

INTRODUCTION

There is a true story of 33-year-old truck driver Larry Walters who one day was sitting in his lawn chair in his backyard wishing he could fly. 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 ordinary old aluminum lawn chair. He came up with what he thought was a good idea. He hooked 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 BB gun over his shoulder to pop the balloons when he wanted to come down. He expected his lawn chair to lift off and climb a couple of hundred feet over his neighborhood. But instead he shot up 11,000 feet right through the approach corridor to the Los Angeles International Airport. When the police finally rescued him with a helicopter, and 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 11,000 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. Perhaps you’ve 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. Nobody wants to come down from the mountaintop. Mountaintop experiences are wonderful, but you have to be sure you *leave* the mountain to go *down* in the valley with Jesus.

Luke 9:37-45. “The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.’ ‘O unbelieving and perverse generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.’ Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, ‘Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.’ But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.”

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

I. A DESPERATE DAD “*I begged your disciples to cast him out ...*”

As Jesus came down from the mountain, He was confronted with a huge crowd of needy people. The first to catch his attention was a desperate dad who had a tormented son. A picture is worth at least ten thousand words; so let’s take a look a Renaissance painting illustrating this event.



Raphael's "Transfiguration"



Inset

It’s called “Transfiguration” by Raphael, one of my favorite artists. It was painted in 1517 and was Raphael’s last work before he died on the day of his 37th birthday. Raphael ignored spatial limitations to portray the full story of the Transfiguration on one canvas. You see a shining Jesus in the center, floating on air to convey His Divinity. On the left side is Elijah, clutching his prophetic mantle. Moses is on the right holding a tablet of stone. On the next level you see the three disciples, Peter, James and John, cringing in fear and shielding their eyes from the brilliant light. Then on the bottom level, Raphael has shown what was happening down in the valley. The other nine disciples are on the bottom left—surprisingly, they all look like middle-aged Italian men! (Raphael often painted faces of actual people into his works.) There is a disciple in front reading a book as if he is searching for a medical cure (books with bindings were still a millennia away from Jesus’ time but we’ll forgive Raphael that mistake.) A very sinister looking Judas is seen at the back of the disciples. The others are pointing to the tortured boy or to Jesus on the mountain. On the bottom right is the mother, son, and father. Let’s take a closer look at the scene. Raphael took pains to paint careful details here. The miserable boy is being restrained by his father. He has a crazed expression, with foam trickling down his chin. His body and feet are twisted in a painful contortion. But the look on the face of the father says it all. His face reveals desperation and frustration. He is desperate for someone to help his son, but at this point, he is showing disappointed frustration at the failure of the disciples. Raphael has brilliantly captured

the overwhelming contrast between the glorious Mount of Transfiguration and the troubled world waiting below in the valley. That leads us to our first

VALLEY LESSON: We’re surrounded by crowds of hurting people who need our help

Oh, the mountaintop is sweet because we commune with Jesus! But when you return to the valley, you will be literally ambushed by people who have all kinds of needs. That’s why we should always be a church built in the valley, not on the mountain. Not surprisingly, there is a beautiful church now built on the top of 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 spent most of his time in the valley dealing 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.

Several years ago, I had a rather tense discussion with a man who used to attend our church. He was complaining to me about some of the people who were coming to our church. They weren’t as respectable and well dressed the way he was and it bothered him. I can recall his words.

He said, “I don’t want *those kind* of people coming to *my* church.”

I said as gently as I could, “First of all, it’s not *your* church—and what kind of people are you talking about?”

“You know, those ‘messed-up’ people. We don’t want them bringing their problems into this church.”

I said, “Those are *exactly* the kind of people that Jesus welcomed and helped—and since this is *his* church, as long as I’m pastor, I’m going to keep on welcoming them, too!”

He soon left our church—I guess he didn’t like valley people.

Before we leave this point, there’s an important truth about mountaintops and valleys I don’t want us to miss. Often we experience tremendous valley trials immediately after a mountaintop experience. The very next day, after this glorious experience on the mountain, the three disciples were confronted with an especially vile and sinister demon. After you’ve had a mountaintop experience, you tend to think things are going to be smooth for a while and when you arrive in the valley “all hell breaks loose.” That’s the standard pattern so don’t be surprised. After Moses had the glorious mountaintop experience on Mt. Sinai, he came to bottom to find the children 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. Immediately after Elijah’s triumphant God-contest on Mt. Carmel where God sent down fire from heaven, Elijah ran into the desert because Queen Jezebel threatened to behead him. We find Elijah in the valley of depression as he sits under a juniper tree and moans, “Oh, God it’s enough, just let me die.”

My old friend and mentor, Ron Dunn, who just went to be with the Lord used to call it the principle of the devil after the dove. He was referring to the mountaintop experience of the baptism of Jesus where the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and God spoke saying, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” Immediately after, Jesus was led into the desert

(valley) and was tempted by the devil for 40 days. Ron used to say, “Be ready. Because whenever God opens the windows of heaven to bless you, you can be certain that the devil will open the doors of hell to blast you.”

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

II. DEFECTIVE DISCIPLES “... *but they could not.*”

The desperate dad complained to Jesus that his disciples had tried to help his boy, but “they could not.” Months earlier, Jesus sent His disciples out and given them power and authority over 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!

Jesus was speaking to the nine disciples as well as the crowd when He called them an “unbelieving and perverse generation” in verse 41.

VALLEY LESSON: Powerless disciples have nothing to offer a hurting world

How many times does this happen today? I fear that multitudes of hurting people come to the church of the Lord Jesus and are hopeful the disciples of Jesus, the church, can help them and they go away disappointed. How many times has a couple on the verge of divorce come to our church or any 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 our 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.

Surveys have shown 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. We are all disturbed by the tragic event that took place in Cedar Lake, Texas a few weeks ago. Andrea Yates allegedly drowned all five of her small children. An article in *USA Today* reports both she and her husband Russell claim to be Christians. She was raised Catholic and home-schooled her children using a Christian curriculum. Russell Yates grew up in a Methodist church in Tennessee and was very active. They had religious artifacts in their home and Russell even led in prayer before his son’s T-ball games. There is one sentence in the article that stands out and haunts me. It says, “Though the family was religious, they did not attend church.” They had tried a few churches but none of them “met their needs.” Like this desperate father in our text, this family visited some churches seeking help “but the church could not.”

I know hindsight is always 20/20 but I can’t help but wonder what might have been. What might have happened if they found a church that could have provided emotional support for Andrea

Yates and her family? Oh, if she could have only been a part of a support group with other young moms like we have here. But we aren't even scratching the surface. I suspect within the shadow of our steeple, there are many families just like the Yates'. In East Texas there must be thousands of disturbed, struggling individuals like Andrea Yates. 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. Thank God for the multitude of different programs and ministries we have here at our church. But we must realize only Jesus can help someone who is in need.

We must realize the one resource we have that secular service organizations do not have is the power of Jesus Christ. That's the key. Jesus said, "... apart from me, you can do NOTHING." (John 15:5) "But you will receive POWER when the Holy Spirit comes on you." (Acts 1:8)

A church without the anointing and filling of the Holy Spirit is a powerless, pathetic institution. A Christian without the filling of the Holy Spirit is a powerless, pathetic contradiction. We must always be seeking to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit. A self-centered, carnal Christian is a liability to the Body of Christ.

Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Let me ask you: If God suddenly removed the Holy Spirit from our world, would you notice anything different in your life? In Ephesians 5:18, the Bible says, "Don't be drunk with wine which leads to excess, but be [literally "keep on being"] filled with the Holy Spirit." That's a *command*, not a suggestion. And since it is a command of God, not being filled is a sin. One of the great revival leaders during the Second Great Awakening in America was Charles Finney. He wrote: "Christians are as guilty for not being filled with the Holy Spirit as sinners are for not repenting. They are even more so, for as they have more light—they are so much the more guilty."

When are the disciples of Jesus and the church of Jesus defective? When there is no filling of the Holy Spirit. Only God knows what might have been different if the Yates family in Cedar Lake had discovered a group of Spirit-filled, loving, compassionate Christians. Will we be that for the hurting families of East Texas?

III. A DETERMINED DEMON " ... while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground ... "

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. 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. Dr. John Phillips compares our attitude to that of the residents of London during the Plague of 1665. Thousands of people were dying mysteriously. Today we know a deadly virus spread by germs invisible to the naked eye caused the Bubonic plague. Dr. Phillips asserts if you could go back 400 years in time and tell the leading English physician invisible germs caused the plague, he

would have laughed at you. The doctors would have ignored you and continued their “modern practice” of bleeding victims and burning foul-smelling potions to cure people. Dr. Phillips writes:

“Modern man has adopted this kind of attitude about demons. We tell them that the world is in the grip of Satan, that he has countless hosts of invisible demons to aid him in his dark designs against mankind. People look at us with pitying scorn and suggest we peddle our theory to the publishers of science fiction. But, it is true all the same. Our world has been invaded by a virus far more deadly than the bubonic plague, a virus all the more deadly because it is able to think and because it directs its attacks against the soul rather than the body.”

Angelic and demonic spirits are invisible to the naked eye but unlike a deadly virus, which can be seen through a microscope, you can't see these spirits with any instrument except the Word of God.

The devil and his demons don't *want* you to be aware of them. They prefer to remain incognito. Another book that will be available in our bookstore on the “Pastor's Picks” list is *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. The book contains fictional letters a head demon, 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*).

A few weeks ago, when I spoke about the demon-controlled man in Luke 8, I went into more detail about the devil and demons. If you are interested, get the tape or access the manuscript on our web site (#889 “The Day Demons Performed a Swine Dive” May 27, 2001). Today, I just want to look at one particular aspect of demonic determination.

VALLEY LESSON: The devil and his demons try to prevent you from drawing near 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. 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.

In Alabama, I led a man to Christ who had no church background. He got fired up and started reading his Bible. One week he came to me and said, “Preacher, I found out what Satan's job is.” I said, “Where'd you find that?” He said, “You should know, it's right here in the book of Job.

Right here, I found that Satan’s job is to keep me so miserable that I’ll curse God.” I didn’t correct him, because he was right (maybe we all mispronounce it). For Satan, JOB #1 is keeping you lost. In just a few minutes we’ll be offering the invitation for people to accept Christ and this is a moment of great spiritual warfare. Just watch, the devil will use anything to distract people during the invitation; a baby will start crying or Christians will start gathering up their stuff and walking out. I had one man tell me he was ready to come forward one Sunday but he saw others walking out and he didn’t know which way to go so he followed them out—all the way to the parking lot.

That’s Satan’s desire but once you come to Christ, Satan doesn’t give up on you. Instead, he just puts your name in a new file and uses a different strategy. When you trust Christ, some data input demon finds your file and drags and clicks it into a new folder:

D:\IMMATURE\BACKSLIDER\UNFAITHFUL\NO QUIET TIME\CRITICAL\SOURPUSS

In other words, Satan doesn’t want you to develop intimacy and fellowship with Jesus. One day Jesus will boot (and reboot) Satan’s entire operation into the bottomless pit but until then, He has access to your files. That’s another reason you must be a Spirit-filled Christian.

IV. THE DIVINE DELIVERER “... bring him to ME”

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, “Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy, 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 greatness of God.” Here are two quick valley lessons:

VALLEY LESSON: Spiritual burdens are lifted by Jesus

Did you bring some burdens today? It may be 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, because 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 relieve your burden.

VALLEY LESSON: Spiritual battles are won in prayer

We can’t leave this incident without noticing this final lesson. Remember, the disciples were unable to cast out the demon? Mark gives us this important insight. At the end of the day when they had retired to a house, His disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we cast him out?”

So he said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but PRAYER and FASTING." (Mark 9:28-29) There are different "kinds" of demons, just as there are different ranks of angels. This was an especially tough, determined demon. What had Jesus been doing on the mountain? Praying and fasting. Why? Because He knew there was a spiritual battle He would face in the valley. He won the battle on the mountain of prayer and fasting. One reason so many Christians are defeated and powerless is that they don't practice the discipline of prayer and fasting enough. Fasting, or refraining from food, is never done alone; it is always linked with prayer. When you are facing a challenge and a battle bigger than you can handle, it's imperative you spend some time in prayer and fasting. One reason this building is built and almost paid for is because many of you were faithful to fast and pray during Discover the Joy and Share the Joy. Our revival begins three weeks from today and I will be asking you to take some days before then to spend in prayer and fasting that God will send revival to Green Acres, to Tyler and to America. Sometimes we face needs so great that the *only* thing that works is prayer and fasting. When you have been on the mountaintop fasting and praying, you are ready to face anything that happens down in the valley.

CONCLUSION

In October 1999, golfer Payne Stuart's jet crashed into the ground at over 600 mph. Investigators determined the occupants of the jet died from asphyxiation long before the jet crashed. There was no body to be retrieved because of the impact of the crash. Many of you know not long before the crash, Payne Stuart had been on the mountaintop. He had just recently given his life to Jesus and he was wearing a WWJD bracelet when he won the U.S. Open. At the crash scene, the only things his wife Tracey was able to retrieve was his wedding ring, a gold chain he had worn since the first night they met, his WWJD bracelet and his daily devotional book he read faithfully. When Tracey examined his devotional book she discovered the corner of the page turned down for that day's devotional. The scripture was Acts 26:18 that speaks of how our job is to "open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." Payne had underlined the printed prayer for that day reading, "Grant that I may be used to open the eyes of others and turn them from darkness to light, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Jesus." That was perhaps the last prayer Payne prayed before he died.

Tracey later observed since Payne's funeral, over a thousand people have written her telling her they have trusted Jesus because of Payne's testimony in death. She wrote, "It was as if God were saying, 'even in the midst of tragedy, I will have a witness.'"

On the mountaintop is a brilliant Savior, glowing with the glory of God. In the valley there are messed up people who cry out for help. On the mountaintop is holy worship. Down in the valley there is hard work. On the mountain we find strength and serenity. In the valley we find frustration and failure. On the mountaintop is delight. In the valley, there are demons, disease and even death. But don't be afraid, for as David wrote, "Even though I walk through the *valley* of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me." (Psalm 23:4) May we always be people who reach up and experience the glory of God in worship! But may we also be a church built in the valley that reaches out to hurting people, sharing the Good News that this desperate dad discovered, and that Payne Stewart and Tracey Stewart discovered. The Good News the

world is dying to hear is that even though your life is messed up, Jesus opens His arms and says, “Bring your burdens, your pain, and your problems to me.” And as the Body of Christ, we open our arms to say, “Jesus loves you and cares for you, and we do, too!”

OUTLINE

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II. DEFECTIVE DISCIPLES "*but they could not.*"

Valley Lesson: Powerless disciples have nothing to offer a hurting world

Jesus said, "...apart from me, you can do NOTHING." *John 15:5*

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IV. THE DIVINE DELIVERER "*... bring him to ME*"

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His disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we cast him out?" So he said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but PRAYER and FASTING." *Mark 9:28-29*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes