

Sermon Text: Luke 9:28-36 ²⁸ Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. ³⁰ And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. ³³ Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" -- not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" ³⁶ When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen. (NKJV)

Sermon Theme: A Heavenly Retreat

In the name of Jesus Christ who gives us an eternal life of glory with Him in heaven, dear fellow redeemed;

The practice of going on retreats has become quite popular in recent years. There have been retreats for young people, men and women, for single folks and married couples, as well as for company employees or members of various organizations.

The nature of different retreats may range from being religious to secular, and from business to personal. Common to them all is the perceived need of getting away from the press and demands of day to day living by seeking out a place of refuge in a secluded place. The desired benefits can be some kind of personal growth or be revived and strengthened in some way so that when you return to your daily routine you are better equipped to meet its challenges.

Another common factor in all these various retreats is that they cannot continue indefinitely. Neither can they completely deliver or rescue you from all the woes and difficulties of life.

The spiritual retreat spoken of in today's Scripture text transcends any kind of retreat offered in our modern day world. It tells of Jesus and three of His beloved disciples Peter, James, and John going up on a mountain for a brief retreat. They were leaving behind for a short time the very demanding work of ministering to countless people.

Just a short while prior to this there had been a large crowd numbering into the thousands that flocked after Jesus--some to be healed of their physical maladies by Him and others, who as spiritually lost and bewildered sheep, wanted to learn more about Him. As that day wore on Jesus and His disciples were confronted with vast numbers of hungry mouths to feed which the Lord responded to by miraculously multiplying a handful of food for the disciples to distribute to the multitudes.

Jesus and His followers were not only confronted with the tremendous press of the physical and spiritual needs of the masses, but they were also faced with some very difficult

and trying times ahead in their own personal lives. Jesus told His followers of what was soon to befall Him which weighed heavily on His mind when He said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Lk. 9:22). Jesus then told His disciples of the sacrifices they would be called on to make and of the cross of suffering they would have to bear in following Him as Christians.

In view of such weighty issues of life, Jesus and His followers were very much in need of a retreat where they could be strengthened, sustained, and uplifted in their spirits. What they experienced on the mountain was a retreat of a heavenly nature, as they received a brief glimpse and foretaste of what it will be like in the eternal world to come in heaven.

To begin with, the evangelist Luke reports that the intended purpose for the four men going up on the mountain alone is so that they could have a solitary place for prayer. Prayer in itself is a way of going off on a retreat, for as our minds and spirits become detached from what is going on around us and we communicate directly with God in heaven, we are in another dimension of life. It is a truly wonderful dimension in which we can bring all our burdens, all our cares, wants, and needs before the throne of grace.

The consoling aspect of this kind of retreat is that according to God’s gracious will we can unburden ourselves by laying out everything that concerns us and then leave all these things with the Lord for Him to carry and help us resolve through His divine workings. To know and trust that God will hear us and help us according to His good will is a big relief and a huge load off our minds.

The psalmist tells us of his personal experience in bringing his cares and concerns to the Lord in prayer, saying, “To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, Lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications When I cry to You, When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary...Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him” (Ps.28:1,2,6,7).

The glorious happening that took place on the mountain as Jesus was praying is most likely the heavenly Father’s response to His supplications. Luke reports that, “As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (vv.29-31).

During Jesus’ life of humiliation as a lowly servant of mankind, His physical countenance appeared like any human. But after He would finish His redemptive work on earth, His divine majesty and glory as Lord and God would shine brightly through His human body in all its splendor. It is with this glorious physical form that Jesus will return on the last day and then be found living with on the new perfected earth that will be the eternal habitation of the citizens of heaven. That future glory of Jesus shined through His person to some degree on the mountain for Peter, James, and John to briefly behold with their own eyes. When they and all believers join Jesus on the heavenly earth to come, we will behold Jesus in all His splendor and dwell forever before His glorious presence where, the Bible says, there are pleasures forever more. (Ps.16:11)

While on that mount of transfiguration not only did the three disciples receive a glimpse

of the future heavenly splendor of Jesus, but also of the magnificent glory which believers in Christ will possess on the day of our resurrection from the grave and in our eternal life on the new heavenly earth. For there before Peter, James, and John stood Moses and Elijah in a glorified form. Moses and Elijah are recognized from Holy Scripture as having been Old Testament believers who had served as prophets of God. These were numbered among the prophets who had prophesied of the grace and mercy that would come through promised Christ and Savior. And now they were standing alongside of Jesus speaking to Him concerning His coming death through which He would pave the way to eternal life for sinful mankind.

Although Moses and Elijah had long since been taken out of this earthly existence, yet for a brief time God, through the use of His almighty power, brought them back to this earth to appear in a glorified form, such as like we will assume at our resurrection. The apostle Peter testifies of that wonderful transformation that will take place at the resurrection, as he declares, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

In First Corinthians, the apostle Paul tells us what is involved in this wonderful transformation, as he said, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body...For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (15:42-44,53).

The lifeless body of the believer that is laid to rest in the grave is one that has been corrupted by the ravages of sickness, disease, injury or aging. In the resurrection, our bodies will be raised in an incorruptible form, never again to be assaulted by the kind of ills found in this present world.

The apostle John declares in the book of Revelation concerning our glorious future life in heaven, “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat” (7:16). “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; their shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (21:4).

Our lifeless bodies which are sown or put in the grave in dishonor will be raised in glory. In this present world, our bodies are far from being glorious in the highest sense. There are physical defects and flaws in everyone. There are bodily members and parts that become injured, scarred, or completely lost. In the resurrection, all trace of physical imperfections will be gone, as our resurrected bodies will be glorified, being completely transformed and perfected so that they will shine in heavenly beauty.

That which is sown or buried in weakness will be raised in power. Our various organs, senses, and powers in the body over time become weak, worn out, and finally totally shot. But in the resurrection, all our bodily functions will be completely and perfectly restored to their fullest potential so that there is no physical weakness or inabilities in us whatsoever.

That which is sown in the grave as a natural body will be raised a spiritual body. Through out the course of our earthly lives this mortal frame of ours is vexed with a sinful nature, which adversely affects our minds and hearts. It is the source of our impure thoughts,

feelings, and emotions. It has incited us to words and actions that are not pleasing to our God. And it is therefore responsible for our troubled spirits that are weighed down with guilt, fear, and shame.

But in the resurrection, our risen bodies will possess a spirit of heart and mind that will be completely free and unfettered by sinfulness. The divine image and likeness of God, which Adam and Eve possessed prior to the fall and then lost for themselves and for all of us, will be fully restored to all believers in heaven. That means we will possess perfect and complete knowledge of God and the things of God, and we will have pure hearts out of which only holy words and deeds will flow.

Finally, the apostle Paul said of the resurrection that this mortal will put on immortality. The glorified and perfected body and soul we will possess on the last day will live on in this heavenly state forever in eternity, never to diminish or perish or pass away.

When Peter saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah standing before him in heavenly glory and splendor, he wanted this wonderful sight to continue, for he foolishly offered to build tents for the three of them so that they could remain on the mountain in this glorious state indefinitely. But this was not meant to be. As much as some might like to think and hope, there can never be a heaven here on earth. If Jesus was to be glorified on high as Lord and Savior, and if we like Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, John, and countless other believers are to be raised in glory on the last day, Jesus would have to go down off the mountain so that He could ascend the cross to suffer and die for the sins of the world. We know by faith that it is through our Savior's blood and righteousness that we are eternally saved and made heirs of heaven. Because He rose from the grave on the third day, we too will be raised at the end of time to live with Him in glory in eternity on the new earth to come.

The heavenly Father confirmed for us that Jesus would be able to accomplish all this as our Savior when He put His stamp of approval on Jesus and His saving work by saying of Him at the mount, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 17:5).

The heavenly sights and sounds that occurred at the retreat on the mountain served to comfort, strengthen, and uplift the spirits of those present. Even though we were not there we have the blessed testimony of it and the understanding of what it means to us and all believers.

While we are living in the valley of life here below, let us ever heed the heavenly Father's counsel that He gave at the mountain, namely, to continue to hear, meditate on, and receive in faith the words and teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ. The word of our Lord possesses the power to sustain, guard, and keep us in the faith until our final end so that we will be able to experience the never ending joys of a glorified life in heaven.

May we never grow tired of hearing the Word of God, but ever look to it in order to find refuge for our souls, peace for our troubled minds, and hope for a blessed life to come through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.