

“The Path to True Glory”

Luke 9:28-36

A pencil is a very important tool to a custom cabinetmaker for measuring, marking, layout work, and more. During the years I spent in that field I would sometimes misplace my pencil. I remember looking for it everywhere. I looked on my assembly bench, in my toolbox, and in the pockets of my cabinetmaker’s apron. I looked under things, behind things, and in things. I looked on the floor, but it was nowhere to be found. And then I found it. It was sticking behind my ear the whole time; right where I put after its last use.

That’s the way that life often is. We miss things that have been there the whole time. That’s somewhat the story of the Transfiguration. Jesus showed his disciples a part of the world that had been there all along, but it had not really been a part of their world. They were bewildered, astonished and trembling with fear when they saw and understood that heaven was already here in their world and that Jesus was the King of heaven.

The transfiguration was a very defining moment in the lives of Peter, John, and James. It was also a defining moment in Jesus’ ministry. Just about a week before this experience Jesus specifically told them, *“I tell you the truth, there are some standing here, who will not taste death, until they have seen the kingdom of God.”*

But what was this experience all about? What did Jesus hope to accomplish by giving the inner circle of disciples this glimpse of deity? What is its meaning and significance for us today? Those are questions we want to answer as we examine Luke 9:28 to 36.

As I reflect on this text, and the surrounding context, it seems clear that Jesus is mapping out for His followers “The Path to True Glory.” We know from Scripture this path seemed ridiculous to the Twelve. In fact, it was so ridiculous to Judas that he actually betrayed Jesus, and unwittingly assisted in Jesus’ fulfillment of His own teaching! In the process, he traded true glory for everlasting shame and contempt. You and I must beware, lest we repeat his mistake.

As we begin our study of “The Path to True Glory,” let me read the text, Luke 9:28 to 36. Listen carefully to Luke’s description of this glorious event. I’m reading Luke 9:28 to 36.

A path is made for walking, for following. To progress along the path, you and I take one step at a time. If you and I hope to progress along “The Path to True Glory,” we must follow the STEPS that will start us on that path and then move us forward to our goal.

The First STEP (on the path to true glory) is,

Communion With the Father

One habit of Jesus that Luke highlights often is the habit of prayer. This reinforces Luke’s goal of communicating primarily about who Jesus is, more than about what He did. So as our text opens, Jesus is praying.

The setting is about a week after He instructed the disciples about the high cost of being His followers. In that time of instruction He told them that following Him would call for self-denial and daily cross-bearing. Discipleship would demand of them a willingness to lay down their physical lives for the sake of the Gospel. If they attempted to save or preserve their lives, they would ultimately lose them.

But there were rewards for discipleship too. Those willing to lose their physical lives would find the blessing of eternal life. Those willing to renounce the world and its system of material profit would receive an eternal glory whose value far outstrips anything of the earth. Those who willingly endured shame and reproach for the cause of Christ would be glorified with Him in His coming kingdom. And He stated clearly that some who were listening to Him teach would get to see that glory before they died.

Unfortunately, the disciples had a mistaken perception of glory. They expected Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom, to free them from Roman bondage, to elevate them to positions of authority in His kingdom. And yes, according to Luke 22:30 they would eventually rise to those positions, but only after they embraced the cross; and only in the world to come.

Many today are like the disciples. They want the glory without the cross. Many hear the message offered today, “Come to Jesus, He has a wonderful plan for your life. Accept Him and He will take away your sin and give you new life.” That’s all true, but it’s only part of the truth. It’s an incomplete Gospel. It offers glory without self-denial, cross-bearing, and full obedience to the Word of God. It is not the Gospel of Jesus.

Jesus understood that the path to true glory was found in complete obedience to the will of the Father. He modeled that obedience for His disciples and for you and me by submitting to John's baptism. The descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father confirmed His obedience. Immediately following His baptism, during His temptation in the wilderness, Satan offered an alternative path to glory – a temporary glory. Jesus rejected that shortcut.

The Gospel writers reveal that even though He was God in the flesh, Jesus still struggled with the desires of His human flesh. In that struggle He understood that knowing the will of the Father was the first step in carrying it out. So He spent much time in prayer, in communion with God. In this He modeled for us the important first step on the path to true glory. If Jesus, the Son of God, felt the need for regular communion with His Father, how much more do you and I need that discipline?

Jesus' baptism was, as I said, a point of commitment; just like yours and mine. At our baptism we made promises or vows to forsake all other gods and give ourselves wholly to Him. We renounced our own sinful will and desires and pledged ourselves to follow His will and His desires for us. We gave public expression to the reality of our death to self and our resurrection to live in the power of Christ. We made a public identification with Him and His people.

Yet we still live in a human body with all its competing affections and desires. And that is why communion or fellowship with God is so important.

Jesus needed strength for what lay before Him. The cross, with all of its shame and suffering, including the weight of our sin, was a grievous burden to be borne. And so it was that He was praying on this night when God met Him in a singular display of glory and confirmation.

We notice from the text that it was while Jesus was communing with the Father that His appearance was altered and His clothing became dazzling white. His Heavenly glory broke through His earthly existence. The veil of His flesh was stripped away temporarily, revealing the glory of His spiritual being. When Moses spent time on the mountain with God receiving the Law, his appearance was altered and he had to veil himself when he came down to the people. Except for a few times during His ministry, Jesus' glory was veiled too.

Spending time in the presence of the Father is the basis of our continuing transformation into the image of Christ. It is the basis of our being changed from glory to glory, II Corinthians

3:18. It is only as we seek Him and His will that we can experience the glory He promised to those who will meet the demands of discipleship.

Those who seek the profit of the world don't have time to fellowship with God in prayer and His Word. They're too busy pursuing their own agenda; an education, a career, a business start-up, an investment opportunity, or even a ministry. None of these are wrong in themselves but, if you and I have identified ourselves as followers of Christ, they become wrong when they cause us to neglect that most important of all relationships.

Those who seek to know Christ and spend time in His presence cannot hide it. Like Moses of old, there is an unmistakable radiance to their countenance; there is an indelible imprint of the Master on their life and conduct. The connection to the Vine will bear fruit. They will become "clean" through the Word spoken by God.

My friend, have you professed faith in Christ? Are you willing to deny yourself and take up your cross daily in following Him? If you are, that will get you started on the path to true glory. But you can only maintain your direction on that path by regular communion with the Father through the Word and prayer. Jesus knew that and He set the example for us.

The Second STEP (on the path to true glory) is,

Confirmation of the Scriptures

As Jesus was praying, He was joined by two men; Moses and Elijah. The text tells us they talked with Jesus about the upcoming events of His death. Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents the prophets. Both of these men, and the eras they represent, spoke prophetically about the coming of Jesus and His sacrifice for sin. You may recall after the Resurrection, when Jesus was talking to the two men on the Emmaus road, He opened their understanding of the Scriptures by beginning with Moses and all the prophets (Luke 24:27).

God revealed the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In that Law He revealed Himself as a holy God and set certain conditions one must meet in order to approach Him. Those who tried to meet with God on their terms, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, perished. He promised that if the people obeyed Him, He would bless them in every way. But if they refused to obey, He would curse them in every way. Because of these realities, and His understanding of human weakness, He warned them not to covenant with Him lightly!

Elijah represents the prophets. The prophet Isaiah predicted that a Redeemer would come; a suffering servant would be introduced to the people. He would be put to death for sins that were not His own. After suffering, He would be exalted very high and offer salvation to all peoples of the world.

Daniel foretold the timing of Jesus' suffering and death using the command to rebuild the temple as the starting point. Micah predicted Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Zechariah prophesied that His body would be pierced; but David revealed that not one of His bones would be broken. Malachi prophesied that the Lord, whom they were seeking, would suddenly come to His Temple and that the Sun of Righteousness would arise with healing in His wings.

We may ask ourselves; what is the significance of all these prophecies? And what do they have to do with this scene from the Transfiguration? For one thing, the Scriptures say repeatedly that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word will be established." In this setting we have the Law and the Prophets attesting the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies about Messiah! Every prophecy under the Old Covenant that was made concerning Jesus was fulfilled in minute detail, thus establishing His credibility and authenticity.

And what were Moses and Elijah talking about with Jesus? The King James Version says they were talking about His decease, His departure. The Greek word is *exodus*. The Greek prefix *ek* meaning, "out of," coupled with *hodos*, meaning journey. They were talking about Jesus' journey out of this life, His crucifixion in Jerusalem. I can only imagine the anticipation Moses and Elijah must have had as they talked with Jesus about these upcoming events.

The Exodus of the children of Israel being led out of Egypt by Moses was a type of Christ as the Deliverer of His children from the bondage of sin. Do you remember what God said to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18? "*I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.*" Verse 15 of that same chapter adds the phrase, "...unto him you shall hearken." The blood of the slain lamb that was smeared on the doorposts and lintel on that very first Passover night pointed forward to Jesus, the Passover Lamb. His blood, applied by faith to the hearts of men and women, would satisfy God's wrath against sin and cause the destroying angel to pass over.

Now while all of this was happening, Peter, John, and James were sleeping. Lest we be too hard on them, we remember that men accustomed to living much of life in the outdoors will respond predictably. The exercise of the hard climb up the steep slope of Mt. Hermon, the fresh air, and the darkness of the night all combined in the experience of these rugged men to call for sleep. Luke says they were “heavy with sleep.” Literally, their eyelids were weighted or pressed down. Today we say “I just couldn’t keep my eyelids open any longer.” And yes, how often has that happened when we were intending to be in prayer?

As Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are conversing, the three disciples begin to wake up. When they were fully awake they saw (literally, stared at) Jesus in His glory, accompanied by Moses and Elijah. As they watched, Moses and Elijah began to leave, and as they were going, Peter speaks up. “Rabbi, it is good, comforting, affirming, that we should be here. Let’s make three booths; one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Like most of us, when awakened suddenly from sleep, Peter most likely didn’t have time to think through the words he spoke. He just blurted out the first thing that came to mind! It does seem that he wanted to preserve the moment; and I can’t fault him for wanting that.

Now it’s true, the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was soon to be celebrated. Why is that significant, and what do Peter’s words have to do with that feast?

The Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths as it is sometimes called, was commanded by God in Leviticus chapter 23. It was established to remind the children of Israel of their wanderings in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt; how God provided daily manna for their food and prevented their clothes and shoes from wearing out. God dwelt in the Tabernacle, in the midst of His people. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night assured the people of His presence.

We notice from the text that Peter was looking back; Jesus was looking ahead. The Feast of Tabernacles, as Peter understood and observed it, was about to be fulfilled. Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about His exodus. Jesus was about to fulfill the types contained in the Feast of Tabernacles. He was about to become the Living Bread that would give men eternal life! Those who ate this Bread would never die. Jesus taught the people at length on this subject in John chapter six.

Furthermore, He was about to provide for all true believers a robe of righteousness that would never grow old or wear out. Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount that He would care for our physical needs, but they were not and are not His primary focus. The robe of righteousness provided by His sacrifice would allow every individual, not just the High Priest, to enter into the very presence of God Himself at any time, not just on prescribed dates of the calendar. In fact, it would allow God to tabernacle or dwell within us by His Holy Spirit. That was a possibility Peter could not see at this point in time. Even today we can only grasp the reality of it by faith.

The Feast of Tabernacles also looks forward to the 1000 year Messianic Kingdom when Jesus will be dwelling in and ruling from Jerusalem. It will be a time when all the nations learn of the great things that happen when people follow the ways of the God of Israel. As a consequence, shalom (peace) will spread out from Jerusalem, the Great City, and eventually encompass the whole world. All these facts were confirmation of the infallibility and reliability of the Scriptures. Peter, John and James were being given a glimpse of kingdom of God. They were seeing the glory promised to those who would lay down their lives to follow Christ and to proclaim His message.

My friend, this second step on the path to true glory is confirmed over and over again in Scripture. It is a pathway of humility versus pride, of giving versus getting, of serving versus ruling, and loss versus profit. It is a path that Jesus said is narrow, restricting, and hard to enter. Only a few will find it and follow it into the presence of the Father. Are you allowing the Word of God to confirm your progress on the path to true glory?

The Final STEP (on the path to true glory) is,

Commitment to Hear the Son

If you're like me, you find that, too often, taking time to commune with the Father through the Word and prayer, results in more talking than listening. In that, we're just like Peter. We think that what we have to say is more important than what God has to say. And we don't take time to listen. As Peter is babbling about building huts out of branches for each person there the whole group is enveloped in a cloud. This was not an ordinary moisture cloud of the kind so

common on Mt. Hermon. No, this was the Shekinah glory of God! We know this because the disciples immediately became fearful.

And then, as they stood awe struck by glory, they heard a voice speaking to them from the midst of the cloud. “This is my Beloved Son, my Chosen One: Hear Him.” It was like God saying to Peter, “Just shut up and listen!” Now I know that sounds rather crude and I don’t believe God talks that way. But I wonder if God doesn’t feel like saying something similar to me at times.

Peter, as sincere as he was, was still looking back to the Law and the Prophets. He wanted to preserve this moment and stay there on the mountain with Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. But God was trying to show him that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the Law and the Prophets. Moses and Elijah had their day; they fulfilled their purpose. Their purpose was to point to Jesus as the culmination of all they had said and done. Jesus’ ministry eclipsed theirs.

When God spoke out of the cloud and reaffirmed Jesus as His Chosen One, He gave one command; “Hear Him.” Hear him. This is the one imperative, the one command, in this whole text. Was God the Father telling Peter, John, and James to make sure that their ears were uncovered so they could hear the sound of Jesus’ voice? No, he meant that they should comprehend or understand the words of Jesus. And when one understands the words of Jesus there is only one legitimate response; obedience.

My friend, this message God spoke at the Transfiguration of Jesus was not spoken to the unconverted masses. It was not even spoken to the Twelve. It was only spoken to that inner circle of three, the most committed of the Twelve. Is there any significance in that fact? I believe there is.

Earlier, in Luke chapter six, Jesus asked the question, “*Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?*” Jesus then went on to point out the consequences of just giving lip service to His commands. Obedience brings reward; disobedience brings destruction. And the church, the body of Christ is suffering great destruction in our day.

There are many today who call themselves by the name Christian, which means “Christ-follower.” But they refuse to “hear” what Jesus has to say. They disregard His commands as inconvenient, culturally irrelevant, or out of touch with contemporary life. They are certainly

religious, but they are like the religious leaders of Jesus' day who said *"We will not have this man to rule over us."* Is that your response to the words of Jesus?

What happened then, as a result of rejecting Jesus? Jesus foretold the result in Luke 19:42 to 44. *"And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

For the Jewish nation, the consequence of rejecting Jesus was the destruction of their beloved Temple in the beloved city, Jerusalem. It resulted in the loss of their homeland and their dispersal throughout the world for nearly 2000 years. It resulted in their temporary rejection as the people of God and the offering of salvation to the Gentiles. Today, the vast majority of Jewish people, from secular to ultra-Orthodox continue to reject Jesus, the only means of salvation.

What will be the result of those who claim the name of Jesus today, but likewise refuse to obey Him? Matthew 7 records the words of Jesus. *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

You know, there are many things today that are called by the name Christian. But they are certainly not of Christ. Many people and things that have the name Christian attached to them stand in direct opposition to the teachings of Christ. Much of modern Christianity has created a Jesus they can be comfortable with; a Jesus who offers all good gifts but makes no demands; a Jesus who embraces all and offends none; a Jesus who overlooks sin and holds no one accountable; a Jesus who allows each person to define for them what it means to be His follower. In all of this there is the rejection of the command of the Father, "Hear Him."

And the result is this; we are no longer on the path to true glory. Like the days of Ezekiel the prophet, the glory of the Lord has departed. And with the glory goes the power of

transformation. The processes go forward, buildings are built, and programs are implemented, but Christ is not honored. Church membership roles expand but people live in bondage to besetting sins. Few take seriously the command to “examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith” and fewer yet make changes as a result of the examination.

My friend, are you on the path to true glory? Do you understand the vital need for regular communion with the Father? Spending time in the presence of the Father is the basis of your continuing transformation into the image of Christ. It is only as you seek Him and His will that you can experience the glory He promised to those who will meet the demands of discipleship.

If you seek to know Christ and spend time in His presence you will not be able to hide it. Like Moses of old, there will be an unmistakable radiance to your countenance; there will be an indelible imprint of the Master on your life and conduct. The connection to the Vine will bear fruit. You will become “clean” through the Word spoken by God.

Are you acknowledging the confirmation of the Scriptures? Are you following the pathway of humility versus pride, of giving versus getting, of serving versus ruling, and loss versus profit? It is a path that Jesus said is narrow, restricting, and hard to enter. Only a few will find it and follow it into the presence of the Father. Are you allowing the Word of God to confirm your progress on the path to true glory?

And finally, are you committed to hearing and obeying Jesus? As I stated earlier, this is the one imperative, the one command in this whole text. God the Father was not telling Peter, John, and James to make sure that their ears were uncovered so they could hear the sound of Jesus’ voice. No, he meant that they should comprehend or understand the words of Jesus. And when one understands the words of Jesus there is only one legitimate response; obedience. Is that your response, and mine?

Let’s recommit ourselves to following the path to true glory as we pray. Heavenly Father, we bow in awe before you. That such a holy God should reach out to such sinful people and offer salvation and forgiveness through the blood of Christ is more than our minds can comprehend. We praise you for your mercy, love, grace, and patience. And we thank you that you have made it clear to us in your Word that there is no other way to you, except through Jesus.

And now Father, I pray for my friend and for myself. Our hearts’ desire is to know you better and to experience your transforming glory. Create within us a hunger and thirst for your

presence and your divine approval. By your Holy Spirit confirm the Word to our hearts. Then grant us the desire and power to hear Jesus and to surrender our lives to Him. We know that the way of the cross will not be easy, but just as it was for Jesus, the glory and joy we will experience will far outweigh any sacrifice we make.

Father, bless my friend and me as we recommit ourselves to following the path to true glory. I ask this in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.