

Title: “Left Behind”

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Mark 9:2,9

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Service Readings: Ex 34:29-35, 2 Cor 3:12-13, 4:1-6, Mark 9:2-9

"Have you ever felt left behind? In this passage Jesus invites Peter, James, and John up a mountain to witness his divine glory. But he left behind the other nine. What does this teach us about God's love for his creation?"

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi,^u it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” ⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Jesus called Peter, James and John and led them up a mountain. In their presence he *metamorphosed*, he transformed in a way that unveiled his divinity. These three disciples didn’t just witness a bright light emanating from Jesus, they saw a glimpse of who he really was. For that moment, they saw the body and human nature of Jesus glorified. And it radiated brighter than the sun! But that is not all! For they also heard the very voice of God speak from the clouds, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”

Up to this point in their lives, they had been witness to the teachings and miracles of Jesus. They had seen him exorcise demons, feed thousands with almost nothing, and heal the sick. They had heard him teach with authority and they had heard him claim that he was the Son of God. And just before this mountaintop experience, Peter had even confessed this very claim, “You are the Christ,” he responds when Jesus asks who he is.

And then. And then Jesus calls Peter, James and John. He leads them up the mountain where they are shown a preview of his eventual resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Peter, James, and John. They were the ones Jesus chose to be witnesses to this event. But Andrew, Nathanael, the younger James, Judas, Jude, Matthew, Philip, Simon, and Thomas. . . . Jesus left them behind. At the bottom of the mountain. Excluded. And not only were they *excluded* from his transfiguration, they were *excluded* from even being told about it. Nine disciples. Nine men hand chosen by Jesus to be his closest followers. Nine men who would not learn of his transfiguration until *after* he was resurrected.

To the world, this might seem a bit unfair. After all, being treated equally is a foundational truth throughout the world, or at least most of it. And when this doesn't happen, when a person is treated differently than the rest, questions are asked and concerns are raised. Why the discrepancy? Why are *those people* treated to something that *these people* are not? Why do *those people* deserve something and *these people* do not? Attempting to find answers to these types of questions usually points a person inward, toward themselves. If I am excluded, for example, what does that say about me? What does that say about who I am? And, even more so, what does that say about my relationship with the person who excluded me? You can imagine how this can, and does, destroy relationships – especially ones that seem solid, that seem indestructible. Can you imagine, for example, finding out that your friend, your very best friend for over 20 years is planning a wedding and has asked someone else to be her maid of honor? Or, can you imagine that God, the very God of all creation, chose you as a disciple but not as a witness to the unveiling of his glory? What does that say about your standing before him? What does that say about how he thinks of you in comparison to those who he *did* invite?

If we place ourselves in the shoes of these disciples and view the transfiguration through the lens of the world, these questions have the potential of eroding our belief of our own standing before God. Why? Because we try to apply the rules of the world's kingdom to the rules of God's kingdom. But God's kingdom doesn't work like that. *Jesus* doesn't work like that. We cannot expect him to act the way the world acts. The world would tell us that there must have been something wrong with those nine because they had been excluded. The world would have us believe that Jesus must have loved Peter, James, and John more than them. You see, in the way of the world, this all makes perfect, logical sense. But in the way of God, it simply is false.

Judging our relationship with Jesus, our standing before God, based on how he treats us is applying the world's rules to God and that is wrong but that is something we all do. Don't believe me? How often have we wondered why God would allow a certain health issue, or social issue, or event to affect one person but not another? Or why God would give one person a certain break or talent but not another? And why would he give a certain talent to this person if they are going to just waste it, ignore it? And this may be especially painful if it is a gift you pray earnestly for.

You see, we all do this. We all in some way view our standing before God, and his feeling towards us, through the world's lens. And so, if we can rightly view and understand what happened 2000 years ago, we can apply it to our own lives and correct our faulty, even sinful thoughts. So, how do we view this rightly? We can start here:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Jesus, our savior, entered into his creation, hidden in the flesh of a human, to suffer God's judgement for the sins of the world. The physical and spiritual agony that he experienced on the cross for the propitiation of all, not just some, not just God's favorites, but for all mankind. No one was left behind. And when Jesus resurrected, that victory, also, was made available to all mankind. *This* is where we must start. We must start with the foundational understanding and faith that Jesus died and rose for all – equally. No one was excluded from the forgiveness of the cross and no one was excluded from the victory of the grave. God's love towards his creation, especially towards people, is

a love that exceeds the human capacity of understanding, just like the transfiguration. We may not be able to fully comprehend it, but that doesn't make it less true.

We are his adopted children. We are loved more than we can ever imagine. He would never do anything that was harmful for our salvation. And so, if we cling to this in faith then we can begin to view these worldly situations in a way that is pleasing to God. Why did Jesus leave the other nine at the foot of the mountain? I don't know. But I *do* know that we are not left behind at the table when he offers us forgiveness through his body and blood. And I *do* know that we will not be left behind when he returns and our own bodies are transformed into the likeness of God. And because I *do* know these things – because *we* do know these things, we can trust God for those things that we *do not* know or understand. We can trust that God is omniscient, that he knows everything. And we can trust that he uses his wisdom to make choices that are for our good.

And so we can pray. We can pray that he will continue to send the Holy Spirit into us and fortify our faith to withstand these sinful thoughts and questions that we will continue to have. And we can pray for the continued strength to trust in his decisions and actions, even when we don't agree or understand them. And speaking of praying, we can pray all of this right now. Will you pray with me?

Lord

We thank you for your great love for us, as shown in the transfiguration of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In his radiance, we see a glimpse of your glory, and we are strengthened in our faith.

We pray that you would continue to transfigure us, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Help us to grow in Christlikeness, in word and deed. May we reflect your love to the world, so that all may know your grace and mercy.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Amen.