

Introduction

At a newspaper stand in Galilee the line stretches around the block. It's going to be a long wait. The scores of people ahead of me bring out their tote bags to fill up with barley bread, grapes, olives, goat's milk, honey, figs, dates, and pomegranates. Everyone can't stop talking about the new feature article. In big, bold letters the frontpage of the *Tiberias Times* reads, "Could He Be the One? New Prophet Dazzles the Crowds." The person ahead of me turns around, "Do you know anything about this? I heard this guy preaches phenomenal sermons in the synagogue. I heard he can exorcise demons. I heard one night he healed all the sick in town. I heard he stuck it to the legalistic teachers of the law when he healed a paralyzed man dropped right through his roof. I heard this guy is so famous he can't go anywhere without the crowds and the paparazzi flocking to him. I heard he fed thousands of people out on the hills. I even heard he might have raised a dead girl of a synagogue ruler named Jairus. Isn't this so crazy? Who do you think he is? Could he be the one our Jewish nation has longed for for centuries? Could he be the one to restore our dignity? Could he be the one to stand up to the Roman establishment? Could he be the one give us glory again?"

A few days later I couldn't help but tell Jesus about it. "Lord, let me tell you what happened. The *Tiberias Times* wrote a feature article about you. The people love you! They can't stop talking about how famous you are! They know all about your powerful preaching, your amazing miracles, and your brazen boldness. They want to be around you all the time. I mean, they were wondering if you could be the one!" "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" "Jesus, you're my Lord. You're the Christ, the Messiah, the one we've been waiting for for centuries!" "Don't tell anyone about that." "Why not? Jesus, don't you want to be popular?" "Not really. I want to be the Savior." "Well, we want that too. We want you to save us from the Romans, who jack up our taxes and make our lives hard. We want you to save us from suffering and pain." "No, not that kind of a Savior. The Son of Man will suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. They will kill him, but he will rise again." "Never, Lord! That will never happen! That is beneath your glory!" "Stop it, Peter! Get behind me, Satan! You have no idea what my glory is all about!"

All that happened a week ago. I haven't stopped thinking about it. Clearly, I have more learning to do. Early one morning, Jesus took me, James, and John and pointed off to the distance, toward the most towering peak in all Israel, Mt. Hermon. "We're going there. No crowds. I need to show you something." I couldn't help but think,

Lord, Teach Me Your True Glory
as the Son of God ... as the Prophet of God

As the Son of God

As we trek towards a mountain over 9000 ft. tall, the views are amazing. It's just the four of us, and you can see for miles and miles. The sight is glorious. Then Jesus stopped. Then something happened I've never seen before. Like turning on the lights full blast after you wake up, I was practically blinded! ***His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.*** I couldn't believe it! Jesus changed! I mean, his appearance changed! His clothes glared, gleamed, glistened, glittered, and glowed! No one on earth could make those

white clothes shimmer and sparkle as much as they did! All my dreams of being in God's presence, now they're coming true! Looking off in the distance, the bright blue sky is suddenly overshadowed by a huge dark cloud. This must have been how Moses felt when he went up to meet God in a cloud on the top of Mt. Sinai. I can't help but think of all of those Sunday school stories I learned as a child. On top of a mountain it just feels like you're closer to God. Then I heard a voice from this dark cloud, ***"This is my Son, whom I love."*** That voice must be from God the Father himself! It's the same voice John the Baptist said he heard at Jesus' baptism. Yes, Lord, you must be the Son of God! Sure enough, he is! There's no doubt about it. Jesus is the Son of God. I wonder if Jesus is purposefully doing this just for me. I was wondering if Jesus really was the Son of God when he was talking about all this suffering and dying nonsense. I mean, where's the glory in that? I mean, what kind of a God acts like that? But Lord, now you have taught me your true glory as the Son of God.

So what would I say to you in Ann Arbor? I know you have questions like I did. I know you need reassurance like I did. After all, not everyone believes Jesus is the Son of God. Skeptics at your university think he is an influential figure in the history of Western civilization. Muslims in your city do not place him on the same level as Allah. Lord, if only you would display your glory like this, then that would convince all the skeptics who don't think Jesus is the Son of God! Lord, if only you could just speak from heaven that Jesus is God's Son, then that would convince all the Muslims and Jews who don't think Jesus is the Son of God! But there's a deeper issue: convincing your own heart what Jesus' true glory is all about. How can Jesus be the Son of God when his life is so full of suffering? That doesn't sound very God-like to me! If Jesus' life is so full of suffering, then that means his followers' lives will be full of suffering too? I don't want that! That's beneath him, and it's beneath me! But you all would be falling into the same sinful trap as I did. Transfiguration shows that it's not either/or, either the cross or glory. Jesus is the all-powerful God, no doubt about it. But nothing, not even our own sinful protesting, will deter Jesus from revealing his glory in the cross. So reject those earthly standards of glory that demand that Jesus needs to win the crowds. Reject those earthly standards of glory that churches need to gain popularity. Embrace that Jesus reveals his glory privately, not publicly, and that humble glory is your life too. That's his true glory!

As the Prophet of God

Right in the midst of this glorious sight, other people appear! Elijah and Moses, welcome! I can't help think about all those Sunday school stories I learned as a child. These are the great prophets of old. You both spent time on a tall mountain like this one, Mt. Sinai. Moses, when you ascended Mt. Sinai, a great cloud enveloped it when God gave you his law to give to the people. Elijah, when you ascended Mt. Sinai, a powerful wind, a trembling earthquake, and a blazing fire all tore through the mountain, but then the Lord appeared in a gentle whisper. You both were prophets who gave God's Word to his people. Moses, you taught our people when they were wandering in the wilderness. Elijah, you taught our people when the true faith almost got snuffed out under wicked King Ahab. You both had unusual ways to end your lives. Moses, when God buried you opposite the Jordan River, no one could find your grave. Elijah, when the whirlwind came, God whisked you right up to heaven. You both are legendary figures we still rave about today, but you both pointed to the greater prophet to come. Lord, you really are the prophet of God, the one whom Moses and Elijah have been pointing all along. No wonder the voice from the cloud tells us to ***"Listen to him!"***

Lord, I don't want this day to be done! *“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.”* I can't help but remember the shelter God had in the Old Testament. In the Sinai wilderness, the Lord set up a tent, the tabernacle, and there the Lord appeared to his people in a stunning display of glory. Lord, I just want to bottle all that up and keep it here. So let me build three more tents! I want you and Moses and Elijah to stay here forever! I want this glorious tabernacle to never leave! But if I'm honest, the more I think about it, I know that doesn't make complete sense. I don't know quite what to say; I'm so overwhelmed and frightened at the sight. Then just like that, it's done. Moses and Elijah, gone. I look around, and it's just us four: Jesus, James, John, and me. No one else. No more dazzling white clothes, no more glory. Too soon, before I'm ready to leave, Jesus tells us to get ready to go down and get back to life as we know it. On the steep descent, Jesus tells us three to hush up and not tell anyone what we saw until he rose from the dead. I turn to James and John, “What does he mean about rising from the dead? Do you know anything about it?” None of us do, but we keep quiet anyways. This day would be our little secret. There's no doubt about it. Jesus is the Prophet of God. I wonder if Jesus is purposefully doing this just for me. I was wondering if Jesus really was the Prophet of God when he was talking about all this suffering and dying nonsense. I mean, where's the glory in that? I mean, where did this idea come from? But now I realize that it was foretold by the prophets long ago. Lord, now you have taught me your true glory as the Prophet of God.

So what would I say to you here in Ann Arbor? I understand why you want to bottle Jesus' glory up and see it fulfilled in the here and now. If only we can bottle Jesus' glory up, then it will be persuasive to all those university professors who question Jesus' teaching. If only we can bottle Jesus' glory up, then we'll have a reason for telling more of our members why they should get more involved. If only we can bottle Jesus' glory up, then we wouldn't feel so limited as a small congregation in a crippling pandemic. But then you all would be falling into the same sinful trap as I did. The fact is, you already have all you need. The Prophet of God has revealed himself in the powerful Scriptures as the culmination of God's revelation to you. What more do you need than his Word? So listen to him there. It's the most powerful message you could ever have. That's his true glory!

Conclusion

Over thirty years later, I never forgot that day. I sat down with my dear friend Mark in the city of Rome to tell him about the life of Jesus. He was writing to Romans, people who love power, might, and glory – and from what I hear, Americans are like that too. So I told Mark he just had to include this story. Those Romans who love the glory of this world reminded me too painfully of my earlier days when I failed to understand Jesus' true glory. Transfiguration was the day when the Lord taught me about his true glory. Now so many years later, I can all put it all together: Jesus' true glory is not about all the fame that I got so caught up in. Jesus' true glory is hidden in the cross, the place we were heading once we left the mountain. I didn't fully understand Jesus until I saw him suffer and die in front of my own eyes. I know you are facing difficult times: a time of worldwide sickness, a time of personal frustration, a time of political drama. Trust me, I've seen those days too. What the Lord did for me that day on that mountain he'll do for you. Once Mark wrote down his Gospel, the day of Jesus' transfiguration is now recorded for your benefit, to teach you about the Lord's true glory. Now people all around the world can open up their Bibles, turn to this story, and pray, “Lord, teach me your true glory. Amen.”