Heaven meets Earth: seeing and savouring the glory of Jesus
Luke 9:28-36

Now before we get into this passage I want to confront straight on any doubts you might have about it. Because if you're exploring the Christian faith or you're a skeptic or even if you're a Christian but you've become a bit cynical, you might read this account of men appearing from heaven and Jesus being transfigured and a voice coming from a cloud and think, 'this belongs with stories of fairies at the bottom of the garden, we're too sophisticated for this stuff.'

Well, if that's you, or if you just have some niggling doubts about this, I want to give you three things to hold on to.

1. Peter says something stupid. Or at least he says something that left Peter, and just about every commentator, since thinking 'what was he thinking?' What possessed Peter, when faced with this vision of glory, to suggest they all go camping? Now, just think about that. Have you ever said something dumb? Like me do you sometimes open your mouth just to change feet? Have you ever said something and immediately thought, why did I say that? Now, when that happens, do you broadcast it? Do you write it down for posterity? Well, you might if it's a good joke, or if you can laugh at yourself and, of course, you talk about it *if it happened*. And this business of Peter offering to put up some tents just doesn't make sense, it's a needless piece of information, unless it really happened and Peter really said it and this is for real.

2. Secondly, the disciples stay silent about it: v36 'And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.' Now, imagine they had concocted this story with Jesus to try and boost His prestige; why stay silent about it? If this was made up to make Jesus look good, they'd be out telling people. But the other gospels tell us that Jesus told them to stay quiet, which they did until after the resurrection, and that only makes sense if it really happened and Jesus really told them to keep quiet.

3. But thirdly, of the three disciples who claimed to see Jesus transfigured, two where martyred for the cause of Jesus – James was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down. And as for them making it up, it is this very event that Peter gives as proof that they did NOT invent all this stuff: 2 Peter 1:16-18 – 'For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.'

So, far from this supernatural, out-of-this-world stuff suggesting it's fairy-tale land, Peter says it is exactly this event that proves we're not making it up about Jesus. It's the reason they're prepared to die for him.

The answer to the question
And that question is the question that Luke has repeatedly put before us over the preceding chapters: Who is this man Jesus? At the beginning of His ministry Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah at His home synagogue in Nazareth, claims it has

been fulfilled in him and people are left asking, 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' – by which they mean, 'Who does he think he is?' After healing the paralysed man, and forgiving the sinful woman, people are asking: 'who is this who even forgives sins?' John the Baptist questions, 'are you the one who was to come?' Jesus calms the storm and the disciples ask, 'who then is this that he commands even winds and water and they obey him? King Herod ponders, 'who is this about whom I hear such things?' And it all culminates, as we saw last week, with Jesus turning to the disciples and asking, 'and who do you say I am?'

Well, in this transfiguration we get heaven's definitive answer to that question. And there are 3 witnesses here as to who Jesus is: the visitors, the vision, and the voice. And each of these is like the last pieces of the jigsaw falling into place, finishing the picture, answering the question of who this man Jesus is.

The Visitors

Let's look first at these visitors from heaven. V29-30: 'And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah.'

Now if *you* were planning this, if you were tasked to be the event co-ordinator for Jesus' transfiguration party, which couple of Bible stars would you have chosen to appear alongside him? Samson maybe? – the Bible's answer to world wrestling, to give him a bit of masculine credibility; or Jonah, because, hey that's your favourite Bible story? or King David? Get some royalty – that'll sell well! Or a woman – Deborah or Esther maybe? But why Moses and Elijah? Of all the hall of fame of faithful saints that crowded the ramparts of heaven to watch this happen, why are these two men so honoured to stand next to Jesus? What's being communicated to us by their appearing?

Well these two men share some interesting overlaps in their biographies. Both were giant spiritual leaders of God's people. Both confronted those who wielded oppressive power over God's people; both encountered God on a mountain; and both, in the minds of Jewish people, were linked to the last days: for Moses, a new prophet would arise who would speak God's word like he had; for Elijah, he would return in some shape or form, before the Lord appeared.

But more than the echoes of those things that we find in Jesus himself, it is what these two men represent that is so telling here. Because Moses stands there as the representative of the Law, and Elijah stands there as the representative of the Prophets, and they're talking with Jesus about Jesus. Their attention is all on Jesus. You see, Jesus is the one all the Law and all the prophets have been looking forward to, He's their ultimate and supreme fulfillment. The whole story-line of scripture, of kings and priests and prophets, of victories and defeats, of sacrifices and offerings, of exile and deliverance, had been building to this moment. And as the disciples wake, these two visitors from heaven begin to fade away, leaving Jesus alone centre-stage. And when the voice from heaven speaks, no mention is made of these other two, because this wasn't a meeting of equals, as if Jesus was just one more in a long line of Israel's leaders and prophets. He stands alone. Moses and Elijah were burning witnesses to the truth, but Jesus is the truth.

Moses and Elijah were faithful servants of the king, but Jesus is the king. Everything these two men, and those they represented longed for, everything they yearned to see, everything they spoke of, is supremely fulfilled in Jesus.

The Vision

What about the vision, what does all the imagery tell us of who this man Jesus is? Well, just visualize it, and think what it reminds you of: they're up a mountain; Jesus' face and clothes shine like lightning; there's the glory cloud which descends on the mountain; there's the voice of God speaking from out of the cloud. Now, doesn't that remind you of Sinai? - with the cloud and lightning and God speaking and Moses going up the mountain to receive the law; and when he comes back down his face is shining with the glory of God?

But if there are similarities, do you see the big difference? When Moses' face shone, it shone with reflected glory. He came face to face with God's glory and reflected it back like a mirror. But with Jesus, there is no external glory source. The dazzling light comes from inside Him. He's not a mirror reflecting God's glory, He is that glory. As Paul says in Colossians (1:19)– 'in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.' As Hebrews says (1:3) 'He [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.' That's why the apostle John, who witnessed all this, could open his gospel declaring, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory' (1:14).

So the visitors tell us He is the supreme fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. The vision tells us He is the glory of God. But what of the Voice?

The Voice

We've heard what the crowds think – he could be John the Baptist, or Elijah or one of the prophets. We've heard what Peter thinks, 'you're the Christ, the messiah.' But now we get heaven's verdict. Who is this man? V35 'And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to Him!"

Now, let's work backwards. God the Father says of Jesus, 'listen to him!' And you could hear that and think 'ok, who is Jesus? He's the one I am to obey.' And you'd be right, but not right enough. You see when God says 'listen to him' those words would have rung huge bells for any Jewish hearers, because when Moses was preparing the people of Israel for his own departure he said to them (Deut 18:15), 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen.' And so God the Father is saying, 'this is *that* prophet, the one who Moses said would come, the one who speaks My word to you, *the* prophet – Listen to him.'

But then the Voice calls him 'My Chosen One.' And again, no one is in any doubt what is meant, because in Isaiah 42 onwards, Isaiah describes God's Chosen One, His servant who would come and perfectly fulfill God's will. And yet in Isaiah 53 this same chosen servant would suffer – he would be despised and rejected, be wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. But through Him many would be counted righteous. And this voice from the cloud calls out 'this is *Him*, my chosen, suffering, justifying, servant.'

But the highest accolade: – who is this? "This is my *Son*." Now if you're a parent you'll know those times when you feel an emotional bond with your child that's almost physical. That may be a right sense of pride, 'that's *my* boy', and you *feel* this affirmation of them; or it might be in anger. I can think of just two occasions when I have felt so angry I could have punched someone, and both were when one of my daughters was being either physically or emotionally mistreated and I felt this powerful identification: that's my daughter. And here, God the Father unequivocally identifies with and associates with and vindicates Jesus as His Son.

Now just as 'Listen to Him!' should make us think of the great prophet after Moses; and just as 'My chosen one' should ring all these bells of Isaiah's chosen and suffering servant, so 'My son' rings out these wonderful echoes of the Royal Son, the Son promised to King David, who would rule on his throne for ever and ever: The Son of Psalm 2 (6-8): '"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: the Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession."'

So who is this man Jesus? The visitors from heaven tell us He's the fulfillment of everything the Law and the Prophets looked forward to. The vision tells us He's the glory of God. And the voice tells us He's the Prophet we must heed, the Servant who has come to die and make many righteous; and He's the Son, the promised King who will rule forever.

But what's all that got to do with you? Well, here's the deal; if Jesus is the supreme fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, then when we come to this book we need to learn to see Jesus as the golden thread running through and connecting every chapter and every book: when you read about bloody sacrifices instead of going, 'yuk!', you should ask, what does this tell me about Jesus? When we read acts of heroism like David slaying Goliath, rather then just thinking– 'ok, so in God's strength I can be a giant slayer', we should see how God was preparing His people for the day when the second, greater David would come to save us from even worse enemies. In the words of one author, we've got to get our eye in to see how 'every story whispers His name'.

But also, if Jesus is the supreme fulfillment of all that went before, if He is the glory of God, if He is the one in whom God the Father takes infinite pleasure, then He should be first in our affections as well and as a church and as individuals we should be radically Christ-centred and Jesus-focused. Because sadly it is possible for something other than Jesus to occupy the ultimate place in your heart. It's possible to make something other than Jesus what you live for. As a Christian it's possible to elevate some area of theology or doctrine to your main thing. It's possible to have as the treasure of your heart – what you most value - something other than Jesus. And just as these disciples had to wake up to see the glory of Jesus, maybe we do too.

So as Moses and Elijah fade into the background leaving Jesus alone, decide again in your heart– He's going to be my main-thing, He's going to be the object of my

worship, He's going to be what I give my life for, He's going to be the passion and the treasure and the pleasure of my heart. Because nothing other than Jesus deserves that place.

But what if you recognize, as we all should, that you're not there yet? How can you grow in your heart and mind understanding of the glory of Jesus, so that He does occupy the place He, and He alone, deserves in your affections and your thinking? Are there any clues here, any guidance as to how we can see and value Jesus as He really is?

Seeing His Glory

Well, this all happens as Jesus goes up the mountain to pray. Now, Mark did a great job last week reminding us of the centrality of prayer in Jesus' life and we see it again here. One commentator (Bock) says of this passage, 'In Luke, when prayer is present, something significant usually follows' – and boy does something significant follow here; and I don't think it's stretching it too far to say that if we want to grow in our love for and appreciation of Christ and His glory, we need to take time to meet with Him in prayer.

The second thing is what the Voice says: Listen to Him! If we want to know Jesus, we need to listen to Him, and that means listening to His voice as He reveals Himself to us from out of His word. Letting His word shape how we think of Him and respond to Him.

But finally, notice how Jesus reveals Himself to these three disciples. He doesn't take them up the mountain one-by-one, He doesn't have individual, private audiences with them. He does it as a group. So if you want to grow in your love and passion for Jesus and His glory, you need others alongside you: so get committed to the church and get in a homegroup, and live this out together.

But as we finish, did you notice the reaction of the disciples to what unfolds before them? v34: '… a cloud came and overshadowed them, *and they were afraid* as they entered the cloud.' Now if this transfiguration speaks so strongly of promises fulfilled and hopes answered, why are they afraid? Surely grown men aren't afraid of a bit of fog? They're afraid, because they know that when the cloud of God's Shekinah glory appears people die – because no man can look upon God and live. God in His holiness and man in his sinfulness don't mix. And yet, just a short time later, Peter, James and John are walking back down the mountain very much alive. How is that? How come they don't get fried on the mountain?

His departure - our deliverance

The reason is the very thing Moses and Elijah are talking to Jesus about: v30-31, "And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory *and spoke of his departure*, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

Now the word that most of our Bible translations translate as *departure* – is the word 'exodus.' So Moses and Elijah are talking to Jesus about his exodus.

Now when Moses lead the people of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt, they had to

take a lamb, the Passover lamb, sacrifice it and sprinkle its blood over their doorposts, protecting them from the destroying angel of God's wrath. And that first Exodus freed the Israelites from physical and economic oppression. But that was just the warm up act. Because, through Jesus' death and resurrection, God brings about a second exodus, delivering us not from physical slavery this time, but from the slavery and oppression of sin and satan and death. And that is why these 3 disciples can walk out of an encounter with God alive. Because not only is Jesus the exact representation of the glory of God, He is also the means by which sinful men and women like these disciples and you and I can draw near to God. As He died in our place, as the Passover lamb of the Exodus, Jesus took away the sin that separates us from God and took upon Himself the wrath of God that would destroy us and through His resurrection brought about the ultimate deliverance we needed.

Now, like these 3 men, there will be times when you feel guilty and soiled and unworthy, if not afraid, to draw near to God. And if you look at your self and your unworthiness, you'll draw back. But it's then that you need to remember, that your standing before God is not dependent on whether or not you shape up. If it was, we'd all be lost. Instead, it rests on Jesus, and it's because of His death and resurrection, His exodus, that we can approach God with confidence, because our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.