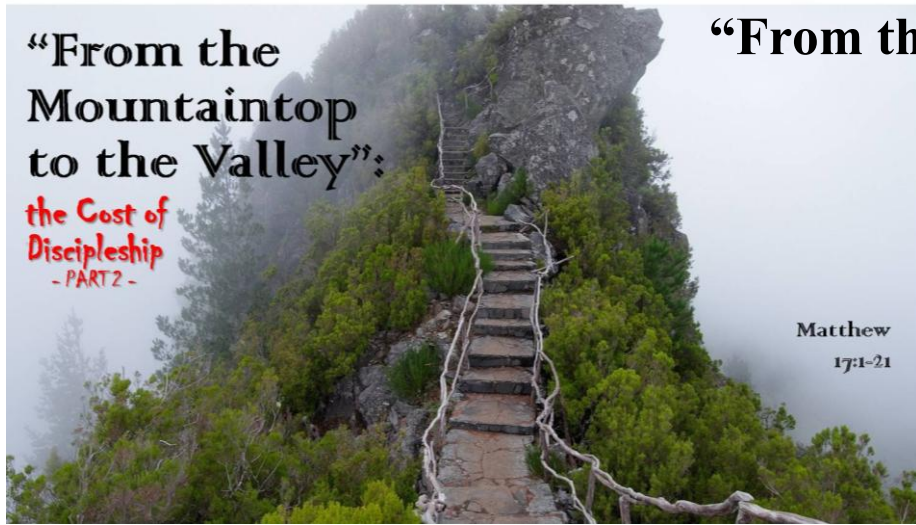


# “From the Mountaintop to the Valley”:

*the Cost of Discipleship*  
- PART 2 -



Matthew  
17:1-21

# “From the Mountaintop to the Valley”

... *the Cost of Discipleship* – part 2

by **Pastor Tim Dodson**  
at **JF Believers Church**  
in **Menomonie Wisc**  
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## Matthew 17:1-21

*1 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. 7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." 8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 9 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." 10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. 12 "But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." 14 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 "So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." 17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."*

The last message we had in the “Life and Time of Jesus Christ” was entitled “From the Mountain top to the Valley,” and it spoke into the idea of “The Cost of Discipleship”: *the principles of enduring through trials and testings, and the very sacrifices that have to be made in order to thrive and yes, even survive in the service of the Lord.* Such is a very real issue and we would do well to pay heed to the warnings, because as we well know, many have not survived it.

This week we literally begin to see just what that journey looks like in very vivid yet practical pictures. Jesus would take a few of His “inner circle” up to the mountain top to see and experience God in a very powerful way, and then they would journey down to the ‘belly of the whale’...to the depths of testing, examination, and discovery as to who they really were and furthermore, just who Jesus was and what it would mean to follow him.

Please note that Jesus *chose*. He chose these three men and He led them up the mountain for this experience. There was no ‘open invitation,’ and there is no record of an apology being given to the others for leaving them back. That really bothers some folks to know this. To recognize the fact that Jesus didn’t treat all of the twelve disciples equally. It’s the American idea of self-entitlement. Among the twelve, He had a special relationship with these three. They were with Him at some of the most important moments in His earthly ministry. The present day complainers are the sort that are quick to state their mantra: “*that’s not fair,*” as if the world is actually fair in anyway. But what they really mean is “*it’s not good for ME to not get what YOU are getting.*”

Jesus *chose*, because He knows all men better than they know themselves. John 2:25 points this out in telling us that "...*He knew what was in man.*" He knew and exercised a prerogative that said while men may have wants, desires, and aspirations, only some are so *chosen*. "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" (Matthew 22:14) We do this all the time: I could hire 10 guys... "call" them, so to speak, and then "choose" one to be the supervisor. I would base my decision on his passion, commitment, aptitude, diligence, etc. *Does not Jesus have that same right?*

Now we generally know this at least in principle, but we often fail to actually know such in real life and in practical ways. Because we most often think we are something that we really are not, or we refuse to acknowledge what we in fact know down deep as the truth. How many of us spend our lives struggling to be...*even within the greater body of Christ*, something we are not "chosen" by Christ to be? We become spiritual "wanna-be's" and we gradually become angry and bitter at everyone around us as if we the church did something to them or prevented them from becoming "all that they could be."

These three men were chosen to share this moment with Jesus. It was a 'thin place' ...a spiritual moment that was both physically and dynamically a 'mountain-top' experience. But it was not for everyone. It was for Jesus and *these three men*.

Please note that Jesus however did NOT choose these guys because they were 'spit and polished.' No, they often messed up...saying the wrong things...even dropping the ball from time to time. I guess that goes without question when you play every game. It's easy to not mess up when you spend your days on the bench. But if you are 'up front and center'...the 'first guy to volunteer for action,' there will be...*as we saw last week with Peter*, mistakes from time to time, and sometimes things go down without a lot of foresight and planning, so there can be some chaos occasionally. Peter certainly was one to be impulsive and impetuous. But he was also the guy who went nose-to-nose with the very men who sent Jesus to the cross and he didn't flinch. Peter could 'bring it' when he needed to. Don't underestimate the guy because he screwed up occasionally.

Here we see these three up on the mountain with Jesus, and they no doubt had no idea what was in store. So the first lesson was they were not prepared...*anticipatory*, for the manifest of the glory of God. They did not *expect* great things to happen that day! It was just another 'normal' day, so why would God show up? I wonder if we got up every morning expecting God to present Himself what would happen to our living? God *surprised* them! I love to be surprised by God! I love the 'thin places' where God is so close and real. And I believe God in turn loves to connect with us in that manner. As the great Olympian Eric Liddell said "*I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.*" If God felt different, than why bring those boys up there? *Jesus* went up there expecting God to show up, and we should live every day with the same passion.

The voice of God spoke those words: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*" Seems like an obvious Christian mantra and a 'no-brainer' as a believer, but sadly it is actually a rather unusual practice in truth! We often hear our church, maybe our leaders, definitely the world and perhaps the religious tides of opinion and popular thought. But are we hearing *HIM*? I think not, at least most of the time. Peter and the boys had a nice idea, but God had His own plan and His own agenda. Oh may we stop making plans and seeking God's approval of them! So many causalities because of such a practice!

And please note that I am not just talking about that “still small voice” that speaks to us in our spirit. Such is important for sure, but I find that in myself and most of us that our desires, passions, and emotions tend to leak into that voice and we then want to believe that God is saying exactly what we want Him to say and exactly what supports our direction and wants. My “loud voice” just so often overwhelms His “small voice.”

The thing we need to embrace is that God has *already* said so much and that our God ‘never changes.’ He hasn’t ‘changed His mind’ or ‘come around to our way of thinking.’ We need to hear what He has *already* said and do *that*. Most of what He has left us is clear, plain, and emphatic. So don’t try to pull the “well, it’s a matter of interpretation” bit! That’s an escapist’s excuse who wants what he wants so badly he doesn’t let anyone...*including God*, get in his way of having it. Once Judas had made up his mind, nothing and nobody was going to stand in his way. The level of personal blindness that we can endure is staggering! Rarely, if ever, does anyone come back from that story... *especially when they eventually and ultimately come to the “valley.”* And they will... *we all will...*

When the boys came down, they discovered their second mistake. Waiting down there for them was a crisis. A tough case. An entrenched issue that could not be easily fixed. One does not have to live their adult life very long to experience such a situation. The apostles had dealt with such things before...perhaps they entered into this one under the presumption that “...*I got this.*” You know...the “been there, done that” kind of flippant religious attitude that is so easy to find in ourselves. But this time things were not going to roll quite the same way as in the past. I do not know for sure in this case, *but I know in my own and others around me*, that this comes from trying to handle it on my own: *with my own power and skill*, instead of leaning on Jesus.

THIS time, the demon wouldn’t leave this boy. The apostles were baffled no doubt: *We did everything according to the directions and it still won’t work! We did it just like we did it last time and yet...*” How often we can think we ‘have it all down’...that we know the recipe and we got the ‘mo so we can do it. But Jesus will never be cut out of the equation. He promised that he would give the glory to no man. (Isaiah 42:8) He will share with us the *experience*, but He will never give us the keys. It’s HIS way, all the way. And what He wants is to invite us in to *participate* with Him and what **He** is doing... “transfigured” amongst us!

So what WAS the problem? What was wrong? Jesus said it was two things: *one*, because they had a problem with “unbelief.” Oh no, not simply a lack of faith. I cannot say for sure, but I believe those guys most definitely *believed* they could do this. After all, they HAD done it plenty of times before! It was rather that their faith *was in the wrong place*. They had faith in themselves...*their ability...their knowledge*. And thus it seems it did not even occur to them the problem might have been that they were out front of Jesus. They were no longer *following*...but rather they were running ahead in their confidence that they were powerful, blessed, and gifted, assuming Jesus was their mojo and would sit in the back and cheer them on. Oh they had faith! Just not faith in the right place.

See, there actually IS a *right way* to do things! I know...I know...on the surface such a statement seems silly. But the truth be told, we tend to think it doesn’t matter how we get it done as long as we get it done! It’s a hard lesson to learn! The fact that God not only has a ‘*what*’ to do, but also a ‘*how to do it*.’ I may be giving these guys too much credit by applying the ‘benefit of the doubt’ but I would tend to think that they basically had the right motivation and earnest behind what they were doing, and again, we tend to think that such is all that is required. You know...as long as I *mean* well, it doesn’t matter the fallout. If there are a few innocent casualties...innocent bystanders, well that’s the price of war, right?

If *I'm* right, I can burn the village down because "I'm a disciple!" You can, but a price will always be paid! Sometimes it can mean a verbal chewing out, a humiliating loss, or maybe *you* will be the casualty! Because as I already stated, pride is the most blinding enemy we face. You can blame it on Satan, or on someone else within your reach, but the fact remains *it was you and you alone*. And the proof is in the fallout. In the end, it is you that is put on the shelf. All because you tried to do things "my way...."

The second mistake these boys made was they weren't ready for the fight. They went in with a cap gun and a plastic sheriff's badge and got whipped. They thought they were the sheriff and they never made a dent. Jesus told them "*this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*" They weren't ready to face what they were dealing with. Their preparation was all external. They took a class or read some book and thought they would take on the world and the world ate them up. I have seen many guys go down in flames because of this! They didn't have their family in order, or some other struggle that was not being dealt with, but they thought they could lead others and 'be the man.' Satan just stepped back and watched them self-destruct! It has all happened more times than I can count, and there are plenty of folks waiting in line to be next up to bat.

One can easily cry foul here. I mean, after all, how could they have known what was coming? Were they supposed to run off and pray and fast for awhile and then come back? How could they have known they were going to run into such a stubborn foe? **Because we are *always* going to run into such enemies!** It's not IF, it's *WHEN*. And not realizing that, puts you into the most dangerous realm a man can be in. The man who *does* realize this, is **always** praying and preparing! And most of all, he is *always looking for Jesus to direct and empower. To give direction and call the shots.* I wouldn't mind so much if this situation only resulted in *you* going down in flames, but invariably when we move in such a manner we take out innocent souls and immature bystanders that didn't know any better. The spiritual 'gawkers' that came to watch and were hurt by *your* actions!

So what have we learned here? We have learned that there are indeed mountain top experiences that God wants to take you on. But **He** does the inviting on His timeframe with you. Are we really living in the light of His presence? *IS HE* present? How do you know for sure? Are we expecting Jesus to do great things around us, and are we also really expecting the devil to show up and knock the wind out of us in some testing and trial? Because they are both coming. To us all!

Are we ready for either of these manifests, because hanging around the master in any way will likely 'put you on the field' whether you want to be or not. So are we really prepared for the mountain tops? Are we really expecting Jesus to be 'glorified' in our midst? And what about the valleys? Are we just reading another 'how to' book or are we spending earnest time in His presence, in prayer, fasting even and preparing the *inner* man? And lastly, are we going it alone? Are we really hearing HIM? And again, how do you know it is Him on the line? Because Satan often manifests himself as an "angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14) We must always remember...you can dress the part, but if you ain't really a cowboy, then you will go down like those at the Alamo.

May we forever remember: **it's HIS show.** We just are to show up ready to participate and always cognizant that Jesus will share with you...*He loves to do so*, but it's not about you and me. It's always and forever about *HIM*...