


## **JESUS CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN**

**MARK 9:14-29**

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February 3, 2002**

 ur scripture reading today begins with the events that took place right after Jesus came down from the mountain where He met with Elijah and Moses. That mountaintop experience was a glorious event that represented humanity at its best. But when Jesus came down from the mountain, He was met by people who represented all the weaknesses of humanity.

Thus, in a very short period of time, we see a contrast between humanity at its best and humanity at its worst, a contrast between strength and weakness, between belief and unbelief.

Let me explain what I mean. Look again at the experience Jesus had while He was on top of the high mountain. MARK 9:2 says that, as three of His disciples were watching, Jesus was transfigured before them.

Now, think about the meaning of this transfiguration. The gospels of MATTHEW, MARK, and LUKE all agree that Jesus underwent some mysterious change during that period of time. MATTHEW 17:2 says "His face shown like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." MARK 9:3 says, "His clothes became dazzling white." I personally believe the bright light the disciples saw represents the holiness of God.

Jesus had lived a life that was perfect in holiness. Even though He suffered temptation like every other human being, He was different than any other human being, because He never sinned. His faith never faltered. He was perfect.

At the start of His public ministry, when Jesus was being baptized, God's voice from heaven was heard saying, "This is My Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." God was pleased with His Son, because for the first thirty years of His life, Jesus remained holy and without sin.

Now, two years later, the voice of God the Father is once again heard, saying the same thing. The temptations Jesus faced during the first years of His public ministry were intense. Satan tempted him in the desert. His own family tempted him when they tried to persuade Him to come home and rest from His ministry. The last temptation before Jesus was transfigured on the mountain came when Peter tried to convince Him not to use the cross to establish His kingdom on this earth.

More than two years of intense testing had occurred from the time God first proclaimed that He was pleased with His Son and the time when Jesus ascended to the top of this mountain and was transfigured, appearing as bright as the sun. On that mountain, the voice of God was heard from heaven again saying, "This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him."

Thus, we see a perfect person on top of a mountain being exalted to a state of glory where He became as bright as the sun. He met Moses and Elijah who had also entered into glory. He talked about the thing that was on His heart the most. He talked about sacrificing Himself for the sins of mankind. He did not talk about how wonderful it was to be on top of a mountain in a state of glory; rather, He talked about going back to the valley where He would lose all form of glory and become sin on our behalf.

No wonder God was so pleased with His Son. Not only had He remained perfectly without sin in face of all temptation; His attitude also remained perfectly unselfish.

The apostle Peter was there. He saw what happened and heard what was said. Later he wrote in 2 PETER 1:17-18 that Jesus "received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain."

These words testify to the fact that Jesus, as He appeared on the mountain, was a perfect human being. Not

only was He perfectly without sin, but His perfect condition did not make Him proud and selfish. Even in His glory He was more concerned for others than He was for Himself. Truly, this is a picture of humanity at its best. It is a picture of One who had perfect faith and trust in God.

And now, let us see this picture in contrast to the story recorded in today's scripture reading. When Jesus descended from the mountain with His three disciples, they were met by people who represented all the weaknesses of humanity. Humanity full of strength met humanity full of weakness. A man whose faith was perfect met men who either could not or would not believe.

The first thing Jesus saw when He came down from the mountain was a group of scribes arguing with His disciples. In our past studies from the gospels, we have already seen how stubborn the teachers of the law were in their unbelief. They were critical and suspicious of everything Jesus did. They had let go of truth in order to keep their own traditions. Their unbelief was willful and persistent.

The scribes were part of the group who demanded that Jesus show them signs from heaven to prove that He was from God. In MARK 8:12, we read that Jesus had refused to give them a sign. And now, we see that they were arguing with Christ's disciples. When Jesus asked them why they were arguing, a father answered that the reason for the argument centered around his demon-possessed son whom the disciples had failed to heal. The disciples had tried to perform a sign from heaven in Jesus's name, but they had failed. So now these people were mocking and questioning and laughing. It seemed like their unbelief was right after all. Jesus's disciples had tried but failed to give them a sign from heaven. They could not cast out the demon in Jesus' name, and as far as the scribes were concerned, that seemed to be proof that Jesus was an imposter.

But, the scribes were not the only ones who lacked faith. There were also the disciples. Six days before, Jesus had introduced them to the fact that He had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. He could win His kingdom only by way of the cross. At the time none of the disciples could accept this teaching. This strange teaching about sacrifice and self-denial was too difficult for them to understand. Peter was verbal in his rejection, but I believe the other disciples felt the same. They could not accept their Lord's teaching about the cross, and so their desire and determination to follow Jesus declined. When obedience fails, so does faith. Thus, when they met the demon-possessed boy, their faith was already reduced and so was their power to perform miracles.

In MATTHEW 17:20, we see the reason why the disciples failed to cast out the demon was because their faith was too small. And MARK 9:29 records Jesus as saying, "This kind can only come out by prayer." Jesus knew that prayer is the way to increase faith. The disciples' faith was small, so they needed to pray in order to increase their faith.

And then, there is the boy who could not believe, because he was possessed by a demon. As a young boy, he should have been full of faith and vision and hope, but all that was taken away from him. In all probability the boy did not even have the ability to think and reason like a normal human being. And because faith requires the ability to understand truth, we must assume that it was impossible for this boy to exercise faith.

And then, we also notice the boy's father. His question recorded in verse 22 reveals that he had some doubts about Jesus' ability to heal his son. "If you can do anything," he said, "take pity on us and help us." I tend to admire this father, because he was an honest person. He believed some truth about God, but He also knew his own limitations. That is why he said to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" It was as if he were saying, "I do believe all things are possible with God, but when I see my son foaming at the mouth and rolling around on the ground, I become very upset. If I could only trust God completely in this situation, I know I would have peace regardless of the circumstances. Help me to be able to have complete trust in God's sovereignty and power. I do believe. But when I reach my limitation and become desperate, please help me overcome my unbelief."

One month, after my first daughter was born, she had to be admitted to the hospital. For a period of a few days I feared for her life. I believed God could heal the problem if He wanted to. I knew that all things were possible with God. But for several days I struggled with feelings of fear that she would die. Finally, after days of struggle, I was able to commit the situation into the hands of the One who could do all things. I came to the point where I was finally willing to give my daughter back to God and let God do what He knew was best. When I reached that point—when I finally ceased doubting—I felt peace.

Can you identify with this kind of human weakness? If you can, then you will be able to understand what the father meant when he said, "I do believe; please help my unbelief."

When Jesus came down from the mountain, He met scribes who did not want to believe in Him. He met disciples who wanted to believe some things that Jesus taught, but not all things. And Jesus also met a boy who did not even have the ability to want to believe; and a father who wanted to believe but was too weak to do so. That covers about all the forms of unbelief I can think of.

So can you see the contrast clearly? The One whose faith in God had been tested and found to be perfect comes down from the mountain and meets all possible forms of unbelief.

Now the value of today's scripture lesson is found in the way Jesus responded when He encountered all this unbelief. His words are recorded in verse 19. "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" We can learn two valuable lessons from these questions and the way Jesus answered these questions.

The first valuable lesson we can learn is revealed to us in the questions themselves. The questions reveal that there is a limitation to the amount of unbelief God will tolerate. I do not mean that God will lose His patience. I believe that God's patience has no limitation. The problem is not with God, but with people. It is possible for a certain person to come to the point where his heart becomes so hard that God can do nothing more to save that person. I think this is a frightening truth, but it is also a very valuable truth. When we realize people can reach a point beyond which there is no hope because God will no longer put up with them, then we will do all we can to avoid going down that road ourselves. We will cry out to God and say, "Lord, I do believe; please help me overcome my unbelief." And we will do whatever we can to help those around us to also avoid reaching the point beyond which there is no return. We must never forget that it is possible for the human heart to become so hardened that truth can no longer penetrate. We must tremble at the thought that many people will eventually reach the point in their unbelief that God will no longer put up with them.

The second valuable lesson we learn from today's lesson brings us both comfort and challenge. The lesson is revealed in the way Jesus answers His own questions. Jesus asked, "How long will I stay with you? How long will I put up with you?" And then, we look at each example of unbelief, and we discover that Jesus decided to stay a little longer and continue to put up with the people in order to help their faith grow.

Even with the most stubborn case of unbelief, we see the mercy of God revealed. He asked the scribes why they were arguing. He did not have to ask them anything. He could have just walked away. They did not respond to His question. They were silent. And, Jesus performed the miracle in their presence. He cast out the demon and gave them the sign they wanted. And, by doing so, Jesus gave them yet another chance to believe. Maybe some day in heaven we will find out that one of those scribes did believe and we will thank God that Jesus did not give up trying to help them.

And then, notice how Jesus helped the disciples. He not only told them that their inability to cast out the demons was due to their lack of faith, but He also taught them how they could restore their faith. He told them that they needed to spend more time in prayer. Jesus offered them a solution to their unbelief.

And, I really don't need to say much about the boy. It is obvious that Jesus gave back to the boy his ability to believe when He cast out the demon. Verse 27 says that, after Jesus healed the boy, he took Him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. Jesus gave back to the boy his youth. He was now free to hope and dream and believe. And I think there is a good chance the boy did put his faith in Jesus even though it is not recorded in the story. Eternal life was made possible for the boy, because Jesus did not give up. He gave him the chance to believe.

And, isn't the story of how Jesus helped the father beautiful? Jesus said just the right things to help the father's faith to grow. The father certainly heard Jesus cry out, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" Those words were meant for everyone to hear, including the father. Hearing those words, the father decided to be honest with Jesus, revealing both his desire to believe as well as his doubts. 'I do believe, but I also have doubts. Please help me overcome my doubts.' Those are not the exact words he said, but I believe that is what he meant. And Jesus did help him overcome his doubts. He immediately turned to his boy and cast the demon out.

And so, the second valuable lesson we learn is that the Lord will do everything in His power to help the unbelieving generation, until it is no longer possible for anything to be done. As spiritual darkness continues to increase all around us, we must never forget that Jesus has not and will not stop working to help people grow in their faith.

Jesus is now seated in glory at the right hand of God the Father, but He still descends to the valley of unbelief in the form of the Holy Spirit to help people who are struggling with their faith. He will always give us another chance to believe if we would only take it. And such truth should bring great comfort to our souls.

But, with the comfort also comes challenge. We should imitate Jesus. We should strive to be holy like Him. And, in the same way Jesus did everything possible to help people increase their faith, we must be willing to do the same. As God helps us to grow in our faith and become holy, we must never think we are so spiritual that we begin to look down on other people for being unspiritual. Like Jesus, we must be willing to come down from our mountains to help people who are weak in their faith.

So let us thank God for the example we have in our Savior, and let us let us imitate Him by helping those who are weak in their faith.

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**Application:** Try to provide members in your group a chance to share victories as well as struggles. Perhaps there is someone who can share how his faith has triumphed. Perhaps there is another person who would like to share how he is able to relate to someone mentioned in today's scripture lesson. Both kinds of sharing can be valuable to all the members of your group.