

Questions on the Mountaintop

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Scripture: Luke 9:28-36

Good evening church. It is such a joy to welcome you to our virtual congregation. We may not be allowed to meet in a church building, but we can still meet wherever we are, for we form the church of God, the church of Christ, the church of our living god. I'm so thrilled this evening to be with you and to share God's Word with you.

Over the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at different parts of Luke's gospel. We looked at Luke chapter 7, the episode with the Pharisee who called Jesus home, and the woman who came when she heard he was there. She brought an alabaster vial, with her tears she wiped His feet and then anointed Him. All this brought much cynical response from the Pharisee, until Jesus pointed out that to whom much is forgiven, there is much love that comes. This brought the question – how much do we accept that we have been forgiven by God in our own lives.

Then last week we looked at the demoniac who was shackled in the Gerasene, and we saw how Jesus came there just for Him. Jesus came, he was released and then Jesus left. What was surprising was that the people of the town actually begged Him to leave. When the freed man who was unshackled said, "Can I please come with you," Jesus said, "No, stay and tell people all the good things that God has done for you." We ended by saying that we too have been unshackled. The Bible tells us that we have been set free so that we can proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

This week I want us to look at the account of the Transfiguration. Just a little context – Jesus has just fed the 5000. He has asked the disciples who they thought He was, and Peter responds by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then He also tells them that He will be rejected by the elders, the scribes, and the Pharisees, and that He will be killed, and then raised up on the third day. Then He also told them about the cost of discipleship and how they need to deny themselves, pick up their cross and follow Him. He also said that to be ashamed of Him here would mean that He would be ashamed of them in heaven.

Luke 9:28-36

Some eight days after these saying, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.

And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found

alone. and they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

Will you pray with me? Almighty God, this is the account of Your Son while He sojourned here on earth. Master, now through the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, help us to see what this means for us in our day, in our age, in our situations and our circumstances, for we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have five people who are engaging in this episode. There's Jesus, the disciples (Peter, John and James) and God. All are protagonists in this particular episode. The Bible tells us that Jesus went to this place to pray. And as He was praying, He was transfigured. The appearance of His face became different and His clothing became white and gleaming. Then, along with Him, all of a sudden, two people appeared. He was joined by Moses and Elijah. They have a conversation, and amazingly this conversation is about Jesus' impending trip to Jerusalem, and His departure from Jerusalem and what He was going to do.

I've read this passage so often, and sometimes we miss this line – that Elijah and Moses came along side of Jesus to be able to talk to Him about something that Jesus has just shared with His disciples, that he was going back to Jerusalem and then He was going to depart from Jerusalem. The Bible tells us that this was the conversation that they were having.

Then we have the disciples: Jesus took Peter, John and James with Him and went up to the mountain to pray. Then it tells us that they were very sleepy. That's something that we can all relate to. Every time we need to go and pray about something, it seems that we get more and more sleepy. When they awoke, they saw Jesus transfigured and speaking to two men. Now, the key in this particular passage, as far as it has to do with the disciples, was Peter's response. What did Peter say? He said, "Lord, it is good that we are here. Let's build three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah." But even before he could finish that, God chose to come alongside them. A cloud enveloped them and then a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One. Listen to Him."

Well, our Lenten service is all about introspection; it's about letting the Holy Spirit come in power within us in ways that we haven't allowed before, to point out things that we need to get rid of, things that we need to do to take us to a different higher ground that we ought to be in but we are not. I think that in this particular passage, there are some things that we need to be aware of. One or two that may be minor, at least for this evening's meditation, but one that is major.

So, let's look at three questions that I believe pop up in this passage.

1. **In a difficult situation, do you pray?**

Is that your default? Is that where you go instantly? That's where Jesus went time and time again. Whenever He needed to hear from His Father, He retreated to prayer. Here He is again. He has just told His disciples that this is what's going to happen to Him. That must be weighing on His mind as well. The events that are going to transpire before He comes to Jerusalem – to be scorned, humiliated, rejected by the elders, scribes and the chief priests; and then to be killed, buried and then to be raised again – all of this was playing on Jesus' mind. So He goes to His Father to spend time in prayer.

Joseph Scriven wrote this very beautiful hymn that captures what prayer does in our lives.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are you weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Friends despise you and forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield you,
You will find a solace there.

Maybe today, even as you are sitting at home, maybe you are at office, or travelling, maybe you're weighed down by difficult situations and circumstances. Actually, all over the world we are facing an extreme situation, the COVID-19 virus. That is a huge situation weighing on everybody, and I'd like to take a moment and ask all of us to pray, right now. Firstly, that the spread of the virus will be stopped, and there will be a boundary wall that is put around everybody who still has it. Secondly, pray that those who have it will be healed. Thirdly, pray that there will be some kind of antidote that will be found that would eradicate this virus from the face of the earth.

Let us pray: Our Father, to You we come. You know the situation that is prevalent in our world today. We pray, Master, for everyone who has caught this virus. We ask that You would bring healing. Lord, we pray that they will not be able to pass on the virus to anybody, but that they would experience healing from Your divine hand. Then Lord, we pray that there would be no more infections. Lord, put a barrier around this virus; stop it Master, and then give wisdom to those who are working to make sure that there is some antidote to this virus, that it will be eradicated from us. We ask this Lord Jesus, in Your holy and precious name. Amen.

2. **What tabernacle are we building that God isn't interested in?**

Peter's response when he saw this glorious site of Jesus flanked by Moses and Elijah, was to say, "Let's immortalize this moment. Let's do something about this so that we

will never forget this.” And often that’s what we do in our lives. When God works miraculously, when there’s something supernatural happening, we immortalize that moment. And very soon, that becomes the place that we go to always, and we forget the One who actually brought us to that place or made that happen in our lives. More often than not, that can become an idol that we start worshipping instead of the God who brought that into our lives.

I wonder, this evening, whether you have immortalized any moments that God is not really interested in. the moment that Peter began to talk about this immortalizing, of building tabernacles, God moved in. it was almost like: Quiet Peter, there is something more important that I want you to listen to.

Maybe this evening, you’ve immortalized a wonderful spiritual moment in your life. maybe that spiritual moment has the potential to draw focus to that moment rather than to God. Or maybe a healing that God wants to show you that He is able to take care of you; but the healing is the thing that you keep talking about, forgetting that God is saying: That is a reminder of what else I can do in your life. maybe it’s a job that God brought to you out of the blue, so that He can show you that He can be trusted to provide for your every need. But you’ve immortalized that moment and you only talk about the job and forget that it was God who gave it, inviting you to trust Him more and more. Maybe it’s a financial gift that He has given you that He intended you to trust Him in the hard times for you, but you’ve immortalized it as well.

I wonder whether we need to move away from those tabernacles, those memorials, those idols, and say: Lord, reiterate once again to me that You can take care of me. Reiterate once again to me that You are my Healer, and You will take care of me throughout my life. lord, show me once again that You can be trusted to provide for every need. Forgive me that I have immortalized one moment when You came through for me and forgotten that You can do it right through my life. O Lord God, would You forgive me? Bring me back to that place where I can trust You implicitly for everything in my life.

3. Are we listening to the voice of His Son?

“This is My beloved Son, My chosen One.” And God didn’t stop there. He said, “Listen to Him!” We may know that Jesus is God’s beloved Son, we may know that He was the chosen one when we look at it in this context. But the question for us is – have we moved past the knowledge of who He is, to listening to the words that He speaks to us every moment of every day?

What are the words, beloved, that ought to come to our mind as we ask ourselves this question? Maybe, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden; and I will give you rest.” Do you need rest this evening? Are you tired or fatigued? Are you burnt out? Are you just living every day on empty? I wonder whether God is saying to you: Come unto Me and I will give you rest. Or I wonder whether for some of us, we need to be reminded that He said, “Go ye, into all the world and preach the gospel; share about Him to the world.”

I love this song by Horatius Bonar, and I ask your indulgence for the number of hymns that are coming into the service. But somehow they speak so vividly to a lot of the situations that we face.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Come unto Me, and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water: thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“I am this dark world’s Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy 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.

Let’s bring it home to Lent. What is He saying to you and to me during this Lenten period? As we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit, dredging and bringing out all those things that ought not to be in our lives, thus making more room for the Holy Spirit to take control. What do we need to hear Jesus say? Maybe this evening he’s saying: I’d like for you to have more conversations with Me. I’d like you and Me to hang out a little more, talk more.

Or maybe this evening, He is saying: I want you to go beyond the milk stage to the solid food stage. Maybe you’ve stayed in the milk stage for too long, just being happy to have a superficial relationship with Him. And maybe He is saying: Will you get in the deep end? Will you stop treading water at the side of the pool, playing safe? Will you head out into the deep? That’s where I am. And the things that I can show you there will blow your mind.

Maybe He’s saying to you this evening, I want you to read my Word more systematically. Maybe memorize things, do a Bible study. You’ve been flirting with My Word till now. Will you grow deeper into my Word? Or maybe this evening, He’s inviting you to trust Him for the future. Maybe you’ve taken your eyes off Him and you are saying, “I’ve got to handle this on my own.” And He is saying, “You can trust me.” Or maybe this evening He is saying to you, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Maybe you are between a rock and a hard place, thinking you are struggling. You’ve asked God to help and you’re bucking against a stone.

Maybe His Word to you is, “Let go, and let me pour My grace into your situation,” and you will find that it is sufficient for the day.

So, as we come to a close, what’s the response that God will be expecting from us? I was reminded of Eli telling Samuel when he kept waking him and saying, “Why did you call me?” Eli told Samuel, “Next time you hear your name say, ‘Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening.’” That must be our response this evening: Speak Lord, for I am listening to You.

Maybe you’ve been there before. Maybe you went out on a limb and you fell. So now you’re backed away, saying, “I’m not going there anymore.” Beloved, remember Peter. He said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water,” and Jesus said, “Come.” And he walked to Him until he turned his eyes away from Jesus. Maybe you’ve turned your eyes away from Jesus and you’re in freefall – remember what Peter did; he said, “Lord, save me.” Maybe those are words that you need to say today. Lord, save me.

I’d like to wrap up this evening by giving you this opportunity wherever you are to respond to this message. If you’ve been hearing or feeling the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your life, saying that there’s a change that needs to happen, that you need to listen to the voice of Jesus, then would you take a moment and respond to Him? Or maybe this evening, you’re saying, “I’ve immortalized moments in my life. I need to move away from those idols. Would you look to Him and say, “Lord, I’m moving away. I’m taking my focus and attention and bringing it back to You.” Or maybe, you are in a difficult place and you haven’t taken it to Him in prayer. I wonder whether that’s what you need to do right now.

So, wherever you are, would you just bow your heads and would you respond to His Word. I’m going to give you a moment and then I’m going to pray for you before we sing our closing hymn.

Heavenly Father, You have heard the prayers of all Your children coming up to You. Lord, would You meet them in those places and take them to the place that You want them to be. hear their prayers Lord, move aside their idols as they look to you. Lord, let Your words speak to them in the quietness of these moments. We love you, Master, and we pray this prayer in the most precious, majestic name of Jesus. Amen.

Our closing hymn is one that invites us to go on to higher ground. I’m so thankful that we have the ability to sing, and to sing it as our response to the Word.

I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I’m onward bound,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”

Refrain:

Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven’s tableland.
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;

Though some may dwell where those abound,
My pray, my aim, is higher ground. (Refrain)

I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground. (Refrain)

I want to scale the utmost height,
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till heav'n I've found,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground." (Refrain)

Benediction:

Dearly beloved, and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the continuing, enabling, inspiring presence of His Holy Spirit rest and abide with each one of us until the end of the age.