

Sermon Text 2 Peter 1:16–21

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such a declaration as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory: "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" —

18 and we ourselves heard this declaration made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

19 And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture becomes a matter of someone's own interpretation,

21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Majesty of God's Word Daniel Cote

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Scripture Reading: Mark 9:1-10

Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21

In May 1855, an eighteen-year-old boy went to the deacons of the Congregational Church of Mount Vernon, then located on Beacon Hill in Boston. He had been raised in a Unitarian church, in almost total ignorance of the gospel, but when he had moved to Boston to make his fortune, he began to attend a Bible-preaching church. Then, in April of 1855, his Sunday school teacher had come into the store where he was working and simply and persuasively shared the Gospel and urged the young man to trust in the Lord Jesus. He did, and now he was applying to join the church. One fact quickly became obvious. This young man was almost totally ignorant of biblical truth. One of the deacons asked him, "Son, what has Christ done for us all - for you -which entitles him to our love?" His response was, "I don't know. I think Christ has done a great deal for us, but I don't think of anything in particular that I know of."

Hardly an impressive start. Years later his Sunday school teacher said of him: "I can truly say that I have seen few persons whose minds were spiritually darker than was his when he came into my Sunday school class. I think the committee of the church seldom met an applicant for membership who seemed more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of gospel truth...." Needless to say, the committee never envisioned that he would become a great evangelist.

Nothing happened very quickly to change their minds. The deacons decided to put him on a year-long instruction program to teach him basic Christian truths. Perhaps they wanted to work on some of his other rough spots as well. Not only was he ignorant of spiritual truths, he was only barely literate, and his spoken grammar was atrocious. The year-long probation did not help very much. At his second interview, there was only a minimal improvement in the quality of his answers, but since he had become a sincere and committed Christian, they accepted him as a church member.

Over the next years, I am sure that many people looked at that young man and, convinced that God would never use a person like that, they wrote off Dwight L. Moody. But God did not. By God's infinite grace and persevering love, D. L. Moody was **transformed** into one of the greatest evangelists and servants of God in church history, a man whose impact is still with us. Moody preached to an estimated 100 million people worldwide and the line of preachers that led to the conversion of Billy Graham can be traced back to Moody. Through the Holy Spirit, no human is beyond the transforming power of God's written Word and the

incarnate Word, Jesus, His Son. The transfiguration of Jesus reminds us that God calls us to personal transformation, like Moody, and that because He is holy, we should also be holy.

God's revelation of Himself to humanity comes primarily in three ways. The first is General revelation, where God's attributes are revealed through creation. As Paul writes in Romans 1:20, "...since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is*, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Paul is saying here that all people simply need to do is to consider and take stock of all that God has made to understand the power and divine nature of God.

Furthermore, Paul says people have no excuse or reason to deny the existence of God. Simply put, we survey a magnificent creation all around us; someone very powerful, knowledgeable, and wise must have brought this entire universe into existence, and of course, that is God. If there had been nothing before the universe came into existence, as atheists argue, there would still be nothing because nothing has no power to produce anything. So, if there were no creator, we wouldn't be here. That seems so obvious that the only way you can argue against it is to suppress the obvious truth. Paul puts his finger on the problem in Romans 1:18, saying that people who deny the obvious truth of a creator "suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Anyone with an open mind can easily see that we live in a vast, incredibly complex universe, on a planet that provides a just right environment for the flourishing of wonderfully complex creatures, including about 8 billion intricately crafted humans created in the image of God, exhibiting the ability to create, reason, and love, possessing an innate sense of right and wrong. From all that nature reveals about the Creator of the universe and life, He must possess immense power, knowledge, and wisdom. Furthermore, He is the author of the moral code that we each possess in our hearts. So, the Creator I just described bears a striking resemblance to the God of the Bible. What is revealed in nature about the Creator should prompt individuals to seek more knowledge about God.

But God has more fully revealed Himself through the written word in the Bible and the incarnate word who is Jesus, the Son of God. Peter addresses both forms of the word, the word in written form and the word in human form, in our sermon text.

Peter opens our text by making it clear that the apostles were not passing on myths and fanciful or clever tales. Peter and the apostles had been eyewitnesses to the power, coming, and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice Peter's use of this lofty title for Jesus. The Greek word translated as Lord is also the Greek equivalent of Jehovah, one of the Hebrew Old Testament names for God. Christ is the English word meaning Messiah who is the Son of God. With this title, Peter conveys to his audience that the apostles were eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of the divine Son of God.

Peter's audience of Christians would have been familiar with Jesus' miraculous ministry, so Peter supports his credentials as an eyewitness in verse 17, stating that he was present at the transfiguration of Jesus, which is more fully described in our Scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke. Peter says that when he was on the mountain with Jesus, he heard God's voice from heaven, God the Father speaking Himself, saying, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

Let's consider the events and significance of the transfiguration of Jesus, which occurred toward the end of His ministry shortly before His departure from Earth. You will notice in our Scripture reading that Jesus says to His disciples, "...there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." Here, Jesus is referring to His transfiguration in the presence of Peter, John, and James in an event that would reveal His divinity and the coming kingdom. Traveling only with His inner circle disciples, Peter, John, and

James, up onto a mountain, Jesus prayed. As He was praying, His face became different, and His clothing was gleaming white. Suddenly, two men spoke with Jesus, whom Luke tells us were Moses and Elijah in glory. Mathew (17:2) writes of this event that Jesus' face shone like the sun. So, Jesus radiated with the majestic glory of God and would have reminded Peter, John, and James that Moses's face shone after his audience with God, where he received the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Apostles would have understood that they were standing on holy ground in the presence of the Divine Son of God.

Luke allows us to be a fly on the wall in the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, saying that the three "were speaking of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." Immediately, you might ask, why is the Divine Son of God having a counseling session with God's emissaries, Moses and Elijah, on the exit strategy for His ministry? The answer is that in His Earthly ministry, according to Paul in Philippians 2:7, Jesus emptied Himself or set aside His divine prerogatives. Jesus remained fully human and fully divine, but He did not rely on His divine attributes of omniscience and omnipotence in His ministry on Earth.

When Jesus did miracles, He prayed to the Father, who answered His prayers and did miracles through Him. We see this when Jesus raised Lazarus in John 11. God performed the miracle through Jesus in response to His prayer. Jesus willingly took on human flesh and subjected Himself to its limitations. He learned, He experienced sorrow and wept, and He suffered and experienced death. Jesus gets us, as the modern evangelism campaign claims. He gets us because He experienced the full range of human emotions and temptations that we do each day, with the difference that He never fell into sin.

Now, as the apostles often did, they fell asleep at critical moments, but Luke tells us that they were fully awake to witness Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in their glory. Peter and the others didn't know how to respond to all this, but they understood that in that brief moment, the kingdom of God had come to Earth in a powerful way, exactly as Jesus had predicted eight days earlier. Peter was caught up in the moment and wanted to put up three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, so that they could hang out for a while. Luke tells us in our text that Peter was "not realizing what he was saying." Peter was in shock, and he was trying to process what he had seen in this otherworldly display. Suddenly, the voice of God is heard from the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And so, in the presence of Peter, John, and James, God put His stamp of approval on the ministry of His Son.

So, the transfiguration of Jesus is the event that Peter is referring to in our sermon text describing the time he was with Jesus on the holy mountain. Remember that Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah about the completion of His ministry and departure from the world, which was accomplished by the crucifixion that purchased salvation for the world. From that point on, Jesus was headed for Jerusalem. We read in Luke 9:51, "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem."

What is the purpose of and what was accomplished at the transfiguration of Jesus, where His divine nature was made plain for the apostles to see? There are several things. First, when Jesus asked His disciples in Matthew 16, "Who do you say that I am," Peter responds, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter correctly discerned by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was the long-promised Christ, the Messiah sent by God. The transfiguration of Jesus affirmed the divinity of Jesus in a visible way for Peter, and furthermore, that He was the incarnate Word of God and the Messiah sent by God. Moreover, in the words of Jesus at the beginning of our Scripture reading, at the transfiguration of Jesus, the kingdom of God was revealed visibly on Earth.

Second, it was the Father's way of preparing Jesus and encouraging Jesus as He approached Jerusalem. Just as He had done at His baptism, God validated and voiced His

approval of Jesus' ministry as He was about to face suffering and crucifixion. At the transfiguration, God commands the world to listen to His Son; thus, the whole world must hear and heed the message of Jesus or face the judgment of God

Third, with Moses representing the Law and Elijah representing the prophets, the transfiguration event shows the impending fulfillment of God's salvation plan for humanity described in the OT Law and Prophets. In the ministry of Jesus, the Law and the Prophets were about to be fulfilled. In Jerusalem, by His atoning sacrifice, Jesus fulfilled God's promises, first made in the Garden of Eden, to destroy the work of Satan and to provide a Savior for the world. Fourth, for Jesus, beyond the cross, was the promise of the throne at the Father's right hand. Jesus' suffering on the cross and the glory of the coming kingdom were about to be reconciled at Jerusalem. After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples would come to understand this, for soon, God's kingdom on Earth would advance rapidly with the initiation and rapid growth of the church.

Returning to our sermon text, Peter says in verse 19 that as a result of the transfiguration, the prophetic word of God is made more sure. The transfiguration represents not only a supernatural confirmation of Jesus as the incarnate Word of God but also of God's entire plan for humanity described in the written Word of God contained in the Old Testament.

Peter calls us to pay attention to God's written word because it is a light that illuminates our world, which is darkened by sin, and shows us the truth and the way for believers. For now, the Word of God is a lamp unto our feet (Psalm 119:105), but one day, at the return of Jesus, the written Word will be outshone by the light-bringer, the morning star Jesus, who is the most complete revelation of God to man. For now, the written word of Scripture illuminates our hearts, but at His return, we will see the Incarnate Word face to face.

Peter closes our passage with an explanation of the origin and revelation of God's Word. He says that the Scriptures did not originate in the minds of the prophets, but rather, the words they wrote came under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who revealed the message of God through the prophets. God used the prophets' individual styles and personalities borne along by the Spirit of God, much like the wind and currents carried along a sailing vessel. The Spirit of God ensured that the message of God was faithfully communicated in the words written by the prophets.

Sunday school attendance picked up at the village church in Kalinovka, Russia after the priest started handing out candy to the peasant children. One of the most faithful was a pugnacious lad who recited his **Scriptures** with piety, pocketed his reward, and then fled into the fields to munch on it. The priest took a liking to the boy and persuaded him to attend church school. This was preferable to doing household chores, from which his devout parents excused him. By offering other inducements, the priest taught the boy the four Gospels. In fact, he won a special prize for learning all four by heart and reciting them nonstop in church. Sixty years later, he still liked to recite **Scriptures**, but in a context that would've horrified the old priest. The pugnacious boy and prize pupil who memorized so much of the Bible was Nikita Khrushchev, the former atheist Premier of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev memorized the **Scriptures** for the candy, rewards, and bribes rather than for the meaning it had for his life. The message of this story for all of us is that not only must we know the Scriptures, but we must also apply them to our lives to be transformed by them. Khrushchev knew the Scriptures but was not changed by them.

In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul instructs us on how to live a life pleasing to God. Paul writes, "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The kind of transformation Paul describes will only come in our lives when we engage with the written Word and the incarnate Word. When we engage with the written Word found

in Scripture, the illumination of the Holy Spirit will help us to understand its meaning and application to our lives. When we engage with the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, we will be reminded of His holiness and divinity revealed at the transfiguration, and we will seek to be holy as He is holy, knowing that one day we will stand in His presence.

I will close with this. Sharon Dutra was born into a massively dysfunctional family in Los Angeles. Her father was an alcoholic and womanizer, and she was abandoned by her mother at the age of five. She writes of her tumultuous early life,

Throughout my childhood, I was moved from foster home to foster home. I started using drugs when I was 13. I believe that's when I finally realized that I hated myself. Up until then, I had been able to ignore my feelings of worthlessness and the ongoing sting of rejection and abandonment. At 15, I ran away from home, living on the streets until I was arrested. Thus began my life with the law.¹

Sharon ended up in juvenile hall, where she was housed with murderers, thieves, and gang members. Eventually, she was placed in a halfway house where she was not permitted to leave the grounds, a rule she frequently broke. Soon, she was arrested again and sent back to juvenile hall. Her father and stepmother wanted nothing to do with her, so she became a ward of the court. Eventually, she was placed in the Convent of the Good Shepherd. Even though the walls were 12 feet high, she escaped from there and embarked on a path of greater self-destruction. At 19, she worked for the California Conservation Corps and was responsible for serving meals to prison inmates. There, she met a man, and after his release from prison, they were married and had two children. Daily life for Sharon consisted of drinking heavily, smoking pot, and using every drug that she could get her hands on, paying little or no attention to caring for her children. Meanwhile, her husband was using speed and cocaine intravenously. Sharon lived this way for over six years and nearly died four times. After 10 years, Sharon and her husband were divorced, and she attempted to get sober for six months but eventually abandoned her family and headed out for a life on the streets and homelessness to feed her addiction. Sharon writes of that period,

By age 29, I had been arrested 13 times. One morning, when I was trespassing on Fort Ord, then an Army base near Seaside, California, six military police cars arrived, and a Seaside Police sergeant came busting through the door. Because of my lengthy criminal record, I was sent to a women's prison in Southern California, where I already knew some of the inmates from my time on the street. Crowded by pairs into tiny cells in the receiving unit, we were on lockdown 23 hours a day, 7 days a week, so there was no privacy. Very few inmates were allowed out of their cells to work.

With a lot of time on her hands, Sharon started reading a book about Al Capone's chauffeur, a mass killer who had become a born-again Christian in prison. Sharon continues her story,

At the time, I wasn't even looking for God. All I knew was that I wanted to die. My whole life had been an unbroken stretch of misery, and the pain was unbearable. After finishing the book, I realized that God was *exactly* who I needed. I got on my knees and cried out to him for over an hour, weeping for all the wrongs I had done. When I got up off the cell floor, I was a brand-new person.

Sharon had finally turned her life over to God. She immediately went to church and befriended the chaplain, who gave her a Bible she read for hours daily. The Scriptures gave hope to her heart, but she had trouble fathoming how Jesus could love a sinner like her. She began to share Jesus with others in prison and, when she was released, started a ministry to

drug addicts and prostitutes in her hometown of Santa Cruz. She married a Christian man and returned to school to become a registered nurse. She co-founded Be Transformed Ministries with her husband and continues to write and teach Bible studies to a diverse group of Christians.

Our God is a God of second, third, fourth, and even fifth chances. No one who repents is beyond His reach. God is in the business of transforming lives through His written Word and through His Son. He transformed D.L. Moody and Sharon Dutra. Wherever you are in your life, God calls you to be transformed to be a better disciple of Jesus. When was the last time you asked God to transform you to be more like Jesus? When was the last time you asked God to do His work through you? When was the last time you surrendered your will, and your time, and your talents for His purposes? You may think you have figured out how the rest of your days will play out, but whatever stage you are in your life, God will use you for His purposes if you make yourself available to Him. Amen.

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2021/11/sharon-dutra-homeless-drug-addicts-prostitutes-gospel/>