

LISTEN TO JESUS

Matthew 17:1-27

Key verse 5

“While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased--listen to Him!’”

In the previous passage, Peter made an amazing confession to Jesus, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”** However, a few minutes later, he rebuked him when he predicted his suffering and death. **“Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”** Who can change those who confess Jesus as the Messiah with their mouths but live according to their own ideas and dreams? Who can change our unbelieving children, students on campus, Muslims, and people with all kinds of different beliefs?

Today we will see how Jesus and God the Father helped his disciples. Jesus showed them his glorious transfigured image. God the Father said, **“Listen to Him.”** Eventually the Holy Spirit will help them internalize what they saw and heard. Then Jesus’ disciples were transformed from the inside out. Through today’s message, may God open our spiritual eyes to see his glorious transfigured image, open our spiritual ears to listen to Jesus, and be transformed from the inside out.

I. Why and how shall we listen to Jesus? (1-13)

Look at verse 1. **“After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.”** Six days prior, despite his personal confession of faith in Christ, Peter had rebuked Jesus after he predicted his suffering and death. In turn Jesus called him, **“Satan!”** Then, Jesus challenged his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. Have you ever heard Jesus say to you, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** Peter, however, heard this rebuke from the very mouth of the Messiah. The words, Satan, denial, carry the cross, and lose your life must have resonated in Peter’s mind. Surely, Peter’s and the disciples’ week was difficult and depressing.

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Jesus, out of his divine mercy, wanted to help them, especially Peter. So, he led his three disciples, Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. “A high mountain” in the Bible symbolizes a place where the prophets in the Old Testament met God by themselves. At the top of the high mountain there are no distractions, no noises of the world, no wifi, no cell-phone, no work. And it is where we can give our full attention, our eyes, ears and minds solely toward heaven. I hope we can have worship service at the top of the mountain, so we can’t look at our cell phones.

What happened at the mountain top? Look at verses 2-3. **“There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.”** According to Luke 9:30-31, **“Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”**

What a glorious scene! Jesus’ face shone like the Sun and his clothes became as bright as the light. Any typical person could see that Jesus is the very glory of God, so dazzling that no one could gaze at him. Alongside him were 2 legendary and now glorious servants of God, Moses and Elijah. In Exodus chapters 33-34, when Moses spent time in God’s presence, his face became radiant. But he suffered much to lead the Israelites, died and was buried in an unknown grave. Around 600 years later Elijah was a prophet in Northern Israel. 2 Kings chapter 2 says that Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirl wind on a chariot and horses of fire. Then around 900 years later, here was Jesus who was transfigured, along with these 2 servants of God, talking about his death and departure, as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

How did Peter respond? Look at verse 4. **‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’** Peter was talking about “remaining” at the mountain top. In other words, he could not accept Jesus’ departure and suffering. He desired to put up shelters for them so they could be comfortable forever on the top of the mountain. That was also what he wanted, only glory but no suffering. How much we are like Peter- we want glory but no death. We want comfort but no suffering.

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While Peter did not accept this truth at that time, later he understood. In 2 Peter 1:16, he said, **“We have not depended on made-up stories in making known to you the mighty coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. With our own eyes we saw his greatness.”** He also said in 1 Peter 4:13, **“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”** Jesus’ suffering as the Messiah was never in vain. He was glorified through his resurrection and will be seated at the right hand of God reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will come again in glory and judge the living and the dead. When we have this glorious image of Jesus in our hearts and minds, then we can participate in the sufferings of Christ with joy for we know that we are also being transformed in the image of glorious Jesus. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, **“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.”** Praise Jesus who is transforming us to be like this glorious Jesus!

But at that time, Peter didn’t understand. Look at verse 5a. **“While he was still speaking.”** Peter would not stop talking! Now let’s read the rest of the verse 5. **“A bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased--listen to Him!’** God is very patient and slow to anger. And God rarely spoke in the New Testament. But God could not keep silent, especially to Peter. Peter had to shut his mouth right away: no more shelter project.

God had two convincing reasons why the disciples must listen to Jesus. Look at verse 5b again. Firstly, Jesus is God’s own Son, whom He loves. In Colossians 1:5, Apostle Paul says, **“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”** Hebrews 1:3a also says, **“He reflects the brightness of God’s glory and is the exact likeness of God’s own being.”** In this world, there seem many great figures we can choose to listen to. But the bottom line is that each person listens to what he or she wants to hear. And we reject what we do not want to hear. But Jesus’ disciples are those who confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus’ disciples listen to Him rather than his or her own feelings, emotions, ideas, past wounds and experiences. Listening to Jesus is the very beginning of true freedom from oneself and of walking with Jesus. Just imagine you follow Jesus outwardly, but you listen to yourself! If so, we will be

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like Peter in this passage. Peter-like disciples need to be rebuked from God and repent. True and deepening repentance is to turn away from oneself to Jesus because Jesus is God's own Son.

Secondly, God tells us to listen to Jesus because he was well pleased with Him. Of course, God has always been pleased with Jesus, his own Son in eternity. Why was God well pleased with him at this particular moment? It was because Jesus resolutely walked toward Jerusalem to obey God's plan and purpose through his death and resurrection.

What are the consequence of not listening to Jesus and blessings of listening to Jesus? The consequence of not listening to Jesus is very serious. In Acts 3:22-23, Apostle Peter said quoting Deut 18:15, **“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.’”**

On the other hand, when we do listen to Jesus, the very blessing of it is eternal life. Jesus said in John 5:24, **“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”** Apostle Paul said in Romans 10:17, **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”** How do you respond to God's voice? Are you listening to Jesus over your own voice?

How then can we listen to Jesus? Some people want to have a mystical, glorious and face to face encounter with Jesus. In 2 Peter 1:18-19, however, Apostle Peter says, **“We ourselves heard this voice coming from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain. So we are even more confident of the message proclaimed by the prophets. You will do well to pay attention to it, because it is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the Day dawns and the light of the morning star shines in your hearts.”** Apostle Peter admonishes us to pay attention to the message of the prophets. For example, he understood the meaning of Jesus' death from Isaiah 53:5, and wrote in 1 Peter 2:24 as follows, **“He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin**

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and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’ ” Likewise, we need to study and struggle with the Old Testament until the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection shines like a lamp or like the morning star in our hearts. This is how we can listen to Jesus from the Bible and be healed.

It was time for them to go down the mountain and come back to the real world. On the way his disciples asked, **“Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”** The disciples reasoned that if Jesus really was the Messiah, as the transfiguration proved him to be, why had Elijah not appeared based on Mal 4:5-6? With Jesus’ explanation, the disciples realized John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah. His disciples began to see the bigger picture of God’s redemptive history. What progress they made!

II. Let’s practice listening to Jesus (14-27).

In the Part II, we will skim through the three remaining stories and try to listen to Jesus.

Look at verses 14-16. **“When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ‘Lord, have mercy on my son,’ he said, ‘He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.’**” Imagine what the nine disciples had been hearing from both outside and inside. They heard, “I am a failure. I cannot drive out demons. I am not good enough as a disciple. Jesus has abandoned me.” They got yelled at by the boy’s father and ridiculed by the crowd. A sense of failure, shame and fear flooded their hearts. Their ears and hearts might be bombarded by all those voices and noise. But to what shall his disciples listen? Of course, Jesus!

Look at verse 17. **“‘You unbelieving and perverse generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.’**” Do you listen to Jesus? He did not say to the disciples, “Shame on you! I am greatly disappointed!” No! Instead, Jesus rebuked the entire generation for its unbelief and perversion. The demon-possessed boy was not the cause of all the turmoil. The unbelief and perversion of the entire

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generation were the causes of demonic work in the boy, the father's helplessness and his disciples' failure. Their perversion, which is their distorted, twisted and misapplied concepts of the Messiah, was the cause of all the trouble and chaos. Jesus was genuinely sorry and grieving for the spiritual condition and unbelief of his generation.

But Jesus did not remain in his grief. He said, **“Bring the boy here to me,”** and he drove out the demon from the boy. Jesus demonstrated his power over darkness and the demons. Now his disciples felt safe. Both they and we, his disciples, however, need to listen to his rebuke seriously because our generation is still unbelieving and perverse. How can we solve both countless individual problems and generational problems! Jesus can solve them all. For this purpose Jesus was going up to Jerusalem as the Messiah. Through his death and resurrection, he would bring a new era and a new generation on earth. His disciples were called to participate in this. We are not called to be spectators, but to be generation-changers and history-makers!

But how can we? Again listen to Jesus in verse 20. **“He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’”** Jesus wants you and me to hear and have faith in Jesus! Jesus came on earth to move the mountains of sin, death, unbelief and perversion as far as the east is from the west through his death and resurrection. When we believe in Jesus, which is described as faith as small as a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for us. Faith is neither about how sincere you are nor how strong your will power is. Faith is to know the right object of your trust, Jesus, and become one with Him. When his disciples absolutely believe in Jesus and his power as the Messiah, we can move any seemingly immovable mountain. Nothing will be impossible for us because Jesus has already destroyed the most impossible mountains of sin and death and Satan. Do you believe this? As we believe and proclaim the message of who Jesus truly is, what he did through his death and resurrection, we can move the mountains!

Let's listen to Jesus now in verses 22-23a. **“When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the**

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hand of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” Jesus reminded them of the gospel again. At this point they slowly began to realize that Jesus was going to die. So they were filled with grief, for they did not hear the message of his resurrection. They still had a hard time listening to Jesus’ full message of the gospel.

Here is the last story in chapter 17. **“After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, ‘Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?’ ‘Yes, he does,’ he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. ‘What do you think, Simon?’ he asked. ‘From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?’ ‘From others’ Peter answered. ‘Then the children are exempt,’ Jesus said to him. ‘But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.’ ”** What is Jesus saying to you? Go fishing in order to pay your taxes. No! But Jesus tells us who he is and who we are, and the power of his words. Firstly, Jesus teaches us that he is the king of the temple. And we are God’s children. Therefore, we can enter God’s temple freely and remain in his presence. How is it possible? Jesus became a ransom paying the price of our sins and bought and adopted us as his own children. Secondly, Jesus said, “but so that we may not cause offense.” Even if Jesus and his disciples did not need to pay the temple tax, he did so anyway simply because he did not want to cause any offense as a tax dodger. Thirdly, Jesus helped Peter experience the power of Jesus’ word. Peter had never caught a fish with a coin in its mouth. But when he obeyed Jesus, he caught one just as he had told him. If this was the case, what Jesus had predicted in regard to his death and resurrection would surely happen. Do you listen to Jesus?

In conclusion, let us listen to the full gospel of Jesus’ death, resurrection and glorious transfiguration, rather than our own ideas and worldly noises. Let us see the glorious image of Christ and have a hope of our glorious transformation as we participate in his sufferings. Let us have faith in Jesus who has already removed the mountains of sin and death and experience him moving mountains in our lives and in our generation.