

“Hearing God Speak”

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21

Graphic: mountain, transfiguration, tents, Lent

Key Verses: Matthew 17:5 While [Peter] was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

Theme: God spoke to the disciples telling them to listen to Jesus (obey Jesus). Our response to worship and discipleship is engaging in real life relationships in order to point people to Jesus and allow Jesus to work through us. As we enter Lent, look inward so that you can begin to shine Jesus outward around you.

1) Introduction

- a) Let’s pray...
- b) Open your Bibles with me to the gospel of Matthew...chapter 17.
- c) There are only two times in my life when I heard God audibly speak to me in my head. I won’t go into details about the circumstances when that occurred, which, obviously doesn’t happen as often for me as it does for some people. Suffice to say, though, that when God speaks into our lives, in whatever form, it’s usually during times of struggle and discernment, and if we listen, these are times of great transformation. I’m sure you’ve experienced God speaking into your life at different times, sometimes as a whisper though someone else, sometimes as a 2x4 upside the head (as my Dad would say).
- d) The Transfiguration of Jesus, God’s final STAMP of APPROVAL on the plan of salvation for the world, was one of those times in the Bible that God SPOKE. First time God spoke was at creation, then God SPOKE to Moses, and God spoke to Elijah, and then God SPOKE to Jesus at his baptism. God spoke a few other times in the Bible, but EVERY TIME he did, amazing things happened afterward.
- e) Today, though, we travel up the mountain with Peter, James and John, to hear the voice of God speaking and to be transformed for the reality ahead.

2) Scripture

a) Read Matthew 17:1

- i) First question we have to ask is: “Six days after WHAT?”
- ii) Back up a little to chapter 16, verse 13 and you’ll see that six days PRIOR to our text for today, Jesus asked the disciples who people were saying he was...Jesus wanted to know who the disciples thought he was.

- iii) That whole passage, leading up to this one today, culminates in Peter saying, in verse 16, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”
- iv) Jesus then went on to tell them that, BECAUSE He is the Messiah, he must, verse 21, go to Jerusalem, undergo GREAT SUFFERING, and be KILLED, and on the third day be raised.
- v) And then Peter tells Jesus he’s crazy and then Jesus tells Peter to shut up (that’s obviously my own paraphrase of the text, there ☺), and then Jesus talks about the cross and about the cost of FOLLOWING HIM, the cost of LISTENING to him...the price that is paid to be Jesus’ people.
- vi) AND THEN SIX DAYS LATER, now, Jesus TOOK Peter (this outta be good! It’s always lively when Peter’s around, right?), James, and James’ brother John, and LED THEM up a high mountain, by themselves. Three men...the INNER CORE of Jesus’ disciples...the ones who were closest to Jesus and who had pledged their LIVES to him...to follow him.
- vii) Jesus LED them up a (notice the adjective here) HIGH mountain. The only other time Matthew describes a mountain this way is following Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 4:8, when the devil takes Jesus to a VERY HIGH mountain and tempts him by offering the WHOLE WORLD to him, if he will bow down and worship the devil.
- viii) We know that something profound – something extraordinary – is going to happen here on THIS HIGH MOUNTAIN...with these THREE disciples closest to Jesus...
- ix) And it doesn’t take long for Matthew to tell us that...verse 2-3...

b) Read verses 17:2-3

- i) Extraordinary!!!! Peter, James and John go on a day hike with Jesus...thinking maybe that they would eat some granola and enjoy the countryside outside Jerusalem, and just when they thought things were going fairly normally, Jesus BURSTS into light.
- ii) Matthew describes it as Jesus SHINING like the sun – generating his OWN light, not reflected from any other source – and his clothes were DAZZLING white. All I can think of when I read that is a blinding, shining, almost painful, sparkly light.

- iii) And there they are, standing and staring at Jesus. I can just hear my Dad now, “Don’t ever stare at the sun or you’ll go blind.” But they can’t help but look at it...it had to be beautiful, right!
- iv) Jesus was transfigured! The Greek word Matthew uses for *transfigured* is μεταμορφωω (metamorphos), where we get the word metamorphosis. And this is a complete transformation. Back to the dictionary, we read it’s any complete change in appearance, character, or circumstance.
- v) And this transformation was from first century peasant-worker to this amazingly bright figure, shining like the sun!
- vi) And then, to make things way more interesting for Peter and his buddies, verse 3 tells us that Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared next to Jesus, talking with him.
- vii) Now, what would your first question be after reading that Moses and Elijah were standing next to Jesus TALKING? Talking about WHAT?
- viii) “Hey, how’s it going, man?” “You’ve been gone for like a couple thousand years...you, about 3-4 thousand? How’s that going for you?”
- ix) Or were they talking about old times, when they were all together in heaven before Jesus gave it all up to come to earth to live in the mess we’ve created. Whatever it was, these three obviously knew each other and were sharing some intimate moment. My theory is that Moses and Elijah were giving Jesus the final encouragement he needed to do what God was asking him to do.
- x) And if you study the lives of Moses – who represented the Law, the Torah (the first five books of the OT) – and Elijah, who, for Matthew represented the OT Prophets, you quickly realize that they had a few things in common with Jesus.
- xi) But the most important connection is that they Moses and Elijah were rejected by their own people, and later vindicated by God. And as we look ahead to the events of Jesus’ life, he, too, would be rejected by the Jews, and then ultimately vindicated by God to a place of honor and glory.
- xii) This encounter was God’s way of showing the disciples, and Jesus, that the plan Jesus was laying out before them was the real deal...

- xiii) And being here to witness it must have been AWESOME for the three chosen disciples...
- xiv) And that's why Peter, instead of just basking in the glow of the moment, opens his mouth...verse 4...

c) Read verse 4

- i) It's good for us to BE HERE!?! You think??? Duh!! (say Duh!) Who WOULDN'T think it was cool to be witnessing this? We YEARN for the visible presence of the power of God in our lives. We WANT to know that God is alive and well here NOW, and doing miraculous and powerful things. It's good for us to BE HERE!
- ii) Maybe Peter isn't that far off in HIS confession. The problem is, he's thinking of himself...he's focused on what they are getting out of the experience and not what God is trying to show them THROUGH IT.
- iii) Sometimes, when we see or experience the living presence and power of God in worship or in our lives, our first reaction is "what does it mean to ME, personally?" When we come to worship, we have to intentionally focus on God alone, or we fall into the trap of "what do we GET out of worship," like it's some kind of cosmic gumball machine...as long as we put the quarter in, we expect a return.
- iv) Being in the presence of God in worship, or discipleship is not the means to an end for US, it's a pathway for God to be glorified because of who HE IS! What we get out of it is not a nugget for life, but a desire to be further transformed and made holy for God.
- v) Peter was too caught up with his own thing and failed to see what God was doing for the world.
- vi) That's why Peter wanted the moment to last forever! Let's put up some tents, build a fire, take some pictures, make some more memories! And can you blame him, really?
- vii) The best vacation we ever took as a family was when we rented a houseboat and putted around beautiful Raystown Lake in PA. I NEVER, EVER wanted that vacation to end. To this day, when I think of it, I have incredible feelings of joy and a desire to go back and relive it.

- viii) If we feel that way about a vacation, can you imagine the desire to prolong this encounter with Jesus on this mountain? We would NEVER want it to end! Let's stay here forever...
- ix) Unfortunately, Peter didn't understand the bigger plan...just like vacations that come to an end because life is more than vacations...this encounter had a bigger purpose...

d) Read verse 5

- i) Whoa! Whoa! In Peter's mid-sentence, this cloud appears – bright, overshadowing cloud – and this VOICE, the voice of GOD, says, “This is my SON...I love him...listen to him!”
- ii) Kinda makes all the stuff Peter was talking about - whatever it was, right? – kinda makes it MEANINGLESS! Lots of times, when God intervenes in our lives, for whatever reason, some other things that we think were critical become meaningless!
- iii) When God calls you, the tasks and duties you had before become less and the new task becomes MORE!
- iv) And these words from the cloud...these are the same words that were spoken by God when Jesus was baptized in Matthew 3. But there's an addition...”LISTEN TO HIM!” This word has the connotation that we should FOLLOW HIM...do what he tells you to do...
- v) The voice from GOD...sent the disciples to their knees!!! Look at verse 6 (through 8)...

e) Read verses 6-8

- i) Jesus touched them...Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid”
- ii) Trembling and afraid, the disciples fell to the ground and buried their faces in the dirt...scared to death!
- iii) But Jesus CAME to them, right where they were...and Jesus TOUCHED them, right where they were...and Jesus comforted them, “Get up...do not be afraid.”
- iv) Basically, Jesus told them, “We have more to do, guys.” You may have wanted to stay here to prolong this moment – of course, now you just want to run away and hide ☺ - but we MUST keep going with the plan

that God has for us. This is not reality as we know it, even though this was a real as it gets.

- v) When the disciples looked up at Jesus, he was to only one left...it was him alone that they saw...no cloud...no bright lights...no voice...no Moses or Elijah...just Jesus.
- vi) When our lives get to the point where we think we have the plan figured out...or when our lives are filled with fear about our current circumstances...or even if we've buried our heads in our faces right on the dirt...there is One who COMES to us, touches us, and says, "Get up. Get up! And do not fear." "It's time to go back down the mountain together, and face the truth about the future"
- vii) And that's what they did...verse 9

f) Read verse 9

- i) It's time to go back down the mountain. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone, simply because they didn't fully understand what Jesus was talking about...and, I think, if the other disciples found out about this encounter with God, they would be discouraged because they didn't get to experience it with them...

3) Application/ 2 Peter 1:16-21

- a) Being a Christian involved in a Christian community is a series of encounters with the living God, followed by a call to go back down the mountain and face the reality of this world.
- b) When Peter was on that mountain, he thought he had arrived in the place where nothing could ever be better! He forgot, for just a moment, that the other disciples were down the mountain, struggling to do what Jesus told them to do. He forgot that people were struggling to find faith in this Jesus.
- c) Years later, Peter was writing his testimony to the world when he remembered this mountain encounter with Jesus...
- d) Turn with me to 2 Peter 1:16-21...read...
- e) You see, Peter wasn't transformed that day on the mountain...it wasn't the transfiguration of Peter, by any means...heck, later on Peter is the one that denies even knowing Jesus...Peter is one of the ones that flees when the pressure is on.

- f) Peter's reality was not on that mountain... Peter's reality was having to be restored by Jesus after confessing his love for him three times to combat the three times he denied him.
- g) But after the resurrection of Jesus, and the encounter with the living Christ, Peter finally understood the foundation of his faith. And it's in the words of the Law and the prophets, confirmed by hearing God speak, inspired by the Holy Spirit from God, and fully realized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus...it's not about human will to do what we want. It's about what God is leading us to be and do for the sake of Christ in the world. That became Peter's reality.
- h) What is our reality? Is it spending all our time on the mountain? Do we worship 24/7/365, loving God perfectly, loving all our neighbors as ourselves? Probably not, if we're honest.
- i) Yet, is our reality spending so much time in the valley of life – entrenched in the world apart from the encounters and experiences of God – that we forget that God is always present with us and wants us to be in relationship with Him?
- j) The transfiguration of Jesus was a pivotal moment in history and in Jesus' life. On one hand, it was an affirmation that Jesus had become and done what God wanted him to do. It was God pouring out love and blessings.
- k) On the other hand, it was a call to go back down the mountain and face the reality of the cross...to finish what he started...to stop teaching and show the disciples and the world what God wanted.
- l) Even though Jesus, right alongside Peter, would have preferred to stay on the mountain that day, he knew he had work that had to be done...for you and for me, on the cross...

4) Conclusion

- a) Our mountain top experience today is Holy Communion. My deepest desire for us is to experience communion like Peter experienced the transfiguration, or like we sometimes experience vacation...we should never want it to end! And when we think of it, we should be filled with such a desire to have more if it - more of Jesus - that we can't wait until it happens again. This is God's voice speaking into our lives today!
- b) Wednesday night, Ash Wednesday, we'll take communion again as a way to mark the beginning of Lent.

- c) For today, let's camp out here for a time, and allow the bright, shining star of Jesus to impact our lives...and then, as we rise from the table and go into the world, may the reality we face, now with Jesus in us again, be an opportunity to share the eternal life and hope with someone who is wandering in the valley and not sure how to find Jesus...
- d) (kneel) Let's pray...