

The Radiance of God's Glory

Luke 9:28-36

There are moments in life when we witness something so extraordinary that our minds can't quite take it in. Maybe it's the birth of a child. Maybe it's standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon or reaching the summit of a mountain. Whatever it is for you, those moments often leave us speechless. Instead of trying to find the right words, we just sit in silence for a while, taking it in. Sometimes, as finite creatures, we simply need time to process before we speak.

Today's passage is a bit like that. What's described in this passage is so incredible, so extraordinary, that the disciples who witnessed it don't speak about it for decades. This morning, I want us to answer three questions: What happened? Why did it happen? And what does it mean for us? So let's read it together and see if we can't get a glimpse of what they saw that day.

28 Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. 30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. 34 As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" 36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

“Now about eight days after these sayings...” Eight days after what? This is where we need to step back and remember the context leading into this moment. About eight days earlier, Jesus asked His disciples that well-known question: “*Who do YOU say that I am?*” Peter responds with a powerful confession...Jesus is the Christ. But then Jesus immediately begins to speak about something unexpected: His coming suffering and death on the cross. And He doesn't stop with Himself. He goes on to say that this is the normal path for everyone who would follow Him. Discipleship is not a detour around suffering; it is a call to take up our cross and follow Him. This is important to remember because all three Synoptic Gospels...Matthew, Mark, and Luke intentionally connect the event of today's passage with Peter's confession. That connection isn't accidental. The transfiguration is meant to be read in light of Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ and Jesus' prediction that the Christ must suffer before entering His glory.

What's weird is that both Matthew and Mark place this event six days after Peter's confession...but Luke's places it “about” eight days later. I think this is intentional and worth asking why. Throughout Scripture, the eighth day carries symbolic significance. It often marks the beginning of something new. Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day of life...a detail Luke intentionally records for both John the Baptist and Jesus. And according to the Torah, a leper who had been cleansed had to wait until the eighth day before entering the temple and presenting the required sacrifices. The eighth day marked restoration, acceptance, and a new beginning.

But the symbolism of the eighth day doesn't stop there. The number also appears prominently in The Book of Ezekiel 40–48, where Ezekiel receives his vision of the restored temple. Throughout that vision, the number eight repeatedly appears in the temple's design and worship, culminating in the eighth day as the point at which regular sacrifices begin. We'll come back to why all of that matters in a few minutes. For now, though, let's return to our passage and see what unfolds on the mountain.

“28 Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.”

So Jesus has taken His inner circle,...Peter, James, and John...up to the mountain with Him to pray. As Jesus is praying, His appearance changes. Matthew and Mark use the word *metamorphoō* which is where we get our word for metamorphosis. His face begins to shine like the sun, and His clothing becomes a brilliant, dazzling white (some translations say His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning). What's clear is that something nearly indescribable happened to Jesus while He was praying and the only word Matthew and Mark could think to use was metamorphosis.

When a caterpillar undergoes a metamorphosis, it becomes a butterfly. In fact, if you saw a caterpillar and a butterfly side by side, you would never guess they are the same creature. Their DNA hasn't changed...their nature is the same...but their appearance has been radically transformed. That's the best way to understand what the Gospel writers are trying to describe. Jesus didn't become someone else on the mountain. His divine nature didn't change, and He didn't suddenly become the Son of God. Rather, His appearance was transformed. For a brief moment, the glory that had been veiled by His humanity shone through. He looked completely different, while remaining exactly who He had always been.

But Luke does something interesting. Unlike Matthew and Mark, who use the Greek word from which we get "metamorphosis," Luke doesn't use that word at all. Instead, he simply says that the appearance of His face was changed. I don't think that's an accident. Just as Luke's reference to "about eight days" seems intentional, I think his choice of the word appearance is intentional as well. You see, the word Luke uses for appearance isn't unique to this passage. It also appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament...the Septuagint in The Book of Exodus 26:30, where it refers to the pattern or appearance of the tabernacle that God showed Moses on the mountain. Luke also uses this same word in his account of Jesus' baptism to describe the appearance of the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. I don't think that's merely coincidence. In both cases, the emphasis is on something becoming visibly manifest. At the

baptism, the Spirit visibly appears. At the transfiguration, Jesus' hidden glory visibly appears. Luke's focus isn't on a change in who Jesus is, but on the unveiling of what has been true all along.

“30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” While Jesus is shining like lightning, two men appear: Moses and Elijah. They, too, are clothed in glory, and they begin speaking with Jesus. Throughout church history, many theologians have understood the presence of Moses and Elijah as representing the Law and the Prophets...signifying that everything revealed in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment and completion in Christ. And there is certainly truth to that. But I think limiting their significance to only that misses something important. Moses and Elijah are not just two random Old Testament figures chosen to symbolize two sections of Scripture. Their presence on the mountain points us to something deeper about who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish.

In Malachi 4:4-6, Israel is commanded to remember “the instruction” of God’s servant Moses. Then, immediately after that, Elijah is introduced as the prophet who would come before the great and awesome Day of the Lord, turning the hearts of people back to God in repentance. So when Moses and Elijah appear together on the mountain with Jesus, there is more happening than simply a picture of “the Law and the Prophets.” Luke is drawing our attention to the final words of the Old Testament and showing us that the hope, promise, and expectation of those words find their fulfillment in Christ.

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke gives us the content of Jesus’ conversation with Moses and Elijah. He tells us that they were speaking with Jesus about “...his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” But Luke doesn’t actually use the word departure. That’s how the ESV translates it, but the word Luke uses is actually Exodus. And that’s an interesting choice of words because this term only appears three times in the New Testament. One occurrence refers to the original Exodus...when Moses led God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. The other two occurrences refer to a person’s death. So I think Luke is intentionally connecting Jesus’ coming death...which He spoke about immediately after Peter’s confession...with the Exodus. But this time, Jesus is not leading His people out of slavery in Egypt. He is accomplishing a

greater Exodus. The first Exodus delivered Israel from the bondage of Pharaoh; this Exodus will deliver God's people from a far greater bondage. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus will accomplish the ultimate act of redemption. He will lead His people out...not from slavery to an earthly ruler, but from slavery to sin and the power of death itself. The Exodus Moses began was a picture; the Exodus Jesus accomplishes is the fulfillment. The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and formed them into a people...a nation set apart for Himself. In the same way, Jesus redeems His people from the power of sin and death, and He gathers them together as a new covenant people: the Church. The Exodus of Moses created a nation; the greater Exodus of Jesus creates a redeemed people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

“32 Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.”

Luke's theme throughout his Gospel is to show that Jesus is not simply another figure added to God's divine roster. He is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan...a plan that began with Israel and extends through Israel to the entire world. Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain, not as rivals to Jesus or as equals standing beside Him, but as witnesses pointing to Him. Their lives, their words, and their work find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. And then, after they have testified to Him, they begin to leave Jesus to accomplish the work that only He can do. The Law and the Prophets have spoken. The promises have reached their destination. The Son alone must go forward to complete His Exodus in Jerusalem.

And then we come to one of the most “Peterish” Peter moments in Scripture. While Jesus is experiencing an all-time high moment with the Father...praying on the mountain, shining with glory like a bolt of lightning, and speaking with Moses and Elijah about the salvation He was about to accomplish...Peter and the other two disciples are asleep.

I think it's safe to assume that this holy moment took place at night. But given Luke's tendency to highlight dramatic parallels throughout his Gospel, there may be more going on here

than just a simple detail about the time of day. This scene may be intentionally pointing us ahead to another night-time prayer on a mountain...one where Jesus again receives a heavenly visitor, and once again, His disciples are found asleep. The contrast is striking. On this mountain, Jesus is surrounded by glory as He prepares to accomplish His Exodus. Later, in the garden, He will wrestle with the suffering that Exodus will require. And in both moments, the disciples struggle to stay awake. The glory of the mountain and the agony of the garden are connected by the same reality: Jesus alone must accomplish the work of redemption.

It's almost comical. Jesus is having a once-in-history, mountaintop encounter, and the disciples are completely missing it because they can't keep their eyes open. But honestly, there is something deeply human about this moment. Peter wants to be part of what God is doing, but he doesn't fully understand what he is seeing. He wakes up, sees Jesus in glory, sees Moses and Elijah, and immediately tries to do something.

Most scholars assume that Peter is doing what Peter often does: speaking before he fully understands what is happening. It's just another classic Peter puts his foot in his mouth" moment...the kind he has become famous for. But I think Peter's statement actually fits with what Luke is doing through his use of the word appearance. Peter isn't simply making a random suggestion. He sees something glorious happening, and his response reveals that he is trying to make sense of what he is witnessing. Luke's careful choice of language has already been pointing us toward themes of God's presence, the tabernacle, and the visible manifestation of divine glory. Peter's desire to build tents may not be as misguided as we often assume. It may actually show that he recognizes, at least in part, what kind of moment this is.

The word Peter uses for "tents" is actually the same word used for "tabernacle" throughout the Septuagint. So don't miss this! Having just been awakened by the blazing glory of Christ, Peter is confronted with a scene that would have immediately brought to mind the glory that filled the tabernacle when Moses completed it. The presence of God had once been visibly manifested in the tabernacle, and now Peter is standing on a mountain where the glory of God is being revealed in the person of Jesus. And with Moses standing there, Peter's mind naturally goes back to that Old Testament pattern. He sees the glory, he sees Moses, and he thinks: *"We need a place to mark this. We need a tabernacle."* Peter is trying to respond

appropriately to what he is witnessing...but he still hasn't fully grasped the significance of the moment. The glory is not descending upon a structure anymore. The glory is standing before him in the person of Christ.

Then Luke adds one more detail: Peter did not know what he was saying. And again, I think Peter sometimes gets a bad reputation here. Luke doesn't say that Peter didn't know *what to say*...as if he was simply rambling because he was confused. Luke says Peter didn't know what he *was saying*. The issue isn't that Peter's words were meaningless; it's that he didn't fully grasp the weight and significance of what he was saying. It's another deeply human moment. Peter is seeing something far beyond his ability to fully comprehend, and yet, in the middle of his imperfect response, there is a profound insight. If Peter's suggestion to build a tabernacle is connected to the glory that filled the tabernacle when Moses completed it, then his statement is not as foolish as we often assume. In fact, it may reveal the same Spirit-enabled insight that led him just eight days earlier to confess that Jesus is the Christ. Peter sees the glory. He sees Moses. He sees the presence of God being revealed...and he instinctively reaches for the categories Scripture has given him to understand it. He just hasn't yet realized that the One standing before him is greater than the tabernacle, greater than Moses, and greater than everything that came before.

34 As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

This is why I think Peter doesn't get enough credit in this moment. As Peter is suggesting that they build tabernacles, the very same cloud that was associated with God's presence filling the tabernacle in Moses' day appears again. The timing is remarkable. Peter sees the glory of Christ, he thinks of the tabernacle, and then the cloud of God's presence descends. That doesn't mean Peter fully understood what was happening...but it does show that he was recognizing something significant. He was reaching for the right biblical categories. He understood that this moment had something to do with God dwelling among His people. And that is exactly what is happening. Before Peter's eyes, the ultimate fulfillment of the tabernacle is present. God's dwelling with humanity is no longer found in a tent or a building. The glory of God is not contained in a structure...it is revealed in a person. Jesus is the true and greater tabernacle. He is

the place where God and humanity meet. The presence of God that once filled the tabernacle now dwells bodily in Christ. Peter wanted to build a tabernacle to commemorate God's presence, but what he didn't yet understand was that God had already provided the tabernacle Himself.

And in order to fully appreciate Luke's understanding of this moment, we need to pay close attention to the word he uses for "overshadowed." This word carries a rich biblical history. The first time we see this idea is in the wilderness, when the cloud of glory overshadows the tabernacle and fills it with the presence of God. Then, in Luke's own Gospel, that same language appears again at the incarnation. The presence of God does not merely dwell in a tent; it comes upon a person. Mary is overshadowed by the power of the Most High, and the Son of God takes on flesh. And now, on this mountain, the cloud overshadows them...Jesus and the disciples. The same divine presence that once filled the tabernacle, and then brought about the incarnation of Christ, now surrounds them with God's glory, power, and authority. Luke is showing us a progression. God's presence moved from dwelling **WITH** His people in the tabernacle, to dwelling **AMONG** His people in the person of Jesus, and now it is revealed that through Jesus, God's presence will dwell **UPON** His people. The glory that Peter wanted to preserve in a tent was standing right in front of him. The true dwelling place of God had arrived!

But the disciples are afraid as they enter the cloud of glory. And they are not alone in that response. Moses, too, was filled with fear when the cloud of God's glory descended upon the completed tabernacle. The presence of a holy God is not something to be approached casually. And yet, what is remarkable about this moment is that the disciples are not destroyed by the glory...they are invited into it. The revelation of Jesus' divine nature points us forward to the promise of The Book of Revelation 21:3: "*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and he will dwell with them.*" What was once impossible because of sin is now made possible through Christ. The God whose glory once filled the tabernacle now draws near in the person of Jesus. The One who was once hidden behind the veil has come to dwell with His people. And through Christ, that presence will one day be fully restored forever.

Luke anchors his transfiguration narrative again and again in tabernacle imagery to show us that the glory of God that filled the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament was always pointing forward to...and is ultimately fulfilled in...the glory of God revealed in Jesus. The

details Luke includes are not accidental. The eighth day points us toward the imagery of the restored temple in Ezekiel 40. The appearance of Jesus in glory recalls the pattern and appearance of the tabernacle described in Exodus 26:30. The glory revealed on the mountain echoes the glory that filled the tabernacle. Peter's desire to build tabernacles reflects the tabernacle of Moses. And the cloud that descends upon them recalls the cloud of God's glory that descended upon and inaugurated the tabernacle in the wilderness. All of these threads are woven together to make one profound point: Luke is visually portraying the reality that John later describes in John 1:14...*"The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."* The glory of God that once dwelt in a tent has now taken on flesh. The presence that once filled the tabernacle is now revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The true dwelling place of God with humanity is not a building, a mountain, or a structure...it's Jesus Himself.

35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" 36 And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Luke intentionally draws our attention to the similarities between the Father's declaration at the transfiguration and the declaration at Jesus' baptism. In both moments, heaven speaks, the Spirit's presence is revealed, and Jesus is identified as the Son of God. But this moment is not simply a repeat of what happened at the baptism. Luke includes some important differences. First, at Jesus' baptism, the Father's declaration is directed toward Jesus Himself...it is a confirmation of His identity as the beloved Son. But here, the declaration is directed toward the disciples. They are the ones who need to hear and understand who Jesus truly is. Second, Jesus is not described here as the "beloved" Son, as He was at His baptism. Instead, the Father identifies Him as the "chosen" Son. This language points beyond Jesus' identity alone and toward His mission. He is the Son whom God has appointed before time, the One chosen to accomplish the work of redemption through His suffering, death, and resurrection. The Father is not only revealing who Jesus is; He is also affirming what Jesus has come to do. The disciples are being prepared to follow Him...not merely as a teacher or miracle worker, but as the chosen Son who must go to Jerusalem and accomplish the greater Exodus.

Then the Lord gives the disciples a command: “*This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!*” I mean, can you imagine? Peter, James, and John are standing on a mountain, surrounded by the glory of God. They have just seen Jesus transformed before their eyes. They have seen Moses and Elijah speaking with Him. They have been enveloped by the cloud of God’s presence. And then the voice of the Father speaks directly to them. And what does He say? “**LISTEN TO HIM!**”

That command is incredibly significant because it takes us right back to Moses. In Deuteronomy 18, Moses promised that God would raise up a prophet like him, and the people were commanded to listen to Him. Now, on this mountain, with Moses himself standing there, God identifies Jesus as the One greater than Moses...the One to whom Moses and all the prophets were pointing. The disciples do not need another mediator. They do not need to cling to Moses or Elijah. They do not need to build another tabernacle. They need to listen to Jesus! And that command is still the heart of discipleship today. Before we can understand what Jesus calls us to do, we must first learn to listen to who He is. The Father’s command on the mountain is the same command we receive now: Listen to Him!

I think we’ve answered the question of what happened on that mountain. We’ve also started to understand why it happened. But what does this mean for us? I think we can answer that by asking what it meant for the disciples who were actually there that night. The Father’s command to Peter, James, and John...“Listen to Him!” does not replace what Jesus had said eight days earlier; it confirms it. After Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus immediately explained what kind of Messiah He would be: a suffering Messiah. And He made clear that those who follow Him must walk the same path.

I think Jesus took Peter, James, and John up that mountain and allowed them to witness something so extraordinary that they wouldn’t fully speak about it for decades because He knew they would need to remember what they had seen. They were going to face suffering. They were going to face persecution. They were going to need the assurance that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be...the glorious Son of God. According to early Christian tradition, Peter was eventually executed by crucifixion in Rome, likely during the persecution of Christians under Nero around AD 64–68. The best-known tradition says that Peter requested to be crucified upside

down, believing he was unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. But he never forgot what happened on that mountain. Listen to what he says in 2 Peter 1:16-18 *“but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”*

James’ life was cut short when, according to Acts 12:1–2, he was executed by the sword under the order of Herod Agrippa I around AD 44. John, however, appears to have lived a long life and died of old age, becoming the only one of Jesus’ original Twelve traditionally believed not to have died as a martyr. It is remarkable that Jesus brought these three men together on the mountain for the Transfiguration. They each walked a different road of faithfulness: James gave a short life of sacrifice, Peter gave his life through martyrdom, and John endured a long life of faithful witness. But before any of them walked those paths, Jesus gave them a glimpse of His glory. The mountain was not just a moment to marvel at; it was a moment to prepare them. They would need to remember what they had seen when the road ahead became difficult. They would need to remember that the suffering Messiah is also the glorious Son.

So what do we do with this? The first thing we must understand is that the Transfiguration was not given to the disciples so they could stay on the mountain. Peter wanted to build tents and remain in that moment of glory, but Jesus did not bring them up the mountain to avoid the valley. He brought them up the mountain so they would have the strength to walk through it. And that is true for us as well.

God gives us glimpses of His glory...not always through extraordinary experiences, but through His Word, through worship, through the fellowship of His people, and through the ordinary means by which He reveals Himself to us...not so that we can escape the hardships of life, but so that we can endure them with confidence. Because the reality is that following Jesus means following Him to the cross.

Jesus made that clear just before this event. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The Christian life is not a promise of comfort, ease, or earthly glory. The path of discipleship is a path of surrender, sacrifice, and

sometimes suffering. But the Transfiguration reminds us that suffering is not the end of the story.

The disciples saw the glory of Christ before they saw the suffering of Christ. They saw the Son shining before they watched Him be rejected. They saw the kingdom before they watched the King go to the cross. And that is what we need to remember. When obedience is difficult, when faithfulness is costly, when following Jesus feels like a road of suffering, we must remember who Jesus is. He is not merely a teacher worth following. He is not merely a prophet among prophets. He is the chosen Son of God. He is the true tabernacle where God dwells with His people. He is the One who accomplished the greater Exodus and freed us from the slavery of sin and death.

So the Father's command on the mountain is still the command given to us today: "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" Listen when He calls you to follow Him. Listen when He calls you to deny yourself. Listen when He leads you through suffering. Listen because the One who calls you to carry a cross is the same One who will one day share His glory with you.

The disciples walked down that mountain changed. They did not have all the answers. They still struggled. They would still stumble. Peter would still deny Jesus. James would still die young. John would still face years of hardship. But they had seen something they could never forget. They had seen the Radiance of the Glory of God. And when the darkness came, when the suffering came, when the cross seemed like the end, they could look back and remember: Jesus is exactly who He said He is. The same Jesus who walked toward Jerusalem and the cross is the Jesus who shines with the glory of God. The same Jesus who calls us to suffer with Him is the Jesus who will one day return in glory.

So listen to Him. The Son who was revealed in glory is the Son who has redeemed us, sustains us, and will one day bring us safely home. Let's pray.