

What a sight it must have been that day to be with Peter and James and John on that mountain and to see Jesus transfigured, to see his face shining like the sun, the face that before had been just like any other face, any other face that we see in this world, to see his clothes white and bright, whiter than anything that we can possibly imagine in this lifetime, those same clothes which before were dirty and probably a little worn from walking around so much, and to see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah! Who among us today would not want to be there, would not want to see God's glory, to see God face to face? I mean, pinch yourself if you don't. Maybe you're sleeping. Because to see Jesus face to face will be a joy that I can't even begin to express. To see him as he is right now in heaven is that greatest joy that we are looking forward to as Christians. So why, then, why does Jesus hide from us? Why can't we see God as he is? And even in the transfiguration today, Christians, Jesus hides most of his glory. The disciples don't see everything. I mean, his clothes turned white, yes, but his glory is still blocked by them. Because if he was showing his full glory, well then, not anything on this earth would be able to stop it. And when Peter says to make those tents, a cloud covers everything so that they can't see anything. And finally after they had fallen to the ground in fear and looked up again, the glory was gone. Jesus looked just like he did before. Why would Jesus hide himself in this way? Why does he hide himself today, even though he is alive? Because who among us doesn't want to see the face of Jesus?

But to answer those questions, we have to answer another question first, the question of what we mean by the glory of God. Because when we know what God's glory is, then we will be able to say, or at least to answer the question of why God hides it from us. So what is God's glory? How should we understand it? God's glory is who God is, Christians. When we're dealing with the glory of God, we are dealing with the very mystery of who God is in himself, and that's very difficult for us to understand, because God is so completely different from us that any explanation we might come up with is going to fall short, horribly short. We won't begin to capture who God is by talking about him, but at least we can say what the Bible says about him.

The Bible says that God is infinite. Did you ever think about what that means? God doesn't have limitations. God is not bound in the same way that we are. I occupy this little space right here because this is who I am. But God is not able to be contained by anything. This universe is billions of light-years across, far beyond our comprehension. And yet it would be too small to contain God, because God is not limited in the way that we are limited.

The Bible tells us that God is eternal. God does not have a beginning. God will not have an end. And more than that--and this is probably the hardest for us to understand--God does not have a yesterday and a tomorrow. God simply is. The creator of time is not bound by time, so your childhood, your adulthood, and your old age are all the same to God. We can't even begin to think in those terms. Because we think in terms of time, which is always moving, which is always flowing, but not to God, because he is the one who created time.

The Bible tells us that God is independent, entirely self sufficient. He doesn't need anything from us. He doesn't need anything to continue to survive. If he didn't create anything, God would still exist as God. He doesn't need us. He doesn't need his creation. He just simply is. But think about us. We need to eat. We need to breathe. We need to sleep. We are dependent upon God in everything, so to think of God as being someone who doesn't depend on anything is probably hard for us to understand.

And the Bible also tells us that God is almighty, that he can do anything. Because when he created the world, Christians, he didn't have to gather his materials together so that he could build a house like we do. He simply spoke and it came to be, because God is all-powerful. Whatever he chooses to do will

happen, and nothing will stop him.

And so when you consider all of those things together--and there's many more that we can go on to--but when you consider all of those together, we have a glimpse of who God is. We have a glimpse of the glory of God. And that's exactly what the disciples saw in our text for today too, a glimpse of who God is. Because when they saw Jesus shining like the sun, Jesus who is, as Hebrews says, the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, they saw God. They saw a small glimpse of who God is.

But why then does he hide from them? Why does he hide this glory from us? Why can we not see him as he is? We want to see God, just like Moses wanted to see God. And in Exodus chapter 33, Moses said to God, "Please show me your glory." Let me see who you are, O Lord! But what does God say to him? He says this: "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord." So Moses gets to see a little glimpse of who God is, his goodness and his name, but he doesn't get to see everything, because, as the Lord says, "Man shall not see me and live." That's the problem right there. We cannot see God as he is, because to see God as he is would mean our destruction. We are sinners, Christians, and God is the all-holy God. God is the one who is perfectly righteous. God is the one who is perfectly good, and like Psalm 5 tells us, evil may not dwell with him. If we were to stand in the presence of God without anything in between, we would be utterly and completely destroyed.

Because think about some of the other times in the Old Testament that people saw glimpses of the glory of God. How did they react? Think of Isaiah, for example, in Isaiah chapter 6, when he sees a glimpse of God's glory, the very bottom of his robes and his feet, as it were, just a tiny part of who God is. What does Isaiah say in that moment? He says, "Woe is me! For I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Isaiah knew how much his unworthiness meant that he would be destroyed in the presence of God. Or think of Ezekiel, for example, Ezekiel who saw that great vision at the Chebar canal, that vision of the wheel within a wheel way up in the middle of the air, as the song goes, and how did Ezekiel react? He fell on his face utterly terrified and sat overwhelmed after it was all over for seven days trembling with fear. And even at this moment with Peter and James and John at the transfiguration, they are also afraid, because when the glory cloud descends upon them and surrounds them, they fall on their face utterly terrified. Man cannot see the face of God and live.

But God, dear Christians, is also love. God wants to be among his people, not because he needs us, but because he loves us, and that's why God hides his glory. That's why God hides himself from our eyes, because he knows that we would be destroyed. But he loves us, and he wants to be among us. So consider like in the Old Testament, how many ways God hid himself from his people. When he hid in the burning bush before Moses and hid in that pillar of cloud and that pillar of fire, all so that he could lead his people to the promised land. And he hid himself behind the clouds and the fire at Sinai and behind the curtain in the tabernacle, so that he would be among his people, and they could hear his voice for themselves. And dear Christians, God hides himself in Jesus too, because Jesus, who is God, has come among us and has become like one of us in every way except sin so that we could be in the presence of God. And Jesus laid aside his glory so much that he took our sins upon himself and died like one of us so that we would live with him. And dear Christians, Jesus hides himself today, because we could not bear to see him as he is now, glorified, sitting at the right hand of God, but he hides himself in the Word which you hear preached to you today. He hides himself in the sacraments, so that he would be with you always. God comes to you this day hidden, because he loves you, and he wants you to be with him forever. Because we see things hidden now, Christians, like Paul says in 1

Corinthians 13, like looking into a mirror, but in the day that will come, Jesus will reveal himself to us, and we shall see him face to face. What a glorious day that will be, to see Jesus as he is.

So dear Christians, Jesus hides himself, yes, because we could not bear his glory, but God hides so that you would live. To him, to whom and from whom and through whom are all things, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever. Amen.