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The Transfiguration of Our Lord – Matthew 17:1-9 – Listen When God Speaks

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When God wants to get a point across to his people, he has some powerful ways of doing it. Most times, he sent wave after wave of prophets and apostles to share his Word with a world that had a chronic problem with listening like it should. Sometimes he had those points recorded on stone tablets, or in written scrolls, or in nicely printed and bound books for anyone to be able to pick up and read. Sometimes he sent angels or appeared specially to people in dreams or visions. And sometimes, the point he wanted to get across to his people was so important and so urgent that he just plain opened up the heavens, got on his heavenly loudspeaker, and boomed out, “LISTEN!”

He did that the first time at Jesus’ baptism, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when he wanted everyone to know that Jesus was the right man to do the job of winning salvation for this world. And now here at Jesus’ Transfiguration, toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, we hear almost word-for-word that exact same endorsement from God the Father: “*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*” The same Jesus whose saving journey got off to a perfect start at his baptism was now approaching a perfect finish at his Transfiguration here and at his crucifixion and resurrection soon after. That was a truth and a confidence that Jesus’ followers both then and now could not afford to go without, so God made sure to get that point across to us here in some pretty powerful ways. So friends, let’s get the point that God wants us to today. Let’s listen when God speaks about Jesus’ plan, about his person, and about his purpose, because what he’s telling us changes everything.

So Jesus brought his inner circle of disciples with him up the mountain that day so they could be alone. He had to show them something that wasn’t ready just yet for public consumption, but they needed to see it before they saw Jesus beaten and bloody and hanging on a cross. There he was transfigured before them, when in light as blinding as the sun and dazzling splendor as bright white as a flash of lightning he revealed his glory as true God that he’d been hiding behind his human flesh since he came into this world. And if that sight wasn’t enough to behold, all of the sudden the ancient prophets Moses and Elijah appeared along with him there to speak with Jesus about what was about to happen to him.

Can you imagine that? Those were maybe the two most towering prophetic figures in the Old Testament. These were legends that the disciples had been learning about since their childhood. And here as they listened in, they found that they all shared the same faith in the same Messiah. Everything Moses and Elijah believed and taught in their day pointed straight at Jesus. It was God’s plan all along that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, should come into this world and die for the sins of all people, and what he was about to do was the culmination of

all the hopes of his people – Moses, Elijah, and everyone else – since the beginning of time. The disciples were there to witness this for a reason – so they could listen and believe!

What the disciples witnessed that day wasn’t just the culmination of Jesus’ ministry that started at his baptism – it was the culmination of all salvation history, going back through Elijah and Moses and even to the very beginning of time. All along the Scriptures had pointed to Jesus, and God used men like Moses and Elijah in just the same way that he would use the disciples themselves to bring his Gospel truth to believing hearts. That means, friends, that just like our second lesson said, we have the Scriptures as something *completely reliable* in testifying to Jesus from the first page to the last. We don’t ever have to doubt it, don’t ever have to wonder about it – it is perfect just as God gave it to us! And so that also means we can have total confidence that everything that happened to Jesus was part of God’s plan – he was in total control the whole time, even when he was suffering and dying. This was God’s plan all along, to make sure we have a place at home in heaven with him someday. So do like the disciples were supposed to. Listen when God speaks!

Yes, it was certainly good for the disciples to be there. Who among sinful humanity was ever so blessed to see and hear something like that? They were so overwhelmed – so excited and at the same time so frightened – that they didn’t even know what to say. So Peter just blurted out the first thing that came to his mind: “*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.*” They didn’t want this moment to end – to them it was heaven on earth! – but the cloud that came and enveloped them signaled that it must.

These disciples just didn’t get the point. Even when they heard Jesus speaking with the prophets, they didn’t really *listen*. Peter in particular still didn’t understand what was going to happen – what *had* to happen. They couldn’t all stay there with Jesus, as wonderful and appealing as that sounds – because in this sinful life, there is no such thing as heaven on earth. No, Jesus had a job to do, and it was winning their salvation so one day they could *go* to heaven! But first, they had to leave that mountain top and go to Mount Calvary. Jesus had to lay down that glory once more and humble himself to death.

And when God the Father spoke from that cloud, he left no doubt that Jesus was just the person to do the job. Jesus left his throne in heaven to take on human flesh so that he could be everything he needed to be in order to save us from our sins. He’s the one who speaks God’s own Word and does God’s own Will. When God the Father rang out, “*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*” That was his ultimate seal of approval on Jesus as His Son and our Savior.

So friends, when God speaks to us about the person of Jesus, let's listen. Let's not be like these disciples, all too prone to miss the point God wants us to get about Jesus' glory. Let's not get lazy in our faith when life gets busy. Let's not blame or doubt God when life gets tough. Let's not lose our confidence in his Word and promises when the sinful world around us tries to make us do exactly that.

No rather, let's listen to the Father speak about Jesus – who he really is, what he really came to do, what that really means for us now, and how much we absolutely need him for our lives and eternities. See how much your God loves you, that he was willing to humble himself to suffer and die to win life for you forever! He walked the path of the cross because he loves you that much. He gave up everything so that he could be your Savior.

And now as we walk the same path of suffering in this sinful world, we can have the same confidence as the disciples. Jesus is true, almighty God – he proved it there on that mountain! So don't ever think that he doesn't have the power or the care to help you out of your problems or your sufferings, because he certainly does. But he also has the love and wisdom to know what's best for us and for our relationship with him, and if that means he doesn't fix our problems right now, then he will surely give us the strength to live under our crosses until he finally brings us home to himself. Sometimes we might not get the way God works and that's okay, because so much better, we know the heart of our Savior. And like the disciples, we *will* understand one day when we see him in his unveiled glory in heaven.

When that cloud appeared and that voice rang out, it all became just too much. The disciples fell flat on their faces, completely terrified, completely overloaded. But then just as suddenly, there was a calm. The familiar voice and familiar face of Jesus comforted them, but you have to think maybe with a smile and a wink. Could they ever look at Jesus the same way again, knowing what kind of glory was hidden in his flesh? Jesus' transfiguration wasn't meant to make them terrified or afraid; it was meant to be a great comfort and assurance to them, so they would know that their constant companion and most beloved friend was in fact glorious God, even and especially when he was being tortured and killed. They had to know that their discipleship wasn't meaningless and Jesus wasn't powerless, but that he had a purpose.

But still, the disciples just didn't get that point quite yet. So that's why as they were coming down the mountain Jesus came right out and said to them, "*Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.*" No, the disciples may not have gotten the point of much that happened on the mountain that day, but if there was one clear thing that Jesus did want them to take from this, it was that what was about to happen to him wouldn't mark him as some would-be leader-of-men reject. It would mark him as their victorious Savior and King. That one clear thing, that one sure promise he made that was backed up by the rock-solid testimony of the prophets and the Father himself, was that Jesus

was not going to stay dead. Yes, Jesus would suffer and die like the worst of criminals, but *listen* when God speaks – there is a resurrection coming. That was his purpose.

And he speaks that to us today as well. See, we've all had our spiritual mountaintop experiences when God's power and glory are unmistakable in our lives – times when we can see so clearly God's hand working to bless us or when God uses us to bring his Word to someone who needs it. But we never stay on that mountaintop. As long as we live in this sinful world, we're always going to have our valleys, too. Life's going to fall apart. People are going to mock or reject or ignore what we say and believe. Sin's going to rear its ugly head in any number of ways. We may never stay on the mountaintop, but we always remember it, we always cherish it, and we always cling to its promises for dear life.

The Transfiguration was meant to prepare the disciples for what was coming, for Jesus' rejection and arrest and for everything that would follow. And that's why we celebrate this festival now too, because it prepares us for Lent. But it also prepares us for life because we have crosses to bear, too. The Transfiguration teaches us that our worship and our relationship with God isn't about the up-and-down feelings of our hearts – it's about the rock-solid, life-giving truth of God's promises. So even when your life looks like it's crashing down around you, remember who your Savior is, what he did for you, and the power he promises to employ for your good. Take to heart how much he loves you, and the heaven that awaits you when you'll see him in glory. Everything that happens to us in this sinful world beckons us toward that eternal, ultimate goal. Yes, Jesus suffered and died, but he rose victorious. The Transfiguration assures us that he would, and it assures us also now that no matter what we have to go through, even if we have to suffer and die like Jesus and the disciples did, our resurrection to eternal life is coming one day, too.

And finally, that was the point that God wanted to get across to his people that day. He had some powerful ways of doing that, didn't he? The two ancient prophets Moses and Elijah showed up to testify to it. Jesus let his divine glory shine through to prove it. God the Father even blatantly boomed from heaven, LISTEN TO IT! But yet, it would still be about six months before the disciples' hard hearts and thick heads would finally get the point. Yes, Jesus gave a glimpse of his glory here on this mountain, but he himself said that his greatest glory would shine out from his empty tomb. So friends, as we once again begin *our* Lenten journey to remember Jesus' death and resurrection for us, let's listen when God speaks: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and our Savior, no matter how it might look sometimes, and he will not be denied his victory or your eternal life with him in glory. Amen.