

A Vision and a Voice

Introduction

The Text

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. (Luke 9:28–36)

How Do You Respond to Suffering?

- A. How do you respond to suffering? We're all going to suffer. But God says, fundamentally, there really are only two basic ways approach it: (1) You can suffer like the world; or (2) You can suffer like a Christian.
- B. The world tries to avoid suffering at any cost.
 - 1. If a circumstance is causing the suffering, there's no rest until it's fixed. Certainly you have no more time to think of others, no more time to be generous. You kick into survival mode and your needs are all that matter.
 - 2. If another person is causing the suffering, it's fight or flight. Either I'm going to take you down or I'm going to pull away and never talk to you again. Either way, I'm going to remove the cause of my suffering.
 - 3. If it's health, I'm going to pour all the money I have into doctors and medicines and, if all hope is lost, well I might just give in to the bottle or the needle or the pill . . . at least I'll be numb when death comes.
 - a. The mantra of the world is: "Eat, drink, and be merry." There's no room in that equation for suffering.
- C. But for a Christian, Jesus says our approach is to be much different. While we don't needlessly run towards suffering, we don't run from it either. We take the cross on our backs before we even begin: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (v. 23). We expect it. We embrace it. We follow behind our Savior and trust Him to get us through it—to ultimately save us from it.

1. And, in this way, even in the face of hardship and trial, instead of spiraling off into anxiety, bitterness, anger, depression, addiction, and so on, we are able to continue producing the fruit of the Spirit— love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.
- D. But the question that this sermon is going to attempt to answer is: How? How do we suffer Christianly? What sustains our cross-bearing and enables our fruit-producing? How does a disciple continue to follow Jesus even through suffering and death?
1. Because I don't know about you, but that's not always and perhaps not even often the way I respond to the suffering that comes my way. I look an awful lot like the world when things get hard. And, brothers and sisters, it must not be so! So, again: How?

Clues in the Context

- A. Now I think our text answers this question this morning, but you'll only see this if you're seeing it in light of the context. What God is revealing on the Mount of Transfiguration can only properly be understood in light of what has just come before it.
1. That's why our text begins: *"Now about eight days after these sayings . . ." (v. 28)*. Luke wants us to connect what's about to happen with *"these sayings"* that came before.
- B. So what are these *"sayings"* He is referring to? Well, Jesus just got done dropping two massive bombshells:
1. The first we saw back in *vv. 21-22*: The Christ is going to bear a cross—He's going to suffer many things, be rejected, and be killed.
 2. And the second comes there in *vv. 23-27*: Not only is the Christ going to bear a cross, His disciples must bear one as well.
- C. The morale at this point among Jesus' followers must have been at an all-time low. This was a bad day. *"We thought you were establishing a kingdom and we would sit at your right hand. Now you're telling us that You are going to die and we are too. I'm thinking I want to get off of this boat. This isn't what I signed up for."*
1. Have you ever felt like that? You start off with all this expectation of what Jesus is going to do now that you've turned from sin and placed your faith in Him. . . and then it gets hard. Sometimes, circumstantially, your life actually gets worse when you start to follow Jesus. What then? *"It's not working. I'm out of here!"*
 - a. That's the temptation. And that's why God gives us the Mount of Transfiguration. It's a sneak-preview of the glory to come and a word of assurance intended to sustain us in the suffering we must endure along the way.
 - i. Though following Jesus is going to be hard, it's end is glory. The disciples needed to see this. We need to see this.
- D. Two things, then, God gives us here as a way of sustaining us in suffering on our way to glory: (1) A Vision; and (2) A Voice.

(1) A Vision

Seeing the Kingdom of God

- A. With regard to this idea of a vision, to better understand it, we first need to remember what Jesus had just said to His disciples back in [Luke 9:26-27](#): “²⁶ [W]hoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”
1. Jesus is referring here to His second coming, when He “comes in his glory”. But then He makes this somewhat enigmatic statement that a few of His disciples will get to see this glory, this kingdom of His, even before they die, even before the second coming and the official consummation of it all.
- B. Well, commentators have gone many directions with this, but I think the way Luke connects these words with the transfiguration story makes it plain: On this mountain, some of Jesus’ disciples (i.e. Peter, John, and James) would get a sneak-preview of the Son’s glory, a preemptive vision of the kingdom of God yet to come!
1. It’s as if God is opening the curtains for a moment and saying: “This is what’s in store. This is where I’m taking you! Will the cross that the Christ has to bear test your faith? Yes. Will the cross that you have to bear in following Him bring you to the end of yourself? Yes. But will it all end in shame and suffering and death for you? No! There is glory waiting on the other side!”
- C. He gives them a vision of future glory as a way of sustaining them in present distress.

A Face like the Sun and Clothes like Lightning

- A. So let’s consider this vision of future glory here in a bit more detail. The descriptions of Jesus at this point are remarkable. Luke puts it this way: “[And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white](#)” (v. 29).
1. With regard to His face, Matthew would fill it out by saying it “[shone like the sun](#)” ([Matt 17:2](#)).
 2. With regard to His clothes, the word Luke chooses here, translated “[dazzling white](#)” in our text, literally means “bright as a flash of lightning”. Mark describes it this way: “[\[H\]is clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them](#)” ([Mark 9:3](#)).
 - a. I love that! Whatever this is, it is not from earth, but from heaven. This is not the glory of man, but the glory of God!
- D. The idea again is this: Though the Son of man will soon be shrouded in shadow—the sky literally goes black while He’s hanging on the cross ([Matt 27:45](#))—and though we also will find ourselves in

darkness as we follow behind Him, it is light and glory that is the proper inheritance of the Christ and His saints.

1. As Paul says in Col 1:12-14: “¹² [Give] thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Again, this is where God is taking us!

Electrifying Connections

- A. Now, as we continue on in this vision, it occurred to me in my preparation, that there really is no way to do justice to all that’s here. The intertextuality in these verses is astounding! The connections between this text and the rest of the OT is almost overwhelming for a preacher trying to exposit and bring them out.
 1. Every word is electric. Touch this word and a text back in Deuteronomy lights up. Touch that word a text back in Exodus lights up. Touch another word and a text back in Isaiah lights up.
 - a. The culminating effect of all of this is actually quite simple: Jesus is shown to be the climactic fulfillment of everything God has ever said or done. He is the apex of the revelation of God, the realization of His plan, the promised Redeemer of the world.
- B. Though I could generate a whole sermon series on this, all I want to do here this morning is just briefly give you a sense of it.

Jesus Was Found Alone

- A. The first thing to note is what Luke says there in vv. 30-31a: “³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory . . .” Now, why these two? What’s their significance in the tradition of Israel?
 1. Well, for one thing Moses stands forth as the chief representative of the Law. He is the one to whom God delivered the law after all on yet another mountain years ago. Elijah, on the other hand, we could say, stands as a primary representative of the Prophets.
 - a. Therefore, the two fundamental divisions of the OT here are shown to be fulfilled in Christ. That’s why Jesus Himself would say to His disciples: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17).
 2. But there is more we could say. Moses is the one God used back when He was first establishing Israel as a nation. Elijah, on the other hand, is the one God promises will show up before the end, “before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (Mal 4:5). So Moses and Elijah stand for the Law and the Prophets, but they also stand for the beginning and end.

- a. And, again, they both point to and prepare the way for Jesus, who Himself is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13).
- 3. One last thing we could say on these two. Moses, you remember dies outside the Promised Land—he could see it, but he wasn’t allowed to enter it. Elijah, on the other hand, never dies. He departs from this world in a way more glorious than perhaps any other man in history—a chariot of fire and whirlwind lift him to heaven. He never tastes death.
 - a. And here again is Jesus who Himself will bring to fulfillment the things to which their departures pointed: He will die outside the gate for the sins of His people and He will rise and ascend into heaven never to die again!
- B. Now, look again at our text. What are Moses and Elijah doing here with Jesus? Luke tells us that they “spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (v. 31b). The word translated departure here is the Greek word: exodos = exodus.
 - 1. Implication: What Jesus is going to accomplish (Gk. pleroo = fulfill) at Jerusalem in His death and resurrection will be a new and greater exodus for the people of God. Just as Israel was freed from bondage to slavery in Egypt through the blood of the Passover Lamb, so too we are freed from the bondage of Satan, sin, and death through the precious blood of Jesus.
- C. When the disciples wake up from sleep, Peter offers to make “tents” (v. 33)—or, in the Greek, “tabernacles”—for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. With the use of this word along with the glory “cloud” which we’re told “overshadowed” them (v. 34), we are intended to recall the same sort of thing that happened on the day the tabernacle was completed back in Exo 40:34-45.
 - 1. Implication: Jesus is the fulfillment of the tabernacling of God with man. He is all that the tabernacle and temple stood for. He is God with us.
- D. And then, in v. 35, from out of the cloud, God speaks, every word rich with meaning.
 - 1. “This is my Son . . .”—recalling Psa 2:7, and showing Jesus to be the fulfillment of Davidic hope, the King eternal.
 - 2. “. . . my Chosen One . . .”—recalling Isa 42:1, and showing Jesus to be the Servant of the Lord, the one whose wounds would be our healing!
 - 3. “. . . Listen to Him!”—recalling Deut 18:15, and showing Jesus to be the coming prophet promised by Moses: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”
- E. And all of this is brought to one grand finale when, in v. 36a, Luke tells us: And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.”
 - 1. Every line of OT revelation—every promise, every prophecy, every symbol, every foreshadow, every hope—is converging in this One person. “Jesus was found alone.”

So What?!

- A. All of this in but a few verses and one grand vision. But so what? What does this have to do with your suffering, with the cross you are called to bear? How does this answer my initial question?
1. Don't you see? God is showing us that if we hope in Jesus our hope is not in vain. He is the answer, whatever your question may be. He is the solution, whatever your problem may be. Will there be troubled times ahead? Yes. But will there be glory in the end? More than we could ever conceive!
- B. Jesus takes Peter, John, and James with Him up this mountain to show them this, to give them a sneak-preview of His coming glory, so that they won't be derailed when they see Him hanging lifeless on the cross, so that they would know, it's not over, this is not how it ends. There's a kingdom being established and, in Christ, we get to be a part of it.
- C. This is where God is taking us. No more death, no more pain, no more tears, no more separation anxiety. We will be with God. We will behold His glory. We will even share in His glory, in His life, in His victory, in His joy.
1. I love that phrase Jesus uses at the end of His parable of the talents when He's describing what awaits the Christian on the last day: ["Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your master"](#) (Matt 25:21, 23). Joy! The joy of God will be ours.
- D. This vision of future glory sustains us in our present distress.

(2) A Voice

A Voice for the Valley

- A. But God gives us more than just a vision here on this mountain. He gives us a voice. I'm not talking about my voice. I'm not even talking about His voice coming out from the cloud. I'm talking about the voice of Christ.
1. Did you notice this? ["\[A\] voice came out of the cloud, saying \[what?\] . . . 'listen to him!'"](#) (v. 35). The voice of the Father directs these disciples to the voice of the Son. Why?
 - a. Well, because God knows this vision is coming to an end. The curtain needs to close once more. You got a sneak-preview but the full feature film hasn't yet hit the theaters. To get to the glory you see here Jesus has to get through the suffering, the shame, the death . . . the cross.
- B. Peter wants to stay there, right? He wants to keep the party going. But it's not time yet.
1. So Moses and Elijah disappear, the glory cloud departs, the lightning brightness of Jesus fades. And they have to descend from the Mount of Transfiguration back down into the valley of demons (cf. [Luke 9:37-43](#)).

- C. And here's the point: In the valley of demons, they no longer have that same mountaintop vision, but they still have His voice—His word. It was confirmed in the vision. You can trust what He has to say, even when you don't see it with your eyes.
1. Our call on this side of heaven is to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). And “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

The Bible

- A. So to sustain us in suffering, to prepare us for the days ahead, God gives us a vision and a voice. And it seems to me that both of these—vision and voice—merge for us now in our Bibles, the book that you have in your lap, the book that I'm preaching from this morning.
1. It is as we come to our Bibles that God gives us vision of glory. Paul would say that when we hear the gospel, sometimes God pulls back the veil and we see “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). We see a face like the sun radiate from the paper and ink. We're struck with an image of glory, of what God has in store.
 2. But there are other times, where our eyes seem dim and our hearts feel cold. We're not on the mountain, we're in the valley. And it's there in the valley, as we still come to our Bibles that God gives us His voice. “I don't see it right now, but I trust it.”
- B. You have the vision, you have the voice, because you have the Bible.

Even through Death

- A. Let me close by showing you how this sort of thing plays out. I could've taken any example of suffering, but I figured let's take the logical end of all suffering: namely, death—the “last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26). How does the vision and the voice sustain you there? How are we kept by Christ even through death?
- B. “So there you are in your hospital bed. Pale, feeble, left bald from the seemingly endless rounds of chemo. Your body aches as if someone took a mallet to you in the night. The pain has settled so deeply now it feels as if your very bones have begun to rot. When the tumor presses a nerve just right, a fire is lit on the inside. You burn in places no water could ever reach. It hurts just to exist.
- Outside your room, you can hear the now rare sound of children chattering. A family must've visited their loved one down the hall and they're now on their way back out to the car. You hear the moans from the patient in the room next door. Her pain meds have worn off again. The nurses scramble to her aid. The window in your room mocks you. Through the glass you see a world you will never take part in again. The blue of the sky, the green of the trees, the red of the garden rose—every color dims to gray. You know, you can feel it, you're not going to beat this cancer.
- Tears fill your eyes, as they do now many times a day. It feels as if death has come for you twenty years too early. You still had so much you wanted to do, so much you wanted see, so much you wanted to experience. But the God who has numbered your days is almost through counting. Like the last grains of sand slipping through the hour glass, they are coming to an end.
- And O how you're tempted to question and doubt, even scream in the face of the One who would permit, even ordain, such tragedies for you. And on your low days, you do . . . scream: “Why me? Why now? How could You? Where are You? Are You even there at all?”

But on other days, when grace and the Spirit prevail, though your hands are too frail to hold a Bible, and though your eyes are too dim to make out words on a page, you ask your spouse, or your daughter, or your pastor, or your nurse to open the ancient Book . . . and read. And, while they read, you catch vision once more of the glory of Christ and you hear yet again the very voice of God.

You hear of the Son not left in the grave. When everyone thought it was over, things had only just begun. God raised Him never to die again. And He says He's gone to prepare a place for you. Even you! And all your sorrow will soon turn to joy.

You hear the pages turn from the gospel of John to the book of Revelation. And now you hear of angels around the throne . . . singing. And people from every tribe, tongue, and nation are joining in. You are in that number. You're not there yet, but you're there! The curtain is pulled back and you see where God is taking you.

One final promise your friend wants to read. It's a word of hope for the valley. " ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:16–18).

And somewhere in the midst of all this, though your body still lay curled in a hospital bed, you find fresh strength of heart to pick up your cross this day as well, and follow your Savior through shadowlands to paradise. There is peace. There is joy. There is love. The vision and the voice sustain!"