

HUMAN BEINGS AND THE GLORY OF GOD

Matthew described Jesus when He was transfigured this way: “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” The two comparisons indicate how extraordinary Jesus looked. We find it harmful, and even dangerous to look at the sun. We know what white clothes are, but white as the light?

Sinful human beings are aware of their sin and expect to die if they are suddenly confronted by the presence of God, angels, or God’s glory. When something happens suddenly, people are often frightened, but much more is involved than fright. When God appeared in the temple, Isaiah said, “Woe to me! For I am ruined! For I am a man with unclean lips.” When the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds near Bethlehem, they were very afraid. When Peter saw the miraculous catch of fish after working all night for nothing, he told Jesus, “Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!” After Jesus rose from the dead, an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, went to the tomb, rolled the stone back, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. When Jesus appeared to Saul near Damascus, he fell to the ground. When the apostle John saw the glorified Jesus on the island of Patmos, he fell down at His feet like a dead man.

The presence of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration is significant in linking the chief prophets of the Old Testament with God’s ultimate revelation in Jesus. Moses had a special closeness to God on Mount Sinai. Once, when Moses went up on the mountain, cloud covered the mountain, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. “For six days, the cloud covered it; and, on the seventh, He called to Moses from within the cloud. The glory of the LORD appeared to the Israelites like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. Moses entered the cloud as he went up onto the mountain. He was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.”

After the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, Moses set up “the tent of meeting” outside the camp. People had to go out to it to make an inquiry of the LORD. The people watched Moses when he went out there. When he went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stand at the entrance of the tent while God was speaking to him. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, they would get up and worship at the entrances of their own tents. However, the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

Moses pleaded with the LORD that His Presence should accompany the Israelites on their way to Canaan. When the LORD promised to do what he asked, Moses requested, “Please, show me Your glory.” The LORD answered, “I shall make all My goodness pass in front of you, and] shall proclaim My name, ‘the LORD’ in your presence. I shall be gracious to anyone to whom I am gracious; and I shall have compassion on anyone on whom I have compassion.” However, He said, “You cannot see My face, because no human being may see Me and live.” The LORD also said, “Look, here is a place near Me. Stand on the rock. When My glory goes past, I shall put you in a gap in the rock, and I shall cover you with My hand until I have gone past. Then I shall take My hand away, and you will see My back; but My face will not be seen.”

The Israelites were aware that Moses had been speaking with the Lord. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he did not know the skin of his face was radiant because God had been speaking with him. When Aaron and all the other Israelites looked at Moses, they saw that the skin of Moses’ face was radiant and they were afraid to approach him. After that, Moses used to put a veil over his face, but removed it when he entered the presence of the LORD to speak with Him.

After Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal, and fled for his life when Jezebel wanted revenge, an angel of the LORD provided him with food. He travelled for forty days on the energy from that food, to Horeb, the mountain of God. Elijah spent the night in a cave on Mount Sinai. He felt that God’s cause had been lost in Israel. When God asked him what he was doing there, he rehearsed the complaint that been running through his mind: “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, they have torn down Your altars, and they have killed Your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left, and they have been trying to take my life!”

The LORD told Elijah to come out of the cave. Suddenly, as the LORD was passing by, a great and mighty wind was tearing the mountains and shattering the rocks ahead of the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a still, small voice. When Elijah heard that, he wrapped his cloak over his face, went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave. He heard a voice speaking to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah repeated his complaint word for word. However, the

LORD gave Elijah a series of tasks to do back in Israel and Syria, and assured him, “However, I shall keep as a remnant seven thousand people in Israel, none of whom have knelt down before Baal, and none of whose mouths have kissed him.” Elijah saw did not see any splendour of the LORD. Although he witnessed a strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire, we are told each time that the LORD was not in them.

The presence of the LORD was not manifested to Elijah in spectacular demonstrations, but in a still, small voice. It is similar in the way God regularly comes to people, not in overwhelming miracles, but in the quiet word of the Gospel. When God works through such means He can be, and sadly, is, often resisted.

For Jesus, being glorified was bound up with His cross. Moses and Elijah talked to Jesus on the mount of transfiguration they were “talking about His departure, which He was about to make come true at Jerusalem.” The hour for the Son of Man to be glorified was the time of His crucifixion and resurrection. For us, glory comes through Jesus’ cross.

Peter, James, and John were overcome by sleep when Jesus was glorified. Peter began to say things that he did not understand. However, Peter’s mention of three tabernacles, although he was saying what he did not understand, made it clear that he wanted that sweet glory to continue.

When Jesus rose from the dead He rose with a glorified body. Our Christian hope includes our belief that Jesus will use His great power to change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body. We shall see Him as He is, and be like Him. When Paul wrote about the glorification of human bodies of believers in the coming resurrection, he compared them to the splendour of the sun, moon, and stars. The body that is sown in dishonour will be raised in glory. What is weak will be powerful, and what is natural will be made spiritual. The image of Adam, subject to sin and death, will be changed to the image of Jesus, the Man from heaven. The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. This perishable body must clothe itself with what is imperishable, and this dying body must clothe itself with what cannot die.

In Second Corinthians Paul says that the glory of the New Testament surpasses that of the Old Testament. It is greater, and permanent. Paul wrote that the “Lord” about whom Moses wrote when he reported about the veil of his face was the Holy Spirit. We Christian people, he said, “all reflect ‘the Lord’s glory’ in our unveiled faces. We are being transformed into the same likeness, from glory to glory, just as it comes from the “Lord”, who is the Spirit.

The message of Jesus’ cross is truly spiritual and gives the hope of the glory of God. Paul wrote that God, who created light at the beginning, “has shone in our hearts, in order to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.”