

# VISIONS OF GLORY

A Striking Preview of Christ's Second Coming



A flash! Christ comes, light beam so bright, His glory all to see.

A world ruled by the sinless man - unveiled, true Deity.

With Him, once weak and failing ones by grace held faithfully;

Redeemed, renewed, now glorified; shine true humanity.

**And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John ..., and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell**

**on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only (Mt 17:1-8).**

Here is one of three historical accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Three of His disciples, Peter, James and John, had front row seats to the reality unfolding before their eyes. They were first hand hearers of the voice of God speaking from Heaven. The experience was striking; it left a deep and lasting impression. Ultimately, they saw in the transfiguration a vision of Christ's coming in power and glory. For when writing of this, Peter said, *we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty ... when we were with him in the holy mount (II Pet 1:16, 18).*

Six days prior to Christ's transfiguration, Jesus told His disciples, *the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Mt 16:27-28).* The "some standing here" is seemingly (based on Peter's testimony) a reference to the three disciples who six days later witnessed Christ's transfiguration. Nonetheless, Jesus indicates that His coming coincides with His rewarding of every man according to his works; i.e., the Judgment. Thus, it is possible that the disciples who were alive in 70 AD and saw the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, also saw in that judgment a foreshadow of *the Son of man coming in his kingdom*; for the judgment that fell on Christ's enemies back then prefigures what awaits all who *will not have this man to reign over them* when He comes in power to rule as King (see Lk 19:11-28, 37-44).

As for the followers of Jesus (who have acknowledged and welcomed His ruling Authority), this preview of Christ's coming, seen in the transfiguration of His person, provides the following reassurances.

#### CHRIST WILL COME IN GLORY AND REIGN AS KING

The word *transfigured* (metamorphose) means "to change form; to be transformed." In the insect and animal world, we see this change of form when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, or a tadpole a frog. Even so, Jesus "was transfigured before them." His form (not substance) was changed. He appeared one minute in ordinary human flesh, the body of a mere man. Then suddenly, shining from within was this brilliant light. His clothing glistened with the white of light. His face glowed like the shining sun. *[H]is countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength* is how the apostle John later described his Spirit-given vision of the ascended, glorified Christ (Rev 1:16).

One day, *this same Jesus* will return to earth *in like manner* as He was taken to heaven (Acts 1:11); *his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives (Zach 14:4)*. As that day draws near, many false prophets performing many signs and wonders will claim that Christ has already returned, and they will bid folk, 'come and see' (Mt 24:23-26). Jesus warns: don't bother. *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (27)*. Shining as the sun in its strength, the glorified Christ will lighten the sky from one horizon to the other. *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him (Rev 1:7)*.

#### The glory of Sovereign Deity

This brilliant, dazzling light seen shining forth from Jesus of Nazareth testifies to His deity, that He is *God with*

*us (Mt 1:23). God is light (I Jn 1:5). That is His essential nature. He is dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto (I Tim 6:16) - a glorious light emitting from His very Being. In our sin, we can no more approach our holy Creator than we can approach the burning sun. For our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). In days of old, it was by the light of the Shekinah glory cloud (which appeared as a pillar of fire at night) that God manifested His presence among His people Israel. Here at the transfiguration that light is shining forth from the Son of God. It did so in eternity past (see Jn 17:5). It will do so in eternity future; for the New Jerusalem will have no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof (Rev 21:23). Jesus, the Lamb of God, embodies the glory of God. He is the Lamp in whom the Light resides - the brightness of [God's] glory (Heb 1:3). At His incarnation, the Son made himself of no reputation (Phil 2:7), meaning, Jesus laid aside the visible brightness, along with the many privileges, of Deity. He would not cease to be God but cease to appear as such. At His transfiguration, a bit of that brightness surfaced. The visible glory of sovereign Deity was on display in the very person of Jesus Christ.*

### The glory of sinless humanity

Moreover, so was the glory of sinless humanity. *God created man in his own image (Gen 1:27). He formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Gen 2:7). The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, reflected God's image in their perfect manhood and womanhood, and were most likely clothed in light. Having sinned, they lost their glorious attire and found themselves naked, destined to return to dust (Gen 3:7, 19). Since then, their descendants all have sinned, and come short of the glory of*

God (Rom 3:23). All, that is, except the *seed of the woman* (Gen 1:15) - the promised Savior.

As prophesied, Israel's promised Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, was born of a virgin (Is 7:14; Mt 1:23). While taking on Adam's nature, Jesus did not take part in his sin. He was *without blemish and without spot*, for He *did no sin* (I Pet 1:19; 2:22). Then on Calvary's cross He *through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God* (Heb 9:14). The sinless One *gave himself for our sins* (Gal 1:4). The death we deserve Christ absorbed and three days later conquered! Now seated at the Father's right hand, He freely offers to all the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life. Christ *bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we are healed* (I Pet 2:24). Those who turn to God's Son for salvation turn from sinfulness towards righteousness, and they will be safe when Christ comes to "reward every man according to his works" and reign as King in the coming kingdom. They will share in the glory God intended for His image bearers – the glory of sinless humanity.

### CHRIST WILL SHARE HIS GLORY WITH HIS PEOPLE

Here in this holy mount preview of the second coming of Christ, two great representative figures in Israel's history appear with Jesus. "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him" (3). Moses represents the Law given by God to His people; Elias (Elijah) represents the prophets who guarded the Law in the face of idolatry. Their gathering around Jesus confirms that He is the promised Messiah, the delivering Savior spoken of in the Law and by the prophets. In fact, Luke in his Gospel tells us they talked to Jesus about His saving work. *And,*

*behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk 9:30-31).* They spoke with Jesus about His *decease*, a reference to His *exodus* – how He would exit the world. The *exodus* Jesus accomplished involved His cross death for our sins, followed by His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand. By this, Jesus delivers His people from sin's penalty and power - and ultimately from its very presence.

### The saints appear with Christ

Furthermore, in this preview of Christ's coming, Moses and Elijah seemingly represent the saints who will appear with Christ when He comes. Scripture tells us that when Jesus returns, *them also which sleep in Jesus [which died in the faith] will God bring with him (I Thess. 4:14).* Moses, who died with the Promise Land in view, symbolizes the believers who exit this world through the gate of death. However, *we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (I Cor. 15:51-52), for we which are alive and remain shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess 4:17).* Elijah, who made his *exodus* by way of a chariot of fire, caught up alive into Heaven (II Kings 2:11), typifies believers who are alive at Christ's coming and are caught up (raptured) to meet the Lord in the air.

### The saints are glorified with Christ

Now in this pattern of Christ coming in glory to reign as King, both Moses and Elijah *appeared in glory* with the Lord (Lk 9:31). They showed up on the scene as glorified human beings – as *just men made perfect (Heb 12:23).* Here is great encouragement for every believer in Christ, for as great as Moses and Elijah were when they walked upon this earth, they were not sinless, perfect humans.

Yes, *Moses was faithful in all his house (Heb 3:2)*, but his failure was so great that it cost him entrance into the Promise Land (Deut 32:48-52). Indeed, Elijah was a man of such great faith that for three years rainfall was subject to his prayer (I Kings 17:1–18:45); yet Elijah was *subject to like passions as we are (Jam 5:17-18)*. Despite weakness and failure, these two imperfect human beings appear with the Lord *in glory* – glorified; made perfect like Jesus! So shall it be for all who come to God by grace through faith in His crucified, resurrected Son.

By grace, those who have answered the call to repent and believe, who love God because He first loved us, have been predestined for glory: *to them that love God, to them who are the called ... he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:28-29)*. By grace, we have been prepared unto glory: *And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (Rom 9:23)*. By grace, we have been called to partake of glory: *Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess 2:14)*. Paul's gospel, the gospel of God's grace, declares that Jesus died for our sins and arose for our justification. If we have turned from sin to Christ, we shall *also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory ... For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him (II Tim 2:10-11)*.

To believers the apostle John writes, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (I Jn 3:2)*. When we see Jesus, our transformation will be complete. We will be just like Him, righteous; and Jesus said: *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Mt 13:43)*. When we see His face shining as the

sun, we will perfectly reflect His and shine as well. Christ's glory is that of sovereign Deity *and* sinless humanity. He will share His glory, not of sovereign Deity but of sinless humanity, with all His brethren.

### CHRIST BARE HIS GLORY TO BUOY HIS FOLLOWERS

For Peter, James and John, seeing Christ's display of Majesty, alongside these two now-glorified heroes of the faith, had to be a breath-taking experience. At the time they could not have known that this was but a preview of Christ coming to establish His kingdom. They most likely thought it was the real thing, for *it came to pass, as they [Moses and Elijah] departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias (Lk 9:33)*. Peter volunteers himself and the other two for the task of building three tabernacles, one for each of these glorified men. Commenting on this, Thomas Coke writes:

The apostles, both before and after the transfiguration, were with their Master in many delightful spots ..., heard many most blessed sermons, and saw many wonderful works; yet in no place, and on no occasion, but this, were they ever heard to say, *It is good for us to be here*. Peter fancied, no doubt, that Jesus had now assumed his proper dignity; that Elias was come, according to Malachi's prediction; and that the kingdom was at length begun: wherefore, in the first hurry of his thoughts, he proposed to provide some accommodation for Jesus and his august assistants.

#### Added assurance

Like his Jewish brethren, Peter did not perceive the suffering that would precede the glory of their coming Deliver-



erer. They expected the Messiah to free them from bondage to Rome; however, Christ came to deliver from bondage to sin. That required an exodus by way of the cross. Just six days earlier, when Jesus first told His disciples that He would go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, Peter was not receptive to that gloomy message, and even rebuked Jesus for espousing it (Mt 16:21-22). In his mind, Israel's Messiah was to be a prophet like unto Moses, boldly leading a new exodus that was all about God's glory and the glory of His kingdom and people. Now, seeing Jesus' glory and these two glorified saints, Peter presumably thought the kingdom hour had come; hence, he says, 'Lord, give me the word and we'll put up the tents!' However, God's purpose in giving Christ's disciples this *fleeting* vision of glory was to give them added assurance of Christ's *future* kingdom and glory (so they might be better prepared to face what lie ahead). The fact that Peter did not grasp this is seen in the words he spoke.

Now, the Bible says, "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them" (5a). This was the Shekinah glory cloud, the visible token of God's presence. Withdrawn from Israel centuries earlier, it now reappears and begins to descend and surround them. Then God spoke out of the cloud: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (5b). Moses and Elijah were God's servants. Jesus is God's beloved Son. Moses and Elijah most often pleased but also displeased the Lord. The Son always pleased His Father, and the Father here testifies to it. Then the Father calls on these disciples to give His Son their full attention – "hear ye him."

Hemmed in by the awesome and terrifying presence of Almighty God, the disciples were completely unnerved. When they heard His voice, "they fell on their face, and were sore afraid" (6). In Scripture, an overwhelming sense

of dread is the natural experience of all who found themselves in the presence of infinite Holiness. These three disciples were no different. They hit the ground scared stiff and did not move until Jesus came to touch them and speak those words of comfort, "Arise, and be not afraid" (7). The Bible says, when "they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only" (8).

### Abiding lessons

What a monumental event! What treasure the transfiguration holds for the whole of humanity! What would God have us take away from this mountaintop experience? What are the lasting lessons for Christ's followers today?

First, God would have us firmly grasp the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. This is God's Son: sovereign Deity in sinless humanity. Hence, the glory (and honor and praise) that belongs to God belongs to Jesus as well.

Second, God would have us understand His Son's supreme authority. To the Jews there was none greater than Moses and Elijah. Yet, the law that Moses gave and Elijah guarded pointed to Jesus. The *law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Gal 3:24)*. Hence, we are to see "no man, save Jesus only." He alone is to increase and abide in our thoughts and hearts. His words are our commands. We are to hear Him; to give *Him* our full attention, to be *His* disciples.

Then also, of equal importance to believers is this: God would have the glory that awaits Jesus and His followers to sink deep down into their memory. He would have us retain in our thoughts the future coming glory to help us endure life's present troubling circumstances. Soon the face of the Master that had shone like the sun would be battered and bloodied, drooping lifeless from a cross. For those who would faithfully take up their cross and follow

Christ in the face of potentially gut-wrenching sorrow and suffering, much comforting assurance would be needed. For this reason, Christ was transfigured.

Just days prior to the transfiguration, Jesus asked His disciples: *Whom do men say that I the Son of man am... And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:13, 16)*. Then, for the very first time, Jesus began to talk to His disciples about the suffering and death awaiting Him, and the suffering (possibly even unto death) that they too can expect as they follow Him (Mt 16:21ff). To help them bravely face these soon coming dangers, Jesus gave them a glimpse of the certain future glory.

By His transfiguration, Jesus is saying to His disciples (both then and now); when you encounter suffering and loss for following me, remember the kingdom and glory you will experience with me. *I will be highly exalted in glory, ruling over a glorious kingdom - and you will be with me*. When you see me on the cross, when you struggle with bearing your own cross, do not think of this as the end. Neither suffering nor death is the end. Glory is the end! Therefore, *reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom 8:18)*.

Brethren, when the nation's rage, and people turn against Christ and away from His Church; when persecution looms and suffering increasingly becomes the lot of Christ's followers in this world, do not lose sight of the glorified Lord Jesus and the glory that awaits His own. Those who belong to God's family by faith in His Son are *heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together (Rom 8:17)*.

Dear beloved ones, hold fast to Christ. Do not leave Him. Do not fall prey to political correctness and the new morality embraced by the world. Do not succumb to calling good evil and evil good. Stand for truth and righteousness as revealed by God in His Word, the holy Bible. Love it. Live it. Do not be ashamed of Jesus and His gospel. Hear Him. Trust Him. Guard as precious His every word for they are the words of life. Moreover, be willing to suffer for doing so.

Unbelieving friend, the day will come for each of us to stand in the presence of our holy Maker. You do not want to stand there without the Lord Christ as your Savior. You will fall to the ground in utter terror when the presence of the Holy surrounds you. I urge you to repent and believe the gospel. Jesus died for your sins. As the risen Lord, He is quite capable of delivering you from the penalty and power of them if you would have Him. He will receive you just as you are if you will receive Him just as He is. Have you seen Him for who He is? Will you confess Him as your Lord and receive Him as your Savior? Will you become His disciple and allow Him to reign over you? *Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed (Rom 10:11)*. In the heart will be this quiet confidence: I will never be disappointed for having become a Christian; thus, with the mouth will be this glad confession: Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9-10).

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