

Working from memory Mark 9:2-9:9 Acts 10:34-43

PORTIONS ADAPTED FROM " THE MOUNTAIN BEFORE THE VALLEY by Don Schultz @ SermonCentral.com

Life is filled with peaks and valleys. A peak is something excellent that happens in your life, something great, something to celebrate and remember. The birth of your child – that is a highpoint in life. The day you get married – that is a peak. During those moments, it's easy to be a Christian. "God is good," you think to yourself. There's no doubt in your mind that God is blessing you.

But life isn't one peak after another. There are also valleys. The troubles of life. Those difficult moments. When you have been diagnosed with cancer – that's a valley. When a loved one dies or a marriage dissolves – that's a valley. During those moments, it's more difficult to be a Christian. 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.

On that mountain top, watching him shining like the sun, talking with Moses & Elijah, hearing the very voice of God; These disciples of Jesus – Peter James & John – were standing on the highest peak in their lives; Peter was even making plans to live there. They had no idea that they were next about to enter their deepest valley – that they were about to go through Death Valley with Christ.

Things with Jesus seemed to be going so well – he was performing miracles – walking on the water, feeding the 5000. He was constantly surrounded by admiring crowds listening to his parables; listening to Jesus stick to the hypocritical religious leadership. 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, unbeknownst to them, 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 disciples will be filled with fear. Soon, it will be very difficult to be a disciple of Christ- many will claim that his teachings are too hard; most will desert him for a time. Peter would even publicly deny knowing Jesus. A deep, dark valley was right around the corner, and the disciples have no idea.

But Jesus knows. And 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.

Just 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, he does this to give them a memory that can carry them through. Today, it is good for us as well to go on this journey with those disciples to that transfiguration mountain, to experience with them this high point, and to also carry away a memory, for two reasons.

First of all, because it prepares us for Lent. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is this Wednesday. Up until this time, you have heard about Christ the teacher, Christ the healer, how powerful he is, walking on water, even raising the dead, he is, without a doubt, the Son of God and Savior of the World.

But Lent is that time when the church watches Jesus descends into the valley of the shadow of death. We hear how he was rejected. How he was arrested and abused. How he suffered and died for the sins of the world. Refusing to resist, how like a lamb being led to slaughter, Jesus went to the cross. **And you will be called to remember how it was for your sins and mine that Jesus purposely walked this lonesome valley.**

These next seven weeks, the Church will walk with Jesus, through this valley, and see again these difficult moments. The season of Lent is long, in the middle it begins to feel endless. It may be easy to forget the reasons why Jesus and we must be here; to mindlessly go through the rituals of penance without such ever touching our hearts. But thankfully, Lent is bordered by two of our greatest mountain peaks: The mount of Transfiguration on this side and Easter on the other. **If we remember this mountain-top experience today, it can carry us along with Jesus - through the valley ahead.**

It is these memories carried from today, the experience of seeing Jesus as he really is, that can bring us consciously, thoughtfully, through this valley to Easter when next we meet him as our risen Lord. Truthfully, Easter has little meaning for those who have not experienced Lent. So we remember and we have the strength to walk through this valley with Jesus. That is certainly what Jesus hoped for his friends; for Peter James & John; and it is certainly what can work for us as well. Memory. **We need to always be working from memory.**

Memory is what brought Peter back to his task as an Apostle – a witness – for Jesus. Years later, as he tells his story to Cornelius and family, we don't hear Peter talking about his denials instead we hear Peter working from the memory of those previous transforming moments: talking about how *"God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power."* Peter said *"we are witnesses."*

When did they witness That anointing of the Holy Spirit? They did at Jesus' baptism. And when did they witness the anointing with power? Surely Peter is remembering the healings, the feedings, and also the mountain.

Working from memory kept Peter going across all his own mountains and valleys until history tells us he came as promised to his own martyrs cross. But Peter could joyously live the life of a martyr, because he was working from memory. WE can do the same thing.

Working from memory can also prepare us for our own personal valleys.

As we see Jesus glorified here today, it can prepare us for when we go through our own difficult moments. May God bless us this day, as we once again stand with these disciples and see Jesus reveal his glory. And may our faith be strengthened, for the days ahead, as we prepare for all the different peaks and valleys in our life.

(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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them

The word "transfigure" means that Jesus' appearance completely changed. The other gospels tell us that somehow even his face changed. Another Gospel writer states that Jesus' clothes became "as bright as a flash of lightning."

At that moment, Jesus revealed his deity. He briefly stripped away the veil of humanity to be revealed as his former self: the holy, almighty God; the brightness of his appearance revealed this 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 misguided man. But here it is clear, as he shines brighter than the sun – he is God – holy, almighty, and powerful.

"And there appeared to them Elijah with 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 a false prophets,** that Jesus had nothing to do with the prophets of the Bible. But here it is clear – Elijah, Moses, are standing with Jesus – and they are speaking together about his final most important task.

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 make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

But that idea wasn't even a possibility. Instead, *Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'*

It must have been the most amazing thing, to hear the voice of God the Father. And they themselves 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. For soon, people would be saying that Jesus was not the Son of God. Soon, it would seem – as the religious leaders had said – that even God the Father had rejected Jesus; that he was no one to believe in.** But here and now, it is clear – none of that is true – this is the true Son of God, dearly 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 saw no one with them anymore, but only 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.

And this should help us as well. As we enter the Lenten season this Wednesday, we will watch Jesus battling with Satan, and we will see him weeping; betrayed and deserted to die alone. BUT here today we are first reminded that Jesus is the Son of God, the holy one spoken of by the prophets. Although he will be suffering and dying, he is still God and Savior, doing these things to win for us our salvation.

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 any of us will be two years from now – what mountains or valleys we will next face. But for us today, right now, it is good for us to be here, because here we are reminded of our Savior's glory, of who Jesus really is. And that Jesus our savior walked through the valley of the shadow of death so that we might see the light of God's eternal day.

The American evangelist Dwight L. Moody told the story about a Christian woman who was always bright and cheerful and optimistic, even though she was confined to her room because of an illness. She lived in an attic apartment on the fifth floor of an old, rundown building. A friend decided to visit her one day and brought along another woman - a person of great wealth. Since there was no elevator, the two ladies began the long climb upward. When they reached the second floor, the well-to-do woman commented, "What a dark and filthy place!" Her friend replied, "It's better higher up." When they arrived at the third floor landing, the remark was made: "Things look even worse here." Again the reply: "It's better higher up." Finally they reached the attic level, where they found the bedridden saint of God. A smile on her face radiated the joy that filled her heart.

Although the room was clean and flowers were on the windowsill, the wealthy visitor could not contain herself about the stark surroundings and blurted out: "It must be very difficult for you to be here like this!" Without a moment's hesitation the shut-in responded: "It will be better higher up." Right now, she was in a valley, but she was not looking at temporal things. With her eyes of faith fixed on the eternal, she had found the secret of true satisfaction and contentment. Where did she get this strength? This perspective? She had been with Jesus in his Word. She had seen his glory on the mountain top. May that same glory you have seen today transform you. Amen.