

# TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

FEBRUARY 10, 2013

## A HOME BETWEEN BITTER AND SWEET

Pastor Jim Dunn

### **Deuteronomy 34:4**

**4** And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

### **Luke 9:30-31**

**30** And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, **31** who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

### **Hebrews 3:6**

**6** but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

*Unfinished Dreams* is a funny story written by Mary Miller. The main character is Abigail Addison, who was born on Christmas Day. Although it had never bothered her before, this year she was turning sixty and even though she didn't feel like sixty, every now and then she felt like sixty. So, this Christmas she decides to surprise Fred, her husband. She invites the whole family down to spend her birthday in the dream house he just finished building for them on an island off the coast of Georgia. When she gets there, however, it's Abigail who is surprised.

She finds that the beautiful red brick home with white columns she thought he was building is somewhat lacking. It's lacking paint, lacking plaster, and even lacking walls! The house is simply not finished. Fred sees the house for what it will be. But Abigail sees it for the unfinished mess that it is. So, she is not happy, because it's Christmas, and their three grown daughters are arriving, and one of them is pregnant and almost ready to have her baby. Where will she stay? Where will she sleep?

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But when the daughters arrive they look at the unfinished house as a great adventure, and, as a family they work to get the walls of the house up. That is, they work at it until Christmas morning. When the baby decides to be born early. Remember, they're out on an island. So, the baby ends up being born in the unfinished house.

Now that's a Christmas story. We can relate to it on a number of levels. But most of all, if you've ever not finished a task, not reached a goal, not fulfilled a dream, not accomplished what you set out to accomplish, then you can appreciate Abigail Addison's frustration.

Moses surely would have of. Is there any moment in the Bible more bittersweet than when Moses looked out at the land before him and saw the home he would never enter? He had led the Exodus of God's people all the way from Egypt and the ten plagues to Mount Sinai and the receiving of the Commandments through the forty years of desert wandering and finally to the eastern shore of the Jordan River. But he would not complete the task of leading God's people into the Promised Land. The Lord said to Moses, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

Yet, it wouldn't be only Moses who might have been frustrated looking out over the land. God's people Israel may also have been dispirited and fearful. Losing their leader, their future was filled with danger not only from the Canaanite peoples who occupied the land. The danger was also in their hearts. They would be in constant danger of not taking possession of the land due to forsaking the Lord and turning to the false gods of the Canaanites.

A promise not yet fulfilled - a task not yet finished - a future of some uncertainty.

That may hit too close to home. There are a number of ways in which both in our personal lives and as a congregation we can see the whole land before us, the vision, the plan, the job, the goal, but we're not home yet. It's a bittersweet moment when you can see your goal, but you know that there's much to go through if you're ever to get there.

You can become dispirited, in danger of losing confidence in your hope. It was a little different for Jesus as He stood on His mountain and surveyed all that yet lay ahead of Him. His confidence in the Lord was not shaken. Yet, all His life He had seen the cross at the end. His death on the cross was His vision. His job. His goal. We suffer death. But, as Elijah and Moses put it, Jesus was to accomplish His death. So, all His life, He had seen the cross at the end, as the objective to be reached. But now He was about to enter the last period of His earthly life. Now the goal stood out more distinctly. There was much He would have to go through yet to reach His goal. His suffering during those last weeks of His life was as real as the suffering of His last hours. He needed strengthening. At this point in His ministry He needed strengthening, as we do.

And He got it and so do we in the Transfiguration. Here on the Mount of Transfiguration our Father in heaven sent two heroes of faith. Both had departed this life with confidence in their hope, with confidence in the Lord and His promises. Now they appeared in glory and spoke of Jesus' departure, Jesus' exodus – which He was about to accomplish. Moses could say to Jesus, "I was not able to finish the job. I was not able to complete the Exodus. I couldn't bring God's people into the Promised Land. But Jesus, my Lord, you will." Elijah could say to Jesus, "Your death will be an accomplishment. For it will accomplish the greatest work of dying for our sins, of bringing God's people into the Promised Land of everlasting life, of which Moses and I are already enjoying the benefits."

That blessed purpose and accomplishment of His death they were able to remind Jesus of, and this strengthened Him for entering the last season of His earthly life. On top of that, as at His Baptism, the Lord spoke to Him those words of encouragement, "This is My Son!" Strengthened, Jesus came down from the mountain, and He went to the cross. He drank the cup of God's wrath for our sins that His Father in heaven gave Him, every bitter drop of it. When the six hours of the cross were over, You could have turned that cup over on the most precious heirloom tablecloth you own, because the cup was empty. Jesus said, "It is finished." He had accomplished His goal. He had accomplished His death for our reconciliation with God, for our forgiveness, for our salvation.

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That same Transfiguration gives us the strengthening we need to remain confident in our hope, in our Lord. We are told here in God's Word that Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' glory up on that mountain. That's what they and all of the New Testament writers encourage us to do. They encourage us to look upon Jesus, to fix our eyes on Him.

Consider Jesus. Look at Him on the cross, and see what He did for you. Walk up to His empty tomb, and see what He will do for you. Fix your minds on His glory, on His glorious body raised from the dead, and see what kind of glorious body you will have on the Last Day. Your confidence comes from Jesus. Your hope is Jesus. Consider what Jesus has done for you and what He promises to yet do for you.

For Jesus is our home between the bitter and the sweet.

It is truly a bittersweet moment when you can see your goal, but you know there is much you must yet go through before you reach it. Jesus knows what bitter cup you may yet have to drink, what obstacles and pain are on your horizon that will test your confidence in your hope, before you get to that sweet home of your dreams.

In the meantime, Jesus takes you up with Him on that holy mountain that we call God's Word, the Bible. He shows you Himself. He shows you His cross and His glory. He will not fail you. He will be with you in your bitterest season. He, His Word and His Supper, will be your home between the bitter that is and the sweet that is to come.

Amen