

See God's Glory on the Mountains

✧ With Moses (vv. 12,15-18)

✧ With Jesus (Gospel – Mathew 17:1-9)

In the name of Jesus, our beautiful Savior, dear fellow followers of God's Son:

Sometimes my mouth gets me into trouble. Can anyone here relate? Getting off the plane a few years ago, I saw a woman in the aisle ahead of me with a backpack that had loops for an ice ax and mountain climbing pitons. So I asked her, "Do you ever climb any real mountains with that?" She kindly looked at me and smiled, "I've worn out three of these." "Good for you," is all I could say.

Did you ever climb any mountains? Wear out any shoes on the way? Suffer from altitude sickness? Hear about climbing the South Sister in the Cascade mountains with my younger brother Chris and a youth pastor? I won't tell you again how gathering clouds and lightning, or the lack of oxygen that nearly killed our friend. I'll spare the details about the "dreaded red ridge" and the spectacular summit. Every mountain is different, yet none can match what we see today **on the Mountains**: the fire all around Moses and the brilliance in front of Peter. For this you need the Word of God. Climbing with Jesus, we can **See God's Glory on the Mountains**. First let's look...

✧ With Moses (vv. 12,15-18)

This happened about 1500 years before the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus in today's Gospel Lesson. God had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt and now was establishing His Old Covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. They were bound for the Promised Land of Canaan. God had promised to send the Angel of the LORD, the pre-Incarnate Christ, ahead of them to guard and guide them on the way. *"Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you."* (Exodus 23:21f) When Moses told God's people everything He said, they sincerely responded: *"Everything the LORD has said we will do."* (24:3) The next day after offering sacrifices, Moses read to them from God's Word. Again they responded: *"We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."* (24:7) Remember your Confirmation? We all promise to obey God!

God commanded Moses to come up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments chiseled in stone with the finger of God. These he would teach to God's people. Imagine watching Moses climb. Then a bright shining cloud settles on top the mountain for six days. Just when you were thinking maybe Moses is dead, the LORD calls him inside the cloud. Down below it looks as if the fire will eat up the whole mountain. But look! There's Moses disappearing into the cloud!

"And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights." Sometimes people ask, "Why forty?" In Moses' first five books (Genesis – Deuteronomy) the Holy Spirit inspired him to use this number "forty" at least fifty times. I've looked at all the examples. They seem to indicate the same thing as the symbolic numbers in Revelation. *Four* is *earth's number* – as in north, south, east and west. *Ten* is the number of *completion*. So in major events when Almighty God is dealing with people on earth, e.g., Noah's Flood or here at Sinai, *earth's-4x10-complete* time is *"forty days and forty nights."*

Seems like a long time, but what if you had only *"forty days and forty nights"* to live? Do you think those relatives you've been trying to reach or the friends you've been inviting to church would finally come if they knew they had only *"forty days and forty nights"* left on earth? Some would just use the time to party. You know, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" After 9/11, church

attendance did rise, but people quickly forgot. Do you know what the Israelites did toward the end of the *“forty days and forty nights”*? Moses was up there so long that they forgot their promise to obey God. They worshipped the golden calf. God would have destroyed them if Moses had not interceded.

Remember another prophet’s experience on Mount Sinai? The other prophet with Moses at Jesus’ Transfiguration was Elijah. He ran all the way from up north down to Mount Horeb, a.k.a. Sinai because wicked Queen Jezebel wanted him dead. Elijah was extremely angry and depressed. He was sure that he was the last believer left on earth! Elijah wanted God to show His glory on the mountain too!

There’s a lesson on Mount Sinai for us. You can’t see it with high powered binoculars. Google Earth won’t even give you a glimpse. You’d still be missing this if you physically climbed Mount Sinai and wore out a back pack. Your relatives won’t see it in some spectacular miracle or a life-threatening illness. Not in the consuming fire for Moses on Mount Sinai. Not in the fire or the earthquake or the wind that tore the rocks apart when Elijah was there. God came then as He comes now to us in *“the still, small voice”* (KJV), the *“gentle whisper”* (1 Kings 19:11f) of His Word. Would it be worth your time, worth the climb to **See God’s Glory on the Mountains**? Do you have forty days? You can see **God’s Glory**...

✠ With Jesus (Gospel – Mathew 17:1-9)

You heard our Gospel Lesson before. (If you’re reading this, take a look at Matthew 17:1-9.) Again, this was 1500 years after Moses when Jesus took Peter, James and John, up on an unnamed mountain far north in Galilee to pray. Luke reports: *“As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.”* (Luke 9:29–32 NIV84)

We don’t know how much of that conversation Peter could actually hear. But we don’t have to guess at his reaction. About a week before our Gospel Lesson, Jesus had just commended Peter for his faithful confession that Jesus is the Christ. But as soon as Jesus started telling His disciples about His departure and the fulfillment of God’s promises by His death and resurrection at Jerusalem, Peter took Jesus *“aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!...This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’ Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.’”* (Matthew 16:22–27 NIV84)

Good works are necessary, but not for salvation. Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone. Good works are necessary to show your faith is alive. You can’t get right with God by getting all excited about religion or giving your life to God; He already owns you – body and soul. Yet we deserve His consuming fire for our own golden calves, like the TV, car, house or relationships. Maybe your portfolio. What’s first in the morning, God’s Word or the paper? What has your heart? Who do you love most of all?

When you **See God’s Glory on the Mountains**, it’s “double glory” (CW 97) as you follow Jesus to mount Calvary just outside Jerusalem. We see Him in shining glory as God today. We see Him in dying glory and grace on Calvary. God glory is to save sinners like us. Now Jesus says, *“Deny yourself. Pick up your cross. Follow me.”* Is it worth *“forty days and forty nights”* to you? Forty days of Lent begin this Wednesday until Holy Week and Easter. God the Father says of Jesus: *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!”* Come and see God’s glorious grace, His loving kindness and saving pleasure for you. Let’s meet at the cross and see God’s glory there. Amen.