

Introduction

It was Sunday morning a number of years ago. The Grace Community Church worship services were being broadcast on the radio. Dean Mertins was called on to give some announcements that morning, and the thought of being on the radio made him extremely nervous. Right before he went to the mic to speak, Pastor Ted Groves leaned over to him and spoke into his ear. His words were these: "Don't blow it!"

As we have been studying the last several weeks through Matthew 16 and now we enter Matthew 17, we look at Peter and we see a man that had some important things right. He rightly recognized Jesus to be the Christ the Son of the living God. And at that point it seems he could have used the Ted Groves' warnings: "Don't blow it!" and "don't say anything stupid!" For right after he made that glorious declaration, he blew it royally. He repudiated the idea that Messiah would suffer and be killed. He even rebuked Jesus. But that was only one of Peter's colossal blunders. We find another this morning as we consider the glorious transfiguration of Jesus.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

Rightly had Peter recently recognized and declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. But there was still a lot to learn. As Messiah, Jesus would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, and he would be killed before being raised from the dead. And there is more. Peter had declared Jesus was also the Son of God, but he did not fully recognize what that meant either. Along with James and John, Jesus took Peter up on a high mountain to give him a glimpse of glory that would leave an indelible stamp upon his mind and heart. What they would experience would demonstrate before them three compelling features of what it means to be the Son of God.

First, we see . . .

I. Glory. The Son of God possesses the glory of God.

A. Jesus manifested that glory on a mountain. He took Peter, James, and John with him up a high mountain by themselves. These words direct our minds to several pivotal events in the Old Testament which occurred on mountains. Moses was keeping flocks in the wilderness and came to the MOUNTAIN of God. There he encountered a bush that burned yet was not consumed. Out of the bush God called to him identifying himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. Later, Israel gathered at the foot of that same MOUNTAIN to meet God. The glory of God was manifest in clouds and fire and smoke and the Lord came down to the top of the mountain. Moses ascended the mountain alone to be with God. The magnificent glory of God made the people tremble with fear. Nearly 600 years later, Elijah the prophet ascended MOUNT Carmel. The prophets of Baal had prepared a sacrifice and had spent all day calling on their god to no avail. Elijah repaired the altar and prepared the sacrifice, dousing it with water, and called upon the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel to make it known that he is God. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water. And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." Each of these mountain-top events identify God with great glory.

Now here is Jesus bringing with him Peter, James, and John alone. And here we have a display of divine glory. An overwhelming brightness shines through Jesus. It is as of fire. It is as bright as the sun. And yet he is not consumed. His face shines like the sun and his clothes become white as light. He is radiant with a display of visible glory. The point? The Son of God possesses the glory of God.

B. Moses and Elijah appear and are talking with Jesus. The Moses that ascended Sinai to speak with God and the Elijah that ascended Carmel to cry out for and witness the demonstration that the Lord is God are now here on the mountain talking with Jesus. Jesus had visited them from heaven when they walked the earth, and now that God the Son is walking on the earth as a human, they have come from heaven to visit with him. This is a powerful and wonderful testimony that Jesus is the one to whom they pointed. The law and the prophets point to Jesus as both Messiah and Son

of God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel with whom they communed.

C. The excitement of the disciples is pulsating. Peter cannot contain his fervor. He blurts out, "Lord, it is good that we are here!" But Peter is about to blow it. He is about to say something stupid. He is about to betray that though he recognizes Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, he still does not really get what that means. He offers to make 3 tents, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The feast of tabernacles was at hand, and this may be why Peter thought of putting up a tent, but at any rate he places Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the same level. And that is called, "blowing it." So while he was still speaking, an directive came from heaven itself. It said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him."

Moses displeased God. Elijah displeased God. But Jesus alone never displeased the Father. His glory is manifest in his absolute perfection of character. He never failed to keep God's law. He alone was completely perfect and pure always doing the will of the Father. He far supercedes Moses and the prophets. The glory of God is made known in the face of Christ. The law and the prophets direct us to Jesus. We must listen to Him.

The writer of Hebrews nails it with these words: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

That name is Son. Jesus is the Son of God. He possesses the glory of God. He is the radiance of his glory and the exact imprint of his nature. Moses was an amazing man by God's grace. And Elijah an outstanding prophet, also by God's grace. And the Jews had the highest regard for them both.

But neither of them created the world. They were not the radiance of the glory of God. That is Jesus and Jesus alone.

D. When the disciples heard the voice from heaven, they fell on their faces and were terrified. Likewise, when God spoke from Mount Sinai, the Israelites were afraid and trembled. When God responded on Mount Carmel, the people fell on their faces saying, "the Lord, he is God." The disciples are still absorbing what it means that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and their response is appropriate. They are in awe. They have encountered holiness. Like Isaiah before the vision of God in the temple, they have sensed their uncleanness. Their view of the majesty and glory of Jesus is expanding, and a fear engulfs their hearts. To be the Son of the living God means to possess the glory of the living God.

The disciples saw the glory of God in the person of Christ. And its first work is to seize human hearts with conviction. Isaiah gasped, "Woe is me, for I am undone." You and I need to recognize that same glory. We cannot fathom the beauty, the weight, the purity of the holiness and glory of God. If we were to come face-to-face with Christ in his unmitigated glory, we would be seized with the same sense as the disciples. It is a glory so intense that the Bible depicts Christ's enemies on the run in the day of judgment calling on rocks to fall upon them to hide them from him. They would rather be crushed by rocks than be laid bare to the intensity of his glorious splendor. To grasp Jesus as the Son of God is to grasp him as God the Son. The Son of God is not a creation of the Father, he is the eternal son of the Father. He possess the same power, the same essence, the same holiness, and the same glory. Fall before him in awe. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord Jesus the glory due his name; worship him in the splendor of holiness. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father. Listen to him.

Being the Son of God means possessing the glory of God, but it also means manifesting the mercy of God ... so secondly notice with me ...

II. Mercy.

The disciples fell on their faces and were terrified. But verses 7-8 pack a powerful dose of assurance and relief. "But Jesus came and touched them,

saying, 'Rise and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only."

Jesus touched them. The hands that broke bread and fish and fed thousands now reached forth to them. The hands that had embraced lepers and lame now extended to fearful hearts. Touching is an expression of genuine care and affection. We are refraining from touching each other during this time of viral pandemic. We are practicing social distancing. But normally touching is not just to be allowed, it is to be encouraged. New Testament letters contain encouragements to greet one another with a holy kiss. Touching is a physical expression of endearment. When Jesus touched the disciples, he was communicating comfort. He was communicating love. He was communicating with his hands what his words were also saying. He was communicating that even when their hearts had come to recognize more deeply how great is his glory and intense is his holiness, he would not be distancing himself from them. He was as close as ever.

And what he was saying was to have no fear. When Isaiah fell before the Lord in contrition over his sin, the Lord dispatched a seraph to touch his mouth with burning coal, and as he did he said, "this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." As Jesus touched his disciples with his own hands and said, "have no fear." In essence he was telling them the same thing the seraph said to Isaiah. No need to be afraid. God is holy and you are unholy, but your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for by me.

For this reason it is so striking that when the disciples opened their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus. Moses and Elijah were gone. They pointed to the Christ but they could not atone for sin. Moses was God's instrument to give the law, but the law could not save. Elijah was a prophet to prophesy God's message but Elijah could not save. God is holy and cannot approve of sin. He must punish iniquity. But he is merciful. He has provided atonement for sinners who will repent and draw near on terms of his provision of atonement. Because God is merciful, he is willing to provide for satisfaction of his wrath in a way that spares sinners. Jesus Christ is the

manifestation of that mercy. His own voice and his ALONE is able to convey peace to hearts stricken with the conviction of sin.

Just as surely as they saw Jesus only, it is Jesus only who can bring forgiveness and cleansing and peace and reconciliation. He does because he is rich in mercy.

Being the Son of God means possessing the glory of God and manifesting the mercy of God, but it also means something seemingly shocking. Notice with me . . .

III. Suffering.

As the disciples were coming down from the mountain, Jesus told them not to reveal what had happened there until he would be raised from the dead. What happened on the mountain stays on the mountain until the time was right. If they are not allowed to tell until he was raised, then Jesus is again asserting that he will die.

But the disciples seemed to miss again the emphasis on Jesus's death because something else was gnawing at them. They had just seen Elijah and it got them to thinking about the teaching of the scribes. It was an assertion they made based upon prophecy from Malachi. Elijah would PRECEDE the great and terrible day of the Lord. So they asked Jesus about it. Jesus responded that Elijah had, in fact, already come, but the Jewish teachers did not recognize him. They mistreated him. And the same will occur to the Son of Man. "Oh. I get it," said the disciples, "John the Baptist who suffered and was killed was Elijah the forerunner, and that explains that."

They may have gotten that, but they missed the astonishing reality that bursts forth in the exchange. Not only was John the Baptist mistreated. Jesus himself, the very one whose glory has just shone forth in the brightness of the sun, the very Son of God, who created the world and holds it all together, would suffer, and notice the wording, WILL CERTAINLY SUFFER, at the hands of the Jewish leaders as well. It seems so unfitting! How can it be that this one who possess the glory and mercy of God would come to the earth he created, live among the people who depend upon him for breath, and the very ones who were given explicit advance notice of his

coming would refuse to welcome him but would instead be against him and make him to suffer and even to die? And yet this is the very point of Jesus.

The lesson of this text overall is that Christ Jesus is confirmed as far more than a great man. He is the glorious radiance of God. Moses and Elijah are revered by the disciples, but Jesus is the one who created Moses and Elijah. He is the God of these two revered figures. He is the one who descended on Mount Sinai. He is the one who descended on Mount Carmel. He is glorious. His glory is fearful. Yet he is also merciful. He is compassionate and forgiving. And yet this great and merciful God will suffer! As surely as John the Baptist suffered, so will he.

He was made to suffer so that his people would not. Hebrews 2 explains this fact. "But we see . . . Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. Through death he destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered slaves. It is because he suffered that he can help us." His help is to satisfy the just demands of God and to provide forgiveness of sin and a full and rich salvation to all who turn from sin and trust in him. This is the gospel. This is good news. Every human being stands in greatest need of what Jesus died to provide. Have you come to him in repentance and faith? You may do so right now if you will humble your heart before him and surrender yourself to him trusting that his suffering and death are enough to make you right with God.

For those who are already trusting in Christ, we need to take note of a great mystery which we tend to miss, perhaps even to ignore, because we don't like it. Even the Son of God was made to suffer. Suffering is a great test as well as a tool to perfect, and God makes use of it both in the case of his Son and in the case of you and me. Jesus was made perfect, complete, through that which he suffered. And if it was necessary to perfect the Son, it is surely necessary for your and me.

1 Peter 4:12 says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening

to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." James also counsels us as to how to deal with trials: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

We may not enjoy suffering. By its very definition it is unpleasant. Yet we experience great good through it. And the God who created the world, whose holiness makes men tremble, but who sets captives free and stills storms, who could stop every trial and affliction refuses to do so because he is wise and loving, and he uses trials because of the benefit that they alone can bring.

When trials come, our immediate reaction is to ask God to take them away, make the way easier, remove the enemy. Just take away my sinful habit. Just get me out of the rut I am in. Just get the disease out of the way. Just make life easier to live. But Peter says in that day what you should do is trust. He says, "let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator." James counsels us to rejoice and be steadfast. Paul assures us that God uses all things for good for his people. And Paul, being instructed by Jesus that his grace is sufficient and his power is made perfect in our weakness, resolved gladly to embrace his weaknesses. He determined to be content with insults, with hardships, with persecutions and calamities, because when he is weak then he is strong.

Conclusion

The same is true for you and me. Do not blow it! Do not live your life to escape trials. Don't live your life to avoid suffering. Jesus did not do that and we must not either. Live your life for the glory of God. And whenever that means trials and affliction and suffering and the pains of self-sacrifice, rejoice. Trust God. Call to him for relief but trust him when he says, "no, I have something even better for you than relief. I have holiness. I have steadfastness. . . . I have glory."