

# On the Mountain with Jesus Moses and Elijah

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Every year, to mark the end of the Edinburgh Festival, there is a massive fireworks display involving, I'm told, four tonnes of explosives and 400,000 fireworks.
- It's typically attended by 250,000 people in the Prince's Street Gardens who want to be part of this grand event. And of course, this year, none of that is taking place. Edinburgh is a very quiet place and has been all summer.
- And the reason, of course, that so many people want to attend a display like this every year is because it is a display.
- It's a spectacular display. There's brightness, there's light, there's colour, there's pattern and there's noise. Every sense is awakened in you and the crowd is awestruck.
- You feel excited and thrilled. There's a sense of anticipation and a sense of wonder and even a certain measure of fear. The same thing happens, of course, as you know, at New Year time. A similar fireworks display is put on.
- [ 1 : 24 ] And there's one word, I think, that encapsulates a display like this, and that's the word glory. The festival finale comes as close, I think, as possible to creating our kind of glory.
- Because that's what glory means. It means the display of something, the outward display of something. It can take many forms. It can be in the form of artwork. Or it could be in the form of someone's voice. Someone with a beautiful, extraordinary voice.
- You go away and you think, that was glorious. Something that's visible or something that's obvious and it's evident. Something that takes your breath away.
- You can get the glory of scenery, for example. We all want to see some form of glory. We're entertained by it.
- And that, of course, in a right sense. We're amazed by it. We're enthralled, at least for a little while. Well, if our attempt to create glory is awesome, how would you feel if you saw God's glory?
- [ 2 : 41 ] A spectacular display of his majesty and his splendor. I don't think there are any words that could describe it.
- We can't even imagine what it would be like to see God in all his splendor and all his glory and his majesty.
- But that's something of what these three disciples, Peter, James and John, saw when Jesus took them up the mountain that day.
- Here's the scenario. Jesus takes Peter and James and John up the mountain and he begins to pray. The disciples leave him to this and they lie down and they fall asleep.
- When they awake, it's like they're in another world. Jesus is not alone. Not only so, his face is radiant. It's resplendent. They've never seen him like this before.
- [ 3 : 39 ] They've never seen anyone like this before. What's more, he's talking to two other men. And they realise quickly who these others are.

It is Moses and Elijah. Both of these men lived hundreds of years beforehand. And so what they're looking at is not some kind of resurrected Moses or Elijah, but they're actually looking into heaven itself.

When Peter saw this, when he saw everything and when he eavesdropped on the conversation that was taking place between Jesus and the three friends and the two friends, he wanted to stay there.

His instinctive reaction was to stay there for the rest of his life. He never wanted to leave. And of course, that's the way it is in heaven. Heaven is a place of perfection and peace and bliss.

If it was possible to go into heaven tonight and interview someone there, they would never, ever, no matter how much they love their loved ones in this earth, they would never want to come back because they've been perfected and they've been brought into the very presence, the nearness of God himself.

[ 4 : 58 ] I often wonder when I read this passage, and I'm sure that you've read it many, many times, the story of how Jesus' appearance was changed and how he spoke to these two friends, these two Old Testament saints, and how the disciples all saw this and their breath was taken away.

I wonder, why did this happen? What was the purpose of it happening? And of course, there's no end to the way in which you can explore a story like this.

But I just want to keep things very simple this evening. I want to say, first reason is so that Jesus would be transfigured, so that his appearance would change because, well, because that's who he was.

He was the Son of God himself. So it's not really surprising if he is the Son of God that there would come even that moment, these few moments, when the disciples would get a glimpse of his heavenly appearance.

And the second reason would be so the disciples would eavesdrop on this conversation that took place between Jesus and two very old friends. And when I say very old, I mean very, very old.

[ 6 : 24 ] Moses was by now about 1,300 years old. It was 1,300 years since he had died. And Elijah, his younger friend, was about 900 years old.

And then thirdly, the third reason was so that they would hear God's voice. The voice that eventually said, this is my son, my chosen one, my son in whom I love.

Listen to him. I want us to remember this evening that each of these events was a display of glory. Not just the appearance of Jesus, bright as that was.

We're told that his clothes became resplendent. We're told that his face shone like the sun. But that wasn't just where glory began and ended.

Glory was the whole thing. In fact, the whole of Jesus' life was glory. Don't ever, let's not forget that. Don't let's ever think of just something like this as being the glory of Jesus, the resplendence of Jesus.

[ 7 : 32 ] Remember that what John said, We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The truth is that here in these few moments, the disciples saw the kingdom of God. They saw into heaven.

I don't believe that this was Elijah and Moses having left heaven and somehow come down here for a visit. I believe that what was happening is that this was a coming together for a few moments of heaven and earth around the person of Jesus Christ.

So the disciples were somehow able in a very limited way to see into heaven. They were able to see something of the splendor, the sheer perfect happiness of heaven.

So in a way, this was a kind of prophetic vision. It was Jesus' way of saying to his disciples and to us, because this was all written down for our benefit.

[ 8 : 46 ] It's his way of saying to us, this is what is still to come. And the fact that Peter wanted to stay there for the rest of his life, never want to go anywhere else. It indicates, it's one more reminder that once we're there, you never want to go anywhere else.

Read Revelation chapter 7. Read the account of all of those people in their thousands and in their millions and their uncountable number. And they're all praising and worshipping and glorifying Jesus.

None of them want to come home. None of them want to come to this earth where they once were and this earth that they once called home. Because home for them is where Jesus is.

And I believe that once perfection comes, and we don't know that yet. We haven't had it. Not yet. Once it happens, that's it. Everything else is past.

It's in the past. You never want to go back. It's hard for us to imagine that, isn't it? It's really hard for us to imagine because, I mean, we naturally love the things that we have in this world.

[ 10 : 00 ] And quite rightly so. Families, wives and husbands and brothers and sisters and friends and all the things that God's given us to love. And yet, he's also promised us that one day all these things will be in the past.

And that there will be a new dimension. There will be a new heaven and a new earth where the dwelling of God will be amongst men and women. And where the Lamb, which is another name for Jesus, he dwells amongst them.

And this is just, this is a foretaste, if you like. It's a kind of a trailer, a prophecy, a living, visible prophecy of what one day will take place.

The fact that they can recognize Moses and Elijah means that once people enter into heaven, they don't lose their identity, the identity that they had in this world.

And yet, something happens, something indescribable happens. God brings them into a state of perfection.

[ 11 : 11 ] But it's interesting, isn't it, that they were still Moses and still Elijah. And they saw Jesus' glory. It's described in verse 21.

His face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. You can't help feeling that language is being stretched to try and describe the indescribable.

Heaven came down. It's breathtaking. We can only imagine what that looks like. Jesus is resplendent.

He is incandescent. Often we use that word to describe someone's anger. That's not the way I'm describing it. That's not the way I'm using it. Incandescence is where something shines intensely.

And the intensity of this was just extraordinary. I don't know why they saw Moses and Elijah.

[ 12 : 14 ] Again, theologians and writers have speculated that Moses represented the law in the Old Testament. And that's true. Elijah may have represented the prophets in the Old Testament.

Well, that's also true. Was that the reason why particularly Moses and Elijah appeared? I don't know. And sometimes I think we try to know too much.

And when we try to know too much, we often don't see the obvious. That here are two men. Two men who lived in the Old Testament.

And if you go back and read about their lives, these two men really struggled. They were great, notable men of God. They were chosen by God.

They were outstandingly obedient. And yet, they had their failures. They had their faults. They sinned on many occasions.

[ 13 : 15 ] They were weak. They struggled. And I'm sure they often felt, what's going to come of this? There were times, for example, a time that comes to my mind is when Moses, having faithfully discharged everything God had asked him to do, he went up the mountain to get the Ten Commandments.

He came back down again. And what did he find? He found that the people of Israel were worshipping a golden calf. And, I mean, how depressing is that?

How discouraging must it have been for Moses, after all he had done, to find the people immersed in such idolatry?

And yet, he carried on because God encouraged him. And he carried on right to the very end. How discouraging is it when, at the very end of your life, you're not allowed to see the promised, you're not allowed to enter into the promised land because you failed.

And that's what happened to him. He failed. Remember the time when the children of Israel were thirsty. And God said to him, go and speak to that rock.

[ 14 : 28 ] And instead of speaking to him, Moses lost his temper. And he struck the rock. Well, that wasn't what God had commanded him to do. He disobeyed God. And as a consequence of publicly, in front of everybody disobeying God, God banned him.

He said that his life would end before they crossed. How discouraging must that have been? How disappointing must that have been? And it must, Moses must have gone through many days in his life wondering, what is God doing in my life?

How is he possibly going to work all this? Of course, he knew very little of what God eventually would do in sending his son into the world. And yet he faithfully just lived from day to day.

And it was hard for him to be faithful. It's hard for us to be faithful. And sometimes we fail.

And we stumble. And we fall. And so did Elijah. Elijah wasn't perfect by any means.

[ 15 : 39 ] He wasn't perfect. And I can't help thinking, now they know why they struggled. Now it's all in the past.

And perfection and bliss and heaven and glory has come. Just as it has come to every other child of God who has struggled and failed sometimes.

And wondered what is God doing sometimes. And wondered why is God not answering my prayer in the way that I think is best. And the way that I think I can glorify him in. And God doesn't seem to be listening.

And so on and so forth. That's the way it is, isn't it? For you and me as well. One day we will know. One day we will see him face to face.

And then everything will fall into place. And here is the living proof. Moses and Elijah. And they've made it. God has brought them into heaven.

[ 16 : 41 ] What's more, I can't help thinking that the conversation with Jesus must have been in terms of everything they ever worked for.

And yet didn't know what God was going to do eventually in their work. They didn't know that one day God would send his only begotten son into the world.

And yet they had a part to play in the preparation of Jesus coming into the world. And they didn't know how Jesus would one day be the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

Moses knew all about sacrifice. He was the one who, under God's command, he instigated the system of sacrifice. He was the one who built or oversaw the building of the tabernacle in which the sacrifices took place every single day.

And the importance of the sacrifice was that sin was atoned for. But Moses knew very little of what God eventually was going to do in the fullness of time.

[ 17 : 49 ] That one day he himself, God himself. This is the most, this is the very heart of the gospel. That God himself would become our sacrifice to take away our sin.

And so not only do Moses and Elijah now enjoy the rest that God has prepared for them in heaven, but they now, in speaking to Jesus, they now witness for themselves that their labor was not in vain.

What encouragement this is for all of us, not just for them, but for all of us who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That God takes us weak and frail and defective and sinful as we are. And he transforms our deficient lives into his plan.

He makes all things work together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. So here are these two men, Moses and Elijah.

[ 19 : 16 ] They get to see Jesus, they get to speak to him, and Jesus gets to speak to them. Because in a strange way, I believe, you can think about this later on, I believe that this was as much for Jesus' encouragement as it was for theirs.

Jesus, remember, was a human being. He was a perfect human being, but he was human nonetheless. And we know from various points in his life, he was subject to fear and weakness and hunger and thirst.

And so the prospect of the cross that lay in front of him must have been horrific. And I can't help wondering if this episode where Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus and speak to him about his forthcoming death is God's way of encouraging him to face the cross, knowing that he was the fulfillment of everything that God had done in the Old Testament.

I can't help also comparing the way in which Elijah ended his life here in the world.

We've talked about this before. How Elijah was, he didn't die a normal death. God took him in a chariot of fire, in a whirlwind.

[ 20 : 56 ] He was one of the only two people in the Old Testament that never died a natural death. God took them, Enoch and Elijah. And the implication seems to be is that these men walked so close to God that their death was unusual.

But what about Jesus? Nobody walked so close to God as Jesus did. But God didn't take him the way he took Elijah.

He could not be spared death the way Elijah was. Jesus had to go through the pain and the agony and the suffering of death.

There was no other way for him to leave this world if he was going to accomplish the will of God the Father. And that will, that plan was to save us, to rescue us from our sin.

There was none other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the door of heaven and let us in.

[ 22 : 18 ] Which, of course, brings us tonight to the greatest place in all the world. Which is also the most horrific place in all the world.

The place where Jesus, the Son of God, was nailed to a Roman cross. There is no greater display of God than Calvary.

Isn't that ironic? We started off this evening by talking about the splendour of God. The beauty of God.

The majesty of God. That's what we usually think about when we talk about glory. And yet, Jesus describes his death as the glory of God.

God, this is the place where we get to see how our sin was paid for in the death of Jesus Christ.

[ 23 : 42 ] And it's, there is no better way to end a Sunday evening than to think about and reflect on his death for us. Right now, we're not able to have communion.

And we miss that, don't we? So we should. Because it's a way in which Jesus wanted to remind us on a regular basis. Not just by retelling the story, but by handling and tasting the symbols that remind us, that represent his death on the cross.

There is no more appropriate way to end a Sunday evening. And there is no greater strength to face all the challenges of the coming week than to think about how Jesus loved us and gave himself for us.

Paid in full the ransom price that set us free from our slavery to sin. That saved us and rescued us.

Let's worship God for that. Let's give thanks. Let us glorify God with our hearts and in our voices.

[ 25 : 03 ] As we come to reflect once again on what Jesus has done for us. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we bless you this evening that we can be reminded of what Jesus did for us.

It was so important that it brought this great conference together, including Moses and Elijah and Jesus and Peter and James and John. What a moment that must have been.

No wonder Peter wanted to stay there for the rest of his life. And one day he got to stay there for the rest of all eternity.

And so were we. Our Father remind us that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world. Lord, remind us that herein we have no continuing city, but that we seek a city whose builder and maker is God.

Lord, prepare us. We pray to be heavenly minded tonight. We pray to reflect on what Jesus has done for us. As he gave himself on the cross and rose again triumphant over the grave.

[ 26 : 14 ] Let us have confidence then to face the future in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pardon our sin, we pray. And we can ask that in confidence, believing that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

In his name. Amen.