

Transfiguration Pt.2: Proof—Listen Confidently

Ignorance and Insight: Part 13

Mark 9:2-7 (Mt.17:1-6, Lk.9:28-35) 7/19/2019

If you struggle with doubt or skepticism when you read Scripture, this message is for you. And even if you don't have doubts, anything that increases our faith and confidence in his Word will improve our listening ear when Christ speaks to us. This message will fortify your faith.

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Mark 9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. **3** His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. **4** And there appeared before them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. **5** Peter 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." **6** (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

7 Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son,¹ whom I love. Listen to him!" **8** Suddenly, when they looked round, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

9 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. **10** They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant. **11** And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" **12** 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? **13** But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

Introduction: Attitude Governs Listening

Have you ever noticed how much your attitude toward a person governs the way you listen to that person? I might hear a statement in the news, and if I find out it came from Hillary Clinton I'll have one reaction, but if it was from Ted Cruz I might have the opposite reaction because I hear it with completely different ears because of my attitude. Attitude is everything when it comes to how you listen. If you ask

¹ The glory is future, but the sonship is present.

someone a question, and just before he answers, you find out he is one of the leading experts in the world in that field, how does that change the way you listen? Think of the different ways you listen to people who have hurt you or lied to you, compared to people who have sacrificed much to do good for you. How do you listen to people who have suffered horribly and responded in a godly way, or if they are endorsed by the person you respect the most? What if you're listening to a lecture on the Nazi concentration camps, and halfway through the lecture you find out the instructor was a prisoner in one of them? How does that change the way you listen? What if you find out the preacher you are listening to is pro-abortion, or believes in evolution, or doesn't accept the inspiration of the Scriptures? Your attitude toward the person you are listening to has a massive impact on the way you listen. And that's never more true than when it comes to listening to Jesus Christ.

The Reason to Listen

We're studying the Transfiguration, and last time we looked at the OT background (which was the giving of the Law through Moses on Mount Sinai) and the main point of the Transfiguration (which is that we should *listen to Jesus*). But it's not just that we should listen to him. God didn't just say, "Listen to him," he said, "**This is my Son whom I love, (therefore) listen to him**" (v.7). We are told to listen because of who Jesus is.

Learn His Nature to Improve Your Listening

The implication is, if you want to become a better listener to Jesus, learn more about who he is and what he's like. That will change your attitude, which changes everything. The more you learn about what Jesus is like, the more fine-tuned your ears will be when you listen to him. You'll be more receptive, more insightful, more enthusiastic, more curious, you understand more, remember more, put it all into practice more, persevere longer—all of that will improve the more you learn about what Jesus is like.

And that's great news for us because if we've learned anything from watching the disciples in the book of Mark, it's that listening to Jesus is a lot easier said than done. There is a lot that can go wrong in listening to Jesus. You can fully intend to listen to him and still fail miserably. So it's great news to find out that there's something we can do that will bring us to be better listeners, namely, to see Christ's glory. The more you see of his glory, the more it will sanctify your ears.

Jesus prayed for that—he can't wait for the day when we see him as he is.

John 17:24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

That's going to be a marvelous day—the best day of your existence if you're a believer.

And until that day, we strive to see as much of that glory as we possibly can through what is revealed about Jesus in the Scriptures—especially the Transfiguration. So far we've seen quite a bit of that glory. Last time we saw the fact that Jesus is the prophet like Moses, he is perfect in moral purity, holiness, and righteousness. He is nothing less than the very God of eternal glory. And perhaps most importantly, he is deeply loved by God the Father.

God's Favor on Jesus

This is the second time now that God the Father has spoken from heaven in Jesus' ministry, and both times he said the same thing. At the baptism, "You are my Son, whom I love. And at the Transfiguration, "This is my Son, whom I love." It's important to God the Father that we understand how he feels about Jesus. That affects our listening because the more God favors a prophet, the more clearly he reveals himself through that prophet, and the more he listens to that prophet—we went over that last time. So let's move on.

Arrival of Elijah and Moses

We left off the story with Peter, James, and John shielding their eyes and looking away so they don't go blind, and suddenly they notice two other guys standing there. In v.2 Jesus and the three were up there **all alone**.

But now 4 And there appeared² before them Elijah with³ Moses,⁴ who were talking with Jesus.

Suddenly there are six of them instead of four. We talked last time about the significance of Moses—what about Elijah? Elijah's important because the OT ends with a promise that someday an Elijah-type figure would come and prepare the way for the Messiah. Let me read you the final⁵ paragraph of the OT (and notice the two names that are mentioned—Moses and Elijah).

Malachi 4:4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

God's last word in the OT is, "Remember the law of Moses, and I will send an Elijah type prophet who will prepare the way for the Messiah. And the way he'll get the way prepared will be by restoring wayward hearts, so when the Messiah comes he can save the people instead of judging them.

And now, in Jesus' day, it's been 400 years since the OT ended, so they've been waiting and watching for this Elijah figure to arrive for four centuries. And that wasn't just some obscure verse in the Bible that most people missed. Everyone in Israel was waiting for Elijah.⁶ Even at the cross the people mocked Jesus by saying, "See if Elijah comes to get him off the cross." And look down at v.11.

11 And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" These fishermen may not have been Bible experts, but even they knew enough to know that Elijah had to come before the Messiah could come.

So all that to say, Moses and Elijah were two crucial figures in the OT in connection with the Messiah. Moses was the first to explicitly promise the Messiah (the prophet like Moses), and Elijah was the last one mentioned in connection with the Messianic hope. And they were the two names mentioned in the last paragraph of the OT.⁷ Together, those two figures embody the messianic hope like bookends.

² According to Matthew, this was a vision (Matthew 17:9). The word "vision" can refer to supernatural ability to see something that is actually happening, such as the burning bush (Acts 7:31) or to something that is not actually happening (e.g. Acts 12:9). Either way, it is a direct communication from God (Acts 9:10, 18:9). So a vision of Moses and Elijah endorsing Jesus is every bit as valid as a physical endorsement (in fact, one could argue even more so, since a physical action could take place without God's endorsement.)

³ The NIV says "Elijah and Moses," but literally it's "Elijah *with* Moses." Some suggest that places the emphasis on Moses, as if Elijah were his attendant, but Cranfield points out the wording in 8:38, where Jesus appears *with* the holy angels. Still, that context is different enough that I think it's still possible that this phrase subordinates Elijah to Moses. On the other hand, Elijah is the one promised at the very end of the OT.

⁴ There's a lot of discussion about how they knew these men were Elijah and Moses. It may be that Jesus was polite, and introduced his friends. "Guys, I'd like you to meet Elijah and Moses." But I'm not sure even that was necessary. When God gives someone a vision, the person having the vision knows whatever God wants him to know in the vision.

⁵ I should point out that Malachi was not the last book in the Hebrew Bible. But it was the last of the prophetic books, and its ending comes across very much like a final word to the OT Scriptures.

⁶ NICNT: In the earliest sources the primary task of Elijah is to prepare the people of God for the reception of salvation through repentance. (For example, Pirque Rabbi Eliezer 43 (25a): "Without repentance Israel will not be redeemed ... They will fulfill the great repentance only when Elijah of blessed memory comes, as it is said ...")

⁷ There are some compelling arguments that the two witnesses in Revelation 11 represent Moses and Elijah. For those arguments see the sermon "The Days of Elijah" from 12/16/2012 on Luke 1:13-17.

Endorsement of Jesus

And v.4 says they **were talking with Jesus**. Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah also appeared in glorious splendor, so you could tell they had come from heaven. And they were talking with Jesus about his coming suffering and death. But Mark doesn't mention that part. He just wants us to know they were talking with Jesus. And the point of that seems to be that Jesus had their endorsement. Every matter must be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If you're typing up your resume, you can't do any better than this for references.

The Scribes were the top experts in the law of Moses, and they had been opposing Jesus. In their expert opinion, Jesus was not interpreting Moses accurately. And when I say, "Moses," I'm including all the OT Scriptures. The Jews often used "Moses" as shorthand to refer to the whole Bible.⁸ In John 9 they were accusing someone of being a follower of Jesus.

John 9:28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

So they are saying Jesus' teaching wasn't compatible with Moses' teaching—in their expert opinion. And so when God endorses Jesus, he produces an expert of his own: Moses himself! Can you imagine if I were teaching one of these Bible studies and you weren't sure about one of my interpretations, and so God sent Mark himself from heaven and he showed up in glorious splendor and said, "Yep. That's exactly what I meant when I wrote that"? That's witness #1. Witness #2 is none other than they one God promised would come and prepare the way for the Messiah—Elijah. And witness #3 is God the Father himself, when he speaks audibly from the cloud and says, "**This is my son whom I love. Listen to him.**" I would say that's pretty compelling expert testimony.

Listen Confidently

How does all that affect the way we listen? It enables us to listen confidently—without doubting. If you have a doubting, skeptical ear, then when Jesus speaks to you, his words won't come into your heart the right way. They will get distorted and won't have the effect they are supposed to have. They might not have any effect at all.

Hebrews 4:2 ... the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

If your ears get clogged with skepticism, the message will be garbled to the point of becoming powerless.

Verified

One reason for the Transfiguration was to provide an anchor for our faith—one of the many convincing proofs that Jesus is who he claimed to be. I get that from 2 Peter 1. When Peter was talking about how reliable his writings are, he appealed to the Transfiguration.

2 Peter 1:16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. 17 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; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. 19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it.

⁸ Matthew 23:2, John 5:46, 9:28, Acts 6:11, 15:21, 2 Corinthians 3:15.

The Scriptures were already certain and verified, but the events of the Transfiguration, combined with Jesus' resurrection, made the gospel that Peter and the others were preaching even more certain than the OT Scriptures. And so what's the implication for our lives? **19 ... you will do well to pay attention to it.** In other words, "**This is my Son ... listen to him.**" Peter got it. By the time he wrote 2 Peter, he understood the purpose of the Transfiguration. But while it was happening, not so much.

Peter's Response

Six days before the Transfiguration, Jesus called Peter Satan. For a whole week Peter has been praying that he will be more careful the next time he opens his mouth. But to no avail. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus That, right there, blows me away. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus Can you imagine this? If you were there on the mountain, Jesus was shining like the sun and flashing like lightning, suddenly Moses and Elijah appear in glorious splendor and they are speaking with Jesus, would you jump in to that conversation?

5 Peter 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."

We talked about this some last time in the Q&A. People go on and on trying to figure out why Peter said this—if it had something to do with the feast of tabernacles, etc.⁹ But Mark saves us the headache of trying to make heads or tails out of Peter's comment.

6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Mark is saying, "Don't worry about trying to figure out what Peter was talking about. Not even Peter knew what he was talking about. The only reason he said it was because he didn't know what to say."

Some people are like that. When they have no idea what to say, they say something. That's Peter. Even when he's at a total loss for words, he keeps talking. So Peter throws out his idea, and God basically says, "No Peter, don't talk—listen."

The main point of the Transfiguration is that we should listen, and so on top of all the things we've learned so far in the Gospel of Mark about how to listen the right way, here's one more: listen confidently. God wants us to be absolutely certain that what we are listening to is indeed his Word, so he gives unquestionable proof.

Why Doesn't God speak from Heaven to Everyone?

Now, everybody thinks they have a better idea than God on how he should reveal himself to us. People often say, "Why doesn't God just speak from heaven and call my name and tell me what he wants to tell me?" We saw in part 1 of this study that God taught us way back in Exodus 24 that that's not a good system. God did it that way then, and the people ended up begging God to stop. It was so traumatic that it was more than the people could handle. They were so psychologically shattered and physically endangered, they couldn't handle it. Believe me—you do not want God to speak to you directly. And as we saw in Ex.24, you really don't want to hear from God directly. It's far better for us for God to speak to us through human intermediaries.

⁹ It is not surprising that people's minds are drawn to the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths by Peter's remark. The word for "shelters" is one of the words used to describe the booths in that celebration. The Feast of Tabernacles, like the Passover, had come to have significant reference to the final deliverance promised by God. And there was a six day period between the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, which could coincide with the six day period between Jesus' announcement of his sufferings in 8:31.

The Best Proof

And it's also the best way for us to know for sure that what we're hearing is really from God. People say things like, "If God wants me to believe, what doesn't he do this miracle or that miracle for me?" When people say that, they are just like the Pharisees in ch.8 who demanded a sign from heaven. "Sure you can feed the multitude, heal the sick, walk on water, still the storm, command demons, and raise the dead, but none of that is enough. Show us something in the sky; then we'll be convinced."

Really? Why? What's more convincing about something up in the sky? What if Jesus only did sky miracles—do you think they would have believed? No. How many times have you seen something in the sky and didn't know what it was? That happens all the time. Jesus did miracles right in front of their faces, close up, where they could see them clearly and examine them.

The evidence God gave is far better than the evidence they demanded. And that's true every time someone thinks they have a better idea. So often people think it would be better if God did personalized miracles for each person instead of the way he did it, which was to do miracles before a small number of reliable witnesses. Would that be better? No. God's way is far better. If God did personalized miracles for each person, first of all, they wouldn't be miracles. What is a miracle? When God does something powerful? Or when he does something that can't be explained by science? No. God exerts massive amounts of power every moment in what we call gravity and scientists have no idea where all that power comes from. But we don't call that a miracle because it happens every day and behaves in consistent, predictable ways. But if an axe head floats, that is a miracle even though it doesn't require all that much power, because it's different from what God normally does with axe heads. So a miracle is simply when God does something different from what he usually does.

If God did miracles for everyone all the time, they wouldn't be miracles. They would be commonplace, which means it wouldn't prove anything to anybody. Plus, life would become impossible, because we wouldn't be able to count on consistency in the creation. If the laws of physics weren't reliable, sometimes there's gravity, other times it's not there because someone is demanding a miracle, sometimes the laws of motion function—it would be impossible to build anything, we couldn't have air planes or cars or even bicycles, life would be chaos, and it still wouldn't convince anybody. People say, "God, if you heal my child, I'll believe." But what if God did that every time? If he did it every time, it would be considered normal, it would become a law of nature, it wouldn't be a miracle, and people would say, "God, if you heal a second time, then I'll believe." And what if he did that every time? "If you raise her from the dead, then I'll believe." What about the next time they die?

The fact is, the best possible proof is the proof God gave. His idea was the best idea—thousands of undeniable miracles, done in the open over a period of years, verified even by his enemies, and reported by multiple, honest, reliable eye witnesses. Seeing something with your own eyes is not always better evidence than the evidence of reliable testimony. My eyes tell me the earth is flat—especially Kansas. Reliable testimony tells me it's a sphere. My eyes tell me the sun goes around the earth. Reliable testimony tells me otherwise. My senses have told me there were ghosts and monsters in my room as a kid. My senses have told me good things were dangerous and dangerous things were good. They have misread, misinterpreted, and misunderstood all kinds of things. Reliable testimony is a far better way to be sure of something than seeing it with my own eyes. If you have an experience, years later, your memory will get fuzzy, you'll have doubts, you'll remember it wrong. But what God gave us is written in black and white and any time in your life you can examine it, re-visit the evidence, night and day, any time you can have it right there.

And God went out of his way to make sure it was reliable testimony. Think of the men he chose. Only three men got to go up that mountain that day. Have you ever thought about how amazing it is that one of them was Peter—a man who was on Satan's team just six days prior? A lot of people have commented on the grace of Jesus in choosing Peter that day. If it were the modern church, Peter would have either been disqualified for life, or would at least have to prove his faithfulness over a period of years before being entrusted with anything of any importance. One week after Jesus had to rebuke Peter for advancing Satan's agenda, he picks Peter to be one of the three whose testimony would be the only

way anyone would ever know about the Transfiguration. That's is marvelous grace, but it's something else as well. It adds to the certainty we can have about what happened. Think about it—how do we know that Peter had failed so horribly six days prior? Mark tells us. Where did Mark get his information? Peter. Would you have included that detail? Luke left it out; why didn't Peter leave it out? It made him look like such a fool. It was such an embarrassment. Retelling the story decades later, why not leave it out? Because Peter was an honest man. No one would tell the story like Peter told it if he wasn't an incredibly humble and honest man. People who are experts in analyzing testimony of witnesses in court have examined the writings of the Apostles and have concluded that they pass every test for reliable, truthful testimony.

On top of that, Peter was a coward who denied he even knew Jesus when asked. And yet he later willingly was beaten, imprisoned, and crucified rather than stop insisting on the truth of what he had seen. People don't do that for a story they made up.

We know that Jesus is the Son of God because Elijah and Moses and God the Father testified to it, and we have reliable testimony of multiple eyewitnesses of that fact. There is no better proof possible.

So, how should we listen to Jesus? Confidently. We don't listen with a suspicious, doubting ear. We listen with the eagerness that comes from knowing what you're being told is verified, proven, pure truth from God—so reliable that you can and should base your whole life on it. Jesus' message is the kind that if you listen with doubt, it corrupts the message in your ears. So when you listen, listen confidently.

Summary: The reason God gives us for why we should listen to Jesus is truth about who Jesus is. Implication: learning more about Christ's nature will improve your listening. Here it helps us listen confidently (listening with doubt destroys the effect of the words) because it shows God's favor on Jesus. And the endorsement by Moses and Elijah, and the reliable testimony about all this, give us certainty.