

2 Kings 2:1-12 & 2 Corinthians 3:12-13, 4:1-6 – February 11, 2018

Since I married my wife 9 years ago, I have spent quite a bit of time in car dealerships. Well, one car dealership, to be specific. The one that both of her parents work at. Neither of them are salesmen. Her mother handles human resources. Her father manages the rental department.

But just about every visit involves at least one trip to that car dealership. And one walk through the showroom floor. As swarms of salesmen descend upon us. All hoping we are there to buy a car. All offering us that classic sales technique: a test drives.

Test drives are an important part of selling a car. Buyers think they're a good idea because they let you gain information about the car. Find out if you're comfortable in it. Find out if it meets your needs.

But salesmen know the real reason they offer test drives is more psychological. Because once you sit in a new car. With the clean, polished interior and the quiet, powerful engine and the fancy bells and whistles all around you. That old car you drove to the dealership suddenly feels really, really OLD. They know it's hard to go back to something old once you've tried out something brand new.

When we look at all of the times in the Bible that God reveals himself to his people – when he reveals his glory to the Israelites and the prophets and the disciples – we often find something very similar at work. Those revelations very often function as test drives of his glory. Brief glimpses that make them only want more.

We see that in our Old Testament lesson, for example. Elijah is with his student Elisha. And as they are talking, great chariots of fire sweep down from heaven. And a whirlwind lifts Elijah into the air.

And Elisha is overwhelmed by the scene of God's glory he is now witnessing. Overwhelmed by the glory that his teacher is now entering. Such that he can only cry out to Elijah, *“My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!”*

And then, as quickly as it began, it's finished. Elijah vanishes. The test drive of God's glory is over. And even though he was privileged to witness this amazing event, Elisha is filled with the same feeling that we all feel when someone we love goes to be with the Lord. Grief. Sadness. Loss.

He grabs his clothes and tears them in two. Because, in the end, it was only a brief glimpse of God's glory. And now the reality of death makes him want all the more for something better.

St Paul says something similar in our Epistle lesson. He talks about an incident with Moses. Moses had spent weeks in God's presence. He had been privileged to have the glory of God pass by him. There was perhaps no one in history who spent more time talking to God than Moses.

So, when he comes down from the mountain, after spending all this time with God, Moses is literally glowing with God's glory. The people can't even stand to look at his face because he is so radiant with God's light. And Moses puts a veil over his face to shield God's glory from their view.

In the book of Exodus, it says that Moses did this because the people begged him to do so. They were terrified of how he appeared. But Paul reveals another reason for that veil. He says that Moses put the veil over his face *“so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.”*

Simply put, Moses put a veil over his face because this was only a test drive of God's glory. Because seeing Moses shining like lightning wasn't the point. Receiving the Law, in all its wrath and judgment, wasn't the point. All of this – Moses and the Law – would one day come to an end. And the Israelites would see the true outcome of their faith.

Moses was shining with the glory of God so that they would watch and wait for the one who would give them true hope. So that they would watch and wait for the one who was indeed light shining in the darkness. So that they would watch and wait for the one whose face, whose very presence, would shine into their hearts with the knowledge of the glory of God.

Both Elijah and Moses were privileged to see the glory of God. Both Elijah and Moses gave those around them the privilege of seeing a brief glimpse of that glory. But both Elijah and Moses did so in order to point forward to someone greater.

Someone who would shine with his own glory before his own disciples. And be transfigured before them. Elijah and Moses gave God's people a test drive of the true divine glory found in Jesus Christ. And, not surprisingly, they appear with Jesus on that mountain.

But a glimpse, a test drive, is really all that Jesus himself is giving to Peter, James, and John as well. Because Jesus doesn't stay in this transfigured state. Peter wanted it to last forever. He wanted to make himself at home on the mountain, in the presence of these three amazing figures. But then, just like that, it's all over.

Why? Well, because even in that magnificent state, Jesus still isn't displaying his full glory. The full glory of the reason why he's there on earth. Just before the transfiguration, Jesus tells his disciples that he will have to suffer at the hands of sinful men, die, and rise again. And Peter refuses to believe it. He refuses to believe that the glory of God can dwell on a bloody cross.

And so Jesus proves it to him. He shows Peter the glory of his transfiguration. And then he goes to Jerusalem. And he shows Peter the glory of his crucifixion. And the glory of his resurrection. And the glory of a God who would love sinners like you and me so much that he would die for them.

That's the glory that Elijah and Moses revealed to God's people. That's the glory that Paul preached. That's the glory that Jesus wanted his disciples to know when he told them to say nothing of the transfiguration until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

And that's the glory that we proclaim as well. Because like Elijah and Moses and Jesus, we have an opportunity to give those we know a test drive of God's glory. We have an opportunity to give them a glimpse of God's love.

How? By the love that we show them. John writes in his first epistle, "*By this we know love, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*" Every time that we show love to our neighbor we are giving them a test drive of God's love for them. We are giving them a glimpse of God's glory found in Jesus Christ.

And that is a wonderful privilege that we have been given. But it's not the end of the story. Because like Elijah being carried away from Elisha or Moses putting on that veil, showing them only a brief glimpse of the glory of God isn't the point. Showing them a brief moment of God's love isn't the goal.

It's only a test drive. It's only there to show them something more. Something new. Something they didn't even know existed. For, as Paul says, what we proclaim is not ourselves. It's not our love, our works, our compassion. What we proclaim is Jesus Christ as Lord.

We go into all the unbelieving world and we point to him. To his death for their sins. To his resurrection for their eternal life. We show them a glimpse of God's love and glory, and then we point to Jesus. And we say, "Don't go back to that old car. You know this is so much better. And guess what? It's free. Take it. It's yours. He's already paid for it."

That's what we do as disciples of Jesus Christ. We continue that ministry of Moses and Elijah. Not pointing forwards, like they did. But pointing backwards. To the one who has shown us the fullness of God's glory in his love for us.

So that one day, like Moses and Elijah, like Peter, James, and John, like all those saints who have come before us and will come after us, we may one day stand with Jesus in all his transfigured, resurrected glory. In the light of the one who has shined in our hearts. And know that this is God's beloved Son, who rose from the dead for us. Amen.