

## Glory in the Face of Christ

✦ **Freed from mountaintop confusion (vv.28-33)**

✦ **Fearless in shadowlands below (vv.34-36)**

In the name of Jesus, whose face shines with God's glorious light, dear fellow disciples:

Do you see any use for "Transfiguration Sunday"? I must confess that as a boy, I did not – not until I experienced the loneliness of abandonment, the hopeless feeling of marital difficulties, criticism from fellow pastors, unsympathetic fellow members in Christ's church of these **shadowlands**. It took many years of painful experience before I came to appreciate Transfiguration Sunday the way I do now. I hope you will too, because then you will see God's **Glory in the Face of Christ** and be...

✦ **Freed from mountaintop confusion (vv.28-33)**

Put your most difficult days into one, and you will feel just a tiny spark from the firepot of troubles for our Lord Jesus, mostly from His closest disciples. It must have been great to hear Peter's beautiful confession that Jesus is "*the Christ of God.*" (Luke 9:20) But then what grief to have to rebuke Peter for telling Jesus not to suffer and die for our sins. "*Get behind me, Satan!...You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*" (Mark 8:33 NIV) Jesus warned Peter and all of us disciples, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?*" (Luke 9:23-25 NIV) And yet after all that, Peter still tried to grab **mountaintop** glory and avoid the cross. Don't we?

Sometimes I don't know what to tell fellow Christians all excited about a preacher they heard in one of the upscale, entertaining, rock-n-roll churches they attend. Since I believe with the Psalmist that "*all things serve [God]*" (Psalm 119:91), I personally don't have a problem with contemporary worship except that so often something is missing. I've often told you, I love to worship. Many nights I wish our Choir could keep practicing if we weren't tired and in need of rest. Sometimes little children cry because they don't want to go home from church. Worshipers from troubled homes and marriages long to stay here. I wish Christians everywhere could enjoy love's sense of belonging in God's house. What troubles me is how foolishly we default to Peter's **mountaintop confusion**. Listening to many preachers, I don't hear the cross or any call to repentance – only a crown of their own choosing popular with supporters.

Jesus was about to set out on His *Resolute Journey* to Jerusalem which Luke traces in fine detail. (Luke 9:51 – 19:44) Jesus was so intent on reaching the cross to suffer and die in our place that He soundly rejected Peter's criticism and his tent-making scheme. Jesus took along His three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, most likely up Mount Hermon a few miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus received great encouragement from the two main prophets of the Old Testament, Moses, through whom God gave His Law at Mount Sinai, and Elijah, who ran from the Law-breaker Queen Jezebel, and discovered God's comfort in the still, small voice of the Gospel on the same Mount Sinai-Horeb. "*They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*" And it's a good thing they did because we needed "*his departure*" and the "*fulfillment*" of all God's promises in Christ.

To illustrate our extreme need, think of what happened to Peter and his companions when they saw this vision glorious. In broad daylight they became "*very sleepy.*" Maybe it was the thin air nearly 10,000 feet above the Sea of Galilee where they spent their lives as fishermen. Maybe it was the high mountain climb. Then again, maybe it was what gets you a poke in the ribs when your head starts bobbing during a sermon. Maybe it was what frustrated me one midweek Lenten service when the

Seminary Chorus sang, and one of our professors preached, and a classmate asked, “Wasn’t that a great sermon?” I had to admit, “Yes, what I heard of it.” It happened to Daniel twice during visions from God. In the brilliance of God’s **Glory** our tiny human minds tune out as cobwebs start to grow. Pretty soon we’re dozing instead of praising our God for all His goodness toward us. We feel heavy in the presence of God’s **Glory**. Finally awake, we get all excited like Peter to build tents and keep the **Glory** from fading away. We don’t have to curse and swear. We don’t have to commit adultery or murder someone. We don’t have to do drugs or abuse alcohol. We prove we’re wretched sinners by the way we take God’s Word for granted as in, “I’ll go to church next week,” or “I’ll go to Bible class some other time,” or “I don’t have time for church twice in one week.” What other sin can hurt our soul like despising God’s Word? Some of us are so bad God makes us pastors to keep us awake during the sermons.

### ✠ **Fearless in shadowlands below (vv.34-36)**

We need to feel the disciples’ fear entering God’s **Glory** -cloud called the “Shekinah” by ancient Jews. In the pillar of cloud out in the desert, at the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon, the LORD God made His presence felt by a cloud so bright on the outside, so dark (1 Kings 8:12) on the inside where God dwells. Christians want so much to have heaven on earth enjoying God’s presence that they have built monasteries like the one high above Lake Como in Italy. No tents up there; Christians carried granite and marble to build an escape from the world below. It’s Peter’s way, our way, but it is not God’s way. We sinful mortals cannot dwell on high with the holy God, not the way we are, not in our sin.

We need our gracious God to open our eyes and ears with the Father’s voice from heaven saying, ***“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*** Have you been listening? Can you tell us when the Father first said that about Jesus in the voice from heaven? Standing in the Jordan River three years earlier at His baptism, Jesus got the same endorsement as the dearly beloved Son of God. Now it’s like a book closing on His earthly ministry. As He prepares to set out in firm resolution for the cross of Calvary, we hear again the Father’s voice clearly proclaim Jesus is God’s Son, the Chosen One, the true Messiah, God’s final Prophet. To Him we are to ***“listen”*** with rapt attention every time He speaks.

***“When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.”*** Jesus truly was “alone” with disciples who kept arguing about who was the greatest while He was warning them about His crucifixion and death. His own Jewish religious leaders would incite the Gentile Romans to crucify Him. But just before His disciples denied and betrayed Him to death, Jesus told them, ***“I am not alone, for my Father is with me.”*** (John 16:32) Jesus suffered extreme loneliness for every lonely Christian who finds so little understanding even at home. Christ suffered your loneliness for all the close friends who turn away because of your faith. Our Lord Jesus shows us where alone to find comfort and peace to soothe our souls. He went to His heavenly Father for strength. And because He did, so can we.

Whose voice will you be hearing for the forty days beginning with Ash Wednesday this week? On our Lenten journey to the cross will you see God’s **Glory in the Face of Christ** and be **Freed from mountaintop confusion**? Will you listen to the New Testament on cassette and CD to let God’s Word make you more **Fearless in these shadowlands below**? C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* refer to earth as ‘shadowlands,’ only a shadow of what is to come, not the brilliant glory of our “Father’s home of light.” (CW 454:2) Midweek Lenten services are a challenge – for people to come and for pastors to preach after a long day preparing. But the desire to skip the cross and grab the crown is a sin for which too we need to repent. We need to trust our Lord Jesus to know what challenges lie ahead of us and prepare us by the power of His holy Word. Jesus sees the dangers in the valleys here below. In all earth’s **shadowlands** God will use His gentle Word to take our fear away, to comfort, guide and bless us. ***“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*** May we heed His call and press on to glory – in Jesus’ precious Name. Amen.