

Series: On This Mountain, #2
Valley Community Baptist Church
Avon, CT

Texts: Lk. 6:12, 13; Mk. 6:45-50; Lk. 22:39-46
Mar. 20, 21; 2010
Pastor Jay Abramson

Jesus in the Mountains: Spending Time with Abba

I don't know why, maybe it's because I was raised on the flat lands of Minnesota, but I've always been fascinated by mountains. For a number of years when I was in my late teens and early 20's, my family vacationed in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. After Liz and I were married, we continued to vacation there. Any time of year the mountains seem to contain endless beauty.

But for me, it goes beyond beauty. I'm drawn to the mountains in all kinds of weather too. There's a power that resides in the mountains that both humbles and rejuvenates you. John Muir, the 19th century naturalist, wrote of a storm he purposefully hiked through in the mountains of Yosemite in 1874. He writes:

I drifted on through the midst of this passionate music and motion, across many a glen, from ridge to ridge; often halting in the lee of a rock for shelter, or to gaze and listen. Even when the grand anthem had swelled to its highest pitch, I could distinctly hear the varying tones of individual trees, --Spruce and Fir, and Pine, and leafless Oak... Each was expressing itself in its own way, singing its own song, and making its own peculiar gestures, manifesting a richness of variety to be found in no other forest I have yet seen.

Muir was so captured by the music of this storm, that he decided to climb to the top of a 100 foot Douglas Fir to become part of the action...

In its widest sweeps my tree-top described an arc of from twenty to thirty degrees, but I felt sure of its elastic temper, having seen others of the same species still more severely tried... I was therefore safe, and free to take the wind into my pulses and enjoy the excited forest from my superb outlook...

I kept my lofty perch for hours, frequently closing my eyes to enjoy the music by itself, or to feast quietly on the delicious fragrance that was streaming past...

When the storm began to abate, I dismounted and sauntered down through the calming woods. The storm tones died away, and, turning toward the east, I beheld the countless hosts of the forests hushed and tranquil, towering above one another on the slopes of the hills like a devout audience. **The setting sun filled them with amber light, and seemed to say, while they listened, "My peace I give unto you."**¹

Jesus was also drawn to the mountains. The three Scripture passages read earlier give testimony to this fact. Why did He go? What music was Jesus listening to? Jesus knew that He only had three short years to announce a worldwide movement, train the necessary leaders and inaugurate all the needed ceremonies. So, why was He constantly wandering off to the mountains? Wasn't this just a waste of time? Those are the questions before us this evening/morning. Let's begin with this question...

I. What Did Jesus Do in the Mountains?

You know, most of the time, Jesus went to the mountains alone and He didn't tell anybody where He was going. He just up and left. **Luke 5:16** says:

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

How often do you do that? Have you ever done that? He had no cell phone. He was not texting His disciples. Could you even conceive of going away by yourself for a day, for an afternoon even, and leaving your cell phone at home? Jesus, it says, did this often. You say, “But what would be the point? What would I do? Go sit on a rock somewhere? What’s the point of that?”

Well, what did Jesus do? According to these three passages, He went away to speak with His Dad. I’m not being flippant. That’s how Jesus addressed His heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. He called him, “Abba.” He wasn’t referring to a Swedish singing group. Abba is the Aramaic term of endearment for a father. So, Jesus was going off alone to speak with His Dad.

And what did they speak about? Everything! In these three passages they talked about who Jesus should pick as His disciples, they talked about the strength Jesus would need to endure the cross and when the disciples were out on the lake at night, it doesn’t say it specifically, but I think they were just talking about the events of the day – Jesus had fed 5,000 people that day. I think Jesus was just talking with His Dad about what happened that day.

In John 5, Jesus gives us some basic principles about how He and His heavenly Father worked together. Jesus was not ‘winging it’ here on earth. Listen to His explanation:

...I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.
(John 5:19)

And in John 7:16 Jesus said:

...My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.

So, are you getting the picture here? Jesus didn’t TEACH anything, He didn’t DO anything on His own. He taught what the Father told Him to teach and He did what the Father told Him to do. Is that your approach to life? If you grew up in this culture, that’s not what you’ve been told, that’s not what you’ve been taught. You’ve been taught to “Be the best you can be,” to stop listening to others and follow your heart. You’ve been taught that at the end of your life the most important thing to be able to say is, “I did it my way!”

But do you see from what I’ve shown you today that Jesus Christ never said that? Do you see that you cannot call yourself a Follower of Jesus Christ and also say, “I did it my way.”? What did Jesus do in the mountains? Why was He constantly ‘sneaking off’ to the mountains alone? Because Jesus had one passion – to do what His Dad wanted Him to do. **“...not my will, but yours be done.”** That was Jesus’ passion. You’re not a Follower of Jesus until that is YOUR passion. Secondly, we need to ask...

II. How Did Jesus’ Time in the Mountains Benefit Him?

This is a perfectly logical question to us, isn’t it? We can’t imagine doing anything that we don’t benefit from. But if my passion is to do the will of someone else, why would I even think I have to benefit from it? Sometimes people will volunteer to serve in a ministry, like say, helping in the nursery. And after a month or so, they quit. And when you ask them why they quit, they say, “Well, you know, I just wasn’t getting anything out of it.” Why do you think it’s called “serving”? You’re not SUPPOSED to get something out of it, you’re supposed to put something INTO it! Ministry is meant to benefit someone other than you!

But having said that, I believe that Jesus DID benefit from His time in the Mountains with His Father. In the three episodes in the mountains that were read earlier, God granted at least three benefits to Jesus. **First, God granted Him wisdom.** In Luke 6, Jesus spent an entire night discussing with His Father who He should select to be His disciples. It was a big decision, so He wanted to be sure that He knew His Father's heart on the matter.

At one point in our ministry, Liz and I felt we were being called to a certain church. We went through the interviewing process and the visiting, the whole nine yards. At the end, they called us to come and we said, "Yes." We had a vacation to the mountains of Colorado scheduled immediately after that. While we were in the mountains, we had time to talk and pray and listen to God more than we ever had before. We realized that we had made that decision on our own and that in fact, it wasn't God's will. We called the church and apologized but told them that we had to reverse our decision. We just didn't have a peace that it was God's will.

Have you ever spent significant time asking God for wisdom? Jesus said, **"Ask and it will be given to you..."** (Lk. 11:9) Too often we have not because we ask not.

Secondly, God the Father granted Jesus endurance. If you look at the context of the Mark 6 Scripture you will see that Jesus and the disciples had been working so hard for so many days straight that he said, "Come on. Let's get away so you guys can have a rest." So, they got in a boat and crossed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But people recognized Jesus when He got in the boat and they ran around the Lake and were there to meet Him when He and the disciples got out. That is when Jesus teaches them all day and it is that night that He feeds the 5,000. After that miracle, Jesus goes to the mountains and the disciples get back in the boat and head back home. But a storm comes up and Jesus goes down, walks on the water out to the boat, rescues the disciples and goes with them to the other shore. People again recognize Him and he spends another whole day healing all the sick. So, Jesus and the disciples did ministry for at least 48 hours straight. How did they do it? In the middle of it, Jesus is on the mountain, praying.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, he took a little boys lunch and miraculously multiplied it. Peter Kreeft, says that is what God does with your time when you pray. He writes:

Every day that I say I'm too busy to pray, I seem to have no time, accomplish little, and feel frazzled and enslaved by time. Every day that I say I'm too busy not to pray [something Martin Luther first said], every time I offer some time-loaves and life-fishes to Christ, he miraculously multiplies them and I share his conquest of time. I have no idea how he does it... Prayer multiplies time. But prayer multiplies time only if and when we sacrifice our time, offer it up. ²

Are you running out of time each day? Is your life 'time starved'? The reality is that you're too busy NOT to pray. Just try me on this. Take time to be with your Abba Father every morning. If nothing else, just get alone, even if it's for 15 minutes and tell Him about your crazy schedule. My bet is that that's exactly what Jesus was doing in the middle of the night on that mountain. Maybe He and Abba were even laughing together about how He and the disciples could be going away for some R & R and instead get roped into an afternoon with over 10,000 of their 'closest friends.' (Remember, the 5,000 number was only counting the men!) But because Jesus stopped in the middle of the night to pray, Abba gave Him AND His disciples the endurance to make it through the next 24 hours. He'll do the same for you if you give your time to Him.

Thirdly, Abba granted Jesus strength to accomplish the miraculous. On that difficult Friday night, after the Last Supper, it says in Luke 22: 39:

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.

Again, we see that going away to pray was Jesus' habit. If your kids are trying to find you, where are the three places they would look? In the garage? In the kitchen? This time of year, maybe out in the yard or the garden? How about in the place where you 'regularly go to pray'? Is that what they think, "Can't find Dad? He must be praying!" I have to confess, I don't think my boys would've thought that. But I do think that's what the disciples thought. Luke wasn't even one of the twelve and yet he knew that Jesus "usually" went to the Mount of Olives to pray. And then we wonder why we don't see miracles as often in our day as people did in Jesus' day.

But on this Friday night we see how intensely stressed Jesus is and how immensely exhausted the disciples are. Jesus is perspiring blood, He's so stressed and the disciples are passing out they're so exhausted. Was Jesus any less exhausted? I can't see how He wouldn't be! But even in His exhaustion, He pushes through it to speak His heart to Abba. And how does Abba respond? Does He give Jesus what He asks for – a way out? No, He gives Him what He needs – strength for the way through.

Just like He did for mother Shu. She was the wife of John Shu, one of some 2,000 pastors imprisoned in Shanghai, China before the cultural revolution. Since John was considered a leader of those pastors, the prison commandant wanted to make an example of him. So he stood him before all the other prisoners, pointed a revolver at his head and said, "John Shu, I'm giving you 24 hours to renounce your faith. If you do not do so before tomorrow at this time, your life will be over."

At exactly the same time the next day, the prison commandant assembled the prisoners and re-enacted the same scene. He put his revolver to pastor Shu's head and said, "I'm ready to receive your statement."

John Shu, in a clear and powerful voice, said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. I will never renounce by faith and I urge every man here to..." And his statement was cut short by the blast from the Commandant's pistol. As His body crumpled to the ground, his spirit rose to its forever home with Jesus. When mother Shu heard the news, she immediately fell on her knees in prayer. Her heart burst open to God! She prayed, "Father, what will I do now? How can I care for these four young children and the one I'm carrying in my womb? I'll be blacklisted. I'll be destitute. Who will help me?"

At that instant, mother Shu looked up to see an extremely tall man standing in her apartment dressed completely in white. The man said, "The Holy Spirit will take care of you and your children. And the son who is in your womb will be anointed by God as a special vessel of honor to the Lord."

Today, mother Shu will show you that everything happened just as the man in white said. Her fifth child, a son, was born healthy. She named him John. And the Holy Spirit DID meet all her needs. And today, pastor John Shu, junior, oversees 1,000 house churches in Shanghai with over 100,000 members. God granted mother Shu supernatural strength to live through her tremendous tragedy and today at 88 she has lived to see the proof of His promise.³

The Abba Father greatly benefited His Son Jesus on the mountain of prayer by granting Him wisdom, endurance and strength. He'll do the same for you, if you'll come to the mountain. So...

III. Where's Your Mountain?

Do you have any big decisions to make right now? Maybe you should find a mountain? Does your life make you feel like you're in the middle of a marathon? Could you use a shot of endurance? Better find a mountain! Have you been begging God to take some burden off of you or to stop some nasty trial or to heal some painful disease but He's just not doing it and you just can't see how you're going to make it through without supernatural strength? I think you better find a mountain and maybe take a dozen friends with you and just spend some serious time with Abba. I'm not talking a few minutes, I'm talking about getting away and having a good 'ol fashioned conversation. Hang out with Jesus and His Dad, your Dad, your Abba. Maybe you need to make it an overnight. I mean, come on, if Jesus found it necessary to spend so much time with His Father that the writers of the New Testament said He did it "often" and that they knew the "usual" places He would go – and if our major complaint with God is that He just isn't as obvious as He seemed to be in Jesus' day, yet Jesus had like ten times the amount of prayer in His life than we do in ours, guess where the problem lies?

In Luke, after Jesus teaches the disciples the model prayer that we call 'The Lord's Prayer' or the "Our Father"; it is then that Jesus tells the story of the man who goes to his friend at midnight to ask for a loaf of bread. Remember that story? The man doesn't want to get up but eventually does because of the man's persistence. Then Jesus says:

So I say to you; Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Luke 11: 9, 10)

Jesus went to the mountain of prayer because He loved spending time with Abba. Abba's ready when you are. When will you be ready?

¹ John Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: The Century Co., 1894), p. 244-257

² Peter Kreeft, *The God Who Loves You* (Ignatius Press, Fort Collins, CO., 2004)

³ Carl Richardson, *Oasis* radio program, WIHS Radio, 3/17/10.