

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *Joining Jesus On His Mission*
Service Theme: *Hear from Jesus*
Sermon Theme: *Mission Fuel* (May 7, 2023)
Deuteronomy 18:15-18

Muhammad Ali knew what it was like to be in the spotlight. Regarded by many as the greatest boxer of all time, Ali was also one of the sport's biggest showmen. With a larger-than-life personality both inside and outside the ring and a penchant for saying whatever he wanted, Ali drew a crowd everywhere he went. We might expect that a man who earned his fame with his fists and mouth would attribute his success to what he did in the spotlight.

But I came across an Ali quote the other day that paints a different picture of "The Greatest." Ali once said, ***"The fight is won or lost far away from the witnesses, behind the lines, in the gym and out there on the road, long before I dance under these lights."*** He credited his success not to what he did while the crowds were watching, but to what he did when no one was watching; the hours of training, practice, and preparation he endured to get his body and mind into peak fighting shape.

Muhammad Ali found that to be true on his mission to become the heavyweight champion of the world, but it's also true about joining Jesus on his mission of winning souls for God's kingdom! We might expect that the most important aspect of carrying out Jesus' mission is our talking; what we say and how we say it when the spotlight is on and God gives us opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with our neighbors.

But while talking about Jesus is key, an even greater priority is listening to Jesus! Because Hearing from Jesus is the **Mission Fuel** for Joining Jesus on His Mission.

That's why God made a promise with an attached command to his people in today's sermon text from Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy is basically Moses' farewell address to the Israelites before he died. For over 40 years, Moses had been God's chosen instrument to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt and guide them toward the Promised Land. He'd been God's chosen mouthpiece through whom God made promises to his people and passed along the laws and commands he wanted them to follow in order to serve him. And so with his final speech, Moses encouraged the Israelites to not forget everything God had done for them, commanded them, and promised to them.

And through Moses, God then made them another promise. ***"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites...I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him."*** For the next 1,400 years, God kept that promise often, raising up countless prophets who relayed his messages of promise and encouragement, of warning and rebuke.

But while God raised up many intermediate fulfillments of Moses' prophecy, there was one ultimate Prophet God was promising to send—Jesus! On two separate occasions in the book of Acts—once by Peter, and another time by Stephen— Jesus is spoken of as the great prophet Moses prophesied.

Jesus was that prophet, raised up from among his fellow Israelites, born as true man from the family line of Abraham, Jacob, Judah, and David. Jesus was that prophet who spoke the very words the Father gave him to proclaim. When Jesus speaks-- as the true Son of God, and as the prophet God promised to send-- he speaks the very words of God himself! Therefore, God commanded his people, ***"You must listen to him!"*** And he gives us the same command—especially when it comes to joining Jesus on his mission!

But how do we listen to Jesus? Not in some mystical sense, like when people say, "I just felt like that's what God was telling me to do!" or "It feels right, so that must be what Jesus wants." Our emotions are

fickle and flawed by our sinful nature, so “listening to Jesus” through our feelings means we’re most likely listening to ourselves, not Jesus!

We hear from Jesus through the God-breathed words of the Bible! And it’s listening to these words of Jesus that helps us properly prepare for joining Jesus on his mission! Like the marathon runner carbo-loading the day before a race, or the dad filling up his gas tank before the road trip, hearing from Jesus is our mission fuel! It’s hearing from Jesus, often behind the scenes when no one else is watching, that equips us to speak about Jesus and show Jesus’ love to our neighbors when the spotlight is on and others are watching and listening.

How so? I think there are four main ways that hearing from Jesus in his Word serves as mission fuel for joining Jesus on his mission.

First, listening to Jesus reminds us what to say when talking to others about Jesus. That sounds obvious, but it’s important, because one of the most common excuses people give for why they don’t tell others about Jesus is, “I don’t know what to say.” And that’s understandable. It would be pretty daunting, even impossible, to teach a college calculus course if you’ve only learned addition and subtraction. And a student would probably feel unprepared and unequipped to take their final exam if they never stepped foot in the classroom or cracked the textbook. But whose fault would their lack of preparedness be? Wouldn’t it be their own fault for never taking the time to read the textbook or listen to the teacher? It wasn’t that the knowledge they needed wasn’t available, it was that they never used it so they could be prepared!

Likewise, if we say we don’t know what to say when telling others about Jesus, is it because what we should say isn’t available to us? Or is it simply that we haven’t prioritized hearing from Jesus in his Word so we know what to say? Now, you don’t have to have a Masters of Divinity degree like a WELS pastor to tell other people about Jesus. But won’t you be way more comfortable and confident doing so the more you know about what God says in his Word? Yes, God promises to give us the words to say. But that doesn’t mean he’ll magically zap some words into our minds that we’ve never heard or read before. It

means that in those moments, God will remind us of the truths we’ve received by hearing from Jesus in his Word, so that we can share them at the right place and right time!

Second, hearing from Jesus in his Word reminds us how to tell others about Jesus. Listen to Jesus meeting people where they are spiritually to tell them the good news. Hear Philip’s “come and see” invitation to his friend Nathaniel to meet Jesus. Hear the ways Peter and Paul use their audience’s context to bring Jesus into the conversation. Hearing from Jesus and his Apostles in his Word shows us how to join Jesus on his mission.

Third, hearing from Jesus in his Word reminds us why we need to share Jesus’ love in our words and actions. As we hear Jesus call us to join him on his mission, ***“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** As we’re reminded how Jesus saved us by grace, and think about the people God used to help bring us to faith, we’re motivated to share that good news with others, so that they also can receive what we’ve received. When we’re reminded that our simple acts of love and witnessing can have eternal benefits for people. When we’re reminded that every person is a soul dearly loved by God we’re motivated to join Jesus on his mission to save those souls!

And finally, hearing from Jesus in his Word gives us encouragement and reassurance when joining Jesus on his mission is hard, or discouraging, or leads to rejection or persecution, so that we can keep carrying out our mission! It also assures us of the forgiveness Jesus won for us for all the times we’ve dodged the mission, instead of poured ourselves into it!

That’s a big reason God promised to send Jesus, the ultimate prophet. Earlier, when Moses brought the Israelites to Mount Sinai, where God gave them his Law, the people quivered in fear, as sinful people terrified by the fiery presence of a perfect God. As Moses reminded them, ***“You said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see his great fire anymore, or we will die.’”*** So God promised to send one whose voice would fill them with peace instead of fear.

Jesus, the one whose perfect obedience to God's commands, and whose suffering under God's wrath over sin on a different hilltop, allows us to stand before God not terrified, but motivated! The more we listen to Jesus' words of Gospel comfort and reassurance, the more we take that good news to heart—and want to do everything we can to share that comfort and reassurance with our neighbors!

So friends, keep hearing from Jesus! Isn't it interesting that most employers in America these days offer regular continuing education opportunities to their employees? That many people spend money and time in pursuit of a further degree? Isn't it because we understand that we need to keep learning and growing to best carry out the missions we've been given? How much more do we need to continue growing in our faith, and learning more from God's Word, so that we can better and more consistently join Jesus on his mission he's called us to?

I want to conclude with a few suggestions that can help you better, more consistently hear from Jesus. First of all, come here, to worship and hear Jesus speak as his Word is preached, proclaimed, and sung! Come to Bible Study on Sunday mornings and during the week and dig deeper into Jesus' Words in the Bible. Bring your children to Sunday School, so they can form at a young age the lifelong habit of listening to Jesus!

But don't let listening to Jesus become something that only happens for an hour or two on Sunday mornings! When you develop a personal devotional life, you can hear from Jesus 24/7, 365! Almost everyone has a smart phone these days. Spending time hearing from Jesus can be as simple as downloading the Bible App, and using a reading plan to read God's Word for 5-10 minutes a day, instead of aimlessly scrolling Facebook, checking e-mails, or playing Wordle.

Or, if you're more of a tactile person, buy a devotional journal, open your Bible and read a chapter per day, using Martin Luther's 4 Questions to truly listen to what Jesus is telling you: The four questions are: **1.) What is God telling me here? 2.) What does that lead me to confess? 3.) For what does that lead me to give thanks? And 4.) For what does that lead me to pray?** If you spend more time

hearing from Jesus, I can guarantee, you'll be more equipped and more prepared to Join Jesus on his Mission!

This might not be the most exciting aspect about Joining Jesus on His Mission. There are other more exciting spotlight activities—sharing apologetics arguments to defend our faith, quoting Scripture to people, or showing Jesus' love by doing good to people. But nothing is more important than being prepared and trained mentally and spiritually by hearing from Jesus, so that we can better, and more consistently, join Jesus on his mission!