

**Mark 9: 6 and Matthew 17: 6-8; “A Fear of God’s Glory”, Sermon # 72 in the series
– “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on August 28th, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This is now the 4th sermon that I have preached to you on the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today I want to bring before you the thought that there is sometimes fear which takes place in the hearts of God’s people in relation to the revelation of the glory of God and Christ. Here in Mark’s gospel, when the transfiguration was taking place, and Christ’s garments became shining and exceedingly white, Peter and James and John saw Jesus like they had never seen Him before. Peter, during that time, made a statement which many have wondered about. When Peter saw Moses and Elijah come up to Jesus, and begin talking with Him, he came forth with this statement, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here”. “Let us make three tabernacles; one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” The words of our text here in Mark say that Peter made this statement because he did not know what to say, “for they were greatly afraid”. And so we must ask ourselves: Why was it was that they were so afraid? They were beholding Christ’s great glory, and yet they were afraid. They were hearing the voice of the Father, telling them that He was pleased with His Son, and yet they were afraid. At first, Peter confesses that he wants to stay there permanently, and a moment later he and the others with him are on their faces in fear. Matthew 17: 6 says that when they heard the voice of the Father, they “fell on their faces and were greatly afraid”. Luke’s gospel says that “they were fearful as they entered the cloud”. 3 questions come to my mind. 1st - Should we be surprised that fear is linked to the revelation of God’s glory? 2nd - Do I personally understand that Jesus’ touch and His words have taken away my fears? And 3rd – Do I personally understand that Jesus is the only One who can bring me a holy confidence in relation to my serving God? May the thoughts expressed here this morning convey to each one of us something of the power of Christ to take away all of our fears.

1st of all – Should we be surprised that fear is linked to the revelation of God’s glory?

It must be understood by any person desiring to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, that there are different kinds of fear which are spoken of in the Bible. There is a holy kind of fear, and there is an unholy kind of fear. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the fear of man is a snare. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction,” it says in Proverbs 1: 9. There are times when men instruct us, and there are times that God is instructing us. And then there are times when God is instructing us in relation to what men are teaching us in the preaching of the Word. “It is good to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long,” it says in Proverbs 23: 17. To fear the Lord is to regard Him; to regard Him in His person, and to regard Him in His Word. The fear of the Lord is to regard Him in all of His attributes, and in all of His Word, as He has described Himself in the Bible, and to think about what He is would want us to do, and to be afraid of falling short of His glory in relation to His commands. It is good, all the day long, to be thinking upon God’s works and ways; His promises and His commandments. Within the fear of God there are different kinds of fear. There is a craven fear, that shrinks and draws back from God because that person is seeing God as He really is, and they are afraid of what will happen to them because He is holy and awesome, and He is a righteous Judge. And then there is a holy fear, which is the work of God the Holy Spirit; that when we have it, we are persuaded that we should come closer to God and have regard for what He is revealing to us, and what He would have us to do. Sometimes this is born of faith, and sometimes it is born of curiosity. In the transfiguration, the experience of glory came as a great and real physical manifestation of glory.

In the preaching of the word of God on a Sunday morning, or any time it is proclaimed in truth and in spirit, there is also a manifestation of the glory of God which comes as the revelation of the glory of the Father and the Son in relation to the truth of the Scriptures. For this is the way that God reveals Himself. A true Christian may have either the experience of being afraid or of being drawn toward God as a result of beholding the Divine glory, and perhaps he will have both at the same time. It seems to me that this is what was happening here with Peter, James, and John. Everything in the transfiguration was revealing the beauty and glory of Christ, at first. And then, as they entered into the cloud, they were afraid. They fell on their faces with holy dread. Psalm 119, verse 120 says, "My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments." They had nothing to really be afraid of, because Jesus had brought them to that place. But they were afraid of the majestic display of the glory of God the Father. Our God is so awesome, so holy, so powerful, and so mighty, that if any of us were to behold the literal spiritual greatness of His glory, as He is seen by the angels in heaven, and as beheld by the souls of redeemed men who have gone before us, our reaction would have been the same as these men. Even if we are not doing anything wrong, still it is always right to respect, and reverence, and worship the God of glory with holy fear.

Let me stop and apply this truth to the subject of our modern worship. This is why so much of what is called worship in our day is not really worship. It does not have that holy dread about it, which senses the greatness and majesty and glory of the Father. And the reason that people do not sense the glory of God, the awesome and awful presence of God, is because they have not been taught by the minister that the Bible teaches them to expect such a thing. And furthermore, the way that they are worshiping God would not let them experience such a thing anyhow. God, in His design of New Covenant worship, has made provision for us to experience His Divine Glory through the preaching of the Word; to experience the glory of God in our hearts. But preaching is not the primary and central thing in the worship of many churches today. And even when preaching is taking place, in many churches it is weak on telling people what God is really like. God would send His glory into the hearts of more people in more churches if they were not so deliberately insensitive to His greatness, His holiness, and His glory; their playing their loud rock music and their conducting man-centered services. It is more like a celebration or a party than it is worship. People think that they have the truth when they do not. People think that they have God when perhaps they do not. With such a vain display, the Divine Glory cannot co-exist. The vain glory of men has been substituted for the Divine Glory, and the Spirit has largely departed.

Let me give to you an Old Covenant example of what New Covenant worship should be like in our hearts. We do not have Divine revelations come to us in New Covenant times through dreams or visions, but nevertheless our reaction ought to be the same as Jacob's in the Old Testament. Jacob had a true holy fear in relation to the Divine Glory, and it has been written down for us in Genesis Chapter 28, verses 10-17. "Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran." "So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set." "And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep." "Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." "And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.'" "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place.'" "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

You see here that Jacob had left his parent's house to travel over to Haran to live there with his relatives, and on the way he lay down and slept, and had a dream. And in that dream God revealed Himself to Jacob in this vision of glory. He gave him salvation that night. He gave him the great promises related to Christ's coming through his descendants, and how greatly they would be blessed. He told him that He would be with him, and that He would keep him wherever he went. He did this for Jacob through speaking words of promise to him, and by revealing Christ to Him as the ladder stretched out between heaven and earth, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And when Jacob awoke from his sleep he said this: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And in verse 17 it says, "And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place!" "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" Now, here was a man who was newly converted, and the dread of God, as He beheld God's glory in this vision, fell upon Him. The Old King James reads that he said, "How dreadful is this place". When you do a word study on the words "awesome" or "dreadful" you find that in the Hebrew it is *yare* which is basically the same word as frightened which was mentioned 3 words before it. The verse could be translated, "And he was afraid and said, 'What a fearful, or fearsome place this is'. I think that it could probably be translated as "What a reverence-creating place this is!"

Now, you have to ask yourself the question: In the church that you attend, if you have ever felt this way at any time, during the time when the Word is being preached? If the minister in his preaching does not preach to you, having this sense of awe and dread upon his own heart, you will probably not experience much of the Divine Presence or glory in the worship services that you attend. You will probably see very little of the majesty and holiness of God being experienced by the people there. You will probably feel very little conviction of sin there. And you will probably not find very much true conversion work going on there. And as a result you will not come to understand true spiritual joy; that solemn joy which comes through beholding the glory of the Father in relation to the preaching of His Word. You should also understand that there is sometimes also a sinful and unholy curiosity which sometimes is found in people in relation to the revelation of God's glory, which is born, not of faith, but of presumption. There are many who presume that they have a right to see and behold the glory of God, who do not have that right at all. And the reason is, that they irreverently handle God's holy law, and His truth. If you look at Peter, James, and John's interest; it was holy. They did have a true fear of God. The Lord Jesus had taken them with Him. Peter may not have been wise in his statement to build 3 tabernacles, but he was not sinful in it. You and I, today, have entered together as a church into the presence of the Lord; we have entered into the cloud. We cannot see the cloud with physical eyes, but we should understand that it is here with us. Let there be a holy awe among us. Let us sense the holy dread of God's majestic and fearful presence; not in the sense that we dread to be here, but in the holy sense in which I have defined it for you this morning. The Glory of God the Father is awesome.

Sometimes we sing, "How sweet and awful is the place with Christ within the doors, where everlasting love displays the choicest of her stores." We know that we are unworthy to be here, but He has brought us salvation through Jesus Christ. Let us be gripped with the strict holiness and justice of God; that He could not, and would not, pass by our sins, but must needs deal with them by sending His only-begotten Son to die in our place. Let us think of the greatness of the Father's love for us that He would give us His very heart. And His giving us Christ would mean that He would have to sacrifice and crush His own dear Son so that He could satisfy His strict justice. He appointed that Christ would bear the full weight and pain of what your sins deserve. Let this make its due impression on your heart. Let it affect you with a dread of dishonoring such a holy God; a God who has shown you such love and mercy. May you, because of the

greatness of the grace of Christ, choose to walk the fear of the Lord. May you today choose to pursue the fear of the Lord which leads to wisdom and carefulness in your walk with Him.

Remember that you have been given the knowledge of the Holy One; the fear of the Lord which causes you to depart from evil. God the Father has given this to you as one of the great blessings of the New Covenant in Christ. So you should to pray with a sense of awe in your heart. And you should remember to carefully love and serve your God, through Jesus Christ your Lord. Remember that you have not come to Mt. Sinai, but Mt. Zion. Remember that you have come to Jesus the mediator of a better covenant, enacted on better promises. And think of the precious blood which Jesus has shed for you the unworthy sinner; His sufferings for you in Pilate's hall, when He was scourged for you for the sake of truth, because He was and is the truth. Then reflect upon this and say to yourself: What Divine glory there is in the preaching of these things which has brought me everlasting life and such an abundance of blessings in my salvation!

2nd – Do I personally understand the Spirit's working so that Christ's words have taken away my fears?

In the gospel of Mark, this truth that I am about to speak on is not related for us. But in Matthew 17, verse 5 it states that the Father's voice came out of the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." "Hear Him!" Verse 6 says, "And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." "But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.'" You see, it was the touch of Jesus which made these disciples able and willing to arise and not be afraid. It will be the same with you and I. Sometimes when the Divine glory comes to the soul of a person, they are so awed by God's Glory and His majestic presence that they feel inadequate to minister to others or to preach to others. But Christ is able to come to them by His Spirit and take away all their fears. If the glory of God has awed you into thinking that you can do nothing for God and for Christ's kingdom, then the good Spirit of God can come and assure you, in connection with the good word of God, that your sins are forgiven when you confess them. And through this holy means, you will be given a good word from God's Word which will show you that it is He who makes you adequate to minister to others around you. Christ's Spirit and His presence with you will come and take away all of your fears. All the right impressions shall be made, because Christ is faithful.

There is an Old Testament passage that I would like to show you in this regard. It is Isaiah 6, if you will turn there with me. Often, a man who is called to the Christian ministry feels himself very inadequate for such a task. He sees his own weaknesses, and his heart sins, all too clearly. He is not sure that God can do anything with him. But let us think about the glorious experience of Isaiah when he was called to be a prophet of the Lord. Verse 1 says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple." "Above it stood two seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." "And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!' "And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke." "So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' "Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Let's make some observations here. Isaiah is seeing a vision of the King, the Lord of Hosts. This is a vision which was given to him where he beheld the glory of God, and specifically the glory of the Lord of Glory, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Lord Jesus Christ. John, in John Chapter 12, verse 41, specifically says, quoting verse 10 of Isaiah six, "These things Isaiah said when he saw Christ's glory and spoke of Him." Isaiah was so awed with the glory of Christ that he instantly realized the greatness of his own sins as he beheld the glory of the Lord. The whole earth was full of His glory, and Isaiah was not going to be able to see much fruit for his ministry. He was fearful about it. He believed that the problem was the way that he spoke.

Perhaps he felt that he had been too harsh. Perhaps he felt that he had been too timid. Perhaps he thought that he had offended both God and man in terms of how he carried out his ministry. He says, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Now remember, Isaiah was a believer. He was about to receive a revelation in regard to his being further commissioned as a prophet. But he saw the sinfulness of his speech as a being a great barrier to his ever being able to fulfill whatever commission that the Lord was going to give him. No true Christian is a man of woe in the eternal sense. He has Christ. He beholds His glory. It is when we see how perfect He is, and when we see how much remaining corruption remains in our hearts, and how many mistakes that we have made, that we see ourselves undone in relation to our living the Christian life and being useful in Christ's service. The Apostle Paul said, "Woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel."

Well Isaiah did not believe that he had been a good a reprover of men. He had spoken up when he should have, but he was not able to convince men of their sin and to convince them to repent. He dwelt among a people of unclean lips; people who did not speak right things about God or about what was right to do. In Isaiah 5: 20, we find that he pronounced woes upon the people of Judah and Jerusalem saying, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!" But people were not turning from their sins. And Isaiah knew that part of this was his own fault. But look at verse 6, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar." "And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.'" "Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'" "Then I said, 'Here am I!'" "Send me."

This angel touching Isaiah's mouth with a live coal taken from the altar is a good picture of what Christ does through the ministry of His Word. Through the preaching of the word, He comes to touch your heart and to put His finger on the specific sins which you struggle with, and against. He does not do this to condemn you. He does this so that you will know forgiveness and cleansing, and be given power to minister to others around you faithfully. When Christ comes and touches your lips, or whatever is unclean in regard to your walk with Him then you will be forgiven; then you will be cleansed, then you will receive power to go and to minister to others in His name. He is, in effect, saying to you as he did to the disciples on the Mount: "Arise, and do not be afraid". Now in verses 9-13, God is telling Isaiah that his ministry was never going to see many conversions, or many people repenting of their sins. Instead, his commission was going to be to preach, and by his preaching "make the heart of that people dull and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed." He would not see many good fruits of conversion and repentance among the people.

But what the Lord was asking him to do, in his preaching, was not to be successful in terms of conversions, but to be faithful to this awful commission. He had felt the holy dread of beholding the glory of the Lord, and saw himself rightly in relation to it. And as a result, he was given the ability to fulfill the commission given to him, by the power of the Spirit. I would like you to think about this great truth; that the revelation of the glory of Christ which is given to you through the preaching of the Word, is intended to do a similar thing for you, as it did for Isaiah. You are called to serve and to suffer in promoting the truth of the word of God and the gospel of Christ. But glory goes before you, and then glory follows after you. Will you not remember that the revelation of Christ's glory includes your understanding that He humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, for your sins, so that you could not only be forgiven, but also be faithful in your service to Him? With that thought in mind, let me give you my final question:

3rd – Do I personally understand that Jesus is the only One who can bring me a holy confidence in relation to my serving God?

When Jesus said, “Arise, and do not be afraid”, you should not think for one moment that these disciples would still be too timid to stand up and go with Him down the mountain to minister. No, I believe that it was by this revelation of the great glory of Christ, that they gained a new confidence in regard to their future ministry. I have tried to show you this morning that a revelation of the glory of God and Christ leads us to have the fear the Lord in a right and holy way. In Proverbs 14: 26, it says, “In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge.” The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.” They are not always safe from the persecutions of evil men, but they are eternally safe in the strong arms of Jesus. Even in the midst of the darkest difficulties, they do not fear. “Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” “You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.” “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23: 4 and 5) That is, there in heaven you will continually be beholding God’s glory.

This is what gives us the holy confidence that our service to Christ will be accepted. We are not promoting our own glory. We are promoting Christ’s glory. We are beholding the glory of Christ; and as we do, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another by the Holy Spirit. The prophet Isaiah received his commission from the Lord and as he went about to preach and to declare to the people the promises of salvation and judgment, he might have been tempted to often think that the people were conspiring against him, and to dwell on that. As he looked at the state of the nation that he lived in, he would be tempted to think that there were conspiracies of forming that would bring an end to the nation. But in Chapter 8, just a short time after he beheld the glory of Christ, God said this to him in verse 11. “For the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying: ‘Do not say, ‘A conspiracy,’ concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’” “The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.” “He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel.” Verse 16 says, “But bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.” “And I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him.” “Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me.” (These words are the words of Christ.) “We are signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mt. Zion.” As you are beholding the glory of Christ, even now, remember that God is making you a sign and wonder in Israel. You will testify to the power of His grace, and the greatness of His glory. He has granted us that we, being delivered from the hand of our greatest enemies; the World, our flesh, and the Devil, we might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of life, and afterwards inherit eternal glory.