

Jesus Reveals Himself on the Mountain of Glory

Matthew 17:1-9

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." (Matt. 17:1-9 NIV)

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of glory, dear fellow believers:

Over the last nine days, dozens of skiers have been going up a mountain in Cortina, Italy. They are looking to gain glory by winning downhill Alpine skiing events in the Winter Olympics. If they beat the competition and win their events, they'll get that glorious moment when they stand on a podium, representing their country and wearing a shiny gold medal.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus took three of his friends up a high mountain, and there he received glory in what is called the "Transfiguration." This day is important for us, because **Jesus Reveals Himself on the Mountain of Glory**. We learn to look at him, and listen to him.

Before we look at how Jesus revealed himself, it's important to understand what took place the week before. It was about six months before Jesus would have to suffer and die to carry out his mission, so he began to instruct his disciples about that. First, he asked the question, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Peter got an A on that test. But when Jesus began teaching them that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be put to death, and then rise, Peter began rebuking Jesus. "Never, Lord! This must never happen to you!" (Matt. 16:22). Peter flunked that test. Jesus had to train his disciples that he must carry a cross—and those following him would have to carry one as well.

So, a week later, Jesus took just three disciples, Peter, James and John, with him up that mountain. There they saw a sight they would never forget. Look! All of a sudden Jesus was transfigured, which means his appearance and form changed to reveal his true self. "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." What this taught those disciples was that, in fact, Jesus is by nature true God, the Son of the living God as Peter had said. Peter never forgot it. Some thirty or so years later he wrote to Christians in his second epistle, which you heard today, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father... when we were with him on the sacred mountain" (2 Pe. 1:16-18).

And look! “Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.” Moses, that great leader of Israel, the law-giver and a prophet who foretold the coming of another prophet like him, was there in glory with Jesus. So was Elijah, foremost of the prophets God sent to Israel during the time of the kings. Elijah got to ascend to heaven in glory in a whirlwind, without having to die. Moses had died, but now he was there, resurrected in glory. All of this was showing those three disciples that Jesus ranked among the greatest leaders of the Bible; he is worthy of glory.

How would we respond to such a glorious sight? We might respond as Peter did, saying, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” Peter wanted to stay. He had an idea: “Let’s put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Both Mark’s and Luke’s gospels tell us that Peter really didn’t know what he was talking about. But it reflects our own feelings. We also long to see that heavenly glory. We see every day the mundane, earthly things; we wrestle with sin in this world and sin inside ourselves. How good it is to look and see the glorious Jesus!

But even as Peter was speaking, look, there was another sight: A bright cloud covered them, and a voice that spoke within that cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” It’s the voice of God the Father! Here is further confirmation that God himself gave: This man, Jesus, whom you’ve been following, is indeed the Son of God and is by nature glorious. But we need to do more than look at him. The Father tells us: “Listen to him!”

“Listen to him!” That’s just what Moses had said about the prophet who was to come after him. “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.... You must listen to him” (Dt. 18:15).

“Listen to Jesus, Peter!” Listen to his comforting words when the disciples fell down, terrified at the voice of God the Father: “Get up. Don’t be afraid.” For Jesus is with us in those dark moments; we need not fear God’s wrath, for Jesus has come to atone for our sins.

“Listen to Jesus, Peter!” He’s telling you to come down the mountain of glory. For this mountain was not where Jesus would achieve the glory and gain heaven. Jesus needed to hide his glory in order to fulfill his mission of saving us.

“Listen to Jesus, Peter, James and John!” As they were going down the mountain, Jesus told them something strange: “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Why not? Because the rest of the disciples, not to mention the crowds, were not ready to hear how Jesus is the glorious Son of God. They would get ideas of anointing him as a glorious King, one strong enough to conquer the Romans. That was not what Jesus had come to do. He would only gain glory by hiding it, humbling himself to the point of death. But after Jesus rose, they could share this message as further proof that he is the glorious Son of God.

Listen to Jesus, modern-day disciples! Listen, for he “has the words of eternal life” as Peter noted another time (Jn. 6:68). Listen, and look, when he came down the mountain and hid his glory, only to ascend another mountain: Calvary, the “Place of the Skull,” a hill of shame outside of Jerusalem, the place of Jesus’ execution on a cross. We will look at him and listen to him on his way there again this Lenten season, fulfilling the Scriptures with his cry: “It is finished!” And then, seeing how he rose, and ascended, listen to Jesus now tell us: “Go and make disciples of all nations; preach the gospel to every creature”—tell the world of how Jesus revealed himself on the mountain of glory, the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Savior! Amen.