

“SONSHINE”: The Light of Life

After the darkness and difficulties of recent times, I think we are all looking forward to more sunshine in the days ahead. The theme of my talk today is sunshine, from a Christian point of view.

I remember going out for walks early in the morning with our dog Marley. Sometimes when we set out the stars were still visible in the sky but during our walk the Sun would come up and all the stars would gradually disappear. Of course I knew the stars were still there, it was just that the Sun shone so brightly that I could no longer see them.



Before Jesus there were many faithful servants of God, all stars that shone brightly in the darkness. On the very last page of our Old Testament the prophet Malachi predicts the coming of Jesus like the rising of the Sun (Malachi 4:2). When Jesus came he shone more brightly than anyone before or since. All the other stars were eclipsed.

This is exactly the significance of today's gospel story. Peter, James and John went up a mountain with Jesus to pray. Unexpectedly they see a vision of Jesus where 'his face shone like the Sun and his clothes became dazzling white as bright as a flash of lightning.' (Matt 17:2, Mark 9:3, Luke 9:29.) At first they see two of the Old Testament 'stars' speaking with Jesus but as they hear a voice speaking from heaven, Moses and Elijah disappear and Jesus is left alone in all his splendour.

This gospel story tells me three things:

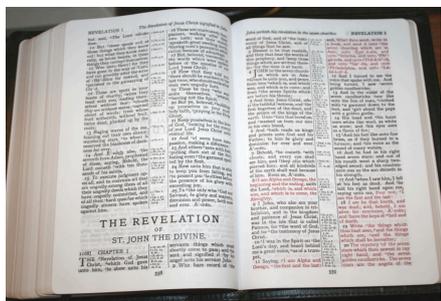
Firstly - **Focus your attention on Jesus.**

The story shows that we focus on Jesus because of who he is and what he has done. God's voice from the cloud says "This is my Son". All the other men and women of God before or since have been simply servants. But Jesus is God's one and only Son. We see 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor 4:6).

Notice that before Moses and Elijah fade from view they are talking with Jesus about the death he was going to "accomplish". Death is normally something that happens to us, but the death of Jesus was different. It was going to be his ultimate achievement! Jesus did amazing things during his life for the people around him - but his death and resurrection were going to change everything for people everywhere and for all time. Through his death and resurrection Jesus offers everyone healing and life.

Secondly - **Listen to the voice of Jesus**

God's voice from the cloud says "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." The first disciples were in a good position to listen to the voice of Jesus, but we can do it too. We just need a Bible and the Holy Spirit.



Here is my favourite Bible, partly because it is a modern translation that is easy to understand, but also because it is a red letter edition. All the words of Jesus are printed in red, but the red letters are not just in the gospels. In the last book of the Bible John has a vision of Jesus with "his face shining like the Sun in all its brilliance" (Rev 1:16). Even after Jesus has ascended to heaven John sees him and hears his voice once again because he is

"in the Spirit." Today the Holy Spirit can take the written words of scripture and make them speak to each one of us personally so that we can hear the voice of Jesus speaking to us.

Thirdly - **Choose to follow Jesus alone**

Peter has a dilemma in our story. He sees three figures: Moses, Elijah and Jesus. He tries to balance the three by suggesting some sort of shrine for all of them. However, he is firmly corrected. 'God's one and only Son' is the only one to receive worship. Peter got it right when he was preaching later on. He told the people "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

In today's world we have so many megastars in religion, entertainment and politics. They are often put on a pedestal and Jesus is often ignored. Our gospel today reminds us that all other stars are fading and Jesus shines like the Sun. Why live in the darkness or the starlight when we can enjoy the full sunshine of his presence?

Many of us are familiar with this hymn which encourages us to ensure that Jesus is the centre of our lives.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my Sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till trav'ling days are done.