

A bigger view of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Good morning. So this morning's reading is found on page 1045 of the Bibles. It is Luke chapter 9 verses 28 to 36.

Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white.

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said.

[1 : 11] As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud saying, this is my son, my chosen one, listen to him.

And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

So our second reading is from 2 Peter, chapter 1, verses 12 to 21. And it's on page 1224.

Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder. Since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 28] But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the majestic glory, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention, As to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, But men spoke from God, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Tim, thanks very much indeed for reading. You might like to turn back to that first reading which we had from Luke chapter 9, on page 1045.

And as we're doing that, can I just remind us that there's a training session this evening On how to use the word one-to-one Bible studies. And some of us may remember when Richard Borgonan, who wrote these, came both to the Men on Track and Women in Partnership meetings about two or three years ago.

[3 : 46] It is a fantastic resource, if you have not come across it, for how to read going through John's Gospel one-to-one with a colleague or friend who's wanting to think about the Christian faith.

And I thought it would be really helpful to put a training session on. Perhaps some of us are keen to use it, but perhaps not quite sure how to use it. It's going to be this evening at our house. Do please give me a rough idea of numbers over coffee.

That would be helpful. Thank you. Well, let's pray together before we look at Luke chapter 9. No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we thank you very much indeed that you are a speaking God. Lord, thank you that we can be absolutely confident as we open the scriptures that we are listening not to the will of man, but your voice, Heavenly Father, inspired by your Holy Spirit.

And we pray, therefore, please would you help us to be attentive this morning. Please help us to hear your words, to be transformed by it. And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[5 : 02] Well, my aim this morning is that we'd have a bigger view of Jesus, such that we'd be those who do the very costly thing of denying ourselves and following him, whatever the cost, publicly, unashamedly, and willingly.

And as so often in life, the key to doing that is to having the bigger picture. Just perhaps as when you set out on a long car journey, and after just an hour, a little voice from the back seat says, are we nearly there yet?

Well, the answer, when we get there, it will be wonderful. It will be worth it. In other words, have a bigger picture than simply your current boredom and desperate to get this journey over with.

Or those taking their GCSEs and A-levels, is it worth it? Well, yes, but keep your eyes fixed on the bigger picture of results day, perhaps what lies ahead in terms of university or whatever, rather than just the day-to-day grind of revision.

Or the marathon runner straining in the London Marathon last Sunday. Is it worth it? Keep your eye on the bigger picture of getting to the finishing line.

[6 : 22] You see, I wonder how many of us left last Sunday morning thinking to ourselves that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is simply too costly. Perhaps when we looked at the words of Jesus in Luke 9, verse 23, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

To deny self daily. To daily have Jesus in the driving seat of my life in a world which simply lives for me. And to live for that future day when Jesus returns in a world that just lives for today, for the present.

Now, I don't know about you, but I've known what it is to feel the cost of following Jesus. And to question for myself whether it is worth it. I guess many of us have. As perhaps Theophilus was feeling it.

Remember, Luke is writing to Theophilus to give him certainty about Jesus. Perhaps Theophilus was wobbling. Perhaps he'd heard that some of the first followers of Jesus had ended up in prison. Some had even been killed. Perhaps he feared what it might cost him. Is it worth it? Just as I guess some of us may be wobbling.

[7 : 41] Being a disciple of Jesus means we have less time, less money, less energy for ourselves. For some it means sexual desires that won't be fulfilled. Ambitions that won't be achieved.

Colleagues or family perhaps who sneer at us. Friends perhaps who shun us. In fact, if we've never seriously asked the question, is it worth being a disciple of Jesus?

Why? It suggests, I guess, that we haven't really understood completely what discipleship involves. Or you may be here looking in on the Christian faith.

And you are asking the question, is it worth even beginning to follow Jesus? Well, wonderfully, Luke gives us the bigger picture that we need.

And there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. First of all, the bigger picture of Jesus.

Because we're looking this morning at what is known as the transfiguration of Jesus. And the key to understanding the transfiguration is verse 27 of Luke chapter 9.

[8 : 48] But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. And I take it that explains why verse 28 begins by linking back to verse 27.

Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. Do you notice how Luke, it's an unhelpful heading.

I think it's unhelpful to have that heading, the transfiguration, because it splits verse 27 from verse 28. Because you see, what is happening at the transfiguration, why they get a glimpse, a glimpse of what the kingdom of God looks like, come in power.

Verse 29. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. Luke, along with the other gospel writers, is, if you like, struggling to describe what

is indescribable.

Because for that brief moment, these three disciples, Peter, James, and John, they see Jesus as he really is.

[10:01] The son of man in all his glory. Just as the glory of the Lord filled the temple in the Old Testament. So here is Jesus in his glory, in all his heavenly splendor and majesty.

The son of man. It's how Jesus describes himself in verse 22. It's how he describes himself in verse 26. The son of man, the awesome figure in the book of Daniel, to whom God gives all authority over all people for all time.

Just listen to Daniel's description of him. I lift up my eyes and looked. And behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold around his waist.

His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning. His eyes like flaming torches. His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze. And the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

Not a gentle Jesus, meek and mild kind of Jesus. But a Jesus awesome in power. Majestic in holiness.

[11:16] But it's not just in the Old Testament. It's the New Testament as well. At the end of the Bible. Where we are also given a description of the son of man. By the apostle John.

His vision in the book of Revelation, chapter 1. He says this. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands.

And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man. Clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.

His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And his face was like the sun, shining in full strength. So you see what's going on here at the transfiguration in Luke chapter 9.

[12:16] While the disciples see Jesus in his full splendor and glory. As he had been from before all eternity.

As he will be for all eternity. A glory and splendor which he had set aside, if you like, for those 30 years on earth as God incarnate.

And yet which he would take up again after his ascension to heaven. If you're a fan of the Netflix production *The Crown*, you may remember the episode where the Queen Mother hears of a dilapidated castle in Scotland for sale.

With fantastic views, her favourite view. And decides to go and have a look at it with the estate agents. So they go to the castle. The owner is there. He obviously doesn't have a clue about her identity whatsoever.

And he apologises for the state of the building. He explains it needs a lot of money being spent on it. He doesn't want much for it. He's concerned this elderly lady will neither have the time or the resources required.

[13:24] But then as he escorts the Queen Mother and the estate agent out of the castle after the viewing. She is then greeted by one of her bodyguards. Your Majesty. At which point, of course, the penny drops.

And the estate agent realises, as her identity is revealed, that of course she has all the resources needed to buy this castle. Well, in a far greater way, the transfiguration, you see, is the moment when the disciples see Jesus for who he is.

The veil, if you like, is lifted aside. Yes, in verse 20, Peter declares him to be the Christ. But you see, this is what it looks like for him to be the Christ.

And of course it brings us back, doesn't it, to our maths equation. I put it there on the outline as a reminder. That if we have a small view of Jesus, we will have a small discipleship that is really no such thing at all.

Whereas if we have a big view of Jesus, well, that's going to lead to a life-transforming, genuine discipleship. Willing to lose our lives in this world for the sake of gaining it in the next.

[14:40] Unashamed of Jesus. Unashamed of the words of Jesus. Now, I said last week that when I was considering the claims of Jesus for myself, the key question someone very helpfully put to me was, Simon, what do you make of Jesus?

Who do you say Jesus was? But I hope we can see that actually that's not just a question for the would-be disciple. It's also a question for those who are disciples.

It's the key, isn't it, not just to start in the Christian life, but actually it's the key to keeping going in the Christian life as well. To daily deny self, to take up my cross and follow, to lose my life in this world, unashamed of Jesus, unashamed of his word.

A life lived with our ambitions and priorities shaped by the return of Jesus. Why you and I, I take it, are only going to do that if we are completely convinced of the identity of Jesus.

So if you are wobbling as a disciple, and I guess a number of us will be wobbling here this morning, then ask yourself the question, who do I really believe Jesus is?

[15 : 59] Not the kind of right answer you'd come out with in a Bible study, but actually in your heart, who do you really say Jesus is?

The bigger picture of Jesus. Secondly, the bigger picture of the future, verses 30 to 31. Now we said two weeks ago, as we looked at the feeding of the 5,000, that in a sense you can sum up Jesus' whole mission just in that one word, the one word, Exodus.

And it's hard to miss the echoes of the Exodus in this account of the transfiguration. So in verse 28, they go off a mountain, just as in Exodus, Moses goes up the mountain to meet God. In verse 34, there's a cloud, just as in Exodus, there's a cloud on the mountain, representing the presence of God.

And then verse 35, there's the voice speaking from the cloud, just as God spoke to Moses. And then it's made specific in the conversation in verse 31 between Moses and Elijah, and Jesus, as they speak about, notice his departure.

And as we saw a couple of weeks ago, the footnote so helpfully tells us that actually in the original Greek, that word departure is actually the word for Exodus. Because the significance of both Moses and Elijah is they pointed forwards.

[17 : 46] They pointed forwards. Moses had led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He had taken them to the promised land. And yet God had promised that one day there would be a second far greater Exodus, a far greater rescue from all that is wrong in our world, from sin, from the consequences of sin, and from the judgment to come.

Likewise, Elijah pointed forwards. The very last words of the Old Testament in the book of Malachi are a promise that an Elijah-type figure will return, to preach a message of repentance and to bring people back to God.

And now you see we've reached the time that both Moses and Elijah pointed forward to, Jesus' departure, his exodus at Jerusalem.

That's where we're told he's heading, chapter 9, verse 51, which begins the second half of Luke's gospel. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And, of course, to his death. His death on the cross, through which he'll bring the forgiveness of sins and the rescue from judgment, and his resurrection, through which he'll establish his kingdom, the new creation.

[19 : 06] And yet, I don't know about you, but I guess for many of us in 2018, we're bound to ask the question, hang on a moment, that's all in the past.

But what about the future? Do you remember how back in chapter 9, verse 26, Jesus said, look, if you're going to follow me, you need to do so in the light of the future.

It's only worth doing so in the light of the future day, says Jesus, when I'm going to return in great glory. And yet, 2,000 years later, he has yet to return.

We might well be asking the question, well, hang on a moment, is he actually going to return? Is it really worth being a disciple of Jesus? Or should I just make the most of living for this life and living for myself, just like everyone else does?

Well, it's the transfiguration, says the apostle Peter. It's what we saw and heard that day on that mountain that gives us confidence that Jesus will return.

[20 : 15] Keep a finger in Luke and turn to that second reading that we had from 2 Peter on page 1224. Written by Peter, who was one of the apostles up on the mountain.

Page 1224, 2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 16. Peter writes, For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he's talking here about the second coming of Jesus, not the first coming, because he's writing into a situation where people are saying, it is just a myth. This whole idea of Jesus returning, come

off it.

You know, these things just don't happen. He then carries on. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 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 are with him on the holy mountain. You see, you ask Peter the question, Peter, how can you be so certain that Jesus is going to return?

[21 : 43] How can we be certain of that future day when the folly of simply living for self in this world and when the wisdom of living for Jesus will be proved right, the day when Jesus will return in great power and glory, how can we be certain all of that stuff is not just a fantasy and a pipe dream?

Peter says, because of what we saw and heard. You know, this wasn't some kind of weird experience. This was reality that we saw.

We saw a preview of the power and glory of Jesus when he returns at the end of history. Just as I guess you might watch a trailer or a preview of a film.

You've heard the film is coming out, but is it worth watching it? So you watch the trailer and it looks fantastic. You know, the storyline, the location, the characters, the cast, the music, and you can't wait to see it.

Well, similarly, the Transfiguration is a trailer. But they see Jesus for that moment as everyone will see him when he returns in all his glory and splendor and majesty at the end of history.

[23 : 06] Remember our question, is being a disciple of Jesus too hard? Is it worth it? The answer, look to the future. Why should I deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Jesus?

Why should I be willing to give up the cost of giving up my freedom and living in the light of a future world which actually I cannot see at the moment? Why should I do that? Why should I endure the hardship of living in a world that so often rejects Jesus?

Perhaps of the conflict that comes, living with a different set of values, perhaps to friends or colleagues or to some of our wider family. Why? Why? Because Jesus will return in great glory and great power.

And these men saw the preview, the trailer of what it's going to be like. The bigger view of Jesus, the bigger picture of the future.

Thirdly, so who will you listen to? Who will we listen to? Verse 34. And as he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

[24 : 20] And a voice came out of the cloud saying, this is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Now this is the second time that God the Father speaks directly in the Gospels, the first time you'll remember being at Jesus' baptism. Notice with you, it's the confirmation, first of all, of Jesus' identity.

This is my son. He's the son of Psalm 2, God's everlasting ruler, through whom he'll establish his everlasting rule. And secondly, it's the confirmation of Jesus, his mission.

He is my chosen one, the servant figure of Isaiah. The one who will die for the sins of his people, who will usher in God's new creation.

So what does God want us to do? He wants us to listen to Jesus. Now, I don't know about you, but I think we can find that's a difficult thing to do because we live in an age, don't we, of information overload.

[25 : 29] We are bombarded all the time with advice and adverts and notifications, everything saying, listen to me. And we tune out of all these voices and we become cynical.

You know, the McDonald's track line, I'm loving it. Really? Or do you just go there because it's the last resort? You know, there's nowhere else. Tesco's, every little helps.

Really? Are they actually trying to help me to save money rather than to increase their profits? HSBC, the world's local bank, well, they just closed their branch in East Dulwich about a year ago. Is BMW really the ultimate driving machine or is it just another mass-produced vehicle? We get cynical. But wonderfully, you see, the words of Jesus are words we can trust.

And therefore, when we think it's too costly being a disciple of Jesus when we're wobbling, well, I guess we need to decide, don't we, for ourselves whose voices are we going to listen to about what's important in life, about what we're going to live for?

[26 : 44] Are we going to listen to the voices of parental or family expectations or the expectations of colleagues about lifestyle and career or friends as they tell us what they think constitutes a good life and what kind of things we should be aiming for?

Or perhaps the voices of our culture as our culture says to us, you know, the way to fulfilment and happiness lies in living for yourself and in pursuing your own dreams and ambitions.

Or perhaps you really are cynical and so you just listen to your own instincts. I'll just do, you know, I can only trust myself. I'll just do what I want to do.

Instead, we're to listen to the words of Jesus. The words of Jesus as he speaks, verse 23, about denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following him.

The choice he presents us with, verse 24, will we save our lives or lose our lives? To the logic of verse 25, what's of most value? This world or the next world?

[27 : 53] And to what Jesus says about the future, his returning glory, listen to him. That's why, of course, a daily quiet time of reading the Bible and prayer is such an important discipline, isn't it?

If we are going to listen to Jesus. It's why being committed to church here every Sunday, again, is so vital so that we listen to Jesus and listen to the words of Jesus.

And it's why, if we're looking on the Christian faith, we long for and encourage you to do a course like Christianity Explored, which simply goes through one of the gospel accounts.

Don't be content with listening to the second-hand opinion of others or thinking about what different churches or different faiths say. No, instead, listen to the words of Jesus.

He is the one, God himself, to listen to. And then as you hear Jesus calling you to follow him, listen to him and follow him.

[28 : 58] And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. Heavenly Father, we praise you for this wonderful preview, this trailer of the future day when the Lord Jesus will return in great glory and power.

And we pray, Heavenly Father, please would you help us to take it to heart to be those who listen to him as he speaks about the choices of life, living for the next world and not for this world, about the future to come, such that we would indeed be those who would daily deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.