

On the Mountaintop with Jesus

Luke · Luke 9:28-36; Ephesians 3:20

AT A GLANCE

The Transfiguration is not primarily an invitation to pursue extraordinary experiences of God but a revelation of who Jesus actually is — the glory-bearing servant Messiah whose Exodus-death redeems — and a corrective to both the skepticism that dismisses such encounters and the demand that makes them the measure of faith. The proper posture is open-handedness: willing to meet God on the mountain, in the valley, or in the mundane ordinary.

- Mountaintop experiences are God's initiative to wake us from spiritual apathy so we can see Jesus clearly, not rewards for spiritual effort.
- The Father's command 'listen to him' answers both who Jesus is and what following him requires, cutting through every competing voice.
- Most of life is lived off the mountain; the discipline is learning to find God in ordinary, mundane rhythms rather than manufacturing peak experiences.

“We don't have to live on the mountain to experience God. We can experience God right where we are.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

Luke 9:28-36 — Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up to the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was now about to accomplish in Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. As the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said. And as he was saying these things, a cloud came down and overshadowed them and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my son, my chosen one, listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone, and they kept silent and told no one in those days

anything of what they had seen.

[Ephesians 3:20](#) — Now to him who is able to do abundantly more than all we ask or imagine.

The argument

The Transfiguration Answers Luke's Two Governing Questions — Glory and suffering are not opposites in Jesus' identity

Luke's narrative has been pressing two interlocked questions — who is Jesus, and what does following him cost? — through the interrogations of Pharisees, Herod, and finally the disciples themselves. The Transfiguration is Luke's definitive scene of answering both at once. Jesus' face altered, his clothes dazzling white, is not a new development but a disclosure: the veil of his humanity pulls back to reveal the glory that has always been his. The preacher presses the contrast with Moses pointedly — Moses descended from Sinai reflecting God's glory; Jesus on the mountain is revealing his own. The presence of Moses and Elijah, who discuss Jesus' 'departure' — the Greek word is literally Exodus — binds that glory inseparably to his coming death. Glory and suffering are held together here, not in tension but in theological unity, because the servant Messiah's path to redemption runs through both.

Insight — Jesus' glory is not a reward awaiting his suffering but the identity that his suffering will express and his resurrection vindicate.

Moses and Elijah Frame the Scope of Jesus' Exodus — Past redemption and future restoration converge on Jerusalem

The appearance of Moses and Elijah is more than a cameo of Old Testament heroes. The preacher reads them as directional markers on the axis of redemptive history: Moses anchors the paradigmatic past act of deliverance — the Exodus from Egypt — while Elijah points prophetically toward the final redemption and new creation. Their simultaneous presence with Jesus, both 'appeared in glory,' signals that Jesus stands at the intersection of everything both figures represent. When they speak of his 'departure,' Luke's Greek word is Exodus, and the preacher draws the implication explicitly: Jesus comes to accomplish an Exodus that dwarfs the first — 'not just deliverance from Pharaoh, but deliverance from sin, suffering, sorrow, and death.' The Festival of Booths echo in Peter's proposal reinforces this Exodus typology, as those temporary shelters memorialized Israel's wilderness wandering after God's great deliverance.

Insight — Every prior act of divine deliverance in Israel's story is a partial anticipation of what Jesus accomplishes in his death and resurrection.

Spiritual Sleep Is the Baseline Condition Mountaintop Encounters Interrupt — Waking up is not the goal; witnessing Jesus is

Only Luke notes that Peter, James, and John were 'heavy with sleep' before the vision fully seized them. The preacher treats this as Luke's most relatable detail — and his most diagnostic. Spiritual sleep is not exceptional crisis but ordinary condition: apathy toward God, idolatry that installs other loves in God's place, distraction that fractures prayer before it begins. Mountaintop experiences are God's interruption of this sleep, not a spiritual achievement the disciples had earned. 'When they became fully awake, they saw his glory' — awareness and vision arrive together, as gift. The insight the preacher draws is directional: these experiences do not exist to produce good feelings. They exist to reorient perception, to let a believer 'see him as he really is.' The mountaintop is diagnostic and corrective, not recreational.

Insight — God grants extraordinary encounters not to reward the spiritually diligent but to break through the ordinary torpor that dulls perception of who Jesus is.

The Father's Voice Drowns the Competing Voices That Govern Identity — 'Listen to him' is both Christology and discipleship in four words

Peter's instinct is to manage the moment — build booths, preserve the experience, hold Moses and Elijah in place. Instead, the cloud descends and the Father speaks, answering both of Luke's governing questions in a single declaration. 'This is my son, my chosen one' settles who Jesus is; 'listen to him' settles what following him requires. The preacher observes that the cloud functions precisely as it did for Moses on Sinai: the divine presence made tangible and overwhelming. The Father's voice, heard amid the disciples' fear and confusion, is the experience's real content — not the light, not the visitors, not the feeling. 'There are so many voices in your life who want to tell you who you are and how you ought to act,' and the mountaintop's function is to silence them long enough for the Father's voice to register as loudest.

Insight — The practical yield of any genuine encounter with God is a recalibrated hierarchy of voices, with Jesus speaking above every other authority.

Open-Handedness, Not Skepticism or Demand, Is the Right Posture Toward These Encounters — Peter's failed attempt to hold the moment exposes both temptations

Peter's booth-building proposal is the sermon's pivot: he wants to institutionalize the peak, to make permanent what God designed as transient. The preacher names two symmetrical errors this passage corrects. The first is skepticism — dismissing intense encounters with God as emotional manipulation or wishful thinking, arriving at worship expecting nothing. The second is demand — living from mountaintop to mountaintop as though the health of faith is measured by the frequency of peaks. Both errors misread what these moments are for. The corrective is open-handedness: 'God, how do you want to meet with me? Do you want to take me up to the mountain? If so, I'm happy to go. Do you want to take me down to the valley? When I'm there, can I find you and meet you there?' The ordinary, mundane encounter with

God is not a lesser encounter — it is the form in which most discipleship is actually conducted.

Insight — Faithfulness is not produced by engineering peak spiritual experiences but by remaining open to meeting God in whatever register — extraordinary or mundane — he chooses.

Cross-references

- [Exodus 34:29-35](#) — Invoked implicitly to contrast Moses reflecting God's glory descending Sinai with Jesus revealing his own inherent glory on the mountain.
- [Matthew 17:2](#) — Cited to supplement Luke's account: Matthew specifies that Jesus' face shone like the sun, filling out the radiance Luke describes.

DEVOTIONAL

Most of life is not lived on the mountain. This is the sentence that cuts, the one that lands after the dazzling white and the voice from the cloud have faded. Peter wanted to build booths. Of course he did. Who among us, having tasted something so clean and so large, would not reach for permanence? But the cloud lifts, Moses and Elijah vanish, Jesus looks ordinary again, and the path goes back down. There is a temptation to read this as loss. To treat the ordinary Tuesday — the commute, the half-distracted prayer, the meeting that ran long, the dinner no one noticed — as evidence that God has withdrawn to wherever glory lives when it is not on display. But Luke's account will not allow it. The disciples were heavy with sleep before they were fully awake. Their sleepiness was not a disqualification; it was simply the condition God interrupted. And the interruption was not to relocate them permanently to the mountain. It was to show them something true about Jesus that they would need to carry back down into the valley, into the ordinary, into the long middle stretch of following someone whose glory is usually veiled. The Father's voice — this is my son, my chosen one, listen to him — was not spoken to keep them on the summit. It was spoken so they would know whose voice to follow when the cloud was gone and the road was long and the other voices were loud again. The mountaintop experience is never the destination. It is the equipment. It clarifies the face you are looking for, the voice you are listening for, so that you can find both in places that look nothing like a mountain. You do not have to go to the mountain to meet with God. He is already where you are.

Reflection

- Where in your ordinary life — in rhythms you tend to treat as spiritually neutral — might God already be present in ways your sleepiness has prevented you from seeing?
- Which voices in your life currently compete most loudly with Jesus' voice, and what would it look like practically to let his be the loudest?

- When you have sought a mountaintop encounter with God and found only the mundane, how have you interpreted that experience — and what does this passage suggest about whether your interpretation was accurate?

Closing prayer

Lord, right here in this ordinary moment, we acknowledge that you are here. You desire to meet with us, to help us see more clearly who you are, and to see more clearly who we are in you. You are eager to speak, and we ask that you would help us to hear you. So we set aside any demand, any pretense, any requirement we would place on how you come to us. We say simply: here we are. Would you meet with us? Would you draw us deeper in faith, deeper in courage? Help us to surrender our idols and become more like you. We look to you, Jesus. Thank you for your love and your sacrifice. We give you all the honor and glory. Amen.
