

Listen to Jesus

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[0 : 00] I will then please to Matthew chapter 17. Matthew chapter 17, and we'll pick it up at verse 1 through to verse 8.

Now hear God's word. After six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up 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.

[1 : 21] 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. Well, I hope God blesses his word to us this evening.

Now, over the past couple of weeks, we've tried to understand the uniqueness of the Christian faith. And in trying to understand the uniqueness of the Christian faith, we've looked at a few things in particular.

Firstly, is there a growing separation between the Christian and the rest of Christianity? And the answer is, well, if there is, we need to address the issue. And I think the best way to address the issue is to go back to the uniqueness of the faith that we have in Jesus Christ.

Just how unique is it? And the first thing that we saw was, quite simply, that Christianity exists because Jesus does. You take Jesus away, and Christianity couldn't possibly exist.

[2 : 38] It couldn't exist as a made-up religion. You couldn't come up with it. The only reason Christianity exists is because Jesus does. Which means this, that our faith is based on someone living.

Someone who died and now lives. Someone who's resurrected. And though that's a small statement, it is a significant statement because it changes everything. That our faith is a living faith, or rather a living faith in a living saviour.

We then began to understand the second part, that our faith is based in Jesus Christ. And it means that we know God. Christianity describes a group of people who know God.

Not just know about God, or know facts about God, but know Him in relationship. And that changes everything. Because that is unique in the sense that you have a relationship with the one who created the world.

I mean, that's quite remarkable. That that's the God that you know. No. But it takes the cross to accomplish that relationship. The only way you can have that type of relationship with God is through the cross.

[3 : 52] Why? Because Jesus was quite clear that we are to come to know the true God. God acknowledges that this world is full of idols. It's full of other gods, lower G.

How do we get to know the true God in a world full of a hundred religions or more? How do we get to know the true God in a world full of a thousand idols or more?

Well, there has to be a way. And the cross is the only way that we can actually come to know the true God. And then remember, John, little children, keep yourself from idols.

Why? Because you're in a relationship with the true God. Don't go chasing around after other things. We come then to a third unique statement. And that is that Christians listen to God.

And they listen to God through Jesus Christ. And that raises a question. Here's the question. How can anybody know what God has said about anything or about anyone?

[4 : 58] I mean, that's quite a challenging statement, isn't it? You know, how can you know what God thinks? How can you know what God says about anything? Yeah, okay. The scripture proclaims that the heaven declares the glory of God.

You know, that the stars proclaim his handiwork. We can understand what God is like through what he's created. But what about life? What about the difficult issues?

What about, you know, matters of how we live and what we do and everything like that? Does God speak? Yes, he does. Well, who has the right to tell us what God has said?

And that's the question, isn't it? That if God has revealed himself, then who speaks for God? Who is God's voice on earth? Who lets us know what God thinks and speaks?

And Jesus, of course, stands at the fourth one and says, yeah, I do. So, Christianity is unique in the sense that Jesus not only is God, but he speaks the words of God, the words of the Father to the people down here on earth.

[6 : 07] So, Christianity, thirdly, then, describes a group of people who listen to God. And they listen to God by listening to the words of Jesus Christ.

Hence what God says here in Matthew 17, verse 5. This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. Listen to him.

Listen to him. I wonder, do you? Do you actually listen to Jesus? Jesus here takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain.

Nothing particularly strange there. But when they're at the top of this high mountain, it says, verse 2, that Jesus is transfigured before them, which means that his face shone like the sun.

In other words, it became so bright you couldn't see it. I don't know if you've ever looked at the sun foolishly, or, you know, you've all of a sudden glanced at it.

[7 : 13] What do you see? You don't see much. It's basically so bright you can't see the sun because of the brightness of the sun. Well, and that's what is happening here with Jesus, that his face shone so brightly that you can't look even though you want to look.

And then it says that his clothes were so white, they became white as light. Jesus has become transfigured. It's almost perfection.

And then it says this, that Moses and Elijah stood beside Jesus. Not the people that you'd expect to find at the top of a mountain, bearing in mind that they died several years earlier.

But there they are. And they must be there for a significant reason. And as Moses is stood next to Jesus, and as Elijah stood next to Jesus, as they both stood there, this voice comes from heaven out of this cloud that overshadowed them.

Verse 5. This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Listened. Listen to him. And then it says this, which is quite odd.

[8 : 20] Verse 6. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and they were terrified. I struggled to figure out why.

And here's why I struggled to figure out why they were terrified. Because in Jesus' baptism, back in Matthew 3, the same thing happens.

A voice from the cloud speaks, this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. And no one falls down face flat terrified. Not a single person.

You can read it in Matthew or you can read it in Luke. The same thing is said. The same voice is heard. This is my beloved son, which the father is speaking. And as that voice is spoken at the baptism of Jesus, not one person, it's recorded, fell down on their face or were terrified.

So, why now? Why do they fall down on their face terrified when we've got an example at the baptism of Jesus where the same thing is said and no one is falling down in fear?

[9 : 34] It clearly says that they didn't fall down in fear because of what they saw. It clearly does say, verse 6, when the disciples heard, it's what they heard.

I think it doesn't have to do with the fact that God said it. Because in Matthew 3, God spoke, this is my beloved son. I think it has more to do with what God said, which is why they fell down with fear. In comparison, what's the difference? Well, the difference is, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Here's the difference. Listen to him.

And as they heard that, verse 6, they fell down on their faces and were terrified. And here's the question.

What is it about being told to listen to Jesus that causes you to fall down on your face terrified?
What is it about that?

[10:38] What is it about listening to Jesus that could be so frightening? Moses and Elijah. In the Old Testament, God spoke in two ways primarily, through the law and through the prophets.

Moses was the law guy. Elijah was the prophets. So in the Old Testament, you know, people conducted their whole way of life according to the law and according to the prophets.

You know, when they made decisions, they consulted the law. When they decided to do this or that or how they were to live within community, they consulted the law of God.

Everything that they did, every decision that they make, the law was the guiding force to what they were to do, how they were to do it, when they were to do it, when they were not to do it.

The law was the very thing that they listened to. There are even cases where, you know, people come to Moses with very complicated legal situations. And Moses has to apply the law and in some cases, even has to develop the law of God in order to deal with these complicated cases.

[11:47] And you see that development throughout the books, the first five books of Moses, especially in the law cases where the law of God is being developed. Because these people are, you know, relying on this to be able to direct their whole life.

Elijah. Well, Elijah's not a lawgiver. He proclaims the law because he's a prophet. You know, he goes off and picks fights with idols.

He goes off and says, you know, the prophets of Baal are false gods and I challenge you with the one true God, you know. And we have that old prophet of Baal scenario.

He challenges people. He challenges nations and even challenges God's people when they go off track. He's a prophet. He speaks God's law and God's words to God's people to bring them back to where they ought to be when they've wandered off the path.

And so this role of the law and the prophets are absolutely central to God's people. It is the only thing that they listened to. They didn't listen to anything else because it was where God spoke.

[12:57] They were a people defined by the fact that they listened to the law and the prophets, Moses and Elijah. And so here in Matthew 17, verse 5, God is telling his disciples that as Jesus stands next to the Moses and as he stands next to Elijah, as he stands next to the law and the prophets, God is saying remarkably, listen to my son.

Listen to my son. Listen to my son. Your whole life you have paid attention to the law and the prophets. Great. Wonderful. But now listen to my son.

This is where God speaks now. In his son. Listen to him. Now you begin to understand why they fall down flat on their faces terrified because this is where God is speaking.

And this is where God is spoken in his son. So he says this. This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. And as God is saying, look, as Jesus said, rather, I've not come to abolish the law and the prophets. I've come to fulfill them. How does he?

[14:15] Well, Jesus speaks. Jesus is the voice of God on earth. Jesus is the only one who can tell anyone about what God thinks or speaks from here on in.

When you hear Jesus Christ, you are hearing God. That's why these disciples fall flat on their face and are terrified. To hear God directly in Jesus.

Jesus put it this way in John 8. I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me. In other words, Jesus is saying, look, I don't say anything other than what the Father has said. So this is like really significant here. These disciples know what's happening. That the one person where we're going to actually get to hear what God is saying is this person in this person, Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews, it says this, that we're to pay much, much closer attention because God has spoken through his son. Okay.

[15:23] Did we pay great attention to the law? Yeah, great attention. What about the prophets? Yeah, we paid a huge amount of attention there as well. God now says, now that I've spoken through my son, pay much more attention.

Lest you drift away, lest you fall away. This is where God speaks. What about Jesus and the Christian then?

Well, Jesus basically says to hear him speak is to hear the Father speak. It also means that Jesus is the most faithful hearer of God's word. God speaks, Jesus hears.

He's the most faithful hearer of God's word. And if he's therefore the most faithful hearer of God's word, he's also the most faithful speaker of God's word. You know, we have examples, don't we, in the Old Testament where the prophets are being warned only to say what God says.

And then being judged when they decide to make up their own message or add to it or take away from it. No, Jesus is the most faithful hearer of God's word and the most faithful speaker of God's word.

[16:36] But more than that, Jesus takes these words of the gospel and then he fulfills them. The cross is not just a message, but it's the very accomplishment of Jesus Christ.

Jesus takes the words of God or the promises of God and then does them. He really is the word that became flesh and fulfilled them. I think the disciples understand what's going on here.

You know, hence why the Lordship of Jesus Christ, week one, is so incredibly important. Because the Lordship of Christ has everything to do with whether or not we listen to the words of Jesus.

From our point of view, from our part. Jesus is Lord. This is what he said in Luke 6 when he asked the question. Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?

Now bear this in mind. When Jesus speaks, God is speaking. Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? Well, the simple answer is, you're using my name in a meaningless way, but it's more than a name.

[17:48] Lord, Lord is a relationship between the two. So let's break the question down. Why do you, Jesus is saying, why do you, pointing the finger. Perhaps he didn't point the finger. Why do you, why do you in particular, call me Lord, Lord?

What are you assuming to be true when you call me Lord? Well, to call him Lord means that you know who he is and you know who you are.

That he is God, you are man, that he is Lord, you are the servant. Lord, Lord. But then Jesus adds quite carefully and honestly, and you do not do what I say.

See, Jesus understands quite clearly that to call him Lord, that the natural follow-on is to do what he says. What's missing?

Well, these people are calling him Lord, Lord, and not doing what he says. And so Jesus is making the point that you understand who I am, but there's no relationship.

[18:50] You're not responding to me in relation to who I really am. Yeah, I am the Lord, but if you really understood it, you'd be doing what I say.

You'd be listening to me, and you'd be doing what I say. So why do you, think about it, why do you call Jesus Lord, Lord? Is it because you do what he says?

Well, yeah, that's part of it. But you do what he says because he's Lord, and you are the servant, that he is God and you are man. It's the defining mark. It is the relationship, isn't it?

Jesus understands that out of that relationship, you do what he says. So Jesus is pointing at these people and to say, yeah, you can call me whatever you like, Savior, Lord.

But unless you do what I say, it's meaningless. It doesn't mean anything. So Jesus asked the question, really to point out the clarity of whether or not we really know him in the sense of relationship.

[19:58] If you really know me, then you follow me. If you really know me, then you listen to me. If you really know me, then you'll do as I say, what I say. Why? Because that's the definition of a right relationship.

Look at Jesus and the Father. I don't do anything other than what the Father tells me to do, and I do it. Jesus is setting the example of what a relationship with God looks like and then asking us or calling us to follow that same relationship out down here on earth.

It's a very simple one. God speaks, we jump. God speaks, and we jump. God's way more gracious than that. He's patient and kind, but essentially God has the authority and we have the right to follow.

It's as simple as that. Jesus elsewhere has this to say that, you know, whoever is ashamed of me and my words, I will be ashamed of when I return.

Mark 8 and Luke 9. You know, don't be ashamed of the words of Jesus. And don't be ashamed of Jesus or anything that he has said.

[21:15] Those who belong to him will do the will of the Father. Luke 8. So you ought to feel, and I mean really feel, as you listen to Jesus speak here, both the depth of blessing that comes upon you, being able to listen to these words.

You know, you are an incredibly privileged people to be able to listen to the words of Jesus and take them in. You know, never underestimate that blessing, that you can actually sit here and be engaged in the words of Jesus and actually sit at home and open up your Bible or whatever it may be and engage yourself in the words of Jesus, listening to God through Jesus.

You're an incredibly privileged people to be used to. But as you do, you know, let the weight of its authority hit you. This is God speaking.

That's the sort of force that should come with reading God's word. This is God speaking. How easy is it to open your Bible?

It's probably not that easy. How easy is it to close it? Well, it's a lot easier, isn't it? A lot easier. You know, I have said, you know what I, I've been in the ministry long enough.

[22 : 36] Do you know what I love seeing, though I never say anything about it, is those people who understand that the sermon's getting to the end and they close their Bible just before it's finished. And I think, oh, just at that point, I wish I had a couple more points to make.

And just let them do this. And just see them go through the holes. I'd absolutely love to see. You pick up on these things. You know, I'm not, I promise I won't do it in the near future.

But I just might. It's easy, isn't it, to think, oh, it's over. Now, let God speak. You know, let God speak.

Yeah, we may not be able to take as much in as we'd like to. But let God speak and understand that God is speaking to you. So, exhortation.

Here's where we close. Here's where we sort of wrap it all up. Every now and then, imagine it this way, you've probably found yourself in this situation. Every now and then, you're in a position where you're asked by somebody else whether or not you agree with your work colleague or whether or not you agree with your husband or your wife or your friend or your family member.

[23 : 51] Do you agree with what they've just said? And the moment you're asked that question, you're put in a specific position. Two issues arise.

The same two issues arise every single time. Number one is relationship. You recognize that whatever answer you give, it's going to have an impact on the relationship with the person that you're being asked about.

The second thing that comes out of that or the second issue is the one of truth or the one of agreement. And here's how I think the conversation normally goes.

Depending on who you are and depending on whether it's a work colleague or a family member or a friend or whoever it may be, you may decide to give one answer to them and then in private say to your friend something quite different or say to your family member something quite different.

You don't embarrass your friend and so you want to agree with them even though you don't agree with them but you don't want to show them up and so you sort of palm it off but then in private you go back to your friend and you say, well actually, they had a point there or whatever it may be.

[25 : 02] And here's the thing. You know, family members can be wrong. Friends can be wrong. Work colleagues can be wrong. And so when you put on the spot and these two issues raise themselves, you know, friendship, relationship, whatever it may be, and agreement.

Yeah, those two things always come to the forefront. You could actually say that they're the two things that are being tested. your relationship and the agreement that you have over the issue.

But now we come to Jesus who said a lot about a lot and who's not wrong about anything. And somebody says to you, you know, I notice you're a Christian therefore you have a relationship with Jesus.

Do you agree with Jesus when he says, what are the two issues at hand? Well, it's the same two issues, isn't it? Your relationship and are you going to agree?

Or are you going to do that friendship where you say one thing to the person and then you go back, well, Jesus, I didn't really mean that, but you know. What is it going to be? Well, it comes down to whether or not you've listened to Jesus. I always think that a Christian gets themselves into trouble when someone says to them, do you agree with Jesus?

[26 : 20] And you go, on what bit? Rather than just say, yeah, everything. Right? Do you get the point? Yes, everything. I think the moment you have to say, what bit?

You're already pointing out something troubling in your own relationship with Jesus and what he said. In other words, you're already showing the other person, yeah, that you too have difficulties with some of the things that Jesus has actually said.

Oh, what bit? No, everything. Everything? Yeah, absolutely everything. I may not understand everything, I may find it challenging, but this is Jesus we're speaking about. This is the one who only speaks what he hears the Father saying.

That's why Jesus asks the question, doesn't he? You know, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? What's Jesus getting at? Well, he's getting at the same two things, the relationship and the agreement.

Do you agree with Jesus? You know, we're very good at being selective listeners. It's even easier when we have a Bible and, you know, as we close it, the voice stops.

[27 : 40] You know, but, you know, if you're having perhaps a debate with your friend, even when you go into the other room, yeah, they can still, I'm not listening, but, you know, they can still carry on. But the thing being tested here is relationship and agreement.

Here's the final consideration. Remember this, that God speaks to us through Jesus. God speaks to us through Jesus. You want to know what God thinks?

Listen to Jesus. And don't go away from here this evening thinking that the Word of God is somehow less authoritative or less powerful. It is the very Word of God.

And I'm going to give you an illustration straight from Scripture to show you that Jesus knew that this conversation was going to happen. That people would say, well, you know, I'm not around on the day of Jesus.

I only have the Word of God now. I don't have Jesus speaking to me. Jesus knew that it was going to come and gives the perfect example to counteract it. And it's this. Back in the day, Thomas said that he would only believe if Jesus turned up in his own viewing.

[28 : 55] Remember, he wasn't there when Jesus first turned up. And Thomas says, you know, I'm only going to believe if I can put my fingers in the hole in Jesus' hands and if I can put my hand in his side.

And we know what happened next. Jesus turns up and he says, go ahead, do it. But then Jesus had this to say to Thomas, have you believed because you've seen?

In other words, have you only believed because you've seen? But then he says this, blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

In other words, blessed are those who have only heard. Blessed are those who have only listened. What did he mean? Well, what he means is this, that to listen to the word of God as the word of God, to listen to Jesus speak as the word of God here is the equivalent, is the equivalent of putting your fingers in the holes in Jesus' hands and putting your hand on his side when it comes to experience.

that if you believe what you're listening to, the experience that comes to you is the same experience that Thomas had.

[30 : 18] Though you don't physically get to do it, the blessed reality is exactly the same. Blessed are those, Jesus says, who have not seen yet have believed.

What's the blessedness? What's the blessing? Well, the blessing is the experience of the reality that this is God's word. You know, so go away from here this evening.

You know, be determined to listen to Jesus. Be absolutely determined to listen to Jesus when you open up his word. Amen.