

*Where we start . . .*

When have you experienced someone “hearing” you but not really “listening”? (For example, with your kids, with a co-worker, while dealing with a salesman on the phone.)

What is the difference between simply hearing and really listening?

*What we read . . .*

In Mark 9 we come across one of the most amazing moments in the Gospel. God sets up, as it were, an “audio-visual display” for a few of the disciples. Apparently, He wants to communicate something! Read about it in Mark 9:1-8.

Seeing as God didn't *have to* do any of this, He must be doing these things for a purpose; He is communicating in some way. So . . .

What do you think it would have meant to Peter, James, and John to see Moses and Elijah conferring with Jesus?

What might have gone through the minds and hearts of these three disciples when the cloud overshadowed them all?

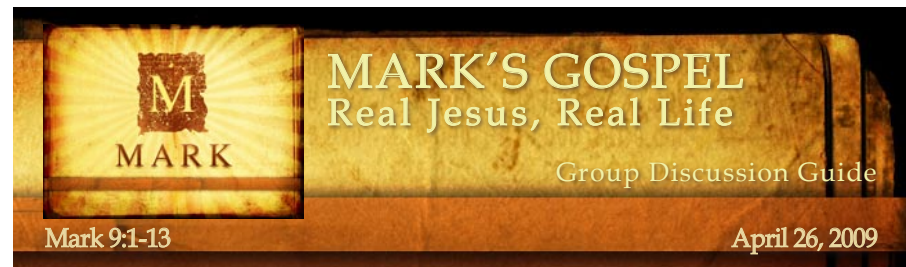
What do you think it is that God specifically intended for these three disciples to take away from this experience?

Given the immediate historical and literary context of this report, what possible reason can you see for God wanting to affirm to the disciples that they need to “listen to” Jesus?

*Why this matters . . .*

Where do you find yourself hearing Jesus but not truly listening to Him?

Why does that matter? What would you like to do about it?



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*Diving in . . .*

Sometimes, when someone isn't listening to you and you really need them to get what you are trying to say, you will resort to more emphatic and direct communication. If the passing remark made in a meeting isn't followed up with appropriate action by a co-worker, perhaps a phone call will be needed. If the simple request doesn't prompt the right response from your child, perhaps a direct command with consequence attached for noncompliance will work. But what would God do if those He wanted to speak with weren't really listening? We get to see that in a glorious way as we look at what really happened at the Transfiguration.

*Discussing . . .*

Although some might argue that it is only a semantic difference, there does seem to be *something* different between someone *hearing you* (the sound of your voice reached their ears) and someone *listening to you* (they "got" what you were seeking to communicate). The opening questions attempt to get at the substance of that difference because it seems that the disciples that we have been traveling with in Mark are only *hearing Jesus* and not really *listening to Him*. And with that as the backdrop, we want to take note of what God ends up doing about that problem.

After reading the account of the transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 9:1-8, it is worth noting that, in one sense, what happened *didn't have to happen*. The transfiguration was neither a random act nor was it somehow mandated by what had been happening prior. That is, the transfiguration is an intentional act of God to achieve a particular purpose. And, as spectators to the event (in our reading of the account), we are left with the challenge of answering the question: What was God's intent? What will help us answer that question is to look closely at what God did and for whom He did it.

Some read this account and draw the conclusion that it is fundamentally a revelation of the glory of Jesus' divine nature; who He really is, in some small way, is put on display. Although it is undoubtedly true that Jesus' divinity *is* displayed (even in a veiled way) in this moment on the mountain, that doesn't explain the rest of the phenomena that God orchestrated.

Why does God bring Moses and Elijah into the picture? Why are they there?

Well, let's think like first-century Jews for a moment—thinking like Peter, James, and John might have.

What would have come to mind when they saw Elijah? Elijah was one of the most notable of the prophets. Of all those who served in prophetic office in the Old Testament days, only Elijah was mentioned as a prophet who would, in some way, "return" before God brought His plans to fruition. In this way, Elijah was a prominent and exemplary prophetic figure. What about Moses? Moses was considered by the Jews of the day as one of Israel's greatest leaders and the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. So, clearly, these two were key figures from the Old Testament. But perhaps there is more.

The Old Testament Scriptures were often understood to fall under two major headings: "The Law and the Prophets" (see, for example, Matthew 22:40; Luke 16:16). With Moses (as the writer of the first five books which were called "the Law") and Elijah (who would clearly have stood as a clear representative of "the Prophets") we have a picture of the Old Testament affirming Jesus and His ministry.

This is followed by a cloud covering those gathered, there on the mountain. This would likely have brought to the memory of those three Jewish men passages like Exodus 13:21; 16:10; 19:9; 24:16-17 where God's manifest presence was seen or represented by a cloud. God's approval was "all over" what was happening on that mountain.

And then the voice spoke. What God said was clear. He identified Jesus. But, recall, Peter already had gotten a good bit of that right! Peter had affirmed Jesus was the Messiah. So, what does God's pronouncement add to that? Notice where God's words to those on the mountain head. "This is my beloved Son. *Listen to Him!*"

Taken all together, what is this divine audio-visual display driving at? Jesus is the one that the Old Testament affirms and tells about; both the Law and the Prophets speak of Him. And God's presence is with Him. And God announces that *He is the one these disciples need to listen to*. But why? Why this particular message?

Well, if we look back at what immediately preceded this encounter, it may become clear. Peter had *some* insight; he recognized that Jesus was the Messiah (8:29). But when Peter made his confession, Jesus began to explain to him what it really meant for Him to be the Messiah (8:31). Peter *heard* Jesus' words but apparently really didn't *listen* because he went on to rebuke Jesus (8:32). In other words, God is affirming: "Peter, you got it right, Jesus is My Son, the Messiah. Now will you *listen to what He's telling you?!*"

How much like us. We know who He is. We can even tell others that He is the Savior, the Messiah, our King. But when it comes right down to it, we are still challenged in the same way: Will we pay attention to what He says? Are we going to really listen to Him?