

Mountains and Valleys - Luke 9:28-43

²⁸ *Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.* Luke 9:28 Luke, the historian is very specific about the short amount of time between Jesus asking the disciples who they believed Him to be and Jesus ascent of Mount Hermon with Peter, James, and John. The experience will confirm the conviction that Jesus is the Christ of God. Jesus let these three disciples in on some of the very special events of His ministry. But why only the three? Jesus' call to us is to make disciples (Matthew 28:19,20). His example is to focus on a few individuals. There will be others, such as Jesus' other nine disciples, and the three can fill them in on what took place at the appropriate time. Then there are the seventy-two and an even wider circle of influence. We only have so much time, energy, and space to fulfill our calling. A few solid disciples are the core of multiplication. It appears it is better to focus our time on a few while influencing as many as possible. The Apostle Paul had Timothy, Titus, and Luke. But he influenced many others and worked alongside his equals, Barnabas, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos.

Jesus had just told them of His impending death and resurrection and of their need to also take up a cross and follow. Encouraging and strengthening their conviction that He is indeed the Messiah would help them not to doubt during the trying times ahead. This moment on the mountain would help them to have faith to hold on until He appeared to them after the crucifixion (1 Corinthians 10:13).

²⁹ *And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.* Luke 9:29 Once again Luke is mentioning Jesus getting away to pray. I hope we are getting the point. Prayer is essential if we are to walk with God and let Jesus life flow through us.

Philippians 2:7, 8 tells us that Jesus emptied Himself to become a man. I believe that means that He set aside His radiant glory, His omniscience and omnipresence so that we could relate to Him. He had to be fully man who never sinned to qualify to be one who could bear our sins. But on the mountain for a short time the Father allowed Jesus' glory to be seen by the three disciples. This happened while He was praying.

I do not know exactly what the words "the appearance of His face was altered" means. We see after the resurrection that Cleopas and his companion did not recognize Jesus until He broke the bread (Mark 16:12). Could it be that Jesus' earthly face and His heavenly face are somewhat different? In Revelation chapter one we have a description of the glorified resurrected Jesus. ¹⁴ *the hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,* Revelation 1:14 Is this what the disciples saw on the mountain? Matthew records that His face shone like the sun! Luke said His clothes were dazzling white using a word that described lightning (see NIV), while Matthew describes it as white as light (Matthew 17:2). Mark writes that His clothes were "radiant, intensely white" (Mark 9:2).

³⁰ *And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah,* ³¹ *who appeared in glory* Luke 9:30, 31a Suddenly Moses and Elijah are there. Were they beamed in Star Trek style or suddenly step out of the spiritual realm into the physical? They are in glory, which I take to mean that they also were radiant, though it may mean they were surrounded with clouds. In the Old Testament and in Jewish thought clouds were thought of as a sign of the presence of the glory of God.

How did they know who these two were? Perhaps their names were used in the conversation, but I think it was a matter of revelation. God enabled them to know. There is a lot of speculation about why Moses and Elijah would be the two to appear to Jesus. The most common guess is that Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets. Jesus speaks directly to the Father, so why talk with these two? Perhaps Moses is there because he often faced the rejection of the people, even attempted stoning (Exodus 17:4). Elijah also experienced discouragement and wanted to die (1 Kings 19:4), but God saw him through and took him to heaven. As a human, Jesus would see His disciples desert Him and the crowds yell to have Him crucified (Mark 15:13, 14). God would see Him through and take Him to heaven as He did with Elijah.

It is true that they represent the Law and the Prophets. Jesus said He had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). Here are the two men of God standing before the fulfillment of all that they were pointing to.

^{31b} *and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* Luke 9:31b Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus' departure which was about to be accomplished in Jerusalem. The word for departure was unusual, *exodos*. It points us to the great deliverance that Jesus would "accomplish"

before He ascended. The Greek verb tense indicates this conversation was an extended conversation. My guess is that these two were encouraging Jesus with how the Father helped them endure discouragement and betrayal and the greatness of what Jesus would accomplish through the cross. Did they share the Scriptures they had written that foretold what was about to take place to encourage Jesus to stay strong through it? Surely the Father could have spoken the same things to Jesus' heart, but to have other men who have endured encourage you with the path they took to victory would certainly be comforting. As humans, we can need the comfort of God through others who have endured with God's help.

We should note that both prophets had spoken to God on Sinai and seen the glory of God before (Exodus 31:18; 1 Kings 19:8ff). In representing the Law and the Prophets they sum up the entire Old Testament. Now they are talking with the One who is the conclusion of it all.

Since Biblical times, sorcerers have called people up from the dead either by trickery or evil spirits.ⁱ These two men of God were not called up, but rather they were sent by God. There is a huge difference. Jesus was not inquiring of them which is called an abomination in the Law (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). This has to do with the salvation of the world and enduring a torture that is horrifically inhumane along with the unique task of bearing the sins of the world. Thank God that we will never face anything like that, because Jesus did it for us. Amen!

³² *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.* ³³ *And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.* Luke 9:32, 33 They were at a high altitude after a tough climb and the disciples were napping while Jesus prayed. It very well may be night when this took place as verse 37 tells us it was the next day when they came down (Luke 6:12). They will sleep again while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. It isn't because Jesus has supernatural physical strength, for we have seen Him exhausted in some passages. His physical endurance in prayer is because His spirit is so earnest that His intense focus surrendering to the Holy Spirit keeps His body pushing on.

When the disciples awoke they saw Jesus in His glory and the two men, Moses and Elijah, who appeared to be departing, so Peter blurts out that He will make three shelters for them. He didn't want the moment to end. If I was in a room with these three I wouldn't want it to end either. I'd offer the guest room, or my room, and I'd sleep on the couch if they'd stay a little longer. Wouldn't you? But of course, Moses and Elijah didn't need sleep, and their mission was accomplished. They had communicated what Jesus needed to hear. That tells us Jesus had also set aside His omniscience to be fully man.

³⁴ *As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.* Luke 9:34 As Peter was saying this, the glory cloud enveloped them. This is the cloud that led the Children of Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21). It is the cloud that covered Sinai the second time Moses went to replace the Ten Commandments (Exodus 33-34). It is the cloud that came to meet Moses at the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:7-11). It is the radiance of which Moses was allowed to see the afterglow (Exodus 33:23). And when Moses came down from the mountain His face shown with the glory that remained on Him. That is the glory that was with the angels that announced Jesus' birth (Luke 2:9). This same glory shown on Elijah and Moses.

What is so significant here is that this is the glory that also filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34, 35) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10,11) and dwelt in the Holy of Holies for centuries from which it had departed long ago (Ezekiel 10:18,19; 11:23). Ezekiel describes the chariot of God carrying the Shekinah (the presence) up from the temple and over the Mount of Olives. The glory had departed. It would be 600 years later, when on mount Hermon Jesus was, as Mark describes it, metamorphosed (Mark 9:2). His glory He had with the Father before the incarnation burst through the veil of His human body like lightning. And scientists wonder how the image was made on the Shroud of Turin. The glory that dwelt in the temple had returned!

They could sense the Divine presence and were frightened. The sense of the holiness of God also conveys a sense of how fallen we are (Isaiah 6:5). Our sins suddenly stand out in all their rebellious ugliness. Those who experience the presence recognize the vile nature of their sins and how they offend the all-powerful holy Presence and deserve judgment. That is the source of the fear. Entering into a cloud is not fearful, but the presence of holiness is.

³⁵ *And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!"* Luke 9:35 It is somewhat humorous but very instructive that while Peter was yet speaking God

interrupted Peter with an audible voice that must have shook them if not the whole mountain! Peter is saying, "Let us blah, blah, ... and suddenly THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN ONE; LISTEN TO HIM! May I offer a somewhat a rewording to try to give us a sense of what was being conveyed? "You are blessed to be with My Son! He is the Chosen One! Use the time you have while He is still present to listen to what He says!" Peter would never forget it. He wrote of it in one of his letters recalling that on the mountain Jesus received honor and glory from the Father when voice spoke to Him from the Majestic Glory (2 Peter 1:17,18). There was just three short years of Jesus' ministry when human beings could walk beside the Son of God and hear Him teach us what we most desperately need to hear. Those words changed the course of the world.

God's words were the string of pearls we saw in the baptism. "My Son" comes from Psalm 2:7 in the writings; "My Chosen One", or as some manuscripts have it, "My Beloved", comes from the prophets (Isaiah 42:1); and "listen to Him" is from the Torah (Deuteronomy 18:15). The writings, the prophets, and the Law all speak of Jesus (Luke 24:44). They all point to His coming. The Old Testament is a revelation of our need for a Savior and how the steadfast love of God would send Him to save us from our fallen condition. That is the only correct interpretation of the Old Testament. God said so in one short sentence. His Word is forever settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89). Every line is so rich we only catch a bit of the depth and are in awe. It all points to the Son, the Chosen One, the light of the world. Listen to Him! He is the light of life! Would you rather walk in darkness or have heaven's revelation in the words of the Light of life? Listen to Him!

Sometimes we wish God would just speak audibly to us so that we knew for certain what His will is. He did! This is it. That is why in the Great Commission Jesus tells us to teach those we disciple to observe all that He commanded us. How dedicated are we to the words of Jesus in the Gospels? God asks of us one thing, "Listen to Him!"

³⁶ *And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.* Luke 9:36 And just as suddenly as when they woke and saw what was happening it was over. The four of them were standing alone. The cloud was gone and with it, Elijah and Moses. And they did what God instructed, "kept silent." In Matthew's gospel we read that Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man was raised from the dead (Matthew 17:9). We saw last week why it was important that people not think Jesus is the Messiah until after the resurrection. The wrong expectations of what Jesus was to accomplish would result in many unnecessary deaths and not align with God's timing for the crucifixion.

³⁷ *On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.* ³⁸ *And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.* Luke 9:37, 38 The disciples were at the foot of Mt. Hermon waiting for Him, and while they were there, a man had come with a son who was possessed by a demon. Why is this not ordinary epilepsy? The clue from Matthew is that when the boy falls, it is in places that endanger his life such as fire or water (Matthew 17:15). The enemy's goal is to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10a).

Mark tells us that teachers of the law were arguing with the disciples (Mark 9:14). My guess is that they were telling the disciples how to cast out demons by their formula and the disciples were telling them it was by faith in Jesus' authority. Mark also tells us that when the people saw Jesus they were overwhelmed with wonder. Was His face still glowing from the mountain experience, or was He so spiritually renewed from that night of prayer that the people could sense the anointing on Him? He came from the mountain top experience to deal with evil in the valley. We have mountain top experiences to help prepare us to serve in this broken world!

³⁹ *And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him.* ⁴⁰ *And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.* Luke 9:39, 40 As a physician, Luke describes more completely how the boy was suffering. He had frequent seizures that caused convulsions and foaming of the mouth. Mark tells us the boy could not hear or speak (Mark 9:25). The disciples had been given authority to heal (Luke 9:1) and word was getting around to that affect. But when the man brought this poor boy to them, they were unable to help. It was only a week before they had come back with a wonderful report of the use of their new gifts. Had they resorted to trusting the past method instead of looking to God in prayer?

The church often falls into this trap. Some success comes as people look to God and seek His direction. Then they continue with the direction previously given without looking to God and stop bearing

fruit. Without even noticing, trust shifts from God to our own exercise of the method. We do things step by step and it worked before, but we don't get the same results. If it is not the Lord's direction from prayer and the trust is in the method and your own ability to apply it, there will be no lasting fruit.

⁴¹ *Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."* Luke 9:41 Who is Jesus addressing? Is it the crowd, the teachers of the law, or the disciples, or all of them? Referring to them as a generation sounds like all of them. Jesus sets Himself apart because He has faith. His perceptions are not twisted because they come from the Word and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is asking the "how long" that we read of throughout the psalms.

How long would He be with them? He already warned the disciples of His death and resurrection. He was really asking how long until the disciples had the faith to carry on without Him. How long would He bear with them, with their lack of faith? Mark tells us that the boy's father asked Jesus to help "if He could". Jesus repeated back to him, "If I can!" And then Jesus addressed the man's lack of faith. Mark tells us Jesus said, *"All things are possible to him who believes"* (Mark 9:23).

Jesus' complaint seems to me to be words of chastisement to both the disciples and the unbelieving crowd. Was this partly because the crowd wanted the Master and not the disciples? Is it similar to today when someone wants the pastor to pray for them, not just one of the elders, as if God only works through the leader?

⁴² *While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.* Luke 9:42 The boy was brought before Jesus and the demon threw the boy into convulsions. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit in the boy AND healed him. The problem was both spiritual and physical. Not only was the unclean spirit gone but the boy could now hear and speak.

This was another scene of confrontation of light and darkness. Mark tells us that the crowd thought the boy was died, but Jesus took the boy by the hand and raised him to his feet (Mark 9:26,27). "Gave him to his father" sounds like Jesus led the boy to the father's embrace. What a tender scene. And how the crowd must have erupted in praise!

^{43a} *And all were astonished at the majesty of God.* Luke 9:43a You would have been astonished at the majesty of God had you witnessed the miracle. Awe and wonder had come over the crowd. The majesty of Jesus is what the three had witnessed on the mountain. That is how Peter described it in 2 Peter 1:16, "we were eyewitnesses of His majesty". Now down from the mountain the crowd witnesses the majesty of God drive out a demon with a command. They had seen evil defeated right before their eyes. If Jesus could do that for the boy, He can certainly confront the evil in our hearts and sanctify any of us. He can bring us out of the darkness of this faithless and twisted generation and give us a believing heart and eyes to see as He sees.

Questions:

- 1 What was Jesus doing when the account began?
- 2 What were the disciples seeing?
- 3 Why did the Father have Moses and Elijah meet with Jesus?
- 4 What was the topic?
- 5 Why was this not inquiring of the dead?
- 6 What was new in what God spoke (compare 3:22)?
- 7 What was the string of pearls?
- 8 Why did Jesus tell them not to tell anyone?
- 9 Why couldn't the disciples heal the boy?
- 10 What was the public's reaction?

ⁱ Despite the injunction of Scripture against speaking to the dead, there was a period in America's history when it was very popular. Even presidents and senators participated. Houdini, the escape artist, exposed the trickery and put the charlatans out of business.