

*My first car was a White Datsun.*

*It had been Amanda's Dad's, and in its day I guess it had been quite luxurious.*

*Despite that, I came to hate it.*

*On damp mornings when it was misty, or drizzling or pelting down with rain, or there was an "R" in the month*

*I could guarantee that it wouldn't start.*

*I'd get in the car, put the keys in the ignition, turn the engine over*

*but it would just chug (you know, erha, erha, erha).*

*That would be it.*

*There would be no spark.*

*So I'd get out, open the bonnet and stand in the rain, wipe down the leads...*

*And then damp and dirty I'd climb back into the car, the engine would start and I would drive to work.*

*Monotonous, predictable, damp.*

*I came to hate that car.*

☺ I guess the experience of waking up and knowing that there will be "no spark" today, inwardly groaning about another grey day at the office, another sunless day at home, another mind numbing day of washing and cooking and surviving – is real for many people.

### **Too often, for too many people: we are "valley dwellers".**

Sometimes we don't see the Sun for days.

Sometimes it just seems endlessly damp and grey,

Sometimes we lose sight of what lies beyond the clouds.

It works this way Spiritually too.

Sometimes it feels our Spiritual life is in a rut,

like our relationship with God is comatose,

like our Spiritual battery is dead –

the Spiritual "get up and go" has got us and gone...

Valley Living.

It's a physical, emotional and spiritual reality.

Some of us feel like that most of the time.

But everyone feels like that some of the time.

### **Jesus' Disciples were Valley Dwellers.**

Today we come to Matthew chapter 17 and from our study so far we know that it has been a pretty difficult week for the disciples –

- Last week Jesus talked about his death: "I will suffer many things" he says (*and if someone you love says that – the correct response is not "oh goodie!"*);
- two verses later Jesus rebukes Peter, saying "Get away from me Satan you don't have in mind the things of God" (*which must have been pretty deflating for Peter and the others*).
- the verse after that Jesus talks about "denying yourself and taking up your cross" (*which can't be what the disciples had in mind when they signed up*).

So all-in-all there isn't much singing around the campfire these days.

Its pretty grey in the valley.

So, v1

*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*

This is how I imagine it happened

After 6 days of nothing much happening, Jesus says to the whole bunch of his disciples –  
“Look, anybody fancy a walk”,  
and the reply is “sure where to”,  
“Oh up that very high mountain over there”  
and if they liked walking about as much as I liked walking perhaps a few of them blanched a little  
for v1 tells us the mountain was HIGH, it was a high mountain.  
For me the mount by the bowling green is a mountain  
Wales has HIGH mountains  
But I guess even Snowdon is nothing in comparison to this mountain  
Even to Matthew – who was no namby-pamby town-boy like me – this mountain is HIGH!

So perhaps they ask “and what are we going to do when we get there, Jesus?”  
“Oh I thought we’d have a prayer meeting” he replied.

And you can imagine 9 of the disciples simultaneously feeling the pressing need to  
mow the lawn, go shopping, spend quality time with the goat, wash and service the camel –  
you know important things like that...

Prayer meeting?

There are always better things to do than go to a prayer meeting!

*High Mountains – I’ll take a rain-check*

*Lets just stay here and do important stuff with all these needy people!”*

So Jesus takes 3 of them up the mountain and leaves the 9 in the valley.

Now this is important,

because v16 shows us that the 9 in the valley continue to live their faith.

This is important: they don’t go up the Mountain but they continue to minister.

This is important **because**, the question is: how successful will they be? -

Having skipped the Mountain – how effective will they be in the Valley?

Well we’ll come back to that at the end.

But for now let’s stay with the three that go with Jesus.

Why does Jesus take them up the mountain? – the answer is simple:

because Jesus knows the view from the top of the mountain will change their perspective on life.

**“Mountain Views are for Valley Living”.**

That’s what I want you to go away with today.

“Mountain Views are for Valley Living”

You and I – we live in the valley

The disciples – they lived in the valley

This is a spiritual, emotional, physical reality for us.

In v1, The disciples are spiritually and emotionally flat.

They are tired and not a little daunted by the task ahead

That can be often true for us

We learn two things from this passage, that

- Tomorrows hope is today’s strength; and
- Today’s strength is other people’s hope.

Tomorrows hope is today’s strength; and Today’s strength is other peoples hope.

Lets start with this

### **1. Tomorrows hope is today’s strength**

This is how it was for Jesus

Look, imagine Jesus, Peter, James and John snaking their way up the mountain.  
The trip has been long and the hour is late.  
They find a level place and they sit down.  
They are tired.  
Their legs ache.  
The twilight settles around them.

Imagine Jesus sitting in the shadows. Legs crossed.  
He slips off his sandals and rubs his sore feet and gazes off to the horizon.  
I am the Son of God (he thinks)  
Can it be? God with sore feet?, Holiness with hunger?, Divinity with a thirst?  
He wonders to himself, “what am I doing here?”

He has been teaching his disciples about his death and suffering.  
It has been playing on his mind all week.  
All week the cross and the nails have filled his thoughts.  
Make no mistake about it – the enormity of his mission weighs heavily on his mind  
All week he has been imagining the sin of the world laid upon him; and  
to be honest (just like it would in Gethsemane) it had made him feel sick to his stomach.  
There will be no easy death for Jesus.  
No painless departure.  
Down in the valley - the shadow of death is waiting for him.

Why is he up this mountain?  
It is this reason: Tomorrow’s hope is today’s strength.

Look, He sits, he prays, and  
As he prays he leaves behind the demands of the world  
As he prays he has space to listen

He takes time out of the ever present, ever pressing demands  
and as he does so the ever present presence of His Father becomes clearer to him  
As he prays his vision extends beyond the valley, beyond the shadow, to even beyond the stars

As he prays the reality of who he truly is,  
what his destiny beyond the cross is,  
You can’t stop it.  
That’s what happens when he prays.

Why is there? He is there to get a mountain view – to see beyond the valley.

Do you see that?  
He has been teaching about his death – he feels the shadows close around him,  
so he goes up a high mountain to pray.

But this time something happens.  
This time, what is inside him breaks through.  
Look at v2.

*There he was transfigured before them and  
His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*

As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became as bright as lightning.  
There on that mountain top, the inner presence of God’s Spirit bursts through.

He becomes a worked example, for you and me this morning.  
We see physically what is spiritually going on:  
The reality of tomorrow's hope, his true calling, his true identity takes over his being and becomes his strength!

This is what happens when **we** put time aside to pray  
I know we can pray anywhere and at any time – right in the middle of the Valley.  
I know that “that type of prayer” is the **normal** type of prayer – the chatty prayer  
I know it is the “bread and butter” type of prayer.

But there also needs to be that instinct, that wisdom, that inner conviction,  
That “when the going gets tough, the tough get on their knees”.  
“when the going gets tough, the tough seek the mountain”

When the grey closes in, when we are so disoriented we lose our horizon  
then we need the mountain  
- we need to find space, we need to get perspective, we need to listen to God rather than the never ending demands upon us.

And it may take time (*and who has time nowadays?*), and  
it may take effort (*it is such an effort to make space – this is a high mountain and a hard walk*), and  
we may be busy, (*the need ALWAYS exceeds the time available, always has, always will, did so in Jesus life*),  
it may even mean leaving some behind, and it may... and it may... and it may...  
(And I don't doubt that there are 10,000 real, good, excellent, outstanding reasons why we can't)...  
But we must...

We must. For ourselves we must.  
It is the most practical and efficient thing you can do.  
Because when you do  
what happened to Jesus – happens to you...

You leave behind the clamour of the world  
You leave behind the pressure of demands  
You find space to listen, and

as you listen you'll sense the reality of the ever present Father  
you'll begin to see beyond the clouds and into eternity – *at first little pin-pricks of light but in reality as huge as stars! fierce and strong*

As we listen his Spirit begins to shine in us.  
As we pray the reality of who we truly are, and what we HAVE secure in heaven becomes clearer  
That is what happens when we pray.

Yes “conversational, spontaneous prayer” is great  
But a daily rhythm, making the effort to make space, getting up a metaphorical mountain –  
changes our perspective, allows us to look beyond the valley, it changes us from inside out.

And so tomorrows hope becomes today's strength  
It did for Jesus – it does for us; and

**2. Secondly, our strength today is others people's hope.**

You see in v3 we read that  
*Just then, there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.*  
Jesus didn't just pray - he listened to what God was saying to him...

And God came in the form of Prophets, and they spoke to him about his purpose

## **2.1 He had a Mission to fulfil.**

Now there are lots of questions this text doesn't answer.

What language were they speaking?

How did the disciples know it was Moses and Elijah?

*Was the stone tablet under his arm just a dead give away?,*

*Had Elijah parked a fiery chariot in the lay-by?*

We don't know,

but what we DO know is what they were talking about.

The parallel passage in Luke 9v31 tells us they were talking about his 'departure,' his death.

The Greek word is literally: "Exodus".

They were speaking to Jesus about the Exodus that he would lead.

And he WOULD LEAD ONE.

He would go to Jerusalem and

He would pass through this valley of death and

He would come out the other side and

He would lead God's people from slavery to freedom,

from valley living into the light of heaven,

from mortality to glory.

That's why it was important for Jesus to go up the mountain.

Because the strength he found is the hope of all the world's tomorrows

That's why it is important **for us** to go to the mountain

Because God will show us that he has a purpose for us too.

That from the beginning of time (Ephesians 2v10) he has set aside stuff for us to do

So just as surely as from the beginning of time Jesus was given HIS mission "his cross"

so God (just as surely) set you aside for your mission and your cross.

Make space for God and He will speak to you through his Word

He will show us that your life is not actually about you

it is about the mission he has called you too.

You know, when we are in dark places, when we are down, when life is pressing in on us

our world contracts, our horizons narrow, how we feel dominates what we think about.

The danger is, that our life then becomes all about "me",

we become self-focussed,

But go to the mountain, **listen to God**

and

firstly, he will expand your horizons to see who you truly are; and

secondly, he will say "you have a job to do",

You have an Exodus to be part of:

it is about saving people from hell

it is about pointing people to God

it is about bringing hope into people's lives.

Read his word... and from Moses to Elijah... from John to Jesus

they will **all** say the same thing to you

you have a job to do, a mission to fulfil

Its true for Jesus, its true for me, its true for us.  
Its true for you.  
You have a mission to fulfil.  
BUT it means leaving the Mountain

## **2.2 Because you must point to the light in the darkness.**

In order for Jesus to fulfil his mission – Jesus has to leave the mountain

Peter wanted everyone to stay! He says

*v4 "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."*

Peter wants to capture the moment.

*He wants to stay at the Soul Survivor concert forever,*

*he doesn't want to leave the House Party.*

*he wants to stay in that Spirit filled moment.*

BUT that's not what this life is all about

This is not what Jesus' life is all about.

That's why Matthew says in v9 *"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them "don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

Why not?

Because "the message of the mountain" is not

that Jesus' garments glowed; or

that he met Moses and Elijah, or

that he had a great prayer meeting where God's presence was felt.

It is about identity and mission

*v5 This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased – Listen to him!*

For us those Spirit filled moments are precious – but they are not what it is about.

We would want to camp on the mountain,

to stay in the presence of God, forever.

But there are people in the valley who need to know this message about Jesus.

That "no matter how grey their world is, how uncertain their future is, how impossible their life is"

God would call them "the child he loves",

He would have them know his smile "with you I am well pleased"

He would have them sense the possibility of eternity with him.

Our "mountain view",

Our hope of eternity,

Our knowledge of the presence of God, is not for us alone.

So God sends us down the mountain, back into the valley, to live in the shadow BUT to testify to the light.

In my lazier moments in life I have been known to say that "a long walk just spoils a short car journey".

That, as the mathematicians will agree, circular walks have no point.

It is tempting for us to say why go up the mountain, why make the effort, why create the discipline every day when I can see what needs to be done right here, right now

that the need is pressing and that the time is short and surely we should just get on with it.

But Mountain Views are for Valley Living.  
Our hope tomorrow is our strength today – as we find our true identity  
Our strength today is other people's hope  
1) because we have a mission  
2) because we testify to the light in the darkness; and  
finally, because

### **2.3 There is no Ministry without the Mountain.**

When they came down from the mountain.

They encountered a man in need. Look at v14

*When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him."*

Luke tells us that he had begged the 9 disciples who stayed behind to drive it out – but they could not.

Why?

Why could they not drive the Spirit out?

The answer is simple.

Because they had not been up the mountain

Where had Jesus been? Up the Mountain praying.

Where had the 9 disciples been? Down in the Valley – NOT.

My friends, effective ministry needs the mountain.

We need to make space to pray.

Not just the "chatty prayers",

But also the deep conversations that involve God in our fears, in our tiredness, in our priorities.

I fear (when invited to "go and pray" many of us will instinctively elect to stay in the Valley)

When I talk about the Wednesday Prayer and Praise meeting –

we think it is for others and not us.

When I talk about Quiet Times with God which ARE hard to make a discipline – they are HIGH mountains

– we never make them our rhythm.

As a result we try and minister but we have none of God's power.

Bill Hybels said we need to be "too busy NOT to pray"

If you are stressed or tired or low you need to take time to find God

To listen to what he says to you

To know his presence within you

To let him turn your thoughts from you to others

To understand that he has a mission for you - to make a difference

Where is the mountain? It is a room, it is a place of quietness.

It may take 5 minutes to go there,

It may take every effort to get up early or stay awake to remain there

I guess it will never be convenient.

But

If we want to be equip ourselves for the valley – we need to go to the mountain.

If we want to be save others in the valley – we need to go to the mountain.

For there tomorrow's hope is today's strength; and

your strength is other people's hope.

It was for Jesus – it needs to be for us.