

A Glimpse of the Glory of Christ

Introduction: On the Mount of Transfiguration

This is the third article based on the account of the transfiguration of Christ as found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). In this one I propose, with some trepidation, to concentrate on the glory of Christ as revealed in the transfiguration: “And who is sufficient for these things?”

When Jesus Christ came to earth, He came in the form of a servant: in meekness and great humility. For the vast majority of His life, that glory which he shared from eternity with His heavenly Father, was veiled in a lowly body of flesh. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, for a brief moment, the veil was lifted, and Jesus was seen in all His divine glory by the three disciples who made up His inner circle: Peter, James and John. He was “transfigured before them (literally, “metamorphosed”, like a lowly caterpillar being transformed into a beautiful butterfly): and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment (clothing) was white as the light” (Matthew 17:2); in Mark’s account, we read, “And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them” (Mark 9:3); and in Luke’s, “And as he prayed, the fashion (appearance) of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening (dazzling)” (Luke 9:29). This glorious scene was further enhanced by the appearance of Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:3), and the appearance of the shekinah glory cloud of God’s presence (Matthew 17:5). Two of those disciples who witnessed this event later wrote of what they saw: “and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), “(we) were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

I have decided to approach the subject of Christ’s glory, as revealed in the transfiguration, by comparing it with another Bible character, who witnessed the transfiguration, and who also went up a mountain.

Moses on Mount Sinai

Moses was a very important character in the purposes of God in the Old Testament. He was responsible, humanly speaking, for bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the edge of the Promised Land.

While journeying through the wilderness the Israelites stopped and camped at Mount Sinai. Here Moses made a bold request of Jehovah: “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (Exodus 33:18); and the Lord graciously agreed to “make all (his) goodness pass before (Moses)” on the top of the mountain (Exodus 33:19). In Exodus 34:1-8 we read how Moses went up Mount Sinai (to receive the ten commandments for the second time) with two tablets of stone. At the top of Mount Sinai God “descended in the cloud (the shekinah glory cloud which represented God’s presence), and stood with him (Moses) there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD (Jehovah). And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses

made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped” (Exodus 34:5-8). And then, after forty days on the mountain, we read, “And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses’ hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist (knew) not that **the skin of his face shone** while he talked with him (Jehovah)” (Exodus 34:29). Here we see the similarity with what we read of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration: Moses’ face shone with the glory of God, in whose presence he had been.

Moses himself was destined never to enter the land of Canaan in his lifetime, due to his rash behaviour at Kadesh (Numbers 20:1-12), where he **smote** the rock instead of **speaking** to it as God had commanded him, and thus he failed to “sanctify God in the eyes of the children of Israel” (Numbers 20:12); but, interestingly, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see Moses coming from heaven and entering the Promised Land, about 1400 hundred years after his physical death!

Christ on the Holy Mount

When we come to the experience of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, despite some outward similarities, we encounter an experience and a person very different to that of Moses. First, the similarities: in both instances their faces shone with the glory of God, and in both cases the shekinah glory cloud of God’s presence was present. However, Christ’s face shone **before** the glory cloud of God’s presence appeared, and, furthermore, the face of Moses shone with the **reflected glory** of God whose presence was **outside of himself**, while the face of Jesus shone with **His own divine glory** which belonged to Himself as the eternal Son of God; even the clothing of Christ shone with the glory that emanated from **within His person**.

The superior glory of Christ over Moses, and everybody else (including the angels), is something that is taught throughout the New Testament, and particularly in the book of Hebrews. Here are just some of the comparisons which are contained in the scriptures:-

Moses’ mission was to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, through the waters of the Red Sea – where they were “baptized unto (into) Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:2), through the wilderness of Sinai, to the promised land of Canaan. **Christ’s mission** was to deliver all His elect people, “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16), out of sin’s bondage (John 8:34), through the waters of baptism where they were “baptized into Jesus Christ” (Romans 6:3), through the wilderness of this world (Revelation 12:6), into eternal glory with Himself (John 14:2-3).

Moses left Pharaoh’s court and “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26). **Jesus left the courts of heaven**, where He existed “in the form of God” and was “equal with God” (Philippians 2:6), and “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

The covenant God made with Moses and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai was **a covenant of law**: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in (by) them: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 18:5; cf. Galatians 3:12); “which my covenant they brake” (Jeremiah 31:32):

and a broken law covenant can only condemn, it cannot justify (account as righteous): “for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (accounted as righteous)” (Galatians 2:16): thus Paul calls **the old covenant, ministered through Moses**, “the ministration of **death**”, and, “the ministration of **condemnation**” (2 Corinthians 3:7,9). But **the new covenant, of which Christ is the mediator** (Hebrews 8:6), is a **covenant of grace**, ratified by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14), “for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament (covenant)” (Hebrews 9:15), resulting in **justification** through faith in Christ: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 2:16): thus Paul says that **the new covenant in Christ** “giveth **life**”, and he calls it “the ministration of **righteousness**” (2 Corinthians 3:6,9). As Jessie F. Webb puts it: “Not now by words bringing death to transgressors, grace unto life the new covenant brings; Jesus our Surety, our Kinsman-Redeemer, round us the robe of His righteousness flings” (from the hymn “God of the covenant”, no. 60 in Christian Hymns). “For **the law** was given by **Moses**, but **grace and truth** came by **Jesus Christ**” (John 1:17).

God gave to Moses the ceremonial law with all its types and shadows, including the Passover meal, where a lamb was sacrificed in each family, and which was instituted on the night before the Israelites left the land of Egypt. **Christ fulfilled all the types and shadows of the ceremonial law**, including the Passover lamb, “For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Christ is the reality (the “truth” - see John 1:17, quoted above) which the types and shadows pointed to (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).

In Hebrews chapter 3 we read that both Moses and Jesus were faithful in God’s house: “For this man (Jesus) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his (God’s) house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Hebrews 3:3-6). **Moses was a servant in, and a member of, God’s house** (the household of God, i.e. God’s people); but **Christ is the Son of God, and the builder of God’s house**. God spake with Moses “as a man speaketh unto **his friend**” (Exodus 33:11); but on the Mount of Transfiguration God the Father said to Jesus: “**This is my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 17:5).

In John 3:14-15, we have this comparison: “And as **Moses lifted up the serpent** in the wilderness, even so must **the Son of Man be lifted up**: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”. In the wilderness, because of the people of Israel’s continual complaining, Jehovah “sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died... And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld (looked at) the serpent of brass, he lived” (Numbers 21:6-9). **Moses lifted up a serpent of brass** that healed people when they looked towards it, thus delivering them, **temporarily**, from **physical death**. **Christ was lifted up upon the cross** that those who look to Him in repentance and faith might be delivered from the **eternal** consequences of their sin – the never-ending punishment of body and soul in hell, and receive **eternal life**.

Moses was a sinner. We have already drawn attention to the episode of the smitten rock at Kadesh where God rebuked Moses, and, as a consequence of his disobedience, was not allowed to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 32:48-52). No such rebuke was ever received by Jesus from His Father because “**(Christ) did no sin**, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Indeed, Christ could say, “I do **always** those things that please him (the Father)” (John 8:29).

There are many other comparisons that could be made between Christ and His glory, and that of Moses; perhaps you can think of some more?

The Superior Glory of Christ

Ultimately, the glory of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than that of Moses because He is **God** as well as man. The attributes of divinity belong to Him. Hebrews describes Christ’s divine glory thus: “who being the brightness (radiance) of his (God’s) glory, and the express image (exact representation) of his person (essence, nature)” (Hebrews 1:3). It also tells us that the Son of God is the object of the worship of the angels: “And let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6); and that which is spoken of God, Jehovah, the creator, in Psalm 102:25, is spoken of Christ: “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Hebrews 1:10). John’s Gospel opens with the words, “In the beginning was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word **was God**. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3); and in 1 John 5:20 we read, “This is the true God, and eternal life”.

Scripture gives us some other descriptions of Christ’s glory, usually in visions. In Revelation we read: “I saw seven golden candlesticks (lampstands); and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps (chest) with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead” (Revelation 1:12-17). Other descriptions are found in Isaiah 6:1-5 (see John 12:41); Daniel 10:5-9; and a poetical description is given in Song of Solomon 5:10-16.

Conclusion

No wonder we read in Revelation chapter 5 of the honour and worship which is being ascribed to the ascended Christ in heaven now (Revelation 5:8-14). And if this incomparably glorious person is your Lord and Saviour, then you can look forward, with joyful anticipation, to the day when Christ will return, with power and great glory, to take you unto Himself; and the glory of Christ that you and I will see in that day will not be a **transient, fleeting glimpse**, such as the three disciples witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration, but we will **bask in the radiance of the transcendent glory of our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever**. In the meantime, let us now, on earth, join with the heavenly chorus in singing, “**Worthy is the lamb**”. Amen.