

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

*We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And yet we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place.*

If you're plugged into the appropriate channels, you've heard of the events currently unfolding at Asbury University, a small Christian college in Wilmore, Kentucky. Nearly two weeks ago, a handful of students lingered after a chapel service in prayer and singing. What began as lingering turned into what many call a revival, reportedly drawing in thousands from across the country and even the world. Worship in the chapel has continued for twelve straight days without stopping. Students from other colleges and universities are pouring in and taking the spark of revival back with them to their own campuses.

People are labeling it a true movement of the Spirit. One student encouraged people to visit if they wanted to meet and embrace Jesus. This encounter with Jesus would enable you, she said, to go back to wherever you came from and share it with the people around you. But as I listened to and read reports, I couldn't help but notice a common thread in all the evidence, the proof that this was a genuine work of God taking place. It was all founded on people's experiences, emotions, and perceptions of what was happening. They were caught up in themselves, and this was their proof that the Spirit was doing something *extraordinary* at Asbury.

Now, I'm not saying that the Spirit isn't doing something extraordinary in Wilmore. The Spirit moves as He pleases. My concern is that people miss the point. Today in our readings, we are privileged to witness an extraordinary work of God through the eyes of the disciples. Jesus has spent years with them preaching, teaching, and performing miracles. One day Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter, as the spokesman for the Twelve, confesses, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus praises his answer but reveals that Peter did not come to this conclusion himself. It was, in fact, the Father who had revealed this to Peter and the disciples. It was a true work of the Spirit.

From that moment, Jesus began to reveal to His disciples what He must do as the Christ, that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer much at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, be killed, and on the third day rise again. The disciples were in disbelief. Peter even takes Jesus aside to reproach Him. "This shall never happen to You!" But without hesitation, Jesus rebukes Peter in turn. God had just spoken through Peter to reveal that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but now Satan speaks through Peter, trying to turn Jesus from His course. Jesus tells him, "You are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man!"

Almost to prove the point, six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John high up a mountain by themselves. There, at the peak, Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shown like the sun. His clothes became white as light. And there appeared before Him Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. This was undeniably a work of God. But Peter and the other disciples did not have their minds set on the things of God. They were caught up in their own experiences, emotions, and perceptions of what was happening. And because of this, they missed the point entirely. Instead of receiving this moment of grace to prepare them for the hard road ahead, Peter, bless his heart, opens his mouth and says, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

The problem was that Peter had his mind set on the things of man. He looked for God in exalted things but not in the things brought low. He saw the glory of God revealed on that mountaintop and desired to preserve it, to keep it going, perhaps even to carry that spark back down the mountain so others too could come, meet, embrace the transfigured Jesus, and take that encounter back with them to wherever they came from and share it with others. He thought that it was good that they were there because *he* could do something *for Jesus*. He thought that He could dwell there in the glory of Jesus. And so he

spoke up. But instead of speaking, he should have listened. No sooner did the words leave his mouth than the majestic cloud of glory enveloped them, and the heavenly voice boomed, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” All that Peter thought was happening was wrong. This glory revealed in Christ’s transfiguration was but a fleeting moment, a flicker of a flame meant to be received by these three disciples simply. This brief grace was given to point them to something greater.

The cloud and the voice had vanished as quickly as they appeared, yet the terrified disciples remained face down upon the ground. Jesus, in His mercy and compassion, came to them and touched them tenderly, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” This was the reason for His coming. This was the reason for His suffering and death. “Rise, and have no fear.” These words He spoke to Peter, James, and John He also speaks to you and me. We encounter the heavenly Father, and our response should be the same as the disciples, falling face down, terrified. Why? Because we are sinful men with our minds set on the things of men.

And all too often, we get caught up in ourselves, and we think we know what is good, right, and holy. We can just feel it in our gut, and so we tell God what we are going to do for Him as if it is good for His sake that we are here so that we can share the spark. Or we tell Him what we need from Him. We just need to dwell in His glory to be lifted up to the heights of the mountain. We forget to seek Jesus where He is and lose sight of Him in the valleys below. And when we do, we miss entirely the point of His coming, even the point of His glory. Instead of speaking, we should listen. As Peter, James, and John found out, the glory of God is terrifying when we are rebuked by it, when it confronts us with our sin.

One of the reporters on Asbury I listened to spoke to Joe Rigney, President at Bethlehem College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They interviewed him on how we could be sure this is an authentic revival. He said historically, real works of God are followed by counterfeit movements, which are demonically influenced, seeking to sow seeds of falsehood and destruction. Fair enough. We can see that in Peter. The work of God reveals through Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But then Peter was influenced by Satan to try and deter Jesus from His path. Then later, Peter proved his mind was on the things of man when he spoke on the mountain rather than listening.

The test then, Rigney says, is whether the movement leads to “real, deep love for Jesus and enduring obedience to Him in every area of life.” I would agree. What did this look like for Peter? We have it in his words. Repentance and submission to God’s Word. This is what a real encounter with Jesus leads us to. “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” Peter writes. We saw Him transfigured, shining. We saw Him speaking to Moses and Elijah. And yet, as great as that glory was, Peter says we have something more sure, the prophetic word. We do well to pay attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place. Words uttered by the Spirit concerning Christ and the forgiveness He brings. This is not a matter of human interpretation, for minds set on the things of men, but is an utterance of God through the Spirit.

That utterance? As we cower in our sin, Jesus comes in His tender love and mercy and tells us, “rise, and have no fear.” Have no fear because He was not deterred on His journey to the cross. For Jesus came in human flesh to take upon Himself our salvation. He took our sin into His own humanity, and as he was lifted up high upon the cross, He faced the glorious wrath of God that our sins wrought. He bore the Father’s rebuke in our place. And it was there, stricken, smitten, and afflicted, that the greater glory of Christ shone brighter than on that mountaintop. For on that cross, Christ overcame the vile Satan, crushing his head and putting our sin to death once and for all. It was there that Jesus was revealed for whom the voice proclaimed Him to be, the beloved Son of the Father who was obedient even to death and, by His death, reconciled the world to God. We cannot live on the mountaintop, but Christ came to be with us in the valley below. So, dear sinner, rise and have no fear. For when your eyes are lifted, you will see no one but Jesus only and the glory of Him crucified.

Is Asbury a real movement of the Spirit? If it is, will they miss the point entirely? We’ll see if it bears fruit in keeping with repentance. Yet I know the Spirit moved today for you. Will you miss the point? Amen.