

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK OF MARCH 19-25

Series Title: MOUNTAIN TOPS

Message Title: MOUNTAINS TO VALLEYS

INTRODUCTION

This week we continue our series called, 'Mountain Tops'. This series is inspired by Joby Martin's book, If the Tomb is Empty. "In his book, Martin shows us how the interaction on these 7 mountains laid the groundwork for the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, and shows what God revealed about Himself in the process. He illuminates seven familiar passages, unveiling how God's plan for Christ's sacrifice is threaded throughout Scripture, and shows why Christ's resurrection—impossible, unbelievable—means nothing is too hard for God." Over the next several weeks as we move towards Easter, we will be teaching on the significance of these seven mountain tops.

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor Mark's Message
- Read Luke 9:28-36 and Mark 9:20-25

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that challenged you from the message this week?
2. How significant was the appearance of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration?
3. Peter, James and John experienced something powerful, unforgettable and unbelievable on that mountain. Have you ever had an experience with God that transformed your life? What happened? Was it preparing you for an upcoming valley?
4. In the transfiguration, the disciples are told to listen to Jesus. How do you go about listening to Jesus?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Luke 9:28-36 and Mark 9:20-25

9:28. Luke places the transfiguration about eight days after the confession of Peter, a somewhat unusual precision for Luke. Matthew and Mark refer to six days. Both are ways of saying “a week later.” There may be differences in Jewish and Greek calendars at work or different ways of relating Jesus’ transfiguration to Moses’ ascension of the mountain to see God in Exodus 24 after God’s glory rested on Mount Sinai for six days. Luke knows his reckoning is approximate.

Jesus took his three closest followers (see Mark 5:37; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 8:51) with him up a mountain (cf. Exod. 24:9). Identifying the mountain is impossible, since the text gives no clues. Tradition links it with Mount Tabor, but this is uncertain. As he often did (see 9:18), Jesus turned aside to pray. He taught prayer by example.

9:29-32. In communion with God, Jesus suddenly took on an otherworldly appearance. Divine glory shone through the earthly Son of Man. Jesus’ uniqueness is further underlined by his companions—the great lawgiver and deliverer Moses and the great prophet and sign of end times Elijah (see Mal. 4:5). Those hailed by the Jews as the originator of their nation and as the one who would return to usher in the end time joined Jesus on the mountain. As Moses introduced Israel to God on the mountain (Exod. 19; 24) and as Elijah showed the uniqueness of God over all other gods on the mountain (1 Kgs. 18), so Jesus revealed the true nature of God and showed that he was one with the Father. Together the three discussed a new exodus, the Greek text using the term “exodus” or “going out” to refer to Christ’s death. Thus Jesus received new assurance that his journey to Jerusalem was part of God’s plan for his life.

The disciples almost missed the greatest moment of revelation in Jesus’ earthly ministry prior to the cross. They slept while Moses and Elijah came. Eventually, they awoke and saw clearly that Jesus belonged in the company of the two great heroes of Judaism. They saw his glory. Jesus had said he would return in glory (9:26). Later he would enter his glory after his suffering on the cross (24:26). This is glory that belongs to the heavenly realm, to the Father and his angels (9:26). Thus the three disciples got a preview of the reigning King and Judge before he fully entered his glory. This confirmed for them Jesus’ divine nature.

9:33. Can such a moment just appear and disappear, come and go? Peter thought not. We must continue the moment. How better to do so than to build places of worship? Like Moses built the tabernacle in the wilderness, so Peter wanted to build a tabernacle for each of the three heroes of the faith on the mountain, providing an eternal memorial to these men and to this moment. But as Moses received no burial monument, so Jesus and his colleagues received no transfiguration memorial. Commitment to Jesus is not commitment to a sacred place with its sacred memories. Commitment to Jesus is commitment to a mission that never lets a follower remain in one place. Luke notes that Peter made the suggestion but really did not understand its full import. Building tabernacles is not kingdom business. Following Jesus to the cross is.

9:34. Suddenly a cloud enveloped the mountain where Jesus and the three disciples stood. A cloud had led Israel away from the holy mountain and into and through the wilderness. Now a cloud led the disciples away from the Mount of Transfiguration and to Mount Calvary. The cloud assured God’s people of his presence while preventing them at the same time from seeing his full

face and glory. The cloud enclosed the disciples so they could no longer see the glory but could be reassured that God was present among them.

9:35. In the Exodus narrative (Exod. 18–24), God spoke from a cloud to reveal his nature and his will. The transfiguration ends as the disciples hear the divine voice from the cloud. The Gospel poses the question, “Who is Jesus?” Taking up Old Testament language (Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1; cf. Luke 3:22), God answers the question. Jesus is the Son of God, chosen by God to complete his plan of redemption and salvation. He completes that plan by being the suffering servant (cf. Isa. 53). God’s people must listen to him. There is no need to build tabernacles and hope Moses and Elijah will return. Their day has passed. Their voices are drowned out by the voice of Jesus, the chosen Son. Commitment to God means listening to his Son.

9:36. Silence followed the divine proclamation. Moses and Elijah had left at some point. The disciples also left the mountain, not telling anyone of the experience until the cross and the resurrection validated it. Visions and holy moments in God’s glorious presence are not the essence of religion. Walking to the cross after Jesus is. He wants to teach you this. Listen to him.¹

Mark 9:20-25

9:20-22. The demon responded violently when it saw Jesus. This is reminiscent of Mark 5:6. Jesus’ questioning of the father was meant to bring a confession of need. It may seem a strange question. Why would the father not admit his need? And yet, many parents are blinded to disabilities. Psychologist John White admitted that when his son was born with a club foot, he literally did not see it. Denial can be a strong opponent—perhaps the only thing that can forever block Jesus’ healing touch. The Master forced the father to acknowledge that Jesus was his only hope. While the man knew this, he did not know whether this hope was enough. After all, the disciples had been unable to do anything for the son. Perhaps this had shaken his faith somewhat.

9:23-24. Jesus declared that he had the power to heal his son if the man had the faith. If you can?... Everything is possible for him who believes, he declared. Jesus did not mean that miracles depend on the strength of a person’s faith. We must pray always with God’s will in mind. The father confessed his belief immediately. It sprang from his heart. But he was aware that he was an imperfect human being; his recent lack of faith proved it. Therefore, he asked Jesus to heal him—the father—first. “Whatever is in me, Lord, that does not believe or want to believe, heal that first.” Like removing the log from our own eye, this request was not only appropriate but life-giving.

9:25. Once again, Jesus moved into action before a great crowd could gather. This family had probably been a spectacle for many years; Jesus refused to make them one in this situation. Further, Jesus would not be made the principle participant in a circus. He had often refused to “perform for the crowds” and he did so in this situation by withdrawing. Jesus rebuked the demon and ordered it never to enter the boy again. How encouraging that must have been for the father!²

¹ Butler, T. C. (2000). *Luke* (Vol. 3, pp. 147–149). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Cooper, R. L. (2000). *Mark* (Vol. 2, p. 149). Broadman & Holman Publishers.