

"Listen To Him!"

Matthew 17:1-9

March 2, 2014

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

We live in what's been called "the information age". Not only is there the thirst for knowledge (as there has always been), but there are so many more opportunities to satisfy that thirst for knowledge than there ever have been before. There are the traditional sources of knowledge that have always been there: libraries, books, magazines, newspapers, and so on. The internet has made the opportunities to gain information explode. There is so much information out there and so many sources from which to obtain that information. Which information do you trust? Which sources do you listen to?

One area in which many people are searching for information on is spirituality. It's a hot topic in our postmodern world. Some are looking for information about whether there is a god or not. Some, convinced that there is a God, are looking for information about who this God is. Some who claim to believe in God or, more specifically, claim to be a Christian are looking for information about how God acts and what we can expect from Him.

Where can people find information about who God is and how He acts?. A popular place for people to look for God is within themselves. The influence of Eastern spirituality has taught many in America to look for the spark of the divine within. Many Americans (perhaps some of your friends and family) will search no farther for God than within their hearts. "Listen to your heart!" they will say.

Pastor John Sias, in His book, *5 Things You Can Do To Witness Christ*, puts it this way: "Even folks who admit there's a God above them are usually awfully quick to assume that they can define Him more or less as they please or as they have interpreted their various experiences and feelings." (p.87) People in postmodern America, even those claiming to be practicing Christians, usually define God in the following ways. God is someone who is always strong and successful. We are not interested in anyone or anything that is weak or a failure. God is someone who will always bless me

when I want Him to and how I want Him to. Of course, I may have to have a strong enough faith or be obedient to God in order to get those things, but I can handle that. And God would never require anything of me or ever let anything bad happen to me. For then, I wouldn't be happy or free to partake in all the other activities that a busy life has to offer me.

Surprisingly, this was not far off from Jewish expectations and assumptions about the coming Messiah during New Testament times. They expected a Messiah who would be strong and successful. They expected a Messiah who would restore the nation of Israel to military superiority and economic prosperity. They wanted a Messiah and the God who sent Him to do what they wanted Him to do, when they wanted Him to do it, and how they wanted Him to do it.

There is one major problem all of us have in determining our knowledge about God. We are corrupted and ruined by sin since the time of Adam. That means our powers to reason, research, and know about God are corrupted and ruined, too. It's like having a broken scale or a crooked ruler. You can try to carefully weigh things or to draw a straight line, but you will always fail because your tools for measuring are broken.

Although it's not noticed by the world or even by you, our minds and our wills are broken in the area of spirituality. We can try hard to search for God on our own in an attempt to know and do His will, but, on our own, we are unable to do this because of the brokenness of sin. We tend to see God, define God, and know God in terms of our own thoughts, desires, and attitudes. As someone once put it, "In the beginning, God created man in His own image. Ever since then, man has been returning the favor." We create God to be how we think He should be and act. When we encounter God in any other way than that, we reject Him.

This happened immediately before our text. Jesus told His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Jewish leaders. He would ultimately be killed on a cross in Jerusalem (yet rise on the third day). He said that anyone who wanted to go with Him had to deny his/her own desires, take up a cross of suffering, and follow Him. This was not what they were

expecting in a Messiah. It's no wonder that Peter took Jesus aside to criticize Him and say, "No way, Lord! This will never happen to you!"

We are not much different, are we? When God appears to be weak and His mission seems not to be succeeding, we doubt and complain. We don't like weak and unsuccessful. When God calls us to do something that may inconvenience us or allows something unpleasant or painful to come into our lives, we bail out on Him or simply refuse to accept it. Since we have decided that following Jesus must be happy, enjoyable, and always the way we want it to be, we reject anything to the contrary.

That's why the Transfiguration of Our Lord is such an important day, not only for Him, but for us as well in understanding who Jesus is and what it means to be a Christian. Shortly after Jesus' little sermon on His mission and the meaning of discipleship, He took three of His closest disciples - Peter, James, and John - up to a high mountain by themselves.

There, Jesus was transfigured. His appearance changed dramatically. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. I don't think we can adequately imagine the magnificence of this sight. The pictures on our bulletins and the children's bulletins don't get it right. This was supernaturally bright light. This indicated that this was no ordinary itinerant preacher from Nazareth. This was not another pseudo-messiah following those who had come down the pike. This was the real deal. In fact, it was more. This was more than a powerful preacher or a mighty Messiah. His appearance showed Jesus to be more than mortal.

Then, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah. These were two of the biggest names in the Old Testament. Moses represented the Law. Elijah represented the prophets. They had both talked to God on the mountain (Sinai). Both of their lives ended in mystery. Moses died and was buried by God. The location of his grave was never known. And Elijah, of course, was taken to heaven without dying in a fiery chariot. Despite the fact that these men and their work were the most important in all of the Old Testament, their appearance here is not shining or majestic in any way. As important as

they were to God's people, they were not equal to Jesus. Jesus stood above the Law and the Prophets. The appearance of Moses and Elijah showed Jesus to be more than the written Word of God.

A bright cloud overshadowed them. The cloud demonstrated the very presence of God Himself. God led the people of Israel out of Egypt in a cloud. God descended on to Mount Sinai in a cloud. As we saw in our Old Testament lesson, Moses went into that cloud to be in the presence of the Lord. Now that very cloud was here. God was here, but how?

A voice comes from the cloud – God the Father Himself – and says, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” The three disciples knew that God was present in the cloud, but the voice was saying God is present in this man. This man, Jesus, is the beloved Son of God. And not only that, but God was pleased with Jesus and all that His Son had done and said. God gave Jesus His full stamp of approval regarding His identity, His teaching, and His mission. And since He approved of it, the Father was saying, both to these disciples and to us, “Listen to Him!”

Here is how you know who God is, how God acts, and what you can expect from God: Listen to Jesus! When Jesus says that His mission was to come into this world to be rejected, suffer, and die, rather than to be accepted, succeed, and live, listen to Him! It's true. When He says that all who want to follow Him will go the same way and deny themselves, accept the cross of rejection, suffering, and even death, listen to Him! That's what it will be for faithful Christians

Yet, at the same time, when Jesus tells you what He has done for you, listen to Him. When He says that He came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom, that is, a payment for the sin of the world, including your sin and my sin, listen to Him! That is the truth. When He promises to convey that forgiveness to you personally and says of the bread and the wine on our altar, “Take and eat; take and drink. This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”

When Jesus tells you what He will do for you because He has died to take away sin and rose from the grave to overcome death and every other consequence of sin, listen to Him. When Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die," (John 11:25-26) listen to Him. That is God's promise to you through Jesus.

After the voice spoke from the cloud, the disciples fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus said, "Rise, and have no fear." When they looked around, there was no one there but Jesus only. No Moses. No Elijah. No cloud. No glory. Only Jesus – in a very ordinary form again – now ready to go down the mountain and up on a cross. The disciples had learned something valuable. One author put it this way,

"The Three have experienced a taste of the glory and power. If they refuse to reckon with the cross, however, they glory and power will elude them. Jesus' disciples are to listen and to believe and accept the necessary sequence of cross before resurrection, both for the Son of God and for ourselves." (Gibbs, p.859)

We, too, have no reason to fear. We have Jesus – only Jesus. As we gather together to hear our Lord speak those His called servants, see our Lord in His Word, and to experience "a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper", we are to listen carefully, believe completely, and accept unconditionally what our Lord tells us about the sequence of our lives as Christians: self-denial before fulfillment; sadness before joy; suffering before glory; and death before resurrection. It was that way for Jesus. It will be that way for all who rightly follow Jesus.

Yet it is all good. For at the end of all this is Jesus. And, at the end, He will say to you, to me, and to all who have listened to Him and followed Him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:23) "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matthew 25:34) What excitement! What bliss! All that we have been through will have been worth it. What eternal joy there will be to listen to Him!

Amen

