

*UNEDITED DRAFT*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today is a transitional day in our church calendar. Our church year started the beginning of December as we focused our attention on Christ's coming. At Christmas we celebrated his birth. For the past 7 weeks we have celebrated Epiphany. The revelation that this person, Jesus, is actually God in human flesh who came to rescue from sin. Now we transition into the season of Lent where we remember *how* he rescues us from sin: through his innocent suffering and death on the cross which is the complete payment for all of our sins. Lent begins this Wednesday with our Ash Wednesday service. It's a season of reflection and repentance... a season to focus on the height and breadth and depth of our Saviors love that drove him to ascend Calvary's cross.

But before we follow Jesus through his suffering and death, today we wrap up the season of Epiphany by observing one of the most significant revelations about Jesus Christ. Today we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord. Before we see him suffer, before we look on a man who appears powerless and humiliated, before we see this man silent before his accusers and passive in his dealings with his enemies... we need once more glimpse of who this man really is. To rightly understand the cross, we need to first get a glimpse of Jesus' future glory.

In fact, not only will we not understand Jesus' suffering if we don't first see his glory, but we also won't understand our own suffering.

There is probably nothing that challenges faith more than suffering does. When you suffer and the more you suffer and the longer you suffer, it can become harder and harder to see and believe in the love of God.

If your **finances** are a little tight one month, that doesn't challenge your faith. But when you get a big financial blow... or a prolonged financial blow... or BOTH... that really knocks the wind out of your sails, doesn't it? Why am I suffering like this? Others are not. Does God not love me?

If your **health** is bad for a week... like a cold or the flu... that probably doesn't lead you to question God. But when the health problems are severe... or they keep going and going... or BOTH... then the questions to God start pouring out.

If you get in an **argument** with someone close to you, that doesn't typically shake your faith. But when there's a huge blow up... or when they conflict goes on and on... or BOTH... and the relationship spirals down... that can shake your faith.

Even in **war**... in World War I there were reports that on Christmas Day during the first year of the war, German troops and British troops came out of their trenches, met in the buffer zone and sang Christmas hymns and carols together. The next day they resumed shooting at each other. However, as the war dragged on to the next Christmas... and the next, they no longer sang Christmas carols together. The prolonged effect of suffering challenged their faith and also their view of the enemy.

So suffering can be a dangerous thing to the faith which connects us to Christ and his love. So what I want to do for you today is prepare you for suffering so that if and when it comes, you will be properly equipped so that it won't damage or destroy your faith. Here's the thing. I don't want to be a pessimist, or a Debbie downer, but the reality is that the vast, vast majority of people on this planet experience a time of considerable suffering. Is it possible that someone has an easy life and then dies in their sleep? I suppose. But I think we can agree such a person is exceedingly

rare. I personally don't know anyone that did not experience considerable suffering at some point in their lives. I don't know of a way to keep all suffering from you in this broken, sinful world. But I do know how to prepare you so you can stand up under this suffering and only grow stronger in your faith. Wouldn't that be awesome? Wouldn't that be ideal? God provides us.

To be equipped by God with a strong faith even in suffering, we will be looking at Matthew 17:1-9. It is the account of the Transfiguration of our Lord. Now it's important to note the verses preceding this account. Jesus was speaking to his disciples about his upcoming suffering and death. They didn't like to hear this talk of suffering. Then Jesus talks about the suffering his own disciples will go through. And they really didn't want to hear about that! They must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus.

Then in the verses immediately preceding the Transfiguration, Jesus says, **“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. 28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”**

So imagine this world isn't all there is. Imagine there is an entire eternity of existence after this existence. Imagine yourself living in a kingdom of glory that never ends, and you are in a state of perfection in God's glorious presence forever and ever. If you could keep that view in mind all the time, would this help you through whatever earthly sufferings you might have to endure?

But here's the thing. If this is going to give us any comfort, we must know it's true, right? And we could be convinced it is true if only we could just get a little glimpse of that future glory. Right? I mean we don't need to see all of the glories of heaven for an extended period of time. But if we could just get a glimpse of that glory... a little taste of the brilliance to come... wouldn't that get us through the suffering of this world? Instead of just a prophecy about the glory, what if we could just get a little preview of that glory.

And so that is exactly what Jesus gives.

**Matthew 17:1-9 After six days (after foretelling his suffering, their suffering and future glory) Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.**

These three were the first and closest to the Lord. They are there on many occasions such as these.

- Why three? All matter established by two or three witnesses. They were the leaders of the group. They would be the most believed by the rest.
- Why ONLY three? If all disciples, or all plus crowd... no way to prevent chaos. All would have known. He would have been pushed into being political, earthly Messiah. Three was enough. Jesus led them up a high mountain. We don't know where.

An incredible thing happens. 3 great proofs of future glory given by the king of glory, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the promised King. They needed this affirmation to get through the suffering that was to come. And so did we. So listen:

1) The transformation of the Son.

**There he was transfigured before them.** [His form was totally changed.] **His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.** [It was dazzling, glistening. The glory inside was unveiled. The transformation of the Son. All they thought they knew blown away. His veiled glory revealed. Who is Jesus? Take a look! Glory radiating from the inside out.

No doubt who this is. When God manifests himself, it is through light (and/or cloud). When invisible spirit-God reveals himself, it is as light. THIS IS GOD! 2 Peter 1 **“We were eye witnesses of his majesty.”** The earthly body of Jesus was a veil. He pulled back the veil and they saw the blazing sun. This is God. Glory! True essence revealed. Not a reflected glory. The glory came from within.

2) By the testimony of the saints / scripture.

**Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.**

Not only seeing, but now also hearing. How do they recognize them? Name tag? Supernatural intuition? Introductions given? We don't know. More important is *why* Moses and Elijah are there. Moses: Old Testament, especially the law, the Pentateuch. Moses a king, a prophet, a priest... a type of Christ. Elijah. Representing all of the prophets. Miracles. Critical time in God's salvation plan as the whole nation was on the verge of apostasy.

So we have the great giver of the law (word). Great guardian of the word.

They are essentially confirming: “This is the one of whom we spoke.”

Matthew says they were talking with Jesus. Luke tells us *about what*: speaking about his departure (Exodus; final outcome; the big event; the final deliverance; his death) in Jerusalem.

“Lord, we're on track. We're on schedule! It's going to happen!”

A testimony from the Old Testament. This is indeed he whom we foretold and he's doing it! Death is the plan!” Old Testament witnesses affirming, attesting to Jesus as the Christ.

**Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”**

When excited and confused and scared... you sometimes say stupid things. And that's Peter in a nutshell. Impetuous, reactive, emotional. And here as he often did, he says the wrong thing. “Lord, it is good.” This is excellent. This is something worth preserving. This is what I want. He really liked what he was experiencing. “He had no idea what he was saying.” He just said whatever was coming out of his mouth.

3) The testimony of the Father.

**While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”**

When in the glory of God, listen, don't talk.

The Father clearly places Jesus above and beyond Moses and Elijah. They are disappearing, and only Jesus stands. They fade away and Jesus is left center, glorious, prominent. This is the testimony of Scripture. Some say we make the Bible our God because we so highly respect it and its authority. No, we most certainly do not. We simply acknowledge that Scripture is what so clearly reveals Jesus, his salvation and his glory. They fade and Jesus shines forth. But Jesus doesn't shine forth unless they are studied.

The Father testifies. Whenever you see a cloud in the O.T., you are seeing God. This was the symbol of God's presence, just like light was. They are in the presence of God! And the result?

**When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.**

When a sinful human stands in the presence of the almighty, holy God there can be two reactions.

1) Thrilled. “It is good!”

2) I am afraid!

This is a divine tension that we don't seek to resolve. It is the healthy in-between in which all Christians must rightly live. \* His majesty, holiness, and the fear we experience in his holy

presence because we are not holy as he is. \* And yet living in his glory without fear is what our hearts crave most. How can we attain this?

*Will we one day stand in the presence of God terrified or delighted?* Isn't this a vitally important question?! Can you face death without knowing the answer? Will you be absolutely thrilled to be in God's presence and glory for all eternity, or will you be terrified by his presence and wish you were anywhere else?

Answer...

**But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.**

These are profound words. Jesus disciples were in terror in the presence of the glory of the Lord. What hope does a sinner have of standing in God's presence? The answer is: Jesus.

These are words of comfort that we would do well to apply to our lives constantly. "Don't be afraid. See no one but Jesus." If you don't see Jesus there is nothing but fear. We have sinned against a holy, all-seeing, almighty God. Without Jesus, we stand guilty and deserving of eternal punishment.

But with Jesus we have God's assurance, "Don't be afraid." Don't be afraid because Jesus has provided the holiness you were lacking. Don't be afraid because Jesus has paid your sin-debt in full. Don't be afraid because you will not be tortured and die because Jesus already was in your place. Don't be afraid because you are accepted now by God and forgiven of all your sins!

Don't be afraid because of the future glory that is yours... a glory we just got a glimpse of in Jesus' transfiguration.

**As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."**

Why tell no one? Simple. Remember Peter's reaction to the glimpse of glory. "It is good, Lord, to be here." He wanted to live in that moment. The crowds would have forced Jesus to be an earthly, political king. They would have desired earthly glory. Such glory cannot last on this broken, sinful planet. They had to come down off the mountain. But they did so holding on to the hope of future glory. And you do too.

Dear friends, in this world you will suffer. Maybe you're going through such a time now. If not, that time is coming. But here's what will get you through the suffering: the glimpse of future glory that Jesus gave us today.

You see, when you believe in Christ Jesus, the Bible describes this as being "IN" Christ Jesus. When you are IN Christ, then what is true of Christ becomes true for you. If you are in Christ, and it is true of Christ that he is the Son of God, then you are a child of God. If you are in Christ and it is true that he is holy and perfect, then you are holy and perfect. If you are in Christ and it is true that he was punished and died for all sin and made complete payment, then your payment for sin is complete. And If you are in Christ and it is true that he rose from the dead and lives triumphant, then you have risen from the dead and live triumphant too... now in a hidden way, but one day in a most outward, visible and tangible way.

**Consider your life (especially during suffering) in view of future glory.** You've gotten the preview... now we eagerly await the reality. It will come. Amen.