

February 11, 2024 (Transfiguration B)

Mark 9:7b

“God’s Simplest and Most Difficult Command:”

I wanted to keep things simple here in this sermon – I was away the past few days so I decided to preach on a very short text / a very simple command / from God the Father Himself on the mount of Transfiguration / only 3 words in English and only 2 in Greek – a present active imperative command. God tells all of us what to DO – do now / do repeatedly / do always – off into eternity. *Do you recall what that simple command was?* **Mark 9:7** (NIV) **“Listen to Him!”**

Of course, as we often discover in life – what seems at first to be so *simple* can easily become so tough, *difficult*, and complicated. For me it started when I began to prepare for this sermon by reading through the 3 Gospel accounts of this event. **Matthew** was a disciple, but he was not on the mountain, he heard about this event directly from Peter, James, and/or John after the resurrection. **Mark** was a disciple of Peter and heard (and recorded) these events later as Peter gave his eyewitness account of what happened. **Luke** was a physician and a historian who researched these events and learned about this account from the eyewitnesses themselves.

The first *apparent* problem I ran into was the timing here: **Matthew 17:1** *“After 6 days . . .”* **Mark 9:2** *“After 6 days . . .”* **Luke 9:28** *“About eight days after Jesus said this . . .”* Uh oh. Critics of God’s Word will jump all over this apparent discrepancy. Obviously they were not copying from each other as the critics assume, *but how do we resolve this?* What I often find is that when we come across apparent discrepancies in Scripture, and then dig a bit deeper to see how they do indeed resolve themselves – we actually get MORE insight into the text from doing the digging. This is certainly the case here. It’s important for us to understand *how* the Jewish people thought of the passage of time back then. They, thanks to God’s Command of the Sabbath, thought of things in terms of 6 day chunks – that was their working week. So . . . *after* Jesus told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders, and then rise from the dead, a 6-day week had passed before this event took place. When **Luke** tells us it was about **8 days** later – we can now pinpoint exactly when this event took place. Jesus predicted His death and resurrection likely in the late

afternoon – close to sunset, on a Friday. The Sabbath began at sundown and following that – a week had passed, along with another Sabbath. *Why does it matter?* It matters because the Transfiguration would have happened on a **Sunday!** *What was that foreshadowing?* His own glorious resurrection – AND – the fact that from then on every Sunday God’s people would gather to worship our glorious and risen Lord. Even during the 40 days of Lent – the Sundays are not included in the 40 days because every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus’ glorious and victorious resurrection. This was all foreshadowed in this incredible account.

The next difficult “problem” I ran into was this – *What, exactly, did God the Father say?* **Matthew 17:5** says, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased – Listen to Him”** Whereas **Mark 9:7** says, **“This is my Son, whom I love – Listen to Him”** And then **Luke 9:35** says, **“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him.”** Again, they are all accurate as Spirit given testimonies about this account – so I would say confidently that God the Father used each one of those 1-word descriptors in regard to His Son: **“This is my beloved, pleasing, chosen Son . . . LISTEN TO HIM!”** Why did each Gospel writer not include the whole list of How God describes His Son? Because, that fact, actually serves to highlight / to underline / to bold print / to put in ALL CAPS – **2 points:** THIS is My Son – *and* – LISTEN TO HIM! If you were there in person you might recall the event by simply saying that God said, **“THIS is My Son! Listen to Him!”** And – your testimony would be accurate. God identified Him. God told us to listen to Him.

We might have expected God to say something like, *“Look at His glory! Do what He tells you! Follow His example! Imitate Him!”* But no . . . what He **did** say is brilliant in its simplicity – LISTEN to Him. That’s really ALL we ever need to know, and exactly WHAT God wants all humanity to do. I suppose I could just say “Amen” right there, and we could move on with the rest of the service.

Unfortunately, that most *simplest* of *commands* is actually, ironically, one of the most *difficult* things for us human beings to do! Go back to the beginning – back to the Garden of Eden, where our first parents lived. *What happened there in paradise?* They didn’t LISTEN! God said, **“You can eat from any tree in the Garden – but DO NOT EAT fruit from THAT tree!”** Satan tricked them. He said, *“Did God really say . . .”* Essentially he said, *“Don’t listen to Him,*

listen to me instead.” They listened to Satan, and the rest was history – ugly history; a history filled with death, corruption, the curse of sin, and everything that’s wrong with this world.

Throughout all of Old Testament history – they just didn’t LISTEN! “*Don’t engage in idolatry.*” They did. “*Don’t intermarry with the heathen nations around you.*” They did. “*Don’t forget to take these commands to heart, and to teach these commands to the next generation.*” They did.

*Why is this little command so **difficult** for God’s people right up to right now?* We are just SO corrupt and contaminated by sin from birth / by nature – that this dreadfully simple command has indeed become quite impossible for us. Listening to the lies of the world / the lies of Satan / the lies we tell ourselves – on the other hand, truly is quite simple, natural, and easy.

- *You would be happy if you had that!*
- *You deserve better than what you’re getting!*
- *It’s not fair that you should have to suffer like this!*
- *You are not a real Christian and God is angry with you.*
- *God didn’t really say all that anyways and you can’t trust that old book.*
- *You can be like God and you can make up the rules as you go – and have all your hearts desires.*
- *You are a total worthless failure who can’t do anything right.*
- *You’re a lost cause and you may as well just give up and quit.*
- *You can’t handle your struggles and your burdens are all proof that God has given up on you and rejected you.*

LIES / LIES / LIES – and God’s people (we) fall for them over, and over, and over again. One of my pastor friends at conference was in the dumps and feeling like a failure in ministry because he was falling for some of those lies. You have your own lies and I have my own lies that I’m prone to – and it’s time for ALL of us to just shut up and **LISTEN to Him!** He says:

- I have chosen you – and it’s totally by grace and not because of anything about you / who you are / what you have done or haven’t done.
- I have redeemed you and made you perfect in my Blood.
- I have washed you and adopted you in the waters of Holy Baptism.

- I have forgiven you of all your sins and will never count them or hold them against you.
- I will never give up on you because I have loved you with an everlasting love.
- I have given you the exact talents, skills, and abilities that I wanted you to have.
- I have planted you right where I want you to be.
- I am doing great and glorious things right there in your humble and daily lives.
- I have a plan and a purpose just for you.
- I have a mansion in heaven with your name on it.
- Trust me – I am the only one you can really count on to tell you the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the TRUTH.

So . . . it really is a very **simple** and clear point I want to hammer home here in this sermon! Please don’t walk out that door and forget this **simple and yet most difficult command**. **Lent** is coming up this week, and it’s a great opportunity to put this lesson into practice. *What is the #1 thing God wants humanity to do?* Sit down, be quiet, tune out everything out there, including the thoughts that pop into your own heads, and just listen to Him. Look at Him winning your eternal salvation – it will change your attitude about sin, as you see the price of your forgiveness. Listen to Jesus as He says:

- I must go to Jerusalem . . . to die.
- Take and eat, this is my body, given for you.
- May this cup be taken from me – yet, not my will, but Yours be done.
- My kingdom is not of this world.
- I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.
- Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.
- My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.
- Peace be with you – see my hands and side, stop doubting and believe!

Hear those words again. Listen to them. Apply them to your lives, and translate them into action. This is God’s answer to any question, any doubt, any fear, any pain, any struggle, any situation . . . and here it is: **LISTEN TO HIM!**