

Mountaintop Experiences. A few years ago in Bible class I told you about the most unforgettable event in my life. In 1978 I backpacked Europe during my summer break from college with my friend Bruce Margraf. I still remember arriving on a boat in Heraclium Crete, from Athens Greece. We walked down a street looking for a cheap pension to stay at, since the youth hostels were very dirty in Greece. A man approached us who didn't speak English. He gave us a sheet of paper in English, that told about his Pension for \$7.00 a night. We said, "Sure", and followed him. We went past some of his neighbors on the way who waved at him. We got to his house, and he introduced us to his wife. We then went up a flight of stairs. He proudly showed us a shower. We were thrilled. A shower. Then he took us up another flight of stairs, and showed us a clean room with two double beds and a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean. We thought that was enough.. Then he took us to the roof, where we had a view of the entire city of Heraclium, Crete and a view of the Mediterranean. He went over to a table, and not thinking he could speak any English said, "Drink Vino Here, yes. Drink Vino here yes. We said, "Yes." That night as the sun set we each had a bottle of Amstel beer and some watermelon. Both Bruce and I said, "Wow, this would be a place to take our wives one day if we ever got married. Have you ever had a breathtaking moment like that in your life? We would call that a Peak! The birth of a child, the day you got married – that is a peak. During those moments, it's easy to be a Christian. "God is good," you think to yourself.

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 you lose your job, that's a valley. When you find out your daughter or daughter-in-law is having a child with only one arm or Down Syndrome. 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 “Prepare for the Valley Ahead!”

“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.

The coming suffering and death on the cross was understood in heaven by Moses and Elijah. They knew the importance of Christ’s suffering and death, for without it there could be no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, no eternal life. The theme of their conversation was not on the Savior’s life but on his death and resurrection from the dead.

All too often people suppose that those living in Old Testament times had a different way of salvation than we have today. It is true, they did not have nearly so clear a picture of God’s plan of salvation as we have today, but they staked their hope of heaven on Jesus Christ, the Messiah who was to come. Abraham was saved by this faith, and so was Moses and Elijah, and Isaiah and all who ever were saved. The whole Jewish system of blood and the sacrifice of animals pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world. Let us be sure, that we too always pin our hope for heaven on the departure that Christ was to accomplish at Jerusalem, and let us like Moses and Elijah also talk about this wonderful event.

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.

Today you hear my voice, but my voice will be silenced in the grave even as the voices of those countless servants of the Lord who have come and gone before me. But the voice of Jesus will never be silenced. His voice was heard at creation when all things were made by the Word of His power. His voice was heard during the days of His ministry when He said to sinners, Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” His voice was heard as he hung dying on the cross, saying, It is finished. His voice will be heard on Judgment day, saying to the unbeliever, Depart from me you cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. His voice will be heard saying to the believer, Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. His voice will be heard forever in paradise as He opens to us new realms of thought and learning, of beauty and wisdom.

So no matter how difficult life may become, Christian, remember who is in charge. It’s Jesus. Remember, who he is. The All Powerful Son of God! A face shining like the sun, clothes whiter than you can bleach them. This is the person who is in your corner through thick and thin. This is the person who empowers us to face the challenges of life. Yes, It is good to be here Jesus, with you. Amen.