

Glory

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the Transfiguration of the Lord, February 18, 1996. Scripture Lessons: Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

After nearly two years of retirement from basketball, Michael Jordan rejoined the Chicago Bulls at the beginning of the professional basketball season. He hasn't lost any of his basketball skills. We've probably all seen news clips of Jordan coming down the court, getting to the top of the key, feet lifting off the floor, moving in mid-air. As he dunks the ball, the commentator says, "Ladies and gentlemen, you are watching living proof that men can fly" .

Regardless of how much you like or dislike basketball or the Chicago Bulls or Michael Jordan, few of us would deny that Jordan may be the greatest basketball player in the history of the sport. Better than Magic Johnson. Better than Larry Bird. Better than Julius Irving. Better than Kareem Abdul Jabbar. For all around athletic ability better than Wilt Chamberlain. Jordan has a unique ability to transcend the normal, and do what many would feel is supernatural: to fly through the air.

"That's glory", Tony Evans writes in his book Our God is Awesome. "Glory is the process of manifesting, demonstrating one's attributes; letting everyone in the stands see you strut your stuff; letting people in on who you are and what makes you tick. That's glory". The Bible tells us that God's glory is revealed in at least three ways: in nature, in God's laws, and in Jesus Christ.

First, we see God's glory to some degree in nature. Psalm 19 says, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." Look up at the Milky Way! Look at a sunset or the majesty of the Rocky Mountains and we see something of God's glory. Christians recognize nature as God's handiwork. We don't see God's actual signature in the lower right hand corner of a beautiful landscape as we would in a painting. But Christians certainly see something of God's glory revealed in nature. Just as certainly as a person who loves blue grass music can recognize the voice of Roy Acuff or Olabel Reed a Christian will recognize God's glory in creation. John Calvin use to say that "creation is the theater of God's glory." But nature doesn't fully reveal God's glory. One of the great theologians of the twentieth century, Emil Brunner, once said ~~that nature can tell us no more than~~ that God exists. But nature can't tell us who God is.

Second, God's glory is revealed to some degree in God's law. We read in our Old Testament Lesson: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tables of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.' So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God... and the cloud covered the mountain. The *glory* of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and ... the appearance of the *glory* of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel." On Mount Sinai the LORD manifested his glory through giving laws to his people.

One of the great concerns of parents is setting limits for our children. Most parents know far better than their children what's best for them and what they need to do in order to avoid getting hurt. Because we love our children we set limits: when they're little we tell them when to go to bed, "brush your teeth", "eat your breakfast", say "please" and "thank you". And we teach them moral rules, the Ten Commandments: Worship only the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. Do not worship false gods. Worship the Lord every Sunday. Don't take the Lord's name in vain. Respect your parents. Find appropriate ways to express your anger. Don't have sex before marriage. Don't lie or tell tales. Don't steal. Don't envy what other people have. If we love our children we'll set limits for them and warn them of the consequences of disobedience.

Because God loves us he reveals his glory through his law. He warns us of the dreadful consequences that follow from disobedience. God knows that when we break those rules we go down the ways of death and misery as Tommy Morrison so eloquently testified last week. He manifests his glory by giving us his law. The Law of God tells us so much more about God than nature ever could. But the Law doesn't tell us enough about who God is. God is far more than a law giver.

God's glory is revealed above all else in Jesus Christ. Turn over to the Gospel Lesson. Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain. "He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.... a

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them to the body of Christ." We become God's child through faith and baptism.

But Jesus is God's unique child. Jesus didn't become God's unique Son. Jesus always was God's son. "He was in the beginning with God." Jesus shares in the very nature of God. On the Mountain of Transfiguration God gave Peter, James and John a glimpse of who Jesus really is. Christians seek God's glory above all else in Jesus Christ.

G. A. Studdert Kennedy was the best known chaplain in World War I. He was affectionately called "Woodbine Willie" after the name of a cigarette he handed out to the soldiers in the trenches. After the war he served parish churches in the poorest sections of London. He was always a friend to criminals, to the outcast, the poor and unemployed. And wherever he went he directed men and women to look at God solely through Jesus Christ. "Don't look for God primarily in nature", he told his friends. Nature is "red in tooth and claw". And he said to his friends, many of whom were criminals, "Don't look at God primarily in God's law. The law will kill you every time". "Look for God primarily in the person of Jesus Christ" he said. In one of his poem prayers he wrote,

Thou hast bid us seek Thy glory, in a criminal crucified.
And we find it - for Thy glory is the glory of Love's loss,
And Thou hast no other splendour but the splendour of the
Cross.

Christians see the glory of God primarily in the death of Jesus and we want our neighbors, also, to seek God's glory in Christ. We want our neighbors near and far to become children of God through faith in Christ and to be baptized into his household.

bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'"

And Peter, referring to the Transfiguration of Jesus, says in our Second Scripture lesson that Jesus "received... *glory* from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic *Glory*." In other words, God manifested or demonstrated to Peter, James and John that Jesus was, in a unique and special sense the Son of God.

You and I are children of God by adoption. When we were born, we were *not* God's children. We become God's children through faith in Christ. In the Gospel of John we read that "to all who received him (Christ), who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." And St Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians that "He (God) destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ". In other words, we aren't God's children by nature but through Christ God has determined to make us his children by adoption.

Jesus is God's unique Child but we must be born again in order to be one of God's children. In the baptism service our Book of Common Worship directs the minister to pray, "We thank you, O God, for the water of baptism.... Through it we are reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit. Send your Spirit to move over this water that it may be a fountain of deliverance and rebirth. Wash away the sin of all who are cleansed by it. Raise them to new life, and graft

We don't believe that Christians are better than non Christians. We don't believe that Christianity is a better religion than other religions. Karl Barth argued better than anybody else this century that Christianity, along with all other religions, is under God's wrath and curse for how we drive people away from Christ rather than to him. Christians certainly have done our share of inflicting pain and suffering on others through the centuries. But Christians at our best don't point to ourselves. We point to Christ. Christians want all people everywhere to put their faith in Jesus Christ and become adopted into God's family through baptism.

Ash Wednesday comes in a few days and with it the Lenten season. Lent directs us to see the glory of God primarily in the death of Jesus. What could be a better time to invite neighbors to Sunday School and to worship - to point your neighbor to Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah; and in the voice from the cloud you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us, with Christ, heirs of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.