

2 Peter 1:16-18

“Ascent to Descent”

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I. Intro

Peter’s exhortation to this first century church was that their hunger to grow in Christ didn’t need to be fed through a “New Diet” on Gnostic teachings. “*The most difficult challenges to personal growth and spiritual maturity didn’t come about due to a LACK of INFORMATION but rather from a LACK of APPLICATION!*” In the rest of this letter Peter writes with regards to “Three things” they need to remember:

- A. 1:12-21 Confidence in the Word of God
- B. 2:1-22 Condemnation of Counterfeits
- C. 3:1-16 Certainty of Our Lord’s Return

Peter addresses the first of these “**Confidence in the Word of God**” in 2 Peter 1:16-21 and he does so in two parts. The reason for Peter’s words is something that we are prone to believe and that is that *the cause of our lack of progression* in knowledge must be due to a lack of “**NEW INFORMATION**”.

- A. First in verse 16-18, *Peter counters the Gnostics lies that Peter’s experiences were old and outdated and didn’t measure up to theirs.* It is here that we get an interesting perspective on Peter’s experiences and **what he considered the most memorable encounter that he had with Jesus.** When you consider everything Peter witnessed of Jesus’ Words and Works recorded in the Bible it fascinates me on what, *he believed*, was the one that left the biggest impact. And just so that you know it was the apostle John’s as well!
- B. Second, *(though we won’t get there this Sunday)* in verses 19-21 Peter says that as great as that experience was that these believers had something of greater continual impact that “**New Experiences**” they had “**New Encounters**” **through the Word of God!** Peter says that during his Christian life that he always sought to confirm the experiences he had come to know through the word of God.

Peter's goal was stated in verse 12 where he said that he didn't want to be "*negligent in presenting the truth and to give everyone equal opportunity to grow in grace*". Peter well understood what it was like to fail as he had denied the Lord three times, but he became determined to not do it again in order to prevent others from failing as he had. What had made the difference to Peter hadn't come from "**New Revelations**" as the Gnostics pushed, but rather from "**Truths confirmed in the word of God.**"

II. Vs. 16 And we beheld His Glory

Vs.16 Immediately Peter sets out to counter the Gnostic lies by stating the difference as he writes: "*We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*" He first addresses the difference between Gnostic revelation and his as well as the difference of their origins and where Peter had received his truths. The Gnostics revelation came from; "*cunningly devised fables*" and Greek has it "*artfully framed by human cleverness*". The origins were from "*fables*" and this is the Greek word for our English word **myths** and there were three prominent myths of that day:

- *Jewish myths from rabbinical embellishments*
- *Heathen myths about the god's descent to earth*
- *Gnostic speculations*

What Peter puts forth is an eyewitness account of Jesus Christ in His majesty. To set the story up **the reader will need to first determine what is the reference Peter is citing.** Here are **the three clues** given in the text by Peter:

- A. **Eyewitness of His majesty:** It had to be **something that Peter personally witnessed about Jesus' majesty** and the word in the Greek means "*visible splendor of divine majesty*".
- B. **Peter personally witnessed: Jesus receiving from the Father honor and glory when Peter heard God the Father audibly said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well**

pleased.”

C. Finally, Peter gives his readers the location of this event as “on the Holy mountain”.

III. Vs. 17-18 “Transfiguration” or “Renunciation”

As we piece all these clues together it only fits “one event” that Peter lists as the greatest “revelation” of Jesus' majesty that he ever witnessed. When I read the gospel accounts and look at all the words and works of Jesus, I feel a bit like a starving man at a smorgasbord of the best foods in all the world... “Ah, where do I begin and which one was my favorite.” But here both disciples, Peter, and John (who along with James were the only three allowed to witness this) list it as the most revealing of Jesus' majesty. John does so briefly in his gospel record in 1:14 saying only that “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Both the Apostle John as well as Peter describe the transfiguration and although amazing, I was more thinking in terms of the resurrection or some other amazing miracle. This makes me want to investigate what both Peter and John describe as the most amazing event of Jesus' Majesty! To do so we will look at the accounts in Mark 9:2-8 and Matthew 17:1-8 We will also look at what preceded this event as that will also shed light as to why this, more than any other event during the earthly life of Jesus, revealed His majesty.

A. First in Matt. 16:28 - 17:1-13 we have one of those unfortunate chapter breaks. If you stop at verse 28 without going on to chapter 17 you would have a contradiction. Jesus says here that some of these guys would be around at the second coming. This of course is not true. What Jesus was speaking of is fulfilled here in the 17 chapter at the transfiguration and it is what Peter affirms here in 2 Peter 1:16-18. Jesus clearly knew that this event was approaching the timing in 16:21-27 affirms this as the transfiguration event is 6 days and about a week transpires between Jesus' words about the cross in Matt 16 and His glorification. Jesus had left them with the statement of verse 28 about His glorification and waited a week before answering it. We can gain a little sympathy and understand the mood of these disciples as we travel back a few verses in Matthew's account to 16:21-27. It is here that we read of Jesus' emphasis for the “first time” (verse 21) that He began to speak about His death. It hadn't been spoken about, the

crowds were increasing, His popularity was at an all-time high, and they were perhaps thinking that what they believed about the prophetic word was going to be fulfilled at any moment and Jerusalem would be the capital of the world! It took Peter by such a surprise that his impulses took over and in verse 22 he says to Jesus whom he recognized as the Messiah, “*Far be it from You, **Lord**; this shall **NOT HAPPEN** to You.*” To which Peter hears Jesus speak in love towards him “Get behind me”. It is ***Jesus recognizing Peter’s love but also his ignorance and Jesus recognizing the insidious nature of satan who will manipulate that love and friendship to take Jesus off course so he could save himself from destruction.*** Then in verse 24, Jesus lets his disciples know that as His followers they too must “*give ourselves away*” if we are to live, we must die, and if we find ourselves then we must give ourselves away. Jesus was talking to them about the great principle of abiding with Him in a continual relation that requires that we too will need to “take up his cross and follow Him”! That was the mood of these three as they traveled up the mountain, they were under the shadow of Jesus’ death, but they were about to see it unfold since the key to GLORY always involves a climb up the hill of agony. It is only when we do so that we can be “**transfigured**”! That’s where Matthew takes his readers in 17:1 “Jesus **took** Peter, James and John”. That word “**TOOK**” in the original Greek language is impregnated with significance as it is rendered in Hebrews as “**OFFERED**”. This wasn’t a casual climb or hike with Jesus...Oh no my friend this was Abraham with Isaac moment as what they believed was being offered on the altar of truth. Jesus offered them as “**Jesus took...them up on a high mountain.**” *The fact that Jesus’ face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as the light indicates that this walk up the mount was at evening time or twilight as they say the night up there and return the next day.* **As often the case God’s glory shines the brightest when we make the climb with only Him by us, when the darkness of our understanding has dimmed the brightness of truth, with nobody near in stillness we climb to the summit of discovery!** The traditional tourist stop for the mount of transfiguration is Mt. Tabor, but we know according to 16:13 that they were in the region of Caesarea Philippi and that is more than a six-day journey to Mt. Tabor. So, the true place of transfiguration is Mt. Herman which is the mountain right above Caesarea Philippi. Its name means “sacred mountain”.

- B. Second, **Mark 9:2-8** reveals that Peter told Mark of four things that he never forgot about the event of Jesus’ “transformation”.
1. Vs. 2-3 **What Jesus looked like:** The Greek word Mark uses to describe Jesus’ transformation is “*metamorphoomai*” and it is where we get our English word “*Metamorphosis*”. The word refers to the “**act of giving outward expression of one’s inner character.**” A full translation of this would be “***Jesus’ outward expression was changed before them and it did so because it was a true representation of His inner nature.***” The usual outward expression of Jesus was the “*Man of Sorrows, the one acquainted with our grief*”. But suddenly He was transformed into the Glory of The Son of God - the essence of Deity - which He had always possessed, and it shone through the clay walls of His humanity and even through the garments He wore. It was the same dazzling radiance the angels saw in Jesus’ preincarnate state that Paul describes in Philippians chapter 2 verse 6 where he wrote concerning Jesus that He was, “*in the form of God, and did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.*” Mark says in verse 3, “His

clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.” Matthew adds that *“His face shone like the sun”* and the point is that in this transfiguration Jesus’ radiant glory was not borrowed like our moon from the sun’s reflection instead His radiant glory came from within, from who He truly was. In fact, the word *“shining”* in Greek indicates that it was **ACTIVE** and as such a picture of what He will be like to all who see Him during His millennial reign. This was a momentary glimpse of His eternal glory that shone through the veil of His humanity. It is what Jesus would pray to the Father a year later in John chapter 17:5 that all of us Christians would experience when He said, *“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”* **One of the implications of the transfiguration is that Jesus clearly didn’t need to die or pass-through death to receive this glory.** He clearly always possessed it and was able to pass back across the boundary of time into eternity without passing through death. That reminds us about two things with regards to His death on the cross: It wasn’t ever about Jesus regaining that which He lost because clearly, He never lost it. Second, it reminds us that Jesus was clearly not afraid to lose His earthly life because it would never change or alter who He essentially was.

2. Vs. 4 **Who was with Jesus:** Mark records for us that Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus. *The original Greek language has it that they were actively engaged in a conversation with Him.* I would very much wish that Peter would have had the forethought to write that one down for us but for now we will just have to wait until we see Him face-to-face. There are several interesting details in this story that indirectly lead us to some interesting conclusions about eternity with Jesus.
 - Jesus makes no introductions as to whom these two men are and there were no photographs of them and yet they seemingly know exactly who they are. *That tells us that in glory there will be no need for introductions; we will just know each other instantly!*
 - Why are the two Elijah and Moses? Why not David and Abraham? Well, I believe that they represent several things:
 - a. They represent the composition of the two great sections of the Old Testament scriptures, **Moses = the law** and **Elijah = the prophets**. The law according to Paul’s words in Galatians *“drove people to Jesus”* and the prophets *“provided the map and directions as to where to find Him”*.
 - b. They also represent the two ways which believers can enter heaven: **Moses = death** and **Elijah = caught up into heaven or the rapture**. Both ways are represented in the transfiguration of Jesus. This was Moses’ first arrival into the land of promise. Moses had been left up on a mountain overlooking the land of promise and was never allowed to enter in for his misrepresentation of the character of God. But here in glory Moses gets to come into the land he could only see at a distance. That tells us that *there are experiences here in this life that we may never fully understand but that the prohibition will be forever lifted in heaven. Moses finally made it past his failures and so will we!*
 - c. Finally, though Mark doesn’t record the conversation **Luke 9:31 tells us that the general theme of the conversation was of “Jesus’ death which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”** The conversation centered upon Jesus’ soon exit from his earthly tabernacle back to His heavenly one by means of His death

upon a cross for our sins. **This causes me to wonder if the conversation wasn't specific with reference to each man: Moses' conversation would have centered upon how Jesus' imminent sacrifice as the Lamb of God would be the fulfillment of what the animal sacrifices pointed to in the law. Elijah's conversation would have centered upon how Jesus' death and resurrection was to fulfill all those prophecies in the scriptures.**

3. Vs. 5-6 **The proposal of Peter:** The third interesting detail that Mark records is Peter's reaction to Jesus, Elijah and Moses discussing what Luke has told us was Jesus' upcoming death in Jerusalem. The Greek doesn't indicate that Peter had been a part of the discussion at all. In fact, the word "*answered*" is a compound word that means "*to give off one's judgment without being asked*". Peter then goes on to say that it was "*good*" for the three of them to be there and uses a word for good that means, "*beautiful*" or excellent and then suggests that the three of them get started in making three tents for shelter. I'm certain that Peter wanted Mark to include the reason for this outburst was extreme fear. But nonetheless Peter had not been called to say anything and silence would have been a far better course of action than what he said. The assessment in all accounts where this story is recorded is that Peter spoke foolishly. I wonder if the point of Peter's words in fear was to suggest headquarters that would set in motion a worldwide movement? There are always two kinds of people in these kinds of situations: Those who have something to say and those who have to say something! And Peter like many of us at times falls into the latter category.
4. Vs. 7-8 **The voice of God from the cloud:** Immediately after this foolish proposal we have the fourth and final recorded detail of the transfiguration. Mark writes of the suddenness of the appearance of the cloud and gives us a better understanding of the cloud as being a specific shape and size and not a vapor thus it speaks of the Shekinah Glory which guided Israel out of Egypt and then resided above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. Matthew tells us that it was "*bright cloud*" that a voice spoke saying, "*This is My beloved son. Hear Him!*" The emphasis is upon two things: That Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, and that He is the beloved One. They are told to be constantly hearing Him and the word means more than just listening; it means to be actively obeying what you heard. It appears that this came as a rebuke from the Father to Peter's fear-based response saying in essence, "*Peter, don't put My Son on the same level as Moses and Elijah. Listen to Him!*" Jesus was the only One to fulfill all the predictions of the prophets and is the fulfillment of the law, He was no mere man like Moses and Elijah. There were three occasions direct from heaven concerning the work of Jesus: At His baptism, which when He began His ministry, where He was addressed "*You are My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" Here on the Mount of Transfiguration, where the Father speaks to correct Peter's mistake. And the final is in John 12:28 where the Father responds to Jesus' prayer to glorify His name, to which the Father responds, "*I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*"

There comes a time when all of our searching for answers to the perplexing questions of life ends at the feet of Jesus and you look around and He is the only One there. The transfiguration is a confirmation that Jesus had lived a sinless life and could have gone directly into heaven. He

didn't need to leave humanity with any explanation of justification for our sin before His departure to the Father. Instead, Jesus came down from Mount Hermon, to climb Mount Calvary, the Mount of our redemption! Sometimes I think that we ought to rename this event from the "Transfiguration" to the "Renunciation" as Jesus would not claim His natural consummation, He didn't claim the "Transfiguration" instead He chose the Cross! He left the natural mountain of Glory and came down the mountain so that we could see a new and living way that through Him we would be taking to Glory. He lays His glory aside and chooses the grave so that we, who were bound to the grave, could see glory! Our "ASCENT" to glory is made possible because of Jesus' "DESCENT" to the grave! And as Jesus turned to make that "descent", Peter records the words of the Father: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". The transfiguration only finds its truest definition at Jesus' death and Peter can say as John says, that they were "eyewitnesses" of Jesus Glory and Majesty!