

This is My Beloved Son, Listen to Him
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This week's sermon is gonna flow out of last week's. It's gonna pick up and carry on some of what we started last week. As we do so, it's gonna have a similar effect. I mentioned last week that the material we're covering these two weeks are 1) for some of you, will be encouraging. It's stuff that maybe you've been living out for decades, and you just...it's your lifestyle. It's gonna be reaffirming to you to hear this and say, 'Yes, I'm living that; I'm pursuing that. I struggle with it at times, I get weary with it, but that is what my life is about.

And then for others of you it's gonna be kind of clarifying. It's gonna help you get information; you may be just trying to figure out this whole Jesus thing. You wonder how it all fits together. And these two weeks, I'm hoping, become very helpful for you to say, "That's how it works! That's how it's put together."

And then for some of you, as we go through this material, there's gonna be an unsettling feeling, a little bit of a dissonance. You've been a Christian for some time, or at least claimed to be. And what you're gonna hear as we go through this material is that there's a gap between what we're talking about and what you're living. It may be something that just really penetrates to your heart with conviction, or it may just a vague sense of 'something's not right.' And my encouragement there is to pay attention to that, and to just respond to God's working on your heart in these areas.

Now, whichever way God will use this material in your particular situation, I don't know. But we do want Him to use it. So let's pray towards that end.

Our Father in heaven,

As we come to listen to Your word today, we pray and we ask that You would accomplish Your purposes through it. The scriptures say that Your word will always accomplish Your desire. And Father, we open up our hearts to that. And we pray that as we spend time in Your word today You would use it to accomplish Your ends in our lives.

In Jesus' name, amen.

I was studyin' one day, and I was really absorbed, as I can be. Oftentimes I get into something and I'm just focused on it, and it seems like the radio can be blaring, cars can be honking, I mean everything can be goin' off around me and I am just focused. I was like that one day in my home office. I was studyin' and I was workin' on something, and I vaguely had the impression that one of my kids was in the room. And it was one of my boys, and I knew he was there, but I wasn't paying much attention to what he was doin'. I just knew he was kinda hangin' out in the room, in my office. And I kept sensing he was there, but not really payin' attention. And this went on for some time, and finally he interrupted me. He says, "Dad."

And I go, "What?"

"You've got over a thousand books in here!"

"What?"

He says, "Yeah, Dad. I've been counting your books. And there's like a thousand!"

I go, "No!" So I start tryin' to confirm it. And yeah, there's a thousand books in there. Whoa! I don't say that as a matter of pride. It's more of a confession. I just collect books; they come in my house and they multiply like rabbits. And in fact, it was after that I decided 'Ok, I need to limit this down before the house caves in.' And so I start...I dump like 200 books; and they've all been replenished. I mean, it's just...they've come back.

I thought about bringin' them in here and showin' you all those books so you could get a visual impression. But it would be a stack that would go to the ceiling three times. About 90% of those books are devoted to the passion of my life—how do I walk with God? And they touch on all kinds of fields—science, history, business, teaching, everything else. But they're all focused on 'What can I learn in these different fields that will help me understand our relationship to God better?' There's very few in there that are just simply novels I purchased and saved for recreational reading.

Interesting thing is you can take those three piles of books and, after now almost thirty years of study, I can boil 'em down to three words with respect to the Christian life. I'm really slow, so it's taken me a long time. But in terms of "Larry, how do we really go about living this Christian life?" I could take all that material and I could put it into three words. And the words are very simple. You say, 'I really want to get this Christian thing right. I really want to connect with God.' I would put it into three words.

Listen to Jesus.

You say, 'Wait a minute, Larry; there's gotta be more.'

No. That's it.

You say, 'Wait a minute, Larry; you've gotta believe Him.'

No. First, you gotta listen to Him. If you say "I believe Him" and you haven't listened to Him, I don't know who you're believing; but it's not Jesus. In fact, scripture tells us that faith comes from hearing. And not only does faith come from hearing, but our hope, our expectation of the future, and our hearts become engaged only as we listen to Jesus. If we don't listen to Him, there will not be faith, there will not be hope, and there will not be engaged hearts. It all comes from listening to Jesus.

Now, I coulda saved myself a thousand books and hours of study if I just would have paid attention to one verse in scripture to begin with. It's found in our text today, Mark 9: 1-13. We're gonna read through it, just like we've been reading through the gospel of Mark; and we're gonna start at verse one, and I'm just gonna read us right down through this text with very little comment. Critical point in our Lord's ministry—it's the turning point of His mission. He was way up north with His disciples, and He's gonna turn south. And He's gonna march...start the long march to Jerusalem.

And His disciples sense something important is happening. Everyone realizes that, 'Boy, we're coming to the pinnacle. The big event is gonna happen.' And there's been some teaching going on. In verse one, however, we're told that He says to those, the ones gathered with Him, His disciples and there's some others that were gathered together...a crowd had come together. And He says to them in verse one, He says

"Truly I say to you that there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

'Some of you...some of you are not gonna die until you've seen the kingdom of God in its power and its glory.'

Six days later...verse two...

Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John, and He brought them up on a high mountain by themselves.

...just those three, all alone on this high mountain. And it says...

And He was transfigured before them;

Other gospels describe that what began to happen is He began to radiate with a glory, a splendor; that His face became bright—as bright as the sun. Mark's gospel doesn't describe that; what it describes is what happened to His clothes as this went on. It goes on and it says

...and His garments became radiant...

Not just white, but radiant!

...and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

And then, amazingly, verse four...

Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.

These two great saints of the past...and we're told from another gospel what they were talking about was Jesus' departure in Jerusalem, His coming death. And these were two Old Testament individuals who had had very different, unusual departures from life. And they're talking about, with Jesus, about His even more unusual departure that lay ahead. We're told, verse five, that Peter said to Jesus

"Rabbi, it's good for us to be here."

It really is!'

"Let us make three tabernacles..."

...three kind of little shrines...

"...one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified.

He's just a frightened person, blurting out whatever's coming out.

Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them,

Suddenly they were engulfed in a fog.

...and a voice came out of the cloud, saying "This is My beloved Son,"

The God of the universe, the Creator of all, speaking

"This is My beloved Son, listen to Him."

Then all at once they looked around and saw that no one was with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

It was like **{POOF!}**, and everything was just back to them and Jesus.

And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.

They seized upon that statement, and were discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. And they asked Him...

...exploring their end-times chronology, 'cause He's just saying the Messiah's gonna have to die, and that doesn't fit with their chronology of what the end times are. So they say, in verse eleven,

"Why is it the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

'I mean, before the Messiah rules why do the scribes say Elijah must come? And we haven't seen Elijah yet.'

And He said to them, "Elijah does come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"

So He throws in another element of their end-times scenario, that they're not sure how to put it together. And then He adds still another one. He says

"But I say to you, that Elijah has indeed come..."

It's a reference, actually, to John the Baptist...

“...and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it was written of him.”

Now, this wasn't an end-times scenario they had put together in their theology at all! I'm not going to go any further with that text. We know it was the one event that made the most lasting impression upon the Apostle Peter. Near his death he wrote a little letter, and one of the things he mentions in the letter...the event he highlights, the event he looks at, the thing he says that 'this was so astounding!' was the day he said "I saw the power and the majesty of Jesus, the king, on that mountain, and I heard His voice."

This was a more dramatic appearance than the post-resurrection appearances. And at the very heart of it, at the very heart of it is not something so visible, so much as so, so audible—the voice of God! And we have here, at the very middle of the gospel of Mark, God...in one of the rarest of rare moments...speaking. And He says, "*This is My beloved Son.*" 'This is the One I really love. This is the One I care for.' And then He comes and He gives the only command God verbally gives in the gospels, the only command God verbally, audibly gives. And it is "*Listen to Him.*" 'Be attentive to Him. Hear Him.'

God could take the whole Bible, all the teachings throughout history, and He could boil it down to us in three words—'Listen to Jesus.' Listen.

The good news in that for us, and I mean it is good news, is the fact that the means of listening to Jesus are available. It's like the communication technology on the spiritual level is in place—it's there. We don't have to wait for some new level of technology to come out from the phone to the wireless to the cell phones, or internet, or all of... The spiritual technology for us to hear Jesus is in place, right now. In fact, I am convinced—absolutely convinced—that we right now, in our day, in our age, in our place, with who we are right now, can hear Jesus better than those disciples could hear Him. You, right now, could hear Jesus better than Peter, James, and John were ever able to hear Him. You can.

For one, we've got the scriptures. In written form we have what He said, and we can go back and we can examine it; and we can analyze it; and we can get out our dictionaries and say, you know, we don't have to say, "Jesus, stop talking. I gotta go look that word up." We can just mark the page, go get the dictionary and look at it, and come back and 'Ok, now it makes sense.' We can memorize it off the page and we can take it with us; and if we have poor memories, we can take it with us in written form. And we can review it any time, any place—just pull it out and read it. We can take it out and we can diagram the sentences; and we can analyze the thought flow; and we can review the tenses of the verbs. We can analyze it and get to the core of the message without confusion, distraction; we can look at it so close. They couldn't do that.

We all know that we may have the written words on the page, but you know...we don't necessarily hear the tone, or the voice. We don't get the non-verbal cues—is that eyebrow raised? Is there a frown? Is there a smile? Is He standing strong in command posture? Or is He just kind of leaning over and holding out His arms? We struggle to pick up the non-verbals and we struggle to pick up the tone of the voice; we struggle with that and we... 'Well, boy, you know, I wish we had more...'

We do have more. We have the Spirit. We have the very Spirit of Christ as believers. That means we have, through Christ's Spirit within us, we have the intent of the words. We have the motive behind them. We have the heart that spoke them.

I remember a man sitting in the front row one time. Strangest note I ever received back from a sermon—it was like three pages long. The guy was a visitor; he only came through that one Sunday. And he didn't speak English very well, but he came up to the front row. He had never been in a Protestant church service before. And he sat up there and he feverishly took notes the whole time I was talking. Just note after note after note. You know... 'What in the world!' I just kept speaking, and later I got those notes. He passed them on to me through a person he was visiting.

And I read through the notes and I realized...you know what? He never got my core idea. He never got the content of what I was trying to communicate. What he did is he wrote for page after page, trying to analyze my intentions, and my feelings, and my motives, and my heart. And as I read it I thought, 'This guy is not getting' it!' I mean, he was describing emotions I've never felt in front of a group of people. 'Oh, he's feelin' this way.' 'Oh, he's tryin' to take command.' 'He's afraid.' He had all these kinds of statements, and I'm kinda—'he has no idea what my intents are.'

When we listen to Jesus through His Spirit we know exactly what His heart is. We know the intent. And more than any non-verbal cue, more than any tone of voice, we need to know that heart—and we have it through His Spirit.

You say, ‘Whoa, wait a minute Larry. There’s verses, there’s words that...I don’t understand. I’m afraid I may misunderstand this particular verse. I need to know what’s really in the original Greek.’

Or we sit there and say, ‘I don’t know if this is really sensing God’s Spirit on this verse, or if it’s just a feel-good impulse that I have. How do I know which?’

Here comes the third element in this, is we have God’s people, the congregation. We’ve got a whole...whole...we’ve got all these other people that are listening with us. And we can check our soundings with one another. ‘Did you think he really said that?’ And ‘Yes, I think so,’ or ‘No, I’m not sure.’ I mean, we’ve got that. It’s a gift.

So I’m absolutely convinced there’s good news behind this. We have the means are available to really listen to Jesus. And they’re better than they even had in Palestine 2000 years ago.

Not only that; the practicals of listening to Jesus are very doable...very, very doable. For one, you don’t need a theology degree to listen to Jesus. In fact, sometimes that hurts you. To me, listening to Jesus is a little bit like telling someone...they say, ‘Where do I start?’ I feel like saying, “you know, it’s a lot like starting on the Internet. You just get on there and start exploring.”

Just start on the right home page. Go to the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Get a feel for Jesus there, and then start exploring elsewhere. And the Old Testament will give you hundreds of years of background so you understand Jesus better. And the rest of the New Testament will give explanation that helps you understand what He said and how it works out in life. But just start at that home page and start exploring.

See, one of the things is we approach the Bible and we get a sense that ‘Yes, I’m gonna master this content.’ You will never master that content. *It will master you.*

Just like you’ll never master the Internet and all that’s out there...just start exploring. You don’t need to be a theologian. Start reading.

Not only that...you don’t need to go to a monastery to listen to Jesus, and get all alone.

I have a class...it’s the most demanding study class I teach. I only take six students in it at a time, six or seven. And they do homework; I mean, they do homework. And they go after it. And this particular group going through right now—there’s two of them are women. And one of ‘em, I look at her and I understand how she’s able to do it. I mean, you need to picture this. You know, she’s got two kids that are out of the home. She’s not quite empty-nest; there’s still one that’s home. But she’s a teenager; she leaves early and comes back late...not late night, but late in the day. And you know, it’s...

This woman...picture this. This is how her day goes. She kisses her husband off goodbye. Her little high school daughter leaves, and then she’s able to sit down with that cup of fresh-ground coffee. She has home-made whole-grain bread still steaming, with butter slathered on it, and home-made cranberry jam melting down into it. And she’s able to sit there quietly with her bible as the sun is coming through the window. She can stop and pray at moments, and she can get out her little notebook (Martha Stewart-style—the cover matches the tablecloth) and she can look at that a bit; ‘Oh, I wanna figure that word a bit.’ She goes over there and she can find the dictionary—it’s right where she left it on the neat bookshelf. And she can look at that. And then, if she really needs some time to think she can go over in the rocking chair and she can knit a while.

So I didn’t even bother checking with her. I called the other young lady, and I said to her, “How do you do it?” She’s got two rambunctious little boys, and a third on the way. And I mean, I’m sitting there on the phone and I can hear the boys in the background. In fact, we have to cut the conversation off at a certain point because she’s gotta go deal with the boys. And then she calls back a little later. I said, “How do you do it?”

She said, "Well, you know, I try to plan some of the tasks for when the kids are busy. I know they'll be busy and I can take some of these study steps that...they're not actually mindless, Larry, but they don't take a whole lot of focus and I can kinda get those done. And then, when I really need to get focused, I try to wait 'til the boys are down and asleep, and I can grab a few moments to concentrate. We've had to adjust our schedule a bit. We changed all the events they're going to...we try to organize that a little bit better. And I've had to cut back, and this is really tough. I no longer go to bunko night, and there's things like this, you know." She says, "I'm..."

You can do it. You can do it. You don't have to go to a monastery. The best bible study I ever had in the gospel of Mark—and I've preached through it twice—the best time I ever had in the gospel of Mark, I would get up on a Saturday morning, I would review the chapter, just get a feel for it, and then in the evening I would sit with my kids. I would gather them around and I would tell them the story of Mark for that chapter, that night. And I would do it as a story-telling. We had fun with it, and we would talk about it. We took the parables and turned them into family riddles. We had...I learned so much, and I heard Jesus so clearly, trying to tell the story to my kids.

I was with a young man yesterday that works with our youth department. And he came back and he...we were chatting, and he says, "You know, Larry, I'm learning so much about Mark." And I'm sitting there "Oh, he's listening to my sermons."

He goes, "At youth group. You know, I listen to Ashley, we go into our small groups, and we and the teens, you know the leaders and the teens start talking about this, and I'm learning so much!"

Tell you what...you teach a Sunday school, you teach a youth group...you will hear Jesus as you wrestle to teach them. We've got men in our church that get up early in the morning. They'll do some exercises. And then they'll spend quiet time meditating and memorizing portions of scripture. We've got another guy that can never get up early. In fact, he can't get up early if he had to. His game plan is he waits 'til Friday afternoons at lunch; he knocks everything off, and he blocks out a time frame just for him and the Lord to spend time in the scriptures together.

Another guy in our church...man, there was a time when I realized this guy almost has a seminary education just from listening to CDs on bible studies goin' in and out of Anchorage on his daily commute. He's got the whole New Testament on CD. It's no problem to put it in your disk...I mean into your tape player.

You say, "Oh Larry, I gotta listen to..."

Let me ask you: what radio talk show has God ever said 'Listen to him.'

He has said "Listen to Jesus."

Put in that CD. Finding the when, and the how, and the where, is easy—it is easy. The hard part's already been done for us. God has clearly, unmistakably, unequivocally told us *who* to listen to. The rest is just simple problem solving. We've been given the 'who'—"Listen to Jesus." Listen to Him.

The challenge...and we're gonna go just a little bit over today...the challenge is really listening. There's a big difference between just hearing and really listening. What intrigues me is the three individuals that Jesus took up on the mountain...the three individuals that God said, "Listen to Him," were three of the best listeners that Jesus had—Peter, James, and John. They had been following Him for over three years, listening to everything He said. And if they didn't understand one of the parables, they pulled Him aside and said, "Jesus, what did You mean by that?"

These were three of the best listeners Jesus had. But they had just hit a point in the ministry where they were having a hard time listening. Jesus had told them, 'I am the Messiah,' and they had realized that; they had finally got that. They had heard well enough that 'Yes, He is the king.' But then He said the Messiah must suffer many things, must be rejected by the religious authorities, and must die...then rise. And Peter had pulled Him aside and said, 'Don't talk like that again. I hear ya, but you're wrong, Jesus.' And Jesus pulls him aside and gives him that amazing teaching that says, 'Listen, if you're gonna follow Me, you are gonna have to deny yourself, pick up your cross, and really follow Me. And you are gonna have to lose your life in order to have it. And if you won't let go of your life and give it completely over to Me, you will never ever have it.'

So many of Jesus' teachings are like that. They're different from what we expect. They're not the Messiah we anticipated. They're not the lifestyle we lined out. I mean, He's the one who came and said, 'I'm seeking sinners to save. I am not recruiting the righteous.'

Do you understand that? Have you heard that? Jesus says, 'I am not here to recruit the righteous. I am seeking sinners.' We have the one who talked most of the love of God, demonstrated to the fullest in human history, is also the one who spoke most definitely, most determinately, most passionately, about the reality of hell.

Psychologists review it over and over. Every study shows it. We assume that we know more than we know. We overestimate how much we know, and we underestimate the value of the little we do know.

God has to pull aside the three best listeners and say, 'Wait a minute. You gotta *really* listen.'

Our Lord's first, first instruction...He said, 'The kingdom is come. It's here now. Repent. Rethink everything; and believe.'

Let's stand.

Our Father in heaven,

We don't wanna walk out of here casually. You, the God of the universe, has spoken. We have the words written, and You've made it absolutely clear what it is we're called to do...and that is listen to Your Son. I pray You'll give us ideas on how to do that, ways to approach it. But most of all, Father, I pray and I ask that You'll lead us into that in such a way that we'll be refreshed and we'll be renewed in the wonder and reality of all that He is, simply by listening to Him.

In Jesus' name, amen.