

“THE GLORY OF THE LORD”
Exodus 24:12-18, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9
February 18 & 19, 2023 Transfiguration Sunday

“There was a little boy who had a problem; a bully was harassing him. Every day he went to school, and the bully would beat him up. Some of his friends were telling him what to do. They gave him a lot of different advice. One friend told him to try another route home, but the bully found out about that route and still beat him up.

“Another friend suggested that the little boy carry a stick. He carried the stick. The bully caught up with him, took the stick away, and then beat him with it. Everything the boy tried to get rid of the bully did not work.

“One day he was walking to school - terrified. Out jumped the bully with his fists clenched and getting ready to pounce on the boy. The youngster beckoned to the bully and said, ‘Come on. I’m ready.’

“The bully couldn’t believe this young man, all of a sudden got some guts. ‘Come on. Come on you bully. I’ll take you right now.’

“Aggravated, the bully started toward the boy intending to pummel him. All of a sudden, out stepped the boy’s father from behind the bush. He was 6’10” and 275 lbs.

“The bully looked up in shock and uttered, ‘Oh no.’

“See, the closer you are to the Father, the closer you are to your Daddy, the more the bully called the Devil will have to leave you alone. If your daddy’s staying home because you don’t want to be close to Him, don’t be surprised if the Devil wears you out day in and day out.”¹

In the book of Exodus, we read how the Israelites had become slaves in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh. They had first come to Egypt at the invitation of Joseph, son of Jacob, who had become the Pharaoh’s #1 man in all of Egypt. Joseph had called his whole family to come to Egypt in order that they might endure the severe famine that had affected the whole region for two years. But it

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 166-167, #501)

had five more years to go, so the whole clan of Jacob went to Egypt to escape the famine. And God prospered the people while they were in Egypt so that the Israelites became a large nation within Egypt. However, after Joseph died, another Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, came into power and he was the one who enslaved the Israelites because they had become so numerous. That Pharaoh had become the bully, tormenting and beating the people of Israel.

Yet, God drew near to His people and delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh through miraculous plagues. The power and majesty of God was displayed to all the Egyptians and to Pharaoh, so the people of Israel were allowed to leave Egypt. Even when Pharaoh decided to pursue the Israelites, God delivered them from the hand of Egypt by drowning all of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. God's miraculous deliverance gave freedom to the Israelites.

All along their way from Egypt to the land God had promised to give to them, God had guided them in a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. The intimacy that the people had with God enabled them to overcome many trials and struggles along the way, and God's presence was shown to them each day. He provided for them and protected them as they followed His commands. As they stayed close to the Lord, their Father in Heaven, the people of Israel were saved from the bullies all around them.

So when they reached Mt. Sinai, east of the Gulf of Aqaba, in the land of Midian, God displayed His presence to the people in the sign of a consuming fire (Ex. 24:17) atop of the mountain. Thick clouds covered the mountain and the voice of God sounded like thunder. There God gave Moses the 10 Commandments and the laws of life for the people to abide by, so that they could thrive as His people.

God was giving the people a sign of His glory so that they would obey His commands and follow His ways. God wanted to so imprint His glory on the hearts of the people that they would never leave His ways, but remain faithful to Him always. It was a chance for God to show everyone how great He was and the value of having a close relationship with Him. For who would ever want to come up against a nation who had the Almighty God as their protector and provider? Who in their right mind

would want to go against anyone who had God as their Father? God showed His glory on the mountain in order to remind the people of Israel of how He saved them from the bullies in Egypt and the surrounding lands that they traveled through, and how He would continue to protect them and provide for them if only they sought Him as their God and followed Him. It demanded intimacy with God.

Sadly, however, the event did not stick in the hearts of the people. God's deeds of miraculous deliverance, provision and sustenance were quickly forgotten, and the people began reverting to worshipping the idols that they had become accustomed to in their 430 years in Egypt. They gave up their allegiance to the Almighty God and paid homage to lifeless, man-made images of stone or metal or wood. Even as Moses was up on the Mountain getting the 10 Commandments, the people were reverting back to their own ways of worshipping the gods of Egypt.

And as we look throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, we see the people, over and again, struggle to remaining faithful to God. And we see them become bullied over and over again when they turned away from God and His ways. But when they turned back to God, He delivered them once more.

And lest we criticize those people, claiming that they were faithless and stupid to return to their rebellion against God's ways, it is easy for us to see it happening in our own world today. God manifests His glory to us, and yet we quickly turn away from Him, too. When one generation experiences God's protection and provision, another one comes along and questions what the first generation experienced. Was it God? Or was it just the hard work and diligence of the people who lived during that generation? Was it luck, or coincidence? We are quick to displace God from our society and turn from Him, only to rely upon our own strength and wisdom and find ourselves becoming victims of the bullies of this world. (Just a quick side note - when anyone describes a miraculous event as a coincidence, just tell them that a "coincidence" is where God shows up to deal with that situation.)

But we have to admit that we are "show me" people. Unless God's glory is shown to us in our own lives, it is easy for us to begin to question, or even dispel, the events of those in the past. It is easy for us to disregard the other times when God showed up to deliver His people when we don't have it

happen to us. Just like Thomas, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus (John 20:24-29) questioning His resurrection, we often need to see it for ourselves before we really come to believe it.

Fortunately, God recognized our foolishness and decided to provide us with another living example of His glory. Listen to the account of how God's glory was once again manifested to His people. This is Matthew 17:1-9 (READ Matthew 17:1-9).

Now, when the glory of the Lord surrounds a person, I guarantee that it will change your concept of that person. Peter, James, and John never looked at Jesus quite the same after they saw Him transfigured in His glory before them on the mountain top. They had never seen anything like that before, and would never see anything like that again on this earth. Jesus glowing as bright as the sun and His clothes radiating as white as light (Matt. 17:2) would certainly have surprised the three disciples. So taken by the event was Peter that he wanted to have the event continue. So he offered to build three shelters right there, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. To be in the full presence of the glory of God is a powerful, life-changing experience. To hear God the Father proclaim that Jesus was His Son whom He loved (Matt. 17:5), and then the command to listen to Him, would certainly have made anyone fall to the ground terrified.

You see, the three disciples thought they had figured out who Jesus really was after spending three years with Him. They were convinced that He was going to become the new King of Israel, and with all of the marvelous powers He was showing - miraculously feeding thousands of people with just a simple meal, healing the sick, and even raising the dead - the three disciples were ready to parade Jesus into Jerusalem and then stand before the Romans and beckon them, "Come on, you bullies. We're ready for you! We'll take you right now!" They saw Jesus as the next deliverer who would save Israel from all her oppressors. But what they missed was who Jesus really was, and what He truly intended to do for the people of Israel. Peter, James and John had not yet fully come to grips with the fact that Jesus had come for the entire world, not as a new political leader, or military leader, but a Savior who would bring greater deliverance from the separation from God because of sin.

While Jesus was confirming His missional reason to be on earth, speaking to Moses and Elijah, the disciples were in awe of the presence of God's glory. Who was this man they called Master? Much like the Israelites standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the disciples were overwhelmed by the full presence of the Lord our God emanating from Jesus. Being so close, would they be killed? Would being in the presence of God Himself terminate their lives? It's no wonder that they trembled with great fear. Very few people survive standing in the presence of the Lord God Almighty. The only way that they could find faith again was to have Jesus touch them and tell them not to be afraid.

Yet, the hardest part of the whole experience was when they were on their way down the mountain and Jesus tells them "*Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the son of Man has been raised from the dead*" (Matt. 7:9). These three disciples would have been so pumped up by seeing Jesus in all of His glory, they could hardly wait to tell the others what they missed. It could have been a real source of jealousy among the disciples when the others heard what they didn't get to experience. So rather than have a division come between the disciples, again, He told them to keep it secret about what they had experienced UNTIL after His resurrection.

You know how hard it would have been to keep that quiet? These three disciples had just experienced Jesus' true person, the Son of God in all His radiance and glory. They had been right there, in front row seats, becoming overwhelmed by the greatness of Jesus as the Messiah. The rest of the disciples only experienced Jesus by being near Him and hearing His teachings and watching His miracles. But the people outside of the 12 were only able to see Jesus at a distance. While they may have believed in Him, it would not have been such a tremendous experience. Depending upon the closeness of our relationship to Jesus determines the intimacy that we have with Him and the difference it makes upon our lives.

It works like this. Several years ago, three of the Sr. High youth and a few others of us, went out to Buffalo, New York, on a mission trip. On our Wednesday afternoon excursion, we decided to go to Niagara Falls. The Falls were first visible from the highway as we drove toward the observation

platform. Now we were on the American side of the Niagara River, but we could see both falls very clearly. WOW! What a magnificent spectacle of nature! It was clearly one of God's marvelous creations here on the earth.

But we soon arrived at the observation area. As soon as we got out of the van, we could hear the roar of the falls. And as we made our way to the observation deck, all of us were just in awe of the power and magnitude of the falls. The amount of water pouring over the cliff was just amazing. We were surrounded by the ongoing roar of the water dropping into the basin of the river, cascading over all of the rocks on the American side. Simply breathtaking to see both the American Falls and Horseshoe Falls from the observation decks overlooking each one of them.

But the group decided that we wanted to get closer, so we paid for the chance to go right at the foot of the American Falls. We were directed through a tunnel that got us right up to the water's edge, so close, in fact, that the river was showering the platform that we were on. That close to the river's edge got us all soaked because we were right up close and personal. We were literally in touch with the water of the Niagara River, looking up to see the water pouring over the edge of the falls, being overwhelmed by the sound, and soaked by the power of the water.

Similarly, how much of Jesus we experience is determined by how close we choose to get to Him. His impact in our lives is determined by the level of our intimacy that we choose with Jesus. The closer we get to Him, the more we experience His glory and His power and His majesty. But if we remain at a distance, we are never touched by the magnitude of His presence. If we never get close to Jesus, we will never experience His overwhelming love for us, and our lives will remain untouched by Him.

The three disciples, Peter, James, and John, were forever changed by this event being with Jesus on the mountain when He was transfigured before them. Peter relates the account in his second letter to the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. He says, "*For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we*

were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 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 mountain" (2 Peter 1:16-18).

The experience changed Peter's life, enabling him to have the power to live as a witness of Jesus the rest of his life. And that experience was magnified by the resurrection of Jesus three days after His crucifixion. So when the Holy Spirit came into the disciples at Pentecost, the presence of the Lord so filled their lives that no matter what they faced after that, they would NEVER deny the authority and Lordship of Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the world. The glory of God given to each one of them enabled them to powerfully proclaim to all the people that Jesus is the Lord of all.

So it is not surprising to hear that when arrested as followers of Jesus, none of the disciples denied Jesus as the Christ. They all endured tremendous abuse and persecution and even torture and death, remaining faithful to Jesus because of what they had seen and heard. The experience of the glory of God manifested before them, gave them the strength to overcome all the bullies of the world, to the point that their witness changed the lives of even their persecutors and spread the faith in Jesus around the world.

And it continues to happen even today that the people who deliberately seek the presence of the Lord our God find revivals happening. "Just this last Wednesday at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, during a required chapel service, students heard a sermon about God's love preached from Romans 12. Afterwards some of the young people lingered to pray and share testimonies, and that began to transform into something that has now been underway for 100 plus hours and counting.

"Students are experiencing God's presence, confessing and repenting of sin, sharing testimonies of their encounters with Jesus the Risen Christ, and hungering for more of His presence to consume them and fellow students on campus.

"One Asbury student testified, 'Worshippers stayed all night. No one person was in charge. No

one dared to get in the way of what God was doing. Reconciliation, forgiveness and healing were in this place.” And the revival continues! Could this move of God among the people come even here in this place? Could God’s presence so fill this church that every heart and soul here would be filled with the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Could God begin a revival right here in Sheboygan, too, preparing the people for the glory of the Lord? Could we, too, have a great transformation of the peoples beginning right here in this place so that God would receive glory, honor and praise?

It all starts with prayer, with the hearing of God’s Word, with the conviction of sin upon the hearts of the people as they witness the glory of God present to all of us. This was the intention of Jesus manifesting Himself in all of His glory to on the top of the mountain when Peter, James, and John saw Him shining in all of His radiance. They were never the same after that, and I pray that God would move here in this place so that we, too, may find the glory of God here in this place, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let’s pray.

Father God, Lord of lords, King of kings, Creator of the world and all that is, You are worthy of our praise and honor. You are the One who has given us the breath of life. You are the One who has called us to follow You. And You are the One who has promised to go with and guide those who diligently seek after You. But we have forsaken Your will and Your ways, to the point of outright rejection of You. We are all filled with sin in our lives through word and deeds. We all have failed to follow You as You would want us to live. Yet, You have not given up on us. You sent Your Son, Jesus to become our Messiah, the perfect One who takes away the sins of the world for those who trust in Him and claim Him as their Savior. Through Him we have life. Through Him we have forgiveness and reconciliation. Through Him we have hope for eternal life. And then You sent Your Holy Spirit to us, to convict us of our sins and to empower us to live as witnesses to the world of Your love and grace. Oh, God, come fill this place with Your Holy Spirit so that we might turn to You once more and find real life as Your people. Come, empower us so that we may gather more people to You as we share Your glory with the world. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.