

The Glory of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning to all of you here, good morning to everyone online. Today is the last day of Epiphany with Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent later this week, as Tommy mentioned.

Epiphany is a season that celebrates moments in Jesus's... Is that me? I'm not sure what I'm doing, but it sounds like a DJ scratch record, but I'm not that good.

I want to say this is my...scratching on my scruffy beard, but I can keep going. That was last year. So Epiphany is a season that celebrates moments in Jesus's life where God or something of God is revealed.

And the season starts with the Magi giving gifts to Jesus to commemorate that he is a light to the Gentiles. It includes Jesus's baptism, where Jesus is revealed as the Son of God to John the Baptist, and the crowds that are gathered.

It includes Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah on behalf of the disciples, or at least most of them. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, where he learns that to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus.

[1 : 17] And then finally, Jesus's presentation at the temple, where Anna and Simeon prophesy to Mary and Joseph and everyone standing nearby about who this baby is in Mary's arms and who he will be.

So there's a lot going on in Epiphany, it turns out. It turns out. And I must admit that when I was in preschool, I didn't focus on Epiphany very much. It's probably fair to say that it's a season that bypasses most of us.

To be very honest, Epiphany for me this year, like most years, is this post-Christmas, New Year season where next year starts like a cannon gunfire.

It's suddenly on. We jump into everything suddenly without any ramp up. This year, winter was supposed to happen. Registration for summer camp opened.

And you've got to rush in and get your kids in camp for summer before all the spots fill up. School application materials for the fall are due. It's all in Epiphany, right? Like, Epiphany.

[2 : 19] Book fairs, Valentine's Day remembrances. Yeah, the Valentine's Day remembrances. And then a whole week-long winter break for the kids right at the end of the month.

And if you're not going anywhere, there's this panic moment of what do we do with our kids for a week? So that was my Epiphany, right? So all this to say, a whole lot just kind of flew by.

Not much Epiphany action on my end. Except today, it's the last day of Epiphany. And all the readings, as Tommy said, revolve around Jesus' transfiguration in keeping with the season.

So the passage we're looking at today comes from Matthew. But all three synoptic Gospels, that is Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they all include this moment in Jesus' life, each focusing on unique details from this experience.

And it's a great passage. And I feel like every time I preach, I say about the verse I'm preaching on, it's a great passage. But I don't remember a preacher ever getting up and sighing and saying, I got stuck with this today.

[3 : 21] So it's a good one. It's the Bible. So Matthew's passage all by itself has lots to dig into. But it functions as part of what literary scholars call a chiasmus, which is when a part of a text appears in sequence, and then the sequence is repeated in reverse order.

Our gospel passage, this mountaintop experience, is linked to an immediate episode right after Jesus comes back down from the mountain and exists as a whole unit.

And we'll get into that in a second. It's preceded by a conversation with his disciples about him going to the cross. And then that same conversation is repeated after the mountaintop experience and this valley floor experience.

And then even beyond that, there are these two broad horizons that the passage links to. There's a forward and a backward linkage to two major events in salvation history, the exodus and the cross. So with all this in mind, let's dig into Matthew. The scene is set by Matthew right away. Jesus takes his inner circle of disciples with him up to the top of a mountain where he would spend time praying. [4 : 29] This was a fairly normal thing. They'd done this lots of times. And Matthew gets right two things. While Jesus is praying, he is physically altered before their eyes, his face shining like the sun and his clothes also becoming light-filled.

Mark adds that his clothes were radiant, intensely white, and Luke says his clothes were dazzling white. This was an encompassing experience. And Luke adds that the disciples were almost asleep when all this happened, but then they quickly became fully awake.

At that same instant when they notice Jesus has changed, they see Moses and Elijah appear in their glorified state speaking with Jesus. And it's really interesting because Peter seems to recognize them and know who they are.

I'm not sure I would. And as if this isn't enough, a whole bright cloud overshadows them. And that word overshadow is the same word that Luke used when he was describing the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary in Jesus' conception.

And then further still, after all of that, yet more, they hear the audible voice of God. And then it's all gone. And there's Jesus in his regular earthly body saying to them, get up, there's nothing to fear. [5 : 44] And so I was kind of picturing at this point Jesus saying, you know what, I'm tired, I'm going to go sleep. And the disciples just kind of stared at him and like, we're not tired anymore. I'm not sure I can sleep.

And Jesus goes to sleep and they just kind of talk about the whole thing all night. It was a lot. So a couple things to notice about this passage. Jesus is seen in a new way.

As the gospel of Matthew progresses, the disciples have this growing understanding of who Jesus is. And only 11 verses earlier, Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God.

But what that means goes to a whole new level for Peter when he gets to the top of that mountain. What Peter sees when he sees Jesus radiant with light, talking to Moses and Elijah, when he hears the audible voice of God is a revelation of who Jesus is, of Jesus' identity that adds depth and texture to Peter's confession just 11 verses earlier.

It comes home, and Tommy alluded to this in his opening. Jesus is utterly human, but he is utterly God. And the contrast here is with Moses and his mountaintop experience that we read about in Exodus.

[7 : 00] In fact, Moses had a couple of these experiences. In particular, Exodus 34, 29 says that when Moses came down from one of his mountaintop times with God, it says that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

He wasn't aware of it. When he came down, people saw this and asked him to put a veil over it for a while until it faded away. But with Jesus in this moment, his skin isn't shining.

It's emitting light. It's like the sun. It's like the sun. And that light even lights his clothes up so they're radiant as well. Moses reflected the light of God's glory.

Jesus emits the glory of God because he is God. And that glory comes from within him. Jesus is so much more than Moses. And to underscore this, Jesus is seen speaking with Moses and Elijah, making it clear that this isn't just Jesus experiencing another repeat Moses experience like he's just another Moses.

There's a categorical difference here. Jesus is speaking with the representatives of the law and the prophets. He is the one from whom the law came and from whom all prophecy comes.

[8 : 13] And he is the one who fulfills the law and all prophecies of the Old Testament. In this way, too, Jesus is much more than Moses and Elijah. This revelation of Jesus is completed by the audible voice of God.

This is the second of three times in the Gospels where it's recorded that God speaks audibly and publicly to Jesus. The first was at his baptism.

The second, in this passage today, at his transfiguration. And the third was in John 12, 27, 28, when Jesus is kind of talking to the crowds out loud and he says, now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I've come to this hour. And then he turns from the crowd to his father and says, Father, glorify your name. And then a voice comes from heaven, I

have glorified it.

And I will glorify it again. The voice of God atop of the mountain in our passage today echoes the words God spoke at Jesus' baptism.

[9 : 14] This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. But then he adds the words, listen to him. These words from God position Jesus relative to Moses and Elijah.

Jesus is not only the one through whom the law came, and he's not just the preeminent prophet, he is God's son. And his words to the disciples are a charge to listen to his words above those of Moses and Elijah, above the law and prophets.

And so he says, listen to the disciples. This would be a very strong statement for Peter and the others who are faithful Jews. so what is God doing in all of this this is one of my favorite questions to ask anytime I read the gospels because in my mind nothing in the gospels is ever said or done for nothing either in the stories themselves for the people in the stories or for us as the readers I'd mentioned that there's a forward and a backward linkage in this story to exodus and the cross while what happened to Jesus on top of the mountain centered on his identity that moment also points to God's purposes through Jesus all three synoptic gospels say that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus but only Luke says what they talked about Luke says they were talking about his departure which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem and that word departure which is in the ESV translates the Greek word that Luke uses which is exodus Moses and Elijah speak to Jesus about the exodus he's about to accomplish in Jerusalem a reference to his death on the cross and just as Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt of slavery bondage and the combined oppressions of empire that served dark spirits so Jesus would lead all people from their sin their brokenness and wounding and their captivity to dark powers and lead them to his father his kingdom and his fullness of life the passages that precede and follow this moment on the mountain are ones in which Jesus tells his disciples that he'll go to Jerusalem in fact and he'll die and he'll rise again but his disciples don't understand it like not even a little bit and this is the but this is the exact topic of conversation between Jesus Moses and Elijah on top of that mountain and what God is doing in this moment one of the things he's linking this revelation of who Jesus is and this revelation that he embodies indescribable otherworldly glory with his suffering and death in God's mind these things are not in an odd tension there's they come together in fact Brendan Manning who wrote the ragamuffin gospel and a whole bunch of other writers not least of all Paul all said that the glory of God was revealed in the cross it's very counterintuitive when you compare Jesus transfigured with Jesus crucified God is saying that in this story that the glory of God is revealed equally in both radiant light-filled moments and grueling suffering not different glories not different sides of glory the same glory of God but I think God's doing something else more immediate not just for us who are reading the story but for the disciples and even for Jesus this week past week at the Wednesday foundations class we talked about prayer and how with God there are seasons where God seems to be manifest and seasons where he seems to be hidden and what and we talked about what God is doing in each of these seasons of life the mountaintop experience was an experience of God's manifest presence right God and the things of God Jesus glowing with light the glory cloud Moses Elijah the audible voice of God direct powerful in your face unmistakable experiences and in one thing that God does in these kinds of moments is build our faith gives us a line of sight into something that is past the earthly veil and we and we see something that is true about reality and it grows our faith in who God is and what reality is really like and he does this so that we can use that faith in the seasons when God seems hidden these are times when God seems silent or absent or even when things are really hard and we suffer Jesus's crucifixion is said to have taken only taken place only 40 days after this experience on top of the mountain so it wasn't too long after and God gifted the disciples and even Jesus with this experience to prepare them for what was about to come the disciples faith in Jesus would be tested far beyond what seemed realistic or reasonable fair or kind when they saw Jesus gruesomely executed and for Peter there was the extra layer of not just watching Jesus die so terribly but carrying with him the awareness that he denied Jesus to save his own skin the collective pain grief disorientation from this traumatic traumatic event was overwhelming but the memory of what they experienced on that night on the mountain would serve to bolster their faith among the readings for today we is the quote from one of Peter's letters he refers to this the experience he had as something that was important for his faith it says it's an experience that Jesus

[14 : 54] Peter carried with him his whole life but this is even true for Jesus whose suffering would be and was beyond our comprehension and it's hard to imagine that Jesus needs anything all his entire job was to go around helping people so to imagine that Jesus needed something is is doesn't really sit easily with us but he was fully human he had all the same needs and frailties that we have and in that moment God gifted him with a connection to the glory he had in his father's presence from before the foundation of the earth he was gifted with the encouragement of Moses and Elijah and the affirmation of his identity in his father's love all this would be needed when he cried out from the cross 40 days later father why have you forsaken me so there's a more proximate connection between this manifest experience of God and the hiddenness of God and it shows up in the combination of these verses from this morning and the passage that follows we didn't read it but again in all three gospels the synoptic gospels these are linked together Jesus comes down the mountain with Peter James and John right into a crowd on the valley floor and the other disciples are there trying and failing to cast a demon out of a boy brought by his father to get help it's literally a movement from a mountaintop experience to the valley floor experience from the manifest glory of God to the confronting the stubborn resistance of the demonic so the details of this are for another sermon but the main point Jesus makes in this passage is after he casts the demon out and sets the boy free is faith the manifest moments of

God create faith and they sustain our faith in hard times in the face of hardship and suffering and in those moments when God seems hidden when we exercise that faith it grows Jesus did what the disciples were not able to do he defeated the demonic that was resisting the other disciples and he called them to greater faith even when it's hard so what does all this mean for us so my sermon process i go through the week i'm thinking about stuff and then i treat my wife jen with random thoughts along the way i'm thinking about this you know i think this passage connects like this da da da and she always listens to me and nods and then she says yeah but what's the application and uh and it always jars me out of my thoughts that knowing cool stuff is just not enough and uh she's right so three applications um the identity of jesus our faith is rooted in the person of jesus in the revelation of who he is and we need to see more of who he is and ever expanding experiences in prayer in scripture and worship and this doesn't mean we seek experience for its own sake or that we go around chasing feelings for their own sake but that we should ardently seek the person of jesus and be open to experiencing him not only when he shows up but when he shows out the other takeaway for me is the lord wants to sustain us in hard times the gift of god's manifest presence whether it's subtle or overwhelming is itself all by itself a gift but it's the kindness of god to us to give us these experiences so that we can carry them with us and treasure them in our hearts later when we experience pain and suffering and hardship this doesn't mean that if god gives you an amazing experience you should know that you're about to suffer and i want to just set that aside but you should welcome these experiences and treasure them in your heart hard times will come but stay in the now these these experiences from god are sweet and important to build our faith and to shore us up when hard times come and the other takeaway for me is that our faith the faith that god creates is grown and stretched in the valley the dad who brought his son to the other disciples to be freed to see his son freed from a demon wasn't entirely without faith it's just that his faith was low and the other disciples who were there who were trying to cast the demon out after all their time with jesus and after all they saw with him even their own ministry tour where they were casting demons out themselves they had faith but not enough what matters is that jesus took the dad's faith however faith however small and did great things with it jesus asks us to put our faith however small whatever it is that we have in him in him and then watch him do what's beyond us when we use our faith like that especially in hard times it grows let me pray for us lord jesus moments with you where you're in our face radiating your glory are amazing overwhelming and we want them but we don't want the hard parts the hard parts of life lord peter was tempted to build three booths or tents or something so that everybody could hang out and just kind of stay in the moment but they had to come down off the mountain lord i ask that you tune our hearts to you the person and let us experience you the person as you really are in all your glory and amazingness but also lord let us experience you when it's hard so lord draw close to us wherever we are this morning whether it feels like we're on the mountain or in the valley draw close to us because you love to be with us in both both places and come share yourself and your presence with us we thank you amen you