

## A Glimpse of Glory

What was so wrong with Peter's wish? "It is good Lord for us to be here. Let's make this last just a bit longer." Every believer is waiting for heaven, waiting for that chance to be with God in glory. Peter, James, and John experienced that for a brief moment. Now, put yourself in Peter's shoes. For a brief moment nothing else would matter. Nothing else would matter because you are with your Lord and his glory dominates the scene. Wouldn't you want to make that last just a bit longer? In a way, Peter was right to say it was good to be there. That's every believers wish. But might there be something wrong with trying to keep that glory here on earth?

Consider this: Deep down, do you ever wish to see just a glimpse of heaven here and there? Or have you ever asked God to give you some sign that He is real and heaven really exists? Heaven is real. And we used to have it. More than just a glimpse. This was way back in the time before sin. Adam and Eve lived in paradise, heaven on earth. They had that perfect, open relationship with God. But then they traded paradise for a prison. Ever since then, believers have been searching for a way to bring that glory back. Think of the Bible stories that get the most attention: The ten plagues; the parting of the red sea; the feeding of the five thousand. What are these stories? Miracles- glimpses of God's glory. There's action. There's power being shown. If this were Hollywood, there'd be Oscar's for best cinematography and special effects. This is the flashy, exciting stuff that we find so attractive.

We crave those moments when the divine breaks that barrier of the mundane. We want to touch, and see, and experience God. And this isn't a recent fad. The Israelites wanted to keep their Messiah on earth. They had been waiting for him to come to free them from their oppressors and restore the earthly kingdom of Israel back to its glory days. They were making the Christ into an earthly conqueror. Remember what happened after feeding the five thousand? The crowds tried to force Jesus to become their king. But what's so wrong with that? Would it really be so bad to have Christ rule here on earth? There are a few Christian groups that support the idea that Jesus will come to set up an earthly kingdom. People seem to think it would be wonderful. And why not? Isn't it our wish to be with God in glory? So why doesn't he just come down and set up a glorious earthly kingdom? What's the catch?

Let me pose this question: Why? Why would we want to bring heaven down here instead of waiting to go there? I don't think it's because we're not patient. I think it's because, we love it here. Despite the problems, and the sickness, and the sorrow, this is what we're used to. We like it here. And if there's a way to make *here* easier, then we're all for it. If Christ ruled on earth, then earth wouldn't be so bad. There's that danger of using him as some sort of life-improvement good luck charm though. Do you want a better, peaceful life? Do you want to be free of worry, free of stress, free of burden? Do you want to live a long and healthy life? Well, Jesus will make everything better. Have you heard that before? It sounds like some sort of \$19.95 Home shopping channel gimmick. A glorious life, free of the troubles and trials of this world, isn't going to happen. Earth is full of problems. Anyone who tells you otherwise is taking you for a ride.

Here's why: First, Jesus doesn't promise a happy-go-lucky life free of troubles, trials and temptations. Right before his transfiguration Jesus reminded his disciples, "Whoever wishes to follow me must deny himself and take up his cross." Is a cross meant to be soft and fluffy like a pillow? Light and easy? No. It's hard; it's heavy; it's a struggle. This is what is in store for Christians because that's what Christ faced. When anyone says otherwise, Christ has some strong words. "Get behind me Satan.

You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Peter had just given an amazing confession of faith, remember? “You are the Christ!” And not five minutes later, he tells Jesus not to go to the Cross. He didn’t get it. That’s what Christ came to do. Sometimes we don’t get it either. We forget that the cross is what we get in this life as well. More often than not, we want the glory, not the pain.

We want to experience that glory so badly that we forget one important fact. Even if God would come in all his glory and set up an earthly kingdom, it wouldn’t do us any good. We’d be fried. Sin and God don’t mix, just like water and oil don’t mix. God is holy. We are not. Those thoughts of bringing his glory here while we still live in these sin-stained, un-glorified bodies are misguided at best. Think back to those times when God let his presence and glory known in a visible way. Think back to Mt. Sinai. In our first lesson we read that it was covered in a cloud. Thunder boomed and lightning lit up the sky. The Israelites looked upon that mountain and did not see a rainbow and gentle clouds. They saw a consuming fire. Just look at the reaction of the disciples at Jesus’ transfiguration. Mark and Luke add further insight. When Peter suggested that they set up tents to make the experience last longer, he wasn’t just saying that out of wishful, joyful thinking. He was also frightened. Jesus doesn’t bother answering him. Peter will soon see why his statement would never fly. After Peter spoke, the Father’s voice shakes the scene and brings the disciples to their knees. His pronouncement wasn’t one of doom and gloom. He was simply reassuring them that this Jesus is truly the Christ. Even that joyous message, coming in unfettered glory, terrified them. God’s glory and sinful man just do not mix.

The same would happen to us. If God brought down his unveiled glory among us, we couldn’t live. The Psalmist says, “If you kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?” No one. None of us could be in that glorious kingdom. No one here belongs in such a kingdom no matter where it is. God didn’t promise to bring that glory to earth. But he did promise to bring us to that glory.

We return again to the cross. When we read the story of the Transfiguration, the focus is rightly on the glory of Jesus as true God. Again, the other Gospel writers add some insight. As Jesus stood there shining in his glory, Moses and Elijah appeared, sainted believers who had looked forward to this Messiah. And that’s what they discuss- his work as the Messiah. They speak of his “departure”- his upcoming death. With Christ, we can’t separate the glory from the cross. It’s through that cross that such glory comes to us.

Again, we look at the context surrounding the Transfiguration. About a week before, Jesus made yet another prediction about his upcoming suffering and death. Then the Pharisees asked for a sign and he promised cryptically that they’ll receive the sign of Jonah. After three days he’ll return from the dead, like Jonah returned after three days in the belly of a fish. And then, once the transfiguration is over with, Jesus asks his disciples to tell no one until *after* he has risen from the dead-which means he’s planning on dying. And he’s dying to bring us not just a glimpse of glory, but the whole thing. He died to remove sin which prevented from being in God’s glory. His perfect life stands in place of ours, so that as believers, God considers us holy- people who are able to be in his glory. This will happen after we follow him into death and then rise again as saints in heaven.

He did this for us so that when we come face to face with glory, we won’t be on our knees in fear. He’ll be there to put his hand on our shoulders and tell us, “You don’t need to be afraid. I’ve made things right.” So the whole purpose of the transfiguration isn’t to try to bring God’s glory here. The purpose is to point us ahead to the glory waiting for us in heaven.

And friends, God continues to give us those reminders, those glimpses of heaven even now. They aren’t meant to focus us on earth and the fading glory of such events. Instead these glimpses of glory keep our eyes fixed on our heavenly goal. These glimpses don’t come with flashes of light, peals of

thunder, and booming voices. Really, these glimpses of glory seem rather mundane and normal. But that's how God works. He uses the mundane and normal so that we don't get caught up in earthly glory.

The first and most obvious glimpse of heaven is what we have right here. For one hour a week you get to experience a foretaste of heaven. You have the blessing to gather with other believers to hear God's Word and sing his praises. Those same joys will be experienced in heaven, but a thousand times better. Another glimpse of heaven we have is the Lord's Supper. The Israelites had their pillars of cloud and fire. The disciples had Jesus in the body walking and talking with them. Today, we have his Word and the Sacraments. And here in this holy supper, Christ gives us his body and blood hidden in the mundane and normal, hidden in bread and wine. It's there, truly and no less glorious. And with his body and blood we remember the forgiveness we have in him. With this we know that we can come into God's presence. God and man can be together. We have nothing to fear from God's glory.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ-was there anything wrong with Peter's wish? Yes and no. It's silly to seek God's unhidden glory here on earth. Jesus made it pretty clear that in this world the cross is our lot. But, can we fully fault Peter for wanting that special relationship restored, a relationship where God and men can exist peacefully side by side? No. It's the same wish we have. And it's a wish that is fulfilled, so certain is our hope of heaven. And so, while we wait to be taken to heaven, God has sprinkled glimpses of his glory here on earth, to keep us looking ahead to the glory that awaits all who believe in Him. Amen.