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Moving Mountains: Mount Tabor Matthew 14:13-23

In northern Israel there is an important valley called the Jezreel Valley. Revelation tells us that it will be the location of the final battle between good and evil at a place called Armageddon. Jezreel was also the location of a superhighway of the time, the Via Maris—the Way of the Sea. The Via Maris was the equivalent of our I-5, running north and south, and was intersected by another road running east-west. And near the junction of those two super highways, rising right up out of the valley floor like an upside down sno-cone, sits one of the most strategic mountains in the Bible. This is Mt. Tabor.

Mt. Tabor is important in the Old Testament because it is the location of a famous battle when the woman judge, Deborah, defeated the Canaanites led by General Sisera. But it is also important in the New Testament because it is the location of one of the most unusual stories in the life of Jesus... and that's saying something!

Jesus had favorites. He loved all 12 of his disciples but he had three insiders. They were especially gifted and would become three of the most important leaders in the Christian Church. Jesus often spent extra alone time with these three. Who were they? Peter, James and John.

One day shortly before Jesus returned to Jerusalem to die, he took the three and climbed a high mountain. We aren't told which mountain but tradition says it was Mt. Tabor. They climbed to the top and, while they were standing there, Peter, James and John watched the most amazing transformation take place before their very eyes. Suddenly, Jesus began to shine. There is no better way to put it.

How many of you have ever used one of these while camping? [Light a lantern—dim house lights.] It has always fascinated me how brightly a mantle burns in a lantern without incinerating. I don't even know how it works. But when I hear the description of Jesus on Mt Tabor, I imagine this is what he must have looked like... only bigger and brighter! The word for this is "transfigured." Listen: "There [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." Mark puts it this way: "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."

It must have been an incredible sight! Jesus' face shining like the sun, his clothes as bright as this. But that wasn't the end of the show! Suddenly, two figures appear

on Mt. Tabor with Jesus. Who? This isn't the first time we've met these guys on a mountaintop, is it? Where did we find Moses? Mt Sinai (with the Ten Commandments) and Mt. Nebo where he died and was buried just outside the Promised Land. And Elijah? Mt. Carmel, where he destroyed the prophets of Baal and Mt. Horeb where he hid in a cave because Queen Jezebel was trying to kill him.

The three boys already knew that there was something special about Jesus. But wow, to see Him on a mountain, shining like the sun, chatting with dead spiritual super heroes... you didn't see that every day. A little unusual... and even more unusual because—**well, when was the last time that Jesus wanted to draw attention to himself?** Think about it: when Jesus did a miracle—healed someone, restored sight, cast out an evil spirit—what were his instructions afterwards? Shhhhhhh! Don't tell anyone. Of course, no one ever obeyed. They ran off blabbing about it.

But why **did** Jesus want to keep things secret? Because, he still had work to do! He had three years of ministry to complete. The religious leaders already hated him. The more people talked about how amazing he was, the more jealous they became and the more they wanted to kill him. So Jesus' tendency was to keep things on the down-low.

But shining like a beacon on a mountaintop talking to Moses and Elijah isn't exactly subtle, is it? Why the change? Why did Jesus let the boys see this... this glimpse of His glory, of what He must have looked like in heaven? Why? What had changed from "shhhhhh?"

Well, He's almost done! Jesus' work is just about over. Jesus is just about to head to Jerusalem where He knows He will be killed. There's no reason to hide any more. No reason to keep things quiet. No reason to "shush" His disciples any more. He might as well let the cat out of the bag. And, wow, did He let the cat out of the bag on Mt. Tabor. But was that why Jesus did it? Just because He could? Is that why He brought the three along to witness this moment? To impress them... to strut His divine stuff? Did Jesus take His three favorites to the top of Mt. Tabor to show off a little bit?

No! Jesus was about to do the hardest thing that anyone had ever done! He was about to die for the sins of the world. Jesus had come on a rescue mission and this was his moment. Now, as he was getting ready to return to bloody Jerusalem; now was the moment when the salvation of humankind hung in the balance. If Jesus fails, all is lost. If Jesus comes through, the world is saved. It was the critical moment in the history of humankind—and Jesus was scared! He knew what was coming and it was frightening. And I think He needed some encouragement. Right now, just before He took His final steps toward Jerusalem—He needed a pep rally. And the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor was the greatest pep rally ever held. The glory of God came upon Jesus and He shone like the sun. The two greatest figures from the Old Testament showed up to chat with Jesus and give Him a pep talk. Maybe they

even did the wave to cheer Him on! But was that all? Nope! You ain't seen nothing yet.

What happened next? God spoke! From heaven! A huge, bright cloud surrounded them on that mountain and the voice of God the Father spoke out of that cloud. There are only two times in the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—that God speaks. Do you remember the first time? At Jesus' baptism! After He came out of the water, God spoke! Just before Jesus was to begin His ministry, God the Father spoke words of blessing and encouragement. And now, just before Jesus heads toward Jerusalem to finish His ministry, God the Father speaks again. Words of blessing and encouragement!

Isn't that cool? God the Father knew that God the Son needed to be encouraged! And at this critical moment, he speaks. Notice the three parts of the Father's blessing.

First: **This is my Son, whom I love!** Another version puts it this way: "This is my beloved Son!" God speaks the words to his Son that every child longs to hear from his or her father—I love you! You are my child and I **love** you! Words of **Affection** based in their identity. God said, "I love you because you are mine! My precious son!"

I am always amazed at the number of men who tell me, "My dad **never** said he loved me." They might add, "I always knew he did...but he never used those words." Anyone here who would say that? Who never heard those words from his father? Some dads say, "I show my love to my children. Words aren't important; they know I love them." But let me ask you this: If Jesus, the eternal Son of God, **needed** to hear his Father say the words, "I love you," how much do you think your own children or grandchildren need to hear those same words from you?

So, first part of the blessing: I love you. Second part: "**I'm proud of you.**" "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased!" Every child wants the **Affection** of their father and every child wants the **Approval** of their father. And not just because they have performed in a way that pleases him. Every child longs for their father to be proud of them for who they are, not just for what they do. For example, my son Cooper has a great heart. It is tender and compassionate. I have told him thousands of times how proud I am of his tender heart.

Last Tuesday, mom and dad came over for dinner. We were talking about our lives, our church, our ministry and all that is going on. As he walked out the door, dad said, "I'm proud of you, son." You know, I am a grown man. I have my own family, my own children and I've made a mark in this world. But when I heard my dad say, "I'm proud of you, it still made my heart swell. My father's pride still matters to me.

I love you. I'm proud of you. And the third part of the blessing was: "Listen to him! My Son has gifts and talents that are worth paying attention to. Listen to him!" In

other words, God was saying, "I have noticed the gifts and talents of my son. I can name them. I know what he can do well!"

The third part of a father's blessing is **Affirmation**... to be able to identify the gifts and talents of the child; to be able to tell them what they do well! Of the three parts of the blessing, this is the part that comes easiest to most dads. When our kids "perform" well in sports or in music or in school, we notice and give them strokes. This is good, but the problem is it is often out of whack and out of order. Too often the father's blessing is all performance oriented. If you produce, if you do, if you accomplish **then** you will get my affirmation. But that's not the order of things with God's blessing. First he declares his love. Next he declares his pride in his child. And only then does he affirm what he does. What he does is important, but it is not most important. And if our child senses our affirmation only when he performs well, they will experience our love as conditional.

When Jesus the divine and eternal Son of God started His ministry at baptism, His heavenly Father knew He needed words of blessing and He gave them. When Jesus was about to embark upon the final and essential stage of his ministry, the heavenly Father knew He needed words of blessing and he gave them. Dads, grandpas... you have no idea how powerful your words of blessing are to your children. No idea. Blessing is something that comes naturally to moms. It is one of the many things that makes moms so universally amazing—their ability to speak words of affection and approval and affirmation just flow out of them. It doesn't come as easily to men. But I'm telling you, dads, even if you stumble over it—even if you struggle to find the right words to say—your words of blessing are among the most powerful force for good that your children will ever experience... if they experience them.

So on this Father's Day, I have a surprise for you dads and grandpas and uncles out there. Your kids. [Children enter] Here's what we are going to do. Men, if you brought your kids with you today I want you to come up here and find them. Get them all and pull them into a little private space. Ladies, if dad couldn't be here this morning for some reason, then I want you to step right up as a stand-in for him, okay? If there are any kids that don't have a parent here this morning, we have some teachers and elders that are ready to stand in. Okay—come, find your kids, and wait for my instructions.

Okay dads, moms, grandpas, uncles... this is an opportunity to give your kids the power of your blessing. When I say, "Go," I want you to grab your kids by the cheeks or shoulders, look them in the eyes, say their name and tell them, "I love you. I am proud of you for the kind of person you are (tell them); and here are some things I have noticed that you are really good at." If you stumble a little bit, it won't matter. You are about to bless those kids in a powerful way.

And kids, when your dad or mom or grandpa are done... I want you to look right back in their eyes and say, "Thank you. I love you, too." Okay? Go!

Close with prayer:

Dear God, I thank you for _____. They are precious to me. I am so proud of who they are persons. And I am so proud of their gifts and abilities. Thank you for giving this child to me. Please be with them and take care of them all the days of their lives. Amen.

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read the passage out loud.**

- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.

- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **Pray together:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **Dig deeper**

1. Why did the Transfiguration occur and what is the message it is trying to relate? Why did Jesus invite only three of his disciples to experience this?

2. How did God the Father bless Jesus with his words? What are the parts of that blessing? Did your own father speak blessing into your life? Talk about it.

3. For the fathers in the crowd, how well have you done at speaking blessing into your children's life? What steps do you feel led to take in this area?