

## Down in the Valley with Jesus

### Luke 9:37-45

The incredible flight of Larry Walters, a 33-year-old Vietnam veteran and North Hollywood truck driver with no pilot or balloon training, took place on 2 July 1982. For as long as he could remember he had wanted to fly but never had the time nor money nor opportunity to be a pilot. So he spent a lot of summer afternoons sitting in his backyard in his aluminum lawn chair. He came up with what he thought was a good idea. He attached 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons to his chair, put a CB radio in his lap, tied a paper bag full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to his leg, and slung a pellet gun over his shoulder to pop the balloons when he wanted to come down.

Walters had planned to fly 300 miles into the Mojave Desert, but the balloons took him up faster than expected and the wind didn't cooperate. Larry Walters rocketed into the sky 16,000 feet above San Pedro. A few minutes later Larry radioed the ground that he was sailing across Los Angeles Harbor towards Long Beach. (He later reported that he was "so amazed by the view" that he "didn't even take one picture.") As Larry and his lawnchair drifted into the approach path to Long Beach Municipal Airport, perplexed pilots from two passing Delta and TWA airliners alerted air traffic controllers about what appeared to be an unprotected man floating through the sky in a chair.

Meanwhile, Larry, feeling cold and dizzy in the thin air three miles above the ground, shot several of his balloons with the pellet gun to bring himself back down to earth. He attempted to aim his descent at a large expanse of grass of a north Long Beach country club, but Larry came up short and ended up entangling his tethers in a set of high-voltage power lines in Long Beach about ten miles from his liftoff site. The plastic tethers protected Walters from electrocution as he dangled above the ground until firemen and utility crews could cut the power to the lines (blacking out a portion of Long Beach for twenty minutes). Larry managed to maneuver his chair over a wall, step out, and cut the chair free.

Asked why he did it, Larry answered: "Well, I wanted to see what it looked like from up there." When asked what it looked like he said, "Awesome, man!"

Why do people want to look at things from above? I don't know if I would feel close to God in a lawn chair at 16,000 feet but I do enjoy a good mountaintop experience. When you are on a mountaintop, you see how big the world is that God made and it makes you feel smaller. In the Bible, some important events took place on mountains. God provided a ram for Abraham on Mt. Moriah. He delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses on a Mt. Sinai. Elijah held his famous God-contest on Mt. Carmel. Last week we studied the Transfiguration of Jesus; it was truly a mountaintop experience for those three disciples. Peter wanted to build three shrines and stay up there and just worship.

Have you had some mountaintop experiences? Maybe you attended a retreat or camp or conference and you saw the glory of the Lord in a new way. It was such a wonderful experience you didn't want to leave. Mountaintop experiences are wonderful, but just like Jesus we have to *leave* the mountain to go *down* in the valley. Let's read about it in Luke 9:37-45.

37 Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him.

38 Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child.

39 "And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him.

40 "So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."

41 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here."

42 And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father.

43 And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples,

44 "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men."

45 But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.

As we study what happened down in this valley with Jesus 2,000 years ago, I want us to learn some important valley lessons.

As Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain, He was immediately confronted by a huge crowd of needy people. The first to catch His attention was a desperate dad who had a tormented son. That leads us to our first,

### **VALLEY LESSON #1: We're surrounded by crowds of hurting people who need our help**

The mountaintop is sweet because we commune with Jesus! But often when you return to the valley, you will be ambushed by people who have all kinds of needs. That's why we should want to be not just a mountain top church that has a great view of the glory of God, but also to always be a valley church where hurting people can come for healing.

Not surprisingly, In the Land of Israel today there are two beautiful churches built on the top of the mountain that many think was the Mount of Transfiguration. You can visit it and see dark-robed monks quietly shuffling along asking the tourists to be quiet. Meanwhile, at the foot of the mountain are thousands of people who have never entered that church.

Jesus visited the mountain, but He spent most of His time in the valley with hurting people, and so should we. It's so wonderful to gather and worship and praise Jesus. Every Sunday is a mountaintop experience for me but for the other six days of the week, God sends us out into the valley: in our homes, our neighborhoods, our jobs and we find hurting people who desperately need what

Jesus has to offer. We need to love them and accept them and introduce them to Jesus.

Before we leave this point, there's an important truth about mountaintops and valleys I don't want us to miss. Often we experience overwhelming trials in the valley immediately after a mountaintop experience. That's what happened to the three disciples who had been on the mountain with Jesus. They were confronted with an especially vile and sinister demon.

After you've had a mountaintop experience, I tend to think things are going to be smooth for a while and often before I even get home "all hell breaks loose." But I shouldn't be surprised. It happened to these disciples.

It happened to Moses. Remember that after Moses had the glorious mountaintop experience on Mt. Sinai, he came down to find the people of Israel worshipping a golden calf they had made. He was so enraged he broke all ten of the Commandments—the tablets, not the laws.

It happened to Elijah. Remember that immediately after Elijah wins over the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel where God sent down fire from heaven, Elijah then ran into the desert because Queen Jezebel threatened to behead him. The next thing you know Elijah is in the valley of depression as he sits under a juniper tree and moans, "Oh, God it's enough, just let me die."

The valley can be a tough place. But it is where God wants us to be. Are you ready to spend time in the valley? It's full of hurting people. There will be devilish problems and demonic conflict in the valley. Be prepared.

Next, I want us to consider the other nine disciples. The desperate dad complained to Jesus that his disciples had tried to help his boy, but "**they could not**," (v. 40). Back at the beginning of this chapter, Jesus had sent His disciples out and given them power and authority over all demons. I can just imagine Andrew as he walks up to the boy and says, "I can handle this." He points his finger at the tortured boy and says, "In the name of Jesus, demon, release him!" Nothing happens. He tries again, "I repeat. Demon, in the name of Jesus, come out of him!!" He looks at his finger as if to ask, "Is this thing loaded?"

Phillip pushes him aside, "Here, Andrew, let me handle this." He tries—no success. Nathaniel tries—no success. Matthew tries. He fails. Here was a hopeful father who brought his troubled son to the disciples of Jesus and they couldn't help. What an indictment against them! "**They could not**." Jesus was speaking to the nine disciples as well as to the crowd when He called them a "**faithless and perverse generation**" in verse 41.

Here is:

## **VALLEY LESSON #2: Faithless disciples are powerless to help a hurting world.**

How many times does this happen today? I fear that multitudes of hurting people come to the church and are hopeful that the disciples of Jesus, the church, can help them and many go away disappointed. How many times has a couple on the verge of divorce come to a church, seeking help? They come and depart disappointed. They could say, "*I brought my sick marriage to the church for healing—but they could not.*" How many times has a broken hearted person

struggling with emotional and physical abuse come to a church and said, “*I brought my battered heart to church for healing—but they could not.*” Those words “**they could not**” keep echoing in my mind.

There are millions of Americans who claim to believe in Jesus but they don't attend church because they feel the church doesn't meet their needs. There are thousands of homes surrounding our church building. There must be many struggling people who just need Jesus. As the church, the disciples of Jesus, we had better sit up and pay attention. We must make sure we are a church that *accepts* hurting people and is willing to *help* hurting people. But we can't do it in our own strength. And we can't do it just with our programs. We need the power of the Holy Spirit. I thank God for the caring people in our church. But we must realize only Jesus can help someone who is in need. The one resource we have as the church that secular service organizations do not have is Jesus Christ. That's the key. Jesus said, “... **apart from me, you can do NOTHING,**” (John 15:5). And “**You will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit comes on you,**” (Acts 1:8).

When are the disciples of Jesus and the church of Jesus defective? When there is no filling of the Holy Spirit, no presence and power of Jesus.

Jesus said, “**Bring your son here,**” (v. 41). And in verse 42, “**And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him.**”

Physical suffering *can* be caused by demonic control but that is not always the case. Many times the New Testament records Jesus cast out demons *and* healed the sick. This boy's agony was demon-induced. The mean spirit caused him to have violent convulsions, while screaming and foaming at the mouth (v. 39). Matthew reports the demon made the boy fall into the fire and into the water.

Demons are invisible evil spirits who are determined to cause us misery. Our modern world often writes off demon activity as some old magic imagined by pre-scientific people. But just because most people today do not believe that demons exist does not mean they are unreal.

One of my favorite authors is C. S. Lewis. One of the books he wrote is *The Screwtape Letters*. The book contains fictional letters that a head demon named Screwtape, writes to his nephew Wormwood, giving him instructions on how to best torment a his assigned victim. In one letter Screwtape writes, “The fact that demons are predominately *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that, he therefore cannot believe in you.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*).

Angelic and demonic spirits are invisible to the naked eye. You can't see these spirits with any instrument except the Word of God.

The devil has a plan. Paul tells us in (Eph 6:11 NIV), “**Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.**” What is the devil's scheme?

**VALLEY LESSON #3: The devil and his demons try to prevent people from coming to Jesus.**

At the very moment the boy was brought before the Jesus, the demon caused a severe convulsion. It wasn't just a coincidence. The main purpose of Satan and his fallen angels is to keep you from drawing close to Jesus. The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon writes:

As soon as ever the devil perceived that Christ was near he began to rend and tear his poor victim—like a bad tenant whose lease is out, he hates the Landlord, and so he does all the damage he can, because he is evicted. Often just before men are converted, they are worse than ever; there is an unusual display of their desperate wickedness, for then the devil has great wrath, now that his time is short.

For Satan, JOB #1 is keeping you from Jesus. In just a few minutes we'll be offering an invitation for people to come to Jesus Christ and this is a moment of great spiritual warfare. Just watch, the devil will use anything to distract people during the invitation; your stomach will growl; someone will drop a hymnal; others will start gathering up their stuff and getting ready to leave; all kinds of distractions occur.

That's Satan's desire—to keep you from coming to Jesus. Satan doesn't want you to develop intimacy and fellowship with Jesus. One day Jesus will throw Satan's entire operation into the bottomless pit. But until then, the devil is at work trying to keep people from coming to Jesus.

Finally, let's focus on Jesus. Can't you just picture Jesus spreading His arms open as He gives the invitation? He says, "Bring him to ME. Come just as you are." Dr. Luke simply says, "**Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father.**" The crowd must have grown quiet because it says in verse 43, "**And they were all amazed at the majesty of God.**"

Here are two quick valley lessons:

#### **VALLEY LESSON #4: Spiritual burdens are lifted by Jesus.**

Did you bring some burdens here today? You may have a sick child, a sick marriage, a sick heart, or a sick checkbook. Do you hear Jesus saying, "Bring your problem to me?" He sees your need and He cares. Will you cast all your cares upon Him today? He cares for you.

Someone sent me an email joke about a group of kids in a Catholic school lunchroom. There were apples on a table with a sign reading, "ONLY TAKE ONE APPLE—GOD IS WATCHING." On the next table there were chocolate chip cookies. One little boy had scribbled a note that said, "Take all the cookies you want--God is watching the apples." Thankfully, God can watch over apples and cookies at the same time, and He can watch over you and me and everyone else in this world at the same moment! He sees you. He knows your pain, and He wants to lift your burden.

#### **VALLEY LESSON #5: The problem lack of power is solved by the cross of Christ, which is the power of the gospel.**

We can't leave this incident without noticing this final lesson. Verse 43 says, "**But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His**

**disciples, 'Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.'**"

Jesus again teaches about the cross. He reminds them of the events He had told them about earlier in verse 22, "**The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.**" Now He says that He will be betrayed. On the night it would happen Jesus told them that one of them would be the betrayer. But for now they could not understand it.

Do we understand it? The death and resurrection of Jesus is the power of God to save. Paul says in Romans 1:16, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**" And again in 1 Cor. 1:18, "**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**"

The Good News the world is dying to hear is that even though your life is messed up, Jesus saves. He opens His arms and says, "Bring your burdens, your pain, and your problems to me."

Remember Larry Walter? Although his flight in the lawn chair brought him instant fame, it never proved very lucrative for him. He was paid a few hundred dollars here and there for television appearances and made a little money as a motivational speaker. Not much else in life worked out for Larry, either — he broke up with his girlfriend of fifteen years, his speaking career didn't pan out, and he worked only sporadically as a security guard. Finally about ten years later on 6 October 1993, Larry hiked to one of his favorite spots in Angeles National Forest and put a bullet through his heart.

Imagine how his life could have been different if someone had loved him enough to bring him to Jesus. And as the Body of Christ living in the valley, we bring people to Jesus by loving them and sharing the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised to give us life. Jesus is the one thing worth living for and worth dying for.

Do you know Jesus today?