

18 February 2007
The Transfiguration of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“The Only One”

Text: Luke 9:28-36 (Deut 34:1-12; Heb 3:1-6)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I think it safe to say that on this day, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in a whole new light!

Certainly according to His person, that is, who Jesus is. For how could one see such a sight and *not* think differently?

But the scene set before Peter, James, and John (and us today) – with Jesus appearing in His divine glory, the visit of Moses and Elijah, the cloud, and the voice of the Father – all that doesn’t just tell us about who Jesus is, but *just as importantly*, it is telling us something about what He has come to do. About His work. About what He was going to accomplish in Jerusalem in the very near future. That we see *that also* in a whole new light, and know that we have a God who is not just glorious in Himself, but is **a glorious God we can count on**. Not a God of glory who is far away, but a God of glory who is with us and for us . . . when life gets tough and it’s hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. When life gets confusing and dark and it’s difficult to know which way to go. When life seem to fall short of what we think it should be.

And it is Moses and Elijah that help us understand this. For they were there with Jesus for a reason. They weren’t just the first two in Heaven to volunteer, because God needed *somebody* from Heaven to appear with Jesus and guys like Able and David and Isaiah were slow to raise their hands! No, it is exactly Moses and Elijah that help us understand the work that Jesus has come to do, and how He was going to accomplish it, and what that means for us. That is why Luke tells us that as the three of them stood there, they weren’t just showing off their glory, they were *talking*.

And they were talking about this work that Jesus was about to accomplish: His *departure* – or, as the original Greek words says, His **exodus**.

Now, of course, *that's* something Moses knew a thing or two about! For it was Moses who led the people of Israel in their exodus out of Egypt – the rescue from their long, hard slavery and bondage. And this was such a monumental event in the lives of God's people that it was rightly understood as the defining moment in their life.

But as great as Moses was (and as we heard, there was never another prophet as great as Moses!) – he could not finish the job. Leading the people into the Promised Land would be left to another: to Joshua, son of Nun. And as great as this exodus was, it did not last. The people eventually fell into bondage *again* – to the Assyrians, to the Babylonians. Another exodus would be needed. A greater exodus. A permanent and lasting exodus. *Jesus' exodus!*

And this is what Moses and Jesus were discussing that day in glory – this last and final and greater *exodus* by the One greater than Moses. An exodus not from any powers of this world, but from the eternal powers of sin and death. An exodus that would take place with Jesus' own sacrifice and death.

And *sacrifice* is something the prophet Elijah knew a thing or two about! Specifically when Elijah stood alone in a contest of sacrifices against the prophets of Baal. When Elijah alone prayed for God to accept the sacrifice he offered. When Elijah alone interceded for an adulterous and idolatrous nation. When the fire of God came down and consumed Elijah's sacrifice, *and* the altar it was on, *and* the ground all around it. The fire of God that *should have* consumed the rebellious and sinful people . . . but didn't, consuming the sacrifice instead. A sacrifice offered in faith.

It was a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus on the altar of the cross. As Jesus hung alone with the sin of the world. Alone interceding for an adulterous and idolatrous world. Alone against Satan and his minions. Jesus offering His life in our place, taking the fire of death that we deserved, and being consumed instead of us.

And so what a conversation was taking place that day on that mountain! Not for Jesus' sake, but for Peter, James, and John's sake. For our sake. To know that what Moses' exodus fell short of finishing on the top of Mt. Nebo, and what Elijah's

sacrifice pictured on the top of Mt. Carmel, would now be accomplished once and for all by Jesus. But not in His glory on Mt. Transfiguration, but in His suffering and shame on Mt. Calvary.

That is why the voice of the Father from the cloud that day says, “*Listen to Him!*” For the glory is not in what you *see*, but in what you *hear*. Not in the vision, but in the Word. The testimony that Jesus’ glory is greater than Moses and Elijah’s not because of the Transfiguration, but because of the cross. Because He was about to do what they could not. What no one else could. Lay down His life for the life of the world. Lay down His life to forgive sin and defeat death. Lay down His life that there we see God in a whole new light – that we see His love, His strength, and His true glory. **To know that only the God of the cross is the God we can count on.**

For just as in Moses’ day, we today are in bondage – to sin. The sin in the world that causes heartache and pain. The sin in creation that causes disasters and disease. The sin in us that we cannot tame, no matter how hard we try. We are in a bondage even stronger than the Egyptians. . . . And just as in Elijah’s day, there are false gods and false prophets today who promise us everything we want and all that we need, if only we follow them, if only we do what they say – then we will be happy, then we will be victorious, then you’ll have the life that you always wanted.

But you know it doesn’t work. Our sin is a bondage too strong, and the false promises of false gods and false prophets just that – *false*. Promising life where there is only death. Promising happiness that only ends in sorrow. Promising satisfaction that only leaves us craving more. Promising glory that never lasts.

There is only One you can count on. Only One who does not demand your life but gives you His life. Only One who does not lure you into sin but forgives your sin. Only one who does not wait for you to pull yourself up to Him, but who came down to you. Only One who does not demand a pound of flesh and sweat and blood from you but feeds you with His own. Only One who promised you rescue, and delivered. Only One who does not leave you in the dark, but is the Light of the world. Only One who does not leave you lost and confused, but sends His Spirit of wisdom and life. Only One who knows this life will *always* fall short, and so had provided you eternal life.

There is only One. Greater than Moses and Elijah. Greater than you and me. Greater than sin, Satan, and death. The One who offered Himself on the altar of the cross. The One who leads us in our exodus, through the waters not of the Red Sea, but the waters of baptism, and not into the Promised Land of Canaan, but the Promised Land of Heaven. There is only One. Who hung on the cross in your place and who died your death, that when He rose, that would be your resurrection too. The sacrifice complete. The exodus complete. The glory complete.

And now yours. For He did it not for Himself, but for you. The glory that He showed in His Transfiguration was always His. He came to give it to you. To give you faith *now*. To give you hope *now*. To give you confidence *now*. To give you life *now*. That in seeing your Saviour in a whole new light, you will see also your life in a whole new light. Not as a meaningless drift through time, but a life worth the life of God's own Son. A life that God will use, and raise, and glorify, just as Moses and Elijah.

You may not be able to see that now, nor see the glory of your life. But that's okay. What is now hidden will one day be revealed. The Father calls us not to see, but to listen. To His Word of promise, His Word of truth, His Word of life. To listen to the Word made flesh.

That as we leave the glory of Epiphany and enter the season of Lent, we look up (like Peter, James, and John) and see Jesus alone. And know that is enough.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.