

# Matthew 17

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[ 0 : 00 ] Who do you listen to? Who do you turn to for words of counsel and direction that you can trust in the midst of many competing voices vying for your attention? Who should you listen to?

This morning I wanted to think about just three words that point in the direction of one you should listen to. They're words that we've already talked about with the children, mentioned in prayer and read in our passage.

But let's just remind ourselves of what the voice from the cloud spoke there on the mountaintop in Matthew chapter 17.

And in verse 5, this is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased. Listen to him. Listen to him. Listen to Jesus.

This is the instruction that God the Father gave to the disciples and he extends to us this morning.

[ 1 : 18 ] Listen to him. Listen to Jesus. Now, if you're a normal human being, and you all look pretty normal to me, well most of you anyway, your response may be a not unreasonable why.

Now, why would I do that? Why would I listen to Jesus? What reasons are there or could there possibly be for listening to Jesus?

I want to look at the passage that we've read that records this very unusual event, commonly called the transfiguration, from this perspective.

Reasons we can find in the passage for listening to Jesus. We're going to look for, and I hope find, reasons for listening to Jesus by considering three aspects of this event.

What the disciples saw, what the disciples heard, and what the disciples felt. That's just the manner in which we're going to try and identify reasons for obeying the words of God directed to the disciples and to us.

[ 2 : 35 ] Listen to him. Listen to Jesus. What the disciples saw. What that tells us. What the disciples heard. What we learned from that. And what the disciples felt.

Now, given the objective that we have that's a very specific one, what we're going to do is going to be by no means an exhaustive treatment of all that we find in this very remarkable passage.

But we'll be looking at it from the perspective already outlined. So, let's begin. What the disciples saw. What did they see?

Well, let's turn to verse 2 then in Matthew chapter 17 and read what it says. There he, that is Jesus, was transfigured or transformed before them.

His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. What did they see? They saw a shining face.

[ 3 : 36 ] In the parallel account in Luke's gospel, we're told that the appearance of his face changed. Or simply, it became other.

It became other. It changed. It was transformed. The appearance of his face. It was the same face, but transformed in its appearance.

What are we to make of this other or changed appearance that is described for us here? A face that shone like the sun, clothes that became as white as the light.

Well, in the Bible, light is a symbol of God. The apostle John tells us that God is light. In his first letter and in the first chapter, he uses this very bold language, God is light.

And so this changed appearance of Jesus, his face shining like the sun, identifies Jesus as one who, at the very least, we can say, comes from God and is in some way a bearer of divine light.

[ 4 : 49 ] But can we say more? Is there more that we could conclude from what we read here in this passage concerning the identity of Jesus and his ownership, if you wish, of this light that is described?

Well, I think we can say more. And we can say more with a high degree of confidence as we have the eyewitness account of one of the disciples who was there.

Presumably, the gospel account itself is an eyewitness account. But we have an additional eyewitness account from one of the disciples.

And I'm referring to Peter who speaks about this occasion in one of his letters. And let's turn to 2 Peter 1 and read what Peter says.

He was there. And he subsequently, years have passed. He's remembering the occasion and he makes reference to it. And in making reference to it, he gives us an insight that we would not have if we were limited to the gospel accounts.

[ 6 : 00 ] So 2 Peter 1 and reading from verse 16. Listen to what Peter says. 2 Peter 1 from verse 16.

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the accusation that has been leveled against Peter and the apostles. You just made it all up. Cleverly invented stories. Does that not sound very contemporary in terms of criticisms of the gospel? Well, there's nothing new under the sun.

Peter was being accused of that. Cleverly invented stories. And he says, no, that's not true. That's not what we told you. That's not what we brought to you. Rather, he continues, But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, this is my son whom I love.

[ 7 : 03 ] With him I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Peter is nothing if not explicit in identifying what he's talking about as being this occasion recorded for us in Matthew's gospel. And Peter says, we were there.

I was there. And I know what I saw. And what does he say concerning what he saw? Well, he says that he saw his majesty.

We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. The transfiguration or transformation that Jesus experienced before the very eyes of the disciples was a revelation or glimpse of his majesty.

Now, majesty belongs to God, certainly in the manner in which it has been spoken of here. The writer to the Hebrews at the very beginning of his letter speaks of God as the majesty in heaven.

[ 8 : 11 ] Jesus, as his face shone like the sun, manifested this divine majesty. But we need to go a little further in exploring this.

This divine radiance or majesty. Is it his own or is it a reflected glory or majesty? We're going to turn again to what Peter says.

And if we've captured even in the reading, I think we've probably come to a conclusion on that. But let's pose the question and seek to answer it. This radiance. Is it his own or is it that which he reflects?

And I think in answering that question, there's two pieces of evidence we can turn to. First of all, we can compare what we're told of Jesus here and what we're told of Moses when he went up Mount Sinai to meet with God.

There are many echoes and parallels between the account of the transfiguration and the account that we read in Exodus. And we didn't read all of what we're told about Moses going up into Mount Sinai.

[ 9 : 18 ] But there are many parallels. And there's profit in comparing the two accounts. Let's just remind ourselves of what is said in Exodus chapter 34 and verses 29 and 30.

So Exodus chapter 34, verses 29 and 30. We've read the passage, but just reminding ourselves of these two verses. When Moses came down from the Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. Now notice that we're told that Moses' face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

His glow, his radiance was a reflected radiance. Indeed, Paul tells us, speaking of this experience of Moses, as he writes to the Christians in Corinth, he tells us that as time passed, time passed from Moses being on the mountain in the presence of God, he comes down the mountain, and as

time passed, the radiance was fading away, which only confirms that this radiance was a reflected radiance.

He was in the presence of God. That led to him having this radiance about him that then fades away as time passes.

[10:52] Well, what about Jesus? Is this what we have on the Mount of Transfiguration? Well, with Jesus, matters are very different. Even if his appearance may well have been very similar to that of Moses.

We don't know, but the language used suggests that it may not have been that different, his appearance. We're speculating up to a point, but the language is similar. But even though his appearance may have been similar, matters are very different.

Matthew tells us in our passage there in chapter 17 that his face shone like the sun. And this is before the cloud envelops Jesus and Moses and Elijah.

The radiance belongs to Jesus. This is Christ's own glory. To use the picture language of our passage, Jesus shone like the sun while Moses shone like the moon.

We know that the moon's light is reflected light. The moon reflects the sun's light. It shines, but it's a reflected glory. Well, Jesus shone like the sun, whereas Moses shone like the moon.

[12:02] But there's a second piece of evidence that we can turn to to identify who this radiance belongs to, if you wish. And we have, of course, the testimony of Peter in the passage that we read a moment ago.

Peter, in those verses, distinguishes the majesty of Jesus. He speaks of it as his majesty. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty, of Jesus' majesty.

And he distinguishes that from what he calls the majestic glory, which is the word that he uses to speak of the cloud that enveloped Jesus and Moses and Elijah, and out of which spoke God, the cloud that served as a symbol of the presence of God the Father.

So this majesty, made evident by his startling and radiant appearance, is not a reflected majesty, but a majesty that belongs to Jesus and is shared with his Father.

It is the majesty of God. And this glimpse of the majesty of Jesus granted to Peter, James, and John has to be understood in the context of the incarnation of Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the Word becoming flesh.

[13:17] He became a man. And this incarnation or becoming didn't involve Jesus divesting himself or emptying himself of his divinity or of his divine attributes, but it did involve a hiding or a veiling of his majesty.

His majesty was veiled, was hidden by his humanity, by his suffering, by his loneliness, by his rejection, by his death. Anybody seeing Jesus in the normal course of his walk along the dusty roads of Galilee, as they saw him suffering and being rejected and being abused, they would have seen nothing or they would have perceived nothing of his majesty.

It was hidden. But at the transfiguration, for a moment and in a measure, the veil is drawn aside. It's not drawn aside completely, but in the measure that the disciples could look upon the majesty and live.

And it is of this Jesus, the Jesus who the disciples saw, whose face shone like the sun, it is of this Jesus that the Father says to us, listen to him.

Why listen to him? Because he is the eternal Son of God, who came into the world to bring light into the darkness. Because he is the Word of God made flesh, a word that we must listen to, what the disciples saw.

[14:54] But then let's turn, secondly, to what the disciples heard. Well, what did they hear? Verse 5 in chapter 17, while he was still speaking, that is, while Peter was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them.

Seemingly, that would be a reference to Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. It would seem that the disciples are out with the cloud, witnessing the cloud. That certainly seems to be the picture that's being painted.

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, this is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him.

What did they hear? Well, they heard a voice from the cloud. Whose voice? Well, in the Old Testament, a cloud or the cloud represented the presence of God with His people.

We won't make reference to passages that confirm that. We'll just state that as something that is clear. The cloud representing the presence of God.

[15:57] And here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the cloud performs the same function. The cloud announces or evidences the presence of God. Or to use the language of Peter, the majestic glory.

It is God's voice that the disciples hear. And what does God say that would give us reason to listen to Jesus? Well, God says very little.

The number of words that he employs are very few. But what he does say is all about Jesus.

Nothing about Moses. Nothing about Elijah. It's all about Jesus.

And they're words of presentation and of commendation. Again, if we take Peter's take, we could say they're words of honor and glory directed to Jesus and concerning Jesus.

They are words that tell us about Jesus' identity, about Jesus' mission, and about Jesus' obedience. Just notice very fleetingly what the words are.

[16:59] This is my son. Jesus' identity, who he is. This is my son. Jesus, the eternal son of God. He who has ever been from all eternity God's son.

You should listen to Jesus because of who he is. But his mission. You see, the father goes on to say, this is my son whom I love. Or the loved one, the beloved.

This is my son, the beloved. I think we have a good reason to understand this expression, whom I love, or the beloved, as not only a declaration of the father's love for his son.

It most certainly is a declaration of the father's love for his son. But it's also to be understood as a messianic title, the beloved. Notice how Luke has the equivalent expression.

Luke, in his parallel passage, has the voice of saying, this is my son whom I have chosen. Listen to him. So there, where Matthew speaks of God speaking, whom I love, Luke says, whom I have chosen.

[18:10] Now, what did God actually say? Well, perhaps a combination of these words. The point is that whom I have chosen certainly is language that speaks much more to Jesus as the chosen Messiah.

But the words whom I love are the beloved. They can also be understood as a messianic title of Jesus. And so they speak of his mission as the Messiah, as the promised Messiah, the anointed one, the one chosen by God, the one chosen to be our Messiah, our Savior, the one sent by the Father to save his people and restore them to friendship with God.

His mission was and is on behalf of all men and women and so necessarily concerns you. And so this is another good reason for listening to him because of what the disciples heard, not only about who Jesus is, but of his mission as the Messiah.

But then also, the Father speaks of his obedience. The Father says, with him I am well pleased. Why was the Father well pleased with Jesus?

Because Jesus, moment by moment, obediently fulfilled his mission as the Messiah. And this walk of obedience was directing Jesus to the pivotal act of obedience of his mission, to hand himself over to death in our place.

[19:42] It is of that death that Jesus speaks, both before the transfiguration, indeed immediately before, we read from verse 21 of chapter 16, where we find Jesus announcing to his disciples his impending death.

So just before he goes up the mountain, he's speaking of his death. When he comes back down from the mountain, again, that is the theme of what he speaks to his disciples.

In verse 22 of chapter 17, the immediately following incident, when they came together in Galilee, he said to them, the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

And they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life. Before and after and during. What it was, the subject of conversation between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

What were they speaking about? Well, Matthew doesn't tell us. He just tells us that they were talking with Jesus. But we do have a Luke's account where we are told what it is they were talking about.

[20:50] In Luke chapter 9 and verses 30 and 31, we read, 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.

They spoke about his departure, about his death. This is what they spoke about on the mountain with Jesus. This was the topic of conversation. And why?

Because the one they are speaking to was God's chosen Messiah, God's chosen Savior, sent to give over his life in our place, something that he does with obedience.

And so the Father is well pleased with him. The transfiguration is God's way of confirming and strengthening Jesus in the right path that he has set obediently his feet on.

Why listen to him? Why listen to Jesus? Because of who he is, the eternal Son of God. Because of the mission he was given and fulfilled. Because of his perfect obedience, even unto death, and death on a cross.

[ 22 : 01 ] Jesus has earned your ears. He has earned your attention. But then finally, and more briefly, what the disciples felt.

Another question that we can ask, another aspect that we can look at to give reasons for listening to Jesus. What the disciples felt? What did they feel? Well, I'm limiting myself to what we read in verses 6 and 7.

There's more in the passage, but we limit ourselves to those two verses. When the disciples heard this, the voice from the cloud, they fell face down to the ground, terrified, but Jesus came and touched them.

Get up, he said. Don't be afraid. What did they feel? Well, they felt frightened. They felt terrified. It's not surprising, given the transformed appearance of Jesus.

Two great men of God from the distant past appearing before their eyes, Moses and Elijah. The audible voice of God from the cloud.

[ 23 : 02 ] Who wouldn't be frightened? They felt frightened. They felt terrified. But they also felt the touch of Jesus in their frightened state.

Jesus, we're told, came and touched them. And his touch was accompanied by words. The very first words that they were to listen to in obedience to the instructions of the Father, listen to him.

What are the very first words that they are to listen to? Get up. Don't be afraid. Get up. Don't be afraid. The first words they listened to are tender words of comfort and encouragement.

The words from the cloud were wonderful words, but they were terrifying in their delivery. The words from the lips of Jesus are anything but frightening.

Now this alone is an insight into the need and loving intent of the incarnation that we might hear the voice of God in human form in a way that we can hear and receive and not be terrified.

[ 24 : 17 ] They felt the touch of Jesus accompanied by these words of comfort and encouragement. And what reason does this give us to listen to Jesus?

Well, it gives us a reason of great merit and great value. Jesus loves us. He loves you. Listen to him because the words he will address you are for your good.

They are words of comfort and challenge and conviction. They are words of truth and wisdom and above all words of love. Listen to him as he, as it were, touches you tenderly and speaks words of truth and peace and love.

I wonder what the next words were that Jesus addressed to Peter, James, and John. Words that they were also to listen to. I'm thinking of words that are not recorded in the Gospels.

You might say, well, I'm on suspect ground speculating about words that are not recorded. But bear with me. were the words that he spoke, the next words that he spoke to Peter, James, and John not words along these lines.

[ 25 : 29 ] Come with me down from the mountain. Down from the mountain into a broken and in its own way a terrifying world.

A world where children suffer horribly and there seems to be no hope. You see, this is the world that they were brought back down into. Because of what immediately follows.

Following on this wonderful experience on the mount. What is it that immediately follows? Well, we read in verse 14. When they came to the crowd, they came down from the mountain.

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.

See, Jesus, Peter, James, and John, they're up in the mountain and the poor disciples are doing their best, but they can't help this man whose son is suffering horribly.

[ 26 : 25 ] And Jesus brings Peter, James, and John from the mountain, from this amazing experience, and he brings them down into this terrifying, horrible world of suffering and pain and absence of hope.

This is what he brings them. Peter would have preferred to stay up on the mountain and build his little huts for Jesus and Moses and Elijah. He would have preferred to behold the majesty of Jesus as his face shone like the sun.

As Peter headed down from the mountain, was he lamenting that he was to no longer witness and enjoy the majesty of Jesus? Well, Peter would still see the majesty of Jesus, but in other ways. Let me just explain. Peter tells us that on the mountain, the disciples were eyewitnesses of his majesty. That's what we read in 2 Peter, eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty.

But then they return to the real world and are confronted with the tragic plight of this poor boy and his father. What a contrast. What a terrible and horrifying contrast.

[ 27 : 39 ] And yet, when Jesus spoke, when Jesus spoke, the demon listened to him. Isn't there a great irony there? The first one, or certainly one of the first beings that we see listening to Jesus is the very demon who is oppressing this poor boy.

He listened to him and the boy was wonderfully healed. What are we then told by Luke concerning this miracle, this healing, and this boy being handed back to his father?

Such a tender picture of this boy who in a way had been stolen from his father, being handed back to his father. What are we then told in Luke chapter 9 and verses 42 and 43?

What is the conclusion concerning this miracle of Jesus? We read from verse 42, Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion, but Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

And then we read, And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. Now the fascinating thing is that the word there translated greatness is the same word translated majesty in Peter's letter.

[ 28 : 54 ] when Peter says we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He's thinking of the face shining like the sun, and yet here, back down in the dark valley of suffering and pain, his majesty is also beheld.

But in this other way, as he delivers this poor boy from the oppression that he was suffering from, Peter was still able to witness the majesty of Jesus, but indifferent.

You might say in manifold ways, the greatness and majesty of Jesus is a manifold wonder. What about you and me today? Well, as we listen to Jesus, as you listen to Jesus, you too will be granted glimpses of the majesty of Jesus.

But you need to listen to him. If you don't listen to him, then you will lose out big time on being witness to who he is and his majesty as he works and reveals himself in glimpses, in the manners that he sees fit in your life and round about you.

Listen to Jesus. Will you listen to Jesus? Perhaps you have yet to put your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Listen and believe as he assures you, I am the resurrection and the life.

[ 30 : 20 ] You who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Listen to him as he tenderly invites you.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Rest for your soul. Listen and live.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the manner in which you speak to us through your word.

And we pray that we would be of those who listen to you. And as we listen, as we hear, we would respond. We would not be mere listeners, hearers only, but also those who do and respond to your word.

We thank you for what your word reveals concerning Jesus and who he is, his majesty and glory, his identity as your eternal son.

[ 31 : 25 ] And we pray that as we grasp in a measure who he is and all that he has done, that we would gladly and with great expectation listen to what he has to say to us.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.