

# **Luke: The Mountaintop Experience**

## **Sermon 2-24-2019**

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#### **Luke 9:28-36**

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

#### **Message:**

We’ve all used the word and phrase, “Mountaintop Experience.” We might say to someone “It was a mountaintop experience.” Many of us know what someone means when they say that or when we use the phrase ourselves, but let’s tease that out a little bit. What is a mountaintop experience?



It can literally be on top of a mountain.



You climb to the top of a mountain and feel the awe, wonder and majestic nature of God's creation.



Less literally, it can be other majestic scenes of the world like a view of a beautiful sunset or the vastness of the ocean.



It can be both the experience, Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro when I was at the 2014 World Cup, and



a mountaintop experience can be the view. This was this past summer when Christine and I were in Florence, Italy. This is a view of Florence from a mountain. A mountaintop experience can be a life experience



. The exuberant joy of finding the love of your life and in one event committing your life to them. A mountaintop experience can also be experiencing something majestic



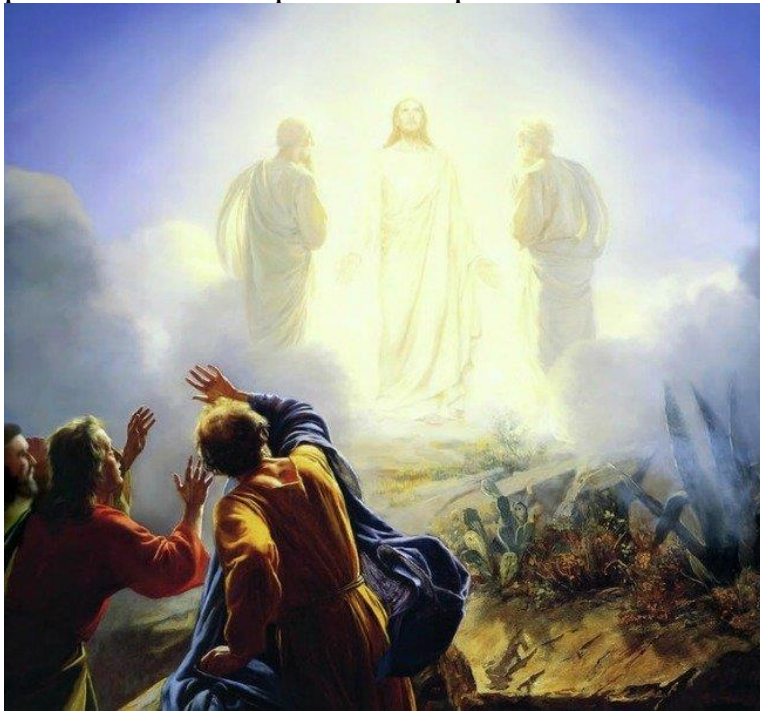
. This is the inside of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in Rome. This is the only place on our entire European trip that when we walked inside, I couldn't help myself, and audibly said, "WOW!!" My breath was taken away by the majestic nature of this Basilica. But you don't always have to go far away or to an exotic location for a mountaintop experience. We can have mountaintop experiences spiritually speaking. It can be when you committed your life to Christ or



when you had an amazing worship experience with others and the Lord.



It can be among the body of believers as you study the word of God or as you pray. These can be just as powerful or more powerful experiences than the other experiences mentioned.



Peter, James and John had a mountaintop experience that was unforgettable, yet they didn't know what to do with it. Let's examine this experience that we read about in Luke, “<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.” Pay attention to what happens in those first two verses. They went up to the mountain. What did they do? They prayed. And while they were praying, Jesus' appearance physically changes. Remember back to Moses in Exodus. When Moses went up to Mt. Sinai, “...the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire

on top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.” Later in Exodus 34, Moses brings a new set of tablets that have the ten commandments. When he came down, “... from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.” And then Moses eventually covers his face when he speaks to the people after speaking with the Lord because his face was too bright and frightening for the people to listen. In this scene with Jesus, it mimics Moses. Jesus prays with the Lord and His appearance is so great that it is overpowering and frightening. In other words, it’s to imply to some readers in the ancient world that Jesus is like Moses and even greater than Moses. This scene confirms that Jesus is with God.

And then guess what happens next? “<sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” What is “glory” as it is referred to here? I can’t say with certainty, but I think it’s a heavenly state. Moses and Elijah appear in glory. Moses represents the law in this scene. Elijah represents the prophets. So this scene strengthens Jesus’ authority to the apostles and to us, the reader. Jesus speaks with God and the greatest figures of Israelite history. Jesus is master over the sea. In Luke 8, Jesus calms the storm just as Moses controlled the red sea with his staff. Jesus conquered the wilderness in Luke 4 in the temptation with the devil just as Moses conquered the wilderness before the people entered the Promise land. Jesus also is like Elijah in multiplying the loaves of bread earlier in Luke 9, cleansing lepers in Luke 5 and raising the widow’s son, Nain, from the dead in Luke 7. When Jesus foretells his death in our previous passage, he says, “Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” In other words, Jesus’ eventual death will not end with his death, He will enter glory with Moses and Elijah, the resurrection and eventual ascension into heaven, is glory. At the end of this passage, like Moses on Mt. Sinai, “...a cloud came and overshadowed them [Peter, James and John]; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.” Now the text doesn’t tell us explicitly who that voice is, but it’s implied. It’s the same voice that said to Jesus upon his baptism, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Now the Father speaks to the disciples affirming the belief that Jesus is the Messiah. Just as Moses

and Elijah had received special words from the Lord, now the disciples, with Jesus, received these same special words.

I find it interesting how Peter reacts in the middle of this scene. “<sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’ —not knowing what he said.” Like the people of Israel, they were frightened by the radiant light of God and didn’t know what to do with it. So Peter decides to find a way to cover it up by creating dwellings or homes for them. It reminds me of an experience that I had many years ago. In high school, I was the leader of a Bible Study of over a hundred fellow teenagers. We decided to have a worship night at my home church one Friday night. And we invited in some other adult leaders to lead us in a night of worship and teaching. These young adults came from a more charismatic background. As you can imagine, as a young Christian leader, I was unaware of the breadth of Christianity, but I knew that I wanted more of the Spirit of God. And so during this worship night, many of my fellow teens joined me in worshipping the Lord. The worship was so intense and the Spirit so strong that things started to happen that I didn’t expect. These young adult speakers and leaders started to manifest the Spirit by speaking in tongues. I can’t explain to you exactly what happened because the experience was truly unexplainable, but I’ll try. They prayed over me and the Spirit came upon me so intensely that I started to speak in tongues. Now, that might frighten some of you as you hear me say that. And I can understand why. Because it may be so foreign from your experience of God. But I can tell you, that the experience was wonderful, blissful and maybe even glorious. Being in full surrender with the Lord was awesome. I felt like the people in Acts 2 at Pentecost. It was an incredible and mountaintop experience. All I can say is that it was good. Now, I’m not saying everyone needs to speak in tongues or that it is a marker of greater holiness as some Christian movements might claim. I’m just telling you that my experience was positive and good. What I didn’t realize until a few days later was that my fellow teenage believers were scared in that moment where they witnessed me speaking in tongues. They didn’t know how to make sense of it. Is it from the devil? Is it bad? What do we make of this? How does it strengthen and build-up the body of believers? I didn’t really have answers for those questions because I had never experienced anything like it before. And I think it was the same for Peter, he didn’t know what to do with what he was seeing and witnessing, so he decides to offer to build them homes. And like-wise at the end of the passage, Luke tells us, “And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.” There is no indication

here or anywhere else in the gospel that the transfiguration somehow transformed or informed their experience with Jesus.

What I will say though, is that I imagine this experience with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, opened the hearts of Peter, James and John to similar experiences in the future. If you fast forward to Acts, if Peter, James and John did not have this transfiguration experience, would they have been as open to the experience at Pentecost? Would they have welcomed the miraculous signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit in the early church? Maybe. But I think this transfiguration experience solidifies the value of such charismatic and mountaintop experiences. I can't say that the worship night where I spoke in tongues dramatically changed the way that I live my walk with Jesus, but what I can say is that it opened me up to more and other such powerful and unexplainable experiences such as healings and miraculous signs and wonders of God. It opened me up to unexplainable and glorious actions of God. I became more familiar with the power of the Spirit like I had never experienced before. Therefore, I'm open to more of those experiences if God so chooses. It's not my intention to conjure or create those experiences, but to openly receive them when they come. If you put yourself in Peter's shoes, could you truly say that you would have known what to do with this experience? How to welcome it? How to react to it? Most of us probably would be just as clueless. Our first response might be like Peter and might be like the Israelites, cover up the light and brightness, it's hurting my eyes.

In Acts 4, the disciples and their friends start to pray for boldness in the church. They prayed for healing, for signs and for wonders. "When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." I know such an experience such as the transfiguration and the movement of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost might frighten us at Providence, but I wonder how if Providence had more of these unexplainable movements of God how it would embolden our witness? We don't want such miraculous and wonderful experiences for our vanity or bragging rights or boasting of holiness, but so that we can declare the word of God with all the more boldness. At the same time, I don't want to be those people who are only recalling past powerful experiences of God as if it is in some bygone past. I want us, I believe God wants us, to be a people that are experiencing these same miraculous stories today and tomorrow. That we don't just look back at a past mountaintop experience or pictures of a mountaintop experiences and say, "Well that was nice back then." I want us to be an alive, living, breathing people of the word of God and be able to testify to the miraculous work of the Spirit in our lives today and tomorrow. That we can be like Peter and the disciples who can't stop speaking about the mighty works of God. I want us to expect God to do these mighty works among us today. That we would glow like



Moses and Jesus to the point where those around us can't help but recognize the Spirit of the living God in us.

So how do we do this? How do such great acts and movements happen? Study the Word. Know the Word. AND Pray the Word. What did Jesus do before this all happened? He prayed. What did the disciples do before Pentecost? They prayed. If we want God to move in mighty ways in our midst and to experience the miracles, signs and wonders as we read about in the Bible, we must study the Word and pray. We see this all over Acts and the early church. After Jesus' ascension, "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer..." After Pentecost and the conversion of three thousand, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." In Acts 4, "When they had PRAYED, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." I'm curious what would happen if the church would pray more. I'm curious if we would have experiences like this transfiguration if we devoted ourselves to prayer. If miracles, signs and wonders would happen in and through Providence, do you think people would opt to sleep-in on Sunday morning rather than come to worship? If miracles, signs and wonders were happening in and through Providence, would people opt for sporting events and TV over life at the church? See, it's not that we have to come up with more gimmicks, it's that we're not steeped enough in the Spirit. Our prayer life is weak. My prayer life is weak. And therefore, our witness is weak. I guarantee you, if miracles, signs and wonders were happening at Providence, these seats would be filled. Not that that's the reason we do it. We pray more fervently and more devotedly because we want the Spirit of the almighty and living God to bring His Kingdom to this earth. We want to see the captives set free. We want to see people healed. We want people to experience the sweetness of His mercy and the abundance of His grace. We want people to come to know the amazing life and salvation in Jesus Christ. Prompted by my conversations with the Acts Bible Study group, we're going to engage in an experiment starting in a few weeks. On March 10, my mentor, Galen Hackman, is going to be preaching on the Lord's prayer. That Sunday, I am inviting you to join me in devoting yourself to prayer for 40 days and see what happens. Why 40 days? In the Bible we see the number 40 used as a time of testing or trial. For 40 days Moses went up to Mt. Sinai to hear from the Lord. For 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus performed "convincing proofs" to the disciples and to the people. And so we are going to spend 40 days, starting on March 10, praying. I'll be giving a weekly prayer calendar that will help guide you in your prayer life. I'm going to invite you to pray those things. And if you're looking to be stretched even further, I challenge you to pray for at least one hour a day. I'm excited about this, because I'm anticipating that we're going to see miracles, signs

and wonders in those 40 days. And in fact, I'm going to ask you to share with us in worship, what you've witnessed as miracles, signs and wonders because of your increased prayer life. So be ready to share. My great hope is that we will all experience multiple mountaintop experiences by the power of the living God. So Providence Church, pray with me for wonders, signs and miracles of the almighty God. Amen.