

“ABIDING IN THE GLORY OF GOD”  
Exodus 24:12-18, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9  
February 22 & 23, 2020

Imagine this: It’s a gorgeous early morning at the beach along the Sheboygan shoreline on Lake Michigan. The sun has not yet peaked up over the horizon, but already the sky is lighting up, illuminating the darkness with the first glows of morning. Then, as you watch, the sun rises over the lake showing magnificent colors and giving a spectacular light show as the day begins. (**Show the sunrise picture**) You stand there in awe of what you are witnessing and you remember you have a camera on your cell phone. So you try to capture the image that you are seeing. However, none of the pictures truly capture the radiant glory of the Sun as it rises in the east, reflecting off the waters of our marvelous Lake Michigan.

You are so excited about what you have witnessed that you hurry home to tell your family what you just experienced. First you have to get them up out of bed, but then you desperately try to describe what you saw, but the words are just not there for you to describe it. How do you help them to see what you saw? You do your best to describe the brilliant blue of the lake, and the dark purple of the rest of the sky. You try to help them envision the warm glow of the yellows and oranges and reds that reflected the Sun’s rays of light as they light up the clouds and fill the morning sky. You tell them how the waves were softly caressing the shore and how beautiful the birds were flying by on their way to find food. Yet, none of your word pictures capture the beauty of the sunrise that you just witnessed. (**Picture off.**)

Your family members yawn and then smile and nod as they quietly pacify your excitement with the words, “that’s nice,” and then beg to go back to sleep again. Nothing you can say helps them to understand the glorious sight you just saw. Nothing you can do will get them excited about that beautiful event. Unless they experienced it for themselves, they will never know what you saw.

So imagine what it would be like to stand in the presence of God in all His glory. How could we even begin to explain that experience? What words could we use, what descriptive language could even begin to capture the wonder and glory of the living God? Unfortunately, nothing we could ever say

would truly reflect and describe the explicit wonder of the glory of God. The experience cannot be described with our language. Artists have tried to display it in paintings and drawings, but even then, it just does not give adequate majesty to God's marvelous glory. Unless we experience it ourselves, we will never know the true nature of God in all of His glory.

At various times throughout the history of Mankind, God has made Himself known to various people in order that they might come to know Him and be led by Him. **MOSES** and the Israelite leaders went up on the Mountain of God and saw Him. In Exodus 24 the account reads, "*Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the leaders of Israel went up the mountain and they saw the God of Israel. Beneath His feet was what looked like a pavement of sapphire, as blue as the sky. God did not harm these leading men of Israel; they saw God, and then they ate and drank together*" (Exodus 24:9-11). Think of how these men might begin to describe what they experienced? Impossible! Even the description of the pavement under God's feet doesn't do justice to truly exposing what they saw.

And having experienced this, Moses is called up again to the Mountain of God to receive laws and instructions for the people to obey and projects for them to accomplish to bring glory to God. This time there is another description given, "*The dazzling light of the Lord's presence came down on the mountain. To the Israelites the light looked like a fire burning on top of the mountain...*" (24:16-17). A totally amazing sight that was far beyond anyone's description! It would burn in the minds of those people for the rest of their lives, reminding them of the splendor and majesty of their marvelous God.

Many of the prophets also experienced the presence of God first hand. **ISAIAH** (6:1-2) stood in the presence of God and he describes it like this: "*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on His throne, high and exalted, and His robe filled the whole Temple. Around him flaming creatures were standing, each of which had six wings. Each creature covered its face with two wings, and its body with two, and used the other two for flying...*" He goes on in his description, but how do you get people to understand what you saw? The language of humans just isn't descriptive enough to demonstrate the majesty of God!

EZEKIEL experienced the presence of God several times. We hear His description in chapter 8:4, “*There I saw the dazzling light that shows the presence of Israel’s God, just as I had seen it when I was by the Chebar River...*” To many people, they could easily claim that Ezekiel had gone mad as he tries to describe the experience, except that the words he wrote applied directly to the people of Israel and foretold what would come. Yet how does one explain adequately what the true glory of God is like to people who haven’t experienced it personally? It’s too much for us to be able to comprehend, much less try to explain to someone else.

The prophet AMOS saw the Lord (9:1), Who gave him instructions to tell the people what the Lord God was about to do to the Temple because the people had abandoned their worship of Him.

You see, each time anyone saw the Lord God, it was beyond their ability to describe the incident. Oh, the teachings were very applicable to the people, and the lessons from God were heard and given out for the people to obey, but the experience each man had with God Himself was beyond their ability to describe. They usually ended up trying to compare it with something here on the earth in order for the ones listening to try to understand what was seen. Yet, there is no way to fully explain the experience of being in God’s presence. The only way one can understand it is for them to have the same experience of being in God’s presence. Only then, can one find the wonder that others have witnessed.

Yet, God showed Himself to people throughout history in order to bring a message to us so that we might change our wicked ways and return to God and obey His commands and abide by His laws. The magnitude of God’s glory is demonstrated in order for us to get the picture of how great God is, and to allow Him to guide us back into His ways so that we might please Him and become His people.

Today, our New Testament account gives us another testimony of the presence of God. Just like many of the other appearances of God, this also occurs on the top of a mountain, but this time it is before the disciples, and Jesus is the One Who displays the glory of God. Listen to the account of Jesus’ transfiguration from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 17. (READ Matthew 17:1-9)

Only six days before, Jesus had explained His future with the disciples (Matt. 16:21-28). He had

asked them who the people said that He was, and Peter makes this great, grand statement, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” (16:16). Peter testified to what he had seen in Jesus and come to believe about Him because he experienced Jesus’ teachings and miraculous works. He was sure that Jesus was truly the Son of God, the One come to take away the sins of the world. That was why he was following Jesus.

So on that particular day, Jesus took three of the disciples up the mountain with Him. Jesus takes with Him, Peter, James and John while leaving the other nine disciples at the foot of the mountain. Jesus needed to be alone with the Father, to pray and commune with Him. But why not take all of His DISCIPLES up with Him to the top of the mountain? Why just these three men and not the others.

Well, even in Jesus’ band of disciples, there was different levels of leadership and accountability. This was the inner circle of leaders. They were the ones Jesus relied upon to guide the rest of the disciples. Peter, James and John were the closest to Jesus, followed by Andrew, Philip and Nathaniel, followed by the other six. Just as the church has people in leadership positions, those on the Administrative Board, and then there are others that are active on committees in the church, and finally there are those who show up on Sunday mornings for worship. While the pastor is the one leading that church, not everyone is a trusted confidant and leader within that church. Jesus’ disciples were the same way.

But here on the mountain on that particular day, something very peculiar happens. Suddenly Jesus CHANGES in His appearance. He doesn’t become some nasty ogre, or morph into evil creature, but rather He begins to radiate light like the sun. His face starts beaming brighter than the brightest spotlight. His clothes radiate pure brilliant white light and I’m sure that the disciples had to put their hands over their faces to even try to look at Him. Can you picture it? Of course not, and neither can I because we weren’t there to experience it. No one in the history of the world has ever started glowing with the radiance of the sun. Not even Hollywood could come close to getting it right. Jesus began showing the radiance of His divine nature as the Son of God. He became the dazzling light of the

presence of God right there before them. Remember it was six days after Peter had proclaimed Jesus “the Son of the Most High God.” Here Jesus allowed His true nature to be seen by these three men.

But then two other men showed up glowing just like Jesus was. I’m not sure how the disciples recognized that it was Moses and Elijah. There were no pictures to compare them to. And **WHY** would **Moses and Elijah be there** anyway? Who were they to talk to Jesus? What importance did they have that they would come down from Heaven to talk with Jesus? Well, these two were a pair of the few who had been very close to God while they were here on the earth. In fact, only three people, other than Jesus, were taken to be with God when their time here was finished. Enoch is recorded as “walking with God and then was no more, for God had took him” (Genesis 5:24). Moses died in the land of Moab before the people of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land, but no one knows where he was buried, for God “buried him” (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). And Elijah was taken up to heaven by a “*chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven*” (2 Kings 2:11). But why were Moses and Elijah there talking with Jesus?

Moses represented the Law of God and Elijah represented the Prophets of God. They were there to remind Jesus what was prophesied in the Law and Prophets as to the work of the Messiah. Jesus came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets, and here, shortly before His arrest, and crucifixion, Moses and Elijah were there to give Him the encouragement He needed to fulfill His task as the Savior of the world.

The three disciples are dumbstruck watching all of this unfold. Either they were overwhelmed by the glory of Jesus radiance, or they were completely overtaken by fear, but due to this experience, Peter wants to do **SOMETHING** to remember the event. What do you do when you suddenly find yourself in the presence of the Holy God? Peter wanted to build three “*tents,*” one for Jesus and one for Moses and one for Elijah. In essence, he did not want the event to be forgotten, so he wanted to build a shrine on top of that mountain so everyone could celebrate the event. But that thought and that offer lasts only for a moment, because another surprising event happens.

As Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah, as Peter is offering to make tabernacles for each one of them, **A CLOUD** shining like it did back in Exodus 24 descends from the sky and overwhelms the mountain top. And then **A VOICE** speaks from the cloud, telling the disciples, “*This is My own dear Son, with whom I am pleased – listen to Him!*” (Matt. 17:5). Like the roll of thunder, God speaks to these three men and politely tells them to shut up and listen to Jesus!

Now we are not told if the folks down at the foot of the mountain saw this event or not. Nor do we know if they heard the voice of God speak to the disciples up on top of the mountain. It seems they have no clue as to what is going on up there. But the three disciples with Jesus are so startled by **the cloud** and **the voice** that they fall face down onto the ground, terrified.

This is the second time God has confirmed Jesus as His Son, and that He was pleased with Him. The first time was at Jesus’ baptism at the Jordan River. But here God adds the words, “*listen to Him!*” It was one thing to state that Jesus was the Son of God. It was another to have God HIMSELF confirm it. What a mountain-top experience for these three men! Do you think these three knew Jesus was the Messiah now? Without a doubt, this cemented their faith in Jesus.

But **what do we do when we EXPERIENCE God’s presence?** We want to share it! We are so excited about it that we want to tell everyone what we just saw or heard. We want to let everyone know about the event because it has touched us so deeply.

So when Jesus reassures them that nothing bad is going to happen and tells them not to be afraid, they look around to see only Jesus. Had they only imagined the event? Had it been a marvelous dream? The purpose for three of the disciples being with Jesus was that they could confirm each other’s report about the event so that people would not think them mad or very creative with their imagination that their account was only made up. Their accounts of this event would corroborate with each other to make it a viable experience that could be believed. Like the women at the tomb of Jesus witnessing and testifying to His resurrection, Peter, James and John could share this event and people would have to receive their testimony because of the three of them sharing the exact account.

However Jesus does something completely unexpected – He tells them, “Don’t TELL anyone about this vision you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead” (Matt. 17:9).

WHAT! They just had the experience of their lives and Jesus doesn’t want them to tell anyone about it?

WHY?

If you think about it, nothing like this had ever happened in the history of the world, before or since. Who would believe their recounting of the event, even with the three of them agreeing on it? If they would have told the others, they would have either stoned them all right there for blasphemy, or they would have lifted Jesus up as the king and started a revolution against the Romans to make Jesus the new Emperor of the world. Neither was a part of God’s plan. Jesus had come to the earth to fulfill the Law and the Prophets AND to “give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). It had to be kept quiet until AFTER Jesus had risen from the dead. Only then would it make sense to all the people so that they could believe it and receive it as another testimony of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

We find Peter relating this testimony to the people in his second letter to the Christian Church as he works to discount the false teachings that were going on around them. He states it clearly, “*We have not depended on made-up stories in making known to you the mighty coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. With our own eyes we saw His greatness. We were there when He was given honor and glory by God the Father, when the voice came to Him from the Supreme Glory, saying, ‘This is My own dear Son, with whom I am pleased!’ We ourselves heard this voice coming from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain*” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Now it was time to relate the true account of Jesus’ majesty and glory and honor to the people. Though Peter does not attempt to detail the event, he testifies that it truly happened and that Jesus truly was and is the Son of God, the Messiah sent from God.

So how are we to relay this powerful experience to our world today? We can only tell of the event and share with others the importance of it for us who believe and follow Jesus. There’s no way

that we can begin to describe the event, especially since we are receiving it second hand, but we can share the true of the event and lift it up as important enough for others to hear what God has done for us.

You see, we do not have the restriction from Jesus not to tell others. Now we can tell **EVERYONE** what we have seen and heard as we have our own life changing events with Jesus. Just like the disciples sharing their faith in Jesus through their own experiences, we are called to testify to our world what the Lord has done for us so that everyone can hear and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior to all those who will believe in Him no matter where they are in the world. This is why I travel all the way over to Russia, so that I can share my life-changing experience of Jesus touching my life and changing me from one who was lost in his sin to one who is redeemed by the blood of Jesus. I am nobody of great importance, but I have witnessed the transformation from Jesus in my own life, and I want others to hear that they also can find new life in Him. Jesus has been raised from the dead, resurrected and glorified by God so that as we put our faith and trust in Him, we have nothing to fear from this world, but have everything to gain from God. That's exciting news that's to be shared with everyone!

But how do we share that Great GOOD NEWS if we have never experienced it for ourselves? How do we **TRANSFER** the experience if we have never had it? Listen folks, Jesus doesn't want us to be Christian in name only. He wants us to have a first-hand experience with Him so that our own testimony can be taken out into this dark and confused world of ours and bring them the light of Jesus to give them confidence and assurance of God's love for them. That's who we are called to be having received Jesus Christ as Lord of our own lives. Private Christianity is an oxymoron – an internally conflicting statement! There should be nothing private about it! If we have been touched by Jesus Christ, if our lives have been forever changed by Him working in our lives, we should be so excited about it that NOTHING can stop us from sharing it with others. The disciples went to their deaths proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Messiah, dead, buried, resurrected and ascended into heaven. It was because of their first-hand experience with Him.

But you can't share what you don't have. Today, I invite you to let Jesus become the Lord of your life. Invite Him to personally touch you with His great love so that you might experience His greatness first-hand. Then you will have a witness to share. Then you will have a testimony of the difference that Jesus can make in your life. Only then can you let it **LIVE** in you so that whole world can see the difference Jesus makes when we claim Him as Savior and Lord. GO LIVE FOR HIM! AMEN? Let it be so! To the glory of God in Jesus Christ our Lord!