

Sermon #1,245: 2 Peter 1:16-21 (*Historic Gospel*)
 2-5-17, Epiphany 6 (Transfiguration)/Catechumens Oral Exam
 Bethany-Princeton MN (*Hymns: TLH 130, 551.1-2, 34 (SS), 167, 47, 16*)

CHRIST SHINING LIKE THE SUN: GOD'S WORD IS LIKE THAT

The Text, 2 Peter 1:16-21. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 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, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Almighty and everlasting God, we give You most humble and heartfelt thanks, that You have given us Your holy Word as a bright light in the darkness of this present world. We intercede with You, Lord Jesus, on behalf of these catechumens Ben and Carrie, whom You greatly love, for You "*didst love [them] ere Thou hadst begun this ancient world's foundation,*" that You would continue to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that in their lives they would always heed diligently the light of Your Word, and that You the Morning Star would arise in their hearts and always shine as their true Light. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who promises not to extinguish the light of faith when it is at times a dimly burning wick, but promises through His Spirit to keep alive the light of faith that was lit in baptism: Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

You are in class with me for 3 years, Ben and Carrie. I've taught both of you at our school: Bible History, Latin, pastor's class, and in chapel. You both started Sunday School right here with me as the pastor organizing your Bible education and arranging what hymns you would sing, what verses you would say in the Christmas program, everything. You've

heard my voice all these years. It wouldn't surprise me if you'd say that you're tired of hearing it from my voice and need a different voice. It's OK, I wouldn't feel bad. I get tired of my own voice too.

What if I could step aside, just for a while one afternoon, and the apostle Peter himself could be transported here and he would be your substitute pastor/teacher? He could tell you exactly what it was like. He could pick out an event from his time with Jesus Himself – let's say, oh, the Transfiguration on the mountaintop. I would step aside and St. Peter would have the floor. No doubt you'd have all kinds of questions for him.

That's actually what we have here in 2 Peter 1:16-21, where an event in the gospels is repeated in one of the epistles, by one who witnessed it, in a reminiscence-style, "I-was-there-and-this-is-what-happened" way. St. Peter retells the story of Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountaintop. He doesn't give every detail, but he does include the words from heaven about Jesus, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."**

What Peter does here is to fill in the blanks, to explain it. He says emphatically that this voice from heaven was God the Father's voice. He says Jesus received from the Father **"honor and glory,"** so He is saying that Jesus has divine honor and glory – He is true God. He says that what he himself, and James and John, were eyewitnesses of was Jesus' divine **"majesty,"** that is, that what dwelt inside His true human body was the fullness of God, all the honor, glory and majesty that God has.

Now if Peter were here telling you this, wouldn't he have all your attention? "How wonderful that must have been," we would say. We long for that kind of experience. It impresses us more than God's Word does.

St. Peter is here to reorient our thinking. He tells us about this impressive event, and you remember his part in it, how Peter foolishly wanted to stay on the mountain, to keep enjoying the experience. But why does he bring up the Transfiguration? Not to make us want that experience – but to highly extol God's Word, to highlight what great things the Word does and make our *"soul break with longing for it at all times (Ps 119:20)."*

What Peter says here is just incredible: that the Word of God – which he calls **"the prophetic word"** – has been "made more sure" by such an event

as the Transfiguration. God wasn't doing something new. He was showing how His Word, which we often think little of, is *'way more certain* than that experience. All the Transfiguration does is **"confirm"** that fact.

So if the apostle Peter *were* your surprise substitute teacher, all he would do is direct you to listen to God's Word, the ultimate authority. He explains why God's Word is authoritative: **"holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** We call this verbal inspiration: the Holy Spirit inspired, "breathed in," all the words that men wrote down in every verse of the Bible. They are the very words of God.

You have been raised in a safe space where you're surrounded with this belief and encouraged in it. It'll surprise you out there how many people scoff at this. They think these are myths. St. Peter knew of this and says, **"We did not follow cunningly devised fables."** They aren't myths. He says, **"We were eyewitnesses of His majesty,"** the truth of who Jesus was, is, and ever shall be. Such people will treat with absolute derision this belief of yours that the Bible is God's Word and it is all true. You'll actually be hated, they'll direct anger and rage toward you, for this. The one they really hate for this is the true God whom you have confessed today. Remember though that they are not your enemies. It is our one enemy, the devil, whose rage and hatred is spewed out of their mouths.

The apostle Peter tells us that this is darkness. He can tell us that because he saw Jesus shining like the sun on the mountaintop. Also, the bright cloud overshadowed Peter, James and John: it revealed the darkness that was their natural condition, and is ours too, as sinners. Peter says what Christ was like, shining as the sun, what does it have to do with our life? How can we experience that? The answer is: God's Word is like that. He says God's Word is what we are **"to heed as a light that shines in a dark place,"** and Jesus is **"the Morning Star"** that **"rises in your hearts."**

It is not only the skeptical unbeliever who thinks the Bible stories are only stories and myths who is in darkness. This also applies to Christians who think God's commands are optional. Sometimes Christians get tired of obeying. They get tired of denying themselves especially if it's inconvenient for them. It's easier to go along with everyone else who is watching a movie or TV show or reading a book that Christians shouldn't, like

the Shades of Grey books and movies or practically every TV series that denigrates marriage and exalts the hook-up culture. Or it's easier to speak badly about someone than to put the best construction on everything or just say nothing. Or it's easier to get angry than to be patient.

Christians can also be in darkness, and considering God's Word a myth, when they can't believe there is forgiveness for them. Doubting God's forgiveness is doubting His Word. The most important thing you two are being catechized in is for you not to consider the promise of your forgiveness in Christ to be a myth. That would be staying in darkness. Martin Luther said that if you know Christ only as an angry Judge and are unsure of His forgiveness, *"it profanes God's grace to the extreme, denies Christ's death, resurrection, ascension into heaven etc., together with all His inexpressible blessings, destroys faith, and sets up in its place nothing but horror, lies, and error. If that is not darkness, then I do not know what darkness is."* (Commentary on Psalm 23)

In fact, the whole reason you learn the commandments is to recognize the darkness so you don't want to stay in it. The darkness that we find in the world we also find in our hearts and in our sin. But the secret – and what Jesus was doing on the mountain – is that Jesus is the Light who takes away the darkness. So what you do is to bring the darkness of your sins to Jesus, because He let that darkness overshadow Him in His suffering and death, He let the dark grave close Him in, so the light of His resurrection could shatter it for you! You bring the darkness of your sins to Him so He can forgive you, and you follow Him and walk in the light with Him, walking in His footsteps, in the newness of life and light.

He is the Morning Star who rises in our hearts, which means that instead of letting our hearts be downcast, He is here to remove the guilt of our sins, to remove the darkness, so you can lift up your head, to lift your spirits, to see how bright everything is in Him, to kindle the light of your faith in Him and keep that candle lit!

This is the light of God's Word: it shines into every dark place of your life, whenever it gets dark because of your own sins or because of the gloom of the evil and darkness of this world. What is the light of God's Word? It is the Gospel, which today you confessed in the articles of the creed – where there is no darkness and everything is bright, because

through Christ's work and through the powerful speaking of His Word to you all your sin is forgiven and erased, and instead there is only the pure righteousness of Christ covering everything and presenting you holy, blameless, spotless, and without fault. It's just beautiful!

And so we learn to love His Word because it is the light. It is the light because Christ is the Light. He is "*the true Light which gives light*" (Jn 1:9) - the light of faith. Through this faith you enter heaven, which is described as the Lord God giving them light forever and ever (Rv 22:5). This is the light and the brightness that you receive when you hear His Word. His Word is where Jesus the Light of the world and the bright Morning Star speaks. When you come to the Word you come to the Light. All He does is to fill you with this light that will never go out. He will bless His Word so that you will believe, so you will live in the light of His love, walk in His light all your life and even forevermore.

Ben and Carrie, guard the Light that is in you. Flee the darkness. Walk in the light as He is in the light, for even He is the Light that lightens you. He is the Light whom you learn to know and see clearly in the light of His Word. He is the Light that is always available to you when all other lights go out. In Him is no darkness at all; so when you are with Him there is no darkness for you at all. He is your Eternal Light. Amen!