

Fleeing From and To God's Presence
Genesis 28:10-17, Transfiguration Sunday
February 1, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....Today is Transfiguration Sunday. Today we remember how the Lord brought Peter, James, and John up into a high mountain, where Jesus was transfigured before them. "His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." At that moment, "the rays of His glory penetrated the veil of His humanity as easily as the rays of the sun penetrate glass" (Kretzmann). Peter later writes of this transfiguration saying, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." These means the Scriptures, the Bible is not in any way a book of clever stories, rather it is a true and reliable record. Since Peter and John were eyewitnesses to the transfiguration, their record and account in the Bible is a far more reliable than any newspaper article written by journalists, for God inspired these eyewitnesses so that they had a perfect memory regarding all that happened. That is why we should read our Bible daily for we will then see Jesus as He really is, the Lord of glory. Then the light of His grace will shine into the darkness of our hearts "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

In the transfiguration of Christ into the Lord of glory, we see an image and picture of the Church. As Christ on earth suffered poverty, contempt, and persecution (His glory being hidden), so the Church on earth suffers poverty, contempt, and persecution. Faith in Christ is hidden in the heart, and outwardly the Church cannot be seen. However, Jesus is our unseen glory, "the glory of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth." In His grace we find our justification. By His grace we are sanctified and made holy in His sight. That is why we dare not glory in ourselves. So while the Church on earth daily suffers all things for the sake of Christ, when Christ returns in all His glory, "we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." In the end, the lowly Church is transformed into glory.

I. Fleeing away from God's presence. The transfiguration of Christ before the disciples today, fits well with Jacob dream of heavenly glory. Jacob, in his flight from Esau, represents the Church under distress and persecution. We remember that Esau wanted to murder Jacob, for Jacob had by trickery received the birthright. When we consider people running and fleeing, let us consider those who flee God's presence, and those who flee to Him. By nature, sinners flee the presence of God because of a guilty conscience. The Bible says, "the wicked flee when no man pursueth."

Sinners flee God's presence because they know their guilt and they know they deserve to be punished for their sins. Some people never attend church even once their entire life because they know they are going to hear their life is sinful and God will punish them for their sin. Even Christians at times flee from God by way of sin or shame, but thanks be to God we repent of our sins and faith compels us to return to our Savior for forgiveness. With the wicked however, it is not so, and those who run away from God dig their own graves. God grants sinners on earth a Time of Grace, where He permits sinners to live though they only deserve death and damnation. Eventually all sinners die. Those who flee and run away from God their whole life, dying in unbelief, wake up in hell, from which there is no escape. In Mark nine hell is described as a place "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Just as the worms continually consume the body in the grave, so the guilty conscience continually consumes the soul in hell. They know their guilt, they know their punishment is just, and they know they suffer hell by their own choice. For on earth they ignored their own conscience which testified to their sin and guilt, and worst of all they refused to believe in Christ who alone had power to deliver. Therefore consider this true yet dreadful point: those who flee God's presence on earth by stubbornly refusing to repent, ultimately they get what they want. For all eternity God separates them from His good and gracious presence.

Of course we should remember here this is not God's will for any man, for the Bible says, "God is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance." That is also why God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, to deliver us from hell and bring us to heaven. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved!" The Son of God did not come to this earth with bolts of lightening, with trumpets blaring, threatening sinners with hell to scare them into heaven! NO INDEED! But Jesus came softly, quietly, gently as a little Child, the Babe of Bethlehem. As a Man in great humility He quietly suffered as a man in the stead of all sinners. He made all your sins His own, dear sinner. It was also for your sins that He quietly suffered on the cross. By His stripes we are healed.

Here also is the reason why Christ was cloaked and veiled in the flesh. His divinity was hidden only so He could suffer all things as a Man. If His glory had been openly seen, our salvation through the cross would not have been possible. Therefore, "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." On the cross Jesus cried out "My God My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Hell is to be forsaken of the love of the Father. It is to be cast away from His gracious presence. Yet Jesus out of love for the world endured this hell for the sinners

of all the world. When the Father saw this great sacrifice of His only-begotten Son, His heart was moved, turned from wrath to peace. "I know my thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil." The glory of Christ shines most brightly when we stop seeing Jesus as only a mere man, and we see Him as He is, the Son of God come in the flesh, to save and deliver us. The scales of unbelief drop from our eyes when we see that Jesus did not come to this earth with anger and condemnation, but Jesus came with mercy....He came with compassion....He came with a love which surpasses all understanding. GOD IS LOVE. Through the blood of the world's Savior, God does not count your sins against you, but He freely and unconditionally forgives them all - without money and without price regardless of anything you have done or not done. By His own blood, Jesus made Himself friend of sinners: that in itself is His glory. In these words our guilty conscience finds peace.

II. Fleeing toward God's presence. Truly, we stop running away from God when we see and realize He only came to save us. In the transfiguration of Christ there is then a picture of our own conversion. It is the Holy Ghost Himself who removes the veil of Christ's humanity, so that we see Jesus as the True God who only came to save. If the Holy Spirit has taught your heart this blessed truth, you will suddenly find yourself running toward Him. O how our heart longs to be with Him, and we feel as though we cannot live another day without Him.

"Behold! I am with thee!" We, like Jacob need to hear these words today when we sorrow over our sins, or suffer distress, trial and tribulation. We need to remember that we are not alone, but God is always near. As the Lord was with Jacob in the midst of his flight, so the Lord, even bodily is with us always while we are here on earth. In Jacob's dream, where the ladder or stairway reached from earth to heaven, we see a picture of Christ who reconciled heaven and earth, through His own divine body on the cross. Colossians 1:20 says Jesus "made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." No man woman or child is outside of His reconciliation, and only those who run away will refuse to receive it. Fear not only believe!

In the picture of the angels of God continually ascending and descending, we see God's constant and continually protection of the Church. No matter where we may be on earth God continually sends His angels forth to protect His Church, and they continually return to do more after their mission is over. How comforting it is to know our Lord uses His angels continually to guard and protect our children from all harm and danger, that the wicked Foe may have no power over them. If only we could see these angels which surround us, we would

never fear nor be afraid of anything all the days of our life. Proverbs 1:33 says, "Whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Jesus also said, "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is the certain will of our heavenly Father to give us the promised land of heaven. Therefore "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

"Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee." What a glorious promise this is! Though often in life we must move from place to place out of necessity, like Jacob, every day we move our tent closer to our heavenly home, for God hath said, "Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places." Indeed to this day, dear believer, it is no accident that you are yet kept and preserved in the true faith. It is no accident that you still mourn your sins yet rejoice in Christ your Savior! Nor is it an accident that even now you hear God's Word, and receive His Sacrament of Holy Communion, His body and blood, the sweet remission of sins! All of this, and so much more, is God's doing. It is His glory, it makes your Lord happy and pleased, to forgive you of all your sins in the name of Jesus Christ. "Fear not little flock!" Let us therefore give all thanks and glory to God. Let us hold steady course and keep clear of all sin and false doctrine. Be not a partaker in other men's sins, but "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." Those who flee to God's presence will one day walk in triumph into their heavenly home. We shall see Him as He is, face to face, our Lord of glory. Christ is the Gate of Heaven, the door to life everlasting! Amen!

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