

"Journey with Jesus: Mountain View"

**Sunday 16 August 2009
Rev Brian Senior**

Readings:

Psalm 121

Matthew 15:29-39

Sermon

Many of us find mountains inspiring.

Whether we are walkers or skiers, climbers or photographers, super-fit hikers or fans of cable cars ... the views amaze us and lift our spirits ... the cool air clears our heads ... and the sheer scale of things changes our perspective.

I'm not much of one for heights, myself. My relatively few aeroplane trips leave me wishing that they could fly at a few hundred feet rather than six miles up ...

... but when we went to Israel and I braved the cable car to go up to Masada and looked out over the Dead Sea ... and later risked the hairpin bends in a mad taxi-ride to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration ... it was so worth it - to be in these amazing places and to take in the spectacular views.

Josh Senior to say something about why he loves to climb

The Psalmist lifts his eyes to the hills and is reminded of the majestic power of God:

"Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:1)

If God made all this ... if he is so powerful and so creative and so full of imaginative creativity ... then somehow my troubles, whatever they may be, take on a different sense of scale. God must be more than big enough to come to my aid.

The Psalmist ... who knew all about hard times and danger, and who knew what it was to live in fear of his life ... speaks of a God who protects and watches over those he loves ... who keeps him from harm and guards him from danger (Psalm 121:7f):

"The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore."

I wonder how much we live in the reality of that? Have we come to that place of trust in which we turn to the Lord whenever troubles come upon us ... or is our first instinct still to panic and then to worry ... and then perhaps a little later to get around to prayer?

Why is it that despite all the evidence of God's love, and every experience of his blessing, we still fret when troubles come? If God watches over us, then what do we need to fear? What will it take to get us to really trust in the promises of our loving and faithful God?

Jesus had spent some time on the Mediterranean coast, at Tyre and Sidon, where we see one of the first hints that the good news of the Gospel would later be taken to the Gentiles ... but now he had returned to home territory ... to the region of Galilee ... and

Matthew tells us that he went up to sit on a mountainside.

There are some spectacular mountains in the Holy Land ... take a look at this shot of Mount Sinai for instance [OHT]. Even the mountain on which Jerusalem stands is at a similar altitude to ski resorts in Europe.

But we're not talking about the Alps here ... not vast, craggy mountains. The mountains by the Sea of Galilee are a little gentler than that. Even so, the views over the lake are spectacular ... across the *usually* calm waters to the Golan Heights, which turn a stunning shade of pink in the evening sun.

To be honest, though, there wasn't much time for Jesus to enjoy the view. Matthew tells us:

"great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them."

Those who came to Jesus on that Galilean mountainside had come to see if what they had heard about him was really true. You see, there had been a similar incident not so long before, when Jesus had gone out by boat to a solitary place, but great crowds had followed him on foot from the towns. On that occasion too, they brought their sick with them, and Matthew records (14:14):

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."

So now another crowd had come ... and they brought their friends and neighbours, parents and children ... all who were touched by disease ... and laid them before Jesus – and he healed them.

Matthew tells us that the crowds were amazed ... so perhaps they had only half believed what they had heard? But then they saw the lame walk and heard the mute speaking, and the blind were now able to see them ... and take in the view!

What was the upshot of all this? *"They praised the God of Israel."*

The feeding miracle which follows ... a mere four thousand men this time, plus women and children ... speaks of the amazing provision of a generous God, for whom no problem is too large ... no need beyond his means. He does not want to send his children away hungry - to leave any of his disciples with their needs unmet. He has compassion on them.

There was more than enough: *"They all ate and were satisfied."*

We are, I think; often slow to understand that God is a *lavish* God, pouring out abundant blessings on his people. He gives far more than we could even ask ... he showers us with so much more than we could ever deserve.

So here we see Jesus the healer in action. He wouldn't have been the only healer they had ever seen, but Jesus healed with the authority of God himself, and every kind of disease responded to his word or his touch ... the power of sickness, disease and death was entirely broken and overcome.

The Bible is very clear that this same healing power is given to God's people through his Church. In James chapter 5 (verses 13-16) we read this:

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray? Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the Church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

Now I know what some of you will be thinking. We all know of faithful Christian people who have been faithfully prayed for, and yet they have not got better. We know of great servants of God who have got sick and died, as it seems to us, before their time.

We have to admit that healing is a mystery ... and to understand that our ultimate healing will come at the end of the age, when we are welcomed into the presence of God and every sickness and disease, and every other cause for sorrow, will be done away with. That's why John's vision of Heaven in Revelation refers to the healing and wholeness of the people of God, which will be complete when we are with him forever. In Revelation 21 we read (verse 4):

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

We saw earlier, In Revelation 22, how John describes our future home in the New Jerusalem, in which the Tree of Life stands on either side of the River of the Water of Life:

"And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:2)

Until that time, we live in the gap between the dawning of the Kingdom of God through Jesus, and the fulfilment of that kingdom when he comes again in his glory. For now, while the battle with evil still rages, sickness and disease will continue to touch our lives ... and in obedience we pray for our healing, and God answers in various ways:

- Sometimes an emphatic yes!
- Sometimes a more confusing 'not yet'.
- and sometimes, like Paul when he asked God to take away the '*thorn in the flesh*' from which he suffered, we have to be content to trust God that for now, his grace is sufficient ... and that there is purpose in our suffering, even if we cannot understand what that purpose may be.

So we come in faith to Jesus our healer, trusting in his goodness and his perfect will. Sometimes people are spectacularly healed ... sometimes people are comforted and given strength to endure ... sometimes we struggle with prayer which seems unanswered.

We have to remember that even Jesus didn't heal everyone he met.

Mountain views are inspiring. Even more inspiring, is seeing things from God's viewpoint. Which of us can unravel the deep complexities of the mind of God? We see only a partial view, and blurry at that ... God sees the big picture. The closer we get to God, the more clearly we shall begin to see things as he sees them.

Healing is not a reward for a special level of holiness ... and lack of obvious healing is not a sign of God's displeasure. What healing gives us is a sign that God's kingdom is

growing ... and that one day, when Jesus comes back, we will all be healed.