

**The View Is Great From Up Here!** *as told by the Apostle Peter*

In the name of Jesus. My dear sisters and brothers in our crucified and risen and ascended and today transfigured Savior,

Have you ever stood on the top of a mountain on a cloudless, sunny day? Have you ever gazed out in amazement from that high elevation at the beautiful landscape of God's creation thousands of feet beneath you and miles out in front of you? Can you, in your mind's eye, picture the spectacular scenery from that mountaintop view? Did it take your breath away? Did it make you say, "The view is great from up here!"?

I've said that before on a mountaintop. I've climbed the mountains of Israel, and I've gazed down at the splendor of the Promised Land. And from Israel's high mountains, I can't help but reflect on the beauty of my homeland and the history she's seen. But, for as breathtaking as Israel may be from above, the mountaintop experience I want to tell you about today is what brother Luke recorded in his gospel, and what you heard read a moment ago – the time Jesus took me and James and John to the top of a mountain and showed us things that would stay with us forever. And believe me, the view is great from up here!

I suppose it's natural for me to be the one telling you what happened that day; I was there, and I tend to be sort of a spokesman for the group. I'm never at a loss for words. However, I do have to admit, I have said plenty of things that I regret. Once, when Jesus was telling us how he was going to suffer and die, I told him he could never let that happen. (I was such a fool!) And he looked at me and called me Satan; "**Get behind me,**" he said (Mt 16:21-23). That hurt! And I'll never forget being in the courtyard the night Jesus was arrested, when I denied even knowing Jesus; and that rooster crowed (Lk 22:60). And that's what a lot of people remember me for. But I don't always put my foot in my mouth. Just before Jesus took us up on this mountain, he asked us, "**Who do the crowds say I am?**" And I said, "**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God**" (Lk 9:18; Mt 16:16). But then Jesus started talking more about his crucifixion, and I just didn't understand what he was saying; but I could tell it was troubling him.

So a few days later James and John and I go up this mountain with Jesus. He said he wanted to be alone with us and to pray with us. So we started climbing, and it took quite awhile, but eventually we got to the top. And then we prayed. (Jesus always used to pray for a long time; he taught me how to pray.) Well, we were pretty worn out from the climb. So in the middle of praying, the three of us actually started to doze off. (Come to think of it, there was another time the three of us dozed off when we should have been praying with Jesus.) But then something happened that woke us up right away. All of a sudden, Jesus started to shine! His clothes became blindingly bright, and his face began to radiate dazzling beams of light. His whole body was shining brighter than the sun, and we could barely look at him; we had to squint and shade our eyes just to see him. We didn't know what was going on! And then suddenly two men appeared, shining just as brightly as Jesus. And when they turned around and looked at us, I recognized them right away: Moses and Elijah. I don't know how I could recognize them; I'd never seen them before. Moses had been dead for 1500 years, and Elijah was taken to heaven centuries ago. But somehow I just knew who they were. And they were talking, and I could hear what they were saying. They were talking about Jesus suffering and being crucified and dying in Jerusalem, and then rising from the dead and returning to heaven. (And, again, at the time I just didn't understand what it all meant. Of course, now I understand.)

And then they stop talking, and it almost looks like Elijah and Moses are about to leave. So I felt like I had to say something – you know me! James and John were speechless. So I said, "Jesus, this is good for us to be up here together," and I suggested that we put up some tents so that we could all stay up there for the night. (I don't know what I was thinking!) But I wanted these men to stay; I wanted to talk to them and ask them some questions! So I'm fumbling over my words with this whole tent thing, and even before I could finish, something else happens. This strange cloud suddenly settles on the mountain. And it's not just a regular cloud from the sky; it's like a thick, dense fog – but bright! Again, the brightness! And by now, I'm starting to wonder if this whole thing's just a dream. And then came the voice – I'll never forget that voice! – firm but fatherly. It said, "**This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.**" God the Father! Then the

cloud dissipated, the brightness was gone, the ancients had left; and there we were, alone with Jesus, utterly dumbfounded at what we had just seen.

That was my mountaintop experience. And thinking back on it all, I know I was scared, but I also felt safe. It almost felt like heaven on earth. I got to see Jesus' glory, and I didn't want it to end. I wanted to stay up on that mountain and not come down.

I wonder if you maybe feel that way, too. You know, it's a pretty special church service on Transfiguration, because in a sense you get to relive that same mountaintop experience we had. Plus, you've spent the whole season of Epiphany seeing Jesus reveal his glory. Maybe you don't want that to end. Maybe you don't want to come down this mountain, because you know that the season of Lent starts this Wednesday, with Ash Wednesday. And in Lent, Jesus' glory doesn't shine as brightly as it did on the mountain. It's hidden behind whips, thorns, nails, and a purple robe. The season of Lent is the pathway to the cross, and maybe you don't want to come down this mountain and walk that path. After all, on the Mount of Transfiguration the view is great from up here!

But you know something – for as great a view as I had that day, I think that you have the better view. I may have seen the transfiguration with my own eyes, but that day on the mountain I couldn't see the big picture. You, on the other hand, even though you didn't see the brightness or hear the voice, I believe you have the better view, because you have the entire record of Jesus' gospel written out for you in the Scriptures. You have the whole story recorded for you in the Bible. And you can go back and reread that story anytime you want. From your vantage point, you can look back and see the prophecies about Jesus, the birth of Jesus, his life, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection; you can read the story of his church; you can hear his words and relive his miracles. You can see everything Jesus did to save you from your sins and from your enemy Satan. And on top of that, you've got weekly worship here in this church, and Sunday School, and a Christian elementary school, where you can return to again and again and see the big picture.

Yes, I believe that you have the better view. You have the Bible, and you can see the whole story. Don't get me wrong – it was pretty spectacular to see Jesus transfigured that day, and to hear the voice of God. I got to see it with my own eyes and hear it with my own ears. I even wrote about it in my second letter, which is in the New Testament, where I said, **“We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 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.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain” (2 Pt 1:16-18).**

We had a great view that day, but your view is better. You have the Scriptures, and through them you can return to this mountain and see the glory of Jesus every day of your life. Up here on the Mount of Transfiguration, you can see everything. Isn't the view great?!

### **Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup> About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup> Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. <sup>31</sup> They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. <sup>33</sup> As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)

<sup>34</sup> While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” <sup>36</sup> When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.