

## The Festival for the Transfiguration of Our Lord

Mark 9:2-9

It must be wonderful, must it not, to see God in His glory. Well, it must be, and faith knows that it is; it is the hope of the faith, and the motivation of the faithful for being that, faithful, and embracing the faith. *One thing have I asked of the Lord, says the Psalm, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord.*

Most certainly God must think it a wonderful thing for us to see Him in His glory; just think of what He has thought it worthwhile to do to bring it about, that we should; see Him in His glory, that is. It is the purpose for which the Son of God suffered what He suffered, who is Himself God from eternity: for us to see Him in His glory. *Father, as the Son said it to the Father in that bitter last night in which He had Himself given over to suffer for our salvation, my will is that where I am, there they may be with me, whom You have given to me, that they may see my glory.* And if God has found it worthwhile to do what He has done for us to see Him in His glory, it must be a wonderful thing, must it not, to see Him in His glory. Of course it must. God is good, and wise, and would not waste His goodness on something not good.

For Peter and James and John it was a wonderful thing to see the glory of God shining from our Lord Jesus, and to see Moses and Elijah, those who had long ago been taken into the glory of God, and now appeared out of the glory of God. Well, we know that it was that for Peter. *Master, it is good for us to be here!*, he said, and *Let us make three tents!*, for he wanted to be there always, where it was good to be, or at least for a long while, *one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*

But then, as we also understand it from what we hear today, it was not a wonderful thing *only* to see our Lord Jesus shining in glory; as we hear it, *they were greatly afraid.* Therefore was it that Peter was perplexed and panicked so that he *did not know what to say*, or rather, as it is actually written in the Greek of Holy Scripture, he did not know *how to respond.*

It is easy, I suppose, to imagine that it would be wonderful to see God in His glory. In Holy Scripture, however, whoever ever came anywhere close to seeing God in His glory always responded by being terrified, anyone to whom God appeared, even veiled and disguised, as in a burning bush, or from behind, as Moses saw Him. Just as we hear it today that Peter and James and John were *greatly afraid.*

And then, on the other hand, seeing the glory of God shining from our Lord Jesus was not terrifying *only*, either, although it was that also; *Master, it is good for us to be here*, Peter also said. So there is that.

For anyone who has any idea who God is, and who he is himself, it must be terrifying to find oneself confronted with God Himself, in His glory, and realise that one is that, for real.

He has said it Himself: *No man shall see me, and live!* And He has had His holy Apostle John write that *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all; and if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie*. God can have as little to do with evil as darkness with light; God is good, and *holy*, that is: He is whole and complete in His goodness; and so, evil cannot be in the presence of His goodness, as little as darkness can be in the light. Therefore is it that neither sin nor sinners can be in His presence without being utterly and entirely destroyed; therefore is it that sinners cannot see Him and live. Because sin is evil.

Obviously, any sinner who knew this would be terrified to find Himself in the presence of God, for real. But, again, from Holy Scripture, it seems that, whether or not one is familiar with what Holy Scripture teaches about God and His holiness, terror is also the *spontaneous* response to finding oneself confronted with the glory of God, that when finding oneself confronted with His glory, one cannot but find one's evil exposed in the light of His goodness, oneself condemned, utterly unworthy to stand before Him.

Never having myself seen God in His glory in this direct sense, I cannot say for certain exactly why that is; but it would make sense that seeing the glory of God, you would become aware of your own shortcomings, or at least that you would be anxious about in any way offending one obviously so powerful.

At any rate, Holy Scripture does teach that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; and that, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. And, again, somehow it seems that they have all sensed it, who have seen His glory, even if only in glimpses, or veiled, or from behind, or otherwise indirectly.

This is probably the real reason unbelievers, and some who think they are Christian, have no desire to see God and make up other ideas, instead, as to what Heaven is, or whatever they call the place to which they have decided that people they like go when they die.

No doubt it is part of the explanation as to why so many shy away from the faithful Church of God, where He is, with His glory, in His Word of worship. Some sense His presence in the life of His faithful Church, in His Word and worship, and shy away because they are terrified to sense that they fall short, and are sinners, but they will not surrender to the salvation His faithful Church proclaims and promises on His behalf, of full forgiveness for all sin, of rescue from judgement and damnation, of eternal life with Him in glory. Some shy away because they sense that if they were to surrender to His salvation and be saved, they would no longer be able to live in sin, that they would have to abandon behaviours and beliefs that are precious to them, but go against His goodness. Some refuse to come anywhere near His faithful Church at all, even some who claim to be Christian, and think that they are that, and they go somewhere else instead that is also called *church*. Others seek refuge from the reality of God by closing their hearts and minds to His Word; while they sit through the worship of His Church they convince themselves that His Word, which His faithful Church speaks on His behalf, well, it is nothing but words, and they have no need to take it seriously, no need to surrender to it, because *I know better*. Some do continue to come to Church even though they do not care for what she believes and teaches and preaches, because they want to think that they are Christian, because it has been implanted in them that *Christian* is a good thing to be, but they will have nothing to do with God as He really is, and will not have Him be too real; and again, others seek out some other place also called *church* for the same reason.

While Peter was confused so that he did not know how to respond, at the same time terrified to see our Lord Jesus shining in glory, but also sensing that it was good for him to be with Him there, on the mountain, *a cloud came and overshadowed them*, we hear of Holy Scripture, and God spoke out of the cloud. He usually does in Holy Scripture; a cloud is usually what marks the separation between our world and the realm of God, which is not for sinners to see. And what God spoke, out of the cloud, was that *this is my beloved Son*, obviously with reference to our Lord Jesus, and: *Hear Him!*

This was the response of God to Peter's response to seeing the glory of God reflected from our Lord Jesus, to his fearfulness, on the one hand, at finding himself in the presence of the glory of God, and also to his desire to be there, on the mountain, always, where it was good for them to be. *This is my beloved Son; hear Him!*

Peter was not to be content to remain there, on the mountain. There was greater glory for him to see than the glimpses of the glory of God given to him to see, there, on the mountain; nor should Peter be perplexed or in panic, nor should the other Apostles, or any other Christian, at the thought of being in the glory of God.

After all, again, exactly that is the promise of God to those who belong to Him, and the very purpose for which the Son of God came into the world to make us to belong to Him: that we shall see Him in His glory. This is the hope Holy Scripture sets before us, and to which it always makes us to look. *Beloved, we are now children of God, writes the holy Apostle John, and what we shall be has not yet been revealed, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* And as Holy Scripture presents it, this is what is so great about the eternal life God promises to those who believe in Him and belong to Him: that we shall see Him as He is, in the fullness of His glory.

Therefore is this the response of God, also, to our confusion, our longing, on the one hand, to see His glory, and on the other our fear of finding ourselves in the presence of the Holy One: *This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!* For to *hear Him* means more than merely to hear what our Lord Jesus once said, about how we should behave, and be good to each other, and *love thy neighbour*; it means more, even, than hearing what He has said about how God is good and merciful. To *hear Him* means to hear what He now *speaks*; and what He speaks is Himself as the salvation of sinners, who He is, what He has done for us, what He gives to us. Therefore is He Himself what His Church preaches; well, therefore, and because what He commands His Church to preach is Himself, as the salvation of sinners, who He is, what He has done for us, what He gives to us.

And to *preach Christ* means more than merely to preach about Him; it is to speak Himself and His reality. For in the preaching of His salvation, the reality of His salvation is present, and He Himself. With the Word He has His Church speak of how He Himself has borne the hatred of His own holy goodness against all our evil, all ungodliness and impurity and unbelief, He declares it all to be dealt with and done away with and be no more, and declares us to be right with Him, so that we can rejoice to worship in His presence, and look forward to seeing Him coming in the fullness of His glory.

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men! *Amen.*