

Freezing the Moment

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Most likely you have experienced, at one time or another, a moment you wish could last forever. Perhaps it was some hard-won achievement, or a maybe an enchanted moment with a romantic interest. College years, often being full of ups-and-downs, are frequently a source of intense experiences that we remember for the rest of our lives. But have you ever thought of what would happen if you were granted a wish to "freeze the moment" during a high spot? I never really gave it much thought myself until I heard a sermon one Sunday a number of years ago by Frank Beall regarding the account of the transfiguration of Christ found in Luke 9:28-36.

In this chapter of Luke we are told that Christ took Peter, John, and James with him up onto a mountain to pray. Luke tells us that "as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." Matthew and Mark also chronicled this event (Matthew 17:1-13 and Mark 9:2-13), with Matthew adding, "His face shone like the sun." Mark is the most descriptive regarding Jesus' clothes. He says, "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." As if all this was not enough to overwhelm the disciples, all three of the gospel writers tell us that Elijah and Moses appeared and talked with Jesus. Luke states that they appeared "in glorious splendor."

Now I had read and heard this passage many times, and had up to that point been content simply to regard it at face value. This touches on something that I very much enjoy about the Scriptures: the lessons are multi-layered and one can often learn new things even from very familiar text. What was emphasized to me on this particular Sunday was the effect that this

event had on the disciples who witnessed it. These men had been raised in the Jewish faith and had no doubt extensively studied the Biblical accounts of Moses, who led the Israelites in the Exodus from Egypt and brought them the Ten Commandments, and of Elijah, who was considered to be the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Surely, to not only see their leader Jesus transfigured, but also to see him talking with two of the greatest heroes in the Old Testament must have been thrilling beyond description. As Moses and Elijah were leaving, we are told that Peter said to Jesus "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He must have been delirious with excitement because we are also told he "did not know what he was saying." Simply put, Peter didn't want the experience to end.

I'm sure we can all relate. Each one of us experiences moments we wish could last forever. We want to stay there; we want to "freeze the moment." Although these high points in our lives are events we may rightly enjoy and later cherish, as odd as it might seem attempting to prolong them can actually be detrimental to us. There are two dangers associated with trying to freeze the moment. The first is that if we try to do so, we can suppress further growth. We can waste years trying to re-live an experience rather than moving on to new achievements and exploring new possibilities. The second is that we might cheat ourselves out of even greater experiences that God has in store for us in the future (sometimes the very near future).

I suspect that Peter probably felt at the time that it simply couldn't get any better than this. But he would have been wrong. Think of all that Peter would have missed had Jesus allowed them to stay on that mountain. He would have missed Christ's resurrection - the most important and stupendous event in the history of mankind! And he would have missed it! Peter

would have missed later preaching an incredible sermon at Pentecost, after which about 3,000 people believed and were baptized (Acts 2:14-41). He would have missed healing a man who was lame from birth (Acts 3:1-10), demonstrating to all who heard about it the enduring power of our Savior. He would have missed being in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10) when the Holy Spirit first came to Gentiles, enabling the Christian church to include people of all nations, races, and classes. And he would have missed being a steadfast leader of the early church as the Gospel began to spread throughout the world!

It was good that Peter, John, and James had that amazing experience with Jesus on the mountain. And it was perfectly understandable that at the time they might have felt the desire to prolong it. But in hindsight it is clear that it would have been a terrible mistake for them to "freeze the moment," even if they had had the power to do so. Of course we can't do it either, but oh do we try sometimes. The best advice that I have heard on this topic is to remember that faithfulness in our Christian life is not about freezing the moment at some high point, but about continuing to follow wherever God leads us, trusting that what He has before us is better than what we have already experienced.