

2 Corinthians 3:12 thru 4:2
Transfiguration Sunday
February 14, 2010

2 Corinthians 3:12-18 thru 4:2 (New International Version)

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. ¹⁴But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect^[a] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

¹Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

During the cold winter months, more and more people from the north spend some time living or vacationing in warmer states like Florida, Arizona, and Texas. We usually refer to them as "snowbirds." How can you tell when someone has been vacationing or wintering down south over the winter months? You can tell it by their appearance. Since they have had more time in the sun and have been able to get out and be more active, they usually have a nice tan and just look healthier and happier than us pasty white northerners!

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus' appearance also changed, not because he got to spend more time in the sun, but because he is the Son of God. On a mountaintop Jesus' appearance was transfigured, that is changed, as he gave a glimpse of his glory to the disciples who were there. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as light!

Did you know that as believers in Jesus, we are being transfigured too? That's what Paul was getting at in the second lesson for today. What is that transfigures, or changes us? Is it our will, our strength, our good and moral behavior? It's not our not our doing at all, but it's the glorious gospel message about Jesus and what he did to save us. What we learn today on this Transfiguration Sunday is this:

The Glory of the Gospel Transfigures Us!

- I. With hope for our hearts,**
- II. With freedom for our lives,**
- III. With courage for our work.**

In the Old Testament reading as well as in our sermon text, we hear about how Moses had to cover his face with a veil as he came down from the mountain after receiving the law of God. He did that because his face was reflecting the glory of God which frightened the people and because he didn't want them to gaze at it while it was fading away. Paul says that the glory of law would fade because it could not save us. The law only condemns. But another covenant has glory that never will fade and does give us the righteousness we need for heaven. It's the gospel message about how Jesus saved us by his death on the cross.

After explaining all that Paul continues with our text and writes about another veil, not the one that Moses used to cover his face. It's the veil of unbelief. ¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. ¹⁴But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when

Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. **16**But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

What's Paul getting at here? Although Jesus is the only Savior from sin, many of the Jews of Paul's day still believed that they could be saved by keeping the law. That ignorance, that false belief was like a veil covering their hearts with darkness. That kind of belief offers no hope, only despair because how can one ever know whether or not he has done enough good to earn heaven.

However, when one is brought to faith in Jesus that veil of unbelief and despair is taken away. How so? Consider what Jesus did. Doesn't the Bible tell us that Jesus obeyed all of God's Law perfectly for us? It does, and he did. Doesn't the Bible tell us that on the cross Jesus took our place and suffered the punishment we deserved for our sins? It does, and he did. And doesn't the Bible tell us that on the basis of his perfect life and perfect sacrifice God offers the righteousness we need for heaven? It does, and God has! And when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you believe that, the veil is lifted off your heart. Now you have the hope of heaven. That's how the glorious gospel message transfigures, changes us! It takes away our fear of death and despair of hell and gladdens our hearts with the hope of eternal life. And what that means dear friends, even if we never get to go to a warmer place during winter, we know that we have a home in which we will live in the heavenly glow of eternal life!

II. But that glorious gospel message changes even more. It transfigures us by giving us freedom for our daily living. Paul continued: **17**Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **18**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." When a person is brought to faith in Jesus through the Spirit, then there is freedom for living!

First of all there is freedom from the coercion of the Law. As believers, we don't have to be forced to do the things that please God; we now gladly do them because it's our way of thanking Jesus. There is also freedom from the power and guilt of sin. When we know that Jesus died and took away all my sin, then why would we want to keep doing that which nailed him to the cross in the first place?! But when we do fall into sin, and we all do daily, sin doesn't have to control us with guilt and shame. Daily we can go to the cross and find the assurance that our sin is forgiven. And then there is freedom from death. Since Jesus rose from the dead, we know that the grave will not be able to chain us forever. We shall be free from it forever. That's what the glorious gospel message brings to us--freedom.

When we contemplate, continue to look at that glorious gospel news it changes us from the inside out. With unveiled faces we reflect the Lord's glory and we gradually are changed more and more into the likeness of God. Do you want to more Godlike in how you live in your marriage? Do you want to be more Godlike as you live together as a family? Do you want to be free from those pet sins that keep dragging you down? Do you want to be more gentle, peace loving, kind, and good? Then spend more time contemplating, looking at the glorious gospel message which shows us Jesus who died to take away our sin. The closer you draw to the cross the more it will transfigure you with freedom in your living.

III. But it does even more. It gives us courage for our gospel work as a church. **1**Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. **2**Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

As one studies Paul's letter to the Corinthians one quickly learns that Paul's ministry in Corinth was not easy. There were cliques in the congregation and people were taking sides with the pastors. People were abusing the Lord's Supper and promoting strange worship practices. Some members were living in open adultery and other members were suing each other in the courts. And there were false prophets, "super apostles" Paul called them, who were trying to undermine Paul's ministry accusing him of being untrustworthy and trying to convince members that they had a better message than Paul. Paul had reason to be discouraged. But he wasn't He knew that the glorious gospel message about Jesus had power and it would triumph over evil and change the hearts and lives of sinners. So what did Paul do? Give in or give up? No, Paul says: "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

What appropriate words of encouragement on this Sunday when we install our newly elected officers. Since we have the glorious gospel message we shouldn't be discouraged if it doesn't always seem to get the intended results we want, when we want. So often we wonder and worry, "Why isn't our church always full? Why do we struggle with our offerings? Why are there so many problems in our marriages and in our families?" Why do there have to be problems even in the church? When we see such things we can become discouraged. At such times there may even be the temptation to resort to tactics or methods or programs, that in and of themselves may not be morally wrong, but are not worthy of the gospel message about Jesus. So through Paul God is telling us: "If the gospel has the power to remove the veil of unbelief from our hearts so that we now have the hope of going to heaven through what Jesus did; and if the gospel has the power to give us real freedom for living God-pleasing lives now and forever in heaven, then don't lose heart when things don't always go the way you want or as fast as you want. Don't be discouraged when others criticize the meager results and would try 'tricks and treats' to accomplish what only the gospel can accomplish. Rather preach the gospel. Openly, honestly, without apology confident that it is the power of God unto salvation." The gospel can change fear into courage!

Dear friends, today we are leaving the Epiphany season as we descend the glorious Mount of Transfiguration. This week we will enter another Lenten season. Through the Word we will begin anew the slow and agonizing climb with Jesus to Calvary's cross to see all that he suffered to win our salvation. As we do, let's remember, that even though the suffering will be brutal, the days will be dark, and the sun itself stopped shining on Good Friday, the glory of Lord will still be there. It is hidden in our Savior's suffering which we can see in the Word. Through the darkness of our Savior's suffering and death, you and I will see the glory of heaven above. That's the message that transfigures you and me! Amen.