

On February 24th, 1791, a man by the name of John Wesley wrote a letter to another gentleman in Britain; his name was William Wilberforce. You are probably familiar with who John Wesley was. John Wesley was a pastor, theologian, and one of the co-founders of the Methodist denomination. William Wilberforce was a 30-year-old British politician who was faced with the insurmountable task of abolishing slavery. Slavery at the time, as many of us know, was such a big part of Britain's economic and social fabric. So to speak against it would certainly cause backlash and for one to lose their reputation.

Wilberforce knew that slavery had to stop, but in his previous efforts, he essentially had failed. However, at the right time, at the perfect time, John Wesley, six days before he passed, wrote this letter to Wilberforce as a letter of encouragement for the upcoming endeavor that he had. Wesley said,

Unless the divine power has raised you up as 'Athanasius against the world,' I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. John Wesley

Not so encouraging. He's pretty much saying that if God is not in this, you're destined to fail. That the task ahead, the road ahead is too much. But then he goes on.

But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it. John Wesley

In the middle of the letter, he talks about this unfair law, and then, at the end of it, he says, "May he who has guided you from youth up continue to strengthen you in this and all things; is the prayer of, dear sir, your affectionate servant, John Wesley."

Now Wilberforce had a difficult road ahead of him, and this letter was an encouragement. And after many long, hard-fought years, slavery was finally abolished. I think it's fair to say that for all of us, we encounter some seasons of hardship. In the middle of that hardship, we need encouragement. And I'm not just talking about a pat on the back. I'm not just talking about "Everything's going to be okay." I'm not just talking about a motivational speech that will titillate your emotions. Instead, what we need is something that gives us an eternal perspective and something that has eternal weight.

This is exactly where the disciples find themselves, given the call to join Jesus on the road of discipleship to pick up their cross to come and die. This is where God meets them in their time of need.

"After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus." Mark 9:24

So in verse 2, we see that Peter, James, and John are invited to the mountaintop with Jesus, and the text tells us that this was six days after. Now, what's the after? We spent the last five weeks discussing what was previous to this event. Just to give you a little reminder and a little recap, Jesus had just publicly rebuked Peter.

Not only did he publicly rebuke Peter, but then he informed his disciples that he was going to be handed over. He was going to be crucified. And on the third day, he was going to rise.

To make matters worse in the eyes of the disciples, he then calls a crowd to himself and says, "If anyone wants to follow me, if anyone wants to be my apprentice, if anybody wants to be my student, you must pick up your cross. You must sever your allegiances, and you must die." Join him in death.

This isn't the kind of team huddle message we would give our employees before we start the day. It doesn't sound so encouraging, but the truth of the matter is this is the very place that Jesus calls every single one of us—this path of discipleship and this road of hardship.

For you, it may be remaining in a marriage in which you have found dissatisfaction. For many here, it is probably fighting the battle of unwanted desires. Maybe for you, it's embracing public ridicule for your faith in the public sphere. Losing family or friends or loving someone that you cannot stand. Maybe for you, it's having someone in your life who is confused about gender and identity and purpose, and remaining there, even though everything in you wants to run in the opposite direction. For all of us, there is a cross to bear. And for all of us, there is this road of hardship to endure.

For a second, I want you to imagine what was going on in the disciples' minds because they were sitting in this reality for six days, questioning whether or not this road on which they embarked was worth it. They had just declared Jesus as Messiah, as the Son of God, as the King, as the fulfillment of the scriptures. Jesus turns right back around and tells them, "I'm going to die, and if you want to join me, you have to die as well."

So they sat in that for six days. I think it is really impactful when you realize that during that time, there were false messiahs and people who would gather groups to themselves, and their whole stint would end in death, and their followers would be scattered, which would be the end of it. So for six days, they sat in this.

For us, we can begin to ask on the road of hardship, what is it really all for? It would be easier to leave the relationship. It'd be easier to keep my issues hidden. It'd be easier to join in with the crowd. Maybe you've been following Jesus for a time and you think, "Man, I'm doing this. I'm doing that, but I don't see growth in my life. What is it all for? Hardships can be discouraging. But for the believer, we have hope. It's at this very moment that Jesus takes his disciples with him so that they can find encouragement in his glory.

What is the glory of God? It's a word that gets thrown around, but I think having a biblical definition of what the glory of God is will help us see this text in a good light. In verse 3, Jesus is transfigured. His facial appearance changes. His clothes become dazzling

white. This word transfigured in Greek is *metamorpho*. *Metamorpho* means to transform, to change. It's where we get the word metamorphosis.

I don't know if they still do the project of seeing the transformation of a caterpillar turns into a butterfly in middle school. Maybe you did that in your middle school. We were obsessed with this phenomenon, and that's what we call the process of metamorphosis. The changing of something, and this is exactly what happens to Jesus.

At this moment we get a glimpse of the fullness of who Christ is and his deity. But unpacking the word glory can be tricky. I've heard John Piper likening this word and trying to unpack what the glory of God really is, likening it to explaining basketball and explaining the word beauty.

If I were to explain to you, say you were a foreigner and you never were taught the game of basketball and you wanted me to explain basketball. I could explain it. I could tell you about the texture of the ball. I can tell you about the point systems. I can tell you how many people are on the team, the color of the court, and how tall the basketball hoops are, and in your mind, you can paint a picture that this is the game of basketball. But if I were to explain to you the word beauty, it'd be difficult because beauty is more of a transcendent phenomenon, and so it is with glory.

N.T. Wright describes God's glory as "The revelation or the shining of who God actually is. It is all of his qualities to the highest degree. It is the brightness of God's own person and presence." Now that's a nice definition. It helps us explain it, but that still does not capture what God's glory really is because to experience the glory of God is something that ought to change us. It's something that ought to move us in our inner man. The brilliance of God's glory was something that Moses couldn't look upon. The brilliance of God's glory was the very thing that blinded Paul for three days.

Jason Micheli, a pastor, when writing about this, says,

The light radiates from Jesus' flesh is the same light that said 'Let there be..' It's the same light that the world awaits with groaning and labor pains and sighs too deep for words. It's the light that will one day make all of creation a burning bush, afire with God's glory but not consumed by it.

So in Christ, at this moment, the disciples see his deity emerging. His face changes appearance, which is also attributed to divine and heavenly attributes.

What is this whole thing with Elijah and Moses? It seems kind of random, but we know unambiguously that Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets. However, I think there's more going on here. When you unpack these men's lives, there are two things that they had in common. The first thing they had in common was that they had an encounter with the glory of God.

Moses, right after Israel is caught in pagan idolatry, says that he's going to go and intercede on behalf of Israel. He goes to God, and God essentially says, "You can go to the promised land, but I'm not going with you." Moses intercedes for Israel, and God relents. In this cry of a need for assurance to know that God is going to go with them, Moses has one request. He said, "Lord, I want to see your glory. I need to know who is leading me. I need to know that you will be with me." Maybe you feel that way today.

God told Moses that he could not show him the fullness of God's glory, but he allowed him to see his back. So he hides Moses in the cleft of a rock. And this is what it says in Exodus. When Moses sees the glory of God, he sees God and the beauty of his person as the full embodiment of love and faithfulness and grace, and truth. And this is what God says about himself in Exodus.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7

Dane Ortlund, who is a pastor, when commentating about this moment, he says,

This is God's own way of saying to Moses and saying to us, there is no termination day on my commitment to you. You can't get rid of my grace to you. You can't outrun my mercy. You can't evade my goodness. My heart is set on you.

Moses's reaction to being in the presence of the glory of God is recorded in verse 8. "*Moses bowed to the ground at once and he worshiped.*" He fell out because of the beauty of the glory of God.

Now, Elijah had a similar instance after a showdown with the prophets of Baal. There was a mass slaughter, and then he literally outruns a chariot. I wish I was that fast, but he outruns a chariot. He goes to Jezebel, and Jezebel threatens him. And so Elijah ditches everything, and we see him destitute, depressed, suicidal, and not wanting to live, and he has this counseling session between him and God after God provides nourishment.

Then God kind of does something strange in our eyes, but there's a big message to it. He displays his glory with shows of magnificent fire, a loud rushing wind, and an earthquake, but it says that the Lord wasn't in those things.

Then it says, in the literal translation, "In the sound of silence, Elijah heard God." His reaction was the same as Moses'. It was a message to Elijah that just because you do not see God working in the most magnificent ways doesn't mean that he's not working in other ways, even if it's undetected by his own servants.

Not only did these men have an encounter with the glory of God, but they've also chosen the way of hardship. They severed their allegiances, as we talked about last week. In the midst of hardship, God gave both of these men a glimpse of glory to change the way that they viewed their hardships because the glory of God changes how we see hardship.

The glory of God is able to comfort us in our afflictions, provide hope for the future, and reveal to us that God is near when everything tells us that he's distant. It brings beauty to a fragmented and chaotic world.

So maybe you're like Elijah, maybe you're like Moses, and you need to know that God is still working. This glory back on the Mount of Transfiguration evokes a reaction from the disciples.

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, 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 to say, they were so frightened.) Mark 9:5

Peter is enamored and afraid of the glory of God. And then, he makes this statement about building three tabernacles. There's a lot of scholarly debate over what he meant. I don't think we need to really unpack a deep, esoteric meaning. But I will say in this verse Peter got one thing right, and I believe Peter got one thing wrong.

The Glory of God is Comforting

Sometimes we can completely dismiss Peter, but Peter did get this right in his initial statement. He says that it was good for them to be there. In other words, the glory of God is comforting. To experience the glory of God is comforting. When they see Jesus glorified, little did they know that they were witnessing that what was true for Jesus would eventually be true for them.

Paul mentions this in Romans 8. *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (Romans 8:18). In other words, what you are experiencing is like a candle compared to the sun for what is going to be revealed in glory. Now that's comforting. So it's good for our souls to be in the presence and glory of God.

Why does he mention this instance of the three Tabernacles? And this is what I believe Peter missed. Paul David Tripp, a pastor and author tells this story about when he took his son to an art museum in Washington, D.C. His son was a young lad. Paul thought that this was going to be a mind-blowing experience for his son. Like he was going to get the reward for being the best parent ever, but he says not only was his son's mind not blown. He said his mind wasn't even activated.

He said that when he looked at these different art pieces, he was just enthralled by their beauty. It actually brought him to tears, but his son was just yawning and nagging. He kept saying, "I want to go." He was just acting like a kid, doing what kids do. This was the point that he made from that story. He said that his son was surrounded by glory but saw none of it. His eyes worked, but his heart was stone blind.

I'm trying to unpack God's glory, but again, words can't even suffice it. Peter is confronted at this moment with the glory of God, but he still doesn't understand. Wasn't there more to this moment than just building tents? Would that be your first initial reaction? And isn't it clear to Peter that Jesus is more than just a rabbi, but we see that he puts Elijah, Moses, and Jesus on the same level. Mark tells us it's because Peter was afraid.

The Glory of God can be Terrifying

We don't have to understand why he made this reaction simply because Peter was afraid. There is a real terror experience by the glory of God. I think of Isaiah in Isaiah 6 when he gets a vision of God in his throne room, and he says he is coming undone at the seams, that he's a man of unclean lips. I also think of John the

Revelator. When the glory of God is amongst him, he is terrified. There is a terror because if we are defining the glory of God, as we have before—the highest degree of who he is that radiates as pure light—then we are certainly reminded of our lower degree.

Imagine God's goodness to the highest degree. Imagine his love to the highest degree, his veracity, or his ability to tell the truth to the highest degree. His mystery. I can't even conceive. There is surely a holy fear in reverence to be experienced by the glory of God, which takes us to the crescendo of this moment where God speaks audibly.

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. Mark 9:7-8

We know that clouds in the Bible are always associated with the presence of God. It was a cloud that led the people out of Egypt, and it was a cloud that descended on Mount Sinai. From this cloud, God speaks to the disciples. Now notice the difference between the baptism of Jesus and this moment on the Mount of Transfiguration.

In the baptism of Jesus, God the Father speaks, and he says, *"You are my beloved son, with whom I'm well pleased."* A voice confirming his identity, his ministry, as well as the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, the voice, I believe, is more for the disciples and more for us. *"This is my beloved son,"* and there's an imperative, "listen."

The disciples, after hearing Jesus' recent sermon, tuning into his recent podcast on Spotify, hear this talk about dying to self and picking up their cross, words which I'm sure raised some eyebrows in their minds and questioned his legitimacy. Their entire worldview was an expectation of a Messiah who would come as a conquering king. Even perhaps thinking that at this moment when Jesus is glorified that this is the moment where the takeover is about to happen. No more talk of that dying stuff. They thought Jesus was finally going to come with power and just overthrow Rome. Now is the time for prosperity and blessing.

Hardship is the Pathway to Glory

But the clouds disappear. Moses and Elijah are gone, and we're left with Jesus. The glory is gone, and the glory only lasted as a glimpse to show that which is to come. In Romans 8, Paul described this groaning

that not only creation has, but all of us have. This anticipation and, in your inner bowels, this groaning for the glory of God to be revealed. Because if we're being honest, there's a real frustration with our work. There's a real brokenness in our relationships, and with sickness and death. We all desire the glory of God to be here and now. But with the disappearance of the cloud and Jesus' dissent from glory, it communicates that hardship is the pathway to glory.

This is why I believe the *Serenity Prayer* by Reinhold Niebuhr speaks volumes to this, especially when you understand the context in which it was written. This prayer is said to be influenced by his book, *Moral Man in a Moral Society*, and it says that the book and this prayer are a response to some of the lowest points in Niebuhr's life—the Great Depression and the rise of Nazi Germany.

Faced with hardship, an insurmountable circumstance, this was Niebuhr's response to circumstances. This was his prayer. And I think in times right now where we have rumors of war, Chinese spy balloons, and many other things going on, including a recession, this might resonate with us.

**God, grant me the Serenity
To accept the things I cannot change...
Courage to change the things I can,
And Wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.
Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it.
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His will.
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with Him forever in
the next.**

In other words, it is a call not to escape hardship but it's a call to embrace hardship as the pathway to glory.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant. And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first,

and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him." Mark 9-13

That's a kind of interesting way to conclude this passage. So they descend from the mountain, and Jesus tells them, don't say anything until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. The disciples had two questions that they were thinking about.

The first question was, what does this rising from the dead mean? When we look at this with modern eyes, because we live in the age of skepticism, if somebody was to talk about resurrection, we're immediately thinking of how this could be possible. Scientifically prove it. We live in this age of skepticism, but for a first-century Jew, the resurrection wasn't a question. Resurrection was something they anticipated at the end of history and at the end of time. But this talk about Jesus rising in three days, what did that mean? In their worldview, they had no explanation.

Their second question is more of an objection. Essentially what they're saying is that "Jesus, if you are the Messiah and if what you said is the way, then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" They're certainly referencing Malachi.

"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction." Malachi 4:5-6.

They're saying, isn't the time for reconciliation now? They're star gazed. They're still dreaming about glory. We'll see this throughout the rest of the Book of Mark because the disciples start vying for positions of authority. They're still caught up in glory. Yet Jesus brings the disciples back down to earth, first, by letting them know that the time has come. The time is now. Then he references John the Baptist as Elijah, but then he identifies his own sufferings with the sufferings of Elijah. What we would say is that the disciples are seeing the world through rose-colored lenses.

There's nothing wrong with optimism, for the believer, glory is to be expected, but there's work to be done. The encouragement of God's glory, what we've been talking about, was not meant to give them naive optimism that everything is just going to change today. And it wasn't meant to stall them. Instead, it

was to encourage them that they have more work to do, which Jesus demonstrates because, from this moment on, he heads to Jerusalem to die.

Jesus, I believe, is creating symmetry for us between the glory to come and the hardships of today. And my brothers and sisters, we have work to do. We have sin to combat. We have neighbors to love, workplaces that need you, children to raise, and a race to run and to finish.

Sometimes this can be hard because we live in our Western culture when individual happiness is the greatest good. If the aim of life is my own personal happiness, we will be sorely disappointed when tragedy strikes. Compared to some centuries and even places in the United States, I would say that we live relatively comfortable lives, and inadvertently they produce a narrative that the meaning of life is comfort.

Corey Brock and Andrew Kelly wrote an article in the *Gospel Coalition* that defines what is called comfort culture. They say that by comfort culture, they mean Netflix binging, online gaming, hours of Candy Crush, Instagram reels, fantasy sports, self-indulgent, Amazon sprees, foodie culture addiction are all comfort consolation to fill the meaning gap of life. I'll be a hundred percent honest. I'm guilty.

It's not that these things are inadvertently evil in and of themselves. However, my point is that we can spend so much time insulating ourselves from hardships that when tragedy strikes, it catches us off guard. In a sense, we almost try to recreate our own glory. Jesus tells the disciples that the Son of Man won't obtain glory unless he embraces the suffering to come.

Perhaps you find yourself in a grind. You identify with William Wilberforce, and the path ahead of you just seems so insurmountable. It could be as serious as reformation or trying to kick an old habit. Perhaps the road of discipleship itself, in this call to die daily mixed with the disappointments of life, have worn you down to where you have to wonder if marriage and relationships and work are still worth fighting for. In other words, you feel this need for the comfort of God's glory.

I find it so fitting that Peter, towards the latter half of his life, is writing towards believers who are scattered

abroad, facing immense persecution. This is what he pens in his letter.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for the spirit of glory, and of God rests on you. May you find comfort in that. Maybe you identify with the boy in the art museum and realize that you need to be unsettled a little bit by God's glory.

Maybe you find yourself complacent on the road of discipleship. My prayer for you, my prayer for myself, is that we would ask God, as David did in the Psalms, to return to me the joy of my salvation and give me a spirit of willingness. I speak to you as a fellow co-pilgrim on the road to glory. Jesus makes it very clear that it is a road that is traveled by few with hardships that presently await us as we walk out of those doors. But may God continue to lead us as we experience the awesome weight of glory and share in his comfort.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for, Lord, just your word, the richness of it, and that through it, we may get to know you more and be comforted by it. Lord, I pray for those in here who are facing insurmountable tasks ahead.

Lord, this call to pick up our cross and this call to apprenticeship and discipleship that can sometimes be discouraging, but in your word that points to your Son, we can find comfort. And we can find comfort, Lord, in your glory. And so may you comfort your people now. I pray for those, Lord, who maybe need to be unsettled a little bit by the comfort and fear of your glory.

May you lead us as your people, as your sheep, as we look to you in the ages to come. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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