

Sermon Reading: Luke 9:28-36

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. ³¹ They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, 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 he was saying.)

³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Sermon Theme: Listen to Him

“Are you even listening to me right now?” You’ve probably been asked or asked this question before. You know how it is when you are talking to someone, you start to see their eyes glaze over, and they stare at a point behind you or something else. So you drop the question snapping them back to attention. More often than not you will be told, “Yeah, yeah I was.” But you both know better. Yes, they may have heard audible noises and sounds. They maybe even actually heard the words and are able to repeat them. But, were they listening? Hearing and listening are two very different things. Hearing takes little to no effort. You hear all sorts of noises and sounds that you even learn to drown out and ignore. It’s a very passive experience where so many sounds go in one ear and out the other without registering a thought. Listening takes work. You need to hear clearly and pay attention. It means you chew on what is said, take the time to go over it, you are thinking and digesting it, applying it to yourself. Good listening means your focus and attention is on what is being said not on what you want to say. Listening is hard. You can hear a lot without actually listening not just in daily life but also when it comes to God’s Word. You hear the Word of God being read to you or by you, but are you listening? Are you actively engaged taking in the message being preached, or are you hearing while your mind is off somewhere else? When we go up the mountain with Jesus, Peter, James, and John, in Luke’s account there isn’t very much actual conversation that is recorded; and so, we need to listen closely.

Luke says about 8 days have passed since Jesus said *this*. Peter had made a beautiful confession of faith saying Jesus was, “The Christ of God.” Think of the miracles they had seen, the teachings they had heard, and we see how the Holy Spirit continued working faith in their hearts. They recognize and understand that Jesus was the Christ—God’s chosen one

promised from the Old Testament who would come and save God's people. So upon that confession Jesus determines they were ready to really listen. *This* that Luke is talking about is when Jesus speaks clearly to his disciples, explaining for the first time what it meant that he was the Christ. He says, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life”** (Luke 9:21). He goes on to explain what this would mean for his followers as well. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”** (Luke 9:23). Being a follower of Jesus was going to be anything but easy. Carrying a heavy cross means there would be shame involved. Being Jesus' follower means you aren't always going to be the popular one; it means it's going to be a struggle and difficult; it may mean at times you will wonder if it truly is worth it and you will have the temptation to want to drop it. Carrying the cross is saying no to yourself, no to your sinful nature...daily.

So about eight days pass after Jesus drops this on them he takes Peter, James, and John on top of a mountain to pray. While Jesus is praying the appearance of his face changes. His clothes become white and as bright as a flash of lightning. But it's not just a quick flash and then it's gone; Jesus is standing transfigured before them. In the face of the coming difficulty and struggles in the coming months and years Jesus gives these three disciples a glimpse of his glory as God to assure them. This glory had always been there while at the same time it's not like he no longer was a human being. But his glory is no longer as hidden from their eyes.

When this is happening, Moses and Elijah appear. How they recognized them, we don't know. But they did. We don't know the exact words or every detail that is being spoken, But we have the summary which is begging to be listened to. It's the same type of conversation Jesus had with his disciples almost a week ago. They are talking about Jesus' departure; that is, his coming death, resurrection, and ascension—his departure from this world. Fascinating how the disciples get to overhear this discussion; but are they listening?

Peter seems to be struggling. A week ago when Jesus told them this Peter told Jesus he was talking nonsense. He wasn't going to let Jesus be arrested, suffer, and eventually be killed. But even after being reprimanded and scolded by Jesus, it seems like Peter is still having trouble. He wants to build tents—places for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus to stay. Luke says Peter didn't know exactly what he was saying. Can we blame him? He had been struggling with staying awake and now was fully awake. You know how confusing it can be right after you wake up so that you need a few moments to get your bearings straight. Then there's the fact of Jesus' glory, the two men, their conversation...yeah, confusion makes sense. To his credit, Peter does recognize that it's a good thing for them to be there and he doesn't want to leave. He wants to stay in the glory; which is understandable. But that's not what Jesus said would happen for his followers. Before the glory must come the cross. But Peter wants nothing to do with the struggle, the suffering. He still isn't listening.

It's not too hard to see ourselves with Peter. How often do we only hear what we want to hear when it comes to God's Word? How often do we hear God's Law condemn a sinful action and tell me what I'm doing is wrong, but in some way convince myself that I'm the exception and my excuse is valid? It's all too often that we find ourselves trying to hold onto the "glories" of this world, trying to build our little kingdoms of social status, financial accomplishments, and life-experiences at the expense of our relationship with God. We are unwilling to wrestle with the hard times and try to avoid whatever makes life uncomfortable, tests us, gives me stress even when it happens because of our relationship with God because, well, it's hard. It's really easy to be thankful for the good times, but then we turn around complaining and griping during the hard instead of being thankful for those too. How often do you and I catch ourselves saying of God's promises, "I know but..." Listening is hard.

We don't hear much from James but we do know he is struggling to stay awake. As well with John and Peter, James feels the heavy burden of sleep making it difficult for him to keep his eyes open. But it's not because he's a lesser man. Remember that James was part of Jesus' "inner circle." He was one of the three that Jesus would bring along on special occasions like when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead or when he goes deeper with Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray the night Jesus is betrayed. He seems to be one of the more spiritually mature disciples. And still he struggles.

Maybe you can relate to this too. The obligations and expectations of life, from yourself and everyone else can weigh heavily on you so that you are wore out. You can feel burdened and sleepy so that even when you know that you need to and should stay awake and pay attention to God's Word, those eyelids feel like they are being pulled down by an invisible weight. Then there's the temptation to be spiritually sleepy, to think that you are "fine" and you should be good enough for now. Maybe you fall into that mindset, "Jesus love me this I know, and that's all I need to know," instead of seeing that you personally need to be in the Word more, actively studying and listening to it. How easily we forget Paul's warning, "**If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Are you waiting for some "wake up" call in your life to get more serious about your faith life and relationship with God? Are you failing to recognize what is in front of your face and that time is now? Are you listening?

Then there's John. He sees the glory in front of him. But then he has to wait. Eventually he is going to be sent into exile on the island of Patmos away from friends and family for his work for Jesus and spreading of God's Word. On that island God grants him another vision of the glory recorded in the book of Revelation. And then he has to wait some more.

Do feel like you're left waiting? Whatever it is you are wrestling with right now—that pet sin you keep falling back into, the sickness that won't go away, the depression, the conflicts among family, questions and self-doubts—it can feel like you've been wrestling with it for

too long and you're just waiting and wondering. Is it ever going to end? Is it ever going to get better? Do you feel like you've been on this earth for too long already and can't figure out why God tells you to wait? Are you having a hard time listening and taking to heart when Jesus tells you, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

While Peter is talking a cloud appears, overshadows them, and they enter into this cloud. Of course they should be afraid. And if they weren't scared enough after entering the cloud, they hear, "**This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.**" Luke doesn't need to go into detail who is speaking. They know and we know. Wake up and pay attention; don't just hear, listen. Listen to God's Son. Listen to God's chosen candidate. Listen to him because here is the Savior that you need. The one who is 100% true God and true Man has one mission: to go to die on a cross. He didn't come to give you a blueprint of a life to follow or to teach you good morals to live by. He came to face the same temptations as Peter to want the glory without the cross. Like James he fought against the weaknesses of the flesh. He wrestled with that temptation where the spirit is willing but the body is weak. Like John he knew what was coming. But I'm sure there were times when Jesus prayed "Lord, how long?" Whether you see yourself more in Peter, James, or John, Jesus knows what you are wrestling with in your life; he faced it himself. He knows what you are dealing with. He is your brother. But he is also God. And as a true God, he's not just wrestling with you, he conquers for you. He doesn't just struggle, he overcame. He goes to that cross not as someone who was defeated but as your substitute who lived in your place. Sin could not overpower him; he was perfect for you so that all your sin is forgiven. The devil would be not be able to defeat him; Jesus will crush him on the cross freeing you from slavery to sin and the devil. Death cannot contain him; on Easter morning he breaks free from death's steely grip and lives so that you too will live. And so he reveals himself to Peter, James, and John, he shows you and me on this mountain that going to Jerusalem doesn't mean that he's losing; the victory is already guaranteed.

The Father doesn't wrap you in a cloud instructing you. He wraps you in the waters of baptism, makes you his own, and speaks to through his Son, the Word—the Bible. Listen to him. Yes, there will be struggles as we carry our various crosses. No, it will not always be easy. But because of the hope that is guaranteed yours, be bold. Do not lose heart; your confidence is in Christ—God's Chosen One—who has already won the victory over sin, death, and the devil. For after the cross comes the crown of glory waiting for you in heaven. And so we face those struggles of life, putting off the shameful, secret ways of our sinful nature following Christ, God's Son, down the mountain of glory. With heads held high we go to Mount Calvary where our Savior will die on the cross for your sins and mine. But you know the rest of the story. This is God's Son, who he chose. Listen to Him. Amen.