

Sermon Transfiguration of Our Lord
January 17, 2016
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Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took with him his three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John. And up on a high moment he was transfigured. His appearance changed. His face shone like the sun. Even his garments became white as light. For a brief time Christ's humility was outshined by intense glory.

Why? What's the point of Jesus' transfiguration? Jesus is showing his three disciples that he is truly God in the flesh. And the presence of the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, shows that Jesus Christ is the one foretold by the prophets, the Messiah who would redeem Israel.

Peter's response is typical. He starts babbling about building tents for the three men. You see Peter wants to *capture* this event. He wants Jesus to be able to dwell with them in his glory. But God interrupts Peter. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. *Listen* to him."

Of course God's voice from heaven terrifies the three men and they fall on their faces. And when they look up, they see only Jesus, his appearance has returned back to normal; no shining face or cloak. Not only has the great event ended as quickly as it started and Jesus' glory is again hidden by the form of a humble servant, but Jesus *commands* his disciples, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Jesus gives them a glimpse. That's all. And then mum's the word. Why? Jesus is God! He's proven it! He's the promised Messiah foretold by the prophets. Why does Jesus' hide his glory? Why can't his disciples proclaim it?

Because there can be no glory for people without Christ's suffering and death. If Christ were to keep his glorious appearance without suffering and dying for the sins of the world, then all people would cower with their faces in the dirt at the sound of God's voice. Sinners cannot obtain God's glory. Instead as darkness flees from light, sinners must flee from Christ's glory.

His disciples already knew that Jesus was the Christ. Six days earlier Jesus asked his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" and Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter knew by faith without seeing Christ's transfiguration that Jesus was the Christ. And yet, Peter had a listening problem. When Jesus began to explain to them that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and on the third day rise from the dead, Peter exclaimed, "Far be it from you, Lord!" Peter didn't want Jesus to suffer. He wanted the Christ, but he didn't want his suffering and death. Jesus responded in love, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on things of God, but on things of man."

Jesus is the Christ. He is true God. He revealed that he is God in his transfiguration. But Jesus' glory does you no good without his suffering and death. At the transfiguration Peter still had a listening problem. Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah, but Peter wasn't listening. Instead he talked until God the Father interrupted him. God's message is short and clear. Listen to *Jesus!*

And immediately what does Jesus say? He speaks about his resurrection from the *dead*. And later in the very same chapter of Matthew Jesus says again, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” This is what God wants you to hear. This is what he wants you to listen to. In fact, that’s what Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah while Peter was yapping. St. Luke records that Jesus spoke to Moses and Elijah about his exodus, that his departure from this life through his death on the cross.

Do you want to see God’s glory? Do you want to see the Christ? Then you have to look at Christ’s suffering. You have to see Jesus with his glory hidden under blood and bruises. That is the only way you can see and enjoy God’s glory.

Most people don’t want to see that. Because Jesus doesn’t suffer for himself. He suffers for *your* sins, which means *you* are a sinner. By accepting Christ’s suffering and death, you accept the fact that *you* are a sinner and that Jesus suffers for your sin. And for your natural, sinful nature that is unacceptable.

Have you ever heard someone talk and talk while constantly getting the facts wrong and not knowing what he is talking about? It’s aggravating. Imagine how God feels. The world likes to talk. It has ideas on what’s right and wrong and it never listens to God’s Word for help. Is it wrong to kill a baby inside the womb? Let’s ask some philosophers, lawyers, and professors when does life begin and whether this is right or wrong. Is it wrong to have sex before marriage? Well, it’s unrealistic to teach such a rule, so lets come up with our own rules. What is marriage really? Let’s discuss, but don’t ask God. Is there a difference between men and women? Well, you can’t believe what the Bible says. That was written by a bunch of misogynistic men! Should I forgive my sister

for that rotten thing she did to me? How about I stew about it instead of asking the Pastor God sent to me to preach his word. Why am I suffering so much? Why do I feel overwhelmed? Why do I feel guilty? Am I going to hell? Who can answer these questions?

Many look at the Bible as a list of rules. Many think that if they go to church the pastor is going to preach to them about how badly they messed up. Well, there are rules in the Bible. And you are supposed to follow them. And the pastor will address your sins. But if you ignore God's preaching and listen to the voices of the world, you will not find real comfort. You will not find God's glory in Christ either. God gave a clear command, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." How do you listen to him? The Bible isn't written by a bunch of misogynistic men, who hate women and gays, and liberals. Rather, as St. Peter (who himself had a problem with listening to God) tells us, "We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place... knowing first of all, that no prophecy comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The Bible is God's Word. Its writers don't give their opinions. They give you God's Word. And this word is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. The preaching of God's Word is how you *listen* to Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father. If you do not listen to his preaching not only will you not hear the gloomy fact that you are a sinner, who deserves God's wrath; you also won't hear the comforting message of what Jesus did for you.

Jesus is God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased. Yet Jesus left that holy mountain where his glory shone. And he climbed another mountain, bearing his own cross. And on that mountain, God did not declare his pleasure for his beloved Son. Rather, God damned Christ Jesus to hell on the cross. Jesus put away his splendid glory and cloaked himself in *your* sin; the sins for which the Bible condemns you. And bearing your sin, your sin of not listening to his word, of believing the perverted lies of the *wise* people of this world, of enjoying your sin, Jesus died. No one saw his glory. People covered their eyes, but not to protect them from light, but to hide their faces from his marred appearance. Jesus died for *you*.

And on the third day Jesus rose from the dead. He voluntarily gave up the glory he had on the mountain of transfiguration and he gain it back again through his innocent suffering and death. So you can have assurance that your sins are truly forgiven.

You will suffer in this life. You will not see God's glory day to day, but must battle your sins, confess them and receive forgiveness. But rest assured. The word of forgiveness you hear is true. Jesus has earned glory for you through his suffering and death, so what Peter, James, and John saw up on that mountain may be revealed to you on the Last Day; and not only for a moment to be hidden again, but for eternity. And you too will shine like the stars in heaven, because through Jesus' blood your sins have been forgiven and God has made you his beloved children in whom he is well pleased.

In Jesus name.

Amen.