

February 14, 2010 Transfiguration Sunday: Luke 9:28-36

Do you remember John Lennon's song, "Imagine there is no heaven?" He implied that without a heaven there would be peace on earth since there would be no religion to die for. But when he entered eternity, he found the real truth about heaven, and hell. Jesus said, "**Whoever believes in the Son is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already**" (John 3:18).

But have you ever wondered, "What if Lennon was right and Jesus was wrong?" Many Americans would probably side with Lennon. How do you know there is a heaven? How do you know you will go there? Just before our gospel lesson, Jesus had asked his disciples, (v. 18), "**Who do the crowds say I Am?**" After a series of responses, none of which were correct, He asked them, "**But what about you...who do you say I Am?**" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." Jesus then told His disciples that He would suffer, be killed, and rise on the third day. He furthermore instructed, "**If anyone would come after me, He must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me...What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?**" (v. 23-25)

Yes Christ's followers will suffer in this life. But He will take them to heaven, so it's worth it. But now we're back to the nagging question, "How do we know there is a heaven?" Let's go with Peter, James, and John to that mountain in Galilee we too **Catch a Glimpse of Christ's Glory**. We'll know there is a heaven. We'll know for certain Jesus is the Way!

During Jesus' earthly ministry, he looked like any ordinary man. People were not moved to declare, "God is here with us! Shh! Listen, God is speaking!" Even after performing His miracles, many thought He was a man, just like the Old Testament prophets who did similar deeds by calling on God in prayer. Certainly when He was rejected, condemned, beaten, and crucified, He did not look like God!

So before He went the way of the cross, Jesus gave His disciples a glimpse of heaven. We marvel when a tadpole changes into a frog or a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. In an even more miraculous way the Son of God, who had taken on human nature and lived a lowly human existence, was transfigured, changed in appearance. His heavenly glory as the Son of God shined through His humanity in dazzling brilliant light. The disciples could conclude but one truth: "This man, Jesus of Nazareth is truly the eternal Son of God."

It's popular today to claim Jesus is nothing more than a man. But as we catch a glimpse of Christ's glory, we once more come away with the firm conviction, "Jesus is my Lord and my God." Already in the days of the apostles there were people who had such "modern" notions as denying Christ's deity and resurrection. Peter, who was with the Lord on that mountain wrote, "**We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty!**" (2 Peter 1:16-18) Catch a glimpse of Christ's glory through the apostles' eyewitness account, and you too can be sure Jesus is true God and man in one person.

Why did he come to earth? Wouldn't it be great if He came to teach us how to find happiness and satisfaction in life, or if He came to end poverty, hunger, illness, and war? Note that the heavenly glory on the mountain lasted only a little while. Jesus came, not to change the earth into heaven, but to take us from this earth to heaven! When Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Jesus, they weren't discussing the weather, politics, the psychology of success, or the latest results from the gladiator tournaments in Rome! Luke tells us, "**They spoke about His departure which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.**"

They were talking about Jesus' mission on this earth – to make up for our sins by keeping God's Law for us and to die under the curse of our sins to tear down the barrier that separates sinful man from

the holy God so we can go to heaven when we leave this sin-cursed world. Seeing Jesus with his face shining as brightly as the sun, it must have been crystal clear that no authority on earth could send him to the cross--if he did not want to go. No power on earth could overpower him, if he did not want to die. The Son of God died, not because He had to, but because He wanted to because He loves you. Since Jesus' bleeding and dying paid the full ransom price of our sins by faith in Jesus we too will live in heavenly glory.

Are you looking to Jesus only for what you want in this life? Do you appreciate the eternal life He purchased and won for you through His suffering and death? Will you meditate on Jesus' death for you more fully this coming Lenten season? Does the message of the Christ's cross give you power for a godly life, despite the cross you will bear as Jesus' follower? **"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth,"** the apostle reminds us (Colossians 3:2). Remember, we are pilgrims in this world, not tourists. Don't let your heart be distracted from the eternal blessings Jesus has won for you by anything this vain world has to offer. It has been said we live in a world that knows the cost of everything, but the value of nothing. When you catch a glimpse of Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, and remember His mission, you will build your life around what lasts forever – Christ our Savior's love, His gospel, and His rule of grace in our hearts now that will culminate in eternal glory in heaven!

But to live in that glory, I must stay united to Jesus by faith now. How can I be sure I'll stay in faith in Jesus? Peter misunderstood at first. He wanted Christ's heavenly glory to continue. Then he wouldn't have to go back down the mountain to face trials and temptations. So he blurted out, **"Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."**

To set him straight God the heavenly Father spoke from within a cloud, **"This is my Son, whom I have chosen; Listen to Him."** Since Jesus is God's Son, listen to Him. Guide your faith and life by His Word, regardless of whether it fits into our human way of thinking; regardless of whether our society accepts it or not; regardless of the suffering, ridicule or persecution you may face for it. When Jesus points out our sins with His holy Commandments, repent! Then when you wonder, "Will God forgive me?" rejoice in Jesus' gracious words, "Your sins are forgiven!" Trusting in Him for eternal life, find courage to do what He says. "Let your light shine!" "You will be my witnesses!"

Sometimes we wonder, "Why did God's Son come in humility to go the way of the cross? Why didn't He just destroy the devil and end all pain and sorrow? Martin Luther commented, **"Because the enemy's wickedness is great and his wrath fierce, it pleases the Maker to despise this wicked, vain, and furious spirit and to mock him"** by lowering Himself to be made man (*Day by Day We Magnify Thee*, p. 87). He chose to attack His enemy, our enemy, the devil in poverty and weakness. He allowed Himself to be crucified, and through His death and resurrection, He won the victory over the devil. Now He takes the simple message of that victory, the gospel, and by the Holy Spirit working through that gospel He gives us the victory of faith. By faith in Jesus we too overcome the devil.

God shows His divine Majesty and power through weakness. Christ's kingdom is carried on through what the world considers weakness, but out of that weakness, strength, power, and glory shall come. When we die, we will see what the disciples saw that day when they were with Jesus on the mountain. Therefore, listen to Jesus! Whenever you hear the Word and whenever you receive that Word in visible forms of bread and wine, exclaim, "It is good to be here! We're listening to God's Son!" As we catch a glimpse of Christ's glory now through that Word, we look forward to that day when Jesus welcomes us into heaven to His glory face to face. Then we'll exclaim forever, "Lord, it is good to be here." Amen.