

“From Glory to Glory”

The Transfiguration of Our Lord Matthew 17:1-9

“No man stands so tall as when he stoops to help a child.” I first saw this quote in an ad for Big Brothers. It’s also been attributed to James Dobson, Danny Thomas, Calvin Coolidge, and Abraham Lincoln. The real author might be that famous writer, ANONYMOUS.

Whoever first said it coined a wonderful truth demonstrated by Jesus. He certainly stands gloriously tall in His majesty. Son of God, transfigured by the brightest light on the glorious mountain. In that same glory, he will come again on the Last Day. Yet, in that kind of glory, he is unapproachable. We cannot stand before him in our sins.

It is in his other glory, as the Son of Man who suffered for our sins on a cruel cross that He is approachable. We can also come to the Father through him, because our sins, paid in full on that cross, no longer separate us from God. By his humble and human birth in Bethlehem, he first stooped down to our world. By his death on the cross, he revealed why he stooped: To rescue us to save us from the punishment of our sin. In his Transfiguration, we get a glimpse of Jesus from glory to glory.

To get all the details of this event we would consult also Mark and Luke, yet let us consider what part of the story the Holy Spirit wanted Matthew to tell us. He begins his account this way: “And after six days”. This draws us to ask, “What happened six days before this”?

In chapter 16, after Jesus praised Peter’s confession that He is the Son of God, he gave them some startling news, *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* ²²*And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”* ²³*But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”* ²⁴*Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

What does glory look like to someone setting his mind on the things of man and not of God? Winning, personal achievement, our goodness. Certainly not suffering. A few years ago, a billboard read, “Make God proud of you”. I remember thinking, “What sacrifice or task can I offer a holy sinless God to make him proud of me? He sees the sin in my heart that is unseen by other people.” That He still stoops down to love me anyway says more about Him than about me. He loves the unlovable.

In Peter’s concept of glory, Jesus didn’t have to go to die for us. For surely, there is enough shred of human decency, enough divine spark in us that with a little tweaking by us and a little grace by God, we can make God proud of us and get to heaven.

In what then do we glory? We love it when our kids and grandkids win races and games and score well in academic contests. Nothing wrong with some parental joy over their success. It demonstrates their hard work and our good parenting. ☺ The standard, however, is how well they do compared to other parents’ children.

Neither we or they get medals for good works shown in the bright and holy light of God’s law. In case you doubt me, be a regular worshiper on Wednesdays in Lent as we examine deeds, thoughts, and motives in the light of God’s law.

Peter and the others were basking in the light, because it was just Jesus their friend and brother. This is cool, Jesus. Let’s hang out together with Moses and Elijah. I’ll make tents for us to stay, Peter reasoned. Only when they heard the thundering voice of the Father did they realize they this Jesus was more than they had reckoned. Beholding him in the glory of the Almighty, they were deathly afraid. No one sees God and lives. Yes Moses and Elijah had, but they were the glorious exceptions.

They had never seen Jesus like this. Yes, Peter had already confessed what the Father’s voice said. Jesus is the Son of God. But, now it’s frighteningly real and a bit confusing. Thank you Jesus for reminding me what a great and majestic God you are. But are you still the one who talked about your coming crucifixion? Is that still in the plans? It was starting to become clearer to Peter.

Jesus did not die on the cross because he was weak. He did not give up the majesty of being God. Rather, he exchanged one kind of glory for another. Having lit up the mount of Transfiguration, he was then glorified on a gloomy mount Golgotha. He stooped down in death to rise up in victory. He lowered himself to raise up all his children from the curse of sin and the fear of death. His light went out on Good Friday as the sky turned

black. In His one last gasp of breath the debts of the whole world were finally marked “paid in full”. The job was complete.

Now to let the body rest in the tomb until Easter Sunday. Now to wait for the first day of new week and for the first day of a new creation, to show the world the fullness of His divine glory again by rising from the tomb.

God’s glory in Christ we claim by faith. Not that we loved God, or did anything to make him proud of us. But that he first loved us and gave himself for us. Words of a popular song express Jesus’ journey from glory to glory.

You came from heaven to earth To show the way; From the earth to the cross My debt to pay; From the cross to the grave; From the grave to the sky; Lord I lift Your name on high.

He stooped down to save us. Looking up, we see Jesus, our big brother, our friend, our Savior. And seeing him in that glory, we need not be afraid. Amen.