

Transfiguration (2)

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[0:00] Thank you, Lord Christ. Lord, open our hearts to your word as we crack it open, that we might be your people. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, please be seated. Hey, Father, how are you doing?

Well, it's Vinny, the mob guy from Utica. How you doing? What can I do for you? I'm not too bad, but I'm having trouble getting close to the Lord.

What do you suggest? What do you advise? Well, let's start out with your prayer life. Are you saying your prayers regularly? Well, I say the our Father once in a while, but it's not working for me.

Okay, so we've got to work on a systematic time of intimacy with the Lord Jesus. All right, how about the Bible? You're reading the Bible? Every once in a while. Last week, I was reading Joshua, and then I see there's a Joshua who's a long shot in the third race at Saratoga.

[1:07] So I put a C note on him, and he comes in. Barabing. I want to talk. I've got to read the Bible more often. Yeah, well, I'm not sure that's what we're talking about when we're reading the Scripture, but that's a good start.

All right, what about church? You going to church? Sort of going regularly. You see, the Padre at this church won't be a little money, so I wanted to show up every day so he didn't forget about it.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Sorry, we've got to do some stuff on giving your heart to Jesus in worship.

Okay, we've got that. All right, final question, Vinny.

I understand you used to be a hitman for the mob. You're not still doing that, are you? Well, I'm doing a lot better. Last week, I only whacked five of them, you know?

I figure I'm doing the Lord's work by taking the lowlife off the streets, you know? Okay. Vinny, I think I see the problem. Have you heard the four spiritual laws?

[2:16] Not yet. Okay. So as we wind up this little discussion, if you would spin around 360 degrees and de-roll as Vinny, the mob guy from Utica.

And now you're back as Jack Mumford, our beloved brother. Thank you, Jack. Appreciate that. I cannot de-roll from FADA because that's who I am.

Okay. Well, intimacy with Jesus. How are you doing with that?

Do you feel he's close or is he more like a sort of an oblong, purple, violet squish out there? If you're like me, you kind of cycle along.

I want to talk today about being intimate with Jesus because that's what God calls us to be. Today is Transfiguration Sunday.

[3:19] Every year on August 6th, the church celebrates the transfiguration, the appearance of Jesus on the mountain in white raiment. That was an intimate moment for he and his three church leaders.

What does it mean to us and how will it give us assurance of his presence? So we're going to do a line by line of Luke chapter 9, starting at verse 28.

It says now about eight days after these sayings. What sayings? What sayings? Well, he was talking about his death. He was acknowledging Peter who recognized him as the Messiah.

He had just fed 5,000 people and given an account for that miracle. So now, eight days after these things, he took Peter and John and James, his three primary leaders.

Remember, he had named Simon Peter, Petros, Cephas, the rock on which he was going to build the church with the other apostles. And James and John, James the older brother, John the younger, John we know, a writer of gospel and epistles and revelations, but a young man at that point.

[4:48] He took them up on the mountain. We don't know which mountain. People have figured out it's a mountain on the plain of Jezreel called Mount Tabor. We have no earthly idea whether that's the mountain, but it's a pretty good mountain.

So he took them up on the mountain and they were praying. It says, and as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. Could this have been a view of the post-resurrection Jesus? In Mark, it says his clothing was whiter than any fuller could ever do it.

In other words, it was miraculously white and his face glistened. You remember Forrest talking, reading about Moses on his mountain and his face glistened when in the presence of God. Could I ask someone to get me a glass of water? That would be really helpful. You want to do it, Mark? Thank you. And then it says, behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure.

[6:04] That word departure is exodus. His exodus. His exodus, we know now, was his crucifixion, resurrection, resurrection appearances, and ascension.

His exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now, of course, we'll talk a little bit more in a minute about Moses and Elijah, very significant to this event.

Then verse 32. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory, the glory of Jesus, his raiment, his face.

And they saw the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus. So as we know, Peter is an extreme extrovert.

He must fill any void of communication. So he jumps in. Master, it's good that we are here. Let's make three tents.

[7:14] I mean, booths. It's not like pup tents. Memorials. One for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. Thank you, sir. That's great.

Thank you. Not knowing what he said. Now, here comes something called a theophany. I learned that word in seminary.

I paid a lot of money to learn that word. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. And they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

And a voice came out of the cloud. Here's the theophany. Theophany is a visit from God.

Theophany. Showing forth God. And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one.

Listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. So the two men, gone.

[8:16] The cloud, gone. Present. Jesus with his leaders. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

So that's the story. And it's a wonderful story. And even better, it's a true story, which I like. And I have, some years ago, in a book I wrote, I gave a little commentary.

So I'm going to give the commentary to you now. Is that okay? All right. So, it was hot. There was no breeze. It had been a long walk up. Jesus was over kneeling by a rock, praying.

His three lieutenants were not far away, also kneeling in prayer. Suddenly, his appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes.

Sunlight poured from his face. His clothes were filled with light. Then they realized that Moses and Elijah were also there in deep conversation with him.

[9:24] Peter broke in. Master, this is a great moment. What would you think if I built three memorials here on the mountain? One for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

While he was going on like this, babbling, a light, radiant cloud enveloped them, and sounding from deep in the cloud, a voice, What it says in the Bible.

We don't know if they fell flat on their faces. I think they fell flat on their faces. I think they were slain in the spirit. Okay, so enough for the commentary. Jesus came and touched them.

Don't be afraid. Part of me wishes that I could have been there to experience such a great event.

Part of me wishes that today I might have just such a miraculous encounter with Jesus. I'd never doubt again, but would always have that vision to hold on to.

[10:44] What an introduction it would allow when I preached in a new setting. So I was on this mountaintop. Of course, there's another part wishing that I might never have an encounter like that.

Most people would not believe me when I tried to explain what I saw. Some would think I was crazy. Maybe, even within myself, I'm not sure I want to get that close to divinity while still on this earth.

It might be too frightening. But Peter, James, and John had no time to decide whether or not they wanted such a vision. There it was.

One minute, they were dozing in the still hot air, and the next they were gazing on a mysteriously transfigured Jesus and two guys who had been dead for hundreds of years. How do you deal with that? If you're James and John, you stare, speechless. If you're Peter, you jump right into the event, mouth first. Peter must have realized immediately that there was a miracle unfolding before his very eyes.

[11 : 51] By the conversation he witnessed before charging in, he somehow realized that one of the visitors was none other than Moses the lawgiver. Moses, who had brought the people across the Red Sea, had delivered the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, and had led the people 40 years in the wilderness, teaching them how to put those commandments into everyday action.

Of course, there was a problem here for Peter. Moses had been dead for 1,300 years. Peter suddenly remembered hearing about how the archangel Michael had contended with the devil for Moses' body after he died.

That's in Jude 1.9. Peter somehow realized that this was a great miracle event, and that the conversation he was hearing between Jesus and Moses centered on how Jesus would accomplish by his cross in Jerusalem what Moses had not been able to fully accomplish in the wilderness by teaching the law.

Peter then recognized the other visitor, the great prophet Elijah, dead 800 years, last seen heading for heaven in a chariot of fire.

Peter, well, he's back, thought Peter. And then he realized, listening to the further conversation between Jesus and Elijah, that the fulfillment of all the prophecies the prophets had spun about a Messiah who had come to liberate the people of Israel was now being achieved in Jesus.

[13 : 47] All this, Peter observed, almost in a heartbeat, and he was bursting with excitement. He simply could not contain himself. That's why he wanted to build the booths.

It was a modern day, in his terms, paparazzi in that moment. He wanted to build a monument. Can you see the three, Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, looking at Peter as he opened his big mouth?

Moses may have mumbled, this guy sounds like my loud-mouthed brother Aaron, all words and no sense. Elijah may have seen a piece of his replacement, Elisha, in Peter.

Lord, your assistant there, he's kind of like Elijah. He doesn't get it, does he? And Jesus probably said, what can I say? He's my rock. He just doesn't know it yet.

So at that point, the Heavenly Father decided to make it really clear to Peter. God the Creator arrived on the scene, as he often did in the Bible, in the midst of a cloud.

[14 : 58] Here's an unholy translation of what the Father said to Peter. Stop interrupting. This is my son. Shut up and listen. It's interesting that even though Peter really experienced that theophany and wanted to memorialize it, he still had the capacity to sin after he had been so close to Jesus.

Shortly thereafter, he was going to deny Jesus three times in order to save his own life. Do you think that Peter was tending toward memorials rather than miracles?

Maybe that's why Jesus wanted nothing to do with building these tents to the transfiguration. You see, the faith lesson here is that Peter wanted to enshrine in stone the law, the prophets, and the gospel, while Jesus wants to enshrine in our hearts the law, the prophets, and the gospel.

Peter's approach would harden the law, the prophets, and the gospel. Jesus' approach would melt the law, the prophets, and the gospel into warm and luscious grace.

Jesus' approach would melt the law, the prophets, and the gospel. I have Peter's problem. I love to have a memorial to everything that happens. And I think that happens with you.

[16 : 28] We move from the event to the memorializing of the event, especially liturgical Christians. We lose the center as we build the outside.

It's called faith drift, drifting from our faith development. We drift from intimacy with Jesus to formality of liturgy.

So let me finish up here. Two key words. One is transfiguration. Anybody know what that means in Greek?

The word is it in Greek? It's metamorphosis. All right, science people, give me an example of metamorphosis. Wait, wait, hear what?

Change in body. And what's an example of that? Yes. A butterfly. That thing it's in is called a cocoon, sometimes chrysalis, whatever.

[17 : 34] And at some point, that worm becomes a beautiful butterfly. That's what happens to us. It happened to Jesus on the mountain.

We are in that process right here in this earthly life. The cloud is the second. God wants you to be close and intimate with Jesus.

Jesus. And as, what was his name in Star Wars? Ben Kenobi.

Obi-Wan Kenobi said to Luke, The cloud, Luke. Use the cloud. Oh no, it's the force. That's right. But for us, he's saying, use the cloud.

The theophany. Allow that cloud to cover you with brilliance. And intimacy will be yours. You know, we started with Vinny, the mob guy from Utica.

[18 : 38] Did he have a few problems getting intimate with Jesus, do you think? Yeah. Two or three. Two or three. Prayer time, not much.

For us, prayer time is a privilege and a gift. We get to do it together. The Holy Eucharist is intimacy with Jesus, right?

It's our supper with you. Intimacy in the midst of our family. Intimacy in our time alone. Bible reading.

Vinny seemed to read it in order to get good pics at the racetrack. We read it to grow closer to God. It's his word to us. Church and group.

I do not owe Vinny a penny. So he doesn't need to come to remind me. We don't come to church to remind people they owe us. We don't come to church to remind God he owes us.

[19 : 41] We come to church to give him our best. To love him. That's intimacy. And then one of the hardest ones is habitual sin. Vinny had a problem bumping off people.

He just, you know, he somehow rationalized it. He said, bump off the lowlifes and it's good. We tend to fall into habitual sin.

In present day society, guys have the tough, deep thing of not going to pornography. That's a habitual sin. Our thought life takes us in other directions.

A lot of times women have to deal with something called the temptation to gossip. Guys have that problem also. We get into habitual sin.

How we deal with others. How we deal with ourselves. How we deal with God. That needs to be moved out of our life. So that the beautiful grace of God can come in.

[20 : 45] And then the, this is the toughest one. Un-dealt-with emotional baggage. Un-dealt-with emotional baggage. We all were raised, weren't we?

We all have scars from that. In fact, about 100% of us have a case of PTSD regarding how we were raised. Well, live with it.

We need to get clear of that junk. Satan means to punish us for what we didn't even do to deserve it. And that is to have a really sad attitude about what we've been through.

And the tip-off is, well, if you'd gone through what I went through. So, good counseling, good prayer, getting it clear, getting free from the junk, the emotional baggage that holds us down and keeps us from intimacy.

Conclusion. Intimacy is God's gift to you and to me. We receive it by setting the right atmosphere in our hearts.

[21 : 59] So, it's you and me on that Mount of Transfiguration. The cloud is for us. We are the chrysalis.

Let us watch for the cloud. Let us pray. Almighty God, whose Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, is the light of the world, grant that your people, illumined by your word and sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.