

Last Sunday after the Epiphany: Transfiguration – February 11, 2018

## **Jesus, The Shining Image Of God**

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

- 1) Sinful people are naturally blind to this gospel truth
- 2) God makes the gospel's light shine in our blinded hearts

The apostles followed Jesus all over Israel. Jesus had hand-selected them to be his full-time students and to learn all he taught them. The apostles knew Jesus was something special from the miracles and teaching he did. If they were around when Jesus officially began his ministry at his baptism by John the Baptist, they would have seen another indication of who Jesus is as evidenced by the full Trinity. God the Father spoke from heaven saying **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased” (Mark 1:11)**. God the Son, that is, Jesus Christ, was baptized. And God the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. Yet, as attention-getting as all those signs were of who Jesus really was, nothing could prepare Peter, James, and John for what they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. We read those verses earlier in our Gospel (Mark 9:2-9) where Jesus let his divine glory shine while talking with Old Testament heroes Elijah and Moses. This was Jesus' greatest display of divine power until Holy Week. But when people today read what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, not everyone leaves with the understanding that Jesus truly is the Son of God. Why is that? Why is it a big deal that Jesus is one of the 3 persons of the Trinity? These are the questions that the Apostle Paul answers in our verses for this morning from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 4. For it is here that we see how, and what a blessing it is, that Jesus is the shining image of God himself.

The public display of **“the glory of [Jesus] Christ, who is image of God”** (2 Corinthians 4:4b) is the central gospel truth that the Apostle Paul focuses us on this morning. When we call Jesus the image of God, it's a big deal. This isn't some form of symbolism or foreshadowing that you'll find in English class. Jesus is not simply the representation of God as an eagle with arrows and olive branches represents our country.<sup>1</sup> When Paul says that Jesus is the image of God, he means that Jesus is the physical appearance of God himself. Where Jesus is, God is because Jesus is God. When Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' shining face on the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw God's shining face.

But as I mentioned earlier, not everyone realizes that Jesus is God. This is because of Satan, the god of this age, has blinded people's minds. As the Apostle Paul tells us, **“the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that**

**they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”** (2 Corinthians 4:4). Paul is correct to call Satan “the god of this age,” that is, god with a lower case “g,” because he has supernatural power over this earth. Satan is very much a reality and his power is far greater than our own.<sup>ii</sup> And it is with that frightening power that he has corrupted us down to our very core. So that those outside of Christianity don’t know what God offers in his Word. They vainly find their assurance of eternal life by comparing themselves to others hoping they’re good enough to earn God’s favor. Minds blinded by Satan find pleasure in all the wrong places. Obvious examples like enjoying the party at a drunken level or committing adultery in the heart and in the actual act. But even people’s motivation to help their neighbor can often be corrupted so that friendly efforts are an attempt to atone for some past mistake.

The Apostle Paul describes the person outside of Christianity as being under a veil so that they cannot see light of the gospel truth – that Jesus is the shining image of God (2 Corinthians 4:3). This veil isn’t like some fashion piece of a bride’s wedding dress which doesn’t actually obscure her field of vision. This is a thick veil that shuts out the shining light of Christ and leaves the person in the darkness of sin. But there’s more to Satan’s veil than being blind and in darkness. They are spiritually perishing with eternal suffering in hell on their horizon.

That is what you and I used to be. From the time we came into the world until we had the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts through faith, we had Satan’s veil over our minds blinding us and corrupting us down to the core. I give thanks to God that you and I are no longer under Satan’s veil. We see Jesus’ light and know that he is the shining image of God himself. Where Jesus is, God is. But who we used to be has not left us. Just because we call ourselves Christians does not mean we don’t struggle today. That former corrupted self still strives to retake our identity.<sup>iii</sup> We need to be continually on guard for this. When you need help in your own problems, who do you go to? Do you go to the god of this age or to Jesus, the shining image of God? Where do you get your assurance for salvation? Is it from Satan’s blinded methods of vainly making yourself better than others? Or is it from Jesus and what he has done for you? When you want to have fun, do you follow the guidelines in God’s Word or do you satisfy your selfish cravings? The gospel truth that the Apostle Paul gospel shows us in these verses from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians is the truth we need to constantly cling to so that Satan’s veil may not creep back over our minds.

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Because it is God, and only God, who can remove Satan's veiled darkness and replace it with Jesus' shining light. There is no way you or I can fight Satan off on our own. From conception on we're blind and living under a veil all the while rejecting God and his good news. A blind person cannot cure their own blindness. You and I cannot remove Satan's veil to believe that Jesus is the shining image of God. The only reason why we are free from that veil is because of our God who made the light of Christ shine in our once sin-darkened hearts.

The Apostle Paul again shows us how God, and only God, can do that. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, there was nothing else. The earth was formless and empty, darkness covered over the surface of the deep, and the triune God was hovering over the waters. It was in the midst of this primordial darkness that God said, **"Let light shine out of darkness" (2 Corinthians 4:6a referring to Genesis 1:3)** and instantly there was light. Who can create light where there once was only darkness? God and only God.<sup>iv</sup> And just as God had light shine on the first day of creation, so he can remove Satan's veil and make the light of Christ shine in our hearts. And the light that shines in the believer's heart is the light of Jesus, the shining image of God himself.

And that's a comforting truth. Where we see Jesus we see God himself because Jesus is God. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus shines with his divine glory to assure Peter, James, and John that he is truly the Son of God. To assure us that this Jesus we keep talking about here in church is not a waste of time. He is God himself and all he does is what God does. And that especially comes into play where we see Jesus go in the coming weeks. On the top of page 2 in your worship folder, you see a paragraph in italics explaining that Transfiguration Sunday marks the last Sunday of the season of Epiphany where Jesus shows us he is the light of the world. In the coming weeks we'll be in the season of Lent where our Savior suffers multiple hardships for our sake. And although it'll take us a month and a half to go from the Mount of Transfiguration to the Mount of Calvary, it is there on Calvary's cross we see what a comfort it is that Jesus is the shining image of God.

As Jesus willingly hid his divine glory on the way down from the Mount of Transfiguration, know that God did that for you and me to be our substitute under God's law. As Jesus suffered multiple hardships for our sake from people with Satan's veil darkening their minds, know that God suffered that for you and me to receive the full punishment for our sins. As Jesus received Pontius Pilate's sentence to die by crucifixion, know that God endured that for you and me to

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complete the plan for our salvation. It is in Jesus we see God himself at work for our salvation. It is in Jesus we see our Savior who alone can remove Satan's veil and bring to us the forgiveness of our sins. It is in Jesus, the shining image of God, we can be sure that our eternal future will not be perishing in hell. It will be living in heaven.<sup>v</sup>

All the credit for this blessing goes to God for making the light of Christ shine in our hearts. All our thanks go to our Savior Jesus for showing us that he is the shining image of God himself and what he does, God does. It is this truth that Jesus is the shining image of God himself that we need to constantly cling to so that Satan's veil may not creep back over our minds. Left to ourselves, Satan will succeed. But we need not be afraid if our eternal hopes are founded on our Savior. He has the power to bring light where there once was only darkness. The god of this age has no chance of success against the God of all time. So go to your Savior and see who he truly is – the shining image of God. Be assured that his life, death, and resurrection has power for you today. As you think of friends, family, and other loved ones who still have Satan's veil darkening their minds, follow the Apostle Paul's advice to consider yourself nothing more than a servant for your almighty Lord who lives to tell others about Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Corinthians 4:5). That is the message which has the power to remove Satan's veil from unbelieving minds. That is the message which gives you and me the assurance that one day we too will see Jesus' shining face in all his divine glory in heaven as surely as Peter, James, and John did on the Mount of Transfiguration. Amen.

### End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor J. P. Meyer wrote an essay for the Milwaukee City Pastoral Conference where he states that the Greek word for “image” is very particular. It is best translated as “duplicate; exact copy” which leaves no possibility for a symbolism or representative understanding. If that was Paul’s intent, he would have used a different Greek word which means representation or symbolism. If you wish to read this essay, you can find it at <http://www.wlsessays.net/handle/123456789/3290>. Be prepared for consistent use of Greek language in the essay as it was written for pastors who have studied Greek.

<sup>ii</sup> Satan and all the demons are fallen angels. There is much more to say about angels, but suffice it to say that angels are supernatural beings who are far more powerful than humans are. Yet their power is still nothing in comparison to God who created the angels.

<sup>iii</sup> Martin Luther regularly referred to this resurgent sinful nature as the Old Adam. In the Small Catechism under Baptism he writes, “Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

<sup>iv</sup> When we consider that God did not create our usual sources for light – the sun and the stars – until the fourth day of creation, it is especially amazing that there was light where before there was only darkness.

<sup>v</sup> Theologians call this biblical teaching that what Jesus does God does the “genus apotelesmaticum.” David Maxwell has an informative yet understandable treatise on this and the other two geni concerning Jesus Christ. To read Maxwell’s treatise go to <https://concordiatheology.org/2011/01/christology-illustrated-from-the-ct-vault/>.