

Marvel At Jesus' Divine Light – Matthew 17:1-9

Synecdoche and metonymy. Whether or not you know what these two words are – synecdoche and metonymy – you use them all the time. It's just how we speak to one another. Grammar experts rightly say there is a difference between the two. But for the average person like me, this is what they are. When you refer to a part for the whole, you are using a synecdoche or a metonymy. When you say to someone, "*Can you give me a hand?*" you don't literally mean you want their hand and that's it. No, what you want is their help. That's a synecdoche because you're using a part of a person to refer to their whole being. When the news say that the White House has decided this or that, they're using a metonymy. It's not that the White House building has actually grown a mouth to pronounce official decrees, but the people who work inside that we're talking about. Synecdoche and metonymy are regular parts of our conversation because they summarize big abstract ideas into short logical phrases.

In these verses from the Gospel of Matthew, we have the account of the Jesus' Transfiguration. And in my opinion we also have a synecdoche or a metonymy here. Because if you had to choose one Bible story that showed that Jesus is the Son of God, what would you choose? Besides Jesus' death and resurrection, the Transfiguration account is probably right up there. Because as we read these verses and learn all that's going on in them, we see indeed that Jesus is the Son of God. And like Peter, James, and John, we marvel at Jesus' divine light without any hint of fear in our hearts.

6 days before the Transfiguration, Jesus told his disciples for the first time that he was going to die on the cross and rise from the dead 3 days later so that he could fulfill God's plan for our salvation. 6 days after dropping this truth bomb, Jesus then takes the inner 3 disciples who saw some of Jesus' more private moments. Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain in Galilee so he could show them that he is without a doubt the Son of God. And he did so with 3 incredible sights. The 1st is that Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. His face shone like the sun and his clothes were as bright as light. If anyone was in the nearby area, they would have seen this beacon of divine light shining from a distance as Jesus allowed his divine nature literally change his normal human appearance. Not long after that we get to the 2nd sight – Moses and Elijah appear. These two people were giants of the Old Testament. Moses who received God's law on Mt. Sinai and led the people out of slavery in Egypt. Elijah who performed

spectacular miracles and was taken up into heaven without ever dying. And here they were on the Mount of Transfiguration talking with Jesus about his upcoming death and resurrection. What a sight it must have been for Peter, James, and John. Two of their childhood role models were there in the flesh with Jesus with them shining as only God can.

It's no surprise Peter offered to make three temporary shelters. This was a good place to be. It was a preview of the glory they would see in heaven. If you've ever wished you could be a fly on the wall just so you could experience something, you probably know how Peter felt. And yet the Transfiguration scene wasn't done yet. While Peter was still speaking God came with a radiant cloud. As on Mt. Sinai the people saw God's presence with a cloud so Peter, James, and John saw God's presence with this cloud. And then God spoke some very familiar words – **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”** Do you remember when God spoke these almost exact words earlier in Jesus' life? It was at his baptism. As Jesus came up out of the water, God spoke from heaven to tell everyone how pleased he was that Jesus was beginning his earthly ministry. 2 years later on the Mount of Transfiguration, God was still pleased with Jesus for what he has done and what he will do. But this time God adds the command – listen to him. Listen to Jesus because he is the promised Savior of the world. Listen to Jesus because he is the Son of God who shines with divine light.

Do you listen to Jesus? Do you take his words and teachings and put them into action in your life? I remember growing up how my parents and I defined what it meant to listen in different ways. According to me, to listen to my parents meant that I heard what they said and thought about it. But according to my parents, listening meant that I would hear what they said and do it. So when my parents told me I should clean room, I would listen. I would hear what they said, thought about it, and decided that I didn't need to clean my room because I could still find my way to the bed. You can guess who won those arguments whether or not I had actually listened to my parents. But let's bring it back to Jesus. These past few weeks we've been reading from Matthew chapters 5-7 where we have Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* where he outlines what the Christian life looks like in a whole lot of areas. But as we think about what Jesus teaches us, have we listened to him? Did we hear what Jesus said and do it?

I know the answer is no. Even without knowing all the details in Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*, we know we haven't listened to Jesus perfectly all the time.

That's what Peter, James, and John knew too. Although they and we have saving faith, we haven't done what God commands in this radiant cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration. And the only way we can respond when we see the full light of Jesus' divinity and how we have failed to listen to him is to do what Peter, James, and John did. **"They fell facedown to the ground, terrified."** Terrified.

Completely scared for their spiritual lives because they knew they were sinful and how they shouldn't be in God's divine presence. And that goes for us too. God has no patience for sin. He will punish those who do not listen to Jesus and trust in what he says. Jesus is the Son of God who shines with divine light. What he says is true and matters for our lives.

But if you notice, the Transfiguration story doesn't end with the disciples face down on the ground in holy terror. In the very next sentence we see why we marvel at Jesus' divine light. Even though Jesus is the Son of God and is far better and greater than we could ever be, he brings that wonderful light to you and me. Listen to what Jesus does. **"The disciples...fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.' When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus."** As quickly as the disciples fell to the ground in terror, so quickly Jesus came to their aid. The Son of God without equal came to the lowly disciples, touched them, and said **"Get up...don't be afraid."** What wonderful words of comfort! And what did they see when they lifted up their eyes? Jesus and Jesus alone. I can only imagine the rush of relief that must have come over them when they saw their Savior back to normal without his divine light blinding them anymore.

Why do you think they felt that rush of relief? Right then and there because Jesus was back to normal without any of those incredible sights anymore. But that relief would stay because of what Peter correctly confessed 6 days before – **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God**. And as the Christ, Jesus would go to Jerusalem so he could die and rise some 8 months later as the Son of God. Because Jesus died on the cross, we don't need to be afraid of God's anger. Jesus was punished in our place for all of our sins and times we haven't listened to him. Because Jesus rose from the grave 3 days later, we can marvel at Jesus' divine light and see it with our own eyes in heaven one day. And it's all because Jesus is the Son of God. That's what makes his death count for you and me. That's what promises us that we will rise from the dead just as he did. And the same love that drove Jesus to speak these comforting words to Peter, James, and John is the same love he shows us. We don't need to be so terrified that we fall facedown to the

ground. Jesus has died and risen. Don't be afraid. Rather get up and look to your Savior when you are overcome by your sins. And then listen to Jesus once again.

Peter, James, and John did. They didn't tell anyone what they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration until after Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning. And it's a good thing they listened because they didn't understand what Easter was all about until Pentecost! But how this magnificent scene must have lived on in their minds. They saw with concrete evidence that Jesus truly is the Son of God and gladly wrote about this as Peter showed us with our 2nd Lesson from this morning.

As Peter, James, and John listened to Jesus, so God gives that command to you and me. Listen to what Jesus says at his Transfiguration. He truly is the Son of God even though our world downplays Jesus to simply be a great teacher or something else. Jesus is God and what he tells us is trustworthy. We need not be afraid because our sins are forgiven. We will see his divine light with our own eyes when we get to heaven. We will talk with him as Moses and Elijah did. And as we learn about his sufferings and pains as he comes down the Mount of Transfiguration to Mount Calvary in the coming season of Lent, Jesus is still the Son of God who lives a perfect life.

But also listen to Jesus in his Word. Listen to him in our midweek Lenten services. Listen to him in one of the many Bible studies that Grace offers at its many sites. Listen to him in your own time with your Bible paper or on a smartphone. Listen to him as you start impromptu conversations with friends and family. Because when you listen to Jesus in his Word, it is then that you can fully marvel at his divine light. Amen.