

# **Sermon: Worship in the Mountains**

**Text: Luke 9:28-36**

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**November 1, 2009**

**Introduction:** In Matthew and Mark, there is also a record of what has traditionally been called the “Transfiguration.” Luke picks up the corner of the tent to the Holy of Holies and lets us do something only the privileged few have done - see God! And even then, up until now, it is really the shekinah glory, the evidence of God’s presence that was seen.

What kind of worship do you think was had by Jesus and the inner circle? Contemporary? Traditional? Emerging Church? Were there are a lot of candles? Pews or chairs? Guitars or organ? Oddly enough there is no mention of music at all. There is, however, a great deal of worship imagery reminding us of O.T. times.

**Luke 9:28-36 (NIV)** <sup>28</sup>About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup>Two men, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup>appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. <sup>33</sup>As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) <sup>34</sup>While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

It seems to me that what we are observing and listening to 2000 years later is indeed a worship service. Jesus is facilitating worship for his disciples.

Worship can be many things:

## **I. Worship Is Following God (v.28)**

## A. To a specific place

We do not always know what God has in mind, but he says to every disciple: “follow me.” Sometimes God calls us to worship in isolated places like here with the disciples.

The inner-circle disciples (Peter, James and John) are called to follow Jesus up on a mountain. There are usually three different places mentioned as possible sites here. The most likely, though, is Mount Hermon. The other gospel accounts do say it was a “high” mountain. Mount Hermon rises to a height of over 9000 feet and provides many high places below the snow line where Jesus could have gotten away. Here Jesus and his disciples could get away from the pagan surroundings of Caesarea Philippi and focus on what lies ahead. It is a private lesson Jesus gives. He needs this time and place to reinforce the Messiah’s complete identity.

## Worship Is Following God

### B. To learn

God-designed places aid us in our worship.

“Our greatest claim to nobility is our created capacity to know God, to be in personal relationship with him, to love him and to worship him. Indeed, we are most truly human when we are on our knees before our Creator.” John Stott quoted in *Quotes & Idea Starters for Preaching & Teaching from Leadership Journal*, p. 183

Like Jonah, God may demand our presence on resistant mission fields. We all need to learn to submit to our Lord or maybe be vomited out of the mouth of a large fish on some distant shore. God may call us to give up our jobs and follow Him. As Christians we need to quickly learn that money and position are to be used for God’s kingdom. This inner circle was being called to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. Peter would be crucified for his faith in about 35 years. James would be beheaded in about 15 years (A.D. 44 by Agrippa I) for his faith. Both learned that following Jesus could be physically costly. John lived another 65 years and was able to write a gospel, three letters and the book of Revelation where he wrote:

**Revelation 1:17 (NIV)** <sup>17</sup>When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

Even though he had seen the glorified Jesus before, you never get over it.

Jesus was allowing them to watch and learn. Frankly, it is not until **Luke 11** that one of his disciples finally said: “Lord, teach *us* to pray,” (**Luke 11:1**, *my italics*)

## II. Worship Is Seeing God (vv. 29-33)

We see God in Scripture today. If you are not reading your Bible you are missing opportunities to see the Lord and what He wants from you and for you as a disciple.

### A. Jesus shows his hidden glory (present)

Throughout the Bible there are times that God reveals himself. These are called theophanies. Just like here, these appearings (epiphanies) are only as intense as man can take in. Many of these God-sightings are connected to mountains, with storms and clouds, earthquakes, lightning and thunder and other intense natural phenomenons. When God comes it is usually not quiet or subdued. It's not easy to describe. Jesus wants his inner-circle to begin to learn that he is no ordinary man, but Messiah *and* God.

### B. Jesus shows us the OT heroes (past).

Those of you who have studied the book of Exodus understand the similarities with Moses' experience on Mount Sinai. Moses the great Law-receiver was speaking with the great Law-giver once again. Elijah who spoke of God's plans for his people was speaking with God's Plan for his people. They represented both the law and the prophets of the Old Testament, and Jesus had come to fulfill and satisfy both. He was the answer to all their questions and dreams.

Luke even uses a highly significant word in [verse 31](#). It is translated "departure" (NIV) and "decease" (KJV). The Greek word is "exodus" (ἐξοδος). Jesus would also lead his people out of captivity and give them their freedom. Do you remember the stated reason for going out from Egypt into the desert? It was to worship.

[Exodus 3:12 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>12</sup>And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

The disciples wanted to build structures for the purpose of extending this time of worship like in the Feast of the Tabernacles. They knew this experience was so important they needed to do something to prolong it.

Still they did not fully comprehend what they were viewing and hearing. Luke makes it clear in [verse 33](#) that Peter again does not get it.

[Luke 9:33 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>33</sup>As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

## **Worship Is Seeing God**

### **C. Jesus shows us his plans (future).**

**Worship is only due Jesus. Moses and Elijah are not to be worshipped, but admired. They are servants of the Most High God. Jesus is the Suffering Servant who is God. He alone deserves our praise and worship. Moses and Elijah are not Jesus' equal from a time past. They are his servants as we are.**

**This is driven home by the later comment by Luke:**

**Luke 9:36a (NIV) When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone.**

**Jesus has no peer, no equal! Later John allows us to hear Jesus speak: [Revelation 1:8 \(NIV\)](#) "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."**

## **III. Worship Is Sensing God ([vv. 34-35](#))**

### **A. Through special places....**

**This was certainly one of those special places I hope we all have experienced where God seemed right there close. For some Christian Service Camp is like that. I remember one year on Agape Farm in central PA at "Creation" that Petra played the music for communion (discuss experience). It was absolutely wonderful. There was that time preaching in a tin shed in the Yucatan, a prayer circle near an artesian spring in Quebec, a worship service in Waverly, NY where I felt called into ministry and another in Sayre, PA where I have never sang so long and so hard.**

**I am sure that God had a part in planning all these experiences. Some of them surprised me.**

**This was a special place where God wanted to help people understand Jesus and thus understand Him. And isn't that what worship is all about?**

### **B. Through hearing His word**

**In the transfiguration God is demonstrating his complete confidence in Jesus to carry out his plan of redemption. It is true hearing must be followed up by obedience. The disciples would hear God again. As Jesus approached the day when he would die for us, he said:**

**John 12:27-33 (NIV)** <sup>27</sup>“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup>The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. <sup>30</sup>Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” <sup>33</sup>He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Don’t misunderstand; but worship is for our benefit, not God’s. It is through worship we realize how much God values us. The focus is on us because it is we who need to be transformed. The word used to describe the way Jesus was changed (*transfigured*, **Mk. 9:2**) is the same Greek word used to describe how every follower must change.

**II Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup>And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Paul tells us we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (**Romans 12:2**). This comes through hearing the word of God. It is a work aided by the Holy Spirit.

Worship is about God, to God and really ultimately for us, not in a self-centered way, but in a relational one.

#### **IV. Worship Is Obeying God (v.36)**

**Luke 9:36 (NIV)** <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Matthew and Mark make the situation clearer.

**Mark 9:9 (NIV)** <sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

##### **A. Sometimes it is a matter of timing.**

Jesus up until now had discouraged demons and many of those he healed not to say anything about his being the Messiah. Jesus had to make his own way to Jerusalem and eventually the cross on God’s timing and for the right reasons.

I think Jesus was allowing for more time to be given to training and preparation for his departure. In the last chapter of Luke, post-resurrection, we still hear Jesus teaching the same lesson as here:

**Luke 24:25-27 (NIV)** <sup>25</sup>He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

**B. There needs to be personal understanding.**

At this point in time, the disciples still needed to learn how to pray. Sure they had heard prayers and undoubtedly even led them in their families, but they would later be reintroduced to Jesus, the risen Lord and Savior. Everything they thought they knew was going to be turned upside down.

C. S. Lewis, speaking about his wife, Joy’s terminal illness once responded to his friend Harry Harrington’s hopeful comment: ‘God is answering your prayer,’ “That’s not why I pray, Harry. I pray because I can’t help myself. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn’t change God; it changes me.” - (quoted in Tom Long, *Whispering the Lyrics*, Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Col, 1995, p. 126)

This needed personal relationship with God through Jesus is not transferable to others, but it is necessary before one can share what real faith is like with others.

**Conclusion:** When we are with Jesus, following Him and obeying Him, worship happens. It may not be as spectacular as what happened in the mountains, but there will be times when we see God in a way that changes us. There will be times when we sense God’s presence. It is in those times whether quiet or loud, whether in bright light or twilight that we fill up our memories and hearts for some of the dry days coming that include testing, and even crosses.

The silence commanded at the end of this passage must not be sustained by the modern church. We have to speak of God’s great love for us and share it with the rest of the world who has never really heard the Good News. But before we do, *we* must really know God!

**Do you know Him, today?**