

How do you know if you're doing alright with Jesus? How do you know if Jesus and you are doing ok? Ya know, there are a lot of people in this world wondering the answer to that question. People who have hit dead end after dead end in their life and are wondering if God is just punishing them for all the bad choices they have made, or whether he's made at them because they stopped going to church a while back and haven't been back. They're wondering if Jesus and they are good because they're feeling guilty, and if they can't seem to forget about it, there's no way Jesus is going to forget about it, is there? But you know, they're not the only ones. I don't think I'm crazy when I say that every Christian has asked themselves that same question at least once, probably multiple times. Are God and I still good? Maybe you've asked yourself that question recently...

Hard question to answer sometimes, isn't it? Now, I'm sure you all have thought up your answers, maybe even as I've been talking, but I think many of them center in our day to day experience, don't they? Let me explain...

Sometimes we try to rationalize God's love based on our experiences. We look at the facts of our lives, and we conclude either that God likes me or he doesn't. Like, it seems that in the rest of my life, whenever I do good things, I get rewarded, and when I do bad things, I get punishment of some kind. Like, why shouldn't God be the same way, right? So, when I've been behaving, and it seems like my life is going pretty well, I think God and I are good. He's still happy with me. And on the flip side, if I've had a couple bad days, and I've been suffering lately, it's probably because I've been disappointing God. Lots of people think that way. In fact, just about every religion on the face of the earth works like that. I think this is probably the most common way we check if we're doing well with God. Do I feel good about my life and myself? Then I must be good with God. Do I feel happy when I leave church? Then this must be the right church for me. Does this what that pastor is preaching make sense to me? Then it must be true. On the flip side, when your life is falling apart, or you don't feel the best about yourself, you kinda feel like God must not love you. Turns out, just about every religion on earth expects you to interpret your experiences...but not Christianity.

In fact, it turns out that there's a reason that we all wonder the question of whether God loves us, and there's a reason we all kinda end up the same place in trying to figure it out. It's because Jesus is a mystery, he is so much more than we can understand, that when we try to figure him out, we end up running in circles. I mean, it would be the same as if you baked a cake, and then expected the cake to figure out what your favorite romantic comedy was. It's just absurd to think about it, isn't it?

Well, if you've ever wondered about Jesus and if he is really all he says he is and whether he really loves you, you're not unlike Peter, James, and John. They had been with Jesus a while, and they had some pretty significant experiences. They had seen him do miracles, but they had also seen people try to kill him. He had said things that made sense to them, but then they saw those same things really tick off the people around them. See, they were wondering in the same ways we do sometimes. But here's what made the difference for them, and it's for you to. Instead of letting his disciples wonder about him, Jesus took them where he wanted them,

and then...he showed them.

**<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.**

See, Jesus doesn't work in uncertainties. So, at kinda this touchstone moment for the disciples, about two and a half years into their time with him, he wants to leave them with no uncertainty about who he is. Now, let's just try to put ourselves in that moment. Jesus is praying and then all of a sudden, he becomes so bright white, you can't even really imagine it. Here Luke describes it like lightning. If you've ever been outside during a night lightning storm, you know how bright lightning can be. When Mark tells the story in his gospel, he describes his clothes as whiter than anyone could bleach them. Now, whenever I see artist renditions of this scene, it's almost invariably that Jesus ascends into the sky a little bit while he's doing his glow white thing, but nowhere in the Bible does it say that he did. So, he's standing there, close enough for them to touch, shining whiter than they can look at, and then Moses and Elijah appear. How amazing is this?

For Peter, James and John, this was more than enough proof of who Jesus was. And my goodness sakes, they needed it. The transfiguration of Jesus marks the pivot point in the year when we stop talking about how Jesus reveals who he is, and where he begins his long trek to the cross. We celebrate his life that way because that's how it actually happened. When they went down the mountain, things started to happen that eventually led to Jesus' death. So, by showing them his glory, he was giving them something to hold onto for the times when he looked anything but glorious.

And it had a profound effect on them... Luke writes, **<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.)** Interesting that Luke includes that Peter didn't know what he was saying, isn't it? I mean for Peter, this was the ultimate. He was in the presence of God's glory, and Moses and Elijah were there. This was so great. But that wasn't the reason Jesus showed him his glory. It was so God could say what he said next...

**<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.**

Those are the exact words God the Father said when Jesus started his ministry, and in hearing those words again, there was no doubt that Jesus was the Son of God and that he was the savior and that everything he had said about himself was true. Peter, James and John knew it now, if they had ever doubted.

But, I'm gonna go ahead and assume that Jesus has never taken you up on a mountain and shined bright white in your face, so what does this mean for you? It means that salvation never has been and never will be in doubt. The world will tell you to trust yourself, but you

haven't proven yourself reliable in living a good life. Other religions will tell you to trust the words of their prophets or church leaders, but then you have to take man's word for it. But Christianity follows Jesus, who proved himself to be the Son of God so you could be sure that when he dies on the cross, it's for your sins, it's for your failures, it's for all the times you trusted something else to get you right in the world. And brothers and sisters, that's a glorious thing.

But let's not forget what happened to Peter. Peter saw the glory, saw the power, and he didn't want to leave. Sometimes I think we have the same attitude. When we feel like the glory of God's forgiveness is around us and for us, it's easy to believe, but when life has beaten you up or everything seems like it isn't going according to plan, we can end up like Peter, dissatisfied that we aren't in the glory.

Well, remember the point of the Transfiguration. It's to give you the promise that no matter what happens to you on this earth, Jesus is still Lord. He's still God's Son, and that means everything for you.

Look, we're all looking for the same thing in this world. We're all looking for approval. We're looking for it from our employer, our parents, our spouse, our friends. Brothers and sisters, God has approval for you. When he says that Jesus is his Son whom he loves, he is saying that he approves and is proud of Jesus. Well, guess what! When Jesus dies on the cross, he gives you his perfection and forgives your sin, and because of that, God says to you, "You are my son, you are my daughter, whom I love."

So here's your takeaway, friends. Jesus is who he says he is. He isn't changing, no matter what happens. And that is really good news for you because in him, God approves of you, he loves you, and you and he are good. You're not just good with God when you feel good, you're good with him whenever Jesus is Lord.

A good pastor friend of mine is known for saying, "Jesus is still Lord" whenever things are going badly. So, I want you to try that this week. I'm going to guess that because you live in a sinful world, something bad is going to happen to you this week. When that thing happens, just say to yourself, "Jesus is still Lord. There's nothing I need to worry about." That's what the Transfiguration means for us. Amen.