

**Matthew 17:1-9 – The Transfiguration of Our Lord – Scripture Alone – February 19, 2023**  
*+In Nomine Jesu+*

There is this great story in the Old Testament about King Josiah. He had been king in Jerusalem for eighteen years. And he demanded an audit of the Temple's assets. Governments like to know how much money we have. Besides, they had a building project to finance.

But in counting the money, they discovered something in the temple treasury. They found—all covered in the dust of neglect—the Book of the Law—God's Holy Word. Now, it makes you wonder about what had been going on at the temple without the use of the Scriptures—without an awareness of the Scriptures. I guess they were just doing their own thing. Their spirituality was whatever they wanted it to be.

And, we do actually know that Josiah's father brought false religion and idolatry into Judah. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And his reign was so chaotic and unstable that he was assassinated by his own servants. Josiah didn't exactly have a good example to follow.

Even so, how did the king and priests just lose God's Word? Now, the Prophets were still around. But I guess no one was listening. Anyway, Josiah—after figuring out what this book was—had read aloud to him and the priests. If it was the whole Torah—all the books of Moses—that would have taken about fifteen full hours. But clearly it was time well spent.

When hearing God's Word, Josiah was keenly aware that he and the people had not been living as God designed. They had not been worshipping the one true God in the way He had prescribed. They looked just like the nations around them. And he tore His clothes in repentance.

But his response wasn't just regret—not just contrition—as important as that was. Instead, he began the process of restoring the ways of the Lord in his kingdom. It is as Jesus Himself says in Luke 1, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God *and* keep it!”

And so, they began an elaborate system of reforms to bring the people and practices in line with God's Word. They removed the idolatrous images. They tore down false worship sites. They kept the Passover. And now they read the Word of God again—in the presence of all the people—fifteen more hours. And this hearing brought repentance and faith and obedience back to God's people.

God's Word does what it says. The people had resisted it for generations. But now, it was getting a fair hearing. The Bible describes the nature of Josiah's reign as king. “And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” And it was the Word of God—discovered in some dark forgotten place at the temple—that changed everything for Josiah.

With this story in mind, I want us to spend a little time with Peter's words about the Transfiguration in his second epistle today. Three of the Gospels record the Transfiguration. We heard it from Matthew this year. John alone omits it—although he hints at it at the beginning of his first epistle. Clearly, this was a paramount experience for Peter, James, and John. The biblical authors can't stop talking about it, at least when they were permitted.

And although this was quite a sight for these men—a bright heavenly cloud—witnessing Jesus in His true glory—this glory was also connected to hearing the voice of

God. At the Transfiguration, the Father spoke, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

And here Psalm 2 is fulfilled. “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’”

But as wonderful as this experience was, Peter puts emphasis on God speaking. And now he says that we have something more sure—the prophetic Word. By this he means the Old Testament—but by extension the whole New Testament, including that Word spoken at the Transfiguration. In fact, Peter will describe apostolic writings as Scripture just like the Old Testament. God has given us His Word in the Scriptures—and we can trust His Word.

The whole idea of biblical inspiration is found in our passage today. When we think of something being inspiring—we usually mean that it gives us encouragement—it helps us dream big. It’s Patrick Mahomes fighting through an ankle injury to win the super bowl. And now we feel inspired to do something lofty. We join the gym or we pick up the next great classic novel.

But we use that word in a very different way as we talk about the Scriptures. As we hear here, God’s Word is a light shining in a dark place. And God’s Word came through the Apostles and Prophets as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. True prophecy—the kind recorded for us in the Scriptures—isn’t infected by human reasoning.

Now, of course, as we read the Bible, we are reading human words. Peter wrote this book. We have the words of Moses, David, and Matthew as texts today as well. They write in their own styles—in their own languages. They tell the story their own way.

And yet, there is another sense to the Scriptures as well. These are divine words. God the Holy Spirit gave the words—inspired the words. We were given exactly what He intended. The Scriptures contain no error. They are without conflict—without contradiction—without corruption. The Biblical authors delivered a product to us that is—at the same time—human and divine.

As Lutherans, we have excellent theological categories for such ideas. It is not the only place where we confess such a truth. We say something very similar about the incarnate Christ. He is one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine. We say something similar about Holy Communion. It is at the same time—mysteriously and sacramentally—bread and wine, and the body and blood our Lord. God works in these ways. And with His institution, we can trust them.

There is a new trend in Bibles these days—and it is something worth noticing. People are producing and buying quality Bibles. Excellent translations. Study notes. Top-grain leather covers. You can spend hundreds of dollars on a Bible. And I do actually like something about this trend.

Our money goes to what matters most in our lives. As Jesus say in Matthew 6, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And the Bible is a treasure. Psalm 19 says that of the Scriptures, “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”

Think of your Bible as an investment with eternal significance. Make sure you understand the different translations and editions before you buy. If you are still using your same Bible from 50 years ago, it is time for an update. And remember, if you are buying an expensive Bible—it's not meant for the coffee table—it's meant to be read. And it's meant to have your heart.

The inspiration of the Scriptures has several implications. Let me offer a few. We read the Scriptures as a whole—in their entirety. God has given us all Scriptures for our learning. This is where a Bible reading plan is important—getting the text into our hearts beyond this hour on Sunday morning. Paul says in Ephesus, in Acts 20, that we are to embrace the whole counsel of God.

And the full witness to Jesus Christ can be clearly heard only in the Bible's interrelatedness. All sixty-six books. We preach Christ from all the Scriptures. We need to hear the close connection between the Old and New Testaments—between prophecy and fulfilment—judgment and grace—cross and resurrection—faith and obedience—command and promise—having and hoping—already and not yet.

In addition, we read them as our authority. We put our ideas, our lifestyles, our religion, ourselves under the authority of what the Scriptures say. Thus, it is not our heart that determines our course in life—but God's Word.

And maybe it is best to just wander back to where we started today with Josiah. It is very hard to get people to change. Josiah had generations of error and evil and idolatry before him. And yet he treated the Word of God as his authority for worship and for life. And he changed—a whole generation changed for the glory of God. He recognized God's authority over his life—and over the kingdom of Judah. And it was the Scriptures that showed him the way.

And finally, inspiration suggests that we enter into the story of the Bible as if it is our own story. We own this history as our own. We are God's people—and these stories are the stories of *God's people*. In doing so, the Biblical accounts come alive for us in new ways.

Here, we receive our part of that which once took place for our salvation. Forgetting and losing ourselves, we pass through the Red Sea to Sinai—and finally through the Jordan to the Promised Land. We follow the disciples in fear and amazement as they witness the appearance of Moses and Elijah standing with Jesus manifested in His glory. We are uprooted from our own experiences—and taken back to the holy history of what God was doing on earth in those unique moments of deliverance.

And this is where God wants to deal with us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it this way, “What is important is not that God is a spectator and participant in our life today, but that we are attentive listeners and participants in God's action in the sacred story, the story of Christ on earth.” God is with us today—but only as long as we are there. A complete reversal occurs here.

And thus we must know the Scriptures as the church fathers and reformers knew them. We must not shy away from the work required for this task. We become acquainted with the Scriptures, first and foremost for the sake of our salvation.

But besides this, there are serious reasons to make this challenge absolutely necessary for us. People often justify decisions and lifestyles based on life experience or personal intuition. But we seek for God's will in God's Word—as we make decisions in our lives. And with His Word, we guide the people He has placed around us. We help people with His Word—with instructions, admonitions, and the comfort of the gospel. We speak God's Word to one another. This is crucial in the life of the church.

So let me invite you to a high view of Scripture. It is a true treasure. God's Word is inspired. It is breathed out by the Holy Spirit Himself. And He means what He says. Let that sink in for a minute. This is the Word that God most wanted us to have—most wanted us to hear. He has preserved His Word as a whole. He has given it to us as the authoritative Word. And He calls us to enter the world of the Word.

Salvation is from outside ourselves. We find salvation not in our life stories, but only in the story of Jesus Christ. And only those who allow themselves to found in Jesus Christ—the one revealed to us by the Father Himself on the Mount of Transfiguration—are with God—and God with them. Our deliverance is found in the story that the Scriptures tell. Because it pleased God to act for us there, it is only there that we will find help.

So with Peter, we confess, “We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*