

Matthew 17:1–13

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 17, verses 1 through 13. This is what God's word says. And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He was still speaking, when behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise, and have no fear.

And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

[1 : 20] And the disciples asked him, Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? And he answered, Elijah does come, and he will restore all things.

But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.

Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

And let me add my word of welcome, especially to those of you who might be finding your way to the city and looking for a church home. We're certainly glad that you've come to be along this morning.

This is the second Sunday in a fall series entitled Following Jesus as King. Lessons to be learned along the way.

[2 : 26] Following Jesus as King. If I were to capture the essence of the lesson for this particular week from this text, you'll find it right there on the back end of verse 5.

There it is. Listen to him. Last week we opened up the series with the lesson simply being get in line and follow.

Today we follow that with listen to him. Why? Why? Why the need to listen?

Why? Why? Why? why?! Well, for starters, you and I live in a world where there are competing voices, are there not?

Competing voices that are calling out to us on the streets for a hearing. We're not short on ideas or understandings or dictums that we ought to listen to.

[3 : 44] I was thinking of the idea that's present in regard to listening to your heart. I think it was Oprah who picked up on the notion of life whispers to you and you need to listen to your heart in advance of being able to know how to navigate your way in the world.

That's a voice that is calling out to you. This sense that you have within yourself an internal soul awareness that will help you navigate, regardless of what's coming towards you, whether it be pleasing or not.

That's not the only voice. There are some who would advocate for not this internal, subjective, experiential listening and following according to the heart, but rather the mental capacities of thought and reflection and logic.

Follow, in one sense, your dreams. Requires that you think through what you want to accomplish in the world. And having set out your goals through mental apprehension and having looked at your

giftedness, you begin to listen to those dreams, but not in a pie-in-the-sky way, but make your plans.

Think it through. Walk it out. Demonstrate discipline. Listen to him. These are our voices. And yet, the text is right there.

[5 : 21] Take a look at it again. End of verse 5. Listen to him. I suppose the scriptures are trying to speak to us.

They do, by way of quotation in another part of the Bible, that we become futile in our thinking, and our foolish hearts are darkened, that our heart can be deceived, that our mind can operate in a deficient way.

And so, if we are listening to our heart or following the dreams of our mind, we have to recognize that there are times in life, are there not, where you've said to yourself, what in the world, go ahead, you finish it, was I thinking?

What was I thinking? I'm in a mess. Because I've followed the aspirations of a well-thought-out plan that hasn't come to fruition.

There are times where we might actually say, why did I follow those feelings anyway? First of all, the feelings have changed.

[6 : 40] And because they've changed, my life direction has shifted. And so, there are reasons to consider why a text might approach a culture like ours and say, hey, time out.

Listen to him. Listen to him. Maybe listening to Jesus might help you this morning put your life back on track.

Maybe it might help you turn your life around. When did the disciples learn this lesson? It's fascinating to me when I look at the text.

I love the literary way that the text moves. Just by simple observation, they learned it, verse 1, when Jesus led them up a high mountain by themselves.

This tutorial course for three disciples. This is when they learned it. They learned it even in a literary way, verse 9.

[7 : 45] And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commands them. They learned this on the day when he took them up on the mountain. And they saw him transfigured before him.

But it was all reinforced by verse 9 as they're coming down the mountain. And he's already commanding them things that they're now listening to and apprehending, perhaps for the first time. They learned this, simply put, in the context of Matthew, six days after he told them, you know, I'm going to die and then rise again.

He's announced death, burial, resurrection, but that hasn't yet come to fruition. In other words, they learned it early. They learned it early.

They learned it before they knew they needed it. Maybe we need to learn it before we know we need it as well. Take a look at these opening lines.

[8 : 47] How did they learn this? What was the scene? Verse 2, he was transfigured before them.

And his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. This word transfigured really has the connotation of metamorphosis.

It has the idea of something changing. He changed before them. He was transformed before them. I don't know how to put a word picture to it, but there was a summer where Lisa and I gave ourselves to milkweed in the hopes of monarchs.

Milkweed are what these caterpillars eat. We put up a netting on our screened-in porch. It had two wooden hoops, one at the top to keep it open and one at the bottom, and a branch within, and we filled it with milkweed and these caterpillars that were voracious in appetite.

I mean, I was searching through the entire city of Chicago and western suburbs at the time for more milkweed to feed these creatures that were just feasting on plant for life.

[10 : 10] Then the day came when they were full, round, and large, made his way to a branch and kind of hung underneath.

I watched, and over the next course of a couple of days, this chrysalis emerges. Green.

Fascinatingly, with gold dots around it, almost ringing it with beauty.

Like a ring, but not quite a ring. And this green chrysalis hung for days. And then one morning I came out and it had been opened, and I began to look in my netting, and there was a monarch, this beautiful creature that had emerged from this hungry, very hungry caterpillar.

And then we watched him fly, or her, I don't know what it was, but off the monarch went. And then we watched this repeat itself two or three or four times.

Fascinating, fascinating to watch metamorphosis take place. Incredible to see something ordinary be transformed into something glorious.

[11 : 33] This is, in some way, what Peter and James and John saw in a moment, not over weeks, and not requiring any milkweed at all.

They were on the mountain with Jesus, and suddenly, instantly, wrapped in the light of green and gold, and the ambiance of cloud.

He's there, and his face is shining like the sun, and his clothing is actually white as light. He's transformed before them.

It's an image of his glory. So, if he first told them, I'm going to die, and later we'll learn for the sins of the world, he now is almost demonstrating through this experience that death is not the end for him. The cave, the chrysalis of life would give way to this transformation, this glory, this eternal weight and display of God's pleasure on him, that Jesus now is actually larger than life.

[12 : 48] And they see what he will be before he ever becomes. Would have been fun to have been there, wouldn't it?

Notice, he's not just there. It says in verses 3 and 4 that he's not just transfigured, but he was talking with two others. There was this apparition, this appearance.

Verse 3, and behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him. He's in conversation. These figures are important figures in the Old Testament.

Moses and Elijah are almost like the dual pillars of the prophetic office. Moses, who receives God's word and dispenses it.

Elijah has this incredible ministry of wonders in the sight of God's people. And so these two speakers on behalf of God are now in Jesus' presence.

[14 : 00] And they're there. And they're all, in a sense, in Peter's mind, on equal footing. No, no, let me put it more succinctly. Peter believes now that his Jesus is on their footing.

We know that because look what he does. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it's good that we're here. Boy, I like the base camp. If you wish, I'll make three tents here.

One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. The tents here probably is in reference to a temporary dwelling.

Something you set up for a limited period of time. Something that Israelites would have done in their 40 years of wandering. Or that they would later celebrate in the festival of the booths.

In other words, Peter is saying, this is so incredible. Can I do something for you three that would just make you stay for a while? Can we dwell here? Can I make something for you that would make you dwell here?

[15 : 10] Peter, my Jesus, he says, you are now revealed to me to be on par with Moses and Elijah. What a moment.

What a youth retreat. What a weekend away. What an encounter. Can we sit for a bit? Be glad to make that happen, says Peter.

Peter. Well, it moves then from transfiguration to this talking to the takeaway. There's the takeaway, five to eight. This now moves right into our text or our theme for the morning.

While he was still speaking, that is Peter, a bright cloud overshadowed them. And a voice from the cloud said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them and said, rise and have no fear.

[16 : 14] And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Peter is now interrupted by the covering of a cloud, like the glory of God come down, and a voice from heaven.

Akin, akin really, to the voice that came from a cloud when Jesus himself was baptized. When that moment said, this is my beloved son.

But now we have this further explication of who he is. And it's not just who he is, but what you're to do with him. This is my beloved son.

Listen to him. No wonder they were terrified. And you don't find Peter speechless very often. But he was here, at least for a moment.

It's almost as though the voice was correcting his subjective experience in the midst of the encounter. It wasn't merely that his Jesus was on a par with the Old Testament prophets of

greatness.

[17 : 18] It's according to the voice from heaven. No, this, this Jesus is my son. Listen to him. The voice says, the word of Christ supersedes all other voices that are competing for your allegiance.

Listen to him. Listen to him.

What about us? I might know why it would be good to consider this morning the biblical text admonition to listen to him.

I might know how and even when they learned the lesson of listening to him. But how do I go about it today? What does it require from us?

Are you supposed to go on some excursion, some retreat, head up into a mountain, wait for some supernatural experience? You know, people do.

[18 : 50] I mean, Aaron Rodgers went away for like, what, four days, got himself in a dark cave? I don't know what he's listening for. I mean, people do. How do you go about it?

I mean, you don't, you don't really expect, do you? I mean, Jesus to show up in your bedroom at two in the morning and cast himself on the walls of your home and tell you what you need to know. I mean, easy for them, but what about us? Even though people all the time are trying to do this. I think of the 20th century and the great Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman who did a number of plays.

One of them was a trilogy and the last one was actually called, interestingly enough, *The Silence*. It actually emerges in his mind, this play emerges when Bergman was in a cathedral looking at a great stained glass window and the window depicted Jesus as a good shepherd.

And so the story, as stories go, has Bergman going up to the stained glass window where Jesus is there as a shepherd and he says, speak to me.

[20 : 07] And, you know, nothing happens, right? I mean, you would expect nothing to happen. So then he says again, speak to me! No experiential subjective encounter with Jesus.

He wasn't coming off the wall. Bergman finally says, I won't leave until you speak to me. Well, of course, you know, he left. And he went home and wrote *The Silence*, which is his understanding that what if we live in a world where God doesn't exist?

No, even worse, what if we live in a world where God exists but he doesn't speak? People today are constantly looking for a voice from God.

But we come up dry. So how do we do it? Well, fortunately, we're not left to just conjure this up for ourselves. This is one of the rare moments in a message where I'm actually going to ask you, if you have a Bible, to turn to a different passage.

Peter shows us how we listen to him today differently than how he heard him as an eyewitness.

[21 : 30] Look further back in the Bible. 2 Peter. 2 Peter, the letter, chapter 1, verse 16.

We have here a paragraph that references this transfiguring experience.

This is how my Bible reads. Verse 16. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Well, when? When, Peter? When did you see this glory? Verse 17. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

Peter is saying, I was there. I heard it. Now here's the link he makes.

[22 : 36] For you this morning, this is the hope he gives. Verse 19. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you do well to pay attention as a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

It's almost like if you want your own transfiguring moment, if you want the light that shines, if you want the glory that descends, and notice how he speaks about the word that comes to your heart. Verse 20. Know this. First of all, no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of men, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

What Peter is saying is that you can listen to him as you read the Bible. In fact, he's actually arguing that what you and I have today places us in an advantaged position to know what God really wants from us.

We're not subject to the internal heart-pulling strings of my feeling. I'm not subject to my own mind, which has limitations and deficiencies.

[23 : 53] I read the word, and I have something more sure than what Peter encountered as an eyewitness. This is fascinating.

How do we go about listening to him? Number one, by reading the Bible. Now, that might not fit with all of you, but I love what Timothy Ward has to say.

He says, The words of Scripture are the vehicle for God's speech. Isn't that a great line? The words of Scripture are the vehicle for God's speech.

For as we encounter his words, we are encountering God himself. You know, this is actually why I do little things that mean something to me, but maybe not even picked up on by you.

This is why when I preach, I put my Bible just over the edge of the lectern. It's because I don't want you to think that I'm doing something with you.

[25 : 02] I want you to think that you're coming to this Bible, and from this side of the lectern, I'm coming to this Bible, and it's the word here that's mediating my relationship to you and you to me.

And if I'm saying things that are not in accord with this word, you ought to be able to sit there and go, What are you talking about? Where are you this morning? Where are you coming up with this? What notes are you hiding on your lectern?

What's emerging from your own mind? No, I want you to be able to go, No, it's right there. I read the same Bible he's reading. I can see it. That's what Peter's saying.

That when you encounter the words of Scripture, you're reading a book unlike any other. You're reading something that's revelatory material from God, authored by the Spirit, through authors, human authors, that convey the very speech of God.

That's quite something. We read it. Not only read it, though. We receive that which we read as God's word.

[26 : 21] Did you notice that this is what we do every week when we read? If you've never been in a church, you're like, what's going on? I go to this church. They repeat this little thing every week after the Scripture reading. Jeremy reads the Scripture.

How does he close? This is the word of the Lord. We respond, Thanks be to God. See, what we're trying to say weekly is, this is the word of the Lord.

And what we're trying to convey is I'm receiving it. Thanks be to God. I might not understand it. I might not know what it's doing here. But thanks be to God.

I pray that the preacher will get up and help me understand why I ought to be thankful for the word that just came to me. All these things. Did you know that the writer of...

Matthew's Gospel actually wanted to ensure that you got the benefit of what he was eyewitness to. You can't walk with Jesus, talk with Jesus.

[27 : 26] But he did. And he wrote it down so that through his words and experiences recorded, you can hear him.

You can listen to him as you read the scriptures concerning him. This means receiving it by faith. I know that this is challenging for many. Ah, I know that the Bible is there, but I'm not sure I should receive it as the very word of God. Too many things I don't understand. Too many inconsistencies I'm not certain of.

But, you know, there's a humility of spirit that ought to pervade this church that says, I don't understand it all. I actually can't put it all together. But, I receive it. I know my mind is limited.

I know my heart would do something else. And to the best of my ability, I'm going to receive this by faith and learn from that. J.I. Packer was a theologian late 20th century, 21st century, passed away.

[28 : 38] He liked to think of the Bible as a listening post. I suppose today, like, what's a listening post? Think of it more like the watering hole.

That when you go to the Bible, you're actually going to a place where you're overhearing conversations. So, this morning, we overheard a conversation between Jesus and Peter and James, John, that if you want to hear something, Packer would say you're overhearing.

You're overhearing something. Listen to what he says. The key truth here is that our hearing begins with our overhearing what he said long ago to Abraham, Moses, for instance, by direct words, or to Israel via Moses and the prophets, or to the Romans, or the Corinthians, or the Philippians, via the Apostle Paul.

In the Psalter, we overhear David and others at prayer. In the Gospels, we overhear Jesus talking to his disciples and the Pharisees and to the woman at the well and to many others. All this material is normative one way or another for forming our ideas of the nature and character of God and coming to understand his work, his will, and his purpose.

[29 : 51] that's what's happening each week. We are overhearing him. Now, you might say, that's a step too far.

I'm not going to believe or trust anything that I don't put my eyes on. Thank you, Pastor, for telling us to read the Bible. Thank you for telling us to receive the Bible.

but I have some objections in regard to actually doing that for my life. I want to see it with my own eyes. I came to the University of Chicago because of its commitments to empirical evidence.

I'm not going to put my faith, my trust, in anything that can't be borne out. Well, okay. But Jesus said in Luke 10, 16, whoever listens to you, that is the apostles, listens to me.

Jesus says, if you're listening to what they wrote, you're listening to me. They recorded it. Think of Thomas, right? Thomas.

[31 : 06] Don't you love that St. Thomas, the apostle, is the Catholic church right in the neighborhood? My uncle visited me once. We drove by and he said, what's the name of that church?

And I said, St. Thomas. He goes, oh, that's great. He goes, there's always a St. Thomas in the vicinity of a world-class university. He didn't mean it in a derogatory way. I said, well, why is that?

He goes, well, Thomas was the doubting one. Thomas needed to see things before he believed things. They're always around in university settings, aren't they? They're always around in the Western world. They're always around where people are sharing ideas.

We want to see things before we believe things, certainly before we just read them and receive things. But Jesus said to Thomas, blessed are those who believe without having seen.

Did you know there are many thoughtful men and women in your presence this morning who believe what I'm telling you and have never seen him, who love him and know him and look forward to seeing.

[32 : 08] it's true. Reading and receiving replaces for you seeing and what it was for them.

Let me see if I can drive that home and be done. you believe, don't you, that there was a catastrophic event that took place in Morocco even if you didn't see it on CNN.

I didn't see it on CNN. I just read it. I read it in the news feed. I believe because I take seriously people who report these things even though I've never been there.

We believe in all kinds of things that we haven't seen. If you study law you might even know that, you know, a lot of cases are won not because you were able to bring this kind of simply eyewitness testimony that had bearing but written record has incredible weight in court.

somebody's name is on something. That kind of evidence that actually is in black and white is compelling. Well, if we believe it for something that happened yesterday that we read about on a news feed today, if we actually find it to be advantageously convincing that will help other people arrive at a notion of the truth in the very systems of our world today, then why don't we believe it when it comes here?

[33 : 59] Maybe it's because our heart doesn't want to listen to him. I love this thing that an old dead preacher once wrote.

Can I read it to you? Let me take it out of law and let me take it out of news. He writes, I reckon that many of you in business are quite content to get written orders for goods and when you don't, you don't require the purchaser to ask you in person.

You would just assume he would not. In fact, you commonly say you'd rather have it in black and white. Is it not so? Well, then you have your wish.

Here is the call in black and white. I mean, you do this, do you not? You ordered something, it never showed.

You try to get that customer service person for like eight months, nobody ever gets back to you.

And what are you doing? You are sending them your irate nature over underdelivered goods by tracking your written record as that which is verifying that you've been in this game.

[35 : 10] Trust that which I write to you, have written to you. That's all God's asking. He's saying, look, I'm not going to bring Jesus to every generation. I'm not walking him in every parlor.

He's not coming into your bedroom tonight. I did it once. They wrote about it. They saw it. Peter says, what you have written down is actually better than a subjective experience to begin with. So read it, receive it, start to align your life under it. That's how. That's how you and I listen to him. Amen. Well, what will that do for you this morning? I would say that if you begin to take the words of the scriptures that indicate that Jesus was going to die and rise again, if you begin to receive the notion that God sent his son into the world for the forgiveness of sins, if you begin to repent of simply going through life according to your own heart's inclinations or your own mind's intentions, if you say, my heart is deceptive, my mind is deficient, your word gives me a savior, I believe it. Guess what? Your life's going to begin to turn around today. And you're going to listen to him. That's the next thing. How do you follow Jesus as king? Listen to him.

[36 : 52] For some of us, that means like actually getting back to listening to him. It's amazing to me how little time we spend individually. This is no scolding.

It's amazing to me how little time we spend reading God's word when this is the place we go to to hear God's voice. If you've never begun listening to Jesus, just tell him this morning, I want to start listening to him.

If you've forgotten that and it's gotten your life off track, just repent and start again listening to him. Following Jesus as king, listen to him.

That's the early lesson to be learned. Our heavenly father, help us to do this. Help us not only to read but receive. Help us not only to read and receive but to repent.

Help us not only to open the word but to obey at least that which we understand from it. that we might actually see our lives and your purposes for them fulfilled.

[38 : 10] We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.