

Peaks And Valleys

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Baseball fans witnessed a most unusual double-header on Thursday night. In game one of the series between Kansas City and Detroit, the Royals exploded, scoring 26 runs in a 26 to 5 rout. In game two of the series, played right after game one in which they scored 26 runs, the Royals were shut-out, losing 8 to 0.

Have you ever felt like the Royals? Faster than you can imagine, your day goes from remarkable victory to pitiful defeat. The Bible tells the stories of many servants of God who must have felt like the Royals.

Joshua followed God's battle plan at Jericho, and God rewarded Israel with a glorious victory; the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. Ai, the next target for the invading Israelites, was a relatively insignificant city. Joshua sent only a small force against Ai, not knowing that there was sin in the camp of Israel, and the Israelites were routed. After the defeat, Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth with the elders of Israel. (Joshua 7:6) The victory at Jericho was a glorious peak. The defeat at Ai was a gloomy valley.

The prophet Elijah enjoyed one of the greatest victories recorded in Scripture. To prove His presence with Elijah and His superiority to Baal, God sent fire from heaven, consuming the water soaked sacrifice Elijah offered. The 450 prophets of Baal, unable to get Baal to send fire to consume his offering, were killed with the sword by Elijah and the Israelites. (1 Kings 18:40). Elijah enjoyed a time on the mountain top. His stay on the peak was short though. Jezebel sent messengers promising to kill Elijah within 24 hours. Elijah went off into the wilderness, sat under a broom tree, and prayed, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4)

In the New Testament, when Jesus asked His disciples, first who men said that He was, then who they thought He was, Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16). In reply, Jesus promised him and the disciples the keys of the kingdom. Peter's quick tongue often got him into trouble, but on this occasion, his reply put him on a peak. Just a few verses later, Jesus would say to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23) Peter went from peak to valley in swift fashion.

The experiences of these men teach us some lessons about serving God. Primarily, we learn that serving God does not mean being on cloud nine all the time. Serving God includes some great victories, time happily spent on the peaks. But, as much as we may enjoy the peaks, we must be prepared for the time in the valleys.

We live in a world of suffering, sickness and death, and these things are inescapable. Peter writes, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though

some strange thing happened to you.” (1 Peter 4:12)

Temptation also presents peaks and valleys. We strive to live faithfully, but sin returns to bring us down. John writes, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8).

Though we will certainly face valleys in our lives, we should remember: Elijah was taken into heaven in a whirlwind; Joshua enjoyed peace in the Promised Land; and Peter became the apostle who preached the first gospel sermon. We cannot avoid spending time in the valleys, but we do not have to stay in them.

Paul experienced a gloomy valley or two. While imprisoned in Rome, he told Timothy to come before winter. He said, “At my first defense no one stood with me.” (2 Timothy 4:16) Paul was left abandoned and discouraged. But he continues, “But the Lord stood with me...and the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.” (2 Timothy 4:17-18). If we walk with the Lord, even through the valleys, He will deliver us. We will enjoy the ultimate, eternal peak, His heavenly kingdom.