

February 14, 2021
Transfiguration Sunday
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From the Top of the Mountain Jesus Shows Us

The Valley - The Goal - The Glory

Mark 9:2-9 ² Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴ And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"-- ⁶ because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. ⁷ And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" ⁸ Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. ⁹ Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sometimes it's much easier to go up a mountain than it is to come down. It is true that it is a lot of work to climb up. But there are a lot of things in this life more difficult than hard work.

I remember when I was little climbing up to the top of the high dive. Getting up there was easy jumping off that board into the water so far below that was a little harder.

Last summer we hiked devils peak with Kaylee. Kaylee was in one of those backpack carriers. Going up with an extra 35 pounds was difficult but trying to go down again was harder. With all that extra weight, with my center of gravity higher than normal, having to brace every footstep, trying to be careful not to slip. Going down can be a lot harder than going up.

Jesus and his disciples went up the mountain, that was easy. On top they saw the glory of God. Jesus received comfort and strength. He talked with Moses and Elijah. There was a lot of good on top of that mountain but eventually Jesus had to come down. And when he came down, he had to face Jerusalem and his death. It was a lot easier for Jesus to go up that mountain than to come down the other side.

There are valleys in our own lives. Those valleys are hard things. Going down the mountain is harder. Days, weeks, years of hard work, of tribulation, of sadness and depression and low spirits. But when we are down in those valleys, we remember what God showed us up on the mountain

The valleys are the hard but God gives us mountains to climb to prepare us for the valleys

Why did Jesus go up? Why did he come down?

He came down to face the consequences of our sin. He went up to receive strength and comfort so that he would be prepared to face the consequences of our sin.

There are many times in our lives also when we must face the consequences of sins. Sometimes our own sins sometimes the sins of others. We might wish that we could always stay on the mountain top.

Peter wished that he could stay on the mountain. He wanted to build tabernacles, if not to stay there at least to commemorate the event and return often. But Jesus knew they had to go down.

We often have high points in our lives as well. Days of good cheer and joy and fun. We often wish we could hold on to these days and make them last. We would like to stay on top of the mountain. But those mountain top days are often followed by deep valleys. Sometimes we cannot stay on top anymore than Peter and Christ could. Sometimes we must come down and walk through the valleys.

But when we do have to go down we want to remember the vision. We want to remember what we saw on the mountain top and bring it with us through those valleys.

One of the reasons that going up a mountain is worth the climb is because of the view. From the top of the mountain, you can see so far. When I was kid we drove up look up mountain in TN. That was kinda of nice because we didn't have to climb the mountain but we still got the view. We could see four or five states.

Jesus could see quite far as well from the mountain of transfiguration. He was able to see past the valley of his death and beyond to the resurrection and the joy that would follow. Moses and Elijah were there and Peter, James and John reminding him why he was going to descend into that valley, reminding him of the reason and the goal. This gave him encouragement and strength for the difficult journey down that mountain.

Hebrews 12:2 ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We see the same thing in our OT reading about Elijah and Elisha.

Elisha asked to receive a double spirit and Elijah responds "it is a hard thing you ask for." Why was it a hard thing? Because it was a hard thing for Elijah to give? Possibly, but it was also certainly a hard thing for Elisha to bear. Elijah knew firsthand how hard of a life it was be the prophet of the Lord. Elijah himself had given up in despair and ran away into the desert and asked God to let him die. Elijah knew that the ministry the life that Elisha was entering into was an exceedingly difficult thing.

But Elijah's cloak was not the only thing that Elisha received. Elisha also saw Elijah ascend bodily into heaven. He saw the result of Elijah's ministry. He saw God say to Elijah "well done."

How many times in Elisha's life when he was lonely, when he was hunted, when no one would listen, did he think of Elijah ascending into heaven and take heart, become encouraged. This is the end, the glory, the result of this hard labor in Christ.

We too have seen the end, the result, and because of that we continue steadfast through the valley.

That is such a great story of Elijah being taken up into heaven. Its so important because it means that Elijah was right. That is important not because Elijah wanted to come back and rub it in the faces of those who would not believe. Its important because we know we are on the right path. There are so many times in our life when it does not seem like the right path. But we have been up the mountain with Elijah and with Jesus. From there we have seen the path winding through the valley but coming out again into the sun.

Through depression and loneliness and guilt over our own sin and tribulation, we can take heart knowing the end that God has in store for us.

We have seen Elijah ascend. We have seen the glory of the mountain top. We have seen the resurrection of Christ. We have heard in revelation the shouts of triumph of those who have made it through the great tribulation. From the mountain top we can see the end and take heart.

From the top of the mountain we can see the glory, not only the glory of the end but the glory of Christ our savior.

The account of transfiguration is perfectly positioned in the church year, starting with Christmas we have been climbing up and up, seeing Jesus many miracles, seeing his power and his glory, and now we have come to the pinnacle and are about to descend into lent. As we enter lent it's going to be all about our sin and our failings. We want to hold that vision of Jesus in our hearts and minds so that we can accept the condemnation of God's law.

Discussing the law often makes us feel guilty and we don't like that. But remember the whiteness of Jesus clothes and the glory of his face. We are not comparing ourselves to other men we are comparing ourselves to Jesus.

I can be annoying to lose to your younger brother. Especially if your younger brother is ten years younger. But if you play Michael Jordan on the court, he is going to win, that's a foregone conclusion. It would be foolish to feel bad if you lose to Michael Jordan.

As we hear about our sins in the weeks to come, we are not sinful in comparison to me or in comparison to one another. We are sinful in comparison to Christ.

But more than that Jesus is on our team. That whiteness that righteousness becomes ours through his death and resurrection. Remember what God said, "Let us reason together though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow." That whiteness is exactly what we see in Christ on top of the mountain.

In ancient days if you had a challenge or a dual you could pick a champion to fight for you. His win became your win. When we see Christ on the mountain we see our victory.

Tomorrow we head down the mountain with Jesus looking towards the cross. Remembering our sins and learning to repent. But today we see the valley laid out before us. We see the path leading through darkness but out again into light. We see the joy of the end that is ours through Christ. We see the glory of Christ. As we head down we head down with Christ.

Amen