

Listen to Him

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Date: 09 March 2025

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[0 : 01] Well, people sometimes speak, don't they, about mountaintop moments. Sometimes they are physical mountaintops. They have reached the peak, they take in a great view, and they have a sense that they are on top of the world.

Sometimes, though, it's not a physical mountain, but a moment of revelation or realization that makes everything fall into place, and it brings a sense of kind of seeing everything laid out clearly in front of you.

Sometimes it's a triumph, a victory in sport, or school, at uni, at work, that makes you feel on top of your game. Well, as mountaintop moments go, they don't get much more special than this one, do they?

It's not just special, what we've just read. It is unique. It's not once in a lifetime, but once in history. It is a physical mountaintop.

We'll come back to that in a moment. It is also a moment of supreme revelation. These guys should not be able to look at Jesus or their lives or the world in the same way ever again.

[1 : 19] And, in a sense, it is a moment of victory or triumph. It's a foretaste of where the gospel is heading. We're halfway through Matthew's gospel, but it's as if Jesus can already taste the finish line.

He knows where it's going to end, and it is victory, triumph. And so tonight, I just want us to savor this moment.

Matthew wants us to take in this glorious view. We're not going to get this view again until the very last chapter of the gospel.

It is a once-in-a-gospel, one-time-only vision that we're getting tonight. And the deeper that this vision of Jesus in his majesty is imprinted on our hearts, the more we'll be ready to respond to him as God the Father in our passage commands us to respond.

Listen to him. Listen to him. So, let's together go up the mountain with Jesus and firstly see what they went to see, his glory.

[2 : 35] His glory. Verse 1 begins after six days. Six days after what? Well, remember last time Ben showed us in chapter 16 what it was Jesus had begun saying to his disciples.

16 verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Yes, I am the Christ, he says, and this is what the Christ must do. Suffer. Die. Be raised. There's no other way.

This is why I'm here. But the disciples couldn't take it in, could they? The very next verse, Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, far be it from you, Lord.

This will never happen to you. A crucified Christ? Don't say things like that, Jesus. Jesus says it has to happen.

[3 : 44] Peter says it can't happen. See, they have reached, haven't they, at this point in the gospel, a crossroads in more senses than one.

Will they follow Christ to his cross? And then Jesus says something even more shocking, doesn't he? Verse 24, Jesus told his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Not only am I going to suffer and die, says Jesus, but anyone, anyone who wants to be my disciple, be my people, has to do the same.

Not a physical crucifixion, but spiritually. He says, come and die. Die to yourself. Live to me. And so the disciples are standing at a crossroads.

Will they follow Christ to the cross? Will they take up his cross and follow? And it's clear at this point, isn't it, that they are horrified by the idea of Jesus going to die, and they just cannot take in what it would mean to take up their cross too.

[5 : 00] Following Jesus has taken a turn in a direction that they did not see coming. They know he's God's king. How can they then be on a path to a cross?

It's six days after that news has landed then, six days in which they can't have thought of much else, that we read, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

And what do they see, verse 2? Well, it is a sight that they needed to see as they stood at this crossroads. He was transfigured before then, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

And now it's hard for us to picture what that is like, isn't it? Because it's so far outside anything that we have ever seen. People do not simply start shining. And it wasn't a kind of faint luminescence, like they had to cut their hands, and if they squint carefully, then they can kind of see him glowing. No, he says, to look at Jesus' face, says Matthew, was like staring at the sun. To see him, you have to shield your eyes. And his clothes, they shone, he says, they became as white as light.

[6 : 26] You imagine Matthew later kind of showing Peter his G-Lux color chart. You know, Peter, was it like this? Was it, you've got a kind of warm white, or we've got an off-white? There's a brilliant white.

There's a pure white. Was it like this? No, no, says Peter. The whitest shade of white is not bright enough to describe what this white was like.

He's clothes, they were white. They were white as light. You know, I think the idea is that even if you glanced at him, you'd close your eyes, and you'd still see the kind of the glow, the outline of his shape, burned into your retinas.

And the language of verse 2 tells us that that radiance wasn't reflecting off of him like a mirror. It was shining out from him like the sun.

So what is going on? What are they there to see? Well, we heard it yesterday, didn't we? Context is king. And for this, we need our big Bible context.

[7 : 32] We've seen in Matthew's gospel so far, there are lots of echoes of the Exodus that run through the gospel. So back in chapter 5, Jesus went up on a high mountain to teach from God's law, like Moses went up on the mountain to receive God's law.

Or just back in chapter 14, we had Jesus walking on the water, feeding the 5,000, like God had led his people through the sea and fed them with bread from heaven.

And the transfiguration, it's another throwback. In our reading from Exodus 24, we heard that Moses took the elders of Israel up the mountain, and there we read, they saw the God of Israel. They beheld God. Now, that raises other questions. But the point here simply is that Jesus, the new and better Moses, the promised prophet of the end time, took Peter and James and John up this mountain, and they are getting the same view.

They saw the God of Israel. And the amazement, the surprise, is that that vision, it is the Lord Jesus too. He is the Son of God, unveiled in his glory and majesty for them to see.

[8 : 56] So why did he take them up for them to see him like that? Why did he want the disciples, why did he want us to see him like this? At this point, I think two reasons, his identity and his victory.

We're supposed to see his identity because while the disciples are struggling to know what to do with the news that Jesus has told them, they should still be in no doubt of who he is.

He is going to suffer, be beaten, be spat on, humiliated. He is going to be stripped.

He is going to be nailed to a cross. And there he is going to die. And yet at the same time, be in no doubt, he is no less the Christ, no less Lord, no less God for what he is going to do.

In fact, it is as the Lord of glory, it is as the God of his people that he is going to the cross. He must carry the failures of his people to that point of death and there pay for the ways that we have failed him.

[10 : 15] Only he can, and he says he has to. But friends, the cross takes nothing away from the sublime, the supreme glory and majesty of Jesus, who is Lord and God from eternity.

Jonathan Edwards, who's a Puritan preacher, he preached a sermon called The Excellency of Christ, where he dwells on this mystery. Infinite glory and lowest humility meet in no other person than Christ, he says.

Infinite glory and lowest humility meet in no created person, for no created person has infinite glory and they meet in no other divine person, for no other divine person has humbled himself to death. In Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, those two excellencies are sweetly united. Christ is a person infinitely exalted in glory and dignity, but however he is thus above all in glory, he is lowest of all in humility.

Friends, how awesome, how excellent is the Son of God, our Savior, the one who is glorious above all the angels, set his path towards the cross for me and ye.

[11 : 42] If you're at a crossroads, that crossroads tonight, friends, for the first time or the hundredth time and you're sitting here not sure if you can do what Jesus calls you to do, to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow, you're not sure you can come and die.

Let this vision give you confidence and compel you after him. He is no failure from history. He is no prophet who promised much and delivered little.

The one who went to the cross is the God of eternity, the Lord of history. Take heart and follow him as you see him in his majesty. And have confidence too as we see his ultimate victory.

Looking back on this view from the top of the mountain, Peter later reflects on what he saw in his second letter, chapter one, and he says what they saw there was a trailer or a preview of what Jesus spoke about in chapter 16, verses 27 and 28.

That is his coming again in glory and power. He writes, for we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is his return, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

[13 : 04] For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was born to him from the majestic glory, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased, we ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

He's saying we saw with our eyes and we heard with our ears his final victory pre-announced, pre-figured, pre-viewed on the mountain.

So when we tell you about his final triumph, his glorious return in power, the coming of his kingdom that he promised, we're not making it up because we've seen it ahead of time.

We've heard it ahead of time. Some people actually think this is what Jesus meant in 16, verse 28, that some of them would live to see him coming in his kingdom, this pre-view that they got on the mountain.

You know, for disciples who were no doubt fixated on the first part of Jesus' plan that he must suffer many things and be killed, well, this vision is a reminder, isn't it, not to cut his plan short.

[14 : 24] On the third day he will rise again and the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of the Father. Yes, there is a cross before the crown, but brothers and sisters, there is a crown beyond the cross.

And we can be sure that in part because of this vision of his glory, one day we will see him coming in his power. We will see the crown upon his head, for through his cross he will win the victory. Follow him to the cross then. Take up your cross and the crown is guaranteed, secured. That's what Jesus wanted his people to see on the mountain as they saw him transfigured, his identity, his victory, his glory.

Can you see what they see? But now they hear something. Secondly, what were they to hear?

They were to hear his voice, which is kind of surprising given what happens next.

If you were here yesterday for Bible handling, you'll know the power of a good surprise. Well, this is a surprise. Which voice on the mountain were they to listen to? Because there are a lot of people talking on top of that mountain.

[15 : 49] I mean, verse 3, Moses and Elijah appear and are talking with him. And then Peter starts talking in verse 4, and then he gets interrupted, verse 5, while he was still speaking by a voice from the cloud.

The voice that speaks from the cloud is the voice of God, the Father. and he speaks about Jesus, but he says, verse 5, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. Listen to him. And with that, the conversation stops. The disciples can't speak for fear.

The prophets vanish, and the next person who speaks is Jesus. Jesus. Rise, and have no fear. We would think, wouldn't we, that if Moses or Elijah, or even one of them, had a kind of posthumous cameo appearance on a mountain, that they would have something to say that was worth listening

to.

They don't. We know by now in the gospel that Peter doesn't always have something worth listening to. Often he just kind of blurts out what's the first thing to pop into his head.

[17:15] This time, even God doesn't let him finish. Right? He's not worth listening to you, at least at this point. We might think, mightn't we, that if God spoke audibly from a cloud with words that we could hear and understand, that he would be worth us listening to you.

And he is. But when we listen to him, what does he tell us? Listen to my son. Listen to Jesus. He's the one the disciples are there and we are here to listen to. God the father on the mountain puts his stamp of authority again, at this point in the gospel, on his son, Jesus. I am pleased with him. He is my son. Listen to him. Want to hear me? Know me? Worship me? Come to him.

And friends, we could spend the rest of our time just taking that in and of itself, that coming to God without listening to Jesus is a non-starter. God says that.

[18:29] How great must Jesus be that he puts the prophets, the great prophets of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah in the shade, they don't even have a speaking part when he is on the stage.

So friends, if you don't know this already, God says that Jesus is the one we must listen to and learn from, follow, worship and obey if we are to be in a right relationship with him.

We cannot come to God without coming to Jesus. God tells us that. God's command that we listen to Jesus is even more urgent, more specific than that.

I think that for two reasons. Firstly, back to Exodus. We've kind of seen the parallels between this and Moses going up the mountain with the elders in Exodus 24. Did you catch in the reading that that time Moses went up the mountain to collect the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them?

Come up to me on the mountain and wait there that I may give you the tablets of stone with the law and the commandment which I've written for their instruction. This is huge.

[19:39] There's hardly a bigger moment in the whole Old Testament than this. The giving of the law. This is God making his old covenant, God's relationship with his people being confirmed.

They're becoming his people right there and then as they hear his word and they're sprinkled with the blood and God gives his law and Moses goes up and down the mountain between God and his people acting as a mediator so he represents the people before God and he speaks for God to the people.

So it can't be a coincidence then, can it, that Moses appears on the mountain mysteriously and speaks with Jesus though he died yet he lives.

and it's as if God is kind of drawing a line isn't he between the top of Mount Sinai and the top of this mountain and all the history of God's people lies in the valley between these two mountains, these two great high points in history.

That old mountain and everything since then had been looking forward to waiting for this new mountain where God would speak again this time not to give tablets of stone to listen to and live by but to point to his son to listen to and live by.

[21:07] Now instead of the law we are given the Lord. God so friends what God is telling us is that this is how his new covenant the new relationship will work.

His people from now on will be in relationship with him in so far as they listen to and learn from and live by not the law but Jesus the fulfillment of the law.

What's Elijah doing? Elijah I think is a kind of middle post that kind of holds up the washing line if you like between these two mountains. He had his own mountaintop moment in one kings but when he gets to the top of the mountain God doesn't speak other than to say what are you doing here Elijah go back still got work for you to do.

Do you want to know more about that come to the book in a day one and two kings at the end of the month. Elijah went looking for a new covenant and didn't get one. God said not time yet wait.

And so this was the mountain that he was waiting for and that Moses was waiting for and mysteriously they get to be there when it comes and speak with Jesus.

[22:28] So the point of this passage is more than listening to Jesus is a good idea though it is it's that our whole relationship with God depends on us listening to Jesus.

Jesus. We cannot possibly be God's people if we do not listen to Jesus because God says that this is how our relationship with him will work from now on.

It's where his relationship with his people was always heading. Moses and Elijah knew that their place really was just to hold the gap to be put in place waiting for Jesus.

Noticing that they vanish right? After God speaks they're not there to be seen because they too were only there to watch and to listen not to speak or distract from the one who the disciples were to look at and listen to.

And so friends tonight if you think that you can be a Christian without listening to you and living by the words of Jesus you are in effect telling God that he's wrong about how you relate to him.

[23 : 41] If God says listen to him we can't say to God I don't need to or I don't have time to or I don't have the energy to or I don't have the interest to or I don't have the understanding the knowledge to whatever.

God says listen to him and we are in no position to negotiate the terms of that listening. And that becomes even clearer for the second reason I think this is more urgent more specific than it sounds to us and that's because of the immediate context the verses around because what specifically has Jesus been saying that the disciples need to listen to right what did Jesus say six days before he took them up this mountain what must he do suffer.

be killed rise again and what did Peter do when Jesus said that what did he not do he did not listen he didn't listen far be it from you Lord that will never happen to you on the contrary Peter it is so imperative that you listen to that message that God the son took you up a mountain and God the father came down on that mountain to tell you himself listen to him don't fob him off don't contradict him don't talk over him don't talk back to him listen to him how imperative for us then that we listen to these words of the Lord Jesus as he tells us about the absolute necessity and urgency of his suffering death and resurrection Exodus helps us again really graphically this time to understand this did you notice what happened to the people just before Moses went up the mountain they offered burnt offerings and they sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord and Moses took the blood and threw it on the people he threw the blood of the sacrifices over the people and said behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words when they listened to

God's words what happened to them they were soaked with blood and friends it is even more necessary even more urgent that we listen to Jesus's words about his death as a sacrifice for sins and so be covered with his blood and it's no less important just because I'm not spraying you with blood now in fact it's more important because the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins but when Christ came he offered once for all time a single sacrifice for sins all the blood poured out in sacrifice before him was only a shadow of the reality that it is his blood poured out on the cross that washes us clean from our sins and so it is this message we must listen to about his blood his death his resurrection that by believing in what he has done for us we will be washed clean from our sins and in this new relationship with

God have you listened have you taken it in and brothers and sisters we we do receive his blood don't we we do receive it what is said from this table when we take the wine of communion what does Jesus say this cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins drink drink and remember me the wine isn't blood of course it doesn't become blood but as we drink it we do receive Christ is the cup which of which we drink not a communion or participation with the blood of Christ says Paul it is a sign it's a confirmation to us that if our trust is in Christ and his gospel we are washed clean by his blood we are cleansed of our sins friends it is by his blood his death his resurrection that we are made

[28 : 16] God's people and so we must listen like Peter and the disciples to that message and believe it and you know you'd think that that would be really obvious in a church like this but you know what's funny is that as elders almost every time that somebody comes to be interviewed for membership this is one of the last things they say sometimes we have to tease it out of them but if this is not the reason that you are a Christian then everything else is take it or leave it you are only a Christian because Jesus died for your sins and was raised on the third day if that's not where your story lands everything else doesn't count listen to Jesus tell us that he must die and rise again for us to be in a new relationship with God for us to be his people and friends if you've heard this and you are not a Christian and you know you're not a Christian well this is how you can be listen to Jesus message believe it's true put your trust in it holy what he's done for you to be right with God

your sins are out there they are laid before him they deserve

God's punishment and wrath but the blood of Jesus covers every sin his death pays for every failing and his resurrection gives you a right standing with God and all we are told to do is listen and trust and follow and by doing that you receive that rescue and you become his people that's what they were to hear have we heard have you heard are you listening and so finally what were they to say well weirdly perhaps at first nothing see that verse 9 as they were coming down the mountain Jesus commanded them tell no one the vision until the son of man is raised from the dead don't say anything he says why the secrecy well we've seen something similar haven't we two weeks ago Jesus told them tell no one that I'm the

Christ and he says it here for the same reason perhaps even more obviously so that people don't get the wrong idea about him yes he's the Christ yes he's glorious he's victorious but if that's all people here then they'll miss what he's saying which is that as the Christ he must suffer die and rise again the very message they need to hear about what he's going to do will be drowned out won't it but by what they want to hear and what they want him to do which is to come in victory and not in humiliation which is ultimately where he wants to leave us and then the disciples are now so convinced Jesus is Christ they're confused why do the experts say Elijah has to come first and it's not just the scribes who say that the end of the Old Testament finishes on that note the end of Malachi says that why hasn't Elijah come back before you Jesus but Jesus says verse 12 Elijah has come but they didn't recognize him and they did to him whatever they pleased the disciples caught on on he's talking about John the Baptist who came to get the people ready for Jesus but we know he was put in prison later he was beheaded he was killed so what's this got to do with anything well like any good teacher Jesus is taking their question and he's bending it back round isn't he to the lesson that he wants to teach which is the end of verse 12 so the son of man will certainly suffer at their hands it's just as if he's checking isn't it just as if he's checking are you listening are you listening the son of man must suffer at their hands and you know what's interesting is that once Jesus is raised we hardly hear a single word from these guys about what they saw on the mountain because by then all they can talk about is that he died and was buried and was raised again so it's not that they were never to tell anyone anything about

Jesus it's that once he's died and risen again that's what they needed to say and they did and we should brothers and sisters Jesus is risen what he said must happen has happened praise the lord he is glorious he is victorious through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave he is lord and he is christ and so let us listen to him let us learn from him let us follow him let us live for him and let us speak for him let's pray together our father we are so deeply humbled to see this vision of Jesus and his glory and to hear your voice because father we know in our hearts that we have diminished him and we've relegated him and we've ignored him gracious father by your holy spirit we pray give us again this vision of

[34 : 16] Jesus the conqueror the almighty king glorious risen victorious eternal and father would we spend our days listening to him learning from him following him belonging to him speaking for him our father that is our heart's desire we pray that you would grant it to us for your mercy's sake in Jesus we pray amen to whoever