

The Glory of Jesus

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who keeps company with Moses, Elijah, and the likes of us, Jesus the Christ, amen.

I'm happy the snow has finally melted. A week or so ago, after we got all that snow, (SLIDE) then the weather changed and we had bright blue skies and even brighter reflections of that big beautiful, extremely bright sunshine, off the fields covered in snow. It was so bright as I drove around town I had to wear my darkest sunglasses. Yet, as bright as the light reflecting off those snowy fields was, it held no comparison to the brightness of Jesus during the mountaintop theophany we call The Transfiguration of Our Lord. (SLIDE) This story comes up every year about this time. Transfiguration Sunday marks a transition from the Church season of Epiphany to the season of Lent. During Epiphany we read stories from the Bible about Jesus being revealed as the light of the world. The 3 Wise Men come to pay homage. Jesus is Baptized. Jesus shows his glory and power in performing miracles like changing water into wine, and even raising the widow's son from the dead. This mountaintop experience is the final capstone to the season of light. I get that the Church wants this to be such an important story because it reveals Jesus as God's chosen son and instructs the disciples and all of us to listen to Jesus, but I'm not so sure this story accomplishes in us what it might have done to the original audience.

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Some of us have been meeting here to watch the TV Show called The Chosen. (SLIDE) We're only meeting twice a month and we watch one episode and discuss the Bible story, so it's going to take quite a while to finish all 5 seasons. We talked about the Chosen last week at the Greater Greenville Ministerial Meeting. We aren't the only church watching and discussing this very well done series. One Pastor though, was pretty vocal about how much he dislikes watching the series because the authors and producers take great poetic license with the biblical narratives. They add a lot of back story to the Bible characters and that seems to bother him. I understand his concern. Too many folks today are Biblically illiterate. The only exposure they have to reading the Bible is what they hear in Church on Sunday mornings. If that's all you know about the Bible, then his concerns would be totally valid. I mean, how can you distinguish between what the Word of God, as told in the Bible, actually says, from the total fiction, made up by the producers in order to make the Bible stories more television friendly and interesting? Our approach to watching the Chosen helps alleviate that concern. We start out by actually reading the passages from the Bible that are portrayed in each episode. That way, when we see the Bible story with the added backstories of the characters, we can readily tell what the TV producers have added.

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I tell you all of this because I read that the creator of the Chosen series, Dallas Jenkins, has commented they will not have an episode depicting the transfiguration. Jenkins says he thinks it would look too much like the Return of the Jedi Star Wars movie. He went on to say that since the three disciples kept quiet about what they had seen, the fact that Peter still went on to deny Jesus three times on the night of his betrayal, and that none of the disciples seemed to understand Jesus' intent to go to Jerusalem to be crucified, (SLIDE) all point to the fact that this experience doesn't seem to change them in any discernable way.

I was disappointed to hear that this story is not included in the Chosen series, but I wonder if Dallas Jenkins has a point. The transfiguration might not have made the cut for the TV series, but it was considered so important by the Gospel writers that it was included in all three synoptic Gospels and in the follow-up to Luke's Gospel, The Acts of the Apostles. Right off the bat I noticed that even if the disciples remained clueless, Jesus most certainly got the point. After the scene concludes, Luke tells us Jesus set his face to Jerusalem. (SLIDE) His face was set. It was like set as in set like cement. From this moment on, Jesus was intent on accomplishing God's will on the cross in Jerusalem.

Even though we read one of the versions of this story every year, God's Word comes to us new and is still the living Word of God. This time as I studied the transfiguration, I looked at what came before and afterward. Right before this

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mountaintop experience, Jesus had taken his disciples to a very pagan religious temple and asked them who the people were saying Jesus was. They reported that some said he was one of the prophets or maybe John the Baptist reincarnated...

Then Jesus turned the question on them, asking who do you say that I am? That's when Peter made his famous confession that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God. Despite Peter saying the correct words, he had no idea what that meant.

(SLIDE) When Jesus began to describe his crucifixion and resurrection, Peter rebuked him. Now, just one week later, Peter and James and John are on the mountaintop and the voice of none other than God Almighty, tells them to listen to Jesus. Peter might not have wanted to hear Jesus talk about his upcoming rendezvous with the cross, but our heavenly Father certainly wants Peter and all of us to listen up when Jesus speaks. The disciples and us, might not be able to comprehend what it all means, but if they and we listen with more than our ears then we too can come to at least partially understand.

When God commands us to listen to Jesus what he is asking of us is more than just hearing the Words. God wants us to hear the words, but then to study and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to understand. I believe it's even more than just hearing and understanding, it also means for those who want to be His disciples to obey Jesus. It took Peter quite some time to get this. Even after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter was still trying to have it both ways. I mean,

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he wanted the grace of the Gospel, but he still wanted the security of the Law.

Peter went up against Paul who opposed requiring followers of Jesus to first become Jews, including all the dietary and ritual cleanliness laws. Also, there was that whole argument over the requirement for the males to be circumcised.

(SLIDE) It wasn't until God came to Peter in a dream much later in Acts, Chapter 10 that Peter realized the Way of Christ was wide open for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. By continuing to listen to Jesus, to God, and to the Holy Spirit, Peter did finally understand this new life was for all people.

How does this story change us today? As we look to the glory of Jesus, we can find comfort...comfort in knowing this Jesus really and truly is the Savior of the world! Jesus didn't come with just the law, or the stern warnings of a prophet, but He came with God's grace and truth. (SLIDE) From the first chapter of the Gospel of John we learn about how the Word became flesh. When you have time today, it would be good to read that first chapter of John. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

As I have come to ponder this story of the Transfiguration of our Lord, I strongly disagree with Dallas Jenkins. I think we can learn a lot and even all these years later still be transformed by vicariously witnessing this miraculous story about the time when God spoke from the cloud and commanded us to listen and to

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obey his Chosen one, his beloved Son. (SLIDE) I love a good mountaintop experience as much as the next person, but we can't stay on the mountain. There are still so many hurting people down here in the valley. We still have so much work to do.

May the awe inspiring brilliance of our savior transform our hearts from cold hardened muscle into hearts full of love. May the transfiguration of Jesus give us a small glimpse of the amazing glory and holiness of the divine man who came to die for you and for me. Dear God, let us reflect your glory today. Amen.