

A TALE OF TWO TRANSFIGURATIONS

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the LORD'S presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

I have two cards. They are very similar. They are both made out of plastic. They both have that magnetic strip on the back. If I would walk into a store and pick up something, all I would have to do is hand them either card and I can walk out of the store without having to pull money out of my wallet or write a check. So they are very similar. But they are also very different. One is a credit card, the other is a gift card. If I use the credit card, I can walk out of the store with my items, but sooner or later I will have to pay for them. I will get a bill and if I don't pay it all in full, I will get charged a rather high interest rate and pay more for it. Not with the gift card. It is free. There are no monthly bills, no penalties, no payment plans. Whatever I buy with the gift card is 100% free.

Today is transfiguration Sunday and we are looking at really two different transfigurations. One involves Jesus, the other involves Moses. Both are similar. Both occurred on mountain tops. In both God's glory shines. Both also speak of covenants or promise between God and man. But they are also different. First, Moses' glory wasn't his own; it was a reflection of God's glory where Jesus glowed with his own glory as true God. Both represent two separate agreements or covenants. Moses' represents the old Sinaitic covenant where God said, "I will be your God if you do this and this and this." It is a list of laws including the Ten Commandments. The second represents God's new covenant or promise of free and unconditional forgiveness of sins in Christ.

There is one other difference which the Apostle Paul helps us understand in 2 Corinthians 3. Moses had to cover up his face. Paul writes, "**We 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.**" The glory reflected in Moses' face faded. Today we will look at the tale of these two transfigurations and see the fading glory of Moses verses the unfading glory of Christ.

I. Moses' fading glory.

When we talk about Moses and the giving of the Law and the Ten Commandments, we may at first think that the Law is a bad thing. It condemns people of sin. It kills them and punishes with death. If I were in a room of people who all were telling me what I was doing wrong, I would be hurt and want to get out of there. People are afraid of the law because it shows us when we sin.

But in reality the Law is good and a glorious thing. Just look at what happened when God gave his Law at Sinai. We are told that the whole mountain was covered with smoke, it trembled violently, and there was the sound of a trumpet. It came in a most glorious way.

The Law is glorious because of where it comes from. It comes from God. It is a transcript of his mind. It reflects his own holiness and righteousness. His Law has no flaws like human laws. There is no question that his Law is perfect and holy.

And the Law is glorious in what it expects. Remember, the Ten Commandments are only a summary of the Law. We can also summarize it as love God and love neighbor or simply love. It tells us how to love. Want to love your neighbor? Then don't kill or hurt him, protect his property and don't steal it, don't tell lies or gossip about him, but defend him. Just imagine what a glorious thing it would be if people did what the Commandments said? How would that effect government, the work place, politics, marriages? It would make them all better.

All of that would be glorious. But there is a problem. The glory of the Law fades as it did in Moses' face. It's not the Law's fault; the Law is good and glorious. It fades because we can't do what it says. It is like NASCAR. Imagine if they took Jimmy Johnson's Chevy and got it all ready for a race. That car has as good a chance to win as any other. But if you put me in it, I will surely lose. I would probably drive no faster than 70 mph and make sure I have five car lengths between me and the car ahead of me. The car is fine; it can't win with me as the driver. The law's glory fades because we are incapable of keeping it.

Our text is a perfect example of this. This isn't the first time Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of stone. It is the second time. Remember how Moses smashed the first set? When he came down, he found that the people had already broken the covenant and were worshipping a golden calf. That is a picture of how quick it takes us to stop loving God and our neighbors and commit sins.

That is why Paul says that the Law kills. Yes, the law does hold out the hope of pleasing God and earning heaven *if we keep it*. The law also says that those who break it die both on earth and in hell.

II. Jesus' unfading glory.

But there is another glory that far outshines the glory of the law, like how the sun drowns out completely any light coming from the headlights of your car. This glory is symbolized by the glory displayed on Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. This glory is not the Law but the Gospel. The Bible speaks of this gospel as the "new covenant" which God promised in Jeremiah, **"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. . . . "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."**

He gives us this new covenant because we can't keep the old. Christ makes it possible, his perfect life and innocent death and resurrection. The old covenant said, "Do this." The new agreement says, "Look what I do. I give you heaven as a gift." The old says, "The wages of your sin is death." The new says, "I don't remember what sins you committed." The old puts all the work on us. The new put the burden on Christ, not us.

III. What does this mean to me?

So, what does this mean? Well, do we want to live in the fading glory of Moses' face or the never-ending glory of Jesus? That question is much more difficult than we think. Of course, sitting here now we see how much better is the glory of Jesus, but do we always view it that way?

St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, **"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they do not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."** So many are blinded from seeing God's glory in Christ. But do you think the devil is content in blinding only unbelievers? No. He also wants to blind believers. A Barna poll from 2016 reveals that a majority of people don't see the glory of Christ. 55% said they believe or agree that if a person is generally good, or does good to their neighbor, then they will earn a place in heaven. The answer should be 0%, but even those who hear the gospel every Sunday can be confused. The world operates under the idea of the law. Good people are to be rewarded and bad people punished. Work hard, you should get a raise or promotion. But we know we are not good enough, so we bend the rules. So what if you didn't come to a complete stop at the stop sign, at least you didn't just barrel right through it. How tempting it is to approach God that way. Lead a pretty decent life, God should reward you. But all of this is the fading glory of the law because we fall far short of God's glory no matter how hard we try.

That is why we need two transfigurations. We need to see that the fading of the glory of the law so we see the never fading glory of Christ. A young man once asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him to recite the commandments. He answered correctly, love God and neighbor. Then, with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus showed him that he only thought he loved his neighbor. He really didn't. Suddenly his glory as a law keeper faded. But what do we see in Christ? His glory never fades. He did it all. There is always forgiveness for every sin at every time.

So which card do you want, the credit card or the gift card? With the credit card you still have to pay and maybe with interest and penalties. The gift card lives up to its name. It is yours as a gift. Which transfiguration do you want, the fading glory of Moses or the everlasting glory of Jesus? Which covenant do you want, by the law which promises punishment or by the gospel which shows Jesus did it all for you? Amen.