

# Down From the Mountain

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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We've all heard of the Mount of Transfiguration, and most of us know what happened when Jesus descended from the mountain. But is there another way to view that story? Our study today comes from the ninth chapter of the book of Mark. The ministry of Jesus was drawing to a close, with perhaps less than six months remaining before His crucifixion. To prepare His disciples for this great disappointment, Jesus had unfolded to them the events which shortly would come to pass. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Mark 8:31. This was the first of three such attempts to make them ready for the ordeal ahead.

He then said, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.....For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father and with the holy angels." Mark 8:34, 38. And Jesus followed by stating, "And He said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.'" Mark 9:1. In Matthew's account it reads, "Assuredly I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Matthew 16:28. What did He mean by these words? Did He intend for them to understand that some would remain alive until the glorious Second Advent? These words were spoken to those who lived 2,000 years ago and have long been dead.

No, the clear meaning of Jesus' words become evident when we read the next few verses, describing what took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. What Jesus meant was that some would see a representation of His coming, depicted in what they would see on the mountain top. We read, "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus." Mark 9:2-4. The story is also told in Matthew 17:1-3 and Luke 9:28-31, verses from which we'll compare as we study. This was the Second Coming in miniature.

Luke adds the thought that He went up the mountain for the purpose of praying, and it was "as He prayed" that He was "transfigured." This word forms the basis of the identification of this site as the "Mount of Transfiguration." It is a word which is used by both Matthew and Mark in

describing this event, and is the word “metamorphosis” in English. It’s the same word which Paul uses to describe the change that occurs in the Christian life when we are “transformed by the renewing of our minds.” Romans 12:2. Jesus’ appearance was “changed dramatically.”

As yet, we don’t know for certain where this took place, the Bible simply describing it as a “high mountain apart.” Many ideas have been put forth as to where this was, but without confirmation. It’s not important to know where it was, but it is important to grasp the message that was taught by what happened there.

As Jesus was praying, His appearance began to change. Luke says, “the appearance of His face was altered,” which means literally “became different, or another.” Matthew says, “His face shone as the sun.” The Gospel writers tell us that it was not only the face of Jesus that became brilliant, but His apparel as well. Matthew says that “His clothes became as white as the light.” Luke says, “His robe became white and *glistening*,” a word which means “to flash as lightning;” *exastrapto*, literally “out of (“ex”) star (“astra”) light (“apto”).” Fittingly, a word from this same root is used by Jesus in Luke 17:24 when He describes His coming. “For as the *lightning that flashes (astra)* out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.” Mark says that His clothing was white “like snow.”

Remember that Jesus introduced the thought of His coming (Mark 8:38) as being “in the glory of His Father.” This glory is what was prefigured by the lightning-like brilliance of His appearance on the mountain, both by His face and clothing. Oh what glory will be revealed on that Day when Jesus returns! When Jesus came the first time, the glory of His splendor was hidden, that the glory of His character might be predominant. Mortal eyes cannot withstand the glory of His being and so in mercy, that we might know Him and fellowship with Him, He covered His brightness. “Truly You are God, Who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior!” Isaiah 45:15. This was typified by the wilderness sanctuary, appearing very drab from the outside with its outer covering of badger skins, but all gold inside.

Concerning His first coming, the prophet went on to say, “He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is *no beauty* that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Isaiah 53:2, 3.

This will not be the case when He returns! In contrast to His first advent, when He came with “*no beauty*,” then our “eyes will see the King *in His beauty*.” Isaiah 33:17. Then His glory will shine forth as the midday sun. Human imagination cannot fathom the glory and splendor of that event. “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.” Psalm 50:2, 3.

On the Mount of Transfiguration there was a pre-figuration, a miniaturization of Christ’s return in glory. It was in this sense that some standing there “would not taste death till they see the

kingdom of God present with power.” On the mountain appeared two individuals, heroes of God’s kingdom in the past, champions of God’s cause, Moses and Elijah. These two personify the “two witnesses” of Revelation 11, who “have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy” (that refers to Elijah) and “have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues” (that refers to Moses). Revelation 11:6.

Moses was there to represent those who fall asleep in death but are brought from the tombs when He comes back. Elijah was there to represent all who will be alive when Jesus returns and not fall victim to the grave. We know that Moses died; the story is told in Deuteronomy 34. We’re given a glimpse of the dispute that took place when Christ (“Michael”) raised Moses in the short book of Jude, verse 9. Elijah was taken to heaven by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire without dying. Moses and Elijah represent the two classes, the resurrected and the translated, that will “meet in the air” at Christ’s glorious return.

Mark says that they “were talking with Jesus.” What was the topic of their conversation? Luke tells us that they spoke to Him of His “decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Normally, death is looked upon as enemy, not an achievement. But in the case of Jesus’ death, it most certainly would be an accomplishment. It would be the greatest victory ever won!

The word “decease” in Luke’s Gospel has an interesting background. It is the Greek word *exodos*, from which we derive the word “exodus.” It means literally a “way out.” Moses and Elijah spoke to Jesus about His *exodos*, His “way out.” Could we say that these two were well chosen to speak to Jesus on that topic? Moses had his exodus, His way out of Egypt. Elijah had his exodus on the fiery chariot. They were qualified to encourage Jesus concerning His exodus, His way out. I’m sure they had uplifting words to share with their Master as to the perfection of the plan of salvation; that no matter what the cost, the integrity of God’s throne in Christ’s obedience and sacrifice were well invested.

This event was also to encourage the disciples, past and present, as to the glory of the final outcome of life’s battles. Though it might be easy to become discouraged on the dusty and thorn-infested paths of life, they and we need to keep our eyes focused on the ultimate magnificence of the final conclusion. Don’t give up now! Jesus is coming! Given the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, we believe that event to be “at the very doors.”

Like so many other “mountaintop experiences,” this one came to its end and the eye-dazzling brilliance faded into the pale moonlight. “Suddenly” Peter, James and John “saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.” Mark 9:8. Many a sermon has been crafted from that verse!

As they came down from the mountain, they were confronted by a crowd and a problem. “And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. And He asked the scribes, ‘What are you discussing with them?’” Then one from the multitude answered and said, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever he seizes him, he throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and

becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast him out, but they could not.’ He answered him and said, ‘O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.’” Mark 9:13-19.

This child was possessed with the devil, as is clear from the narrative. The concerned father had brought him to the disciples, but they were unable to do anything to help the poor boy, which no doubt led to the scribes casting disparaging remarks. According to the story, Jesus asked the scribes what the problem was, but apparently they now became silent and had nothing to say to the Master. It is the father of the boy who speaks up and relates the problem. And it was a big problem. This young boy was so tormented by the devil that he seemed bent on self-destruction. He had no control over himself but was left to the whims of a cruel and evil spirit.

“Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’” Mark 9:20-22.

I’m sure the father had exhausted every means at his disposal. No doubt frequent and expensive trips to the doctors had been made, without success. The disciples of Jesus had tried but couldn’t do anything to help his son. Now Jesus has come and the father puts forth his final plea for help. “If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

Jesus hears the pitiful prayer of this concerned father and sees the need wallowing at His feet. But before He answers the man’s prayer, He wants to gently probe into the caliber of the man’s faith. That little word “if” that prefaces the prayer speaks to Jesus’ heart. “If You can do anything.” Was the man willing to recognize that he was in the presence of the Creator God of the universe, the One Who speaks and planets and stars come into being? Was he willing to acknowledge that Jesus is God Almighty and the devil and his angels must give way to His commands?

We don’t condemn the desperate man, but we have to wonder if later he wished his choice of words were different. Beginning a prayer to the Omnipotent One, the One Mighty in Power with the words, “If you can do anything” is myopic to say the least. How about our prayers and our attitude to the Almighty? Are we ever like this man? Do we ever approach Him with the same sentiment, “If You can do anything,…” We need to recognize that He can do all things. We need to approach Him knowing that “nothing is too hard for the Lord.” There is nothing beyond His capacity. In His wisdom, our prayer may not be answered exactly the way we think it should, but one day we’ll confess that He did everything perfectly.

There may be a reason why God answered our prayer in a different way than the way we, in our shortsightedness, saw fit. But whatever the case, let us settle it in our minds that “He is able” to do anything and everything. We should approach Him with confidence in His ability, leaving aside all “if’s” as to His power, but with humility ask that our prayer be answered according to His

omniscient will. A young woman applied for a job for which she seemed perfectly qualified. Palomar college had an opening in the student finance department and this young woman had done the very same thing in a community college in another location. She prayed about the job, but it was given to someone else. There were tears, frustrations and questions. But then, in what seems now like a short period of time, an opening was created in the faculty of the history department and she was invited to teach the subject she loved. God gave my wife Yvonne strength (having had multiple sclerosis now for 42 years) to teach for 29 years before she retired last year. Thank the Lord He answers our prayers according to His will!

Because the man expressed his plea with a portion of doubt, Jesus turned the question around. The man had said, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus now directed the question back to him saying, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Verse 23. Jesus is asking the man, "Do you believe that I am the Messiah, the Christ? Do you believe that I am Yahweh in the flesh, the great "I Am" of Scripture?" This was the same type of searching investigation that probed the depth of Peter's love after the resurrection, asking three times, "Do you love Me?" Sometimes God's questions are for us to look deeply into our hearts and see things that we might otherwise miss. It was for his own good that Jesus responded to this man and to Peter the way He did.

Remember that in the Bible "to believe" and "to have faith" are translations of the same word, *pistevo*. The man now recognized the immaturity of his faith but, to his credit, he was not willing to relinquish this opportunity to receive help for his son. There was no other place to turn; there was no other place to go. There's good news in this story. I hope all of us can see this picture within the account: the Lord looks kindly on those who have persistent and persevering desire as this man did, and as the Syro-Phoenician lady who "begged for the crumbs that fall from the table" for her child. This was Jacob-like tenacity that would not let go without God's blessing. In a humble and honest confession of his imperfect faith, he "cried out and said with tears, 'Lord I believe; help my unbelief.'" Verse 24.

Take note, friends. Jesus hears prayers like this! Do you feel that your faith is weak and shallow? Don't give up! "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." Psalm 103:13, 14. But don't let that become an excuse to remain in the condition of immature faith. Ask Jesus to increase your faith. Don't forget that spending time with God in prayer and Bible study daily is the prescription for increasing faith. We've all been granted "the measure of faith." Romans 12:3. It is up to us to take advantage of the opportunities to allow our faith to grow and become strong, to have the "faith of Jesus." He wants us to be victorious in His name as we wrestle against the carnal nature and against the powers of fallen angels. Wielding the shield of faith, God wants us to be more than conquerors and to stand in the day of battle.

"When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to him, 'You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him, and enter him no more!' Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so

that many said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." Verses 25-27. What a day of rejoicing that was for the father, the boy and the rest of their family!

Every part of this story is true and contains valuable lessons to consider, which we've done, but I'd like to look at this narrative from a slightly different perspective. I believe it tells the story of Jesus, the whole story of Jesus, in a nutshell. There He was, on top of a mountain high and distant, where His glory shone forth in a brilliance and brightness that it could only be compared with lightning, the sun and new-fallen snow. His clothing dazzled with glistening radiance. This can represent Jesus prior to the incarnation, before He took upon Himself human flesh and hid His glory. In His prayer, Jesus referred to this. "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." John 17:5. This was Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But there was a problem "down below." Things were chaotic. Mankind was in trouble, being influenced by demonic and destructive powers, represented by the condition of the little boy. That's what the devil desires for humanity; total and complete annihilation. This little boy's pitiful existence as he foamed at the mouth, as he cast himself into the water or the fire, as he gnashed his teeth and wallowed about represents the lot of lost mankind. He stands for fallen humanity, powerless to resist the cruel influences of Satan. Where could help be found? Nowhere, but in Jesus. All other avenues; all other attempts would prove futile and worthless. But there was One Who could restore order. The Christ Who came down, the Eternal Jared ("Jared" means "the one who comes down") has the power to rebuke the evil spirits and bring healing and life.

But note this: the devil doesn't give up easy, and even when Christ gives the command to depart, there is a violent and turbulent struggle. There is "convulsion." The word in the original means "to tear or lacerate." In the Bible it is used exclusively of the destructive activity of devils on humans. In the KJV it is translated the evil spirit "rent him sore." This particularly represents Satan's last ditch effort to destroy humanity in the days just before Jesus comes back. This is the fulfillment of what John wrote in Revelation when he reported, "The devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time," and "the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:12, 17. Before he retreats, the devil "convulses" us greatly in a last desperate attempt to destroy. Don't be surprised if it seems like your life is mirrored in the experience of this boy, being tossed about like a rag doll. Satan is doing his best to discourage you, because he knows his time is short.

There is good news! Jesus is more powerful than the devil, more powerful than any evil habit into which he might have led you. He is your Savior, your God. Cast aside any "if's" as to His ability to heal and restore you. He is able!