

Theme: Come Down from the Mountain to the Plain

1. To personally grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.
2. To publicly defend and proclaim the Word of God

We all know what it feels like to have such a good day that you don't want it to end. It could be a day where everything goes your way, or a day when you reach the culmination of a long goal or hard work. Sometimes, it's about a day where we've had a fun time with family or friends, or maybe the weather was excellent. There can be a certain feeling of sorrow when a day like this comes to a close. Life continually moves along and so nothing good lasts forever and so it can be difficult to come down from the high of a good day.

We get that sense when we think of Christ's Transfiguration. The sight was so magnificent that Peter requested that three tabernacles be built; one each for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Part of this was Peter responding in a moment that he didn't fully understand. But, there was also an element of joy to Peter's request. He didn't want this to end. He wanted to continue being in the presence of His Lord's glory. But, as happens with all good things, it came to an end. We sang of that in the final verse of hymn 135:

*"Tis good, Lord, to be here.  
Yet we may not remain;  
But since Thou bidst us leave the mount,  
Come with us to the plain."*

The hymn writer captures the scene well. Up on the mountain, in full display of the Lord's glory, things seemed pretty good. But, the end was not yet. God still had work to do and work for His disciples to do. In order to follow Jesus, they needed to descend to the plain. So, too, it is in our lives. We have not witnessed the Transfiguration of our Lord, but there are moments when we are called to descend from the spectacular and inspiring down to the common and lowly.

The Transfiguration clearly made a big impression on Peter. He would write about it later as a defense of the validity of His faith; remarking how he did not follow false fables when it came to Jesus but he actually was an eye-witness of Christ's glory. He was talking about the Transfiguration. Later on in the same letter, Peter describes what it means to descend from the mountain to the plain. This portion comes as our sermon text, from the end of Peter's second letter:

**2 Peter 3:14-18 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; 15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation-- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.**

Part 1: To personally grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ

---

The Lord beckons us to come down from the mountain to the plain, first of all in order to personally grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there was anyone who knew the importance of growth, it

was Peter. The books of Acts, and 1 and 2 Peter paint an entirely different image of Peter than do the Gospels. Peter's early track record with Jesus was nothing to boast about. He was certainly impetuous and eager in many things. Boldness was not something he lacked. But, it was wisdom that was often in short supply. I'm sure in the later years of his life Peter probably reminisced with a smile about his former ways. When you look at the composite view of his life in the Scriptures, Peter was certainly someone who grew.

But in order to grow as a Christian, you must be in the thick of this world. You have to come down from the mountain. New life by faith in Christ can certainly feel inspiring. But, life is not lived in an isolated bubble of good feelings. In order to grow one must be out in the world, on the plain, in order to learn and experience the guiding hand of Christ by faith. Peter was thrust into this scenario right after the ascension of Jesus. In the early chapters of Acts, Peter is the main leader in the church. He is one who is preaching boldly, leading the Christians, and suffering for it. Peter displayed his growth by rejoicing after suffering a beating for Christ's name. He epitomized the early church's motto of "we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22)."

Jesus even prepared Peter for this, saying near the end of His ministry: John 21:18 "**Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.**" Ultimately, Peter would give his life in service of His Lord.

We may not be subjected to the same dangers as Peter and the early Christians, but we are still faced with the decision to stay on the mountaintop or come down to the plain. Perhaps your mountain is church. Is that the only place where you grow in the Lord? Just for one hour or two on a Sunday? Is this the only time you surround yourself with the Lord's Word? Furthermore, is church the only place where you are willing to talk about your faith? Do you keep it distant when you're out during the week and only bring it out on Sunday? These are examples of ways that you might be staying in your "safe space" while refusing to come down to the plain.

Life on the plain isn't easy, that's why it's the plain. But life is not lived only in the extraordinary, either. The measure of our days is built upon the successive things we do in the common and ordinary times. To encourage you in your personal growth, Peter writes, **Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; 15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.** This is an interesting statement because literally Peter is saying, "Eagerly be a patient Christian." He implores you to wait upon the Lord's power, mercy, and word but to do it eagerly. That's a hard line to walk. But, that's why Peter also says, "**Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.**" Jesus is the engine that drives our personal growth. It took extreme patience to come to earth and live, suffer, and die in our place; so much so that patience itself isn't even a complete enough word. Jesus was more than patient; He was "longsuffering". Jesus did more than wait, He suffered continually in our place. He proved Himself worthy as the Son of God and as our Savior by never once stepping out of line in the midst of that longsuffering. And so Peter tells us, this is our salvation.

When we come down from the safety of the mountain to the frustration of the plain; we grow because Jesus did the same thing, and now uses His grace to bless and strengthen us.

Part 2: To publicly defend and proclaim the Word of God

---

The rest of this text goes on to tell us why life on the plain is difficult and what we should be invested in while we are there. When it comes to that most important teaching of salvation in Christ, Peter warns, **as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.**

When Peter was on the mountaintop with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, there were no dangers present. He was simply in the presence of His Lord, completely protected. Coming down, though, things would get much more difficult. Life would go back to normal. That's also what makes the different mountaintops of our lives so enticing. We are protected. We are safe. We don't have to venture outside of our comfort zone.

Peter explains to the Christian reader some of the things they will have to deal with on the plain. There are many out in the world who would tear down the work of Jesus Christ. Some may do it in ignorance, but Peter speaks of others who would deliberately do it. They actively twist and distort God's Word. They obscure the message of salvation to the point that someone cannot receive it. This is the true danger we are confronted with.

It's interesting that if you think about it, almost all false teachings are done with good intentions. People often do it because they think they will gain something better by it. For example, if a particular word from God is not popular in the current world, change it and we can get more people in our church. Or, if God calls something a sin, but no one else wants to believe it, just let the matter go and you'll never have to have that difficult conversation of admonition. No one changes the Word of God because they think it's a harmful thing to do. They always feel like they know better or they'll get something better for doing it. Peter tells us the truth. Anyone who changes God's Word does it to his own destruction.

And for the Christian, Peter also reminds us, you know these things already so be prepared. Yes, life on the plain is difficult, and yes, we are confronted by many enemies and opponents. But, we know this already and we know what our hope is. We have Jesus, and His gift of salvation. Nothing can rob us of that, unless we are willing to give it away.

Here's where we must ask ourselves about our willingness to contend for the faith. Jude writes, **"I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints, for certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 1:3-4)."** Growing personally in Jesus Christ is important, but so is publically defending and proclaiming His Word. Both tasks are involved in descending from the mountain of safety to the plain of real life.

Have you asked yourself recently, "How am I doing at defending my Lord's word?" Are you ready to stand up in the face of opposition and give your confession of Jesus as Savior and Lord? This doesn't mean you have to be expert apologists or theologians. Oftentimes, it's the simplest of God's followers that give the best defense of His Word; people like young children, the elderly, the sick, or those who have next to nothing in the material possessions of the world.

We live at a time when social movements rise up all the time in the face of disrespect or offensive actions. Would you rise up for God if someone disrespected Him? Would you come to His defense before those who

## INI-SDG

would twist and distort His Word? Or, would you hold it in until you're back on the mountaintop of safety? Remember that when you defend your faith you're doing it for more than just God. Peter tells you that those who change God's Word do it to *their* destruction. What does it say about us as Christians if we know that but don't care enough to say anything about it?

You know this beforehand, don't allow it to lead you into falling away from your steadfast foundation in Jesus. It takes courage and it takes patience. Life on the plain is difficult. But, it the same, and even more, for us to have anything worth defending. The longsuffering of our Savior is salvation. That is the steadfast foundation we have been given. That is what we risk losing when we fail to grow to grow in or share the same.

Protection and safety in our spiritual lives is not about hiding from the enemy, nor is about keeping that good feeling of being a newborn Christian. We, too, must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. That's life on the plain, but as the hymn-writer wrote, so we believe. Jesus is by our side.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Preached at Redemption, 2-5-17