

“WE BEHELD HIS GLORY”

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on December 24, 1967 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Of all the apostles, John seems to have been closest to the Lord. Along with Peter and James he was one of the inner circle of three who were present with Christ at the transfiguration. These same three had the privilege of witnessing the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead. They were also closest to the Lord during his agony in the garden of Gethsamane. John was the apostle who “leaned on Jesus’ breast” at the last supper. It was he who entered with Jesus into the trial hall when Jesus appeared before the High Priest. John was also the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of his mother, at the time of the crucifixion. John is described as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” further indicating the intimacy of his relationship with the Lord.

The apostle John lived longer than any other apostle, and eventually approached the age of one hundred before his banishment to the Island of Patmos. He did most of his writing in the latter part of the first century. His story of the life of Christ was written twenty-five years or so after the other gospel narratives. Looking back over the years in which the church had begun and spread, knowing what others had written about the Lord, and remembering his own intimate association with Jesus, John began his gospel with these words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not.” Then, a few verses later John came to the theme of the entire book, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-5, 14).

In the sentence just read, we find the expression “we beheld his glory.” This is our theme for this study. John and the other apostles knew Jesus as fully as men could possibly know him. John especially had an opportunity to know Jesus in depth, and it is he who speaks for all of them as he says, “We beheld his glory.” No one is better qualified to speak than John.

Christ’s Words

John beheld Christ’s glory as he heard his words. Through more than three years of time John heard Christ speak under every kind of situation and on almost every known subject. He heard Christ as he answered the questions of the old and the young, the rich and the poor. He heard him teach; he heard him preach. He knew the unique quality of the words of the Lord.

Even after nineteen centuries, we also can feel the great spiritual strength that is to be found in the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are they that mourn ... Blessed are the meek ... Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness ... Blessed are the merciful ... Blessed are the pure in heart ... Blessed are the peacemakers ... Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake ... Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgement ... Ye have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also ... Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven ...

“Take heed that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do ... And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites ... Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites ... Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust dost consume, and where thieves to not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also ... But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you ...

“Judge not that ye be not judged ... All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets ... Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock ... And everyone that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.”

These selections have been chosen entirely from the Sermon on the Mount, which is to be found in Matthew 5, 6, 7. It comes as no surprise, because of the very nature of the message which Christ spoke, that we read at the sermon’s conclusion, “And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teachings: for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes.” We remember on another occasion how the chief priest and Pharisees had sent officers to arrest Jesus. Sometime later the officers returned empty handed. When they were asked, “Why did ye not bring him?” they responded, “Never man so spake.”

(John 7:46). Jesus demonstrated his divinity by the quality of the message which he presented throughout his life. John and the other apostles beheld his glory as they heard Christ's words.

### Christ's Miracles

John beheld Christ's glory as he witnessed his miracles. Jesus went about healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead. At least on one occasion he walked on the Sea of Galilee. On at least two occasions he multiplied a small supply of food so that there was enough to feed thousands. At the end of his life he demonstrated his divine power by triumphing over the grave. As this almost endless procession of miracles passed before the eyes of the apostles they were convinced that Jesus was truly the Messiah sent from heaven.

The reaction of the people to the miracles of Christ is seen in Matthew 9:32-33, where we read, "And as they went forth, behold, there was brought to him a dumb man possessed with a demon. And when the demon was cast out, the dumb man spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel." Similarly, in John 9:32-33, we read of another case in which the people were deeply impressed by Christ's miracles, "Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

We read in Mark 2 of the healing of a palsied man. The friends of the palsied man had carried him to Jesus, then had let him down through the roof, when they found the house where Jesus was teaching so crowded that they could not enter by the door. When Jesus saw the man he said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven." Then he perceived that some were critical of his forgiving sins. For their benefit he added, "Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Rise, take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose, and straightway took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion." (Mark 2:5, 9-12). The disciples beheld the glory of the Lord as they witnessed his miracles.

### Christ's Life

John beheld Christ's glory as he observed his life. A man's life is made up of his basic attitudes as they are translated into action. When we narrow our consideration down to the most fundamental of attitudes, there are basically three which all men hold. These are: (1) attitudes toward things; (2) attitudes toward other people; and (3) attitudes toward one's self. In his attitude toward things, Christ showed little concern for earth's treasures. On one occasion he said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Luke 12:15). His attitude toward others is seen in the statement, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 12:34-35). Jesus demonstrated his love in a most difficult moment as he was dying on the cross. He looked down at those who were in the very act of crucifying him and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34).

Christ's attitude toward himself is revealed in the gospel of John, in passages like the one found in John 4:34, which reads, "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work." In John 5:30, we read further, "I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Again, Christ gave evidence in his own life that he lived according to his principles when in the garden of Gethsemane he prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39). Later, the writer of the Hebrew letter was able to say, "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Christ so perfectly lived according to the principles of eternal right that it could be said that he was without sin. The apostle John and the other apostles beheld his glory as they observed his life.

### Christ's Purpose

John beheld Christ's glory as he realized his purpose in coming to the earth. The apostles were familiar with the writings of Isaiah, which had existed for some seven centuries before their time. In them Isaiah, like many other prophets of the Old Testament, had foretold the coming of the Messiah. In Isaiah 9:2, 6-7, we get this graphic picture of what the Christ would do, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined ... For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of Hosts will perform this."

Later, Isaiah wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them

that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified.” (Is. 61:1-3). As John and the rest of the apostles came to understand that Christ came into the world, as Matthew 1:23 puts it “to save his people from their sins,” they realized the glory of the Lord. He was God’s emissary for the salvation of the lost souls of mankind.

While here on the earth Jesus had said, “Ye are the salt of the earth ... Ye are the light of the world ... Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:13, 14, 15-16). Christ not only taught his disciples to so live as to glorify God, but he demonstrated preeminently this glorification of God in his own life.

Notice this summary from the pen of the apostle Paul of the life of Jesus. “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore God also highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:5-11). Notice especially that all of Christ’s acts resulted in the glorification of God.

### Conclusion

In Col. 1:27, the apostle Paul wrote, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” If our lives are to have any lasting glory it will be because Christ dwells in our hearts and lives. The only real glory that is possible for us is the reflected glory of the divine Son of God.

As we choose our life-goals and determine the pattern that our lives shall follow, we might well ask: “Is there anyone whose words are more noble than those of Christ? Is there anyone who can do greater deeds than Christ did? Is there anyone whose life is more worthy than Christ’s life?” As we read the record of his life and work we, like John and the apostles of old, behold his glory.

It behooves us, if we are wise, to accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. We do this by giving our love and allegiance. We demonstrate the commitment of our hearts by obeying his commandments. Confess the name of Christ before men. Repent of our past sins. Be buried with your Lord in baptism for the remission of your sins. Then, walk in his steps as long as he allows you to live here on the earth. After a while, you, too, shall behold his glory throughout the eternity to come.