

SM030 – The Night of Vision and Glory

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, The Night of Vision and Glory. This story is from Matthew 16:21-17:8 and Luke 8:28-36. I hope you will follow along in your Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, The Night of Vision and Glory.

SM030 The Night of Vision and Glory

“Get behind me Satan!”

Those were the strong, piercing words Jesus said to Peter when Peter suggested that Jesus should not think about going to Jerusalem to die.

Peter was stunned. He looked at Jesus with shock and hurt on his face. He was speechless. Jesus had reprimanded him before for unbelief but Jesus had never spoken like this to him before.

“Peter, you are setting your interests on the things of man, not on the things of God,” Jesus continued.

Peter could not understand. What was more godly than protecting the Messiah from danger? That's all he was trying to do. Jesus had said that he was going to Jerusalem and that when he was in Jerusalem the religious leaders would arrest him, torture him, and kill him. He also said something about rising on the third day but he didn't know what that meant. He did understand what it meant for the religious leaders to arrest people, try them, and kill them.

Peter had watched carefully in the months he was with Jesus. He knew the religious leaders were frequently upset with Jesus. He remembered the time when he and some of the other men were plucking the heads of grain on the Sabbath and munching on the grain for a snack and the religious leaders were outraged that they were doing this. They said the disciples were working, reaping a crop by reaching out their hand for a snack from someone's field. Peter remembered another occasion when he and the others prepared a meal and they did not first go through a ceremonial cleansing ritual before they ate. Again the religious leaders were outraged at this breaking of the traditions that they had created. Jesus had some really choice words for the religious leaders and the suspicion and animosity against Jesus only grew with time.

But why would Jesus think about going to Jerusalem and giving himself up to them and letting them kill him? That didn't make sense. And so Peter, who had just moments before received a revelation from God that Jesus was the promised Messiah and who had just moments before been blessed by Jesus for receiving this revelation thought it was his responsibility to talk some sense into Jesus who thought that he had to go to Jerusalem to die so he pulled Jesus aside and said to him, "God forbid this, Lord. This will never happen to you!"

And this is when Jesus said to him in a tone of voice he had never heard before – "Get behind me Satan!" For Peter did not realize that he was doing exactly what Satan had done. Satan tried every strategy he could to keep Jesus from Jerusalem and dying on the cross and Jesus resisted his temptations and firmly fixed his face toward a future that would lead to the cross. Now, Peter was trying to keep Jesus from dying on the cross and this is why Jesus spoke so firmly to him. "No, Peter, you are speaking as Satan speaks." And just as Jesus had to resist firmly the subtle temptations of the evil one, so he had to speak firmly to Peter and show him how wrong this suggestion was. Peter did not understand why this was so important – that Jesus had to die and he would not be able to understand until after he did die and rise again. Peter did not understand that he was seeking the things that please men – to their own death – and not seeking the things that please God and that bring life to all men.

Jesus gathered his men together and spoke to them all. It was time for a new lesson. Peter, and all of them had just heard Jesus declare to them that he was Messiah. Now, he was going to give them the first lesson that they needed to hear, but it was a lesson for which none of them were ready.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

These were hard words for the disciples to hear just as they are hard words for us.

"Do you wish to come after Me," Jesus asks. "If so, you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow."

What did this mean to those men? What does it mean for us?

First, for the disciples it meant that if they were going to continue following Jesus they had to realize that he was going to Jerusalem and he would die. He was not going to Jerusalem to be enthroned. He was not going to be worshipped. He was not going to be acclaimed as king of Israel. He was going to be rejected and die.

And if they followed him they could expect the same. They should get out of their minds that Rome would be overthrown. They should get out of their minds glorious ideas of fame, wealth, and honor from men. They must deny themselves these things just as Jesus denied himself the glory of the world. When Satan said to him, "Bow before me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world and their

glory” Jesus refused. He would not accept a world that was under the dominion of the evil one. He had come to take the kingdoms of the world away from his dominion and put them back under the dominion of God.

And in the same way, Jesus was telling these men that if they were thinking of a future of wealth, authority, and praise from the world, they were setting their minds on the things of men – the things that ungodly men work so hard for and they were not setting their minds on the things of God. They must deny themselves these worldly things and these worldly ideas and follow Jesus into death.

And friends, Jesus speaks those same words to us today. He challenges us! “What are you setting your hope on? Are you seeking the things of this world – fame, wealth, power, praise. Do not seek those things. Do not set your interests on the things of man. Set your interests on the things of God.

Jesus said if you set your mind on the things of man you will lose your life. What would it profit you to gain the whole world and lose your life? Do you really want to forfeit your life? What will you take in exchange for your life? What if someone did offer you the whole world – all the wealth of the world, all the fame of the world, all the pleasure of the world but the only catch was that at the end, you would lose your life. Would you bargain your life away? I fear, that we bargain our life for far less than the whole world. We bargain our soul for cheap trinkets that have no value and that do not last.

But if you set your mind on the things of God you will gain your life. God does not want you to die. God wants you to live! But in order to live you must die to the things of man, you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus and then you will find life and the blessed things of God.

What are the things of God? The things of God are to do what Jesus had just told the disciples. He told them he was giving them authority to attack the gates of Hell. He was giving them authority to break open these gates that enslaved the nations of the world. He wanted to free the nations from the dominion of Satan so that they might come into the dominion and kingdom of God.

And there was more – a day would come when everything would be turned upside down. Jesus would come to Jerusalem again, not to die, but he would come in the glory of his Father with his angels. He would repay every man according to his deeds. Those who denied him, persecuted him and his disciples would be repaid with judgment. Those who had followed him and who had taken up their cross and served him would find eternal life.

Jesus knew the disciples needed some encouragement. He knew they did not fully grasp the meaning of taking up the cross. He knew the words about denying self and following him to Jerusalem were hard and disappointing. And so he said to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

And when we come back, we will see the glorious vision Jesus showed these men and the vision he wants us to see – a night of vision and glory.

Interlude

Hello Everyone! This is Jonathan Williams the creator of and storyteller for Stories of the Master. I hope you are enjoying today's story. These were hard words Jesus was giving to those men. They are hard words for us as well. But sometimes, the words we need to hear may not be pleasant words. Sometimes, the words we need to hear may be difficult. But God speaks difficult words to us in love so that we might not miss the life that he has for each of us.

We are presented with the things of man vs. the things of God, with the world, vs. eternal life, with the kingdoms of rebellious men vs. the kingdom of God, with enslavement to Satan vs. service to God. Which will we choose. Will we choose the ways of God, deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus or will we choose the easier path of living for self and then losing it all in the end?

Choose life today!

I hope you will let us know about your choice. Write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA Texas 78209 in the U.S. and let us know about your following Jesus today. We would like to help you grow in your faith. Check out our website at StoriesoftheMaster.com and there you will find resources to help you in your discovery of Jesus and following him. You can listen to today's story again, download it, or purchase a CD for yourself and to share with friends. Again, our website is storiesofthemaster.com or you can write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA Texas, 78209.

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Jesus has laid out the future for his followers. It is different than what they imagined. They were not going to march on Jerusalem, take it by force, then march on Rome and cleanse the land of the pagans. Jesus said he was going to Jerusalem to die and if they wanted to follow him they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow. If they tried to save their life, they would lose it in the end. But if they lost their life in following Jesus, they would find real, lasting, eternal life.

And then to encourage them he gave them this word – He would come again in the glory of his Father with his angels and set everything right in the world. And some of those who were with him would not taste death until that had seen Jesus in his glory.

Let's get back to our story and see what happened.

Part 2

Several days passed from when Jesus made those hard statements to his men. Almost a week had passed from the day when Peter made his great confession that Jesus was the Messiah and from the day when Jesus had said that Peter and the other disciples would be given authority and would storm the gates of Hell.

And it had been almost a week since Jesus told them the sad, disturbing, and confusing word that he would die in Jerusalem and they must pick up their crosses and follow him into death if they wanted to have life. But he had also told them they would see him coming in glory and power.

Finally, one day, Jesus said, “Peter, James, and John, come with me up to this mountain. The rest of you, stay here until we return.”

Peter was feeling better about himself. He had been wounded when Jesus said to him that he was speaking with the voice of Satan. He had been hurt when Jesus told him that he was setting his mind on the things of man and not on the things of God. It was hard for him to hear these words, yet Peter loved God. He loved Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus and he wanted to know God fully as Jesus seemed to know him. And so he continued to follow Jesus and now on this day he and James and John received a great privilege. Jesus asked them to come with him for a special time in the mountains.

Up the mountainside they went. It was strenuous climbing and it wasn't long until they were breathing heavy and becoming tired. Finally, Jesus found a secluded place for all of them. The sun began to set and Jesus began to pray as night came upon them. What was it like to see Jesus pray? The disciples watched as their Master continued to speak to his Father in such personal ways and with such earnestness. They had never seen anyone pray as he prayed.

They could hear snatches of his conversation with his Father, “give me the strength ... help me in Jerusalem ... the cross ... for the sake of the world ... help these men” and many other phrases. As the evening wore on, the disciples began to get tired, and one by one, as Jesus prayed, Peter, James, and John fell asleep.

Peter awakened. How long had he been asleep? Why was it so bright? It wasn't morning. The sky was still filled with deep darkness and the piercing light of the stars but it was so bright. Peter heard voices. He heard the voices of three men. Who was Jesus talking with? He heard Jesus say, “Yes, Moses that is true. This must happen in Jerusalem.” Moses? Was Jesus talking with Moses? How could this be? Then he heard the other voice and Jesus said, “Yes, Elijah, that is true as well.” Elijah? Was Jesus talking with Elijah.

Peter said, “James, John, wake up. “Something is happening,” and when they all awakened from their heavy nighttime sleep they were astonished at the vision in front of them. There was Moses, the giver of the Laws of God, and there was Elijah, the prophet of old who had overcome the pagan god Baal on Mt. Carmel. They were talking with Jesus about his journey to Jerusalem. The same conversation Jesus had had with them just a few days before about going to Jerusalem to die. But whereas the disciples were confused and saddened by Jesus going to Jerusalem, Moses and Elijah seemed to understand it fully and they continued to talk about Jesus' coming death in that city.

But it was not the conversation or the company that Jesus was keeping that astonished Peter and James and John. It was not Moses, the Lawgiver and Elijah, the prophet that astonished them so much as it was Jesus himself. His face was shining like the sun and his garments were brilliantly white, whiter than anything they had seen in the world and moving like lightning moves through the sky.

Then they saw that something was surrounding them –a cloud, a glorious cloud, a brilliant cloud of light surrounded them and Moses and Elijah began to walk away from Jesus into the cloud that now was all around them and Peter said, “Wait, it’s good to be here. This is a good place. Let me build three small booths for us. There are some tree branches over there and we can construct three places of worship, one for you Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

You know, you have to hand it to Peter. He may have made a lot of mistakes but at least he had the courage to speak up. James and John just sat there but Peter wanted to do something! But, alas, Peter was wrong again for on this night in which Jesus appeared in glory, in which he appeared as he would in his kingdom, in which he spoke with Moses and Elijah, it was not his place to speak but it was his place to listen.

As the cloud of God’s glory deepened around them Peter’s words died out as if they had had no meaning and as if they had never been spoken. Then, a voice spoke from the cloud and the voice said, “This is My Son. This is the Chosen One. I am well-pleased with him. Listen to him.”

And my friends, this is the clear message for all of us today. Sometimes we need to sit still and close our mouth and listen to the voice of God.

Will you do that right now and listen to these words of God from the cloud. They may be the most important words you will ever hear.

God said four things. First, he said, “This is my Son.” For all who are listening, especially any Muslim friends who may be hearing this today, I want to make sure you do not misunderstand this. God was not saying that Jesus was his son in the same way that you and I have sons. I have two sons. They were gifts of God to my wife and me. But God does not have sons in this way for God is not a man who marries and has sons in the way he has ordained for us humans.

In the writings of the Psalms, we find a passage where God refers to the king of Israel as his son. Again, he was not his son in the same way that you and I are sons of our father. On the day that the king of Israel would ascend to the throne and would assume kingship, on that day he was considered to be adopted into God’s family. God would become his adopted father and he would become God’s adopted son and he would rule the kingdom with justice and righteousness for the honor and glory of God in the world.

When God said, “This is my Son,” he was saying that Jesus was the king of Israel and the king of the whole world. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 2 which speaks of the kingdom of the Son of God, the kingdom that would rule over the nations.

Second, when God said, “This is my Chosen One,” he was referring to another prophecy. He was referring to the prophecies of Isaiah about the Servant of the Lord. And what did these prophecies say? They said that one would come who would perfectly do God’s will. One would come who would bring salvation and peace and justice to the nations. And God was saying that Jesus was this Chosen one. Jesus was this servant who would bring the kingdom of God to the world.

Third, when God said, "In him I am well-pleased," he was saying that everything Jesus had done was perfect. The religious leaders might argue with him. They might even be extremely angry with him and plot his death. They might even arrest him, torture him, call him a blasphemer, put him on trial, find him guilty, and execute him. But it was not because of any fault in him. God was well-pleased with all he did and if God was well pleased with him, then what others thought did not matter.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, God said, "Listen to him!" Peter started blabbing something about making three small huts out of tree branches, three places of worship like in the ancient festival of tabernacles where God told his people to make small booths and live in them to remember their time in the wilderness when they did not have a permanent home.

But all of that was now old and finished. Now, the important thing was to listen to what Jesus had to say! And what had Jesus been saying to them? He told them that he must go to Jerusalem and die. That they must deny themselves. They must pick up their crosses and follow him. They must not love their life in this world. Those were the things of men that would not last. They must give their life completely to Jesus for in losing their life for him they would find life. What would it profit them if they gained the whole world and lost everything in the end? What was more valuable than one's life? What would one receive in exchange for a life?

And as fearful and as upsetting as these words were, they were true words and words that would lead to life and God said, "Listen to him!"

My friends, are you listening to these words of God? Jesus is the king of the world. Is he your king and have you submitted your life to him? Jesus is the servant, the chosen one who perfectly carried out the plan of God in the world which included him going to Jerusalem and dying ... for you. You are the one who deserved to die. I am the one who deserved to die for we are sinners. But he died in our place as a sacrifice for our sins. And Jesus did such a perfect job with this that God said, "I am well pleased!" Jesus is the Savior of the world. Is he your Savior?

Jesus is speaking to you right now. He wants you to receive him. He wants you to welcome him. He wants you to make him your king and Savior. He wants you to listen to him.

After God spoke these words to Peter, James, and John they fell on their faces with fear. They had heard the voice of God. But Jesus walked up to them, placed his hand upon them and said, "Get up. Don't be afraid." And when they lifted their faces the cloud was gone, the voice was gone, Moses and Elijah were gone, and Jesus was dressed in his normal garment and his face was no longer shining. They were alone with Jesus.

"It's time to join the others," Jesus said, "Let's go down the mountain and see what they are up to." And down the mountain they walked, deep in thought, and with many questions about what they had seen on the mountain that night.

Ending

Don't you wish you could have been there on that mountain and seen Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah and seen Jesus in his glory? Hi again everyone – this is Jonathan Williams and I am happy to tell you that a day is coming when we will see Jesus in this way. After he died in Jerusalem, he rose on the third day, and 40 days later was enthroned in glory at the right hand of God. There he lives and his face shines like the sun and his garments are brilliantly white like the flashes of lightning.

The same John who was on the mountain that night saw him many years later and when he saw Jesus in his glory he fell at his feet like a dead man. But just as Jesus told him on that mountain not to be afraid, he told John then, "Don't be afraid." He told him not to be afraid because he had conquered death. He had conquered every enemy. He had conquered sin and he was in control of everything including our eternal destiny.

And to those who obey the voice of God and who listen to Jesus and who embrace as king and Savior, he has the same message, "Do not be afraid." Today, if you have not yet done so, I urge you to give your life to Jesus and let him rule in your life and lead you. And if you are already his follower, I urge you to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow him in this world in loving service to the needs of mankind.

Write to us and tell us about your following Jesus. Write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA Texas 78209 in the U.S. and let us know about your following Jesus today. We would like to help you grow in your faith. Check out our website at StoriesoftheMaster.com and there you will find resources to help you in your discovery of Jesus and following him. You can listen to today's story again, download it, or purchase a CD for yourself and to share with friends. Again, our website is storiesofthemaster.com or you can write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA Texas, 78209.

I hope you have been blessed by today's story. I know I have as I have thought about those days long ago. And I hope that you will listen to Jesus and I hope that you will join us again for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master Himself richly bless you.