

Glory revealed: Christ and his people

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well now this really is a very special occasion for me.

Every time I ever climbed these stairs in the 20 years that I was here in St. George's Tron, I remember giving thanks every time for the privilege it was to serve God here and to be called to proclaim the glory of the Gospel.

I feel that same privilege this evening as I came up the stairs. It took me probably a little longer now than it used to do, but it is a privilege that I cherish to be here and to see so many who are still close and cherished friends.

Somebody said to me in America not too long ago, I used to attend St. George's Tron, she said, when I was in Glasgow, and I was just saying to a friend of mine when we were listening to one of the tapes of St. George's Tron and which you were preaching, she said, I said to them, you know, every time he begins a sermon, he begins it the same way.

You will find it a help to open your Bible at such and such a place. Well, I want to say this evening that there is no greater help with which we can begin than have you open your Bible with me at the passage that we read together.

[1 : 56] The girl concerned said that I hadn't said it right at the beginning and she passed a note to her friend and said, first time he hasn't said that. And then I had obviously immediately, she had written the note, I said, would you please turn your Bible to such and such a place.

The reason that's important, of course, is that we are here not to hear the words of any man, we are here to hear the words of God.

And that is why it's so important that you become like the Bereans in the book of Acts who search the scripture daily to see that these things were so.

And I want us to do that in this remarkable passage that we read earlier in our service this evening and that we turn to together now.

We call it the transfiguration. But of course it's Matthew and Mark who use that word. Luke simply says that the appearance of his face was changed.

[3 : 17] Nothing more dramatic for the disciples certainly happened in the whole of Jesus' earthly ministry than this event. It has so many different kinds of description of dramatic things that took place.

All of the first three Gospels emphasize that when Peter and James and John went up the mountain, you will remember that they went up another mountain to pray with him.

It's an interesting thing that Luke is so interested in the occasions when people are praying. He highlights it.

He mentions it. He marks it out. And he is the only one who mentions of the three Gospels that give us an account of the transfiguration that it was when he went up into a mountain to pray.

That as he was praying, verse 29, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

- [4 : 25] Matthew says his face shone like the sun, which is precisely how John describes it in the book of Revelation. So bright that it was impossible for anybody to look upon him.
- Mark tells us his clothes were dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. Luke says his clothes were like a flash of lightning.
- And it's Luke that sums up the whole account by saying in chapter 9, verse 32, they saw his glory. That's the climax of the whole thing.
- That's the essence of what happened here on this mountain whose name we don't really know. What happened was that they saw his glory.
- And in a sense, these men could never have been the same again. They had beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [5 : 34] You'll remember that just before this, in the passage we read and even further back, there is a kind of mounting up of a series of events that all concern the question who Jesus is.
- Have you noticed that? In chapter 8, for example, there was a storm in the Sea of Galilee, you remember? And the disciples began to be alarmed and distressed.
- And Jesus stood up and commanded the waves to be still. And their question was, who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?
- And Luke chapter 9 tells us that Herod the Tetrarch had been hearing a great deal of commotion about the person of Jesus. And some said he was John the Baptist, some others Elijah.
- Very interesting that Elijah is one of the people who appears here with Jesus. But he says, well, I have beheaded John the Baptist, but who is this of whom they speak?
- [6 : 50] And then the crucial issue appeared in the words of Jesus when he comes to them in chapter 9, verse 20, and asks the disciples, who do the crowd say that I am?
- And Peter gets as near as any human being apparently does at this time, and he says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- And so, they have come to a point where the answer has been given, but if you read through into the transfiguration story, you will discover that God is not satisfied with that answer.
- And suddenly the heavens are opened, and a cloud covers them, and a voice comes from the glory saying, the real answer to the question is this, this is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him.
- And heaven gives us what earth cannot. And you will notice that the answer is a double answer that comes from God, who is Jesus Christ.
- [8 : 15] The answer is first visual, and then verbal. The visual is the blinding glory and majesty in which he appears at the transfiguration.
- The verbal is that living word that comes from God, this is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him.
- It's clearly to show us his glory, that God arranges this special occasion.
- It's clearly of paramount importance to the living God, that all who are his disciples should have absolute crystal clarity as to who he is.
- That they should not have dismissed him as another prophet or as somebody who has come from another world. He does not want them to see him as merely one of their best pals.
- [9 : 23] He wants them to see him as the God who is in majestic glory which he had shared with the Father before the foundation of the world.

God and so we come to this remarkable account. Let me say before we come into it properly that there's a very close connection have you noticed between Peter's confession of Christ and the events that surround that and the transfiguration that comes immediately afterwards.

It's not for nothing that Luke says in verse 28 about eight days after Jesus said this he took Peter and John and James up into the mountain and both the other two gospels which include the transfiguration Matthew and Mark have the same measurement.

They say either six days or seven days or eight days it was around a week afterwards. words and there is a connection between the two.

Have you noticed them? As a matter of fact they deal with the same three subjects. Jesus steers the disciples to think about these three things first of all about his identity his person who he is.

[10 : 54] Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And when he has got the answer from Peter which he identifies as coming from God you know.

Flesh and blood has not taught you this Peter he says but my father who is in heaven. When he gets hold of that answer he takes them on to the next focus and the next focus begins in verse 22 do you notice where he says the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and teachers of the law and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

What is the next thing that he focuses upon? It is the mission of Jesus. The person of Jesus and then the mission of Jesus. Why he has come into the world.

And then thirdly he goes on after that to say from verse 24 something about thee or verse 23 rather something about the people of Jesus the disciples of Jesus and he says if anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Whoever wants to save his life will lose it whoever loses his life for my sake will save it and so he goes on but notice these three areas on which Jesus focuses.

[12 : 32] First his person then his mission and finally his people and if you look at the transfiguration account you'll find they are exactly the same three areas on which he focuses.

It is the glory of Christ in his person verses 28 and 29 it is the glory of Christ in his mission verses 31 for example we need to come back to it but he appeared in glorious splendor with Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus and they spoke about his departure I need to tell you now rather than later that that simply if you read it in a literal transliteration would be the word exodus so the answer to the question what was it that they were talking about people have said to me I wish I knew what Jesus spoke about with Moses and Elijah it's here it's on the face of the scripture they talked about his exodus which was his redemption that he accomplished at Jerusalem and finally the glory of Christ and his people did you notice that these two men verse 30

Moses and Elijah who appeared with Jesus appeared in glorious splendor so the glory did not just affect Jesus it affected those who were his from before the foundation of the world I want us then for the rest of our time to look at these three areas of the transfiguration there are multitudes of lessons to be learned from this passage so don't go away this evening saying oh well that's the transfiguration done and I understand it all now you could spend the rest of your life long or short on this amazing episode of the transfiguration let me turn with you then first to the glory of Christ in his person as I said earlier it's revealed to us both visually and verbally now the glory of

God in the Bible is the out shining of the inward being of him who is very God of very God and when God's glory appears from the beginning of the Old Testament it is the out shining of all that God is in his being his goodness his love his grace his mercy his greatness and majesty his tenderness and compassion his holiness and his justice when God's glory appears that's what happens all that he is breaks out as it were upon those who are around and that of course is why when Abraham said to God show me your glory do you remember what God says to him

I will allow my goodness to pass by you you cannot see my glory for you would die if you saw it but I allow my goodness to pass before you and it's true in so many other places but exactly what is being displayed here in the transfiguration is this burning glory glory of Jesus Christ described as a flash of lightning by Luke or as though you were looking into the sun now this is the problem John has as I was saying a moment ago in the first chapter of Revelation when he describes this same Christ now if you want to get a real picture of Christ my friends the place you turn to is the book of Revelation chapter 1 or one of these other places where the glory breaks through but do you notice when

[17:12] John is taken up into the spirit on the Lord's day and he is in the heavenly glory what does he see well he tells us immediately I saw the glory of Christ and then he says among the lamp stands was someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest his head and hair were white like wool as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace his voice was like the sound of rushing waters in his right hand he held seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance now my friends that is the true vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ that is what he is like and when you see him you would not first say ah it's

Jesus you would like John fall fall down on your face confused and filled with awe and fear and wonder that's what happened to them on that day you do remember how Peter looked back and spoke about it so if you want it he says an eyewitness to what happened on that day listen this is how Peter describes it in 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 16 we do not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty for he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory saying this is my son whom I love with him

I am well pleased we ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mount now some people have remarked that John in his gospel doesn't include the transfiguration couldn't have been so important to John well I do want just to say to you and this is my as my friends in America say this is my humble and accurate opinion if you read John chapter 1 and verse 14 and remember John was one of these people who was there on the mountain top Peter was another and Peter tells the people to whom he writes in 2 Peter 1 but John says in John 1 14 we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father it's at least possible that he was thinking about the transfiguration now when

Jesus was here in this world and during all his ministry on earth that glory was a glory that was veiled you know Charles Wesley has written an excellent Christmas hymn on this veiled in flesh the Godhead see and it was true it was veiled not because God was hiding himself but for our sakes he veiled his glory so that we would not be blinded by it you know what you say when somebody looks up at the sun you teach your children this don't do that don't look at the sun you lose your sight and God veiled his glory here and there it breaks out in all its wonder and this is one of these occasions the other thing of course that happened was the verbal answer to the question that came from heaven and the verbal answer in verse 35 is a voice came from the cloud saying this is my son whom

I have chosen listen to him now let me just point out to you if you didn't know before that here when God speaks and when he speaks in other places like the annunciation of Jesus at the beginning of the gospels when he says this is my son whom I have chosen that is a composite quotation coming from heaven first first of all from psalm 2 which is a messianic psalm as you will know speaks about Christ and there God says this is my son this is my son you are my son he says to the son and then in

[23 : 22] Isaiah chapter 42 at verses 1 and 2 you find the phrase I have chosen him he is the chosen one and Isaiah 42 is of course one of the servant songs of Isaiah did you know that the phrase that God speaks comes from these two messianic sources this is my son I have chosen him I am well pleased with him so what is God saying from heaven I tell you what he's saying he is saying the son of God is the suffering servant of Jehovah and in his one person now gloriously revealed and identified from heaven he is both the son and the servant both the savior and the suffering servant and that is that is the point of this utterance from heaven can

I just point out one little thing to you which just came into my mind last night do you notice where God goes for authoritative statements about his son or about anything else where does God go what does God quote from that's with me now when when preachers like my dear friend Willie and myself are wanting support for what we say and we want to quote some higher authority who is ten feet above us we go for Jim Packer or Don Carson you've heard these names I guess have you and others like them but when God authenticates his statements he refers us to his own most holy word that's where

God sends us this is my son the beloved whom I have chosen psalm two this is he whom I have chosen my servant the servant of Jehovah Isaiah 42 now you know it's an amazing thing that when God is searching for veracity authority when God wants to underline and demonstrate and prove to us what he is saying he flies to the scripture in other words he quotes himself which is the only reason we need that when we are looking for our authority the one place we will go is to the word that the living

God has already spoken if it's God's authority it needs to be ours too now to the second thing and I promise you it won't take nearly so long as the first they never do these second points but the second is this that God is pointing in the transfiguration not only to the glory of Christ in his person but to the glory of Christ in his mission because the next thing that is of absolutely vital importance for us if we are going to understand who is this Jesus God has sent in the fullness of time the second thing we need to understand is why did he come what did he come for what was his purpose in coming why did the father send him what was the mission that he was on and the answer and the answer notice what happened on the mountain two highly significant and representative figures in the persons of

Moses and Elijah representing the law and the prophets from the old testament you remember how sometimes Jesus just used that phrase the law and the prophets and that was the whole Bible described well these are the representatives of the law and the prophets and their conversation as I was saying is about his departure verse 31 they appeared in glorious splendor talking with Jesus they spoke about his departure and it does help you know if you know what that word really means and really is the word is quite simply our word exodus and what did the exodus mean well I think when Peter and James and John heard Elijah and Moses speaking with Jesus about his exodus that he was to accomplish at

[29 : 23] Jerusalem they said what a thing what a thing to be happening before our eyes that Moses is speaking to Jesus about his exodus the exodus as every Jew would have told you was when God sent Moses down and delivered his people out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage and from the grip of Pharaoh but it was beginning to dawn on them to see what Jesus was sent by the father for was the exodus that the one in the old testament was but a shadow of and pointed forward to and that exodus where God delivered his people by the blood of a slain lamb and came as judged down upon the nation and said when

I see the blood I will pass over them that exodus was gained not without the shedding of blood and here is our Lord Jesus Christ talking with Moses and Elijah about the exodus the redeeming work that he was to do now there are many people who have plenty of time for Jesus plenty of time for Jesus as the model leader of men and women too they have plenty of time for Jesus as the great example of going about and doing good but you know when Jesus had heard the confession of Simon Peter he said the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders he must be killed on the third day rise again and

Simon Peter Matthew tells us immediately held his hand up this shall never be to you Lord he said Simon Peter was experienced in lecturing Jesus and how he should be savior you know just let me say to you to all of you who are here this evening it's one of the biggest snares you can ever get into if you try to tell Jesus to do his work your way rather than you're doing his work Christ's way and Jesus said the son of man must suffer and Jesus you see was to be that slain lamb his was the blood that was to be shed which would make

God say when I see the blood I will pass over and make the apostle say Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us it's all so glorious isn't it and you notice he was to accomplish it it wasn't going to happen to him he was going to accomplish it at Jerusalem and that was when they saw his glory so it's the glory of Christ in his person that we are shown in the transfiguration the glory of Christ in his mission and finally the glory of Christ in his people you didn't miss that when we were reading the

Jews very important thing to grasp the glory of Christ in his people the people are represented by Moses and Elijah 30 verse 30 of chapter 9 two men Moses and Elijah look at that appeared in glorious splendor talking with Jesus whose is the glorious splendor then well it's not the splendor and glory of Jesus that Luke is speaking about at this point it's the glory and splendor of Moses and Elijah and there's an important part about that you see that really needs to be something we take hold of the word for transfiguration is just the word that's put into our English language the word metamorphosis there's a metamorphosis takes place when little tiny insect becomes a butterfly that's when you get the metamorphosis from what is there before the butterfly in all its glory and that metamorphosis is a word that's used four times in the new testament twice in

[35 : 10] Matthew and Mark to describe the transfiguration and twice elsewhere in the new testament first in Romans chapter 12 verse 2 changed changed we that's the ordinary

Corinthians have you grasped just what this means because they were a bunch of oddities if ever there were any if a pastor had gone to the church at Corinth to try to clear up the mess that was there he would have been there for 50 years I reckon but God says you Corinthians are being changed from one degree of glory into another even as by the spirit of God now my friends what does the spirit of God do in you what's all this in the transfiguration got to do with the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer just this that the Holy Spirit's work is so to labor in your inmost being that a reflection of the glory of the

Lord Jesus Christ might be seen in you where does God display his glory today then well some of us would say in the heavens the Bible says right and on the earth Isaiah 6 says right but what does Jesus say in John chapter 17 when he's praying to the father and sharing intimacies with the father he says father the glory you gave me I have given to them as the disciples now my dear friends this is what the Christian life is all about this is what the great change is when redeeming grace comes and you have your personal exodus from darkness to light from the power of

Satan to God what happens is that you are being changed into the same image from one degree of glory to another that's why Anselm the 11th century archbishop of Canterbury who says some very interesting things it was Sinclair Ferguson who introduced me to him first so he's bound to be alright Anselm said he gave he's speaking about the transfiguration he gave a preview of his own glory and of the glory of his own he gave a preview of his own glory glory and of the glory of his own that's what

Jesus burden for his people is that we might be changed from one degree of glory into another nothing less than that is his purpose for his redeemed people and that really is the answer to the question that I find all over the world people are asking what am I in this world for sometimes when disasters come that they have recently done in the United States what are we for is there some purpose behind this mad universe in which we live is there some underlying intent that God if there be a God has and the answer is this is what you're for you know how children get this idea from an early age what's this for and what's that for and the wise parent begins to tell them that something of such a significance is always for something and you and I do you ever think what you are for why God has made you why God has redeemed you what God's ambition is for you and the answer is he wants you to reflect the

[41 : 56] Savior's glory let's pray together our great God and our heavenly father how marvelous are your ways how wonderful your saving purposes how glorious us all that you have designed for us in Jesus Christ we bow down and worship you teach us your word write it into our hearts let it have the power of God in heaven to change us for the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ we pray amen now we'll pray