

**Don't Get Discouraged that You Don't See God's Glory Now!**

Neuschwanstein is the world's most famous castle. It rises from the top of a mountain high in the Bavarian Alps. From the parking lot to the castle is a one mile walk up a steep grade. If I showed you a picture of Neuschwanstein you would recognize it instantly. It was in the 1968 movie, "Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang." It was also the inspiration for the Cinderella castle at the center of Disneyland and Disneyworld. I have toured Neuschwanstein twice and was in awe each time. It literally was a mountain top experience.

No castle on earth, however, even comes close to the majesty and glory that Peter, James and John saw at the top of the Mountain of Transfiguration. As Jesus was about to begin his final walk to Jerusalem, he took his three closest disciples to the top of a mountain. When they got to the top, Jesus prayed. The three disciples – tired after the long, uphill hike and probably a little lightheaded at the higher elevation – fell asleep. They woke up with a start and may have thought for a split second that they were dreaming. For the only time in his earthly life, Jesus let his divine nature step in front of his human nature. He no longer looked like a human, but like God. It wasn't that a spotlight was shining on him, but that he, himself, was shining. He was the source of light that was whiter than white and brighter than bright. As the disciples they noticed the great Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah. It was a glimpse of heavenly glory, quite literally a mountaintop experience.

Luke usually begins a narrative with, "And it happened (And it came to pass) ..." But here, he began by saying (28), "**About eight days after Jesus said this.**" Said what? Eight days earlier, Jesus told his disciples that he was going to be rejected, arrested and killed. Yikes! Peter told Jesus not to have such negative thoughts and Jesus scowled at him (Matthew 16:23), "**Get behind me, Satan!**" Double yikes! For eight days there was a bit of a gloomy cloud over those disciples. Above the clouds at the top of the mountain, though, things were bright and glorious. THIS was what Peter and the others wanted to see. THIS was the glory of God on this earth. It's not surprising that Peter blurted out (:33), "**Master** (mighty commander), **it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah.**"

If I was next to Peter, I would have shouted, "Amen!" I, also, want to see God's glory on this earth. I want visible proof of Bible truth. I want to see God's glory and power in people's lives. I want to see:

- Every member in church every Sunday and on Wednesday nights for Lenten worship, too.
- Every member sharing the gospel in their daily lives.
- Every service with first time visitors who quickly ask for membership classes so they can join our church.
- Every service adorned with moving music led by lots of instruments and a huge choir.
- Every Bible class with standing room only.
- Every husband and wife loving and cherishing each other.

- Every parent joyfully and eagerly meeting their children's needs.
- Every child respecting and honoring their parents and teachers.
- Every child getting a quality Christian education from pre-school through college and a good number of them becoming pastors and teachers.
- Overflowing offerings for our next building project because we don't have enough room.
- Volunteers begging to help in some way.
- A society where all the laws follow the morality of the 10 Commandments.
- Every member enjoying perfect health and happiness.
- (and, please) No more funerals.

Are any of these things bad? Is it wrong to want to see such things? I want what is best for God's people and his kingdom. I want to see God's glory shine.

What I see, however, is:

- A membership and attendance that has plateaued and even declined a little over my 20 years of ministry here.
- Empty pews and excuses for not coming to worship and not getting themselves and their children deeper into God's Word.
- Members complaining about other members.
- Marriages and families struggling to survive.
- Broken hearts and shattered dreams.
- Never ending health problems and aging bodies.
- Death knocking on many doors.

And no matter how hard I and others work and pray, I can't fix it all. It's easy to get frustrated. I agree with Peter. I want to see God's glory, but what I see is not so glorious.

That is especially true when I look in the mirror. Instead of someone greeting each day with joy to know Christ and share his love, I see someone who is:

- Quick to complain.
- Upset that people do not see things my way and do what I want them to do.
- Distracted that many turn their backs on God and his Word and his will.
- Lack of patience and trust in God to work out all things for good in his way and at his time.
- Wimpy prayers instead of bold petitions for God's kingdom.
- Worry and pessimism.
- A frail body that does not do what I want it to do.
- A pharisee who thinks that he is better than others.
- A sinner getting closer to death day after day.

I could go on and on. When I look in the mirror, I see the same thing that Peter saw when he looked in his mirror and what you see when you look in your mirror.

You know what it feels like:

- To be discouraged.
- To feel insecure, insignificant and unimportant.
- To be frustrated with things in your life and at church.
- To feel guilty for the times you did not give God first place in your hearts and lives.
- To hurt because of the way others have treated or neglected you.

- To be disappointed with your many mistakes and failures.
- To be broken hearted at the death of a loved one.
- To be distressed about failing health and your impending death.

Where's the glory? Like Peter, we want to see some affirmation, some reminder, some tangible proof that God is loving and good. We would like it very much if Jesus gave us the best possible life until death, or even a life that somehow avoided death. What Peter blurted out is in all of our hearts. We want to see and feel God's glory and power. Luke tells us, though, that Peter (:33), "**did not know what he was saying.**" Once again, if Peter had kept his mouth shut and thought before he spoke, he would have realized that asking the Lord for heaven on earth was a terrible idea!

It's so easy to miss the good news in this Transfiguration story. Jesus is perfect and glorious. The Father gave him a ringing endorsement and praise. Good for Jesus. But we are not good and glorious and we can not get that glory no matter how hard we try or beg. Where is the good news for us in this story? Where is the glory? Luke explained that after the Father spoke, the disciples saw Jesus was all alone again. No more Moses and Elijah. No more radiant beams from his holy face. Simply Jesus looking like a mere mortal. The overarching theme through all of the lessons and hymns, prayers and praises of this Sunday is, "Glory Uncovered – When it is most hidden, it is most on display." Huh?

After that momentary glimpse of glory on that magnificent mountain, Jesus once again let his divinity hide behind his humanity. Jesus' true glory is not seen in a dazzling display of divinity. Jesus' true glory is seen in him becoming fully human so that he could be our substitute and die the death we deserved. Jesus' true glory is seen in the way he walked away from the Mount of Transfiguration and walked toward Mount Calvary. Jesus did not let Peter set up any shelters where we could visit like tourists and see God's glory because Jesus was on a mission to be our Savior from sin and death. Jesus did not come to give us the best possible life on earth until death or a life that somehow avoided death. He came to give us life after death with a glorified body in heaven. The only way for Jesus to be our Savior was to let the Jews arrest him, abuse him and falsely accuse him. The only way for Jesus to be our Savior was to let Pilate cave in to the cruel crowd and condemn him to death, even death on a cross.

As we journey through Lent, we are going to see Jesus stricken, smitten and afflicted; beat up and brutalized; the flesh ripped off of his back and spikes pounded through his limbs. We are going to see Jesus forsaken by his friends and his Father. We are going to see sweat and spittle and blood drip down his face. Jesus is not going to look very glorious. We are going to hear him scream, but not in pain. We are going to hear him scream with joy, "It is finished." He saved you. He completed the plan of salvation. Nothing more needs to be done. Your guilt is gone. Your sins are forgiven. Death is not the end of life, but a doorway to another world that is far more glorious than you could ever imagine. Jesus' glory as our Savior is far greater than any bright beams on any magnificent mountain. Transfiguration shows us Jesus' "double glory" (as we will sing in our final hymn). Yes, Jesus is true God. That is pretty glorious. But the greater glory is the fact that Jesus would set his divine power and glory aside in order to suffer and die for worthless sinners like you and me. The glory of salvation is much more glorious than what Peter, James and John saw on that mountain top.

Before Peter spoke, he should have listened, God the Father said (:35), "**This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.**" Listen to Jesus. Luke tells us that Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about (:31) "**his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.**" A footnote in your Bible says that the word "departure" is the Greek word "exodus." The word exodus refers to the road out. It reminds us of Israel's way out of Egypt. The word exodus here refers to Jesus' departure from this world—his death, resurrection, and ascension—by which he has paved the way for you and me to leave the hard labor and bitter bondage of our captivity to sin and to escape the wilderness of this world to our heavenly promised land. If Peter and the others would have paid attention, they would have heard what was going to happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. Indeed, throughout his entire ministry, Jesus kept telling his disciples that he was going to suffer and die.

Instead of taking a tourist trip to the top of a mountain in Palestine hoping to get a glimpse of God's glory, listen to Jesus. Listen to him again and again and never stop listening. It is only through God's Word – the message of salvation through Jesus Christ – that we can experience any true and lasting glory. Double and redouble your commitment to spending quality and quantity time with God's Word here at church and in your homes. When the Devil suggests that you and your children already know enough about the Bible or that your faith is strong enough, tell him to go back to where he belongs. Challenge yourself to go deeper into God's Word more often. Come to our Lenten services. If you need a ride, let me know. We'll find you one. If you can not make a service on a Sunday or Wednesday, watch it online. For the good of your immortal soul, God urges you, "Listen to him!"

Ever since sin came into the world, life has been discouraging for every single human being. Life is not simple or easy for anyone, including and especially for God's people. God's greatest glory is not seen in dazzling displays of grandeur or even in beautiful scenes in nature. God's greatest glory is here with us, but it is a glory that is hidden, a glory that we can not always see. Again, the theme of our service is that when God's glory is most hidden, it is most on display. It's easy to miss it. The glory of salvation is hidden in plain sight. The glory of salvation is in the simple words of the Bible (read or said or sung), the gentle splash of baptism, the savory taste of wheat and wine. Right here and right now, we have something far more glorious than what Peter, James and John saw. We have the greater glory of salvation.

Each and every one of you is living proof of the power of God's grace. Each and every one of you is glorious through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no halo over your head and your skin does not glow. To my mortal eyes, you do not look so glorious. Through the eyes of faith, all of you are glowing. God calls you his chosen child. Because of what Jesus did, God declares you to be a glorious saint bound for the promised land. Yes, there will be times when you hurt and are confused; times when we will stumble into sin and struggle with sadness; times when spiritual apathy will take control. It's easy to get discouraged. Life is not always so glorious, but you are on the path to endless glory and delight where each day will be greater than the day before it without end. Listen to Jesus. Do not let go of him. Don't get discouraged that you don't see God's glory now because you will see your Savior forever in heaven. Amen.