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“Mountains or Valleys, Jesus is There”

Mark 9:2-29

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In life we can have mountain top experiences and valley low experiences. Most of life is lived somewhere between these two extremes, but the truth is, since we live in a fallen, sinful world, it's more common for us to live in or near the valley rather than on the mountain top. In Mark 9, there are two stories back-to-back: the first story took place on a high mountain where Jesus was glorified; and the second story took place in the valley where there was a demon-possessed boy and his desperate father. These are very different stories, but they help us understand that whether we are on the mountain or in the valley, the Lord is there with us!

1. The mountain

- a. Jesus wasn't showing favoritism to Peter, James, and John. It's just that he was closer to these men than the other disciples, so they would be seen as members of Jesus' inner circle.
- b. Before the transfiguration Jesus took the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, which is north of the Golan Heights, and it was here that Jesus asked them, “Who do men say that I am?”
- c. Pastor Gary said it's likely that this happened on Mount Hermon because Caesarea Philippi is at the base of the mountain, which is 9,000 feet tall.
- d. **Mark 9:2** - “... [Jesus] was transfigured before them.”
 - i. The Greek word for transfiguration is metamorfoo, which is where we get the English word metamorphosis.¹
- e. Peter, James, and John saw a glimpse of the glory of God.
 - i. **Mark 9:3** - “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.”
- f. At the time of this event, Elijah had been gone for about nine hundred years,

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3339&t=NKJV>

and Moses had been dead about fourteen hundred years.

- g. Pastor Gary said, “Somehow by God’s providence, departing for the moment, paradise, to be in the presence of Jesus, either just their spirits or perhaps they retained some kind of glorified body... Why Elijah and Moses of all of the people who could be seen with Jesus? Because Elijah represents the prophets and Moses represents the law, and Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets. ² ... And, by the way, I think we are going to see Elijah and Moses make another appearance at some point in the future; because if you know your [Bible, in Revelation 11, we see a reference] to two witnesses who come during the tribulation period... to proclaim the good news of Jesus... And when you look at what the witnesses do in terms of their miracles, it parallels the miracles of Elijah and Moses...”
 - i. **Mark 9:5-6** – *“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’ – because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.”*
- h. Pastor Gary said, “How did they recognize Elijah and Moses except God had revealed it to them, or more likely, this is a biblical proof text for the fact that [a person] in their spirit or their glorified body still bears their physical likeness even after they die. ... [It’s clear] they were still recognizable because something about their appearance in their spirit form or [their temporary] physical form... they were recognizable. You will be able to recognize your loved ones, [and] they will be able to recognize you, in heaven. Consider, if nothing else, that when Jesus appeared to his disciples post-resurrection from the dead, having a glorified body, they could still recognize him. So, we do bear a resemblance to our likeness now when we are in heaven.”
- i. Concerning the making of three tabernacles, Pastor Gary said, “[Peter wanted] to preserve the moment. ... I get why he was saying this. When you are on the mountain top, you wish it would never end... Everybody loves to stay on the mountain top experience, but you can’t live there because reality is in the valley. ... [As] soon as they tried to preserve the moment, God said, ‘I want you to listen to my son, and I want you to move on.’ Heaven will be a mountain top experience that will never end, but this is not heaven right now, and everybody has to come off the mountain at some point. Oh, you might get a glimpse of God’s goodness and of his glory from time to time with certain experiences that you will live out in the course of your life here on earth, but much of life takes place in the valley of reality where there are demonic influences, and sometimes unanswered prayer, helpless parents and tormented children and frustrated disciples because all of that is what they

² **Matthew 5:17** – *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.”*

find when they get back to the valley. [In] the valley is where faith and reality meet. Anyone can enjoy the mountain top and feel cozy while you are there; meanwhile the world also needs Jesus in the valley, and because that's where [we] spend a considerable amount of our time, we need Jesus in the valley too."

- i. **Mark 9:7-8** - *"And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!' Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves."*

2. The valley

- a. **Mark 9:14** - *"And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them."*
 - i. Scribes
 1. In Jesus' day, scribes not only transcribed Hebrew texts, they were considered to be religious leaders and legal experts.
- b. **Mark 9:16-17** - *"And He asked the scribes, 'What are you discussing with them?' Then one of the crowd answered and said, 'Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.' "*
- c. Pastor Gary said, "[So, this man] has a son who is possessed by a demon. We know that it's possession because at the end of the story Jesus cast the demon out of [the boy]. We don't know the background. We don't know how young this boy [was]... [The] demon was doing violent things in him, possessing this boy such that he exhibits [what appears to be] epileptic-like symptoms and seizures, and he [convulsed and he foamed] at the mouth, and the [father] said that sometimes the demon [tried to throw] his son into the fire... or drown him in water. This [father was desperate]!"
- d. **Mark 9:22b-24** - *"But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' "*
- e. Of this man, Pastor Gary said, "I believe but I have some unbelief too. I have faith but I have some doubts too. There are times I feel strong, and there are times when I feel weak. And Jesus [didn't] shame him [or] say, 'Until you really get your faith act together, I'm not doing anything for your son.' No, Jesus still [healed] the boy and [delivered] him from [the] demon. When you are in the valley, sometimes you are just too weak to have all of the faith in the world, and Jesus knows that. Sometimes all you can muster up is a little, but Jesus will take our little and use it for his glory to help us."
- f. **Mark 9:28-29** - *"And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked*

Him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.' "

3. Jesus is with us on the mountains and in the valleys
 - a. **Psalm 139:7-10** - *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."* (NIV 1984)
 - b. **Psalm 46:1** - *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."* (NIV 1984)
 - c. **Psalm 23:4** - *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* (NIV 1984)
4. You always have to come down off the mountain; real life happens in the valleys
 - a. Pastor Gary said, "[You] can't stay on the mountain forever; real life happens in the valley. [The valley] is where faith and life merge. [The valley] is where we invite Jesus into every dark day, into every unexpected disappointment, and we say, 'Lord, you are the same God of the valleys as you are of the mountains, and because you are the God of the mountains and the God of the valleys, I'm going to trust you even in my real-life situations. ... Faith is not supposed to be [some kind of] cosmic head knowledge; it's supposed to be where real life and real faith intersect, in the valley of reality."
5. The most difficult challenges in the valleys must be met with prayer and fasting
 - a. Pastor Gary said, "In this particular case [Jesus'] disciples were unable to cast out the demon... [The disciples had already done this when they were sent out two by two.] ... Is it that prayer and fasting make [us] more powerful in [our] spirit to do things that are more uncommon? [That may be], but I don't think that is what [Jesus] was trying to teach us. I think that what he was trying to teach us is that through the disciplines of prayer and fasting, [our lives] are more faith-filled and less fear-filled. The more [we] seek him through prayer, and the more [we seek him through fasting, we] can grow in a deeper way with the Lord. [And] in moments when difficult things demand them, then [we] need to practice those disciplines. ... [Some people are going through difficult things, and they are trying to find out how to make things better; it may be that things will only get better through prayer and fasting.]"
6. Even a little belief with unbelief is better than no belief at all
 - a. Pastor Gary said, "**The mighty hand of God is not dependent upon the mighty faith of man.** If you think that God will only move based on your level

of faith, you've put yourself in charge of God. You are manipulating the hand of God if your theology [is] the more faith [you] have, the more God will do for [you]. No, wait a minute. God wants us to exercise faith. God wants us to enter into what he is wanting to do with belief, but it's okay to say that [you] have some unbelief, and [you've] got some doubt, and God's mighty hand will still move. Because God is the one who is sovereign, and God is the one who is powerful, and God knows that there are times when we are just so weak and weary and discouraged that we can't muster up more than a tiny bit of belief... and God will show himself strong." (Emphasis added)

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Mark 9:2-29](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide a brief overview of the setting for the account of Jesus' transfiguration. (See #1a through #1f above)
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about Elijah and Moses. (See #1g and #1h above)
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks about the reason Peter wanted to build tabernacles on the mountain. (See #1i above)
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the man and his great faith in Jesus. (See #2c and #2e above)
6. Read and discuss [Psalm 139:7-10](#), [Psalm 46:1](#), and [Psalm 23:4](#). (See #3 above)
7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the fact that real life happens in the valleys. (See #4 and #5 above)
8. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's statement that "The mighty hand of God is not dependent upon the mighty faith of man" (See #6 above)
9. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)