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Next week I am heading overseas to eastern Europe where I will be teaching at Moldova Bible Seminary. It will be my 21st year to teach there and I still remember my first time. I had no idea what to expect. What would the students be like? What was this school like? It had been since college that I had been on a transatlantic flight and if you know me, I like to travel. I was so incredibly excited to go and experience it all. The flight was long, and back then you didn't have your own little TV, you had one big screen at the front of the cabin and a place at your seat to plug in the headphones to hear the movie. You had no choice but the preselected movie to watch. But everything about it was so exciting to me. Going through customs made me anxious. Back then, Americans had to buy a visa to get into Moldova and I'd never done that. So much to take in and experience for the first time. I'll never forget how I felt on that trip. Now after 21 years and probably about 26-27 trips because I've gone some in the summer, Moldova has become so familiar to me. I know how to use public transportation on my own, order at a restaurant, and how to function in the society. Needless to say, the new has long worn off. I still love going but it has become so familiar, maybe even ordinary.

I think about that kind of feeling as I think about this passage of Scripture today because in this Scripture, we will see the majesty, the glory, the reality of who Jesus really is. And sometimes we may lose sight of that, and we make Jesus too familiar, too ordinary, even non-special. Jesus is never ordinary. When you talk with Jesus or think of Jesus or worship Jesus, do you recognize the beauty of Who He is, the incredible majestic glory of His person, the eternal nature of His existence, the weight of sacrifice He made on your behalf; the fact that death could not hold Him and that one day He will reign over the entire world bringing His kingdom to us for all eternity. Jesus is never ordinary.

Imagine these disciples who had spent three years with Him. They traveled with Him, ate with Him, saw how He looked when He got up in the morning. Sure, He was the savior of the world, but He's my friend, my traveling buddy.

The scene of today's Scripture, Matthew 17, is six days after last week's Scripture. That was the scene where Jesus asked the disciples who people were saying He was. Then He asked them: "Who do you say that I am" and Peter responded "you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Then Jesus tells them of His coming death and resurrection to which Peter objects. He tells Jesus that he, Peter, will save Him for the brutal death of the cross. Jesus says, get behind me Satan for you're thinking of man's ways not God's. The cross was His destiny and to work against that was to work against the plan of God to save the world from our sins. That evening closes with Jesus making this rather odd statement:

Matthew 16:28

28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Since we know that none of the disciples are still living and Jesus has not returned even now, what does He mean by that statement. I believe He means what happens in the next verse:

Matthew 17:1-9

1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said,

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“Get up, and do not be afraid.” 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”

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These three disciples, Jesus inner circle, went with Jesus up to the mountain where He was transfigured. The Greek word is metamorphoo which means to completely change from one thing to another. It is complete transformation. It is a sneak preview of coming attractions. Jesus is transformed into His eternal state for these few moments to give the disciples a glimpse into the future, the coming of His kingdom. You’ve been to the movies where before they start the movie, they show you 3 or 4 or 20 trailers of upcoming movies. They give you a snapshot of what that movie will be like. That’s what’s going on here.

Jesus is transformed into His heavenly existence where He isn’t reflecting the glory of God, He is radiating the glory from the inside out. His face is like the sun, His garments white as light. In Revelation there is a description of the new heaven and new earth where believers will spend all eternity and in that description is this:

Revelation 22:5

5 And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

NEXT SLIDE

This is what is in the future of every believer. Jesus will be the constant light of heaven. There will be no darkness – ever and we will reign with Him forever and ever. There will be no sorrow or pain or tears. It will not be temporary but eternal. Imagine the disciples who saw that preview of what eternity will look like. Imagine how they faced life from that point on. There is suffering here, yes, but there’s coming a day. I remember an old gospel song when I was growing up that we would often sing in church. It simply said:

What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see
When I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace
When He takes me by the hand and leads me to the promised land
What a day, glorious day that will be

Living For the Future Changes the Present

Why do you think there is so much prophecy in Scripture? It is everywhere. The story of Noah and the ark where Jesus removes His people before the judgement comes. The story of Lot who is removed from Sodom before the judgement of the Lord comes. The salvation of the Jewish people through the waters of the Red Sea. The rapture of Enoch, Elijah and Jesus Himself as a preview of our coming rapture. The details we have about what’s coming and what eternity is like is woven throughout the pages of Scripture. This life is not about this life near as much as it is about the next.

Think about how that changes the way you think, the way you live now.

2 Corinthians 4:17–18

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17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

NEXT SLIDE

Dan Stone, in his book, *The Rest of the Gospel*, uses the illustration of a line which separates the two realms of this passage. Above the line is the unseen eternal realm and below the line is the seen, temporary realm. He writes:

“As believers, you and I live below the line, but we aren’t really below-the-line people. We are of God’s kingdom. But we live in a realm of temporal appearances that differ from what God sees in the unseen and eternal. Spiritual growth is a process of replacing temporal appearances with eternal reality and living out of it.”

How does that live out practically in our lives? Some “below the line” person tells you or makes you feel that you’re inadequate, unlovable, and deserving of rejection. My discipleship in Jesus into the “above the line” eternal realm tells me the truth, which is I am more than enough, deeply loved, and fully accepted and adopted into an eternal relationship with the creator of the universe.

On the mountain that day, Jesus was transfigured and with Him were Moses and Elijah. Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets. Together they represent the old covenant, the Old Testament which pointed to the coming Messiah. On the sermon on the mount, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:17 (NASB95)

17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”

NEXT SLIDE

So, Peter sees these three and somehow knows it is Moses and Elijah with Jesus and once again, Peter thinks he has a good idea. He suggests that he will build three tabernacles, one for each of them. In Luke’s account of this scene, he adds that Peter didn’t realize what he was saying. Peter saw these three as equals. He had been raised to almost idolize Moses and Elijah. They were the heroes of the Jewish faith and now in Peter’s mind, Jesus has risen so much that He is equal with these Jewish legends. Here’s a point for Peter and maybe us also.

Sometimes We Talk Too Much and Listen too Little

I love how the Scripture details what happens next. While Peter was still speaking giving his good ideas to Jesus, it says a bright cloud appears and a voice out of the cloud said, “This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; Listen to Him.”

It’s like God is saying I’ve had enough. He interrupts Peter and I wonder the tone of voice He used. This is my beloved Son. What were you thinking making Him equal with Moses and Elijah. He, Jesus, has my complete approval. Not Moses and Elijah – Jesus. Peter, just stop talking and listen to Him, Jesus. Listen to Him.

The next time you think you have a good idea Jesus ought to consider, remember this verse.

The passage says that when they heard the voice from heaven they fell to the ground. I bet they did. Jesus told them to not be afraid and get up. When they looked up, all they saw was Jesus and we can safely assume He was back to His human self. The incredible preview into the glorious supernatural kingdom was over and in verse 9 they go down from

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the mountain. Peter wanted to build the tabernacles like the Jewish people do at the feast of tabernacle. They live in these little booths or huts for 7 days commemorating the time their forefathers spent in the wilderness, yet God was with them and provided for them. This feast of tabernacles is the only Jewish feast explicitly mentioned in the 1000 year reign of Jesus after the rapture and tribulation. It signifies the habitation of God with His people. Peter wanted to capture the glorious moment and make it last by building these shelters.

God Doesn't Want Us to Stay on the Mountain

I think I can safely say that none of us have experienced what these three disciples experienced on this day, but perhaps you've had a spiritual communion with God that was so real, maybe so emotional, exhilarating, that you wanted to bask in it forever.

I remember back when I was in a week-long pastors' conference in 1988, I was 30, and there were about 500 of us there worshipping, listening to preaching night after night, and when Thursday came, it was all a very normal night until something happened – God showed up. We didn't see Jesus or experience any kind of supernatural things but everyone in that room, immediately knew they were on Holy Ground. It was a night of profound love as the Holy Spirit brought people to places of repentance, an outpouring of His grace, and the agenda of man for the evening was discarded. It was as if God interrupted the meeting and was saying, "Jesus is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him." Now, I know some may be thinking it was just an emotional thing where some particular song was sung or the preacher told a moving sermon and everyone was emotionally moved. No, not that at all. The manifest presence of God moved on us before the first song was ever sung and 4 hours later we were all still there. It was amazing and you know what I wanted to do – stay there until Jesus came back and I could just go from there into heaven. But that's not what those experiences are all about.

Peter, James, and John came off the mountain that day and back into the valley where real life took place, but they had been strengthened in their faith. They knew there was a grander vision of God for the future that was beyond their comprehension. They had heard from God the Father Himself that Jesus was who He said He was, that He was completely approved by His father and had supreme authority, so listen to Him. They had seen the reality of the spiritual realm and what is to come. Jesus is the King of Kings. He is the center of all things. He will reign forever and ever.

As you meditate on this event in the life of Jesus, maybe you will realize that your life is so myopic – meaning you're only focused on the immediate. How can I fix this one problem that just came up? I don't have time to go to a mountain to be still and receive a grander vision of God. I never think about heaven and God's kingdom, quite frankly, because I'm too busy raising kids, helping with grandkids, paying bills, and just getting through life. I have too much going on in the temporal realm to even think of the eternal. And I will add and it's destroying you. You were made for heaven.

Who do you listen to? Maybe it's your friend, family member, pastor. You're facing a difficult situation or need to know what to do about something or you come up with your own ideas of what would be most appropriate. Maybe you think too much, talk too much, and just need to be reminded that Jesus is the Son of God – listen to Him. He knows what He is doing and seeking Him opens the doors for heaven to flow into this world through your life.

I think this scene of the transfiguration happened as an example to us that heaven is always closer than you think. Paul wrote in Ephesians we are currently seated with Christ in heavenly places. Jesus prayed let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Colossians 3:1-2 says to set your mind of things above, not on things on earth. James 4:14 says what is your life? It is even a vapor that lasts for a brief moment. In Matthew 6, Jesus said lay up your treasures in heaven where they are secure. Why would you want to lay-up treasures here where nothing is safe.

Heaven. The coming reign of Jesus. The complete defeat of Satan. The final victory. The glory. The majesty. The beauty. Is your life pointed towards heaven?