

**Pastor's POV (January 2023 Newsletter)**  
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One of the daily highlights every year at Vacation Bible School is when the students have a chance to share their “God-sightings”—moments when they’ve caught a glimpse of God in the midst of their day. Maybe it was in an especially beautiful sunset, or a lost puppy that was found, or an exciting family adventure. It’s great that we’re teaching our youngsters to be attuned to what God is up to in their world. All of should be on the look-out for “God-sightings” this year.

A couple of thousand years ago, folks in ancient Palestine came to believe that they had experienced the most incredible God-sighting of all. Not just a place where God acted in a dramatic way—but God himself breaking into human history to become a visible presence with us. We don’t know how this realization dawned on them. In the earliest gospel writings (the so-called Synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke), there are clear intimations that this figure, Jesus of Nazareth, is in some sense divine. He receives worship and exercises divine prerogatives (like forgiving sins). What was implicit in these earlier gospel accounts becomes a full-blown assertion in John’s gospel. In Jesus, this gospel writer claims, the eternally existing Word—the Father’s only begotten Son, himself God—took on our humanity (“was made flesh”) and took up residence in our world (John 1:14).

As a result, John says, we were able to see, observe, contemplate his *glory*. There’s a whole ton of meaning packed into that little word “glory.” In the Old Testament, it refers to God’s visible splendor, the radiance of God’s character. Exodus is a book that is chock full of references to God’s glory. It appears as a thick cloud of fire atop a mountain in the wilderness, inaccessible and remote (Exod. 24:16-17). At one point, Moses asks to see God’s glory (Exod. 33:18). All God can do is place him in the cleft of a mountain and pass by, with Moses only able to glimpse God’s back (Exod. 33:21-23).

Later, the glory cloud descends from the mountain and takes up residency in the tabernacle, the tent where Israel worshiped in the wilderness (Exod. 40:34-35). When the Temple was built in Jerusalem, the same glory cloud descended and took up residence in the inner sanctuary (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Just before the city fell and the Temple was destroyed, Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory departing (Ezek. 10:3-5, 18-19). Interestingly, though the Temple was rebuilt by the returning exiles, there is no record of a glory cloud re-inhabiting it. It’s almost as if God had a different plan: the glory would be enfleshed in a person!

That’s what John says happened when Jesus appeared. In lieu of actually *seeing* God’s glory, Moses only *heard* God’s character verbally described: “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and filled with gracious love and truth (Exod. 34:6, Int’l Standard Version). In the person of Jesus, that *Word became flesh*, i.e., the character of God which had been conveyed in speech came to be expressed in the form of a human life. The glory that was displayed through Jesus was, John says, “full of grace and truth,” a phrase that (according to New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham) is essentially a Greek rendering of the phrase “filled with gracious love (*he-seḡ*) and truth (*ë-met*)” found in the Hebrew text of Exodus 34:6.

In Jesus, that glory came in the form of a human life and “made his dwelling” or “took up residence” among us. The Greek is *eskēnōsen*, literally meaning to pitch a *skēnē*, a tent, which is the word customarily used for that Old Testament tabernacle. You could legitimately translate it as he *tabernacled* among us (the reading that’s actually found in a few translations, like the Tree of Life Version or Young’s Literal Translation). The glory cloud that resided in the Old Testament tabernacle came and was made visible in a human person.

That one verse, John 1:14, establishes the premise for the whole rest of John’s gospel. It’s with good reason that Prof. Bauckham entitled his collection of studies on John’s theology, *The Gospel of Glory*. Glory is the theme that runs throughout the book. And that glory is seen in a couple of primary ways. First of all, it was displayed through a series of extraordinary deeds that John characterizes as “signs.” (John 2:11 is the programmatic text, referring to “the signs through which [Jesus] revealed his glory.” Again, the idea comes out of Exodus, where God’s glory was shown through “signs” that Moses performed, e.g., Exod. 10:1,2). But the greatest display of glory was in the Cross and in the Resurrection of Jesus. The Cross, on which Jesus experienced the depths of human degradation, was paradoxically the paramount expression of God’s glory—a visible display of that grace, love, and truth that Moses heard being verbally extolled when God’s glory passed by.

So those themes are going to be our focus for the next three months. During the Sundays after Epiphany (which celebrates Christ’s manifestation to the world) we’ll be looking at the first half of John’s gospel (chs. 2-12, sometimes called the ‘Book of Signs’) and considering how each of the seven signs depicted there reveals to us something about Jesus and about how we should respond to him. Then, during the season of Lent, we’ll be looking at the second part of the gospel (chs. 13-20, sometimes called the ‘Book of Glory’) in a series called “the Glory of the Cross.” Along the way, we’ll be challenging our whole congregation to engage with the Gospel of John and to encounter Jesus in a new way.

John is basically saying to his readers (and to us) if you want to see God, look at Jesus! So may we have lots of “God-sightings” as we explore this part of God’s Word together!