

The Glory: External or Internal?

Romans 9:4d

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

"If you could show me God so that I could see him with my own eyes, then I would be prepared to believe that he exists." Most of us have said that or have heard it said. "If you could show me God so that I see him with my own eyes, then I am prepared to believe that he exists." We know that "it ain't necessarily so," because belief in God is not just an intellectual issue. It is really a volitional issue, because once you have decided there is a God, you have to adjust your life to please him. So there is a big question of the will involved in deciding whether God exists or not.

As well as that, all of us believe in wind and neutrons and love, and we have never seen them and probably never will. Yet it is good, loved ones, to see that such hard, scientific evidence of God's existence and character is available to us. It is important for us as we share about God with other people not to pretend that this is just something that you have to have faith for. It is really important to see that there is good solid evidence available and observable by our finite senses that expresses God and his reality. It is important to see what such evidence is called in the Bible. Evidence that consists of things or events that express the reality of God, his nature and his character is real-life action that we can observe with our five senses. That is called, believe it or not, the "glory of God." This Bible calls that the "glory of God".

Whenever God expresses himself in some thing or some event that we can observe with our five senses, that is called the glory of God. That is the only way we can know God. He is really unknowable because he is secret and invisible, but whenever he expresses his character in ways that you and I can see or hear or touch or taste, that's called the glory of God. Without that glory the Israelites would never have believed that God exists. If you look at Menachem Begin you see an Israelite of the Israelites. You can't put anything over on him at all. That's what the Israelites were -- shrewd, skeptical, cautious people who would not have believed God existed if there hadn't been plain evidence presented to their five senses over so many years.

For instance, look at them after that incredible incident where they crossed the Red Sea, Exodus 16. You remember a corridor had just opened in the sea and they had walked on dry land right to the other side of the Red Sea, and then, as the Egyptian army began to try to follow them, the water resumed its level and drowned the whole army. Yet they remained skeptics in Exodus 16:2: "And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger'" -- because of course, they had nothing to eat now. Verse 6: "So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, 'At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your murmuring against the Lord. For what are we, that you murmur against us?'" Then in verse 11: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have heard the murmuring of the people of Israel; say to them 'At twilight you shall eat flesh and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.' In the evening, quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoar frost on the ground. When the people of

Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the Lord has given to you to eat.'" Look at verse 7; there you see Moses and Aaron saying to the Israelites, "And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord." Then in verse 13: "In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp."

Now the glory of the Lord was not only something that they could touch and see, but something that they could eat. It was a real expression of God's nature and his character and his existence in a real-life physical situation that they could touch and see -- that was the glory of the Lord. That is why they believe in God. That is why we believe that the Judaic-Christian presentation of the Creator of our world is the only one that is worth looking at. It is consistently and continuously real in the evidence that it presents to us about our God. It is always real-life evidence.

Look, for instance, at verse 31: "Now the house of Israel called its name manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." Moses didn't get into all kinds of existential arguments about the ontological or the teleological or cosmological, or the moral reasons for believing in God. He had stuff that they could see. This little kid could say, "It is like coriander seed. It is white and it tastes like honey." That is pretty down-to-earth evidence.

Now, loved ones, we need to see as we at times allow ourselves to be driven back into all kinds of philosophical, existential argumentation and dialectic, that you don't need to go that far. You can go beyond even the existence of the earth itself; you can go to the incidents that take place again and again. This is the evidence that the Jewish people present to us. Verse 35: "And the people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land." So you know it wasn't just one morning when they all got up drunk, and they were bewildered and thought that the snow was bread. They ate it for forty years, year after year in the wilderness. Then in verse 32 you see the way they passed this evidence down to their children: "And Moses said, 'This is what the Lord has commanded; 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" And Moses said to Aaron "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations."

That is the kind of evidence that has come down to us from the Jewish people. They believe there is a God because they have experienced real-life physical situations over a period of four thousand years which have been promised beforehand to them by prophets and accompanied by a commentary by God that shows them what it means. They have experienced that over four thousand years of their lives. Those things have been passed on to their children in bottles and containers like this and today have created ceremony and traditions which are an integral part of the Jewish civilization and society. That is the glory of the Lord that they have passed on to us.

So today in synagogues throughout these Twin Cities the laws of God are read and they attest in print to the superhumanly advanced laws of hygiene and of behavior that God revealed to Moses thirty-four hundred years ago. It is the same with every other ceremony that they have. It is the same with the rite of circumcision. Where did it come from and why did they do it if the things that their fathers said happened did not happen? All the traditions and ceremonies of the Jewish people today are evidence -- see, hear and touch evidence -- that there was a mighty Being that did unbelievable miracles among this people. The theologian, Leslie, has stated four criteria for establishing the historicity of a fact or event in the past. That the matter of fact be such that

man's outward senses, the eyes and ears, may be judges of it. It just can't be Mohammed saying "I had a dream last night" or "I had a vision". It can't be Confucius saying, "Well, I think that this is the philosophical explanation of the way we should live." It can't be Cayce saying, "Well, at a seance last night I sensed the spirit saying this."

If the fact is to be real and historical then it first has to be such that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it. It has to be something that six hundred thousand people can eat over a period of forty years in the wilderness. Second, it must be done publicly in the face of the world. It has to be things that you can check up in the Egyptian and Babylonian histories. You can see whether these things happened to the Jews or were a myth of their own making. Third, that not only public monuments be kept in memory of it, but some outward actions be performed. That is, there are not only monuments that sit there and are forgotten, but there are some people who do some actions year after year -- in the case of the Jews, century after century -- that attest to the original fact. Such actions and observances are instituted and commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.

It is because the evidence that the Jews passed on to us of God's existence down through the centuries meets all those conditions that Paul said what he did in Romans 9:4: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory." That's why Paul says that. They haven't much glory today, I think we would agree. So it is not glory in the sense of everybody looking up to them and respecting them and thinking well of them. It is the glory in the sense that God chose Israel as the nation to whom and through whom he would make himself real in physical events that could be seen, heard, touched and tasted. That's the glory of God.

In our study of this verse we have been asking, "Do we have any more than the Jews have? Do we have any more evidence?" We have. Look at John 1:14. Again, he's talking about seeable, hearable, touchable evidence. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." When Moses said, "God will make a way of escape" and the Red Sea opened; when Moses said "God will lead us" and a pillar of fire appeared in front of them in the wilderness; when Moses said, "You can trust God", the Jews would say, "Yes, we believe you were right even though you are just a man like us; you have never dwelt in heaven with God and conversed with him before the creation." Loved ones, that's the kind of evidence that we have.

Jesus of Nazareth was not just a prophet like Moses. He was the only begotten Son of our Creator. Those are the very things he says he did. He asks God to restore to him the glory that he had with him before the world was. He presents himself as somebody who talked with God before any of us existed and before our world was created. He says, "The words that I speak are not mine, they come from him that sent me." He says, "I and the Father are one." He says, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father. I am he. He is in me. When you look at me you are looking at God, your Creator." That's the kind of glory that belongs to us. It is the kind of evidence that belongs to us.

The Jews could always look at Moses' faults and say, "Maybe he speaks for God, but look at the faults in his life -- that Cushite woman that he married." They could always look at Elijah and see his failings and his inconsistencies and say, "Well, maybe he speaks for God, but he has made mistakes in other things. He may be making a mistake here." Loved ones, this man Jesus did not only have the power over nature and disease that these Old Testament prophets had, but he had a life of such balance and purity and wisdom that it has been unparalleled in the world's history. There have been many people who could have claimed to be the Son of God, but none of them have a life like his

that no one can question. Jesus has a life that presents evidence that he is a supernatural being who has had a unique relationship with our Creator and therefore, knows what our Creator is like.

The supreme piece of evidence is his ability to exit from this life. None of us have ever exited from life and then come back and told the rest of us what it was like, but he exited and explained how he was going to do it. He explained at great length how he was going to die, how he would be dead for three days and then would come back and live among us, and he did all that. He lived for over a month and appeared to different people at different times and assured them that, "Look, you see that it happened as I said it would. I was really dead and I really did leave this earth. I went to my Father. I know him and all is as I said. You can see that I've got my life given back to me and now I'm leaving off this earth and you will never be able to find my body. Believe me that I am the hardest most solid evidence that there is a Creator in this world that you will ever find."

Loved ones, that is the glory that belongs to us. Is there any other glory? There is. There is a glory that can belong to us today that even the disciples couldn't have. I want you to listen carefully because it is something that is talked about glibly and rather superficially. There is a piece of hard evidence that there is a God that we can have that even the disciples could not have. It is in John 14:22: "Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered him, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" You can tell me that your mother loves you and I can say I believe you because I know you and I respect you and respect your judgment, but I can never know that the way you know it. If the two of us were put on racks and tortured so that we would be forced to say that your mother doesn't love you, I would give in before you, because you know it in a way that I don't know it and that I can't know it. Now, loved ones, it is possible to have evidence like that in your life. It is possible to have the personal presence of God in your life. It wasn't possible to the disciples. The disciples had Jesus with them, but until he died and rose from the dead and sent them the Holy Spirit, they couldn't have that reality within them. The Spirit of God worked upon them but the Spirit of God could not dwell in them and bring the presence of God into their lives until Jesus had risen from the dead. Why was that?

Look with me at two Psalms that are really important. Psalm 24:3: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully." The person who can know God's presence has clean hands and a pure heart. In the Old Testament that was not possible except for a few prophets and kings. This is always what the people were praying in the Old Testament, Psalm 51:3: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Then in verse 10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." In order to experience the presence of God you had to have clean hands and a pure heart, but in the Old Testament all you could have was a clean conscience. I think some of you think that is the highest. They could have a clean conscience, because with continual confession and daily repentance of repeated sins they knew that God was willing to forgive them. They could clear out the guilt from their conscience every day, but they did not have a clean heart. Yet clean hands and a pure heart are the things that are needed if you are going to experience the reality of God's presence in your own life. That suddenly became available to us when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. You remember one of the apostles says in Acts 15:9: "And God gave the Holy Spirit to them as he did to us and cleansed their hearts by faith."

Loved ones, it is possible today to let Jesus take away the sin from your heart so that the heart is clean. When it is clean the Holy Spirit pours in and brings a strong, incontrovertible confidence

that God is in you. That presence of God in your life is evidence that goes beyond even the evidence of Jesus; it goes beyond the evidence that the Jews had; it goes beyond any scientific evidence. Loved ones, it is only possible if you are willing to go the whole way with what Jesus has done for you on the cross -- go all the way to a clean heart. Many of us so-called Christians say, "I know that God is not dead because he lives in my heart," or "he is not dead because I talked to him today." If we were honest about his presence in our heart, we would often say, "There are many times I am not too conscious whether God is there or not." It is because we have settled for a clean conscience instead of a clean heart. Now I'm with you -- God does give us a clean conscience. Because of Jesus' death he forgives us all our sins. But do you see that the deeper meaning of Jesus' death is that that self in you that believes so much in itself that it cannot wholly believe in God, was crucified with Christ? And when you are willing for that, the Holy Spirit is able to create a new being in you that can put all its trust and belief in God? Do you realize that? The reason you are not sure whether you can wholly believe in God (you are not a fool) is because you believe in yourself. I know you sit there and say, "Oh, no, if you knew me, I am the shakiest person here. I have no self-confidence at all."

Loved ones, we are subtle people, us miserable little human beings. We are subtle, we are no fools. We know we have to believe in something. It has to be money or something that we have that we can put our trust in. The reason we have doubt about our belief in God is because we still believe so much in ourselves. Jesus died to destroy that belief in self, so that we could be filled with a belief and a total surrender to him that would enable the Holy Spirit to bring God's presence into our lives. That is the glory that a child of God has in these days. It's the glory of God personally present in your life so that you know him like a real person. I would ask you, "Do you know him like that?" If you don't, I would encourage you by saying it's not because you are not the right kind of personality, it's because you are playing around with some sin still in your life. That's it.

God only comes into a heart that is ready to be clean. So it's all those little things. It is that little bit of sarcasm that comes out to your wife; that's an unclean heart. That's a desire to use your power to get a person to treat you the way you want to rather than let them treat you the way God may permit them to treat you. It's sidestepping a little dishonesty on money; that's a dirty heart. That's what steals from you the presence of God. If you could see the supernatural world as it really is, you would see the presence of God disappearing in your life as you begin to let uncleanness come into your heart.

So even though God himself will continue to be loving and gracious to you and continue to allow you to be his child, your sense of his presence in your heart will disappear with the first touch of sin. Loved ones, the secret is to enter into the glory of what we have that the Jews could not have -- the glory of God's personal presence in our lives through our being able to have our hearts cleansed by the Holy Spirit because we are willing, at last, to let Jesus take away our sin instead of live in it. Then you can say, "God is not dead. I talked to him this morning. He lives in my heart" -- and you will know it with absolute freedom. That is see-touch-hear evidence. That's when some person will say, "How did I come to believe in God? I met a man with a shining face" or "I met a woman with a shining face." That is the final glory. That is the final persuasion that God exists. I pray that you just won't be talkers. We have enough talkers; everybody is talked silly on religion. I pray that you will give God an opportunity to clean your heart and dwell in your life personally, so that you will know him as you know your mother loves you.

Let's pray: Dear Father, you know fine well that the world is filled with a whole lot of gospel preaching -- Lord, a whole lot of religious talk that just has turned us all off. Father, it badly

needs Jesus alive -- so that he can be touched and seen and heard in somebody's life. Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters -- and I pray for myself this morning -- so that we will go the whole way, Father. We won't be satisfied with a clean conscience, just cleared of guilt because we've done our daily confession and repentance of the old sins that we've been committing for years. But Lord, I pray that we'll go all the way and be willing to let this old self, with all its desires and its preferences and wishes be destroyed with Jesus on the cross, so that you can clean our hearts, Lord -- clean them and make them pure -- and can dwell in them personally. Thank you for your good word when Judas asked you, Lord Jesus, "Jesus, how will you manifest yourself to us and not to the rest of the world?" You answered, "If a man loves me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him, and we will make our home in his heart." Thank you, Lord. Amen.