

Luke 9:26-36

Aim of lesson

To show how God strengthened Jesus and demonstrated to the disciples the pre-eminence of Jesus in his purpose.

Background study

Exodus 34:29; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 3:17; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 1:17; 24:26-27; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:16-18.

Suggested outline of lesson

Jesus needed time with God

Remind the children that Jesus often went to pray on a mountain. Usually he went alone, but this time there were to be witnesses. We are not told which mountain provided the backdrop to these events. It could have been Mount Hermon (9000 ft.), which towers above Caesarea Philippi, twelve miles to the south, from where Jesus had come. The tradition that it was Mount Tabor does not agree with the geography so well.

We read so often of Jesus helping others in their times of trouble that we forget that he, too, was human and in need of help at certain times. He always found this help by withdrawing from other people and communing with his Father in prayer. This was more important to him than food or sleep, and he sometimes spent many hours praying. When he set out this time, taking with him his three closest friends, he knew that this was to be a special occasion. He knew that his ministry was nearly at an end, and that soon his enemies would cause him to be put to death. He needed great support as he prepared to face the terrible ordeal of the crucifixion. As they climbed the high mountain, Peter, James and John must have wondered what was to happen, and why they were being privileged to accompany him.

Three disciples witness something very special

Ask the children to imagine the scene by describing the event as seen and heard by the three disciples. They had stayed to one side while Jesus knelt alone to pray. As it grew late they became sleepy, but were suddenly dazzled by a brilliant light; the dark figure of Jesus had been transformed. His face shone, and his clothes had become sparkling white. None of the disciples' past experiences had prepared them for this vision of God's glory, manifested in their master. As they watched in awe, two more glorified figures became visible to them and they realized with wonder that these were Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet.

We are not told whether the disciples could hear what was being said, but it seems that the words of those great men of faith were for the ears of Jesus alone. They understood, however, that they spoke of his death. As the vision began to fade, Peter spoke to Jesus,

offering to make shelters he was overwhelmed and mystified but, being Peter, he had to say something. However, before Peter had finished speaking they were all enveloped in a cloud. They must have felt something of the fear experienced by the Israelites at the giving of the law, for now they heard the voice of God speaking to them out of the cloud. Then the vision, the cloud and the voice were gone, and they were left alone with Jesus on the dark mountain-side.

God-given reassurance and encouragement

What was the purpose of this incident? Refer to the words of Jesus in verses 26 and 27. What had taken place on this mountain was a foretaste of the kingdom that is to come. The disciples witnessed the vision of Moses and Elijah resurrected in glory, and Jesus the future king endowed with the glory of God. Later, after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter spoke of being “eye-witnesses of his majesty” and of having heard the voice from heaven. But there was another purpose behind this event. We understand from Luke that the three glorified men talked together about Jesus’ impending death. We forget how lonely Jesus must have been in carrying out the work given to him by his Father. Although he had many friends, none of them understood that he must lay down his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. From this experience Jesus received sympathy and help, strength and encouragement to endure the hard task which lay ahead. This was a taste of the glory that would be his for doing the will of his Father, and it was the vision of this glory that helped Jesus to bear the cruel death which he was soon to suffer.

Relevance to the children’s lives

Peter, James and John were very privileged to see Jesus as the glorified Christ. We are privileged, too, for we have the Bible in which we can read of Jesus - what he did, the things he taught, how he died and came back to life again, and how in the future he will come again as glorious king of the whole world. As God instructed on the mountain, we must listen to Jesus.

Worksheets

The letters in the box read MOUNTAIN.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for giving us the Bible, so that we may know what your son Jesus did and said. Help us to listen and learn about him so that we may be ready to welcome him when he comes back to the earth again as the king of the world. Amen.

Memory verse

‘A bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5).