

ViralStJames Bible Study #23: Mountain High, Valley Deep

The Background – The Transfiguration

Mark 9:2-9

When studying Bible passages, it is often useful to read the bit that comes just before and the bit after, in order to help grasp the context and understand the unfolding story. This is particularly true of this passage. In the preceding chapter, Peter responds to Jesus's question about his identity by stating that 'You are the Messiah' (8:27-29). He then typically betrays his lack of understanding of the true meaning of what being the Messiah will involve by rebuking Jesus when he tries to talk about his impending death and resurrection. So in Chapter 9, we see Moses, representing the Law (also given on a mountain) and Elijah representing the prophets, talking with Jesus. To any Jewish listener at the time, the meaning would have been clear – Moses, the revered leader, and Elijah, the great prophet, were confirming the exalted position of Jesus, unwittingly if truthfully confessed by Peter in the previous chapter. In fact, Luke, in his account, (Luke 9:31) makes it clear that they were talking about Jesus's forthcoming 'departure' in Jerusalem. The word Luke actually uses for departure is 'exodus', deliberately calling to mind the exodus that Moses led God's people through in the delivery from slavery in Egypt. Jesus is going to bring about a new exodus, a new deliverance of God's people from the bondage of sin and selfishness.

The mountain top experience is followed by the Slough of Despond as Jesus is confronted with the failure of his disciples to be able to heal a man brought to them. His response is truly human!

The Passage – Mark 9:2-9

Mark 9:2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Mark 9:9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The Questions

- 1) **What has been your mountain top experience(s)? How has it affected you? What have you taken away from it?**
- 2) **Peter tries to prolong the event – why might it not be a good idea to stay on the mountain top?**
 - *That which we receive needs to be shared - For Peter, as for us, the best was yet to come – the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus enabled Peter and enables us to be filled with the life-giving Spirit. Life is for growing in knowledge and love, experienced through seeking to put the insight we may receive on mountain tops into action in our community, not staying in an isolated people-free comfort zone.*

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- 3) Have you, like the disciples in Mark 9 14-19 found that mountain top experiences can be followed by times of frustration, setbacks? How do you handle these? How can we remain focused on hope when in these valley-deep times?
- *Life is not lived on the mountain top – we need to take what we learn to help see us through the challenges of everyday life. Look at the troubles that Paul faced that he lists in 2 Corinthians 11. v 24-29 – but it is a word from Jesus that keeps him going (2 Corinthians 12 v 9). Faith and hope keep us going when life gets tougher.*
 - *It may be helpful to record your mountain-top experiences, the times that you have found God speaking to you – in journals, in the memo pad on your phone, on post-it notes in jars – where you can go back and recall what God has said in the past and be encouraged to go again. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever.*
- 4) Clouds in the Old Testament are normally associated with the presence of God (think of the pillar of cloud by day in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt with Moses). What does the voice (God) say in Mark 9 v 7 and why do you think he says it?
- *Listen to Jesus –for Peter, James and John, it was needed to help them focus on what Jesus was saying about his suffering, death and resurrection. They didn't initially understand it, but were able to recall what Jesus had said and use those memories after his resurrection as they preached in Jerusalem, Judea and took the good news out to those willing to listen.*
 - *The message is the same for us – Listen to Jesus. Fortunately for us, the Gospel writers wrote down his teachings so we can reflect on what he said.*
- 5) Can awesome experiences sometimes inflate our ego? How can we guard against it? (Read Mark 9 v 33-37) The disciples had a habit (eg Peter in 8 v 32) of trying to shape Jesus into the image they wanted. Are we still tempted to do this today?
- *Peter didn't want a suffering messiah, one who would die – he was initially thinking of a Messiah who would set his people free – which he perceived as freedom from the Romans. Jesus was going deeper, dealing with releasing the bonds that prevent us from living the life the creator wants for us. We have to deal with our own selfish desires ('to be the greatest') – Jesus explains and demonstrates that humility and generous service is the way forward, the way we discover who we are meant to be*
- 6) The transfiguration features Moses and Elijah with Jesus. Why do you think these two Old Testament figures appear? Can you think of other occasions when Jesus talks about Moses and the prophets? What does this tell us about God's revelation of himself to us?
- *Moses represents the Law (eg the Ten Commandments), whilst Elijah represents the prophets. They appear to affirm Jesus's authority and to signify to Peter, James and John that Jesus fulfils what the law and the prophets were pointing to. They point the hearers of the Gospel to listen to him as God's full and final revelation of himself;*
 - *Luke 24 25-27 The Road to Emmaus; and same chapter Luke 24 44-45;*
 - *God's revelation is an unfolding one – the Old Testament is part of the story, which reaches its climax in Jesus*
- 7) Is there anything here that encourages you? Is there anything that you will do differently as a result? What do you think is the good news in this passage?