

# THIS IS MY SON; LISTEN TO HIM

Luke 9:28-36

Key Verse: 9:35

**“A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.’”**

In this passage Jesus' glory is revealed during a time of prayer on a mountain. It is commonly called “the transfiguration.” This helped the disciples realize who Jesus truly was: the Son of God. Then God said to them, **“Listen to him.”** Apparently, the disciples had a listening problem. That is a serious matter for his disciples. When we do not listen to Jesus, we cannot grow spiritually. If we do not grow, we become miserable and unhealthy. Finally, we die. Some of us have a listening problem. It cannot be solved with a hearing aid. It is a spiritual problem. Jesus helped his disciples by showing them a vision of his glory. When our eyes open to see his glory, our hearts also open to hear his words. Open the eyes of our hearts Lord! Open our ears! Help us see your vision and listen to you. This passage can be divided into two parts: Jesus’ transfiguration on a mountain (28-31) and God’s word to the disciples, **“Listen to him”** (32-36).

## **I. Jesus is transfigured on the mountain (28-31)**

Look at verse 28. **“About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.”** It had been about a week since Jesus told his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer, die and rise again, and that they must deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him. Mark’s gospel tells us that the disciples were shocked. Peter even took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. Then Jesus rebuked Peter. A week went by in which nothing happened, as each synoptic gospel implies. Jesus and his disciples were in a kind of stalemate: Jesus was determined to teach them the truth of the cross and resurrection, and they were determined to reject it. Jesus must have grieved over the poor spiritual condition of his disciples. The disciples must have had a vague sense of problem, but they were not sure if something was wrong with them, or with Jesus. They must have felt awkward, sneaking furtive glances at Jesus. An ordinary leader might have dismissed the disciples and started over. Jesus did not. He went up onto a mountain to pray. Jesus would solve the problem through prayer. Those who try to raise disciples understand that we reach human limits; even Jesus did. We learn from Jesus to pray to God at such times. Let’s see how God answered.

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**First, Jesus' appearance became glorious (29).** Look at verse 29. **“As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”** Luke simply says, “the appearance of his face changed.” We can guess that, prior to this, Jesus had been crying out to God with passion, anguish and tears. Hebrews 5:7 says, **“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”** When Jesus began his prayer, he was crying. He was crying for God's help to save him from death. He was crying for God's help to open the spiritual eyes of his disciples. He was crying for the salvation of the world through his suffering, death and resurrection. Although Jesus was strong and courageous before any human being, he wept before God with all his heart.

When Jesus began to pray, his face must have looked pain-stricken from taking the burdens and sorrows of mankind. He might have had dark circles under his eyes from lack of sleep. He might have looked haggard from the stress of struggling with his disciples, drained from the ceaseless labor of shepherding the needy. But as he prayed, the appearance of his face changed. Matthew says, “his face shone like the sun” (Mt 17:2). All the traces of darkness vanished, and a radiant light began to shine from Jesus. This light was so bright that no one could look at it directly. At the same time, his clothes, which had been dusty and ragged, began to radiate in such a powerful way that they looked like flashing lightning. Amazing power was coming from within Jesus. Jesus revealed his glory and identity as the holy God. Until now, Jesus' glory had been veiled by human flesh. But at this time, Jesus' glory blazed forth in such power that it defied description.

**Second, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory (30-31a).** Jesus was not alone. Verses 30-31a read, **“Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.”** Moses and Elijah are spiritual giants in God's redemptive history. They have several common factors which may account for their appearance here with Jesus. In the first place, they both suffered a great deal to deliver God's people. Moses received eighty years of training to prepare for his mission. At last, he became a truly humble man. Then God used him powerfully to deliver the people of Israel out of the land of slavery and train them in the wilderness. While working hard, he was the target of bitterness and complaint. When people were tired or hungry or thirsty, they grumbled against Moses, and even talked of

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stoning him. **On one occasion, when Moses could not take it anymore, he prayed to God, “If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now...”** (Nu 11:15). Elijah lived in a time when Baal worship poisoned the hearts and minds of all Northern Israel. Elijah fought against Baal worship as a matter of life and death. God gave him a great victory on Mount Carmel that helped turn his sinsick and wayward people back to God. After working to the point of exhaustion, he was threatened by evil Jezebel and became so discouraged that he prayed, **“I have had enough, Lord, take my life”** (1 Ki 19:4). Indeed, Moses and Elijah suffered much to deliver God’s people.

**In the second place, they both saw the glory of God in the midst of suffering.** Moses once asked, **“Now show me your glory.”** The Lord hid Moses in the cleft of a rock. Then the Lord passed by Moses in all his glory. Moses saw only the Lord’s back, as the Lord proclaimed: **“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...”** (Ex 34:6). Strengthened by the vision of God’s glory, Moses could carry out his task as a shepherd for Israel. When Elijah was deeply discouraged, he ran away to Mount Horeb. There the Lord displayed his glory before Elijah. It was not in a powerful wind, or an earthquake, or a fire, but in a gentle whisper (1 Ki 19:11-12). Then the Lord gave Elijah a plan to continue his work in history by raising Elisha as his successor and anointing kings of the nations according to his will and purpose. This encounter strengthened Elijah to finish his race to the end until he went up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot of fire. To sum up, both Moses and Elijah had suffered much to deliver God’s people and were strengthened by visions of God’s glory. At last, they entered God’s eternal glory. They appeared in glorious splendor. Here we find a principle of God’s work: first participate in his suffering, and then enter his glory. Sufferings last for only a season. The glory of God lasts forever. So Paul said, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Ro 8:18). We must have this conviction. Then we can have a healthy attitude toward suffering.

**Third, Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus (31b).** Look at verse 31b. **“They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”** We find two key words here: “departure” and “fulfillment.” Jesus’ departure from this world came through his suffering, death and resurrection, and his ascension to the right hand of the Father to have all things put under his feet. This departure would restore God’s

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righteous reign over all creation once again, fulfilling the promises and prophecies of God that were given in the Law and the Prophets. Jesus would liberate mankind from the awful bondage to sin, death and the devil and restore those who believed in him to be children of God. Moses and Elijah must have helped Jesus to see the vision of God's everlasting kingdom, filled with people from every tribe and nation and language, who would worship and serve God forever. Moses and Elijah must have testified that Jesus was the one, that Jesus would fulfill all of God's promises and prophecies. Through this glorious vision, Jesus found the absolute meaning of his death and was strengthened to obey God's will to the end.

Here we can learn that God gives his kingdom vision to those who must suffer much to bring it about. Isaiah had to share God's word with people who were hardened and stubborn, and watch his nation decline until it disappeared. But God gave him a vision of the holy Lord Almighty, seated on the throne, high and exalted. God opened his spiritual eyes to see the whole earth full of God's glory; he could see the coming Messiah, and the new heavens and the new earth. With this great vision, Isaiah served God to the end. Daniel had to serve God in a foreign land, under the rule of world powers Babylon and Media-Persia. It was a time when his people mourned over the loss of their abundant blessings. But the Lord showed Daniel a great vision: the kingdoms of this world would be smashed and turn to dust, but the Lord's kingdom would fill the whole earth. The Lord gave Dr. Samuel Lee a vision of raising a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the USA and the world. For this vision, he sacrificed much and went through many hardships. People who see God's kingdom vision are willing to give their lives for it. We can live and die for it. May God's kingdom vision come into each of our hearts! It happens when we study the word of God intensely, until its light shines into our hearts (2 Pe 1:19).

## **II. A voice from the cloud said, "Listen to him" (32-36)**

Let's think about the effect of this event on Jesus' disciples who were with him. At first, they were very sleepy. Of course, they must have been tired after climbing up the high mountain. But the real reason for their sleepiness was that they had consumed a lot of energy trying to reject Jesus' words. They did not like to hear about suffering and death--neither Jesus' nor their own--and they did not want to participate in it. So they tried to ignore Jesus' words. But the more they did so, the more feelings of rebellion rose in them. Gradually they fell into sorrow and then depression. So, as

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Jesus began to pray, they began to nod their heads, and slept. When the glorious event was almost over, the disciples began to wake up. At first, they thought they were dreaming. So they pinched each other until they became fully awake. Then they saw Jesus' glory. Jesus, who had been so familiar to them, suddenly looked dazzling and majestic and awesome. They became aware of Jesus' spiritual bearing. It was the bearing of the holy God Almighty, in whom there is nothing impure, but who is full of light. This vision of Jesus drove all the darkness from their hearts. They no longer felt conflict or strife. They felt that God was in control and that everything was going to be okay. Peace and joy filled their hearts.

Then they noticed some movement on either side of Jesus. To their surprise, it was Moses and Elijah! But they were leaving. Peter did not want them to leave. He appealed to Jesus to make them stay, saying, **“Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”** The parenthetical comment says, “(He did not know what he was saying.)” This indicates that Peter was speaking not only from his conscious mind, but from his subconscious mind. He was revealing the deep thoughts of his heart. He wanted to stay on the mountain and enjoy glory with Jesus forever. Peter had completely forgotten Jesus' words that he must suffer, die and rise again. He forgot Jesus' words that whoever would come after him must deny himself and take up his own cross daily. In this respect, Peter is a representative sinner. It is part of our sinful nature that we want to enjoy great glory without the cross; great success without hard work; straight A's without studying. It was this deeply held sinful thought that blocked Peter from accepting Jesus' words. Peter's problem was not in his ears, but in his heart. He had his own self-centered dream of glory without suffering; he needed to replace it with God's kingdom vision.

This time, God himself intervened in Peter's life. Look at verse 34. **“While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.”** Here the cloud represented the presence of God Almighty. God had appeared to the Israelites in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Ex 13:21). The disciples were suddenly surrounded by the Holy God Almighty, and they were afraid.

Look at verse 35. **“A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.’”** With these words, God Almighty affirmed Jesus' identity in the presence of his disciples. Jesus is

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the Son of God. Jesus, whom they were resisting in their hearts was not just another man. He was the Son of God. Jesus is in very nature God. Jesus' thoughts are God's thoughts; Jesus' words are God's words. God is the Creator and we are the creatures. God is the source of life and we have no life without him. God is the Sustainer of all things, and we need his provision daily. God is the only Savior and we need his salvation. God is the Judge and we will stand before him to be judged. That is why we must accept God's words from our hearts when he speaks to us. At this time, Jesus' disciples had to repent of their own ideas and accept Jesus' words because they were the very words of God.

Jesus taught us the necessity of his suffering, death and resurrection. It was the only way of salvation that God prepared for mankind. Our salvation was so costly and so difficult to obtain that it required the death of God's one and only Son. Jesus alone can save us from our sins, heal the wounds in our souls, restore the image of God in us, give us eternal life and take us to his everlasting kingdom. Jesus is the only way of salvation. And he taught us that we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily, and follow him. We must listen to this.

I must listen to Jesus. The Lord has been renewing my vision of his kingdom, first by visiting the Philippines and then by visiting Israel and sharing a message on Romans 11. Concurrently, my ears began to open and I could hear two things the Lord is saying to me. **First is to pray for American missionaries.** So I made a new decision to correspond with them in order to know their prayer topics. **Second is to engage in disciple training.** This means bearing misunderstanding and complaints. It means making hard decisions. It is costly. But it is most important to the Lord. I must listen to this. To do so, I pray to keep my eyes on his kingdom vision.

God blessed America in many ways. We have enjoyed the word of God. We have freedom of religion and freedom of speech and abundant resources. God gave us all this to use us as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, sending missionaries to the ends of the earth. But so many are immersed in self-centered human dreams, petty pursuits, and pleasure-seeking. Now, let's accept God's kingdom vision, and listen to Jesus.

After the voice of God spoke to the disciples, they found themselves alone with Jesus. The heavenly vision was gone. The mountain-top

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experience of glory was over. But Jesus remained. In the end, we are alone with Jesus, Jesus who became flesh to be with us.

The disciples kept this experience to themselves, without telling anyone at the time what they had seen. It was meant to be a secret in their hearts that would enable them to obey Jesus' teachings throughout their lifetimes.

Today we have seen Jesus' glorious image as the Son of God who restores God's righteous reign in the world. Let's hold this image in our hearts and see his kingdom vision so that we may listen to him, especially his gospel message and his challenge to follow him.