

And Straight Away All the People'

by Raymond Golsworthy

Seeing Christ is the beginning of true Christian experience and the foundation of all spiritual experience.

Topics: "Christian Faith", "Spiritual Vision"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches on the profound encounter of the people with Jesus after the transfiguration, emphasizing the importance of seeing Christ as the foundation of all Christian experience. The response of beholding Him, being greatly amazed, running to Him, and saluting Him illustrates the essence of Christian faith from its inception to its progression. Golsworthy delves into the significance of spiritual vision, the awe and wonder that comes from encountering Jesus, the urgency of moving towards Him, and the deep intimacy of embracing Him as a reflection of believers' life-union with Christ.

Transcript

"And straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him." Mark 9:15

The Lord has been laying the above verse very much on our hearts in recent weeks, and we would like to pass on some thoughts that have come to us concerning it.

The passage that leads up to this particular verse deals with the transfiguration of our Lord, and we read that He took Peter, James, and John up into a high mountain and was transfigured before them, and "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow" (verses 2 and 3). We read of a Voice coming from heaven, and Matthew tells us that "when the disciples heard it they were sore afraid."

The verse we are now considering, however, tells us what happened when the little group finally came down from the Mount, and rejoined those who had been left in the valley. We are told that "when they beheld Him, they were greatly amazed, and running to Him they saluted Him". Some have suggested that there was still some 'after-glow' from the transfiguration still shining from the Lord's face, and quite possibly that was so, but our present purpose is just to consider the immediate responses of those who were meeting Him in the valley.

The words themselves are very simple, just four phrases: they "Beheld Him", they "Were greatly amazed", they "Ran to Him", and they "Saluted Him"; all very significant statements we dare to say.

As we have pondered these four phrases, it has come to us that here we have something which illustrates very vividly the true essence of all Christian experience. And that we shall try to explain.

We would make it clear, too, that the phrases illustrate not only the four elements in initial Christian experience, but also the four factors which mark the later and progressive aspects of the Christian life. From beginning to end it will always be a matter of seeing Christ, gravitating towards Him, and embracing Him, and doing so in ever-deepening and rewarding ways.

Let us, then, say just a little about each of these four phrases as we have them in our verse.

First, we are told, "they beheld Him." The original word used here is 'eideo', just the ordinary word for seeing, though the context indicates that, in this case, it has something very, very special. The 'seers' here were somehow 'stopped in their tracks' by what they saw. We shall have more to say about that extra element of amazement a little later, but here we stay with the simple fact that they 'saw', and that it was this that set in motion the whole sequence or process that followed. They 'saw Jesus'.

This, in a spiritual sense, is always the beginning of true Christian experience, be it these earlier aspects or any of the later steps in the onward pilgrimage with the Lord. Vision or the 'seeing of Jesus' is the basic secret.

A few verses from the life and experience of the Apostle Paul may help us here, for he, surely, 'saw Jesus', and had much to say about it.

As far as his conversion is concerned, we are told that, on the Damascus road he saw a 'great light', and it is evident that he immediately realised that that 'light' was in fact a living person, for he cried out, "Who art thou Lord?" The answer came back, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." In a very special way, then, the Apostle had seen the living Jesus, the Messiah, and that was the foundation of all that followed in the course of his ministry. As he puts it later, he had seen the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Perhaps that is why, in the same chapter, Paul refers to the gospel as, "The gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4 RV). We remember, too, how, at his conversion, Ananias of Damascus had come to him and said: "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee that thou shouldest ... see that Just One, and be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:14, 15).

That, incidentally, is a clear word on evangelism as a whole. Evangelists are chosen, first and foremost, to see God's Christ, and then to say what they have seen. And we may add that the best 'seers' are always the best 'sayers'! Our point just here, however, is that all true spiritual experience, from first to last, initial or progressive, is based on a seeing of the Lord. Thank God, the blessed Holy Spirit has been sent down to "take of the things of Christ" and show them to us; more and more of Him being unveiled to us as we go on in the Christian life. The Holy Spirit always delights to show Christ to us.

Reverting now to our Mark 9 story, everything began when these disciples in the valley saw Jesus. In their case they saw Him coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration; in ours we may 'see' that same Blessed One coming down to us from the Mount of Glory, mighty to save (See Isa. 63:1).

Summing up, then, we would suggest that all who would be saved, and all who would go on with the Lord, should pray from the heart the prayer of John 12:21, "We would see Jesus." That will be the releasing secret. Blessing will follow.

The next phrase in our special verse tells us that on seeing Jesus, all the people "were greatly amazed". Other translations render it they were "overwhelmed with wonder" (NIV) or "overcome with awe" (NEB), evidently a very startling experience for those concerned!

This particular detail would certainly support the view that there was some lingering 'afterglow' on the face and person of our Lord as He came down from the Mount, but, be that as it may, we simply want to say, here, that there is always an inward and compelling 'soul-awe' when a human being, helped by the Holy Spirit, begins to 'see Jesus'. We would even go so far as to say that the presence or absence of that 'awe', or that 'amazement', is a clear indicator of whether or not the person in question has really seen Jesus at all, that is, in a spiritual sense. And we would say, too, that this 'soul-awe' is something which will greatly increase as we go on in the spiritual life. We know, indeed, of some believers whose 'awe at Christ' becomes evident whenever they so much as pronounce His Name. A certain 'hush' seems to come over them, and onlookers sense the powerful and gracious presence of the Lord.

We remember, too, how Isaiah the prophet could only cry, "Woe is me, for I am undone," when he saw that same glorious Person (See Isa. 6:5, John 12:41). And we believe it is essentially the same with us. Seeing Jesus is, in fact, the beginning of a necessary inward undoing essential to glorious newness of life in Christ (Rom. 6:4). And that, again, is progressive. Continual beholding, in other words, leads to a continual and blessed brokenness of spirit before the Lord.

Christian hymn-writers have frequently touched on this matter in their heart-moving and Christ-exalting hymns. C.H. Gabriel, for instance, writes:

I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers,

Confused at the grace which so freely He proffers me:

I tremble to know that for me He was crucified;

That for me a sinner He suffered and bled and died.

O it is wonderful, wonderful to me.

Again, we cannot here say all that we would about this extra factor of amazement but we do long for more of it in our own hearts. O, to be numbered among those who are 'greatly amazed' at Christ, not only in His dying love but also in His risen power and His exalted glory. Christ is the One before whom the angels veil their faces, and we would at least be stopped in our tracks by a sight of that dear Person, finding our hearts, "Moved at Him" (Song 5:4), or, as the New International Version puts it, "My heart began to pound for Him." Something like that will surely be the effect when we, too, see Jesus. We conclude this section by remarking again that here is an amazement which strikes at the heart of all inborn self-strength, and makes us look away to Christ for all we need. In a deep sense, it is a seeing that slays us, and leads on to a glorious renewal in fellowship with Christ. (See Rev. 1:17, 18).

The next thing we read in Mark 9:15 is that these same people, seeing Christ, and being greatly amazed at Him, forthwith ran to Him. This, too, is important for us, and something from which we may learn much. Once we have seen the Lord, we, too, need to move in His direction, and we need to move swiftly. That is the way to Christian experience. We must run to Christ.

We may say that these people in our verse were not only 'greatly amazed', they were greatly, and irresistibly attracted. The Christ whom they were seeing was not only magnificent, He was magnetic; they could not but run to Him. Christ Himself said that if He were lifted up, He would "draw all men unto Himself" (John 12:32). We now venture to say that this always is the case when Christ is really 'seen'. And, it takes place to the degree that He is seen!

I well remember a young Brahmin student who was present at a gospel meeting I was addressing in South India. He sat on the floor right in front of me, and his eyes were wide open! I just went on with my message and when I spoke to him afterwards he said, 'O, I do find your Jesus so very attractive.' I had been speaking on the reasons why Christ came into the world, and emphasizing, particularly, that He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). I remember pleading personally with the young man afterwards, and urging him to respond to the evident workings of the Holy Spirit in his heart, and just come to Christ, specially as He Himself lovingly invites us to do so (Matt. 11:28)! We agreed to pray together right there, and I believe he did come, 'running', I feel sure, into the outstretched arms of Christ.

It is interesting to note that, according to the Bible, there is always movement in saving faith. The literal meaning in John 3:16, for instance, is that we believe 'into' Christ, and it is the same in many other similar passages; as we trust we move. Indeed, we 'run to Christ', as did those who saw Christ coming down from the Mount.

And that word 'run', of course, always brings in the idea of urgency. That is particularly important in these end-days in which we are living. How bad, and how shameful, if, after all the opportunities we have been given, our laps should be found without oil in the hour when the Bridegroom comes! (See Matt. 25:1-13).

We conclude, now, with a brief consideration of the closing phrase in our verse, "they saluted Him." The original word here (*aspazomai*) literally signifies 'they draw Him to themselves' or, shall we say, 'they embraced Him'. All who are familiar with Eastern customs will know that the normal salutation in those parts is an embracing, with each party extending the arms and firmly drawing the other to himself. This, we feel sure, was the picture in Mark 9:15, not just a formal salutation by any means, but a welcoming of Him with outstretched arms.

This, surely, has a message for us today. This is how the Lord would have us come to Him. He wants us to embrace Him, to press our hearts into his heart, and, greater wonder still, to know Him pressing His heart to ours! If we have seen Him, and if we are 'running to' Him, that is the salutation He is waiting for.

Perhaps we should not try to go further with this particular aspect of our study. It is all too sacred and wonderful for feeble words. And there are delicacies here that we cannot, and need not, go into right now, but the Holy Spirit will lead us in as we are able to bear it (see John 16:12-14).

The great Bible mystery that lies behind what we are here saying is that of the believer's present life-union with Christ. That is the supreme reality into which God's grace is calculated to lead us; "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). That, and nothing less than that, is God's glorious purpose for His people, and perhaps the simple picture in Mark 9:15 is some small indication of it; "They embraced Him"; they clasped Him to themselves.

We are reminded here of two beautiful verses from the pen of Frances R. Havergal:

Jesus, Thy life is mine,
Dwell evermore in me
And let me see
That nothing can untwine
Thy life from mine.
Jesus, my life is Thine,
And evermore shall be
Hidden in Thee,
For nothing can untwine
My life from Thine.

The key to it all, of course, is what we said at the beginning; they 'saw' Jesus. That is what we should pray for, and that will lead us to all that is to follow.

And straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him, saluted Him." (Mark 9:15)

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