

Life is filled with peaks and valleys. A peak is something excellent that happens in your life, something great, something to celebrate and remember. I still remember a family vacation we took many years ago to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. We stayed in a small community called Teton Village, just below the Grand Tetons. We went horseback riding, did a rafting trip on the Snake River, and took the cable car to the top of the Grand Teton. We had a pretty clear day at the top. What a view. Let me tell you, I didn't want to come back to Mid-West. I just wanted to stay in the Tetons, and exist as a rich bum. That was a peak. A Peak! The birth of a child, the day you got married, that awesome family vacation – that is a peak. During those moments, it's easy to be a Christian. "God is good," you think to yourself. How He has blessed us!

But life isn't one peak after another. There are the valleys too. Those difficult moments. When you have been diagnosed with cancer – that's a valley. When a loved one dies – that's a valley. When your child or grandchild is going through a painful divorce, that's a valley. During those moments, it's more difficult to be a Christian sometimes. When you're in the valley, it's hard to say, "God is good." Sometimes your faith is shaken. There's some doubt there, when you're in a valley, that God is blessing you and those around you.

Peaks and valleys – where are you right now? Are you on top of a peak? Or are you in a valley? Maybe you're somewhere in between – maybe there's a peak or a valley for you right around the corner, and you don't even know it. The disciples of Jesus Christ had no idea that they were about to enter a valley – they were about to go through a low-point with Christ. Things with Jesus seemed to be going so well – he had performed miracles – walking on the water, feeding the 5000. He had been surrounded by crowds of people, listening to his parables. It was easy to be a disciple of Jesus at that time. There was no doubt that this was the Son of God, the Savior of the world. The disciples were experiencing one high-point after another with Jesus.

But right around the corner loomed the valley of the shadow of death. The crowds would soon turn against Jesus. He'd be betrayed, and arrested, and tortured, and publicly condemned, and executed in the most shameful way known to man at that time. The valley was right around the corner. The disciples would be filled with fear and doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. Soon, it would be very difficult to be a disciple of Christ. A deep, dark valley was right around the corner, and the disciples had no idea.

And so that is why today, Jesus takes them to the top of a mountain. He lets them experience something amazing – with their own eyes, they catch a glimpse of his glory. Right before the valley, Jesus takes them to a mountain, to a high point, and he does this to strengthen them for the difficult road ahead. Today, it is good for us to go on this journey with those disciples too, and experience this mountain peak, so we can "Glow On The Way To Glory!"

"After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them." The word "transfigure" means that Jesus' appearance completely changed. "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." Another Gospel writer tells us that Jesus' clothes became "as bright as a flash of lightning." At that moment, Jesus revealed his deity. He was the holy, almighty God, and the brightness of his appearance revealed that to his disciples. This was good, because soon the disciples

would see Jesus dirty and bloody and weak and dying. During that time, it would seem as though Jesus was a lowly man. But here it is clear, as he shines brighter than the sun – he is God – holy, almighty, and powerful. Remember who Jesus is in the valleys ahead, He is the Holy, Almighty, All-Powerful God!

“And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.” The other Gospels tell us that they were talking about his future death and resurrection and ascension. These were two of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. Once again, this was good for the disciples to see. Soon, people would be saying that Jesus was against the prophets, that Jesus had nothing to do with the prophets. But here it is clear – Elijah, Moses, and Jesus – they are speaking together about his imminent departure.

Why exactly did Jesus have to depart or die. Let me give you a simple everyday illustration. You can go to a store today and buy things without paying for them, right? Sure, that’s what those things you call “credit cards” allow you to do. But paying for something with a credit card doesn’t mean you’re getting it for free. Some time later you’ll have to pay the bill with real money. If you don’t, the credit card company will come after you. In Bible times if you didn’t pay your debts, you were thrown into prison. God is like a credit card company. Whenever we sin we wrack up charges on our spiritual credit card. Eventually payment needs to be made for these sins. God doesn’t just negotiate a settlement where only partial payment is allowed. He doesn’t allow us to declare bankruptcy, and start again. Rather, God demands full payment for what is owed. The thing is, you and I could never make the payment since every sin is only payable with an eternity in hell. That’s where Jesus comes in. He made the payment for us when he suffered and died on the cross. He was able to pay for the whole world’s sin because he wasn’t just human; he was in fact the Son of God – as the Transfiguration revealed.

What an amazing high point for those disciples to experience. Peter wanted this moment to last forever. He wasn’t really sure what to say or what to do, so he said, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.”

But that idea wasn’t even a possibility. Instead, “a bright cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’” The disciples were surrounded by a bright fog, and then they heard the voice of God the Father himself. It must have been an amazing thing, to hear the voice of God the Father. They heard the Father say that Jesus really is his Son, that he was loved, and that they should listen to him. Once again, this was good for those disciples to hear. Soon, people would be saying that Jesus was not the Son of God. Soon, it would seem as though God the Father didn’t love Christ. The religious leaders would be saying that no one should listen to Jesus. But here it is clear – none of that is true – this is the true Son of God, loved by the Father, whose words are words that we should listen to.

And then, just as quickly as it began, this moment ended: “Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.” This was a high point for those disciples, a peak – they saw Christ in all his glory, surrounded by the prophets, and acclaimed by God the Father. This would help and strengthen them as they continued on with Jesus into the valley of the shadow of death.

This also helps us as we go through our own personal peaks and valleys in life. I do not know where you are right now – if you are experiencing a high moment, or a low

moment. And I don't know where you will be two years from now – what high moments or low moments you will be going through. In reality, neither do you. For us today, right now, it is good for us to be here, because here we are reminded of our Savior's glory, who he really is.

The disciples needed to climb a mountain to see this. Today, God's Word is your mountain to climb. Every time you come here, to church, and you hear the Word of God, you have climbed the mountain. Here, you see Christ, who has taken your sins away on the cross and who has risen from the dead. Here you catch a glimpse of his glory, even if it's just for a moment. Sunday morning worship – the Word of God – this is your mountain top. It is good for you to be here, because this is where you are strengthened for the days ahead, for all the peaks and valleys that are around the corner for you.

Tell me, which picture of Jesus do you prefer? Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? Or Jesus on Mount Calvary? Which one shows Jesus in all of his glory? It's Jesus on Mount Calvary covered in blood. Surprised to hear me say that? Think of it like this. When did your mother appear to be the most glorious? When she got all dressed up for an anniversary meal at a fancy restaurant, or when she got up at 2 in the morning to look after a sick child? She looked great when she's headed to the fancy restaurant. Her hair was meticulous and she was wearing her expensive jewelry, but she seemed more glorious when she got up at 2 in the morning to look after you – even though her hair was a mess, and her pajamas didn't match. She looks glorious because her love for you is unmistakable at times like that.

That's how it is with Jesus. He was at his most glorious when he resolutely set out to win your salvation. And although the unbelieving world scoffed at Jesus as he hung on the cross, because to them he looked weak and ineffective, for us who believe the truth, we see Jesus' love for sinners like us.

Mountain top experiences are great, but living, working, helping, loving in the valleys are where Christ asks us to be. God uses our uncovered faces to display his glory. The transformation isn't easy. The sculptor of Mt. Rushmore faced a lesser challenge than does God. But our Lord is up to the task. He loves to change the faces of his children. By his fingers, wrinkles of worry are rubbed away. Shadows of shame and doubt become portraits of grace and trust. He relaxes clenched fists and smoothes ruffled brows. His touch can remove the bags of exhaustion from beneath the eyes and turn tears of despair into tears of peace.

How? Through the Powerful Word of God and the wonderful promises He gives us there. On difficult days climb back up the Mount of Transfiguration and see your Savior transformed. Be convinced that he's not some ordinary guy. Jesus is the all-powerful, all-glorious Son of God. There is no problem he cannot help you handle. And then follow Jesus back down the mountain and see him on the cross. Be reassured that there is no problem of yours that he does not want to handle because he's already handled our greatest problem: sin. Truly What a friend we have in Jesus! Amen.