

~~ 2026 Bible Study Theme ~~

**THROUGH
FAITH**
MISSIONS



John 11:40...

**Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that
if you believe,
you will see the glory of God?'**

Mission Bible Study Notes

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Note: What is 'the glory of God'?

As we'll see in the progress through these studies, it is where people in the bible literally experienced the presence of God. This was a combination of physical revelation (actually 'seeing' the Lord), and revelation of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. There may be different interpretations of the operation and work of the Holy Spirit today, but it is clear from the bible, as Christians, we cannot work effectively without the Holy Spirit, and, we can indeed experience the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit (essential in salvation) and beyond that, have further deep and personal experience(s) of God, which are life changing for us. Through his work in us, the Holy Spirit will in turn have an effect on others around us.

If we believe.....we will see.....

1. Wrestling with God

Passage to read: Genesis 32:1-2, 22:22-2

Reference points:

- Despite idolatry (back story), all parties call on the name of the Lord - and He answers!
- What we fear often turns into blessing - God visits
- Jacob meets angels
- Wrestled all night: he *knew* it was God
- 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared'

God has already met with both Jacob and Laban, and spoken / given instructions. Both of them were engaged in idolatry, and yet God speaks - to warn, to guide, to lead, to instruct. This isn't an excuse or reason for us not to follow God fully. God is speaking into the situation in spite of the idolatry, in spite of the half-hearted (if any) worship of the one, true, living God. God *will* have the worship due Him. He *will* have His purposes fulfilled. There is a higher purpose, a fulfilment to come, in God's leading. It's bigger, and beyond anything which Jacob could have conceived. And so it is for us, for what we are doing, how we are serving; it's Kingdom work.

Then Jacob meets with angels! It had a significant impact on him! (Giving of sacrifices on altars / raising and dedication of stones, was symbolic in the OT: a physical reminder of the spiritual elements of worship).

Jacob becomes fearful, He's just about been able to pacify Laban, but then hears Esau is coming with an army. How like us Jacob was! Paralysing, incapacitating fear resulted. How quickly he forgot the God who has just spoken with him! He tried to take things into his own control, and be a master of events. God had other plans. A verse from a hymn by William Cowper, someone who knew great and deep bouts of depression, but at the same time knew and loved his Saviour deeply:

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread,
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

How often, in our spiritual experiences, is a trial transformed into a time of blessing. Even through circumstances which drag on and drag us down, we are to see, and remember, that, if we believe, we will see the Glory of God. **Romans 5:3-5**

Jacob then wrestles 'a man'. Something was odd in that neither Jacob nor 'the man' were able to prevail. No winner, all night. Finally, God (pre-incarnate Jesus Christ), did 'the supernatural thing' to win the fight. Jacob wouldn't give up - and was rewarded, in blessing. Was his hip healed? Or did he carry it as a reminder.

This wasn't a spectacular revelation of God in ALL His glory. Nevertheless, God's glory was revealed to Jacob. There was a supernatural, holy, divine, glorious, and deeply personal encounter with the Living God. Was this Jacob's moment of salvation? Possibly, but, definitely, his life was never the same again.

Jacob's final words in this chapter clearly show us that he has seen and known the presence, power, and glory of God: "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." Even if he didn't know before, he knows now that God has been merciful, and revealed his glory and presence, to Jacob, the schemer and deceiver, and probably not a particularly nice character to deal with.

Remember, the covenantal promise was already there for Jacob. God's plan, the fulfilment was being revealed, and so it is for us. As we move forward, although we have a responsibility to equip ourselves, always in the Holy Spirit's strength *alone*. We are to both equip ourselves, and expect to be equipped for the mission work ahead. (Paralyzing) fear should have no place for us in the presence of God. John 14:26-27, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

- 🕒 Perhaps a moment of personal reflection: Do I need to raise a metaphorical (spiritual) stone and sacrifice (give up) idols before I move forward into this mission?
- 🕒 Do you have a particular instance where you have felt God's presence / the glory of God revealed? Would you be willing to share (one or two folk) - to encourage each other and build up?

2. We won't survive?

Passage to read: Exodus 33:12-23

Reference points:

- Moses argues with God
- God knows Moses' name
- A conditional guarantee (leverage)
- ...You can see my Glory, but not my face
- God gives assurance

Moses has already seen God work, miraculously and powerfully. Now he is meeting regularly (!) with God in the 'tent of meeting'. The people would present their requests to God through him. The tent of meeting was found outside the camp – (why was this? Perhaps some reasons can be suggested!)

The people knew Moses knew God, and they knew God's power. Such was the awe and respect, the people would stand outside their tents watching, bowing, worshipping. Joshua, son of Nun (we need to watch this young man, good things ahead for him!) would remain in the tent with the Lord's presence!

Moses (again) is disputing with God. There is immense value and depth of friendship, when we can freely point things out to each other and debate a point. This is Moses' relationship with God. It's a conversation, not a prayer request list. Moses knows God, and God repeatedly states that He knows Moses' name too.

It's significant that God didn't let Jacob know His name! This question was side-stepped, but Jacob received the blessing. God repeatedly assures Moses of His continued presence, help, guidance, and peace. Verse 14 is brilliant – *The Lord replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest – everything will be fine for you."*

What more could Moses, could we, ask of God than this?

But even this wasn't enough for Moses. We have seen that Jacob wrestled all night with God. Now, Moses is *in* the presence of God, but it still isn't enough for Him. *Do you, do I* have the same desire to be in the presence of God?

If we own the name of Jesus, we do, or have known, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. However, just as with Moses, our longing should be for more of God's (Holy Spirit) presence with us. If we have known this in power, then we long for more. If we haven't experienced such power, desire for it. (this can be called an 'infilling', 'baptism', 'renewal' or other such words - the actual word doesn't really matter, it's the work of and presence of the Holy Spirit that is central here).

Moses uses leverage with God. Can you imagine! The presumption.....! How dare he.....! God is God - how dare he order God around! **It's because** God has made His promises to Moses. Moses, in his humanity (no different from us) needs assurance from God. And, in His mercy, God gives Moses what he asks for - with one condition.

God will not reveal His full glory, but does reveal something of himself. Later, such was the effect of the presence of God on Moses, that his face shone with holiness - so that the people could not bear it!

The purpose was to equip Moses to lead the people, and to give him a guarantee. We too can experience the presence of God. We have the Holy Spirit in us. *His presence is in us already!* **But..** we can know His presence in greater and greater measure. We should be leveraging God with His promises. He knows our names. We know Him. We can argue with God to reveal more of His presence, His glory with us and in us.

Finally, Moses got his guarantee from God. God has promised to go before, alongside, and behind. God is the same God of Moses as for us. He doesn't lead where he doesn't intend to bless!

- 🗣️ Is there any verse in Exodus 33:12-23 which really sticks out, and has spoken to you in this study? Feel free to share and encourage!
- 🗣️ What are your expectations for the revelation of the Glory of God here in the next few days?

3. Being Purified

Passage to read: Isaiah 6:1-8

Reference points:

- Ch1-5 records visions Isaiah had
- Description of the throne / voices
- Isaiah's awareness of himself - the need for purification
- Being purified
- The message

Isaiah is a prophet. In the OT, a prophet was one who received a message from God, and delivered the message either to God's people or those nations around. These messages were generally in one (or, often, more) of the following categories: For immediate delivery / action, For the near future, or for the far (further ahead) future. God delivered these using different methods: direct communication, visions, or dreams.

Isaiah has received visions from the Lord regarding the situation of Israel, of the nations around, God's judgement, and restoration.

There is no 'pre' narrative. Simply introductions to the visions he had. And here we are, the chapter opening with the simple statement '...that I saw the Lord'. I don't know if you've ever noticed - there's no extra or superfluous words in Isaiah - no flowery language. It's actually quite clinical, logical, and factual. Yet, there's symbolism, and poetic language, but this was received to be passed on. Entirely speculation, but it's very possible that his character was someone who dealt with facts, unemotional, well able to retain knowledge and describe, write exactly what he saw and heard. Why could this be important? Because it then emphasises the reality, the awesomeness, the beyond-words descriptions that he gives. It makes the messages he received all the more potent as we read, consider and understand in the context they were written.

Here in these verses, Isaiah sees God on His throne. He doesn't go to great lengths to describe the Lord or the throne, but even the power and majesty of the seraphim are enough for him! (and therefore us?) The whole building shook simply with the sound of their voices. The smoke symbolises God's presence (eg Moses and the temple of meeting). God's presence filled the temple. Not that we'd expect anything else, but such is His power and majesty.

We've already seen some of the effects of God's presence. God is utterly, completely holy, pure, righteous. And His presence simply cannot allow anything which doesn't come up to that standard to even exist in His presence.

Even so, here is Isaiah in God's presence. Isaiah's spoken words here don't do it justice. We are not worthy to be in God's holy, holy, holy presence (the three times repetition is significant). Not only is Isaiah himself unworthy, but also the people he lives among (God's own chosen people) are unworthy. Isaiah knew, understood God, followed the law. But we too are unworthy, condemned: Ephesians 2:1-3. This is the state of the people we have come to reach. Those who do not even know that they are condemned - though some may, but have buried it in their minds! - 2 Corinthians 4:4. Do we bear, carry this burden for the people around us? Are we even worthy to reach them? We are not - in and of ourselves.....

The Lord knows us. He knew Isaiah. Even before Christ came, removal / forgiveness of sin, purification was possible, imputation of righteousness was available. One of the seraphim took a coal from the altar (this was symbolic of Christ's atoning sacrifice, on the altar of the cross - the great exchange of our sin and unworthiness, for our Saviour's perfection and robes of righteousness). The coal touched Isaiah's lips. The change was immediate. It was spoken. Certain. Guilt: Gone. Sin: atoned for. It doesn't matter how unworthy you, I may feel as we are right now. If we know our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, if we know the Holy Spirit has worked / is working in us, then no matter how unworthy we may feel, before the throne of God we stand as pure, holy, and righteous as the angels - in fact, more so, as they have never known sin, or forgiveness.

How can we go out and tell others about Jesus? Not because we are more holy or righteous than anyone else, but because *in Christ* we are made holy and righteous. We are forgiven, freed, made alive *in Christ*. Ephesians 2:4-8. We want and need to tell this to those around us. Isaiah saw the Lord in all His glory and splendour, but needed purification, forgiveness for his sins.

Only then was the request for a messenger made, and the message given for him to take.

- 🕊️ This was a 'mind blowing' experience God for Isaiah. Perhaps a few folk can pray for God's presence, assurance, and forgiveness for each of us and the team as a whole before we embark on today's mission.

4. In the Stillness

Passage to read: 1 Kings 19: 8-15

Reference points:

- The call of God
- Fear
- The noise around us
- Discerning God's voice

Elijah is worried, concerned. He's run away from the authorities in fear – in this case endorsed by the Lord because he was fed (equipped) for the journey (40 days!). Only then, the Lord asked him what he was doing – how gracious and kind the Lord is to us in our weakness and fear.

Who, or what is 'the word of the Lord' v9? It's the same Hebrew word in Gen 15:1. Likely to be the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord asks Elijah what he's doing, and he explains. Was he afraid? Yes, we're told so. Was he defending himself to God? Possibly. But he was also pointing out to God that God's own honour was being destroyed, through the destruction of the prophets of God.

There is a cost to following Jesus. There is a cost in being active in service for God. Sometimes we may fall in the trap of viewing folk we're trying to reach with the good news as 'numbers', or achievements. 'We had a great conversation' or 'We felt this person was so close'. We don't want to take away from what God is doing, but at the same time, we need to be humble before him – how much of the conversation was the Holy Spirit, the Lord himself speaking, and how much of it was / is us speaking on our own terms.

Then comes the instruction for Elijah to go outside the cave. Such was the power of the instruction that Elijah knew he had to cover himself – once again, we see we cannot stand (as we are, in our sin) before the Holy God. Then we see the mighty power of God reflected in all the power of nature being unleashed: Strong winds. So strong it tore the mountains! The Lord wasn't in it. Earthquake. The Lord wasn't in it. Fire. The Lord wasn't in it. Perhaps a slightly unconventional look at this, but sometimes we can even be so caught up in mission, in the noise, in the activity, in the mighty things that are happening, that we actually miss the Lord, the Holy Spirit speaking. It could be distractions from home, it could be 'oh, this person on the team is really winding me up', perhaps even a team leader! Or something isn't done quite how we like it in the church or event. Baseline question. Is the Holy Spirit present?

Do we / have we let our own feelings, or things around us, the 'noise', take over to the extent we're no longer listening for His voice.

How then to discern God's voice? How then to see God's glory revealed? This small voice in the stillness to Elijah was in its own way no less the Glory of God revealed than the previous examples we've already worked through, or we will look at following. It's important to note that God's voice isn't always quiet, still, small, speaking in the absence of noise. Sometimes he does smack us in the face and tell us to get on with it. But sometimes, perhaps even on mission, we need a little quiet to rest in the Lord, and ask, listen, hear him speaking.

Of course, the focus of mission should be Holy Spirit empowered work for the Lord. Of course, there has been preparation in advance for the mission, much prayer. Much seeking of the Lord, and therefore the focus is activity. But we all also know there are times where we, as individuals, as part of the team, or even the entire team, need to stop for a short time (pause) and intercede, listen, hear, and obey.

God's voice, the Holy Spirit speaking to us, audibly, in our minds, drawing our hearts to him, in pictures, in visions, dreams, will ALWAYS be consistent with the Word of God as it is written. Beyond that, we should look to our team members and leaders to help to discern the way forward. Being in a mission team is not the place for lone activity or isolated ideas. The Holy Spirit will always be inclusive of our brothers and sisters in Christ, wholesome, and drawing others in. The Holy Spirit is about fellowship; he is in perfect, holy, unity with the Father and the Son.

- 🗣️ Would anyone share an example of a Holy Spirit empowered conversation, and one where you may have spoken on your own terms - it was your words, not the Lord's? (The difference)
- 🗣️ How can we ensure we see the Glory of God revealed in the activities we're engaged in.

5. On top of the Mountain

Passage to read: Matthew 17:1-13. cf (Read in preparation): Mark 9:1-9, Luke 9:28-36

Reference Points:

- Preparedness?
- Partial revelation

- The Glory of God revealed
- Are we ready to see the Glory of God revealed?

The narrative here is picked up after six days. Prior to this, in ch8, Peter has confessed that Jesus is Lord, and then promptly told 'get behind me, Satan'. Followed by Jesus speaking of his second coming in glory.

In our chapter, we see Jesus has chosen three disciples to take with him up the mountain. Why were only Peter, James, and John chosen to go with him, do you think?

Then we see a partial revelation of God's glory on Jesus. His appearance is changed completely. His face shone, and his clothes changed completely. And Moses and Elijah appeared - we are not told how the disciples recognised these patriarchs or how they knew who they were, but clearly, whatever the mechanism, they knew.

Despite the appearance change of Jesus at this point, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John were still able to stand, converse, and perhaps say silly things - we're told Peter didn't know what he was saying. This was probably one of the most perplexing and amazing thing they had seen so far - and they knew of / had seen some pretty amazing things already.

But amazing though this was, it still wasn't the full revelation of God's glory. This was revealed in the next step. A bright cloud, and a voice, before which they could not stand. Such was God's majesty, such was the authority and power of the voice, and the cloud, that as we've already seen, and will see, the disciples could no longer remain standing. They may have been in awe, amazed, confused by the change in Jesus. This would have been, in a way comparable to Moses' skin shining when he had been in the presence of God - more so, being Jesus himself, the Son of God. But Jesus' full glory was still hidden at this point, otherwise they couldn't have stood.

Even in the bright cloud, even with the voice, the full extent of God's glory was still not revealed. The disciples (and our) human frame could not be in the full presence of God. As we are, it simply wouldn't cope. Here, on the mountain top, God was gracious, and revealed as much as he could to Peter, James and John.

Were the disciples prepared, ready, equipped for this event? Given the immediately preceding events, (even if they were six days prior), no. Had the disciples fully comprehended this event, even after it had happened? At the time, no. Were they changed by this event? Yes.

Perhaps it was in God's graciousness and kindness that there wasn't an immediate revelation of His glory, that is was step wise. Jesus knew exactly where Peter, James and John were in their readiness and understanding. He knew exactly what they needed, and when, and how.

There was a required separation for this to occur. It wasn't something for 'public consumption'; it was private, special, for the individual.

Where do you and I fit in this picture? This was, for Peter, James and John a mountain top experience, both literally – on the top of a mountain, and spiritually – being privileged to be in the presence of God. Even if the consequence of the event weren't immediately apparent, they were changed by this. Such is the effect of the presence of God.

Have you, have I, had a mountain top experience? To have had the revelation of the Glory of God? Have you truly seen, been enabled to understand, to not be able to stand – spiritually, even if not physically. The effect of God's presence is to purify, to change, to expose our sin, which cannot be in His presence. This mountain top experience for each one of us will be different – it cannot be the same for everyone as we are all individuals, and the Lord works with us, through us as individuals. He knows each one of us: Matthew 10:29-30, Romans 8:16-17. Testimonies are wonderful to hear, but we should never think 'it didn't happen for me like that!' We know when God has revealed his presence in a 'mountain top experience' to us! We will know. We will be changed.

As we are on mission, we can know God's presence with us. Even being on mission, although focussed on outreach and evangelism, we can know and experience God's presence, the Holy Spirit, with us, working in us, through us, assuring us, empowering us. Are you, am I, ready to see the Glory of God revealed through our work for him, through our fellowship, friendship, relationship-building.

- 🕒 Are there a couple of other bible references you can quote regarding God knowing us personally?
- 🕒 How can we 'lose God's felt presence' with us?

6. Potential Cost

Passage to read: Acts 9:1-7

Reference Points:

- Permission to persecute
- The unknown
- The Glory of God
- Sight is precious

Study 6 and 7 are out of sequence, but fit the sequence and progression through the series! But still, why do we consider the potential cost here. Isn't this account all about Saul's conversion? Note, that he isn't called Paul until Acts 13:9. Verses 1 and 2 of our passage, briefly considering those who Saul was wishing to persecute. Jesus had told his disciples to expect opposition, persecution in John 15:18-20, as well as other places. The opposition isn't about the individual Christian. Its spiritual opposition dressed up in physical form. The enemy, the Devil, is again, described by Jesus as the father of lies (John 8:44), and that he will seek to oppose - specifically he told Peter this in Luke 22:31-32, but it's legitimate to take this for each and every one of us. *Me, You*. Here and now, in the middle of mission, which is directly the work instructed by the one who leads us, the one who has forgiven and saved us, the Lord Jesus himself.

Saul here was progressing in what he thought was God's work. He was a great Jew. He was of God's chosen people. Of course God must be with him, by inheritance, by teaching, by value, and, of course, added value now in the destruction of who he saw as God's enemies, Christians. He sought, and obtained the highest authority in the Jewish world to continue his work. What must the Christians, local and across the region, have thought when the news of this got out - we do see that once Saul was converted, everyone was afraid of him. Bring this to now. Consider the pressures on us, God's people. Even if there is no direct threat of imprisonment, punishment at the moment, there is most definitely pressure to conform, to deny truth, to compromise, either fundamentally, or around the edges - and this is authorised by the state to a lesser or greater degree. There is an unknown for us. Perhaps there is even fear. Then, from Saul's perspective, completely unknown to him, he was to meet with God personally. He'd just got all the authority he thought he needed to do God's job, then met God himself.

Saul entered a completely unknown, unexpected situation. Although he thought he knew God, he was now confronted by a different reality. One which was so all-encompassing, overwhelming and one in which he was forced to face the truth.

Saul saw the glory of God revealed to him. Saul, who was witness to Stephen being stoned to death (Study 7!), now saw this same God for himself. As we've already seen in previous studies, none of us as sinners can stand in the presence of God, without the forgiveness and justification of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through this process, he lost his sight. Whether this was simply because human eyes could not withstand seeing the Glory revealed, or whether it was a spiritual sign, or both, we don't know. We aren't told. His sight was only restored later, with the laying on of hands by Ananias. Our physical sight is precious: how much more our spiritual sight.

Then consider those we will be talking to today. Folk who may be going about their daily business, as 'normal'. Perhaps, in extreme cases, with threats and murder in their hearts, but, most are probably just weighed down with burdens and cares, with some, not even this. Pray that even today, these folk may encounter the unknown, and be confronted with the Glory of God, through what we say, what we do, by our example, maybe even by our prayer for them. Of course, Saul's conversion was about the Lord Jesus, just as with us, but, even so, it was the Holy Spirit who dealt with Saul to recognise Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and even had a part in physical manifestation / revelation of God's Glory here.

How much is our burden to be able to break through the normal routine of folks' lives and for the Holy Spirit to speak into situations and lives – the amazing thing is this is that you and I are often the mechanism, and the only means by which God does this.

- 🕊️ Take a moment to think about the gospel, which is the 'unknown' for so many folk we seek to reach. Saul's initial 'gospel' had to be destroyed.
- 🕊️ Pray that we may be able to, in the power of the Holy Spirit, take down, destroy the 'unknown gospels' we may encounter that the Glory of God may be revealed!

7. Death & Glory!

Passage to read: Acts 7:54-59, in preparation read Acts ch 6 & 7 in entirety.

Reference Points:

- Rage
- The Glory of God
- Death

Often, we look at these verses, and focus on the result: Stephen, the martyr, the one who, at his death, absolutely saw the glory of God revealed to him personally. However, there is so, so much more to this than simply the account of Stephen's death. As always, we need to review the context we find in Acts 6 and 7. The account of this apostle, this man of God, begins by stating the way the Lord was using him. Acts 6:8. But where there's gospel work, there is opposition! Note Acts 6:10. Such was the power of his words, and works, through the Holy Spirit. Even so, and because of this, false accusations are brought, and he is taken to trial. His speech is his testimony during the trial which culminates in echoes of the words of Jesus to the pharisees and saducees, the religious leaders and lawyers. That they are blind and cannot see the salvation that is in front of them; they actually don't want to know, or engage with, or follow. Then, being told this, their consciences are triggered, raising anger.

There are many ways to speak the gospel, and many ways to speak about sin. And we need to engage in prayer as we are speaking to others, for the Holy Spirit to help lead conversation, to those areas which are actually directly relevant for the person or people we are engaging with. Stephen was overflowing with the Holy Spirit - in power, in presence, in action, in faith, in appearance. This wasn't something forced, or artificial, or even psychologically generated by words spoken. Stephen's actions, words, and the conviction of the rulers was solely because of the Holy Spirit's presence and authority.

We can encounter different responses in our speaking / preaching of the gospel. Thankfully, we are not in a nation (at present) where our lives are in danger if we speak the Gospel. But we will encounter opposition, we will encounter resistance, and thankfully, we will also encounter positive responses. Our responsibility and duty to our Lord and Saviour is not to generate results - that is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit. Our role is to speak, to preach, to teach the good news. We need to deal with the response we receive (whether positive, indifferent, or negative) graciously, in love, and always, always pointing to Christ.

Would you, would I be prepared to go directly to trial, then to be dragged out and stoned to death? Pray that we would have the grace and empowering of the Holy Spirit in that circumstance to be filled. To have hearts so full of love and mercy, that even in death, we know that Jesus is with us, and we are able to forgive anything, and anyone, in Jesus' name.

Who were the rulers reacting to? Not Stephen himself. He was the human representation of the Father, of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, and it was seen, felt, known and heard. Did Stephen go out in ministry expecting to die? Probably not. It hadn't even entered his thinking, he was focussed on ministry, on preaching. Perhaps such is the power of the Holy Spirit when he is at work: the words of the chorus:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His Wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

Was it so surprising that Stephen saw the Lord at the point of his death? Or was it perhaps a natural conclusion to a life and ministry filled with the power of the Holy Spirit – Stephen believed, and thus saw the Glory of God revealed – not just at the point of his death, but in his life and ministry too. The finale was the result.

- 🌐 A couple of folk to pray for the equipping today by the Holy Spirit in our ministry and activities.

8. An experience to remember?

Passage to read: Revelation 1:9-18

Reference Points:

- Revelation is possible anywhere, in any circumstances!
- Seeing Jesus
- Understanding Jesus
- Being changed by Jesus

At this point on mission, there will have been some significant encouragements. Along with this, no doubt there will also have been discouragements or frustrations to overcome. We will, no doubt be feeling a combination of tiredness, perhaps spiritual exhaustion, but at the same

time, full of praise and wanting to give glory to God for what we have seen, heard, and been equipped to do.

So what to learn from this passage? What worse circumstances could we imagine than where we find the apostle John. On the hard labour camp of the island of Patmos. There was nothing of comfort here. Utterly physically demanding. Utterly brutal. No compassion, no comfort, physically or mentally. Not enough to eat, not enough to drink. Likely nowhere to sleep..... and yet..... He was there because of His Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

...And, His Lord and Saviour was there, with him. Very, very present, by the Holy Spirit. In these worst of circumstances, hardship. And suffering. God's glory was revealed to him. And what a revelation. To see Jesus, in all His glory, as the word of truth. The personification of truth, holding all things in His hands.

Remember that this same John had been with Jesus as he walked with, talked with, and taught the people and his disciples. He was on the mountain top for Jesus' transfiguration. Yet even that was nothing when compared to this. Even this apostle, absolutely devoted follower of Jesus, one who had, through the Holy Spirit, seen and done more than most in the way of miracles, healing, restoration and lives changed, fell on his face before the revealed majesty of his Saviour. He is seeing Jesus for who he is. And he couldn't stand before him.

As with so many other instances (more than we've discussed in this series), when confronted with the glory and majesty of God, we, in our sin and shame, cannot stand before Jesus..... but we can, once we've fallen on our faces! Jesus touched him, raised him, and he was able to hear the message to be passed on. This is another key in this passage. While we're here, when we meet with Jesus, even if not quite as glorious as this encounter, we cannot remain unchanged. An encounter like this will never be forgotten - for the apostle, here, it tops everything he has experienced so far.

As we have experienced this week, where are we at? Are we at the heights of glory, on the mountain top, or are we in the depths, perhaps even not looking forward to leaving this week, our team, brothers and sisters in Christ, and returning to our reality, our lives.

So what is the encouragement we can take from this? It's ok for John, he had this experience. Yes, and what a glorious experience it was. But where was he when he came down from this vision of the Lord Jesus'? Back on the island of Patmos! Back to reality. Back to certainty

of death. However, even from these verses we can be assured in our situation. Fear not, I am the 1st and the last. The living one, the one who died and is alive. The one who holds the keys of hades and death!

Oh what an amazing message we carry! The gospel message concealed in these words! Life. Nothing happens without Jesus' consent, not even death. And there's more! However you interpret verse 20... there is no doubt there are angels overseeing even our churches, but there are also pastors, elders, vicars etc, (whatever title we give) who are responsible for, and undershepherds of our churches and the flocks within them. God has given the church order, structure - no matter the system. And he has given both spiritual direction and practical direction, those gifted with each.

What a responsibility they (we?) have, but also what a glorious privilege, to be a servant to the flock. And for the flock, you and me (even if we happen to be one of those undershepherds), to know that our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, is THE shepherd. He is the one we bow to, he is the one who has all the glory, all the majesty. And no matter how we leave this time, of mission, we can depart in confidence - that God has used us, that he has revealed His glory through us in this week. And no matter what we face as we leave, we can go in, and be absolutely assured of Him going with us, and before us.

He holds the catholic (the whole) church, the church that owns his name, in his hands. We are secure. We are confident. Jesus has us. Nothing, not even death happens without his consent. Those new spiritual lives he has, and the growing seeds that will continue to change after this week, are held in His hands, and only His. What a glorious Saviour we have, what glorious testimony we have revealed for us in His Word. Oh that we can know more of this. Oh, that we can taste more of his goodness. Oh, that we can see him in all his majesty! We are saved. We will never be the same again. We have been on this mission week. We will never be the same again! The Holy Spirit, Jesus, our Saviour, our Father God changes us too when we encounter him and work for him!

 A couple of folk give thanks for what we have seen and heard this week.