

The Man Who is God: *Just Another Bright Guy?*

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When I was in college I was invited to a professor's home. A student rented one of her rooms and it was he who invited me actually. His name was Jamie and upon arriving that evening I found a half-dozen other students plus a few professors. What ensued for this small group was a cup of coffee and then Jamie sitting down at the grand piano and giving a private concert. He was absolutely brilliant. Our school had a conservatory of music and I noted an accomplished professor nodding her head admiringly. I knew Jamie was a German major and played the piano. But that he could play like this ... brought a hush to my soul.

The passage we come to today is not unlike this living room concert experience I had. Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in a private moment in a way that brought a hush to their souls. May it bring the same to ours.

We are in a study of the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. We're looking at the way, though he was a man, Jesus was also mysterious. Things came through him, happened because of him, were said by him, that were not normal. It adds up to him being the man who is God.

In the Orthodox Church, besides Christmas and Easter, there is celebrated The Transfiguration. Wow. What would line up right behind the virgin birth and the empty tomb? Answer: a commemoration of this moment we are going to read about now.

¹ Luke 9:28-36.

¹ The setting is a mountain. When this story is told in the gospel of Mark, it is at exactly the mid-way point. If all the verses of Mark form a mountain, this is the peak in the middle. Whichever gospel you read this story in, whether Matthew, Mark, or Luke, there is a definite shift from this point on. Everything tilts away from Galilee and toward Jerusalem, from Jesus teaching to Jesus speaking of his death. The divide is here.

²⁸About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³²Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." ³⁶When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Imagine awakening to see your high school physics teacher being consulted by Albert Einstein and Sir Isaac Newton or your art tutor being looked to for advice from Picasso and Rembrandt. So the disciples find their rabbi Jesus ... with Moses and Elijah, one representing the Law and the other the Prophets (as when we speak of the Hebrew Bible as containing of "the law and prophets"). Both had in common that neither were said to have died, but went right into heaven, and they both had asked to see God's glory and were given a backside glance from the cleft of a rock.

The disciples who awakened were Peter, James, and John. The last time we heard Peter speak, he answered Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" In every inch of every gospel, there is that matter of who Jesus is. Who is this that wind and waves obey him? Who is this forgiving sin? Who is this touching lepers? Eating with sinners? Teaching with such authority? Who? Who? Who? Peter's is the climactic answer: Jesus, you are the Christ of God.

But that's Peter's answer. Lofty as it is, it must be elevated more. What's God's answer to the question? That will lift Peter's

answer to the truest height. God's answer, that's what this whole incident is about. Why so much of Christendom gives heed to this passage is because it is God's answer. God gives us here who Jesus is, why he came, and what we must do.

Who Jesus is. To read Steinbeck's book *The Grapes of Wrath* or Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* or Paterson's *Jacob I Have Loved* and lots of other books, we would do well to have some Bible background. Both of those titles refer to verses in the Bible. The same is true here in Luke 9. What is big in the background is the Old Testament book of Exodus. In fact, that word is used in the passage. Exodus is a Greek word and it is translated into English which is why you didn't hear it probably. It's the word, "Departure." Departure. Exodus. Here, in Luke 9, there is mountain, luminescence, cloud, and voice. That alignment happens one other place in the Bible. In Exodus, we read about lightening, cloud, and voice together at Mt. Sinai. We are meant to link that story with this one.

The Hebrew people who had been enslaved in Egypt were led forth from there by a pillar of fire and cloud. It was a glory cloud experience they had. That incandescent cloud caused disarray amongst Pharaoh's pursuing armies, settled on Mt. Sinai as God addressed the people, and come upon the tabernacle when Moses entered there. Plain and simple, it symbolizes the very presence of God. It is a physical symbol of his spiritual presence.

When Moses met with God in that tabernacle on which the glory cloud descended one of the things that happened was that his face became bright. II Corinthians speaks of Moses' face shining. Both in Exodus and in II Corinthians, we discover that, for Moses, the brightness of God *reflected* off his face. He was like the moon as it is brightened by the sun. On this mountain, Jesus also shines. However, there is something fundamentally different about his shining versus Moses'. For Moses the glory came down

and for Jesus the glory comes out. The light doesn't come to him, but from him. He is not the moon, but the sun.²

This is why the writer of Hebrews says, "Jesus is God's radiant glory, the exact representation of his being."³ He is literally, the impress of God. When a foot touches the sand on the beach, it leaves an impression. Jesus is the physical impress of the spiritual God. How do we know that that is a chair over there? Light hits it and sends its exact outline and location and color to our eyes. But light does not hit Jesus. Rather it comes from Jesus and exactly shows (not partially) none other than God himself to our eyes! The lightning and the cloud in Exodus *symbolized* the glory of God, but Jesus, in Luke, *is* the glory of God. He is the radiance, the glory, the exact representation of God. You want to see God? Look at Jesus.⁴

Peter says, 'Let's build booths. Maybe we can have three shrines to you famous guys, a holy hall of fame.' Immediately, immediately the voice from heaven comes, "This is my son." 'Don't you see, Peter? When you said, "Jesus, you are the Christ of God, did you get it?" He is not a Christ who is like a prophet. He is not a great prophet like Moses and Elijah, but the God those prophets longed to see. He is not an enlightened prophet, but the one who enlightens the prophets. He is not a prophet trying to get near God, but the God the prophets are trying to get near. You see three heroes, Peter, but I give you one son. You imagine a place perhaps for people to come to, Peter, but I give you a person to come to.'⁵ Peter's Christ, he here learns, is God's

² Jesus is praying and it is not so much that who he is is changed by praying as who he is is revealed while he is praying. My piano friend didn't become someone by playing but who was was revealed by his playing. Who Jesus is comes through ... brilliantly.

³ 1:3

⁴ John 8:19ff, 14:8ff -- Jesus, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

⁵ Two comments. One, the word for tent or booth is the same as tabernacle. The tabernacle was the precursor to the temple. It was a place of meeting. Jesus said, Destroy the temple and I'll raise it up. His life makes the temple,

glorious self.⁶ How about you – is Jesus a great prophet or God himself?

An old movie, “O God,” starring George Burns as God, has him saying, “Jesus? He is one of my boys. Of course, I have other sons. Mohammed. Buddha. Ghandi. I have had many sons, not any special one.” Many people think just this. But Mohammed, Buddha, Gandhi ... they never, ever claimed or accepted any assertions that they were anything other than perhaps enlightened. Jesus alone stands on the face of history as the face of God.⁷

Jesus is the uncreated light, God’s radiant self.⁸

and the tabernacle, before it obsolete. Two, Abraham Heschel, a Jew, writes, “Wile the deities of other peoples were associated with places or things, the God of Israel was the God of events: The Redeemer from slavery, the Revealer of the Torah, manifesting Himself in events of history rather than in things or places ... We remember the day of the exodus from Egypt, the day when Israel stood at Sinai, and our Messianic hope is the expectation of a day, the end of days.” In *The Sabbath*, p. 8.

⁶ Peter did get this. See if this mountain moment did not mean something to him. II Peter 3:16ff, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”

⁷ NT Wright says in For All God’s Worth, “How can you live with the terrifying thought that the hurricane has become human, that the fire has become flesh, that Life has walked into our midst? Christianity either means that or it means nothing. It is the most devastating disclosure of the deepest reality in the world or it is a sham, a total nonsense. Most people, unable to cope with saying either of those two things, are condemned to live in the shallow world in between.”

⁸ Notice that we have not talked about how Jesus, in 9:26-27, speaks of those present seeing the Son of Man in his, the Father’s, and angels’ glory. Some present won’t die before seeing the kingdom. Some present were Peter, James, & John. Who is Jesus? The Son of Man, possessor of divine glory, displayer of the kingdom of God.

Why he came. When I was born, it just happened. I didn't will it to happen and I didn't have a why I came. Most people don't. That's why the book *The Purpose Driven Life* has been one of the greatest selling books of all time. But this is not true of Jesus. He determined his entry into time and space, and he did so with a specific purpose. What was it?

Just as the light did not come down on Jesus, but came out from him, so the cloud does not appear to directly descend on the mountain, but suddenly to envelope it. Peter, James, and John were terrified. Well, they should be. When God's cloud was on Sinai, you know what happened, don't you? If anyone touched the foothills, they died. When Moses and Elijah asked to see God's glory, God Almighty answered, "No one can see my glory and live."

We moderns know the fear of radiation, but those then knew the fear of his holiness. We are alert about a radiation cloud, they were alert with respect to the glory cloud. Not having a fear of his holiness, we have a faith without mystery and worship without awe. But they fell on their faces before The Transcendent One. We are told that Peter, James, and John are afraid. No wonder! They are thinking, "We're dead." But here Moses and Elijah are seeing Jesus face to face and are alive. Here the three disciples are alive. Peter, James, and John didn't die. Why?

The answer is in the word "departure." Moses and Elijah were discussing with Jesus his departure. The word is a euphemism for death (like in the "dearly departed" or "the time of my departure has come"). But it is also the same exact word, "Exodus." Exodus was the deliverance of enslaved people from Egypt. His "departure" means their "deliverance." That Exodus deliverance was ultimately effected by a death, the angel of death taking all first-born. He wreaked havoc, exacting punishment for all rebellion and oppression. He took the firstborn first fruits

which were God's. The only way to live was to find a substitute, a lamb, and to put that blood on the door post of your house.

Why did Moses, Elijah, and the disciples see God and not die? Because, quite simply, Jesus did. He gave that blood. That is what he came to do. They saw God and did not die because he saw them and did. How could Moses and Elijah simply go up into heaven? Because, quite simply, Jesus came down from heaven ... for them. Moses with Elijah, the disciples with each other ... together. Why? Because, quite simply, Jesus became alone for them. That's why Jesus came ... to live the life you should have lived and to die the death you should have died. Do you want to see God? Look at Jesus. Do you want to see God *and live*? It has to do with Jesus.

What we must do. The passage suggests two things for us to do and tells us another thing we must do. First, we should ask God to reveal himself to us. To Peter's confession Jesus said, "Flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but my father in heaven." It wasn't his IQ, it was Jesus' father. The disciples were half-asleep. They did not get the revelation of Christ on the mountain because of how bright they were, but because of how bright he was. The glory did not come because they were awake, but they became awake because the glory came. All of us are spiritual sleepy heads. We don't figure God out in our sleepy heads and then come to him. He comes to us. Do you want to know God? Ask him to come. You sense him. You say you want to know if he's there and what he's like. Have you asked him to reveal himself to you? Do it now. Right now. I mean it. Ask now in your chair, in your heart.

Two, if he came to live the life you should have lived and to die the death you have died. Then let him. Don't live the life you have lived and die the death you will die. Live his life. Give him yours. Trade places with him. It is why he came.

There is one command in this passage. "Listen to him." Do you want to know God? Do you want him to come to you? He has. He's come to you in this passage, in *this* Jesus, in this moment. For all who have asked for God to come, he has ... perfectly, exactly. All the fullness of God dwells in him. He is the exact representation of God's glory. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Awaken fully to this Jesus. Don't wait for something else. The perfect has already come. Don't wait for something more complete, the more complete has already come. There is nothing more complete. Take this word, this life (of Jesus). Consider *him*. Study *him*. Look at *him*. Listen to *him*. Listen, listen, listen to *him*.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

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