

**Sermon: Exodus 24:12;15-18**  
**February 3, 2008**

It was quite a view from where I was standing. We were on top of a mountain in Thailand. Down below us in the distance was the muddy waters of the Mekong River, meandering its way through the mountains. On the other side was Laos. One of the members of our party, a Hmong man told us tales of the war that was fought from these mountains. It was a war between the people who lived near the mountain on which we stood and those who lived near the mountain across the river. The marks of war were still on the mountains which also helped to tell the tale of what went on here 20 years ago. Both of these mountains were covered in war. In the lessons today for the celebration of our Lord's transfiguration we hear about two mountains on which significant events took place. Today we will listen to the tale of two mountains. Both of these mountains are covered in glory, but one shines with greater grace.

Exodus 24 takes us to the first mountain along with the Israelites. It is the well-known Mt. Sinai. The Israelites arrived there three months after leaving Egypt. On the morning of their third day at Sinai there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud over the mountain and they heard the sound of trumpets. When Moses goes up onto the mountain later, we are told that the glory of the Lord settled on Mt. Sinai. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain.

This cosmic show served an important purpose. First, as the Israelites camped at the bottom of the mountain and saw what was going on, there was no doubt in their minds that God was present there on the mountain. Second, it showed them the majesty and holiness of the Lord. At the same time as they were witnessing the glory of the Lord, the Lord was giving them the law, the ten commandments and various other laws and commands that they were to follow.

When God gave Israel those laws, the people responded to God, "We will do everything the Lord has said." But as they witnessed this display of God's glory, it caused the people to tremble with fear. God wanted to impress upon this people who had entered into an agreement with him to obey all of his laws not to trifle with his holy will. In other words we might say that God scared them to death so that they would take his law seriously. All this he accomplished by showing them his glory on the mountain.

In the gospel lesson today, we find Jesus, Peter, James, and John on top of a mountain. We don't know the name of this mountain, so we will call it the Mt. of Transfiguration. This mountain is also covered in glory. Like Sinai this mountain was covered with the glory of God which came down on the mountain like a cloud. Remember again that God does not reveal his glory for nothing. That is also the case here.

Matthew tells us that Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes became the brightest white. It was as if Jesus' human body could no longer contain the divine and his divine nature came shining through. Just like the Israelites could not miss God's glory on Mt. Sinai, there was no missing this bright shining glory of Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration. The glory shone forth as if to say, "This is the Son of God." Remember that God does not reveal his glory for nothing. This instance of God's glory convinced Peter, James and John beyond a shadow of a doubt that this was the Son of God. Peter confesses in his letter, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

In case they missed what Jesus' glory meant, God the Father's glory settled on the mountain in the form of a cloud. There they heard the voice of God testify, "This is my Son." Peter says that the voice came from the majestic glory. Their response to that glory was no different than what ours would be. They were terrified.

When we look at the similarities between the tale of these two mountains, we can see that both were covered in God's glory and in both instances it caused the people who witnessed that glory to tremble in fear. What other reaction could a mortal creature have when confronted with the presence of the almighty God? God's purpose was to terrify with his glory and we could use some holy terror in our lives too. I am not saying that God's people should be afraid of him, but we should recognize him for who he is and treat him that way. Too often we think of God as one who lets sin go as if it doesn't mean anything to him. Too often we think of him as being distant and not concerned about what goes on in the world. We get complacent about the fact that we are dealing with the almighty God. His demands have not changed and he expects us to be perfect. When we sin, God's anger is like the smoke and fire, the earthquakes and trumpets of Sinai. God is really mad! The full impact of God's glory and his hatred of sin should bring us to our knees like the Israelites at Sinai and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration when they were faced with God's full glory. When we approach God in worship, let us also recognize that we are in the presence of our holy God, who comes to us in his Word. A little holy fear in our lives is a good thing.

God is not just about scaring his people to death. And that is the real difference between the glory on Mt. Sinai and the glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. The glory on the Mt. of Transfiguration shines with greater grace.

It is not as if we can't see any grace on Mt. Sinai. The Israelites stood and watched God's glory on display and that consuming fire did not crawl down the mountainside and destroy them where they stood. It would have been God's right and prerogative to do so. The Bible tells us that the soul who sins is the one who will die. But God does not destroy them, he has plans for this people. In his great love he spares them. For the sake of his promised Savior he withholds his hand of judgment because he has the salvation of the world in his plans.

Put yourself in Moses' sandals for a moment. Moses saw the display of God's glory and he got the message about God's justice and righteousness. Now he has a job to do. God says, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction." Moses has to go to God on the mountain and stand before the one who has displayed his awesome splendor, and he has to receive from God the law which condemns him at every turn as one who deserves nothing but destruction by God. But God brings Moses into his glory and into his presence on the mountain and Moses stays there in God's grace for forty days and forty nights. Moses stood with God and lived!

As much grace as there was on Sinai, there was so much more on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John were standing on that mountain accompanied by God's Son, the Savior of the world. There stood Moses and Elijah, both of them were testaments to God's grace. Elijah was spared physical death when God took him to heaven in the whirlwind. Moses stood before God as a first-fruit of the eternity that God's people would enjoy when God calls them from this world. Yes, there is so much grace on that Mountain.

God's glory shone forth again. Remember that God doesn't show his glory for nothing. He wanted those disciples to know that this was not only his Son, but the one that he loved. Here is God's grace in bodily form. Here is God's Son the one that he loved, but the one he was willing to forsake so we his sinful creatures won't be forsaken. He is the one who God afflicted with the full punishment of hell so that we his sinful creatures will live forever in glory.

God's glory can ultimately be seen in his saving act through Christ. We see God's glory, not a dark cloud with lightning shooting forth from it that causes our knees to tremble. We see God's glory, not in a shining face and bright white clothes that cause us to fall to our knees. We see God's glory in his saving work through Christ, which allows us to stand before God in holy awe and with the utmost of respect and worship.

When we approach God's altar in this place we come in holy awe and with the utmost respect and worship. We declare in our hymns and in our words of praise the glory of God as shown in his great acts of salvation. We listen to his Word as the Father himself urges us to do on the Mount of Transfiguration so we can marvel all the more at the great things God has done for us.

We see his glory on Mt. Sinai, the Mt. of Transfiguration and especially on Mt. Calvary. For without Calvary the Mt. of Sinai will leave us trembling in fear. Without Calvary the Mt. of Transfiguration is another mountain that causes us to tremble. With Calvary the tale of these two mountains all comes together. God's glory causes us to tremble as he thunders his law at us. God's glory causes us to rejoice over the Son of God who came for us. God's glory on Calvary causes us to sing praise because we are saved.