

Hearing Christ's Voice: Then and Now

Introduction: On the Mount of Transfiguration

This is the second article based on the Gospel record of the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. As mentioned in the previous article ("Mission Impossible? Mission Accomplished!"), all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) give us an account of the transfiguration; this indicates just how important this amazing event was to the Gospel writers, and it was most certainly a memorable incident for the three disciples who were its eyewitnesses.

Peter, James and John, the select inner circle of Christ's disciples, were the privileged onlookers of this spectacle. Peter himself mentions the event in his second epistle: 2 Peter 1:16-18, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount". Peter was clearly profoundly affected by what he saw and heard; and it is hardly surprising: he caught a brief glimpse of the divine glory of the Son of God. Matthew 17:2 says that Jesus was "transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment (clothing) was white as the light" (Matthew 17:2). And then there was the sight of Moses and Elijah, appearing in glory (Luke 9:31). And, as if all this wasn't enough, Matthew 17:5 states, "a bright cloud overshadowed them (the shekinah cloud of God's glory)", and the disciples heard the voice of God the Father speaking.

Hearing Christ's Voice Then

What I want us to concentrate on in this article are the words which the Father spoke to Peter and the other two disciples in Matthew 17:5: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him". What was the purpose of the transfiguration? **For Christ:** God the Father was confirming His love for Him in view of the agony He was about to go through. **For the disciples** there was also a purpose: 1) **to witness the true glory of Christ as the beloved Son of God** before they witnessed the awful suffering which He was to experience at Jerusalem, and, 2) to impress upon them the importance of **listening to what Christ said**. Jesus did some amazing things while He was on earth: He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, working limbs to paralytics, and life to the physically dead; but more important than these miracles were **the words** which Christ spoke; words from God the Father whom Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to reveal; words which explained why He had come and what His mission on earth was all about; words of eternal life. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days **spoken unto us by his Son**" (Hebrews 1:1-2); "That which was from the beginning, **which we have heard**, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of (concerning) **the Word of life**" (1 John 1:1); "In the beginning was **the Word** (the Son of God, Jesus Christ), and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**... No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, **he hath declared (revealed) him**" (John 1:1,18). Jesus Christ, the Word of life (the source and giver of life, who has life in Himself), the Word

of God, who is Himself God, is the ultimate revelation of God. No wonder the multitudes “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22); and even Christ’s enemies were forced to exclaim, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46).

Oh, to have been in Palestine in the days of Christ’s flesh! to have been amongst the multitude and heard the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth; to have been one of His disciples and received the wonderful explanations which He gave them of His parables: explanations that the multitude never got to hear; to have been one of the chosen three who were eyewitnesses of His glory on the holy mount and heard God the Father speak with an audible voice. But alas, Jesus, in His human nature, is no longer on earth; Palestine no longer echoes with the sound of His human voice. Are we not, sadly, far worse off, than those privileged disciples 2000 years ago? Peter says, “**No!**”.

Hearing Christ’s Voice Now

In 2 Peter 1:17, we read, “For he (Jesus) received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. What is missing from Peter’s quotation of what the Father said to His Son on the Mount of Transfiguration?... “**Hear ye him**”. Why does Peter omit those words which he himself heard? I believe they are omitted on purpose, and the purpose is found in what he goes on to say in the rest of chapter one. 2 Peter 1:19-21 says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”. Peter’s purpose, from verse 12 of 2 Peter chapter 1, is to impress upon the readers of his epistle that what they had heard from Peter and the other apostles were not “cunningly devised fables”, i.e. mere human inventions, fabricated stories made up by men, but words of truth from God Himself. What we have in the Bible are the very words of Jesus Christ **speaking to us now!** The scriptures of the Old Testament prophets are **the words of Jesus Christ**, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10); and the New Testament scriptures of the apostles are also **the words of Jesus Christ** (and not just the words in red in many Bibles today), who is **Himself the Word of God**: God’s perfect revelation of Himself to man (John 1:1,18, and Hebrews 1:1-2, as quoted above). The apostles were, indeed, eyewitnesses of Christ’s glory: they heard the words of truth which Christ spoke while on earth. But those times of sense are no more; those times, when, as another of those privileged three disciples says, as we have quoted above (1 John 1:1), **they heard and saw and touched** the Son of God. The Christian life is, above all, **a life of faith**; it was so for those believers who lived before Christ came in the flesh, it was so for those who heard Christ in the flesh, and it continues to be so for us today: “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). The hearing that truly profits us is the hearing of Christ’s voice by faith (Galatians 3:2). This was national Israel’s problem throughout the Old Testament: “the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2); and the Israelites of the first century AD, who were privileged to hear Christ’s voice in the flesh, were no better; after all, after hearing His voice and seeing His miracles in the flesh, they proceeded to crucify Him!

Jesus promised the apostles that, after His death, resurrection and ascension back to heaven, the Holy Spirit, “whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26), and “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth... He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:13-14). The Holy Spirit revealed the truth of Christ to the apostles, and they wrote it down for us all to read in the scriptures of the New Testament. It is also the Holy Spirit who enlightens the eyes of our understanding (Ephesians 1:18) when we read the scriptures with the eyes of faith. **Having attentive ears which hear by faith the voice of Christ speaking in the scriptures, is more important than being able to hear Christ’s voice in the flesh;** hence Christ’s oft repeated words while here on earth, **“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”** (Matthew 11:15).

The voice of Jesus Christ in the flesh may no longer be heard **in Palestine** today, but His words of truth and life are to be heard **everywhere** today whenever we read and listen to the scriptures with Spirit-illuminated understandings and attentive, believing ears. As the apostle Paul says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect (complete) thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17); the scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God’s full, complete and final revelation to all men: they are **all that we need** to thoroughly equip us to live the Christian life, and to which, we are warned, nothing is to be added or taken away (Revelation 22:18-19).

Conclusion

How privileged we are, therefore, to have the holy scriptures, God’s word of truth (John 17:17), in our own language, readily available to us, and which we can read without the threat of hostile authorities interrupting us and taking us off to prison. Christians in other parts of the world do not have it so easy. Let’s take full advantage of the privileges we have, while we still have them.

In chapter 3 of his second epistle, Peter tells his readers that his intention in writing to them is to “stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Peter 3:1-2). We need to be reminded that the scriptures are essential reading for Christ’s disciples if we are to be spiritually alert in these last days, when people mock the Bible and its teaching, and behave contrary to God’s holy standards (2 Peter 3:3f). Let us, therefore, prize the Bible above everything else that we have in this life; let us listen to Christ speaking to us in it, every day; may our minds, our hearts, and our lives be saturated with its teaching; and let us hold onto its truth in the face of false teachers with their destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1).

As God’s people we are truly blessed, as Peter says, in 2 Peter 1:19, to have a “more sure word of prophecy (the scriptures); whereunto (we) do well that (we) take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark (squalid) place (this fallen world in which we live)”. Similarly, the Psalmist says that the scriptures are “a lamp unto (our) feet, and a light unto (our) path” (Psalm 119:105); and they will remain so “until the day dawn (when Jesus returns), and the day star (Jesus Christ Himself) arise in (our) hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

*In our next article we will look, God willing, at **The Glory of Christ** as revealed in His transfiguration.*