

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THEY CAME DOWN” ~ Luke 9:37-45

☑ {“Darkness,” Lord Byron}

**I had a dream, which was not all a dream
The bright sun was extinguish’d,
and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening
in the moonless air;
Morn came and went – and came,
and brought no day....
– and all was black...**

○ These words are from “Darkness,” by Lord Byron. His poem captures some people’s view of life. **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”** (Matthew 6:22-23) Many hearts are darkened by misery, fear, sin, and oppression. Morning comes like clockwork, but for them it brings **“no day.”** **“How great is [their] darkness!”**

☑ It happens even to Christians. I am a case in point: I asked Jesus into my heart at the age of 5, and I cannot remember a time when I did not believe the Gospel; still, I battled depression for some years.

Much of the time it was tolerable. I could pick my way through the fog, but everything was gray and colorless. It was like sleepwalking.

When I was 20 it got worse. I looked at my past, present, and future and could see nothing but darkness. I was treading water in a sea of ink under a sunless, moonless, starless sky – night after endless night. It took me to the edge of suicide.

I was one step away from death. Thank God, he opened my eyes and gave me his light!

{Jn 1:9} My very existence is a living testimony to what happens when **“The true light that gives light to everyone”** penetrates the darkness.

☐ Please turn to Luke 9:27-45. Our text describes a mighty clash between the light and the darkness.

■ Verse 37: **“The next day, when they”** (Christ Jesus, Peter, James, and John) **“came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him.”**

● {Lk 9:28} **“The next day”** is the day after the Transfiguration. Yesterday, Jesus took his three closest disciples **“with him and went up onto a mountain,”** probably Mount Hermon. The peak is a place of extraordinary beauty and, at 9,232’ above sea level, it is the tallest in the region.

● {Lk 9:29; Mt 17:2; Mk 9:3; Lk 9:29} **“As [Jesus] was praying, the appearance of his face changed.”** It **“shone like the sun”** and **“his clothes became dazzling white,”** **“as bright as a flash of**

lightning.” Christ’s often veiled majesty, excellence, and holiness were literally brought to light in a dazzling display of light.

- {Lk 9:30-31a} Not only so, Moses (the preeminent lawgiver) and Elijah (the Old Testament prophet *par excellence*) materialized from heaven **“in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.”**

- {Lk 9:34-35} **“A cloud appeared,”** enveloping them. And **“a voice came from the cloud saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.’”**

The Transfiguration is the definitive “mountaintop experience.” It sets the paradigm for transcendent encounters with God that open your eyes, enlighten your mind, and illuminate your soul.

- {Lk 9:33} No wonder Peter exclaimed, **“Master, it good for us to be here”!** His proposal to **“put up three shelters – one for [Messiah], one for Moses and one for Elijah”** had as much to do with prolonging *his* ecstasy as with honoring *them*.

And who can blame him? Who wouldn’t want this kind of experience to last forever?

But the Lord did not grant his request. Instead of basking in perpetual luminosity **“they came down from the mountain.”**

Physically, they were at high altitude. Then they climbed downhill.

Spiritually, they were in an exalted state of glory. Then they descended to a lower level.

“They came down.”

It is hard enough to come back down *from* camp, a mission trip, a retreat, or a life-changing worship service *to* regular life, isn’t it? Ordinary life seems so flat and gray by comparison.

- Imagine how much harder it is to leave the mountaintop and immediately come face to face with the worst kind of darkness. Luke 9:37-40:

The next day, when they [come] down from the mountain, a large crowd [meets] him. A man in the crowd [calls] out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.”

Some commentators {Wright} take Luke’s language at face value and see this as demonic possession. Others {Barclay} construe it as an extreme case of epilepsy.

{Jn 10:10} Either way, the effect is the same: against his will, this boy shrieks and writhes and hurls himself down. His mind and body are in the iron grip of an enemy that has come **“to steal and kill and destroy.”**

- ☑ I am reminded of a section of Byron’s poem in which he describes various responses to the darkness, including this one:

...others hurried to and fro, and fed
 Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up
 With mad disquietude on the dull sky,
 The pall of a past world; and then again
 With curses cast [themselves] down upon
 the dust,
 And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd....

This boy is being eaten alive by “**mad disquietude.**” He literally casts himself down upon the dust, gnashes his teeth, and howls. He is in a dark place, indeed.

So are his parents. As Elizabeth Stone put it, to have a child is “**to have your heart go walking around outside your body.**”

This cherished only son was the focal point of his parents' brightest joy, best hopes, and sweetest dreams; now he embodies their darkest fears, cruelest despair, and worst nightmares. Their hearts are darkened by grief, fear, doubt, and helplessness.

Can't you hear the desperation in this dad's voice? “**Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.**”

■ Luke 9:41-43a:

“**You unbelieving and perverse generation,**”
 Jesus [replies], “**how long shall I stay with you
 and put up with you? Bring your son here.**”

**Even while the boy [is] coming, the demon
 [throws] him to the ground in a convulsion.**

**But Jesus [rebukes] the evil spirit, [heals]
 the boy and [gives] him back to his father.
 And they [are] all amazed at the greatness
 of God.**

■ Now, get this: in verses 43b-44, “**While everyone [is] marveling at all that Jesus [just] did, he [says] to his disciples, ‘Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you:’**” (the Greek literally reads, “**Let my words sink into your ears:**”) “**The Son of Man is going to be delivered over to human hands.**”

To review: Jesus is glorified, and Peter, James, and John have *the* definitive mountaintop experience. They want to stay, but Jesus leads them down to ground level where they are confronted with terrible darkness. Jesus casts out the demon. As the crowd celebrates, he douses the disciples' excitement by warning them that he is going to be betrayed.

■ Is it any wonder “**they [do] not understand**” verse 45?! “**It [is] hidden from them, so that they [do] not grasp it, and they [are] afraid to ask [Jesus] about it.**”

We shall we take away from this narrative?

⚡ 1st, Jesus is the Light.

○ {Lk 1:78-79; Jn 8:12} “**The rising sun [has] come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.**” Christ declares: “**I am the light of the world. Whoever**

follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

✎ 2nd, the Light of Jesus is greater than the darkness, *any* darkness.

○ {Jn 1:5} **“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”**

- {Mt 4:16} **“The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”**

The darkness in our lives is no match for the penetrating brilliance of Christ!

✎ 3rd, Jesus gives us light so we can shine it into dark places.

○ {Mt 5:14, 16} Christ says, **“You are the light of the world....let your light shine before others....”**

The Lord had every right to remain on that mountain, perpetually illuminated by divine majesty, excellence, and holiness. Instead, he came down to the demonized boy and liberated him.

The disciples naturally wanted to stay on the mountain. It was beautiful and exhilarating and edifying. But Jesus led them back down to ordinary life and broken, needy people.

God shines his light of Life and Love and Truth and Goodness into our lives, so that we can reflect it out

to **“those”** who are **“living in darkness and in the shadow of death.”**

○ {1 Th 5:5; Eph 5:8; Php 2:15} If we are alive in Christ we *are* **“children of the light.”** Not only so, we *are* **“light in the Lord,”** and we **“will shine” “like stars in the sky” among** this **“warped and crooked generation.”**

- {Is 60:1-3}
 - “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.**
 - See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,**
 - but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”**