

Sometimes we Christians speak a language, no one else understands (Let's call it "Christianese"). And if you've been in church circles for 10 or 20 years, you might be quite fluent in Christianese (and understand what a lot of these special words and phrases mean)... But for somebody who's only been a Christian for a **little** while, sometimes we Christianese speakers, might leave them wondering, "What on earth are you talking about?"

One common Christianese phrase is "mountain-top experiences"...

Who knows what I mean, when I use that term? : "Mountain-top experiences"?

Alright, let me explain it:

As we read the Scriptures (both in the New Testament and the Old Testament), it amazes me, the number of times, that when somebody has had an amazing, life-changing encounter with God – it amazes me, the number of times, these things have happened, up on a mountain.

E.g.

- When God told Abraham to go and sacrifice his son, Isaac,,,,, God met Abraham on Mt Moriah, and God provided a ram for the sacrifice (instead of Isaac). And Abraham came to know God, as the one who provides.

- Then there's the burning bush incident, where God met with Moses, and God revealed His personal Name (YHWH). This happened on Mt Horeb
- At **Mt Sinai**, God met with Moses again, and He gave him the 10 Commandments
- on **Mt Carmel**, The Prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, to a contest to see **which** God could demonstrate his power, and light up the sacrifice... And of course God won, and all the prophets of Baal, not only came out of it looking decidedly foolish, but they died.
- Then, it was on **another** mountain, where The Lord spoke to Elijah, with a still, small voice

But it's not only in the Old Testament where God meets people up on a mountain.:

- Jesus **often** went up on a mountain to pray;
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gave some of His most significant teaching up on a mountain. We now call this, "The Sermon on the Mount"
- In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus appointed His 12 apostles, up on a mountain
- After His resurrection, Jesus gave the great commission, up on a mountain
- And of course, the transfiguration (that we're studying today) happened up on a high mountain.

When God reveals Himself, in significant ways, it often happens, up on a mountain...

And **that's** why we have the Christianese term "Mountain-top experiences"...

Now, here's the thing:

Mountain-top experiences, don't necessarily describe something that happened up on a mountain – (they actually don't depend on altitude) – They describe moments (God incidences) where we have encountered God in very significant ways... They're times where:

- we've experienced the grace and mercy of God
- they're times when we've experienced the provision of God
- They're times when God has challenged us, and He's pointed us in a new direction

Maybe:

- a new direction in obedience
- a new direction in faith
- a new direction in service
- a new ministry
- a maybe new commitment to righteousness

Mountain-top experiences are times when God has spoken to us:

- maybe through His word
- or through a preacher
- or evangelist...
- or they might be times of significant prayer;

- times when we've had an overwhelming sense, that we've truly encountered the Living God.

Mountain-top experiences are wonderful, and they have a massive impact on us:

- We cannot stay the same, after a mountain-top experience
- They strengthen our faith; and
- they move us along in our walk with God...

*It's a pity we live in St George really. No mountains around here... I sometimes find myself wondering, "Is there any place flatter"??? We're 200m above sea level, and our river has around about 2800km to go, until it reaches the sea.<sup>i</sup> (average 0.007% fall... Irrigation min. approx. 0.1%)... It's pretty flat around here, and if we want to visit a mountain, we've got to travel about 200km just to find a small one... Or to get to a decent mountain, you've got to do about 350km to get to the Bunyas (Mt Kiangarow 1100m [half of Mt Sinai]), or to Mt Kaputar (1489m)...*

But the thing is, mountain-top experiences aren't limited to mountain tops, because our God can do His work anywhere...

In 1 Kings 20, a foreign king (Ben-hadad), attacks Israel, but the Lord gave Israel the victory... And so Ben-hadad goes away (with his tail between his legs), and waited to give it another go next year... and his commanders said to him, "The Israelite gods are gods of the hills – that's why they gave you a flogging... Next year, we'll fight 'em on the plains – we'll get 'em then."

But of course, they learned the hard way, that the Lord our God is **not** just the God of the hills – He’s also the god of the plains, because He’s the god of the whole universe...

And so, the Christianese term we use (Mountain-top experiences) – it’s just a metaphor, for when we have an amazing personal encounter, with the Living God...

So, what do we need to know about “mountain-top experiences”?

## 1.

Firstly, “A **true** mountain-top experience, is something that **God** initiates”.... **You** can’t just decide, “I’m going to have a mountain-top experience today”, and set it up. And as a Pastor, I can’t say “You lot are going to have a mountain-top experience today, because I’m going to organise it”...

A mountain-top experience is something that God initiates... At the transfiguration, it was **Jesus**, who led Peter, James and John, up onto the mountain...

Now, I don’t think there would be too many of us here, who **don’t** want to have an amazing experience of God... Am I right??? Of course I am. We all want to have an experience of God...

But a very real temptation for church leaders; worship leaders; camp leaders; or whatever,, is to try and orchestrate it... I call it moments of “very carefully planned spontaneity”.

The temptation is ever before us, to very carefully plan and organise, for a seemingly spontaneous moment, where those present will have a significant mountain-top experience with God... The reality is, “We can’t plan for these things.” We shouldn’t **try** to plan these things...

But of course, that doesn’t mean that God **won’t** initiate a mountain-top experience, in the midst of something that’s been planned.... God can do whatever He likes... And I’m certain that many of us here, **have** experienced some significant God-moments, where, in the midst of an event, **God** has taken the initiative and He made Himself known...

Alright, so **God** is the one who initiates a mountain-top experience – not us.

## 2.

**But**, in order to have a mountain-top experience, we **do** need to make ourselves available to God, and follow His leading...

- **Jesus** called His disciples, and they followed Him.
- Moses – well, he could’ve kept on looking for his lost sheep, but he didn’t. He approached the burning bush.
- When The Lord told the prophet Elijah, to show himself to the wicked King Ahab, who was trying really hard to kill him: It would’ve been **so** easy, for Elijah to take the safe option – he could’ve stayed **well** away... But he

didn't... Instead, he ended up at Mt Carmel, and there, God did something truly amazing....

Do you know what I reckon is our biggest barrier today, to having a mountain-top experience??? Busyness and a reluctance to follow God's leading...

We tend to fill our lives up with so much activity, and so many commitments, we just don't have time to encounter God in these sorts of significant ways...

*You think about it: If God said to you today, "I want you to take an unspecified amount of time... (day; week; month)... And I want you to go out into the bush, and sit on a river bank, and I'll meet you there..." Would you do it???*

To have a mountain-top experience, we actually need to make ourselves available, and when God leads us, we need to follow Him...

### 3.

Thirdly, **most often**, a mountain-top experience will usually happen, either when we're on our own, or when we're in a very small group.

Jesus left most of the disciples behind, and when He climbed that mountain, He only took **3** of them with Him (Peter, James and John).

*Now, in my experience, a lot of people, when they want to tell me about **their** mountain-top experience, often they'll describe some kind of massive Christian rally – a gathering of*

*thousands, or even 10s of thousands of Christians... And they tell me about amazing atmosphere and the fantastic music & gathered worship & the phenomenal speakers....*

Now, there's nothing wrong with these events, but I would suggest that we sometimes confuse an atmosphere of euphoria (and it may very well be an atmosphere of 'pure spiritual delight'), but we confuse it, for a mountain-top experience ...

And I would encourage you, to seek God when you're alone; in a place of solitude; maybe in a place of need; maybe at a crossroads in your life... Stop trying to generate a mountain-top experience with atmosphere and amazing productions,,, and seek God in the quiet; and listen...

#### 4.

Which brings us to our 4<sup>th</sup> point. **Never** expect, that **your** mountain-top experience, is something that everyone else has to have too...

Imagine if Moses came down from the mountain, and he went into the land of Egypt and he said to the people there, "God gave me a burning bush, and He spoke to me, out of that burning bush. Now it's your turn. You need to go out into the wilderness, and climb that mountain so you can have **your** burning bush moment..."

Imagine if Moses' brother Aaron got all upset, "How come Moses got a burning bush? Where's my burning bush?"

You see, the burning bush, was **Moses'** mountain-top experience. It wasn't for anybody else...



Why is it, that we come back from having an amazing experience of God, ourselves,,, And all of a sudden, we feel that everybody else is missing out, until they've had the same experience???

So E.g.:

- Somebody goes away to a youth camp; or
- a church conference; or
- they have some kind of pilgrimage; or
- a spiritual retreat; or
- maybe they've climbed a literal mountain (all on their own) and spent the week with God... .. –

Whatever it was,,,,, and now they feel “You lot are missing out... Your walk with God is not complete, until **you've** experienced what **I've** experienced....”

Never expect that your mountain-top experience, is something that others have to have too...

## 5.

Similar to this:

We need to be careful, that **our** close encounter with God, doesn't become a thing of pride – that it doesn't lead us to assume or **seek** an 'elevation in spiritual status'.

Before we get to the end of this chapter 9 of Mark, we're going to hear how the disciples are too embarrassed to even admit to Jesus, what they've been talking about. Why? Because they'd been chatting amongst themselves, about “Which one of them's the most important”....

And when we get into Chapter 10, James and John (2 of the 3 who went up on the mountain), are asking Jesus, “When you come in glory, can we be your top-dogs”... Can one of us sit on your left, and the other one on the right???

If I’ve just had an amazing encounter with God, that should **not** lead me to assume, that I’m more spiritual, or I’m more important (or that I’m more authoritative) than anybody else... If anything, it should be humbling.

## 6.

Sixthly, Mountain-top experiences, are often terrifying... In fact, Peter’s reaction was, “It’s really good to be here. **Let’s make 3 tents: One for you; One for Moses; One for Elijah...**”

He just didn’t know how to respond... Why??? Because he was terrified...

And let me tell ya, “When you next have a mountain-top experience with God,,, expect to be terrified.” A mountain-top experience is often the time when:

- The Lord will call you to go where you do not want to go;
- He’ll ask you to give up what you do not want to give up;
- to serve Him, how you do not want to serve;
- to forgive the person you do not want to forgive;
- to surrender the possessions you do not want to surrender;

- to repent of the sin you **do** want to continue ; and
- to follow the path of suffering, for the sake of the Gospel...

What God reveals, and what God asks of you, can be terrifying...

**But** it's not only what God calls us to do, that can be terrifying... It can be the very presence of God Himself...

The popular, 'feel-good' teaching of today, assures us, that we can stand in confidence, before the Awesome, Holy, Living God... Really??? ... That's not the experience of those who have met Him...

E.g.

In the book of the Revelation, the Apostle John, records what happened, when he had a vision of Jesus. And he said:

**When I saw Him, I fell at His feet, as if I were dead...** But then Jesus reached out and put His right hand on Him, and said, "Don't be afraid."

True: "In Jesus Christ, we don't need to be afraid when we encounter God, but until we have the reassuring word and touch of Jesus (in person), the natural human reaction is to fall down in terror..."

7.

**But** (and this is really important): Even though our initial response, is probably going to be one of terror, a true

mountain-top experience, leaves us with a greater understanding, of who Jesus is, and how we should respond to Him.

You see, up until now (in the Gospel of Mark),

- the disciples have been bumbling along, wondering who Jesus is...
- Just before they go up on the mountain, it's been revealed that Jesus is the Christ...
- When Moses & Elijah & Jesus were all together, it **seems** like Peter saw it as Jesus being on par with Moses and Elijah ... **Let's make 3 tents: One for you; One for Moses; One for Elijah...**"
- But then, the voice of God came out of the cloud and said **"This is my beloved Son; listen to him."**
- And Peter looked around, and there was no Moses; no Elijah – just Jesus.....

What did Peter, James & John learn??? Jesus isn't only the Christ – He's the Son of God...

And how should one respond to the Son of God???? You **listen to Him** – that's what you do... And of course, that doesn't mean "Hear and disregard what Jesus says." It doesn't mean hear Jesus and pick-and-choose what we want to obey.... It means "Listen to Jesus" and "Obey Jesus"...

## 8.

Righto,

When you've experienced the extraordinary, it's so easy to become dissatisfied with normality... Compared to a mountain-top experience, the normal life of being a disciple of Jesus can seem very 'ho-hum' ... And the temptation is to either **stay** up on the mountain, or to **chase after** mountains, so you can have another mountain-top experience...

– Some people try to orchestrate mountain-top experience; after mountain-top experience; after mountain-top experience...

Our generation – we live in a consumer culture. And sadly, even Christians begin to see church, and our walk with God, as something to be provided for us to consume, and we're never satisfied – we're always chasing more...

- Simple worship isn't enough, because we've tasted a concert-quality worship atmosphere, and now we expect it to be provided... And if that church won't provide it, I'll find one that does.
- We might hear a renowned international speaker - someone who tours Christian conventions on the word circuit, and they've captivated me with their charisma and their engaging style... and the simple country preacher – well, they just don't 'cut it' for me any more...

And we can become like spiritual junkies, where our whole spiritual experience can be summed up as a constant quest for the next spiritual high...

But the fact is, God doesn't intend for us to live up the mountain – we actually need to come **down** from the mountain...

When Peter, James and John came down from the mountain, boy-o-boy, didn't Jesus bring them down to earth... Coming down, from the highest of highs, and Jesus starts talking about His pending death...

We don't **live**, up on the mountain... We don't **live**, on a constant high... We come back down the mountain again, to the normal and challenging life, of being a disciple of Jesus.

## 9.

So:

We might have to come back down-to-earth again, but something a mountain-top experience does for us, is it prepares us for the tough times...

**This** mountain-top experience, is the beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross...

God meets us up on the mountain, and He gives us what we need, to increase our faith... And in faith, we journey, on the often difficult path of being a disciple of Jesus...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for the extraordinary.  
We want to thank You for the times we have encountered  
You, in that quiet, lonely place.  
We thank You for the times that, over the years, You have  
built our faith.

And Lord, I want to pray,  
that when You take the initiative,  
that we would immediately recognise  
that You are leading us to a meeting of significance,  
and that we wouldn't let anything stop us,  
from following You on, up that mountain.

Lord, we eagerly desire to encounter You on the mountaintop.  
But Lord, don't ever let us become mountain-top junkies –  
always looking for the next fix...

Give us the encounter of You, that we need,  
to build our faith,  
so we can follow You, with commitment and resolve,  
in the normality of Life.

In Jesus' Name,  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup>(Balonne) St George to Bokhara estimate 180km; (Bokhara) Balonne to Barwon 360km;  
(Barwon)Bokhara to Darling 80km; (Darling) Barwon to Wentworth 1320km; (Murray)  
Wentworth-Murray Mouth 830km. Total 2770km