

Who do you listen to?

I'm not asking who your favourite musicians are, or what radio programs you prefer. I'm asking who do you pay attention to? Who do you believe when they express an idea or an opinion or a fact? Who do you provide for when they say they need something? Who do you obey when they ask you or tell you to do something? Who you listen to is more than just what you hear, it's who impacts on what actions you take.

When your spouse, or your parents, asks you to do something, do you listen? Of course you do. We all want happy homes. When your children tell you they need something, do you listen? Of course you do, you love your children. When your boss at work tells you to do something, do you listen? Of course you do, you want to keep your job. When environmentalists tell us to recycle, we listen. When doctors tell us to take medication, we listen. We listen to friends, we listen to family, we listen to preachers (hopefully), we listen to police, we even listen to politicians.

In our passage today, Jesus is transfigured in glory, Elijah and Moses appear, and God says about Jesus, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Over the past eight chapters of the Gospel of Mark, we have seen Jesus driving out demons, healing the sick, forgiving sin, ruling over the Sabbath, calming storms, walking on water, multiplying bread, discarding traditions and teaching in parables about the kingdom of God. Those are impressive, great, worthy of praise. They are all signs that point to Jesus being God. But the transfiguration is not just a sign. It doesn't point. It reveals that Jesus is God. All those miracles before were like those little signs on the side of the road that say, "God: 180kms. God: 35kms. God: 16kms." The transfiguration is the big sign that says, "Welcome to God. Population: Jesus."

Jesus proves that he is God, but not by doing miracles putting up signs pointing to him being God. He reveals one of the characteristics of God: he reveals his Glory. God is not just worthy of glory because of all the things he does, but God IS Glory. Just like God is Love, and all love comes from God, and God is Goodness and Holiness, and those things come from him, God is also Glory - no glory exists apart from God. When Jesus shows his friends his glory up on that mountaintop, Jesus is revealing Glory itself - he is revealing God. It's not just a light show, it is God's power, his holiness, his goodness that make up the light of his glory.

Later in his life, Peter would say that the transfiguration was the key act of Jesus he witnessed that meant his message about Jesus could be trusted. In 2 Peter 1 "16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." The transfiguration is the time in Jesus' life that we can point to and say with absolutely certainty that Jesus is God. That is why he is worth listening to.

"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" The message is loud and clear. Jesus is God. The Kingdom of God has come with power. That has been the message for eight straight chapters now, getting stronger and stronger, culminating in the transfiguration. Moses and Elijah, the two men who represent the epitome of God's

relationship with his people, are right there with Jesus. God spoke with his people by the giving of his law through Moses; and God spoke to his people through the prophets, of whom Elijah is a representative. Jesus is the way God speaks to us in these last days.

Listening to Jesus should have a huge effect on how we live our lives. For the disciples at the time, this required a huge upheaval in their faith. As Jews, Moses and the Prophets were the foundation upon which they did everything. They were the way God and his people interacted. Now God himself had told them, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" That's a foundational change for them, because 'listen to him' means 'do what he says'.

Take one small example. In chapter 7:19 it says as an offhand comment in brackets, "In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean." What a huge difference to people who their whole lives followed restrictive food laws! Imagine if the opposite happened tomorrow - if Jesus told us that we have to follow the food laws to be Christian. No pork, no ham, no bacon. No shellfish. No cheese and meat mixed together. How does Christmas look without ham and prawns? How does McDonald's look without cheeseburgers? One small part of life, one huge upheaval when it changes because we do what Jesus says.

God says "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" But no-one is going to force you to do it. God certainly doesn't force people to listen to him. If he did, I wouldn't have to stand here telling you to listen to him, because we wouldn't have a choice. God wouldn't have had to say, "Listen to him!" because there wouldn't be another option.

But there is an option. God gives you a choice. And you should choose to listen to him. If you accept that Jesus is God but refuse to listen to him, that is something you need to fix. Not listening to God is untenable. Being God's enemy is terrible. But if we listen to Jesus earlier in Mark 2:10 he said, "I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." That is, he can forgive being God's enemy. We can actually be transformed from being God's enemy to being his friend. It's not about being forced to listen to Jesus. It's about wanting to listen to him. If you want to know how to listen to Jesus in your life, because Jesus is God and because Jesus is your friend, then I see four things that we need to do.

Step 1: To listen to Jesus, you need to hear what he says. Jesus speaks in the New Testament, and he quotes from almost every book of the Old Testament. So the whole bible is valuable in understanding what Jesus has to say. I read the Bible almost every morning. I have a devotional that looks at one verse, sometimes one idea in one verse, and explores it. It's about a hundred years old, but it's free. It's actually online. It's one page, takes about five minutes to read, if that. Before that, I used to read 10 verses of the Bible every morning, and really focus on what they were saying. That took about an hour. Before that, I used to follow a yearly Bible reading plan, where you're reading several chapters a day. That took about 40 minutes. They are all good.

Memorize scripture. I started in September last year, and I have memorized the entire book of Galatians (six chapters), and coincidentally I have memorised the first nine

chapters of Mark. It takes about 45 minutes every morning. Yes, it takes a long time. But I cannot praise it highly enough. It is a phenomenal way of listening to Jesus. I strongly recommend it to you all. If you want to do it, come to me afterwards and give me your contact details, and I'll send you the pamphlet I used to learn how to do it (it's free). It is not hard to do, all it takes is time. I recommend that you make time to do it. Give other things up to do it. That's what I did. It's better than reading the news.

I started memorising scripture because I was convicted about it by something Bruce said in a sermon on James last year. Which brings me to the next thing to do to listen to Jesus: Listen to sermons being given here, at Waitara, every Sunday. Sermons are an amazing resource. They don't just tell you what Jesus says, but they help us to do it to our lives - the other half of what listening means. One thing I don't do takes notes during sermons. I listen to sermons every week, and as sure as I listen to them, I forget most of them the next day. What a waste!

Every week there's a sermon outline. I'm going to start using it. Well, actually I'm probably going to take notes on my tablet because my handwriting is rubbish. But I'm going to note down the challenge that the preacher gives every week, and if I'm not doing it, figure out one way I can apply it to my life, then actually do it.

Go to a Bible study. Bible study is a great way of sharing not only what we think Jesus is saying to us, but also challenging and supporting one another to listen to what Jesus says, and to do it. It turns listening to Jesus from being just a personal act into it a communal activity.

Step 2: We need to talk to Jesus. That means pray. I keep a prayer blog actually. I write in it every morning. I pray about my daily devotion. I pray about whatever is exercising me that morning. Then I pray about different topics each day of the week. Prayer is not just about me asking for stuff though. It's about working with God through why stuff needs to be prayed for at all. It's a time where I thrash out with God why things are the way they are, and every day come to the same conclusion - I need to have faith that God is in control.

If you go into praying every day expecting everyone around you who is sick to get well, and everything that's wrong to go right, you're going to be disappointed. That's certainly not my experience. But if you go into prayer expecting to wrestle with God, and to be put into submission by him - then do it. Prayer is where the desire comes from to want to listen to Jesus.

One thing I struggle with is praying to God throughout the day. But I find the more I learn to rely on God in one area of life, the more I'm prepared to reach out to him, to put him in control of that. So one step at a time.

Step 3 is to think. What I mean is, try to think about what you're doing, thinking, and saying, and evaluate it against what Jesus says. I am thoroughly terrible at this. I often act or speak without thinking. Sometimes I do things even after thinking about it and knowing it's probably not what God wants me to do. Trying to evaluate everything you say and do can be tiring. But what I find is the more I want to listen to

Jesus through prayer, and the more I actually hear Jesus through the Bible, the more my thoughts come from a godly basis.

And that makes a huge difference. Thoughts that come from a not-godly basis are the ones that you have to firstly identify, and then stop and check, analyse, consider, and think about. They're the thoughts Jesus describes as the thorns that choke the seed in Mark 4:19 "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things". They choke Jesus' word, making it unfruitful.

But thoughts that from a godly basis, you don't need to analyse - because God's ways are the right ways, and they will never be defeated. Instead, they're the thoughts we need courage to act on. Because they're the thoughts and actions that aren't like what everyone else is doing and thinking. They're the hard sayings of Jesus that we'd really rather not follow. They're the scary actions, the ones we pray we don't have to do.

Lastly, step 4, of course, is to do those actions. With the courage and the strength God gives, trying to live the life he wants us to live. Not the life that makes us comfortable. Not the life that makes us feel good. Not the life that everyone else thinks we should live. It's trying to live the life God wants. To me, that generally looks like being confronted by things some other people don't even think about; struggling to work out what Jesus says I should do; not wanting to do it; being too afraid to do it; being too selfish to do it; and then deciding to trust God, and stepping forward to do it anyway. And I praise God when he gives me the courage to do what he says. And I thank God that Jesus can forgive my sins, because there are so many times in my life where I am too selfish or too scared to take this last step of listening to Jesus.

But listening to Jesus is a package deal - you have to do it all. You can't think about what Jesus says if you don't know what he says. You won't do what he says if you haven't had your mind transformed to think in a godly way. You won't do any of it if you don't pray. If you want to listen to Jesus, then you need to know what he says. You need to talk to God. You need to have your mind transformed to think the way Christ wants you to think. And you need to do what Jesus says. I want to ask you all to take these words of God seriously: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Don't just ask yourself if what you're doing is enough to listen to Jesus. Ask yourself first if that's what you actually want to do. Ask yourself honestly, Who do I really listen to?