

SM031 – A Disappointing Day

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, A Disappointing Day. This story is from Matthew 17:9-21 and Mark 9:9-29. I hope you will follow along in your Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, A Disappointing Day.

SM031 A Disappointing Day

Have you ever had a mountaintop experience? I mean that literally. Have you ever been to the top of a mountain, breathed in the fresh air, and looked at the countryside around for miles? There is something refreshing about it, something invigorating about it. Our minds clear, we feel better, and we are happier for the experience.

I also ask the question figuratively. Have you ever had a mountaintop experience? And by this I mean an experience with God – wherever you are – where your mind clears, you see life from a better view, you understand God's will, and your life is changed.

Peter, James, and John, three of Jesus' twelve disciples had both experiences at the same time. They went with Jesus to the top of a mountain in northern Israel. No one knows which mountain it was. Some have suggested Mount Tabor, some Mount Hermon, and some Mount Meiron which is only about eight miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee. But whichever it was these men had a mountaintop experience with Jesus.

They saw Jesus in all his glory. His garments shone and moved like lightning in the sky. His face was like the sun. Moses and Elijah appeared with him and talked about the great deeds he would accomplish in Jerusalem, and the cloud of God's glory surrounded them all with the voice of God saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One, Listen to Him!"

If the disciples had been alert they would have noticed something about all these events. What happened with Jesus on this mountain was a symbolic re-enactment of what happened to ancient Israel so many centuries before. After the great deliverance from Egypt, Israel went to a mountain. Most of

the nation stayed at the foot of the mountain. Moses went up to the mountain and was surrounded by a cloud and heard the voice of God.

In the same way, Jesus and his men had been at Caesarea Philippi, where there was a cave that many people believed led to the underworld. Jesus used this cave as an illustration of the deliverance that he would give to people who would trust in him. The gates of Hell would not be able to stand against his power. Then he travelled to this mountain, took some of his men with him to the top, the cloud of God's glory surrounded him, and the voice of God spoke. Moses, along with Elijah was on the mountain with him and he spoke with Jesus about his departure, which, in the language of that day was the word, "exodus." Can you see all the similarities? Another exodus is the topic of conversation. Another journey to a mountain takes place. Moses is on the mountain again. The glory of God appears. The voice of God speaks. Only a few of God's people are there. The rest of God's people are at the foot of the mountain.

But this time there is a big difference, instead of God giving laws and commands, God says only one thing – "this is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!" Even though the original commands and laws God gave to Moses were important, they now give way to the new revelation of God, the revelation of God that he gave in Jesus, the Chosen One. And so what did Jesus say to these men?

The next morning, Jesus, Peter, James, and John started coming down from the mountain. As they were descending they started talking about the events of the night before. Was there excitement in their voices? Was there an air of mystery about it all? Were they amazed that they had seen Moses and Elijah? Were they in awe at seeing Jesus in his glory and majesty and kingdom?

As they talked and discussed the night's events, Jesus broke into their conversation and said, "Tell the vision to no one until I, the Son of Man, have risen from the dead."

Disappointment filled the hearts of the disciples. They were looking forward to telling the others what had happened, but now Jesus was ordering them not to say a word about it. This was not the first time Jesus had done this. The week before after Peter's great confession that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and after Jesus conferred great blessings upon him and upon the others and told them of the mission ahead, Jesus told them to tell no one that he was the Christ. This was so hard to hear. They wanted to tell the world that the Messiah had come and that Jesus was the Messiah. But Jesus told them to tell no one. He said that first he had to go to Jerusalem and die and then rise again the third day.

This was so disappointing and so confusing. Why would Jesus go to Jerusalem if he knew he would be martyred. And what did this "resurrection on the third day mean?"

And now, here he was again saying the same thing after a glorious event. "Tell no one until after I have risen from the dead." The disciples started talking about this. What did Jesus mean by the resurrection on the third day? They believed in the resurrection. But the resurrection would not happen until the last day, the last day of the world in which God would raise up everyone, some to an eternity of glory and life and some to an eternity of shame and death. But what does resurrection on the third day mean? The third day from what?

And didn't the prophets say that before the resurrection, before the final events of God's plan took place, that Elijah would come? Finally, one of the three turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, why do the teachers of our day say that Elijah will come first and restore all things? Is their teaching accurate? We saw Elijah last night. Will Elijah come first?"

And Jesus said, "Yes, the teaching is clear. Elijah does come first and he restores all things. The prophets are certain on this. But, why do the prophets also say that the Son of Man comes and suffers many things and is treated with contempt?"

To this the disciples had no answer. They believed in the prophets but they believed that the future would be one of glory for God's people. They believed that when God acted, he would act in power to save his people, deliver them from the pagans, and bring in the kingdom of God's glory and power. If this is what the prophets spoke about, why did Jesus keep speaking of suffering?

The disciples continued to wrestle with these words as they descended the mountain. Jesus let them discuss it for a while, and then he said, "Men, you must realize that when the prophets of old and the scribes of today say that Elijah must first come, they are telling the truth. And I say to you that Elijah has already come. And when he came, our people did not recognize who he was. And because they did not know he was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah, they mistreated him and they carried out their evil desires upon him."

Then the disciples realized that Jesus was talking about John the prophet, the one who was the voice in the wilderness, the one who baptized them and who baptized Jesus. They thought about John. They thought about how the religious leaders did not accept him. They thought about how they questioned him and followed his movements closely. And they thought about Herod Antipas arresting him and throwing him into prison.

The disciples remembered also that day when Jesus was healing the multitudes and John had sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he really were the promised one and Jesus sent them back with the encouraging news that he was the one. And what had Jesus spoken right after that? Jesus said that John was the messenger who prepared the way of the Lord and John was the one who fulfilled the promises of Elijah.

Yes, Elijah had come, so to speak, not literally, but this time in the person of John the Prophet and in this way the prophecies were fulfilled and yet John was martyred. And Jesus was saying that he was going to die as well, just as John had died at the hands of Herod Antipas.

The men thought soberly on it all. Jesus had told them if they wished to follow him they must pick up their crosses and lose their lives for him. John had lost his life. Jesus would lose his life and they would lose theirs if they followed, but in the end, they would gain true life.

The disciples were just beginning to put the pieces of this mystery together when they came to the foot of the mountain. A large crowd had gathered. People were shouting, "Get back. Get away. He is mad! A growling noise was heard in the middle of the crowd, like a wild animal ready to pounce on its prey, but

the noise was not coming from a wild animal but from a young boy. The crowd moved back and the young boy shrieked and fell to the ground, rolling and thrashing his arms about.”

Some scribes were there and they were taunting Jesus’ disciples, “Cast him out, Cast out the spirit. You say that your Master has power and that you have power in his name. Cast out the spirit if he is from God.”

But the disciples of Jesus, the ones who had stayed at the foot of the mountain while Peter, James, and John went up onto the mountain, stood by helplessly and with great shame. They could not cast out the spirit.

Then, someone said, “I wish Jesus were here,” and he turned and looked toward the mountain where Jesus and his three disciples had been and there they were in the distance. He said, “Look, here comes Jesus now!”

And when we come back, we will find out what happened when Jesus came into the crowd with the young boy who was possessed by an evil spirit.

Interlude

Hello Everyone! This is Jonathan Williams the creator of and storyteller for Stories of the Master. I hope you are enjoying today’s story that looks back to the mountaintop experience Jesus’ disciples had! Have you ever had one? I’m sure you have. I’m sure you have had one literally where you enjoyed the clean mountain air and the beautiful views. I’m sure that you have had one spiritually where everything has seemed clear and glorious and you really understood the need to listen to Jesus and follow him.

But what happens after the mountaintop experience? I think you know, we have to come down and enter every day life with all its challenges and difficulties. In our story, in just a moment, we will find out what happened when Jesus and the disciples came down.

But first, I hope you will write to us at Stories of the Master and let us know how these stories are blessing your life. Write to us at PO Box 90047 in SA Texas 78209 in the U.S. and let us know about your relationship with Jesus. We would like to help you grow in your faith. Check out our website at StoriesoftheMaster.com and there you will find resources to help you in your discovery of Jesus and following him. You can listen to today’s story again, download it, or purchase a CD for yourself and to share with friends. Again, our website is storiesofthemaster.com or you can write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA Texas, 78209.

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Jesus and his three companions have started coming down from the mountain – the mountain where he was changed before them on a night of vision and glory. But as they came down, a great spiritual challenge was waiting. Jesus was ready for it. Were the disciples ready?

Let's get back to our story and see what happened.

Part 2

There was a father in Israel who loved his son. His son represented his hopes and dreams. When he was born he beamed with joy at this little boy who would carry on the family name and who would one day receive his inheritance. The father looked forward to training him in his occupation, to teaching him the word of God, and to hearing him recite the Shema – “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” He looked forward to taking him to the great Temple in Jerusalem, to offering sacrifices for his sins, and to bowing low before the Name of God that dwelt in the Temple. And he looked forward to the day of his maturing when he would find a suitable bride for him, they would marry, and they would have grandchildren that would bring him great joy.

But all of these hopes and dreams seemed to evaporate like a morning cloud in the hot near eastern sun. And they seemed to be only that – dreams that faded with each passing day for the son became gravely ill. The father did not know when or how it had started. He just noticed his son's strange behavior. One day the father had built up a fire for cooking and the sun immediately collapsed, started making strange gurgling noises, foamed at the mouth, and started rolling toward the fire. The father had shouted out, “No, son, no!” And only just kept him from the fire that would have consumed him.

On another day, he and his boy were out by the lake and his son started foaming again and fell face first into the lake. He would have surely drowned if the father had not been alert and run to him. Many times this happened and the wear and worry on the father were obvious to all. His son was gravely ill and seemed bent on killing himself. All of the hopes and dreams of a normal life faded and now the father just wanted to see his boy get well.

Then, the father heard about Jesus and when he heard that Jesus was in the area close to his home he and his son travelled to find him. One morning someone said to them, “Over there. See that group of men? They are his followers. You should find Jesus with them.” But when the father arrived Jesus was not there. The man said, “Please, sirs, I must see Jesus. Are you his disciples? Can you take me to him?”

But the disciples said, “Yes, we are his followers but Jesus is not with us. He left us last night with three of our companions and they went up on the mountain.” The father looked up and fear and hopelessness entered his heart. He dared not take his son up there. There were too many dangers. If his son were to fall on this mountainside, he could fall to his death. “Can you help?” the father asked. “My son is very ill. A spirit seizes him slams him to ground and he tries to kill himself.”

Philip and Andrew looked at each other. Thomas hung his head. Matthew looked away. They had done things like this before when they went on their preaching ministry. They had healed the sick in Jesus name but it had been awhile and they did not know if they could or should do try it again.

During those moments some religious leaders of the people had come to them and were listening and they said, “Yes, heal him in the name of your leader. If he is a prophet, if he is the Christ then heal him in his name.” And so one of the disciples stepped forward and said, “OK.” He looked at the son and said,

“In the name of my master, in the name of Jesus, evil spirit, come out of him.” But nothing happened. The scribes laughed.

Another disciple tried it, “in the name of Jesus, come out you evil spirit.” But again nothing happened and the scribes roared with laughter again. “I guess your Jesus isn’t so powerful after all,” they said.

“He is too. He has healed the sick and even raised the dead. You know this. We have healed the sick as well in his name.”

“Then do it again,” they mocked. And for a third time one of the disciples said, “In the name of Jesus, you evil spirit come out of the boy,” and this time something happened, but it was not what they expected. The boy stood stiff as a board. His eyes bulged and a look of evil and terror came over his face, a low growling noise came from his throat and then he fell face first onto the ground and began wildly thrashing about, uncontrollably.

The crowd moved back, the scribes had stopped their laughing, and the disciples of Jesus looked on with fear and with helplessness. Just then, someone shouted, “Look, over there, here comes Jesus and the others.”

The father of the son didn’t need any encouragement. He ran to Jesus and said, “Lord, please help me. Please have mercy upon my son, for he has gone crazy and is so sick.” As they walked toward the crowd the father continued, “An evil spirit has taken over him and he tries to kill himself.”

As Jesus approached another convulsion came over the boy and Jesus said, “How long has this been happening?” And the father said, “Since childhood. If we are near fire he will try to roll into the fire. If we are near water he will try to fall into the water. I brought him to your disciples but they were unable to cast him out.”

Jesus looked at his men. They hung their heads with shame. He looked at the scribes who had been mocking rather than trying to help. He looked at the father who had suffered for many years with his son. And he said, “O unbelieving and perverted generation. How long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me,” but as soon as said that another convulsion racked the boy’s body with pain and agony and the father said, “Please Lord, if you can do anything, help us!”

And Jesus turned to the father and said, “If you can? If you can? What do you mean, ‘if you can.’ All things are possible to him who believes.” And the father said, “I, I do believe. Help my unbelief.”

There was so much Jesus wanted to say to this man, so much to his disciples, so much to the scribes. But Jesus saw that the crowd was starting to get very large and he did not want to have a large crowd around at this moment so he turned away from the disciples and the father and the scribes and said, “You evil spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.”

The boy convulsed again and the crowd drew back. The boy rose to his feet, and with a face of rage and horror he looked at Jesus, screamed, and collapsed on the ground. All was silent. The boy did not move. He hardly seemed to be breathing and someone from the crowd said, “I think he’s dead.” But Jesus

walked over to the boy, knelt down, took him by the hand, raised him up and gave him back to his father.

The father and son embraced with joy and relief, such as they had not felt for years. “Thank you, Lord, thank you for your mercy.” The crowd looked on in astonishment and Jesus and Jesus and his disciples walked away.

They went into a home they were using. Jesus was very quiet and finally the disciples said, “Lord, why could we not cast out the evil spirit?” And Jesus said, “Because of the littleness of your faith. Have I not said to you that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to ... this mountain ... “Move from here to there and it will move. And nothing will be impossible to you.”

But this kind ... this kind of spirit ... it only comes out by prayer and by fasting.

How little their faith must have been. The disciples were disappointed over their failure. Jesus was disappointed in their lack of faith. The son was healed but it a disappointing day after a night of vision and glory on a mountain.

Ending

Hello again everyone, this is Jonathan Williams again, your teacher and storyteller for Stories of the Master. I am sure this was a disappointing day for the disciples and for Jesus. He had gone up onto the mountain and showed three of his disciples his glory. The other nine had been left on the plain below and when they were challenged with a difficult situation, they were not ready for the challenge.

Situations like the one that they encountered require deep discernment and mighty power that only comes through prayer. And while Jesus was praying on the mountain, the others were sleeping and it teaches us the importance of walking close to God, being filled with His Spirit, and remaining in a spirit of prayer for whatever situation might arise.

But though it was a day of disappointment, Jesus was there to make all things right. He healed the boy. He taught his men, and they moved forward in their mission and you and I can take encouragement from this truth – that though we may have days of disappointment and failure, Jesus will not forsake us. He will make all things right. He will teach us and he will move forward with us in the mission that he has given us. And my prayer for you is that you would move forward with him and let him teach you all that he has for you and let him use you to bless others.

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I hope you have been blessed by today's story. And I hope that you will join us again for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master Himself richly bless you.