, we can't handle the truth. The reality of heaven is so wonderful that it is beyond our ability to even begin to comprehend. When we see Moses and Elijah standing there with Jesus we get a taste, a glimpse of what is in store for us in heaven.

Just like people wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between Jesus and his disciples most of the time, today people often can't tell the difference between believers and unbelievers in this life. We don't go wandering around with halos around our heads. Yes, we will listen to God's Word and try to apply it to our lives, but we also have a sinful nature that leads us to do some very terrible, un-Christian kind of things.

The Apostle John wrote about this in his first epistle, **“Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is.”** Even the one who saw Moses and Elijah wasn't sure what things would be like for us in heaven, but he drew a logical conclusion. We will be able to see him as he is without fear. Therefore we will be like him in holiness forever.

Remember this throughout your life. What Paul and Barnabas said in the book of Acts remains true for us, **“We must go through many troubles on our way to the kingdom of God.”** Don't let those things get you down or make you question God's love for us. Keep that vision of Moses and Elijah in your mind. One day we will be shining in that same glory. Sin, death, and pain will be gone forever.

The problem is that we want all of these things right now and not a moment later. Peter did too. He said, **“Master, it is good for us to be here. Let's make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”** Even though he was scared, he knew that he was seeing something special. Maybe they could just stay on that mountain and bask in that glory for the rest of their lives.

Nope. Jesus had to hide his glory once again so that he could go down that mountain only to go up another one—Calvary, the place where he would be crucified. In the same way we can't stay up on that mountain with Jesus today either. After this service will be go back home and the problems you left there will still be there to greet you. But we can face those things with confidence until faith is turned to sight.

Get Ready for Lent by seeing our glory and finally by listening to Jesus.

Moses and Elijah didn't appear on that mountain just to be impressive. They **“were talking about his departure, which he was going to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.”** This is another one of those places where I wish the Holy Spirit would have had Luke record another chapter or so just to give us more insight into what that conversation was like.

Thankfully we don't have to guess. That word **“departure”** is packed with meaning. There were times in his ministry when Jesus used picture language to describe it. Just like the Prophet Jonah was three days in a fish, he would be three days in the grave. He used the Temple as a picture of himself when he said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again’...Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body.”**

Now, at the end of his ministry, Jesus speaks very directly and bluntly. In the beginning of this sermon we heard him say, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests,**

and experts in the law. He must be killed and be raised on the third day.” You can’t get more direct than that, even though the disciples still had a hard time understanding.

While Peter was speaking, something else amazing was happening, ³⁴**“While he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. They were afraid as they went into the cloud.”** If we only had Luke’s account we might assume this was like a storm cloud. That’s why they were afraid. Matthew tells us that the cloud was **“bright.”** It reminds us of the dedication of the Temple, **“The priests were not able to take their positions to minister in the presence of the cloud, because the Glory of the LORD had filled the House of the LORD.”**

So often in the Old Testament when God appears to his people, he appeared as a bright cloud. Think of the cloud that was over Mount Sinai when God gave his covenant to Moses. Think of the pillar of cloud and fire that led Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. Just like seeing Jesus’ glory terrified the disciples, so did seeing God the Father’s glory in that cloud.

Once again the goal wasn’t to scare them. God the Father had something very important to say, **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, God had said very similar things at Jesus’ baptism. Now he repeats it at the end of Jesus’ ministry. They weren’t just seeing things. Jesus really is the Son of God. He deserves God’s love because he is carrying out his Father’s will perfectly.

Now he adds the command, **“Listen to him!”** All of the troubles that the disciples had came because they just didn’t listen. If they had just listened to what Jesus told them a week earlier, they wouldn’t have been surprised when Good Friday came around. They wouldn’t have been hiding behind locked doors after that. They wouldn’t have been confused on Easter Sunday when the faithful women said he was alive.

All of our problems come down to the same thing. If we really listened to him, we wouldn’t go wandering into sin so easily. If we really listened to him, we wouldn’t be so upset by how things seem in the world. When problems come—and they will—sit down and listen to your Savior speak to you in his Word. There you will be assured of your forgiveness, assured that he is in control of everything, assured of your eternal reward.

Get Ready for Lent by seeing Jesus’ glory, by seeing our glory, and by listening to Jesus. I’m glad that God doesn’t routinely appear to us in his glory. We can’t handle that. No human being can. But with the eyes of faith we have seen his glory in the Scriptures. God’s greatest glory is when he hides that glory so that he can serve us—even by dying on a cross for us.