

“Jesus’ Transfiguration Prepares Us for His Passion”

(Luke 9:28-36 – Transfiguration – March 2, 2025)

Luke 9:28-36 – ²⁸Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. ³⁰And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. ³³Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. ³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” ³⁶When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

Dear Redeemed, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ:

This week, we will begin the season of Lent in which we observe the passion of our Lord. We will follow Jesus as He is arrested and condemned to death. We will see Him on the cross, suffering and dying to take away our sins. In our midweek Lenten series, we will hear the seven words Jesus spoke from the cross – words of anguish for Him, yet words of pardon and comfort for us in the salvation He won.

Before we observe the passion of our Lord and see Him in deepest humiliation, it is fitting on this Transfiguration Sunday that we get a glimpse of Jesus’ glory as our Savior. **“Jesus’ Transfiguration Prepares Us for His Passion”:** **1) By giving us a glimpse of His heavenly glory, 2) By reminding us of His earthly mission, 3) By pointing us to His revealing Word.**

1) By giving us a glimpse of His heavenly glory

We get a glimpse of Jesus’ heavenly glory as He took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. “As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory” (vs. 28-31). Later, a voice came from the cloud of glory saying: “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (vs. 35).

As the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus is one with His Father and the Holy Spirit in eternal glory and majesty. Yet during His life on earth, in His state of humiliation,

He only revealed glimpses of His glory in His powerful miracles and teaching. But now as He prayed to His Father in heaven, His divine glory shone through His human nature in a way the disciples had never seen. Matthew's account says: *"His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light"* (Matthew 17:2).

At the same time, Jesus spoke with two important Old Testament prophets who appeared in heavenly glory. Moses was the first great prophet in Israel, who led the people out of Egypt with many signs and wonders from God. On Mount Sinai, Moses spoke with God in a cloud of glory as he received the Law God gave to His people. As Moses led the people through the wilderness to the Promised land, whenever he spoke with God, his face would shine with God's glory (Exodus 34:29-35). Elijah also was a great prophet who zealously called the people to repentance in a time of widespread unbelief. God worked great miracles through Elijah, too. And when his faithful service was completed, he was taken into heavenly glory in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:12). Moses and Elijah represent all the faithful prophets in Israel, who pointed God's people in faith to the coming of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we see the transfigured Jesus speaking face to face with these saints in glory, we get a glimpse of the heavenly glory that is promised to us as believers in Jesus. As Philippians 3:20-21 says: *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."* There in heaven, we will speak with our Lord Jesus face to face in glory. With saints and angels, we will worship around the throne of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in everlasting joy!

2) By reminding us of His earthly mission

Jesus' Transfiguration prepares us for His passion by giving us a glimpse of His heavenly glory. But it also reminds us of His all-important earthly mission as the Savior of sinners. This is what Moses and Elijah talked about as they appeared with Jesus. They *"spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem"* (vs. 31). They spoke of His earthly mission in fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. According to the Scriptures, the Savior had to descend to deepest humiliation and suffering on the cross to pay for our sins. Only then would He rise to give us the eternal life and glory He came to win for us in His heavenly Kingdom.

This was an important lesson the disciples still needed to learn. There on the Mount of Transfiguration, what a sight it must have been as they woke up to see the glory of Jesus and these men with Him! Here was heaven on earth! Peter blurted out: *"Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said*" (vs. 33).

Peter wanted this heavenly glory on earth to continue. We can understand this. We like those mountaintop experiences in life, where everything is going just as we like, and feelings are high; we wish we could just freeze the moment. Who wouldn't want to prolong a glorious heaven on earth experience like this? Who would want to descend back down to the way of the cross, hardship, and suffering in this world?

But there can be no heaven on earth, because of sin. In fact, the kind of heavenly kingdom the sinful nature wants is different from the heaven God wants to give us. Our feelings are not always in tune with God's plans and what is truly best for us.

In this regard, Peter did not know what he said. The same was true about a week before this. At that time, Jesus began to teach His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things and be killed; but He would rise on the third day. Then too, Peter had blurted out: "*Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!*" (Matthew 16:22). He and the other disciples envisioned Jesus establishing a kingdom of glory on earth. But their vision of glory did not include the cross and suffering, and they were not so ready to follow Him in that path.

Isn't that often how it is with us? It is easy to say to Jesus, "*Master, it is good for us to be here*" when we have a mountaintop experience, when everything feels great. Then we think we can see how God is working everything out just the right way. Jesus is leading us in a path we desire, and we are ready and willing to follow.

But when Jesus leads us in a path of cross and suffering, we are not always ready to follow. Standing up for Jesus and His truth brings worldly rejection and hurt. Earthly plans are foiled by frustration and loss. Good feelings go away. Then our sinful nature chafes at Jesus' way of leading. It develops a bitter and complaining spirit. We begin to feel we deserve a little more heaven on earth than we are getting. How easy it is then to justify following our own path. We allow ourselves to indulge sinful appetites, telling ourselves we deserve some of the pleasures others are having. We turn to money and possessions, seeking glory in the passing things of this world, instead of God alone. At times, as Peter would soon do when Jesus was on trial, we hide our faith to make life easier, to avoid the cross and shame associated with Him.

But when we seek a heaven on earth our own way, God gives us a wakeup call. This is what happened with Peter and the others on the mountain: "*While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud*" (vs. 34). Suddenly in the holy presence of God, they felt their utter sinfulness and were overcome with fear. As they learned that day, there could be no permanent dwelling for sinners in the presence of God's glory, unless Jesus descended in deep humiliation to the cross to take away all our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We can be thankful that Jesus did fulfill His earthly mission. As the *“one Mediator between God and men”* (1 Timothy 2:5), He went to the cross to suffer and die for all the ways we have not readily followed Him; all the ways we have sought a kingdom of glory by following our own desires; all the ways we have denied Him. In His cross and suffering, Jesus took all our sins and their punishment on Himself. Now instead of counting our sins against us, God is counting to us the sinless life His Son lived for us. We can be thankful that Jesus finished His earthly mission, even to the point death for us; and that He rose again to give us eternal life and glory in His heavenly Kingdom.

3) By pointing us to His revealing Word

Now Jesus’ Transfiguration prepares us for His passion by pointing us to His revealing Word. As it says: *“A voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’ When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone”* (vs. 35-36).

As the disciples were bowed low in fear, stricken with their sinfulness in the holy presence of God, they heard the voice of the Father directing them to His beloved Son as the Savior of sinners. There on the mountain, Peter and the others saw Jesus’ glory firsthand. Yet even they were directed to Jesus’ Word for enduring comfort.

So too we have comfort as we focus on Jesus. We do so by hearing His Word in Holy Scripture. For this is where He reveals Himself to us today in His saving glory. As Peter later wrote in 2 Peter 1:18-19: *“And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place.”*

When we find ourselves in a dark place, let us turn to the light of Jesus’ Word where He reveals His salvation to us. When we feel the guilt and shame for our sins, let us hear Jesus’ Word and promise: *“I have baptized you and cleansed you by My own blood from all sin and unrighteousness. Take, eat and drink, this is My Body and Blood, for the remission of your sins.”* When we feel rejected and forsaken in this world, let us hear Jesus’ Word: *“I am with you always; never will I leave you or forsake you.”* When we fear death, let us hear Jesus’ Word: *“Because I live, you will live also.”*

This week as we enter the Lenten season, we will descend with Jesus from the Mount of Transfiguration and follow Him as He goes to Mount Calvary for us. We will see Him hanging on the cross. Yet even there, in the deepest darkness of His suffering, we will hear His words spoken for our salvation. Even there, in His revealing Word, He will give us a vision of His heavenly glory and the Kingdom He has won for us.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.