

Peeking at the End

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[0:00] Now, have any of you ever flipped to the end of a book and read the last page? I know some people who do this religiously.

They pick a book off the shelf, they read the first page, and then they flip to the last page. And that's rather controversial among people who read books, but some people swear by it.

Now, I've confessed I have sometimes read something at the end of a book. About a year ago, I was reading Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. And I was absolutely engrossed by this murder mystery set in 14th century and how it was set in this ostensibly idyllic monastery.

But this monastery was filled with murders, intrigue, history, hidden labyrinths, conspiracies. And I greatly enjoyed this book, and I really savored it.

And I was slowly trying to figure out who, which one of these monks was responsible for all of these murders. But one day, I was flipping through the book, and my eyes accidentally landed on the first line of the final chapter.

[1:08] And I couldn't help but read it. And it was this, the abbey burned for three days and three nights. Now, I didn't know how the rest of the book was precisely going to turn out. But I knew something was going to happen.

I knew that this ostensibly peaceful monastery was going to burn to the ground. And even though I wanted to forget that line, I couldn't. And I enjoyed the rest of the book.

It's one of my favorite books. But I did have something in the story slightly spoiled for me. I read with new eyes. I couldn't help but read each page in light of what was coming.

And while this passage that we've just read is in many ways like we have just skipped to the end of our Bibles. Like we have read a chapter from the book of Revelation. And all of a sudden, we see Jesus in new light.

We see Him in His own glorious light. And from this point on, we cannot help but read Luke's gospel with this passage in mind. But this is a vision of the end that we don't have to cheat to get.

[2:13] It's not that we flip to the end of our Bibles and we read things out of order. Luke is putting this deliberately right here in his gospel. Right before Jesus travels to Jerusalem.

He wants us to see Jesus clothed in His majesty. You know, we would be doing Luke's gospel an injustice if we tried to forget this vision took place and just read the rest of his gospel like there was no transfiguration.

From this point on, we are supposed to read Luke's gospel with a sense of who Jesus really is. And so what I want us to do is as we look at this passage today, I want us to see this vision of Jesus.

I want us to see this vision of Jesus because it's not simply what we need as we read the rest of Luke's gospel. It's what we need to have in mind whenever we think about our Savior. And so what we're going to be doing is we're going to be looking through this passage to see three things it shows us about Jesus Christ.

Three things it reveals about our Savior. These are truths that should forever change the way we read Scripture and the way we see Jesus.

[3:30] And the first thing I want you to see, and most basically, is that here we see Jesus as God incarnate. We see Jesus as God in the flesh.

Now up to this point, Luke has spent a great deal of time telling us that Jesus is human. He gives us one of the longest accounts of Jesus' birth. He even mentions his circumcision.

He talks about how Jesus is baptized. He presents him constantly having face-to-face conversations. He's eating. He's sleeping. He's praying. And all of these things are physical.

They involve Jesus' human body. No one can read Luke's gospel and think that this is some sort of ghost or apparition. He was really and truly human.

And certainly, Luke has also been telling us that Jesus is more than human. Both we as readers and the disciples themselves, they have heard Jesus say divine words and speak with divine authority and power.

[4:37] In Luke's gospel, when Jesus says things, things happen. Things that only God can do. That only God does in Scripture. Things like still, the winds, and the waves.

He says things that only God can say. He forgives sins. But in the transfiguration, we have something different. Hear the disciples not only hear with their ears, but see with their eyes. Jesus being divine. Suddenly, Jesus' disciples wake up from their dozing prayers. And they discover his face and his clothing are changed.

They have now become dazzling white. So it's hard to look at. This is a divine glory. Jesus is blazing with uncreated light like a beacon.

He does not have a flashlight in his pocket. There is no special light show here. This is simply Jesus' face radiating. His clothes radiating. This cloud comes and engulfs Jesus and his light so that his disciples are too terrified to really draw close to him.

[5:51] This is a glory that we see described throughout the Old Testament as only belonging to God. It's the same glory that Moses glimpsed in Exodus 33 when he asked to see a portion of God's glory.

He saw the back of God on Mount Sinai. And this glory cloud is the same, shining with the same light as what entered into the tabernacle and what entered into the temple and dwelt above the mercy seat.

This is a light that only the high priest would see once per year and only after filling the entire room with incense lest he capture just too much of a glimpse of this glory.

And Peter here, he instinctively understands that this is a divine glory, which is why he responds the way he does. If you look at verse 33, Master, it is good that we come here.

Let's make three shelters. One for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for you. His reaction is precisely what you would expect from a young Jewish boy who has really mastered his Old Testament catechism.

[7:06] He knows what to do when he sees divine glory. What do you do with divine glory in the Old Testament? You put it in a tabernacle. And the word you have in your Bible is either tent or shelter, depending on the version.

That is the Greek word for tabernacle. He is proposing building a tabernacle like the Old Testament tabernacle and putting Jesus inside it. Peter wants simultaneously for this glory to dwell with him, but also to keep it slightly far away so that it doesn't destroy him, like in the tabernacle.

And yet Peter's reaction, as much as we can say it's rooted in a sort of standard Jewish understanding of things from the Old Testament, this is a pretty good answer when you're waking up sleep deprived, and if you're going to give a wrong answer, this is a good one.

But he's misunderstood things. They don't need to build a tabernacle for Jesus. He has been tabernacling with them the entire time. As it says in John 1, 14, And the word became flesh, or literally tabernacled, among us.

And we have seen his glory full of grace and truth. Jesus is tabernacling. His tabernacling is his taking on of flesh.

[8:31] He is dwelling among us. As Paul says in Philippians 2, 6, and 7, Though he was in the form of God, Jesus took the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

In other words, hiding his glory. In just a few moments, or a few minutes, this tabernacling is going to continue. The glory is going to be concealed once again.

Jesus is going to walk down the mountain with feet that are clothed, not with glory, but with dust. With calloused feet, one foot in front of another, like any other man in his day.

But just because that glory is gone from sight, doesn't mean that it's not there. From this point on, Peter, James, and John know what is behind the veil, so to speak.

They have a glimpse of who Jesus is. They have seen him as both God and man. From this point on, Jesus is going to go to Jerusalem.

[9:37] He's going to be crucified, die, and be buried. Outwardly, these three disciples are going to see everything the other disciples are going to be seeing. They're going to see Jesus put one foot in front of another.

They're going to see Jesus be nailed to a cross. They're going to see his body carried to a tomb. But for these three, it has new significance.

Jesus is going to suffer as the King of glory. He's going to be crowned not with light, but with a crown of thorns. And they understand that the Lord of life is about to be nailed to the cross and suffer the pains of death.

What we are called to do is read the gospel story like Peter, James, and John who experienced it. When you see Christ suffering on the cross, you need to know who is there suffering on your behalf.

No matter how much the glory may be obscured by the wormwood and the gall, the one who is nailed there is the one who is upholding the universe by the word of his power.

[10:50] The one that the Bible says is the one for whom and by whom all things exist. And someone like that is only on the cross because he wants to be.

The second person of the Trinity is suffering for you as a Jewish peasant mocked and jeered to his dying breath for you.

You are called to behold Jesus there in his suffering glory filled with love and wonder because of the glory that lies beneath that suffering.

And if you see that, then you will be changed. It is a vision that changed Peter. It stuck with him throughout the rest of his life. He says this in 2 Peter 1, 16-18 which he wrote as an old man.

For we do not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

[12:07] We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven for we were with him on the holy mountain. When you're walking through a forest it's actually quite difficult to walk in a straight line.

It takes a fair amount of skill to figure out how to walk in a straight line in the forest. If you're all on your own you often end up veering to one side or another and if you're in a really thick forest and it's really obscure and you're really unskilled you can even end up wandering in an entire circle.

And that's because people go through forests and they usually go from tree to tree and they just say well I'm going to go from that point to that point to that point. And they lose all sense of perspective.

The way you get through a forest is you focus on a single tree or a landmark way off in the distance and you pick that point and you walk straight towards it. When you get there you pick another point lined up just the same way and you have to be very careful.

You need something in the distance to focus on in order to not become lost. Well what we're supposed to focus on in the Christian life is our love of Christ.

[13:17] It's that which makes sense of everything everything we do everything we experience. And if you want to grow in your love of Christ then you need to focus your eyes upon His glory and upon His suffering in glory.

Because when you behold Christ's suffering in glory then you will understand that the reason Christ was there on that cross was because of His love for you.

You see in Him a love that as the Apostle says bears all things believes all things hopes all things and endures all things.

And seeing that will change you. It will stick with you just like it did with Peter. The gospel story will take on new significance new power.

Your love for your Savior will grow it will get into your bones it will begin to pour out of you. You will naturally seek to love your neighbor because of your love for Christ.

[14:20] You will love your spouse as Christ loved the church and you will love the church because the church is the apple of His eye. But if you want those things and you want to be loving to those around you you need to see His glory first.

You need to focus on that and everything else falls into place. But the second thing I want you to see in this passage is not simply Jesus as God incarnate.

I want you to see that in this passage Jesus comes as the greater Moses and Elijah. Jesus is not simply there on the mountaintop by Himself blazing with light like a lighthouse.

No, there are two other figures who appear there as well. There's Moses and Elijah. Now, why those two? This is a question that's debated a lot and perhaps it's because Jesus is the fulfillment of the law of Moses and He's also the fulfillment of the prophets.

Elijah symbolizes the prophets. That's possible. It's also possible that Moses is the premier example of a prophet and Elijah he is the example of someone who turns the hearts back to God and He brings in the new heavens and the new earth and He brings in the Messiah.

[15:40] That's also possible. I think those are perfectly reasonable explanations. I don't want to get lost in those details though. What I want you to see is that Jesus came to fulfill the work of Moses and Elijah.

He came to be a better prophet, be the ultimate prophet. Now what do prophets do? Well they reveal the will of God to His people.

They tell the people who God is and what He wants. Prophets are the one they commune with God. They come back and they tell people what He said and what they need to know.

They have God's ear and they listen to Him. They listen to every word. But the great irony of Moses and Elijah is that even though they are prophets, even though they are great legendary prophets who reveal the will of God on a daily basis, they still longed to have a greater revelation of Him than they possessed.

Their ministry, as great as it was, left them wanting more. Both wanted God to reveal Himself to them more clearly.

[16:55] Now this mountaintop transfiguration is what Moses and Elijah have been looking for their entire earthly lives. They have been longing and hoping for this moment.

Both are men who wanted to meet God more fully. Now Moses seems to have been interested very much in seeing God. God. Hebrews 11, 27 says this, By faith he left Egypt not being afraid of the anger of the king for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

His eyes were focused on the invisible God. And then in Exodus 33, as we read, Moses takes his shot and he asks, Can I see you? Can I see your glory?

Can I have a glimpse of the glory of this invisible God? Now Elijah is very similar. At the lowest point of his life, when he is despairing of Israel, ever turning back to God, he goes into the wilderness, he travels to Mount Horeb and he wants to meet with God and to speak with Him.

They both hid in caves on the same mountain. They may have even hidden in the same cave. And Moses saw the glory of God pass by obliquely and in part.

[18:17] Elijah heard God come in a low whisper, not in thunder and lightning. Both of them came out of the cave with their faces covered to make sure that they don't get too much of a glimpse of this glory.

And so both of them can say partially their wish has been granted. Moses is able to go away saying that he has seen the back of God. Elijah is able to go away saying that he has heard God whisper. But as wonderful and powerful as both of those experiences were, this passage is greater. And it's really the true fulfillment of all of their hopes and prayers. On this mountain, in this transfiguration, Moses is able to say, not only have I seen God's back, but I have seen God's face.

I have seen the face of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God of God, light of light, very God of very God. And Elijah, he is now able to say, not only have I heard God in a low whisper, but I have heard him with a clear voice.

For I have spoken and had a face-to-face conversation with the Word of God himself. Jesus is what both of them have been hoping to see and hear all this time.

[19:41] And it's finally fulfilled on this mountain. And this is because Jesus is our true prophet. He reveals the will of God to us.

Indeed, he reveals God himself to us in a way that is far superior than any other prophet and leaves no one wanting anything. He reveals the will of the Father as the Son who has dwelt with him in perfect communion from eternity past.

And he comes with a greater recommendation than any other prophet. Moses and Elijah, they both had, they came with signs. And Jesus comes with signs too. He has great signs, wonderful signs, more than Moses and Elijah put together.

But, Jesus comes not only with signs but with the very words of God the Father blasting from heaven, this is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him.

In Deuteronomy 18.15 it describes what a prophet does. God says he will send a prophet and says you will listen to him. This is the fulfillment of that as well.

[20:52] Because whenever you hear anything Jesus say, you can take that as definitionally, literally, the word of God.

Because he is God. Unlike any other prophet. And so Jesus, God in the flesh, he came to reveal God to us as the prophet to whom all other prophets pointed to and longed for.

And you can see this in one other thing I want you to see in the passage. It's how he's described as performing Moses' work. There's one other word besides tabernacle which is kind of hidden under the Greek and it's in verse 31.

It says that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about his departure. Most of your Bibles are going to have a little footnote there and at the bottom it's going to say that's the word Exodus. That's the word Exodus in the Greek.

Moses and Elijah are speaking to Jesus about how he will perform the greater Exodus. How much more important and magnificent his work is than their small, feeble foreshadowings.

[22:05] The Exodus was never about simply moving the people of Israel from one location to another and all the logistical challenges that that involved.

The Exodus is about more than logistics. It pointed forward to a greater new Exodus performed by Christ himself. And Jesus is going to come down from that mountain, he is going to enter into the land of death, and then go into the land of life in his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. And it is through that work that we are saved from our slavery to sin and we are brought into a new promised land of the kingdom of God. And when we are saved and when we are baptized, we follow him as through the Red Sea.

We are baptized into his death and we are raised with him into life. And all of this was foreshadowed by Moses. And there are so many other glimpses that you can get of Christ's work in the Old Testament.

Seeing Jesus as the greater Moses and Elijah should make us read our Bibles more carefully. You know, particularly the Old Testament. When we open up our Bibles and we turn to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy or whatever obscure Old Testament book we do, we need to realize we are not entering into hostile territory.

[23:35] We're not even entering into alien territory. We are not uncomfortable houseguests in a foreign land. We are reading Christian books. And these are books that are about Christ, written by people who longed to see Christ and hoped that he would come soon.

Jesus comes fulfilling everything that has come before. And so we should listen to him. We are called to listen to his words in the Gospels knowing that it is the fulfillment of God's plan from eternity past and that has been performed from Adam all the way through the Old Testament. And Jesus comes fulfilling it all. There's nowhere else we should go except to Jesus. He has the words of eternal life.

To whom else shall we go? But there's the final thing that I want us to see in this passage. It's that Jesus comes as he, we can see Jesus as he will come again.

This is Jesus as he will appear on the final day when he shall come riding on the clouds. The first time he came he took the form of a servant hiding his glory, putting it aside so to speak.

[24:53] But now he has been exalted above all others. The Father has declared that the Son is the Son and he is worthy of all praise and honor

and glory forever and ever.

He now appears in glory and splendor. A glory that was his from eternity past and yet it is given to him by the Father after he has performed his mediatorial work.

No one can mistake Jesus anymore for a poor Jewish peasant. Because now you will notice him on the final day and he shall come to judge the world and rescue his people as he is in this passage. On that day he shall appear clothed in majesty. Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. And Christian, what we have in this passage is Jesus how you will worship him for the rest of eternity.

This is who you will stand before. This is who you will worship. This is who you will seek to glorify every single day for the rest of your life. This is who you will give an account to.

[26:06] Now what does a vision like that entail? Well, this is either a wonderful vision or a terrifying vision. You look to Revelation. The book of Revelation is a kind of scary book for some people.

My grandmother was blind and she was actually scared of the book of Revelation because she would hear this and she had no idea what any of this involved. She was kind of scared by the book. That's a sort of typical reaction in many ways.

Many of us, if we saw the glory of Jesus and he just was right here at this moment, we would fall down and we would be quite literally terrified. This is the reaction of Isaiah. He falls down when he has the vision of God in the temple.

He says, Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips because he understands he is a sinner in the sight of God. He is just and deserving of his displeasure. But, if you are in Jesus Christ, if you are clothed in his blood, if you are washed in him, this sight is no longer terrifying.

It becomes the most wonderful sight in the world. This is the sight of your Savior. This is the sight of your Savior who has come to save you here on earth.

[27:14] It is the sight of your Savior who bled and died for you. The glory of the Lamb now blazing in all of its fullness. One of the great ways that the church has talked about our future hope as Christians is saying that we hope to see something.

The \$10 word is the beatific vision. But what it really is is we see Jesus Christ and we see him in his glory and we behold him to which for whom we have been made and to which our hearts are constantly drawn and we find our fullness in beholding him, praising him, and worshipping him forevermore.

In heaven, what do you expect to find? I expect we're going to find many wonderful things. But the Lamb, he is the glory of Emmanuel's land.

He is the chief and greatest pleasure. He is the one to whom we are to direct our entire lives, the one to whom we desire to go. And we are this day operating as pilgrims.

But we're pilgrims heading home, desiring to see this vision. And we need to have it. Because when everything else seems to get grim and dark, we become like the psalmist in Psalm 73, where the psalmist confesses that I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[28:50] Because the arrogant and the wicked, they seem not to suffer. They seem to be able to get away with anything. What solves the psalmist's problem though in that psalm? It's that he goes into the sanctuary.

And he goes into the sanctuary and then he says, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their ends. But what we are called to do is we are called to come into church, to gather together and to focus our eyes upon Jesus Christ.

To have a longer view as we walk through the forest of this world and to focus on Jesus Christ. And once we see him, everything else falls into place. The troubles that we face year after year seem to melt away because the glory of Christ is so bright.

It doesn't always mean that it makes it easier. But it does give us comfort in the midst of suffering. And we are called to go through this life as pilgrims focusing upon the glory of our Savior to come. I want to close. I want you just to consider for a moment that do you want to see Jesus? Do you want to see his glory?

[30:10] And if you do, then you must behold his glory first by faith. You know, we have seen the glory of Jesus Christ. As it says in John 1, 14, we

have seen Jesus full of grace and truth.

faith. We have seen him by faith. And a day is coming when faith shall be sight. But you need the faith first.

A day is coming when we will know him not in part but in full. And if you desire Jesus Christ, you will know true joy and lasting pleasure.

You will know the joy of Jesus Christ. He is the fountain of fountains. Everything good is in him. So we are called not to look anywhere else in this life.

Be careful where your eyes go. Don't have them go to the right or to the left. Be careful what you find drawing your eyes. And when you find your eyes moving to the things of this world, focus them back upon Jesus and upon the conviction that his glory is better and it is more wonderful and it is what we truly need.

[31:26] And we shall one day see him and we shall see our Savior face to face. Amen. Let us pray.