

# Perspective: From the Peak, for the Valley

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## Introduction

- A. This morning, we're going to do something similar to what we did last year, if you were here.
  - 1. I'm not going to preach for nearly as long (you're welcome!). Maybe 30 minutes or so.
  - 2. And then, after me, and in light of what I'll be teeing up for us here, we're actually give space for Michael Boone and Danielle Tejes to share a bit as well.
- B. I trust it'll make sense when we get there. But for now, let's read . . .

## The Text

<sup>28</sup> Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup> And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup> And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup> As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup> And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. (Luke 9:28–36)

## "Perspective"

- A. When Joey and I were planning for this year's All Church Campout, we wanted to try to identify a theme of some sort that could stand as an organizing principle for our times of reflection and sharing and all this.
  - 1. And Joey came up with this idea of "perspective."
    - a. We hope that our time away here together helps us in some way regain perspective—on God, on our lives, on the good and especially the hard stuff—before we head back down from the mountain and reengage with our everyday lives.
- B. And I think this theme jumped out at us because we know, especially here in Silicon Valley, in the midst of the hustle and the hurry, it's so easy to lose perspective. Perspective is hard to come by.
  - 1. We get buried in tasks, weighed down with the daily grind, carried off to sea by the undertow of anxiety and fret. We get tired and discouraged and maybe a little depressed.
    - a. We don't always see where God is and what he's doing. We lose sight of him. And we lose perspective.

C. Maybe that's even how you come in this morning. You just feel turned around, upside down—you're struggling.

1. So what can we do, if anything, to regain it?

D. Well, I think that's what this text is about and that's what I want to break down for us in the brief time I have here this morning.

1. I titled this sermon: "Perspective: From the Peak, for the Valley."

a. And I want to consider three main headings: (1) The Surrounding Context; (2) The Mountain Moment; (3) The Lasting Impact.

## (1) The Surrounding Context

### Trouble All Around

A. One of the most interesting features of this story, it seems to me, is actually not found within the story itself.

1. It's found in what surrounds it, in the context. That's what really makes the moment here on the mountain pop with significance.

B. Because you see, on either side of this mountaintop experience there's trouble. There's hardship. There's confusion and disorientation and disillusionment. There's this growing risk of losing perspective.

### Immediately Before

A. So in the material just before our text, Luke tells us of how Jesus first discloses two very troubling truths:

1. The first comes to us in [v. 22](#). This is the very first time he tells them that he's come not first to conquer, but to die: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed . . ."

a. To be fair, he does conclude with the fact that, after all this, "[on the third day \[he shall\] be raised.](#)"

b. But they don't understand this. They likely didn't even hear it. They were fixated on the front end of that statement.

i. The Christ doesn't get killed. The Christ triumphs. It was disorienting. It was disheartening. It couldn't be!

(1) That's why in Matthew's account we're told that this is the point in time where Peter pipes up to rebuke Jesus: "[Far be it from you,](#)

Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matt. 16:22). But it would. It did.

2. But there's a second troubling truth that promptly follows this first one. So Jesus goes on now in v. 23.: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."
  - a. As if word about Christ's cross wasn't hard enough. Now we begin to learn about our own.
    - i. We have a cross to bear, if we are to follow after him.
    - ii. Just as he will be killed before he conquers, so too we will suffer before we ever share in his glory.
    - iii. Before we'd ever sit next to him at his right and left hands on thrones as the disciples envisioned, we'll be more like those men crucified on his right and left hand as he hung on the cross.
- B. These are two very disturbing disclosures from Jesus to his disciples. There's stuff coming where you're really at risk of losing perspective.
  1. You might be tempted to think God has abandoned Jesus or abandoned you.
    - a. And some of you likely have things like this right now, don't you? Where it feels like God's not up to good in your life, like he's left you to flounder on your own. You've lost perspective, and, with that, you've lost hope.

### Immediately After

- A. But this is not all. As I said, we see the same sorts of things in the material that immediately follows our text as well.
  1. So Jesus and the disciples come down from this mountaintop experience and what do they find? They are brought straightaway face to face with a demon-possessed man (vv. 37-43). And, quite frankly, they soon realize they are no match for him.
    - a. So there's combat with the devil. It's hard. It's life in the valley.
  2. But beyond that, we see here again that it's only going to get worse. For, as Luke tells us in v. 49, it's at this point that Jesus first "set[s] his face to go to Jerusalem" where, as he'd just said and resaid, he'd be rejected and killed.
    - a. We are not in pursuit of our best life now.
    - b. We have set our GPS for calvary and the cross. We are going to die.
  3. Almost as a foretaste of all this, in v. 52, we read that it's because Jesus' face was set towards Jerusalem that the Samaritan village they were passing through at the time "did not receive him [or them]."

- a. They were starting to feel the weight of that cross on their own backs. Following Jesus would mean walking through some hard times. It's not a journey through bright hill and meadow; it's a journey through the shadowlands.
- 4. As Jesus says to close out the chapter: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (v. 58).
  - a. It's going to be hard. You might be tempted to lose heart. You're certainly, again, at risk of losing perspective.
- B. So what does he do? How is he going to help them gain and keep perspective?
  - 1. Well, that's where our story comes in, you see. What's he going to do?
    - a. He's going to get them alone with him up on a mountain. And from there they can see some things they couldn't see too clearly down in the thick of it all.
      - i. As we read in the first verse of our text, Luke 9:28: "Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray."

## (2) The Mountain Moment

### "Went Up . . . to Pray"

- A. I've mentioned before that after I graduated college I took the summer and just went off into the woods with my buddy. His family has a cabin in Colorado and from there we would just backpack all around the Rocky Mountains.
  - 1. And we didn't use trails. We used compasses and topography maps. And one of the things that would happen from time to time is you'd lose your way. We would get turned around. We'd get disoriented amongst the trees.
  - 2. And so, when this would happen, one of the ways we would deal with it was: go up.
    - a. Once you get above 12,000 feet or so, you're above the treeline. And when you're above the treeline, guess what, you can see. You regain perspective. "Ah, that's where we were, that's how we got off, I can see it now!"
- B. And so Jesus here, takes his disciples up above the treeline, as it were. They go up a mountain.
  - 1. And what are they going to do? They're going to pray.
  - 2. Well, to be clear: Jesus prays, and they sleep. Did you catch that? Look at v. 32: "Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep . . ."
- C. What's the deal with us? The same thing happens in Gethsemane, if you remember.

1. Whenever Jesus is deep in prayer, somehow we're always deep in sleep—like this is a perfect time to take a nap, because he's all tied up over there doing holy Son of God stuff, maybe he won't notice. It's not good.
  - a. He knows what they need more than anything is to get up on a mountain and pray.
  - b. They think what I need most right now is a solid siesta.
    - i. Sound familiar?
2. Somehow we seem to always get this wrong. When the hard stuff comes, when it's a stressful season, when things are pressing in on us from all sides, when we're at risk of losing perspective, we have all sorts of unhealthy ways of dealing with it.
  - a. Some of us, like these disciples, might just escape into sleep. I'm just going to check out.
  - b. But others of us go to the other extreme where we don't stop, we're going to fix what's off, we're going to figure it out, we're going to keep banging our head against the map until we determine the right way to go.
    - i. But I'll tell what we often neglect to do: get up and alone with God and pray.
- D. But that's where Jesus goes with these guys. And when they're finally shaken awake, they get to share with Jesus in this incredible "mountain moment," as I'm calling it.
  1. And, regarding this, I want to quickly consider three things with you: (1) What They Saw; (2) What They Heard; (3) What They Did.

### (1) What They Saw

- A. There's so much I could say here but let me at least draw your attention to one thing. It's what Luke accents for us in what he goes on to say in the rest of v. 32: "Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory . . ." What did they see? They saw his "glory".
  1. I love how Mark puts it in his account: " <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:2-3).
- B. Interestingly, the word translated "transfigured" in these texts is the Greek word *metamorphoō*. It's obviously the Greek word that stands behind the biological process we refer to as metamorphosis—which just gives us this beautiful word-picture, doesn't it?
  1. To this point Jesus has looked to many as a mere man, even a worm.
    - a. The Scriptures say he was nothing to behold.
    - b. And in Ps. 22, clearly foreshadowing Jesus on the cross, David cries: " <sup>6</sup> I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. <sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads . . ." (vv. 6–7).

- i. So Jesus often looks to our natural eyes like a mere worm in the dirt.
- 2. But here he shows his disciples something of who he truly is. It's the difference between a caterpillar writhing around on the ground and a butterfly—radiant with color and vitality, taken to the sky.
  - a. And he wants them to see that, because it will help when the day gets dark, when the times get hard, when they come back down from the mountain, when it feels like God's abandoned him and them, when it feels like all hope is lost . . . when they're tempted to lose perspective.
    - i. He's the King. He's in control. He's beautiful. He's glorious.
    - ii. And he's got me. He's on the move for good in my life. I know it. I've seen it!

## (2) What They Heard

- A. But they didn't just see something of Jesus. They also heard something about him.
  - 1. And, again, for this, there is so much we could look at, but I can only bring out one thing. Did you notice what Luke tells us Moses and Elijah and Jesus are discussing there in vv. 30-31? “<sup>30</sup> And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup> who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”
- B. Now, the English here is not so good. Even just looking at it, you get the sense it's not been translated over quite right.
  - 1. For what exactly does it mean to “**accomplish**” a departure? No one accomplishes a departure. They just depart. They go.
    - a. So it's clunky at best. And it alerts us to something more significant that we see when we look underneath in the Greek.
  - 2. This word translated “**departure**” here, it's the Greek word **exodos**.
    - a. And you don't have to be a Greek scholar to see: it's the same word used to refer to that that great redemptive “accomplishment” of God in the OT, the Exodus—where he released Israel from bondage to the Egyptians by way of the blood of the Passover lamb.
    - b. Now suddenly we see something more of what this “**departure**” is that Jesus is about to accomplish in Jerusalem.
      - i. Jesus isn't just departing, he's redeeming.
      - ii. It's a new and greater exodus he's after here.
      - iii. When he dies, rises, and ascends, he does it for us.

C. So these men see Jesus in his glory and now they hear of him and his grace.

1. And, again, this is precisely what we need if we're going to regain perspective. We need to get up on a mountain alone with God and pray. And we need to see Jesus in his glory, and meditate afresh on the great grace that flows to us from his accomplishment at Calvary.

### (3) What They Did

A. But now we shift from considering what's going on with Jesus here and we start to look at how these disciples of his respond to it all. What did they do? And here, as we might expect, is where things begin to go awry. Somehow these guys always seem to get it wrong.

B. So Peter, as he is prone to do, speaks up in reaction to all this: *"Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents . . ." (v. 33).*

1. "Let's just stay here. I like the glory. I like the mountaintop. I don't want to go back down and deal with the cross and shadow and the valley and all this."
2. But he's missed it. As I say in the title of this sermon, we get perspective *"from the peak"* — but it's *"for the valley."*
  - a. In other words: We go up, perhaps ironically, so that we can come back down.
  - b. We get away with God so we can get fresh vision of who he is and what he's done and what he's doing, so we can regain perspective, so that we can come back down and carry on in valley of the shadow with newfound light and hope.

C. Oswald Chambers, reflecting on this transfiguration chain of events gets at this very point quite masterfully when he writes the following: *"We have all experienced times of exaltation on the mountain, when we have seen things from God's perspective and have wanted to stay there. But God will never allow us to stay there. The true test of our spiritual life is in exhibiting the power to descend from the mountain. If we only have the power to go up, something is wrong. It is a wonderful thing to be on the mountain with God, but a person only gets there so that he may later go down and lift up the demon-possessed people in the valley (see Mark 9:14-18). We are not made for the mountains, for sunrises, or for the other beautiful attractions in life— those are simply intended to be moments of inspiration. We are made for the valley and the ordinary things of life, and that is where we have to prove our stamina and strength. Yet our spiritual selfishness always wants repeated moments on the mountain. We feel that we could talk and live like perfect angels, if we could only stay on the mountaintop. Those times of exaltation are exceptional and they have their meaning in our life with God, but we must beware to prevent our spiritual selfishness from wanting to make them the only time" (Utmost, October 1).* We may get perspective from the peak, but it's for the valley.

### (3) The Lasting Impact

## “Something More Sure”

- A. For these disciples, of course, while they were obviously quite confused at first, it becomes clear later that this perspective they were given from the peak with Jesus really sustained them when things got hard.
- B. It's interesting. Peter would refer to this whole transfiguration incident later in his second epistle (cf. [2 Pet. 1:16-21](#)), when he's nearing the very end of his life and ministry.
  - 1. And though his words are a bit hard to understand at points, he says in essence that on that mountain God really showed us something incredible and we never forgot it. We saw the glory of Jesus. We heard of his grace.
  - 2. But he goes on to say (and this is the essential point): though we (you and I) have not had such an experience, though we weren't there on the Mount of Transfiguration, we are not at a disadvantage.
    - a. Why? Because we have the Bible.
      - i. “You have something even ‘[more sure](#)’ than this experience we had,” he seems to be saying. “You have the ‘[word \[of God\], to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts](#)’ ([2 Pet 1:19](#)).”
- C. So what does this mean for us?
  - 1. Well, it means that if you want to regain perspective now, though you can't go up on a mountain with Jesus in the way that Peter did . . .
  - 2. . . . you can get alone with him, “go up” with him, and pray and open your Bibles.
    - a. And as you do that, you too will see his glory, you too will hear of his grace, and you too will find fresh perspective and be kept through the hard times, as you inevitably pass through the dark valleys of this life.
- D. That's what I'm praying God does with all of us as we're literally up here with Jesus on this mountain.

## Up Next . . .

- A. And so now, as we transition to having Michael and Danielle shar with us, this is essentially the prompt I gave them. I just asked them to . . .
  - 1. Identify one place in Scripture where you can say God used it to really help you gain perspective with him “on the mountain” before coming back down into the valley to face the hard stuff of life.
  - 2. Share that text with us. Read it. Help us understand what it means in general. Then tell us what it's meant to you personally, how it's helped, how it's sustained you. Then, finally, show us how it might apply to us as well.