### “Being Transformed” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Feb. 27, 2022

**2 Corinthians 3:12–18**

12Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, 13not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. 14But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. 15Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; 16but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

**Luke 9:28–36**

28Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31They appeared in glory. . . 33Just as they were leaving Jesus, Peter said to Jesus, “Master . . . let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. 34While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 36When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Our lives are filled with changes, some we can see outwardly, others that happen more slowly or subtly.

These two texts both have to do with transformation, first the transformation that believers will undergo here, but also and *especially* in the afterlife, a transformation into Christ’s image, and secondly the transfiguration that Jesus himself underwent when he revealed his glory to Peter, James, and John. These are obviously two very different kinds of transformation.

Our transformation will be a product of growth. Jesus’ transformation was simply a choice to momentarily reveal an image of his pre-existent divinity. It may have been to strengthen the faith of his leading followers. Or it may have been a kind of follow-up to Peter’s declaration “You are the Messiah of God,” which occurred a few verses earlier (9:20), as a confirmation of Peter’s declaration. The reason for the Transfiguration is not clear. It was not to be announced to the other apostles or to anyone right away. Perhaps these apostles were chosen and allowed to see briefly Jesus’ spiritual nature. No doubt these apostles’ lives were changed by this experience.

Let’s turn to the 2 Corinthians passage, which contains a revelation that is directly relevant to *our* lives. The key verse is the last one: “all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). It is quite logical for there to be stages in our spiritual growth, just as there are stages of growth in our *earth* life. It fits in with Jesus’ own teaching about stages of growth: “first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head” (Mark 4:28). Growth is always by stages, and so will our spiritual growth be. Sometimes we do not know the extent of how far we have progressed.

The veil and the shining illustrates a difference between the old covenant and the new. Even the old ministry came with a certain glory. Moses had to put on a veil to shield the Israelites from the spiritual shining of his face (Exod 34:30–33), but that glory is outshone now by “the greater glory” (2 Cor 3:10), Paul says.

Moses’ veil becomes a useful symbol for Paul, representing in this passage the self-blindedness of those who read the Law only in a literal or material way. “Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (3:15–16). The literal minded reading of the Scriptures is like a veil, blocking insight.

It also may stand for a certain kind of restriction on freedom, for he insists that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (3:17). The greater glory leads to freedom and to transformation “from one degree of glory to another” (3:17–18). The new covenant with God brings freedom and growth. Refusing to open up to the new covenant brings slavery, blindness, and spiritual stagnation.

Paul emphasizes the new age that Jesus brought to the world. Later in the letter he says “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation . . . everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17). Salvation means accepting new life, even a new *altitude* of living.

Here’s an example. A thief underwent a salvation experience. As part of his reforming of his life, he got himself a simple but honest job. He encountered many opportunities for theft, but never took them. He told his Shoplifters Anonymous group that the greatest things in life were neither stolen nor bought, but gifted. He said Jesus had gifted him with a new life. Jesus’ gift of new life is available to all. Each day presents a new opportunity to experience that gift.

Back to the Bible: Paul says the new covenant clears away the confusion, difficulty, and lack of freedom that came to encumber the old covenant. So, among other things, the gospel is a liberation and a clarification. Paul hoped that his fellow Jews would understand the contrast and would seek the better way. But the religious leaders of that day, the priests and the Pharisees, largely rejected this message, and many of the common people just followed what their leaders said. They failed to follow the true leader, the one who wasn’t trying to exercise religious control and power, but who wanted to give power away.

Paul never said Judaism was illegitimate, he just said that the new covenant with its glory, was greater than the old covenant and its lesser glory. Moses had glory from his encounter with God. But the law of Moses was not the perfect revelation, and it ended up having certain negative side effects. It was hard to follow, and it imposed heavy burdens, such as many purification rites, on people. The new covenant was the clear and straightforward revelation that made people into children of God, and gave them spiritual freedom and power to enter on the way of eternal progress, a way of step-by-step transformation from one degree of glory to another. And it was clearly offered to Gentiles as well as Jews. So the promise that was like a secret sub-theme within Judaism, that all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3), was now made known to all. All are invited to enter on this pathway to Paradise wherein there is progressive transformation, spiritual change within the heart of every believer.

It *is* a pathway. We are going somewhere. Life is not static, nor will the afterlife be. It is a pathway of learning, sharing, and growing. Friends, I ask you to affirm in yourself a faith in God’s plan for your eternal growth. Go forth in your life, comforted by this faith, and able to comfort others. Go forth in joy.