

Listen to Him

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Preacher: Niels van de Kastele

[0 : 00] Today's scripture reading comes from Matthew 16-17, starting in Matthew 16, verse 21, we read, From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan, you are hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Surely, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

[1 : 29] And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.

When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise, and have no fear. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. And the disciples asked him, Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?

[2 : 46] He answered, Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased.

So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. This is the word of God.

Great. Thanks, Sherman, for reading. Now, a week ago, I moved house, and so I spent a lot of time on the phone with utility companies.

And I always have to verify my identity. Can you give your Hong Kong ID card? How do you pay us? And those kind of things to change the address. It's just for security, right? They don't want any stranger to just come and change the address.

I think it's a good thing. It's a hassle, but it's a good thing. One credit card I have in the UK is they are really, it's kind of worrying in a way. They know me so well. Whenever I buy something strange, they will give me a call.

[3 : 47] Is this really you? So a few months ago, we booked flights to go abroad. And hey, you haven't bought flights in two years. Is this really you? But yeah, I mean, right, you don't want anyone to just use the credit cards and everything.

Verifying the identity. I mean, you would do the same. I don't know if you've ever had this kind of email from a friend suddenly who just emails out of the blue and says, hey, I'm in Spain on holiday.

And, you know, all my bags got stolen and all my money and my phone. But I found this local. So can you please transfer \$20,000 to this account? That'd be really helpful for me.

I don't know what you would do. I think it sounds a lot like a scam to me, right? But you would give them a call, right? You would text them and say, hey, is this really you? Otherwise, your account's been hacked.

Now, if you get a strange request, you want to make sure, is this real? Is this true? Is this really from you? And that's kind of how we should see today's passage. Because, you know, the thing we're going to look at in chapter 17, people call it a transfiguration, right?

[4 : 55] When Jesus is completely changed on the mountain. It comes after last week. And if you were here last week, well, it was quite a shock. I mean, it was a big moment that we're looking at these few weeks because the disciples of Jesus finally figured out who Jesus is.

Well, God revealed it to him, right? And in verse 16, Jesus asked, who do you say I am? And Peter gets it. You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

You're the Messiah. You're the one who comes to bring God's kingdom. You're going to make everything right. You're here. And Jesus says, yeah, that's right. Don't tell anyone. But verse 21 was then a big shock, right?

Verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed.

And on the third day, be raised. Yes, I'm the Messiah, but I'm going to get killed. Which just doesn't compute. I mean, for us as Christians, we're so used to it.

[6 : 01] But imagine the shock. I don't know. A few decades ago, people voted for Obama in the US, right? Because they wanted change. And he complained, oh, let's have change. And they all voted.

And he won. Imagine him in his victory speech, you know? Thank you so much for voting for me. Thank you for putting your trust in me. And I promise that on my very first day in office, I'm going to commit suicide.

Right? Right? It makes no sense. But that is what Jesus is saying, right? I'm the Messiah. And so I'm going to go to Jerusalem and they're going to kill me. You would just think, if you're Peter Bates, are you really the Messiah?

Is this really you? Because this does not make any sense to me. Or, to us, of course, we know, right? 2,000 years of Christianity. We know, of course, Jesus had to die.

It's for our sins to rescue us. And it's wonderful. But then the second part of last week, right? It's not just Jesus who's going to die. We're going to, well, deny ourselves.

[7 : 02] Lose our lives for Jesus, right? Verse 24. Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Denying yourself. Taking up your cross. Saying no to sin. Saying no to your selfish desires. Putting Jesus first. Putting up with hardship and persecution for the kingdom.

Very demanding. And you hear that and you think, wow, this is a big ask. Do I really have to do this? Is this really from you, Jesus?

Because, again, we were expecting paradise. We were expecting the good life to come now. Instead, we're getting the hard life. The cross-shaped, cruciform life. Because it can be tough to be a Christian.

It's full of joy and peace and comfort. But also, it can be demanding, right? Giving up your life for Jesus. You know? You have those doubts.

[8 : 03] Sometimes you need to sacrifice something. Can I do this? You're at work. Jesus wants you to do the right thing, right? And I can lie or I can be honest.

But if I'm honest, I'm going to lose a lot of... I'm going to take a big financial hit. Can I do that? Can I really live for Jesus and put him first and not myself?

Well, Jesus wants to assure us. Jesus knows that, you know, it is hard to live for him. What he says is confusing. What he says can be demanding for the disciples, for us.

And so 17, verse 1. And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother. There's a time reference, right? Six days later. These are linked.

What's happening today, you know, it's connected with last week. It helps us with last week. Because if you wonder what should we do from today, actually God himself speaks in the passage.

[9 : 02] You've heard it, right? At the end of verse 5 of chapter 17, listen to him. All right? That's what God says. This is what, you know, Jesus just gave this speech and God says, listen to him.

That's what he wants. And then to really listen to him, well, we need to have a bigger view of what Jesus is, which is what we're going to get. And so we're going to look at this passage, yeah? And I hope I have a great view of Jesus so we can do this.

We can follow him. We can trust him. But what, who is Jesus then? What do we see here? Well, first point, God says it, right? This is my son.

Jesus really is the son. Peter, this is not, no confusion. This really is the son, the son of God. Because we get this incredible event that has such an impact on the disciples as, well, Jesus, yeah, the transfiguration is what it's called.

But what happens? So they go up a mountain, right? Up a high mountain, verse 1. What do you do on a high mountain? Well, in the Bible, you meet God, right? Like Moses going up Mount Sinai.

[10 : 10] Those kind of things. They're going up the mountain to meet with God. And then Jesus is completely transfigured, right? Verse 2. He was transfigured before them. And his face shone like the sun.

And his clothes became white as light. I mean, it's a bit rainy now. But the heat wave the past few weeks, right? Have you ever tried to look at the sun? And it was so bright. And you can't see it.

That's what Jesus suddenly became like. He was full of dazzling splendor. And his clothes completely white. And this was just no mere human being, right, that they suddenly saw.

Suddenly, Jesus was so much more. And then Moses and Elijah appeared, right? These two figures from the Old Testament were suddenly there talking to Jesus.

I don't know how Peter knew it was them. I don't know. Did Moses have his stone tablets or something? I have no idea. Or did they just talk? Jesus, hey, Moses, what's up? I don't know. But Moses and Elijah, you know?

[11 : 12] Guys from 1,000, 1,500 years earlier who were long gone. And they were there talking with Jesus. I don't know why it's Moses and Elijah.

Maybe some people think, oh, it's the law and the prophets. So it's the Old Testament pointing to Jesus. Maybe they were just these heroes who actually went up a mountain and met with God.

Except now they're meeting Jesus. Kind of shows you who Jesus is, right? But, you know, I would be in awe, right? If you're there and Moses and Elijah appear. But at the same time, it's not about them, right?

It's all about Jesus. The big focus is on him. Peter is a bit confused, right? And so, oh, Lord, verse 4, it's good that we're here. If you wish, I'll make three tents here.

One for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. Basically, all three the same. No. And so, God himself speaks, right? The Father, second time in the gospel.

[12:10] This big cloud appears, a bit like in the temple. The presence of God. And this booming voice. This is my son with whom I'm well pleased.

Listen to him. And the disciples, they fall on the ground. And they're terrified. But it's all Jesus, right? Verse 8, the cloud disappears and there's only one person left.

Jesus. He is the one. Moses and Elijah, they're gone. It's like they're not even there. Right? The point is very clear. Jesus is the son. The one and only.

And that's really imprinted deep in their minds and hearts now, right? Jesus is the one. They, that's what the Father says. And so, if he really is the son, really the Messiah, well, this is my son.

Listen to him. May sound very confusing what he says. But no mistake. This is the Messiah. This is the son. May sound very demanding. This really is the son.

[13:10] That's the point. I mean, it must have been terrifying for these guys, right? But although in a way, I hope you see this is a very kind and gracious thing of Jesus to do. He knew that his disciples were having these doubts and fears about who he really was.

And so, he gives them this, what a scary thing. I love verse 7, right? That contrast. On the one hand, Jesus so shining. And then verse 7.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, rise and have no fear. Right? They're terrified on the ground. And he just, hey, come on. It's okay. He scares them, but then also. But he wants to assure them, look, this is really me.

It is really, I really am the Messiah. And maybe you've had that sometimes, that God just really assures you in a certain way. You know, you're really worried about something.

And then you see an incredible answer to prayer. And it's kind of scary almost. Except that it reassures you, oh yeah, God is with me. Or some, you didn't even pray, some amazing coincidence.

[14:15] And just, you know, okay. You know, God is with me. He loves me. It's okay. I can do this. That's the idea here, this sign. Jesus really is the Son.

Yeah? And Peter got that message. You know, 35 years later, he wrote a letter of 2 Peter. He wants to say to his readers, look, what I'm telling you is really true. What does he say?

Well, 2 Peter 1. Some verses. This is Peter. Look, we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard his very voice, born from heaven. For we were with him on the holy mountain. Look, this is really true. We heard God speak. We saw the Son. This is really true.

[15 : 17] That's the point, right? This really is the Son. And so, I mean, we all believe that, right? We all, you're a Christian, you believe Jesus is the Son of God. But this passage says, if you believe that, what will you do?

You will listen to him. You will take his words seriously. No matter if they are difficult to understand or hard to obey. You will listen to him.

Right? That's what it says. So, are we doing that? You know, Jesus tells us what it's like. We need to deny ourselves, say no to our sin. How seriously do we take that?

Because I know what I'm like, right? Life is busy. And I know kind of, I've been confronted with maybe some sinful desire, some envy, pride, lust.

And I read the Bible, and I can feel Jesus speaking to me that I should do something about this. But so often, we're just so slow, right? I'm so slow that, yeah, I know, but it doesn't really mean that.

[16 : 23] It should be okay, right? I'm a bit busy right now to really sort this out. Maybe Christmas I'll have more time. I don't know if you recognize that in yourself. But it's so easy to take it slow, right?

But then we haven't really grasped who Jesus is. Then in our hearts, I think Jesus is just this very small little guy, right? Compared to my sin, compared to the things of the world.

If you were on that mountain, on your face, before Jesus in dazzling splendor, with this cloud, and God says, listen to him. I don't think you'd say, well, maybe Christmas time, I'll have some time.

Right? You would listen. You would take Jesus seriously. Yeah? So, next time you struggle to obey, yeah. Well, what is it?

Why are we so slow? Well, what's really going on inside? Yeah? Or maybe something else. Maybe, you know, Jesus says he needs to die for us.

[17 : 24] Maybe you're here, you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus, because, look, I'm a pretty good person. Jesus, you don't need to die for me. It's okay. I can sort myself out. Do you take seriously what Jesus said?

Jesus says, I have to die for you. I'm not going to enjoy it, but I love you and I'm going to die for you. Do you take that seriously? Do you take, yeah, that's, okay.

If he says, I'm so sinful, he needs to die for me, then that's true. And I need to do that. And I need to humbly come to him and accept his sacrifice for me. All right?

If you were there before him, so small, and he is so great, and he would say that to you, I need to die for you, yeah, you would accept that. All right? Do we take him seriously? But it's not just his identity.

Because, yes, this is Jesus' glory, but there's more. Because this glory has a certain focus, and namely what we need to, what Jesus wants to really tell us is that Jesus will really rise and return.

[18 : 29] Jesus will rise and return. Because that is, in a way, the big thing that our last week's passage ends. It ends with Jesus' return. Because why should we follow Jesus?

Why give up your life for him? Right? Why? Well, the future, right? This whole passage is full of the future. So, verse 25, right? For whoever would save his life now will lose it later.

But whoever loses his life now, for my sake, will find it later. Right? Well, what good is it to gain the whole world now if you forfeit your soul later?

It's all about later. And why does later matter so much? Well, because Jesus is going to return. Verse 27, for the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

And why does it matter? Because Jesus will return. Well, I mean, if Jesus won't return, right? If there's no future, then, yeah, it doesn't matter, right? Why give up your life now?

[19 : 38] Just meaningless. Like we just saw in Ecclesiastes over the summer. But no, Ecclesiastes ends in the same way. No, no. Life now matters. Why? Well, we heard that, right?

The end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments. Why? For God will bring every deed into judgment. Except here it's Jesus who will bring every deed into judgment.

Kind of shows you again who he is, right? If any of you here think Jesus is just a good teacher, he claims he is the judge. He claims he's going to come with 200 million angels and judge the world.

That's not just a nice teacher. But that's the thing, right? Jesus will come and judge. And therefore, life matters now. And in a way, that is then how it's connected, right?

Because he says that, I'm going to return. Verse 28. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

[20 : 36] And so, you know, I'm going to return. And let me tell you, some of you are not going to taste death until you see something. It's like he's promising a sign, and then he takes them up the mountain.

So it's connected, right? This is the glory of his return. The glory when he comes as judge, as king of the world. That is what he's showing. And not just beforehand.

Afterwards, verse 9. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. Again, it's connected with his resurrection.

Because, of course, Jesus is glorious right then as well. But it's hidden, right? He walks around as a rabbi through the desert. And you wouldn't even notice that he is the Son of God until he maybe does a miracle.

And his glory was hidden. That's what the disciples don't seem to really get, right? Because as they go down the mountain, they have this discussion.

[21 : 35] And verse 10. The disciples asked him, Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? And if you're confused about that, that's from the last verses of the Old Testament.

God promises in Malachi 4, Behold, I'll send you Elijah the prophet. Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

Elijah's going to come. And then the day of the Messiah. And you're the Messiah, you're here, but I haven't seen Elijah yet. No, no. Elijah has come, but he's hidden.

Right? Verse 11. Elijah does come, and he'll restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come. And they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased.

Gee, it was John the Baptist, but he was kind of hidden. People didn't notice it was Elijah, and they killed him. And it's going to be the same for the Son of Man.

[22 : 29] Right? So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer. Jesus came hidden in a way. He laid aside his glory, came as a rabbi, came as someone who would die as a criminal on the cross.

But after that, after that, when he will rise, then we'll see his true glory. And that's what they get a glimpse of now. The glory will come, but later.

And the thing is, that's what matters, right? So Obama committing suicide, then he's gone, and he can't do anything. And so there's no change. But if Jesus will rise, then it's okay if he dies.

Who cares if Jesus dies? Three days later, he'll be back, and he can reign forever, right? If Jesus comes back, it's okay if he dies. And so this reassures them.

It reassures them, yes, Jesus can die, and you can die. There is an end to the hardship. There's an end to the suffering. The glory will come.

[23 : 25] Because I think most of us have experienced hardship in some ways, right? But you need an end point. If you want to obey Jesus, you need an end point.

I think the COVID situation here in Hong Kong, the frustrating thing is there's no end point, right? If someone just told us, okay, six more months of masks and red tests, and then it's over.

We can do it. Right? Three more months of quarantine, and then it's over. But the thing is that there's just no end inside. We don't know when it will end. It's the same with following Jesus, right?

You want there to be, okay, I can deny myself. I can take up my cross, but it should end one day, right? And Jesus promises, yeah, it will end. Jesus, he went to the cross, but he had an exit strategy.

He would rise after three days. And the same for us. Jesus will return. Right? No matter what life is like now as a Christian. I mean, some of us are having it easy, but others of us, life is being pretty tough.

[24 : 29] There is an end point. Jesus will return. And we have a glimpse of that here. We see him in his glory. We see him in a kind of the white, dazzling splendor that you also see in Revelation.

He's going to rise. He's going to return. And so you can do it. We can deny ourselves. Jesus will return. And so, again, the question is, do we believe it?

Of course, we believe Jesus rose. We believe Jesus will return. But then again, we're often so reluctant to give up our lives, right? We are so reluctant to sacrifice.

We focus on money and work and comfort. And I can see it in myself. And, you know, as if there's no future. You know, Jesus has stored treasure in heaven.

And we store up the treasure in HSBC. Why? Well, kind of, I think somewhere deep down, we're just not sure about the future, right? I hope Jesus comes back. But just in case not, let me have a good life now.

[25 : 33] Then at least I've had one good life. That's what deep down we're thinking. All right? If I want to let go of the world, I need something certain to hold on to. The certainty of Jesus coming.

But if this is not certain, then I want to hold on to my life now, right? That's what's going on inside our hearts. And that's why Jesus wants to say, no, you can do this.

You can follow me. You can give up your life. Because you can see absolutely certain, I will return. We've already seen the resurrection, right?

Disciples hadn't seen it yet. But they saw it. They were changed. Jesus, he will, for us, the resurrection is past. His return is still future. But, you know, he will come.

And that means it's okay, right? It's okay to follow Jesus. Now, just to say that there's a range of people here. For some of us, we are really giving our lives to church, to Jesus.

[26 : 32] But there's others of us. And, yeah, our future doesn't seem to make much difference. Jesus says, no, you can follow me. You know, you need to make that financial decision.

You're worried. Can you take the hit? Jesus says, yes, you can. I'm going to return. Things will be fine. Sacrificing for the kingdom. Don't worry. I'll return.

You'll be fine. Risking that friendship to speak the gospel. You'll be okay. I will return. It'll be fine. That's Jesus' message today.

And that's so liberating, right? And we, you know, last week it was tough. It was demanding. But Jesus is assuring us, no, we can do it. Right? There is a future.

There is a hope. There is an end point. Let's follow him. Now, I know that it's not always easy. Yeah?

[27 : 30] But just remember. I mean, if you were going to be there, imagine yourself standing before Jesus. Right? When he returns with 200 million angels in the glory of his father.

Well, what will you think then? You know, when you see those who've tried to save their life losing it forever. But Jesus says to you, well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.

Right? Then all those things don't matter anymore. Right? But then you're not going to think, I wish I'd saved more money. I wish I'd watched more Netflix. No. None of that matters because you're with Jesus.

And there's eternal, everlasting glory. Just remember that. Next time you find it hard to obey. Next time you find it hard to follow Jesus. Remember that.

Right? And then, you know, for the moments we struggle. Again, remember, yes, Jesus will return. But he came first to die. Right? Jesus didn't stay up on the mountain.

[28 : 33] He could have done that. Right? In his glory. Sent the disciples down. But Jesus came down with them. And as they came down, he took the lead. And he would lead them to Jerusalem. In no glory at all.

Go to the cross as a criminal. To die for their sin. To die for the times that we fail to listen. For the times that we've put ourselves first. For the times that we haven't trusted him.

That he will take care of us. And knowing that love. Yeah, we can follow Jesus. So let's pray we would. Let's pray that we really believe this.

Believe who Jesus is. What he has done. What he will do. So we can follow him. Why don't we pray now? Lord Jesus, we are just so amazed at your glory here.

We believe in our heads who you are. And yet we don't see it. Pray that today's passage is by your spirit. Would be real in our hearts. We know you're not here physically.

[29 : 35] You gave us this experience. Here in the words. What happened to them. So that we could believe you now. But pray that we would. By your spirit. Convince us of who you are.

That we would take your words seriously. Convince us that you will return. So we can do this. We can live for you. Because we know we'll be with you forever. And nothing will be lost. Lord, we need that.

And so speak to us. Encourage us. In Jesus' name. Amen.