

Glory

*Sermon preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast
at Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan
February 24 & 25, 2020*

Scripture

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

Sermon

You probably know this already. The Bible is about Jesus. The whole thing. From start to finish. So those four Bible passages we had in front of us first hour—Exodus 24, Psalm 2, 2 Peter 1, Matthew 17—those four Bible passages are about Jesus.

TAKE EXODUS 24. What a scene! The Israelites are camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. At the same time, Moses and Joshua are with a group of elders part-way up the mountain. But then the Lord calls to Moses, calls him to come the rest of the way up. So Moses takes Joshua with him, and they start climbing higher, climbing toward the fiery presence of the Lord.

It's just the two of them. And as they climb, a cloud of glory envelops them, or maybe envelops just Moses. Anyhow Moses stays there in the glorious presence of the Lord, stays there for forty days and forty nights. And the Lord gives Moses the stone tablets of the Law, the binding covenant between God and Israel.

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Exodus 24 is a Moses story. And it's an important story. Because it's a story that opens the way to the future for Israel. But Exodus 24 is only a hint. And it finds its deepest meaning in Jesus.

THAT TAKES US TO MATTHEW 17. What a scene! The disciples are at the foot of a mountain, and they stay there while Jesus climbs up with Peter, James, and John. There on that mountain, Jesus himself is revealed in radiant glory. And there on that mountain, Moses and Elijah appear, just Moses and Elijah. They appear to the One who will accomplish the purpose of the Law. They appear to the One who will fulfill the message of the Prophets.

Peter expects the encounter to last for a good while. After all, Moses had spent forty days and forty nights on Sinai. And Elijah had journeyed forty days and forty nights to Sinai. So Peter wants to build some shelters so everyone can settle in for the duration.

But instead a cloud of glory appears, and it settles upon them all. Then a voice speaks, and it fixes all attention on Jesus: “This is my Son. I love him. I’m happy with him. Listen to him!”

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Then the cloud is gone. Moses and Elijah are gone. Only Jesus is left with Peter, James, and John. Only Jesus is left because the story is about Jesus, Jesus the glorious Son of God.

THIS BRINGS US TO PSALM 2. What a scene! All around the holy mountain of God, the nations are in disarray. All around the holy mountain of God, the kings of the earth are in rebellion. They don’t want God. They don’t need God. They have no intention of listening to God. After all, they themselves are gods. They are a law to themselves.

These kings of the earth have no fear of the Lord. After all, the Lord is just the god of a fourth-rate nation that lacks the horses and chariots to defend itself. The Lord is just the god of a disloyal nation that’s always sniffing around for other gods to serve. So there’s no way the kings of the earth will submit to the Lord. They intend to break free, and nothing will stop them!

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And the Lord sees. And the Lord knows. And the Lord laughs. “I’ll show them a king! And he will rule over every nation. I’ll show them a king! My king on my mountain!” In other words, “I’ll show them Jesus!”

THAT TAKES US BACK TO MATTHEW 17. There, after the singular glory of his Transfiguration, Jesus tells Peter, James, and John, “Don’t tell anyone about this until after I’ve been raised from the dead.” Yes, raised from the dead. Because this King, the only true King, will die.

As the psalm says, there will come a day when the King will be enthroned on a hill just outside of Zion. But his throne will be a cross. And above his head, a sign will declare his kingship: “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Then just as it did at Mt. Sinai, the earth will tremble. And clouds will block out the sun.

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But a Roman soldier, a servant of great Caesar, who has no need of the Lord—a Roman soldier will himself proclaim the Lord’s decree: “Truly this is the Son of God.” Truly this is the Lord’s anointed One. Truly this is the King.

SO NOW LET'S TURN TO 2 PETER 1. It's not the clearest passage in Scripture. But it's clear enough. Peter is talking about the Transfiguration. He's talking about the revelation of the power and the honor and the glory of Jesus.

It happened on a mountain. Peter, James, and John saw it. They saw it firsthand. They were eyewitnesses of this glory, the three of them, just the three of them. They saw. They heard. And now they proclaim it. "Listen to what we're saying," Peter writes. "And pay attention to the Scriptures. And you too will see the glory. It will rise in your hearts, Jesus will rise in your hearts, like the morning star." Once again, it's about Jesus.

NOW I WANT TO SAY TWO MORE THINGS. First, and I know I'm repeating myself, but first, there's more to the glory of Jesus than a beaming face and blindingly white clothes. No, it's clear enough from the Gospels that the glory of Jesus is revealed especially on the cross.

His glory is to die in front of the whole world, naked and shamed and God-forsaken. His glory is to be obedient all the way to death, even this death. His glory is to reveal the mercy and justice of God to a rebel world. For that is the will of the One who sent him.

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Notice, though, what happens this time when the glory is revealed. It's not revealed just to Moses, Joshua, and Elijah. And it's not revealed just to Peter, James, and John. No, this time it's revealed for all the world to see. This time it's revealed even for you and me to see. And that's the point.

THEN THERE'S THIS. You know what it's like to be naked and shamed, don't you? You know what it's like to be stripped and searched. You know what it's like to have your darkest deeds made public.

You know what it's like to have the worst day, the worst hour, the worst minute of your life bind you with chains. You know what it's like to feel God-forsaken, to be forsaken by your woman and by your children.

You know how demons hide in bottles and syringes. You know how anger and pride become gods. You know what it means to hurt people in a way that will never heal. You know what it means to be guilty. You know how the devil will keep on accusing you, no matter how many times you've repented, no matter how many times you've received forgiveness, no matter how many times you've been baptized.

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But Jesus stretched out his arms on that cross for you! Not for some imaginary you, but for the real you, the actual you, the you who did it. Because God loves you, the real you, the actual you, the you who did it, the you who could do it again.

That's the glory of Jesus. The glory of Jesus is that he dies a shameful death for shameful sinners like you and like me. And that glory isn't hidden away somewhere. It's not just for special people like Moses and Peter.

No, that glory is for you. Jesus is for you. That's what the Bible says from start to finish. Jesus is for you. Believe it. Trust it. Count on it. So go ahead. You tell those demons to go to hell. And tell them that, thanks to Jesus, you won't be seeing them there!

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Glory and thanks be to God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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