

TEXT: 17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Dear Friends in Christ, our Glorious Savior,

Could you have done it? Could you have done what Peter, James and John did, not tell anyone what they had seen and heard? Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen and heard until after his resurrection. From all we know in the Bible they obeyed Jesus and kept the experience they had up there on the mountain to themselves.

But what they knew burst forth after Jesus’ resurrection, didn’t it? After Jesus resurrection they had to speak what they had seen and heard, even though they were threatened and put in prison by the Sanhedrin for speaking up and confessing what they knew about Jesus.

We have no such restrictions. Jesus tells us and all believers to be his witnesses, to confess what we know about Jesus. Jesus wants us to **confess to the world what we have seen and heard to everyone**. Let’s consider that directive this morning. Let’s consider what we have seen and heard through the eyes of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples and what we have also seen since then through 2000 years of history. We have an important confession for the people of today just as the disciples did in their day.

What did the disciples see and what did it mean for them? They saw the glory that Jesus had before the world was created and which he had up until he became incarnate. Remember what Jesus prayed in the upper room? “**Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.**” Matthew tells us in our text that the disciples Peter, John and James saw that glory. ² **There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.**” The word in the Greek for transform is “*metemorphw, qh.*” *The idea is change (meta-) of form (morphê)* We get the English word metamorphosis from that Greek word. What happened to Jesus appearance and form was as drastic a change as a caterpillar becoming a butterfly or a tadpole becoming a frog. Brilliance and majesty are connected with Jesus appearance: his face as bright as the sun and even his clothes were affected by that glory, his clothes became as white as the light. The other gospel writers said that “**His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them**” (Mk. 9:3) and “**his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning**” (Lk. 9:29). Human language is inadequate for describing what they saw. Peter was an eyewitness. He described what he saw. “**...We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.**” John too saw this transfiguration. He wrote, “**...We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only**” (John 1:14). Christ revealed his glory to them through his miracles, his resurrection and his transfiguration too. They concluded that he is the only begotten Son of God.

But that’s not all they saw. They saw Moses and Elijah. Moses had died 1500n years before Christ. Elijah was taken to heaven about 880 year before this event. These two most important Old Testament prophets “became visible,” that is, they “appeared,” to the disciples on that mountain with Jesus in his glorified form. In other words, Peter, James and John saw visible proof of eternal life, visible proof of the concept of life after death in a place called heaven. Matthew tells us that they appeared and were “**talking with Jesus.**” (v. 3) Luke adds the detail concerning the substance of that conversation when he writes that they talked about Christ’s death (Lk. 9:3).

They also saw the Heavenly Father’s presence. ⁵ **While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them. This cloud** is not described as a mist or a murky cloud, but as being “**bright,**” illuminated or “**radiant.**” (fwteinh.) This reminds us of how God appeared sometimes to his Old Testament people Israel. God had led his Old Testament people for 40 years through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This is what the disciples saw and it frightened them so that they fell to the ground, collapsed. What they saw is what we call a theophany. Did they pass out? Jesus immediately touches them. Jesus literally “**takes hold of them**” and says “Fear not.” The text says they were “exceedingly” afraid. They were scared “out of their wits.” Sinful human beings are afraid of the holy, Almighty God.

But it wasn’t just what they saw that scared them. It’s what they heard too. They heard the voice of God the Almighty.

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” What God said to them made a tremendous impact on them. Peter’s words years later reveals that impact. ¹⁶ **We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.** ¹⁷ **For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** ¹⁸ **We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.** ¹⁹ **And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.** ²⁰ **Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation.** ²¹ **For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”** (2 Peter 1:16-21) What the disciples heard and saw on that mountain made them more certain about what the prophets of the Old Testament wrote. And that certainty lead to them seeing how important it was to obey Jesus. For God himself was speaking to us through the prophets and the Son, Jesus. The writer of the Hebrews also said this. **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed as heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he inherited is superior to theirs”** (Hebrews 1:1-4).

Peter, James and John would not be evolutionists today. They believed that Jesus was the Creator of the universe. (*And so should we!*) Peter, James and John would not fear global warming today because they believed that Jesus sustains all things with his mighty Word. Peter, James and John would not believe that you have to do good works to save yourselves from hell because Jesus has already purified us from all sins. Peter, James and John believed that everything Jesus taught was truth and that he is full of grace to save us. That’s what the prophets taught. That’s what Jesus taught. We can be absolutely sure of what they taught because God has revealed to us who Jesus is, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased! Listen (obey) to him.”** Jesus is the perfect Son of God. Like his heavenly Father, he tells us the truth. Like the disciples we are to confess that truth!

We heard about what they saw and concluded for us to learn. What about us? What have we seen and heard that we can share with the world to make the words of Jesus even more certain. We have the witness of Gamaliel to share as proof. Remember Gamaliel’s famous words of wisdom to his Jewish counterparts in the Sanhedrin who wanted to kill the apostles because of their witness to the resurrected Savior. This is what he advised them: (Acts 5:27-40)

“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ **“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”** ²⁹ **Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!** ³⁰ **The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross.** ³¹ **God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.** ³² **We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”** ³³ **When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.** ³⁴ **But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.** ³⁵ **Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.** ³⁶ **Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing.** ³⁷ **After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.** ³⁸ **Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.** ³⁹ **But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”** ⁴⁰ **His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”**

What do you and I have to share with the world that we have seen and heard. We have seen and heard how the enemies of the true church both within the church (false teachers) and outside the church (secular government) have tried to destroy Christ’s church, but after 2000 years the Church still stands. If we take Gamaliel’s words and advice seriously, as the enemies of Christ did in his days, then what must we conclude? In his words, **“If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fall. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”** After 2000 years the Church still stands. Millions have believed Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Millions have gone to heaven as a result of faith in Jesus. For salvation is found in no one else. Let this be our confession. For we also, like them, **“cannot help speaking what we have seen and heard”** (Acts 4:20). Amen.