

Peter's Remembrance Of The Transfiguration.

Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Suggested Hymns:
747, 456, 37, 273, 454

- 1) Is The Testimony Of An Eyewitness
- 2) Is A Testimony Of The Fullness Of Salvation
In Christ
- 3) Is A Testimony Bidding Us To Heed God's Word

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Peter 1:16–21, ¹⁶ *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.* ¹⁷ *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."*

¹⁸ *And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.* ¹⁹ *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;* ²⁰ *knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,* ²¹ *for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Remembrances, especially memories that bless, help us bring the past into the present for a good purpose. Thanks to memory, we can relive joyful moments.

Memory is a wonderful gift of God for our spiritual well-being as well. In our personal lives we can, to our benefit, recall Biblical truths we once learned or meaningful experiences that deepened faith and understanding.

As a congregation we can on various occasions, such as church anniversaries, recount God's deeds among us in past years, always with the assurance that these same mercies of God will be with us in years to come. So

with the psalmist we say, ***“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works.”***¹

In our text Peter shares with us his recollection of a most memorable occasion: the transfiguration of our Lord. As an Apostle he must have often pondered in his life the meaning of this event and drawn strength from it! Now in his older years, as he contemplates his death in the not-too-distant future, he reminds us once more of the great truths of the Gospel he proclaimed at Christ’s direction.

Let us meditate on *Peter’s Remembrance Of The Transfiguration*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Peter’s Remembrance Is The Testimony Of An Eyewitness

If someone was to ask, *“Peter, were you there when Jesus was transfigured?”* he would say, *“I certainly was, together with two other eyewitnesses.”* Consequently what the apostle shares with us in the text is not hearsay, or rumour, or a cleverly devised myth, but a report of what he himself saw. As one present he gives us a first-hand account of what took place on that holy mountain.

He was an eyewitness who was there. What, precisely, did Peter see? He calls himself and the other two apostles ***“eyewitnesses of His majesty.”*** He saw the outward manifestation of Christ’s divine majesty — light, splendour, a whiteness beyond that of clothes washed with the best laundry powder — as his Lord ***“received honor and glory from God the Father.”***

Thus with his own eyes Simon Peter saw the glory that was Christ’s as the Son of God. He saw a glorious change in Him as we read in Matthew 17:2, ²***and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*** The transfiguration of Jesus was God’s own seal on the truthfulness of the confession Peter had made only six days before, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***² What magnificent splendour, what sublime radiance! This is the light of holiness in which God Himself dwells³ and of which the hymn writer says,⁴ ***“No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight.”*** Little wonder that Peter and the others had to shield their eyes.

Peter had seen manifestations of Christ's glory on previous occasions. He was present when Jesus revealed His glory in the performance of His first miracle in Cana. He was on the scene when the Master healed the sick, including his own mother-in-law. He was on hand when Jesus recalled pallid corpses to life. The same eyewitness now reaches back in his memory to recount a special revelation of Christ's glory which had made an indelible impression on him: the transfiguration of Jesus on the holy mount.

Peter was an ear-witness who was there. On the occasion of Jesus' transfiguration Peter, together with James and John, were also ear-witnesses, for they heard the Father's voice that said, "***This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.***"

This voice "***came to [Jesus] from the Excellent Glory,***" that is, by the Father of Lights. It is significant that Peter includes James and John as also ear-witnesses, saying, "***We heard.***"

The presence of two other witnesses rules out the possibility that Peter was just imagining or dreaming all this. Two other men saw and heard the same things, and in the prologue of his First Epistle John puts his concurring testimony on record: "***We have heard,***" "***we have seen with our eyes,***" "***we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.***"⁵

The remembrance that Peter relates here was the kind of testimony the apostles were to render, for Christ has appointed them to be His witnesses⁶ — witnesses of His resurrection⁷ and the events preceding it.

What does this remembrance mean to us here and now? It strikes a sure keynote in our hearts and minds, for we know it to be the testimony of an eye-and-ear witness.

It always means more in everyday life when the people to whom we go for advice know from first-hand experience what they are talking about. If it is a product they suggest, it helps if they can say, "***We ourselves have tried it and seen its good results.***" If it is a doctor or lawyer they recommend, it bears weight when they say, "***This is the man we know and to whom we ourselves go.***"

Peter speaks to us as one who had been with Jesus, and what he tells us is trustworthy. This is not a blind man describing beautiful colours. His words carry special force, for they are the testimony of an eye-and-ear witness.

2. Peter's Remembrance

Is A Testimony Of The Fullness Of Salvation In Christ

Our writer is painstaking in recalling the transfiguration events because they are related to and support the great truth behind Christ's glorification, *"the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* He mentions *"power."* On the holy mountain, as on the occasion of His many miracles, Jesus revealed Himself as the Son of God with power, in fact, with all power in heaven and on earth. The transfiguration confirms Jesus to be God's Son, the very truth that Peter confessed and proclaimed.

God's Plan of Salvation

But Peter is concerned not only with the Father-attested Sonship and deity of Christ with power, but also with His *"coming,"* that is, with the whole compass of the Gospel that declares why He came. Like Paul, this apostle is also committed to declaring *"the whole counsel of God"*⁸ for the fulfilment of which God's Son came into the world.

That counsel or plan of salvation for fallen mankind was conceived in eternity. The hymn writer Paul Gerhardt⁹ has put this heavenly consultation into the form of a dialog or conversation between the Father and the Son:

"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith, "And free men from the fear of death from guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear, but by Thy Passion men shall share the fruit of Thy salvation."

And how does the Son reply? Like this:

Yea, Father, yea, most willingly I'll bear what Thou commandest; My will conforms to Thy decree, I do what Thou demandest."

This is indeed the saving truth *"which angels desire to look into."*¹⁰

At the fullness of the time this counsel of salvation was due to go into effect. He who was to come did come. He came not primarily as a teacher or a moral exemplar but, in Christ's own words, *"to seek and to save the lost"*¹¹ by laying down His life to save all sinners.

So beginning with our Lord's physical coming into the world as the Babe of Bethlehem, God's eternal plan for our redemption went into a step-by-step fulfilment.

Included in Christ's coming as per God's plan are the incarnation, His obedience to the Law in our stead, His vicarious atonement, resurrection, ascension, seated at God's right hand, sending of the Holy Spirit, and His promised Second Coming.

Peter's Witness to Christ's Salvation

Advanced in years and about to honour his Lord with a martyr's death, Peter remembers the transfiguration as an event most closely connected with "***the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.***" This salvation in Christ, Peter and the other apostles "***made known to you.***" It is what he witnessed to. It is what he preached.

Let us recall some of his testimonies of the fullness of salvation in Jesus. Soon after Pentecost we hear him testify on behalf of the crucified and risen Christ: "***Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.***"¹²

In Peter's First Epistle we have the testimony on which Martin Luther based his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. 1 Peter 1:18–19, ¹⁸***knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ...*** ¹⁹***but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.***

And who can forget that great introduction to this First Epistle, showing the power of Christ's resurrection in our lives as we read in 1 Peter 1:3, ³***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.***

Our salvation is fully in Christ — that is the truth we need to fix firmly in our hearts and minds. What blessed assurance!

Let us imagine for a moment what life would be like — and how non-existent the prospects of eternal life would be — if "***the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ***" was a cleverly devised myth and we were thrown on our own resources to gain peace with God!

When the treasures of King Tutankhamun's tomb were displayed, there was quoted what the ancient Egyptians' *Book of the Dead* told people to say to the

divine judges as they sought to pass into the next life: *“I have always shunned evil; I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, a ship to the stranded; to the orphan I was a father, to the widow a husband, to the roofless I gave a home.”* This is good-works religion.

Now Jesus in Matt. 25:31-46 lists similar good works the righteous have done, but these works they did, not in order to be saved, but because they were saved. Our full salvation is in Christ, and it is ours by faith, not by works.

3. Peter’s Remembrance Is A Testimony Bidding Us To Heed God’s Word

In his reminiscing mood the apostle recalls the testimony he has given — and gives it here afresh — about the Word of God concerning Christ. At the transfiguration the Father spoke this Word, *“This is My beloved Son.”* This same Word of God concerning *Jesus as the Christ* was spoken in the Old Testament Scripture, and this truth, too, Peter and the others have *“made known.”*

Peter’s Use of the Word

In his Pentecost sermon Peter preached the Word as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance. All that he said about Jesus — the Holy Spirit’s descent as per Christ’s promise, His crucifixion to redeem all people, His burial, resurrection, and ascension — was declared to be in fulfilment of the Scripture, specifically of the prophecies of Isaiah, Joel, and David in the Psalms.

Further, to the “house church” assembled in the home of Cornelius, Peter said that you know *“The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ.”*¹³ This good news of peace is the Gospel as proclaimed in the Old Testament, especially by Isaiah, who wrote, *“How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace!”*¹⁴

In his First Epistle the apostle records his testimony concerning the Word of God — how we have been born anew *“through the word of God which lives and abides forever,”*¹⁵ then quoting from Isaiah 40; how we should long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word that we *“may grow up to salvation.”*¹⁶ All this, Peter recalls, he had *“made known,”* asserting that the Word concerning Christ is true, for He had been an eyewitness of His majesty at the transfiguration.

The Word Sure and Clear

It seems likely that the writer had anticipated this question from a reader or hearer: “*Peter, we don’t want to dispute your recollection of the transfiguration and what it means, although it did happen many years ago. But put yourself in our shoes. We weren’t there on the mount to see Christ glorified and declared to be God’s dear Son. How can we be sure of the truth concerning ‘the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’?*”

The reply is this, *we have the prophetic word confirmed.* This prophetic Word he identifies as the “*prophecy of Scripture.*” The reference is to the writings of Moses and the prophets, of which Jesus said, “*They ... testify of Me.*”¹⁷ This prophetic Word is “*confirmed.*” The prophetic Word in the Old Testament Scripture is independently true; it is not made more true, but made more sure, by the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies in Jesus as demonstrated in the New Testament.

This sure prophetic Word did not come “*by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*” Since this is so, it follows that we cannot interpret it in keeping with our own personal impulse, will, wisdom, interest, or convenience, for “*no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.*” So we put aside our own preconceived notions and let the Word speak for itself — let clear Scripture interpret Scripture.

The prophetic Word, so Peter further testifies, is not only sure but also clear, for it is “*a light that shines in a dark place.*” With great clarity it directs people to the Saviour of whom the prophets spoke. When, for example, the Wise Men of the East inquired where Christ was to be born, the birthplace could be pinpointed on the basis of Micah 5:2.

Because the Old Testament Scripture is clear, the psalmist likens it to a “*lamp*” and a “*light.*”¹⁸ The Bible is especially a light, for we have also “*the rest of the Scriptures*” of which Peter speaks in this epistle,¹⁹ by which he means the New Testament writings which so clearly focus on Jesus as the promised Christ.

The writer of our text makes a pointed application when he urges us that we “*do well to heed*” this shining lamp. As long as we are “*in a dark place,*” which we certainly are as long as we are in this world, we need the guidance of God’s

Word. That is why we give heed to the Word not only here in church but also at home when we conduct family devotions.

In possession of this light, we are able to be light-bearers in this world. We pass on the light to others. Centuries ago relay races were run in Greek stadiums. Runners bearing torches would cover a certain distance and then pass the torches on to their partners. The Greek spectators, very fond of this light race, would shout as the exchange took place: *“Let those who have the light pass it on.”* That is what we Christians do when we share the Gospel with our fellow human beings at home and abroad.

All Glory and Honour to Christ

Peter’s remembrance as firstly, the testimony of an eyewitness of Christ’s transfiguration, secondly, as the testimony of full salvation in Christ, and thirdly, as a testimony to the certainty of God’s written Word, is intended to give all honour and glory to Jesus Christ.

About to enter His Passion and the valley of the shadow of death, the transfigured Christ is revealed in His divine majesty. Although in the state of humiliation He did not always and not fully use His majesty, the transfiguration reveals that He did possess it. He is God’s true Son.

The story is told that Alfred, king of England in the ninth century, had to flee for his life when the invading Danes had taken over much of the land. Laying aside the tokens of his royalty, he sought refuge in a peasant’s cottage. The wife gave him the job of watching the oatmeal cakes baking on the hearth. Preoccupied with the problems of his realm, Alfred let the cakes burn and for that had to endure the indignity of a tongue-lashing from a peasant woman.

Jesus our heavenly King, too, was deeply humiliated, despised, and rejected by many people. Soon he would enter the deep degradation of a slave’s death, even death on a cross. During His Passion He had *“no form or comeliness,”*²⁰ and some would say that He has no divine majesty at all.

But the transfiguration assures us that Jesus is indeed our heavenly King, the promised Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of glory. To this King, humiliated but soon to be exalted, we give our hearts. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 143:5

² Matt. 16:16

³ 1 Timothy 6:16

⁴ “Crown Him with many crowns”

⁵ 1 John 1:1

⁶ Acts 1:8

⁷ Acts 1:22

⁸ Acts 20:27

⁹ “A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth”

¹⁰ 1 Peter 1:12

¹¹ Luke 19:11

¹² Acts 4:12

¹³ Acts 10:36

¹⁴ Isaiah 52:7

¹⁵ 1 Peter 1:23

¹⁶ 1 Peter 2:2

¹⁷ John 5:39

¹⁸ Psa. 119:105

¹⁹ 2 Peter 3:16

²⁰ Isaiah 53:2