

“THIS IS MY SON...LISTEN TO HIM!”

Mark 9:2-13

Key Verse: 9:7, “Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

We heard Peter’s confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. We also heard Jesus tell his disciples about his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. Peter didn’t like to hear about suffering and death. So Jesus told him and the others that to be his disciple they must die to themselves and follow him. But Jesus also promised that some standing there would not taste death before they would see the kingdom of God come with power.

Today’s passage is called “The Transfiguration of Jesus.” Only three disciples—Peter, James and John—were privileged to experience this. It was a rare glimpse of heaven on earth. Scholars call these heavenly glimpses “theophanies,” that is, “visible manifestations of God to humankind.” Jesus became radiant. In addition, God spoke audible words from heaven to the disciples. We may not ever have the privilege of such an audiovisual experience of God. But we can see and hear Jesus through deep, humble Bible study and prayer. In fact, many of us have had such an encounter with Jesus. Actually, we really need, by the work of the Holy Spirit, such encounters to overcome the darkness, wickedness and evil in the world that opposes God and affects our minds and hearts. Today let’s pray to see glorious Jesus and to hear his words of life.

First, a glorious vision of Jesus (2-6).

Six days after the previous event, Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone (2). It was these same three disciples that Jesus took with him to Jairus’ home when Jesus raised her to life again. What happened on the mountain? Look at verses 2b-3. “There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”

As we know, Jesus was not wealthy. In today’s day, he might’ve gotten his clothes from a yard sale or discount store or Salvation Army store. To be sure, his clothes were not impressive. But on this special day, Jesus’ clothes became dazzling white. Shining. Brilliant. Matthew says his clothes became “as white as the light.” Luke says, “as bright as a flash of lightning.” You get the idea. Matthew also tells us that Jesus’ face “shone like the sun.” What is the meaning of this radiance? You might remember that when Moses met with God, his face became radiant. Also, when God appeared to his people in Israel, it was sometimes in a cloud of glory, known as “the Shekinah glory.” So, this blinding light represented the presence of God in glory. Jesus was showing his disciples a glimpse of his true origin and his final destination: heaven. They caught a glimpse of heaven on earth.

Have you ever seen something awesome? I’ve been to the Niagara Falls a few times. It’s always a powerful sight to get close to the edge of the falls. I’ve heard the Grand Canyon or Glacier National Park are both awesome. I’ve only seen these in pictures, but never in person. Seeing a sunset or looking down from a mountain can show breath-taking beauty. Looking into a starlit sky reminds me how small I really am and how unimaginably big God is. Consider this: the sun is too bright to look at, though we are 93 million miles away from it. But God made the

sun, and the stars, and the earth. This moved one hymn writer to declare, "How Great Thou Art!"

Another songwriter wrote, "Out of the ivory palaces, into a world of woe. Only his great eternal love, made my Savior go." We can't really fathom the glory of heaven that Jesus left to come into our world that became fallen, rebellious and decaying due to sin. But we can get glimpses of it from time to time through beautiful acts of love, mercy and self-sacrifice. I heard the story of a firefighter who found a bird that was burned to death after a forest fire. When he turned the dead bird over he found some baby chicks alive, that the mother bird had shielded from the fire. What a beautiful sight of self-sacrifice.

People are wounded and scarred from ungodly things that they've seen and heard. Jesus' own disciples would see Jesus tortured and crucified. I personally don't like to watch horror movies, because I already have enough trouble wiping frightening images from my mind that I already have. How can we wipe out evil images? I'm no expert to answer that question. One way may be to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Christian scholars say that Apostle John was tortured and later banished to a prison island. But on that island he wrote the book of Revelation. Some of the images in his vision were beastly, like in the book of Daniel. But other images were glorious images of heaven, God, Jesus, angels and the souls of the redeemed. He also saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. He also saw Jesus "dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" (Rev 1:13-16).

Our eyes long for beauty, just as our souls long for eternal glory. But worldly beauty is short-lived. People spend much time and money trying to look beautiful. Apostle Peter had God's perspective on beauty: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1Pe 3:3-4). Apostle Peter agreed with the prophet Isaiah regarding human glory or beauty, saying, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1Pe 1:24-25). Psalm 27:4 speaks of eternal beauty: "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

A lot of human pursuit is chasing human beauty or glory or honor or recognition. Apostle Paul understood this well and wrote, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (1Co 9:25). When Peter and Paul met the Risen Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, they were motivated, inspired and compelled to pursue the eternal glory that comes only through Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

There is one more surprising appearance in this event: Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Jesus (4). Luke tells us what they talked about; they spoke about his departure,

which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). Luke also adds that Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor. That makes total sense since they had died long ago, so they came from heaven to visit Jesus. Why did these two men appear to Jesus?

It is significant that Moses and Elijah were both great leaders of God's people in their generations. Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt with mighty miracles of God's judgment on Egypt. Then God gave Moses the Law of God to give the people to live by. So Moses represents the Law. Elijah was a great prophet who challenged the king and queen and the people to repent of idol worship. He defeated false prophets in a contest of fire. So Elijah represents the Prophets. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. In Luke 24:44 the Risen Jesus said to his disciples, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Both Moses and Elijah suffered much to do God's will, to bring the word of God to the people. But now they appeared to talk to Jesus. They must've been a great encouragement and comfort to Jesus. Peter and the disciples weren't giving much help to Jesus. Rather, Jesus rebuked Peter, calling him "Satan," for having in mind human concerns rather than God's concerns.

I want to share one prophecy given to Moses which is relevant to our passage today. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses spoke to the people of Israel saying, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him." Both St. Peter and St. Stephen quote this verse as having been fulfilled by Jesus (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

So this event was to strengthen and encourage Jesus. But it was also for the three disciples that Jesus took with him up this mountain. So how did they respond? Verses 5-6 tell us. Peter, in typical fashion, was the one who spoke up. He said to Jesus, "Rabbi, 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 to say, they were so frightened.) Isn't it surprising that Peter is still giving advice or ideas or direction to Jesus? "Hey Jesus, how about we stay here a while. This is a nice place! I'd like to rap a bit with Mo and Eli too if you don't mind."

Second, "Listen to him!" (7-13)

At this point, Jesus didn't even reply to Peter. Rather, God the Father spoke from heaven. Verse 7 says, "Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" In the Bible, clouds sometimes indicate the presence of God, like in this case. The voice from the cloud is clearly the voice of God. This reminds us of Jesus' baptism. During Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11).

In both cases, God the Father identified Jesus as His Son. Jesus is the one and only Son of God. The expression "Son of God" denotes Jesus' eternal nature as God, as well as his divine authority as the appointed Messiah and Christ. Jesus Christ is the beloved Son of God. Jesus was about to suffer much. But that didn't mean God didn't love him. Jesus is still God's beloved. Maybe sometimes when we suffer we don't feel that God loves us. But suffering or hardship doesn't mean God hates or has abandoned us.

Finally, the voice said, "Listen to him!" These were words that were added from the time of Jesus' baptism. Matthew, Mark and Luke all add these words: "Listen to him!" This was God's

important message to the disciples, maybe especially to Peter. Peter needed to seriously listen to Jesus. To seriously listen to someone, means you can't talk at the same time, or be thinking about what you are going to say next. Good listeners can repeat what they've heard, word for word. Good listeners ask very good questions.

Here's a relevant quote from Abraham Lincoln: "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt." Perhaps he learned from the Bible, since Proverbs 17:8 says, "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues."

Peter needed to stop talking about his own ideas and start really listening to Jesus. So much so, that God the Father spoke from heaven! Wow! Jesus must've been so thankful to his Father God that he rebuked Peter for him. How about us? Are we really listening to Jesus? Hopefully God won't have to rebuke us directly from heaven.

One of our challenges is that there are so many things to listen to or read, that are contrary to God's word and wisdom. The first thing printed in 1452 was the Gutenberg Bible. That was a good start. But there have been many ungodly things printed as well. Thankfully, there are still good things being printed. What we decide to read is the key. In 1844, Samuel Morse sent one of the first morse code messages, "What hath God wrought?" based on the Bible verse Numbers 23:23. The first things broadcast on radio in November 1920 was the Harding presidential election result. Consider the inventions of film, television, telephones, then cell phones, then smart phones, the internet. These are all means of seeing and hearing messages. They are all giving a particular message to gain your attention—your mind, heart and especially, your money. We can't do much to stop the flow of information or entertainment. But we can control what we decide to watch or listen to.

At the start of 2021 I resolved to read the Bible daily and to finish a Christian book every 3 or 4 weeks. I started off well. But I got 40 days behind in my daily Bible reading, with many lame excuses. This week I caught up 15 days in my Bible reading. I must say I got more joy, wisdom and spirit through it. What a blessing it is to read or listen to God's word on my phone or while driving in my car. My youngest son Andrew knows I like to hear him read the Bible whenever I drive him to volleyball practice. For one thing it blesses me. But I know and believe it also blesses him, since there are so many other things to distract and detour our minds and hearts in today's world.

Listening to Jesus requires serious effort and prayer. More than just a few minutes here and there. Listen to Jesus! That's God's message to Peter and to us as well. Are you confused or depressed? Listen to Jesus! Are you tempted or weak? Listen to Jesus! Are you feeling guilty or angry? Listen to Jesus! You know what is surprising? People listen to people who are not good role models at all, but whose lives are often quite messed up. That's foolishness, not wisdom. Ecclesiastes 7:5 says, "It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools."

So what happened after the disciples heard the voice from heaven? Verse 8 says, "Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."

Then, as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to

themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant. At least they began to think about Jesus’ words a little bit more.

And they asked Jesus a question: “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” By the way, I’m not sure how they recognized Moses and Elijah. Perhaps Moses was holding the Ten Commandments and Elijah was dressed in his camel’s hair with a leather belt. Just a guess. Anyway, seeing Elijah made them think of Elijah. Even to this day, during the Passover meal Jewish people leave an open seat for Elijah just in case he shows up at the meal. This is based on the fact that Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, and some think he’ll come back down some day. Also, Malachi 4:5 prophesied that God would send the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. Then what does this mean? Well, Jesus explained it to his disciples in verses 12-13.

Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.” Matthew 17:13 adds to this passage: “Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.” Jesus to remove all doubt, Jesus said, on another occasion that John the Baptist is the Elijah who was to come (Mt 11:14; also see Lk 1:17).

There is one more significant thing that Jesus mentioned in their question about Elijah. Jesus said, “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?” Just as Jesus’ disciples must listen to Jesus, they must also listen to the prophets who spoke of these things to come.

Today, we got a glimpse of the glory of Jesus who is the Son of God from heaven. We heard God’s reprimand, “Listen to him!” Our 2021 Chicago UBF key verse is Hebrews 12:2, that we may fix our eyes on Jesus. May we all see and hear Jesus through humble, repentant prayer and Bible study.