

Imagine, for a moment, what Peter, James and John saw on that day, the day of transfiguration, the day described in Matthew's Gospel. It begins as any other day, with the sights by now familiar to them. For years they had traveled with Jesus, with the other disciples. They knew the details of those faces—the faces of Matthew and Thomas, of Philip and Nathanael. They knew the face of Jesus. How remarkable this face was to them: it was the face of the very Son of God—Peter had confessed that Jesus was the very Son of God just days before. Yet it looks like the others in the group; there is no light shining from it, no halo hovering over it. These familiar faces greet Peter, James, and John on this morning.

The scenery too is familiar—the land, dotted by villages and houses, made of stone and brick; plaster and stucco. Children running in and out of the streets; women going to market; men working in the fields. But on this day their path leads them away from the towns, away from people. Jesus leads them on a trail to an isolated place; a high mountain lies before them. The land of Israel opens up to their eyes as they climb the mountain, gaining a vantage point looking over the houses and vineyards and fields. All is common and ordinary, even if the view from on high is beautiful. But on this day, Jesus does not lead them up the mountain for the scenery. He has something else to show them—something far beyond common and ordinary.

On the mountaintop the sights become glorious. Imagine what their eyes see: Jesus transfigured before them; that is, Jesus' appearance changes radically. No longer does he appear common and ordinary. He shines before them, radiant and white. His face shines, light coming forth from it. His clothes, just like theirs on the way up the mountain, are now made white as light. Here is the glory of the Lord, the glory of the Son of God shining into their pupils.

Who should appear with the Lord in His glory? Moses and Elijah. The Lord's glory

enfolds two of His saints, called to their eternal rest in glory. By this time, Moses had been dead nearly fifteen hundred years; Elijah for eight hundred. They are a testimony to Jesus' glory, just as much as the light shining from Him. For here is the result of His work: His people, rescued from death; Moses and Elijah, visiting with Him centuries after their death. Here is the Lord, giving life, even to the dead. Here on the mountain, Peter, James, and John see this with their own eyes.

Peter is awestruck by the sight. The images dancing on his retinas are too much for him. Lord, he says, let me put up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. Let's stay here, Peter says, in your glory, with your redeemed saints. Who could blame Peter? He has a glimpse of heaven—Jesus in His glory, surrounded by his saints—and wishes to stay.

But then the sight grows somehow more glorious. A bright cloud overshadows them; the light of God the Father shines on them too. His voice speaks from the cloud: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him. This is too much for Peter, James, and John. They fall on their faces in fear and terror. The glory of the Father, unveiled in the cloud; His voice addressing them strikes fear in their hearts. They collapse under the glory shining before them.

As they lie face down in the dirt, the moment passes. The light is gone; the cloud removed. Jesus comes, reaches out his hand and touches them. Rise, He says: have no fear. They look and see Jesus only. No one there but Jesus only. Gone is the cloud of the Father's glory. Gone are Moses and Elijah. Jesus only stands before them—no longer Jesus in His glory; no longer radiantly white. The same Jesus they walked up the mountain with, the Jesus who looks like them; the Jesus who hides His glory under human flesh and blood.

They see no one but Jesus only. Think of it! All they saw and heard points them to Jesus and Jesus only. The glory does not stay; the Father's voice falls silent. But these passing things direct their eyes and their ears to focus anew on this Jesus. Ponder what this means for them. How blessed they are to see Jesus only. The light was, in the end, too much for them. They fell in

fear before it. The holiness of that light, the glory of the Father, impresses on them just how sinful, how unworthy they are. The brightness of that light makes the stains of their sin look darker. The glory of the cloud makes their guilt and unworthiness all the more humiliating.

And Jesus' companions: they only make it worse! There's Moses—the Law-giver. Had they kept the Law given through Moses? No! Moses could stand and accuse them: You have not kept the Law the Lord gave to me, to pass on to you. You have sinned; Moses could accuse them of sin, just as Jesus warned others that Moses would accuse them.

And Elijah? Here stands the zealous reformer; the one calling Israel back to the Lord and the Lord only. There is no room for any other gods, Elijah calls. Serve the Lord and Him only! Remove all half-hearted attempts at serving the Lord; they are not good enough. Worship, honor, love, obey Him above all else.

Moses and Elijah make the sin of the disciples stand out all the more. Who are they, to be in the glory of Jesus, to stand and see these redeemed saints? It is little wonder that they fall on their faces in fear! The holiness surrounding makes their sin stand out. Like a ketchup stain on a white shirt—there is no hiding it! The white shirt makes the stain leap out to anyone who sees it. How much more the sin of Peter, James, and John! For the light and glory surrounding them are brighter than the whitest shirt; the stain of their sin more crimson than the worst ketchup can do. It is painfully obvious that they are out of their league; their sin and guilt is evident on that mountain—painfully so!

Moses and Elijah have their moment, and are gone. The glory of the Father passes; the glory of Jesus is veiled again. But Jesus remains, and Jesus only. What blessing for the disciples! This Jesus touches them, not lashing out in anger; no, He touches them and bids them rise; tells them to have no fear. Their sin is forgiven by this Jesus, the only one they see. The Jesus who walks down the mountain with them. The Jesus whose well-worn sandals will take Him to

Calvary's cross. The Lamb of God, come to win atonement for them and for all men. This Jesus they see, and this Jesus only. He silences the accusing voices; He takes away the shame, the fear that come from a guilty conscience. When He speaks to grant forgiveness, the accusers disappear; the sin is removed, and there is no one to see but Jesus only—the disciple's Savior and Redeemer.

May the same be true for us! May we turn our eyes in the end, to Jesus, and Jesus only. When it comes to our salvation; when it comes to our everlasting life; when it comes to our relationship with our Lord, look to Jesus and Jesus only! Where else will we find hope and forgiveness? Where else will we find righteousness and holiness? Turn your eyes to yourself, and what do you see? Sin and failure and guilt and shame. Glance to Moses, and what do you see? His law accusing you. His words, inspired by our Lord to be recorded in Scripture, condemning you for sin against your God. His ten commandments show you that you have sinned and fallen short. You have not loved the Lord your God alone and with all your heart; you have misused His name. You have not kept the Sabbath day by hearing and learning God's Word as you ought. And on the commandments go! By all means, look to Moses, but not because you can earn salvation by keeping His law. Look to him to see your great need for a Savior.

Look to Elijah, and his condemnation comes to you as well. You have split your worship between the Lord and false gods. You have placed money or family or work or recreation before your Lord. These have been more important to you than spending time hearing the Lord's Word, praying to Him, learning of Him and His great love for you. By all means, listen to Elijah, but not to win salvation by shaping up. Look to him, that you may despair of your own righteousness and fall on your face in humility and repentance, confessing your own unworthiness.

Turn your eyes then to Jesus, and Jesus only. He bids you rise; He reaches down to touch you and comfort you: Do not fear, He says; Your sin is atoned for, your guilt is cleansed. Look to me for forgiveness. Look to me for mercy and compassion and help. Look to me for life and

salvation. Lift up your eyes to Jesus. Place your trust in His love. Know of His work of redemption for you.

Lift up your eyes from the pain and heartache that enters your life. When sorrow strikes, look to Jesus; see in Him the one who loves you always, the one who fails you never. Look to Him for strength and comfort and patience. Look to Him for hope; the confidence that He will one day take you to His unveiled glory. On that day, cleansed and forgiven of all sin, you will stand and see Jesus only in all His glory, without fear, without shame, without guilt. Look to Jesus now in joyful expectation of that day.

Open your ears to hear His Word. Listen carefully as we descend with Him into the depths of Lent. In the coming weeks walk with Him on the way of salvation; hear again of His suffering and death that bring you life. The opportunities to hear that Word, to look to Jesus, grow during this holy season. Come to the midweek services; read the devotions offered. Do so to fix your eyes on Jesus in repentance and faith. Turn your eyes from the things of this world; drown out the buzz of noise and confusion for quiet moments in the presence of Jesus, listening to His Word, looking to His loving face.

Look to Him, confident that your Father's eyes see Jesus when He looks to you. Yes, when our Father gazes upon us, He sees us in Christ. He sees our sins covered by His righteousness. He sees us clothed in the robe of His holiness. He sees us cleansed by Jesus' blood. What comfort and peace! God sees us in Christ Jesus; He sees Jesus in us. He counts us righteous for Jesus' sake, through faith in Him. Lift up your eyes to Jesus, and Jesus only. Find in Him your hope for forgiveness, your confidence that you will stand before Him for all eternity, clothed in His righteousness. Amen.