

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am glad all of you are here today, because I really have something exciting to share with you. You see last night the Lord God himself appeared to me, and I just want to share that experience with you today.

Okay, that didn't really happen. But I bet I caught your interest. In fact, I bet everyone would want to hear all about my experience of the Lord appearing to me. Some would listen because they would want insights about God. They'd be interested in what God said. Others would listen because they would be skeptical, and they would want to evaluate my psychological wellness. They would be thinking, "I've always wondered what kind of person claims to have visions from God, and now I've got a live one in front of me! This will be fun."

But I would also suggest to you, that each and every one of us has a yearning to see God with our own two eyes. In fact, I've had atheists tell me that for them to believe in God it would take God appearing before them in a miraculous way and doing some miracle. I wonder if they secretly really do desire such a meeting with God. They really do want to see him. They really do want to be convinced of his existence.

Why do we long to see the Lord? Because we want to know. We want to know our standing with him. We have a conscience that screams at us that we have failed and we're not worthy. We know that we haven't even met our own expectations... we've disappointed ourselves, haven't we? How much more have we disappointed our God? So a part of us wants him to appear to reassure us. Another part of us wants to hide from him and never wants to see him. Do you want to see God in his glory, or not? What I'd like to do today is take you for a walk through the pages of Scripture and explore an interesting and unique term in the Bible: The Glory of the Lord." In Hebrew it's the "*Kh'vod Yahweh* or *Adonai*" in Greek, "*doxa kyriou*." This same phrase is used again and again to describe the physical manifestation of God to man. By exploring this phrase and its many occurrences in Scripture, I hope you will not only gain a better understanding of this recurring phrase in Scripture, but also have your own personal experience of the glory of the Lord. Not that I expect you will see God with your eyes, but I desire that you see him through the eyes of faith.

We find the term "glory of the Lord" first in the first book of the Bible, Genesis in chapter 15. We continue to see the phrase repeat through the last book of the Bible, Revelation. In most cases the glory of the Lord refers to a visible manifestation of God supernaturally produced in the form of fire or smoke. It could be as simple as a flare of fire enveloped in smoke or a cloud. At times the glory of the Lord was just a bright cloud (no fire) or just a bare fire (no smoke.) Sometimes the appearance was more complex than this... in both Ezekiel and Revelation, the appearance of God and his glory was so complex it's hard to understand or visualize all the details.

In general, though, the interpretation of "the glory of the Lord" is not difficult. Every time it is an image of the true glory of God. It is a glimpse of his absolute and infinite transcendence. It's a glimpse of his pervading presence and his mighty power. It's a glimpse of his infinite grace, but also his all-consuming holiness. It is a symbol of his absolute sovereignty

as the one to whom all creature ought to render willing obedience, joyful service, and unending praise.

And wherever the glory of the Lord appears, it not only demonstrates that God is present in a special manner, but also that God is going to act in a special way. When the glory of the Lord appears at various times in the pages of Scripture, that's your cue to sit up and take notice because God is about to do something very important... that he is going to do something supernatural and momentous. We also find that when the glory of the Lord appears it always linked to God's plan of salvation from sin which was carried out through his Son Christ Jesus.

So when this visible manifestation of God, the glory of the Lord appeared, it meant this: "God is here! He is holy and sovereign and almighty! Watch carefully, because something connected with his plan of rescuing mankind for sin and rebellion is on the line! God's about to do something!"

[By the way, a quick aside... there are those who say, "Well if God appeared so often in the Bible, then all I'm asking for is a little of the same. Show me the glory of the Lord. I want to see him! If these accounts are true, then why don't we see him today?" Here's a four part answer. 1) Rare. Understand that the appearance of the glory of the Lord was a very rare thing. We see it relatively frequently during the time of the exodus from Egypt.

2) The appearance of the glory of the Lord was not something man called forth. God appeared when decided to appear, not when he was asked to appear. To think we can command almighty God to appear at our bidding is a horrible misunderstanding of who God is and our relationship to him. We don't command him, he commands us.

3) Scary. Those who desire to see the God in his glory as evidence of his existence don't seem to understand that the glory of the Lord was a terrifying thing. When the Israelites saw God's glory on Mount Sinai before the giving of the Law, they were so terrified, they pleaded with Moses to make God go away. They were eager to send Moses up the mountain so they wouldn't have to see or hear God's glory any more. When Isaiah was called by God and got a glimpse of God's glory, he was convinced he would be killed. If you're asking to see God, you're asking to be terrified.

4) The glory of the Lord appeared at critical times in salvation history. God didn't appear willy-nilly whenever someone asked for it. He appeared when *he* saw a critical moment in our rescue plan. Now, God's rescue plan is complete. There are no more key steps left to complete the plan of our salvation... it already is complete. Christ came. He lived a holy life on our behalf. He suffered and died on the cross to remove the guilt of our sins. He rose from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to prove that he had finished it all, and there was no more salvation work left to be done. I fully expect that we will not see the glory of the Lord ever now until the Lord Jesus returns in a bright flash on Judgment Day to judge the living and the dead. That's the consummation of his rescue plan as he calls an end to his patience and takes to heaven all who believe. ]

With that, let's recall some of the appearances of the glory of the Lord. Your ears piqued when I said the Lord had appeared to me. Let's listen carefully to these appearances. In fact, if you just tracked the appearances of the glory of the Lord in Scriptures, you would have an excellent outline of the steps God took to accomplish our salvation. Let's look:

1) The first appearance ever of the glory of the Lord was not when Adam and Eve fell into sin... or at the first murder when Cain killed his brother Abel.... Or before the sending of the great flood... or after it when God promised never to send another. No, the first appearance of the glory of the Lord was after God promised Abraham a son, from whom would come a

countless descendants... one of whom would be the Savior who would be a blessing to all nations. To confirm this promise, the glory of the Lord appeared in the form of a torch or a flare... and the promise or covenant or contract God made was secured. God manifested himself at a key time in salvation history.

- 2) The next significant appearance of the glory of Lord occurred about 500 years later. Abraham's descendants were now a small nation numbering about 2 million. They had been living in Egypt for 400 years when a famine in Palestine took them there. But then they were enslaved by the Egyptians. It was time for God to free his people and lead them back to the land God had promised Abraham... the land where the Savior was to be born. The leader God appointed was Moses. The glory of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush. The bush burned, but it didn't burn up... just kept burning. Moses was terrified... this was holy ground. God called Moses to lead his people out. This was a critical moment in salvation history. Living in Egypt, the people would either be destroyed or assimilated. For God to bring forth the promised Messiah, they needed to be separate and protected. The glory of the Lord meant God was acting for his salvation.
- 3) Again, we hear of the glory of the Lord as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night that continuously /led Israel on its way out of Egypt and then to the Promised Land. When Pharaoh's army pursued the Israelites and pinned them against the Red Sea, the glory of the Lord went between the people of Israel and Pharaoh's army... blinding that army. God rescued his people from certain death, and kept the plan of salvation alive. Several more appearances of the glory of the Lord are recorded in connection with the Exodus and arrival at the Promised Land.
- 4) But perhaps the greatest was at Mt. Sinai where God gave the his Law and the 10 Commandments to the people of Israel. The glory of the Lord appeared on that mountain described like this: Exodus 19:16-19 "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. ... 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder." When the people saw this, they were terrified and said to Moses: "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

God gave the Commandments to Moses. This Law of God would remind the people of their sin, and the need for a Savior. They would serve as a hedge to keep the people separate from the heathen nations so God could preserve the line of the Savior. This was a critical juncture in salvation history.

Because Moses stood in the presence of the glory of God, his face shined and the people couldn't look at him and a veil had to be placed over him. (Think of a stick you place in a hot fire. You pull it out and it glows with a fraction of the heat and light from which it came.)

- 5) When Israel was wandering in the wilderness, God had Moses build a tabernacle. Basically it was a tent church. They could take it down and put it up, but it was a symbol of God's presence among the people. When it was finished, the glory of the Lord covered that tent and filled the tabernacle. When the cloud lifted, they would pack up camp and set out. When the cloud settled again over the tabernacle, they would stop and pitch camp. God was with his people. About 400 years later, Solomon would build a spectacular, permanent building, a temple in Jerusalem for the Lord. When it was completed and the ark of the covenant brought

in, a heavy dark cloud came upon the temple and filled it. God was among his people at work to save them.

- 6) When some of the prophets were called by God, they got glimpses of the glory of the Lord. Isaiah in particular saw the glory of the Lord fill a temple. There was smoke everywhere, and the train of God's robe filled the temple. Through these prophets God spoke to his people, rebuked them of sin, and kept alive the promise of salvation.

That's a brief overview of Old Testament appearances of the glory of the Lord. Now let's jump to the New Testament. Guess when the very first reference to the glory of the Lord appears in the New Testament? Let me read it to you... maybe this will sound familiar:

**8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

When God sent his Son into our world, the glory of the Lord appears to some lowly shepherds outside of Bethlehem. God entered human history, and his dramatic rescue plan of salvation was being launched. God marks such events with a physical manifestation of himself... the glory of the Lord. Christ our Savior was born.

He grew up. He was baptized in the Jordan River and God the Father declared from heaven, "This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased." And with that, Jesus began his preaching and teaching ministry.

Then, near the end of Jesus' ministry, we another very important appearance of the glory of the Lord. It is the theme of our worship today. It occurred at the transfiguration of our Lord. Lets read:

**28 Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.** [This wasn't unusual. Jesus would often go up mountains and to remote locations to pray.] **29 As he was praying,** [by the way, this detail comes out in a couple verses, but as he was praying, his disciples fell asleep. Was it the difficult hike up the mountain? Was it late evening? How long did Jesus pray? Any of these may have been factors.] **the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, 31 appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.** [what we have here is another appearance of the glory of the Lord. A physical manifestation of God in light or smoke, at a critical time in salvation history. But there is not separate fire... Jesus is the shining light. Jesus is transformed. HE is the glory of the Lord! All of those appearances we looked at in the Old Testament... that was Jesus before he was ever born. He is true God from eternity. He was shaping human history, appearing at key times to ensure the plan of salvation would be completed.

He appears with Moses and Elijah. Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible, commonly called by the Jews "The Law." Elijah the most important prophet of the Old Testament through whom God called his people to repentance to keep them prepared for the coming Savior. He represents "The Prophets." They come and talk to Jesus. The topic of conversation His coming departure. His upcoming suffering and death and resurrection to atone for the world's sins and open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. This is a key juncture in

salvation history, and so the glory of the Lord appears, and it's revealed that Jesus is the glory of the Lord! Amazing.

**32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)**

This is great. Let's have our own group. We want to stay in the presence of your glory! But this was just a glimpse of God's glory. Salvation was not yet won. Living in the true glory of God is not something that can happen in this sinful, corrupt earth.

**34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.**

The Father testified that this was his Son. His mission of salvation was the Father's mission of salvation. So... LISTEN TO HIM!

Let me wrap this up. Do you desire to see God? Do you want to know him? Do you want to know your standing with him? Do you want to know he is with you and loves you and accepts you? Do you want to know that you will be with him for eternity? Well, I have good news for you. If you will pay attention to the glory of the Lord, you will know the answers to all those questions and more. If you want answers, don't look for God to appear to you. Instead look to his Son, who is the glory of the Lord. Listen to him! And when you listen, you will hear him say: **"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes the Father accept through me."** And you will hear him call out from the cross after intensely suffering for you sins: **"It is finished."** And as you listen to him, you will hear the resurrected Christ say to you, **"Peace be with you. Look! It is I myself!"**

Will you listen to Jesus who is the glory of the Lord, during the season of Lent? Join us this Wednesday and again next Sunday as we listen intently to Jesus, and hear again the most important story ever told to man... the story of our salvation. The glory of the Lord has accomplished this. I look forward to listening with you. Amen.