



November 2009
Message # 11
From the desk of Rick Hagans

On The Road With Pastor Rick...

I appreciate so much the thoughts and comments many of you have sent, emailed, texted or spoken directly to me regarding my messages in our past newsletters. Keep them coming. It's encouraging to know you read the messages. It's a blessing to know the Lord has used them to minister to you.

I recently received an email from a friend in Dublin, Ireland sharing how a previous message had touched a place in her heart. Later she shared the message with a friend in need and saw God use it in a mighty way in her friend's life as well. You can't help but see God's hand in all of this. Only He could plant a word in the heart of a country preacher from Alabama and see a harvest in Dublin, Ireland. I pray that these messages minister to you, wherever you are when you read it. Might He always be glorified in the planting and the harvest; life is in the seed.

My message for this newsletter always begins with the title, "On The Road With Pastor Rick." That's because so much of my life is spent, "on the road." In the thirty-something days since my last word with you, I've been to New York, New Jersey, and Washington D.C. You should receive this newsletter even as I depart (November 3) for New York and then 3 weeks in India. Like Willie Nelson sings, "On the road again, on the road again, the life I love is chasing Jesus with my friends. I can't wait to get on the road again." Ok, so I changed the part about "chasing Jesus with my friends," but I do love life out on the road. It's what God called me to do. We should all love whatever life He's called us to at this season of our lives. For me, for now, that calling includes a going.

I can't count how many people have told me time after time, "I wish I could go to New York or New Delhi or anywhere 'new'..." The inference of their comment is that it would be great to be doing something other than what they're doing, anywhere other than where they're at. Such people, and there's a lot of them, seem to see joy only in a journey that takes them around the next bend. Let me assure you, as I've oft assured them, that while yes, there is a joy in the journey...the journey is now, not tomorrow; the adventure begins with the next step you take, not the next mountain you climb.

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LET ME SHARE A STORY WITH YOU:

In the 17th chapter of Matthew; Peter, James and John have a most outstanding adventure with Jesus. They climb a lonely, high mountain peak all alone with Jesus which is an adventure in itself. The climb is something altogether new for those men, something wild and wonderful.

These are sea-side fishermen. They've lived their entire life on the flat shores of Galilee. While there are a few hills that roll down to the sea, the only mountains these guys have probably ever seen have been in the distant haze of a desert's illusion. The highest peak they've ever climbed would've most likely been to hoist the sail on their fishing boat (not a "ship" but a mere "boat"). They might have climbed up a hill while they were just boys so they could meet a girl or steal an apple. But they were certainly no mountain climbers. They were fishermen. Their fathers were fishermen. Flat land and calm waters were their lives.

And yet, here in Matthew 17, three years into their adventurous life of following Jesus, they're climbing a "high mountain". We don't know for sure which mountain it was, all Matthew tells us is that it was "high." Mark 9:2 echoes the same description, a "high mountain." There are lots of mountains in that part of the world. I have a feeling Jesus would've taken them to the one with the best views off it's side and the toughest trails to it's peak. We know that it was a secluded, lonely mountaintop because both gospels tell us Jesus and the three disciples were the only ones there...for a while.

There is a lesson here in these few facts. Since the Bible tells us, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (II Timothy 3:16), we can know these verses regarding this mountain climb have a message. God tells us that Jesus took them up on a high mountain by themselves. Can I tell you one truth I've found following Jesus and climbing high mountains, you do either, "follow Jesus or climb high mountains" and you'll usually be all by yourself.

I'm no mountain climber the likes of Sir Edmond Hillary or an Ed Visters, but I have made an effort to try and climb the highest points in the states I've walked across. In Florida, it was no great feat. The highest spot in Florida is Britton Peak, a mere 344 feet. You climb that high to get into your bed at night. In Delaware it's not even that, Iron Hill tops out at 331 feet. But in some states it's been a little more of a challenge. In Tennessee, Clingman's Dome, is 6,647 feet and a formidable climb for someone who lives on the "rolling hills of Dixie." The tallest peak in Alabama, Mt. Cheaha is only 2,382 feet. As a kid I could've sworn it was taller.

Last year I climbed Spruce Knob in West Virginia which topped out at 4,862 feet. We scaled out on a sheer rock face beyond the Park Service trail that sure made it seem taller. My friend Roger and I took the day off the highway when I was walking across New York State, several years ago, to climb Mt. Marcy at 5,305 feet. It was an all day adventure that

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had us coming off the mountain by a dim flashlight. There were bears out there and we were just a “little concerned”. I think we scared them away with all our laughing. It was a lonely mountain with a cold fog buffeting the top. I remember Roger and I sharing the view and an apple on the peak. The memory now is even better than the going then.

Elliot and Blake climbed Wheeler Peak in New Mexico with me 3 years ago. At 13,163 feet it was one of the tallest I’ve ever climbed. We reached the top just after a September hail storm ripped across the ridge leaving a foot of hail in the shadows. I remember the three of us crouching in a bent old juniper tree trying to keep out of the lightening and the wind. We shared a drama and a dream that day and made a memory. To this day, Elliot will tell you he wants to move to New Mexico when he gets grown. I know what he feels, a mountain calls him.

Chester and I climbed Mt. Washington, New Hampshire’s highest peak in 2003. Besides being New Hampshire’s highest peak, it is also the mountain that has recorded the most extreme weather in the entire United States. The cold there has reached -59° and the wind has topped out during an April storm in 1934, with gusts of 231 miles per hour. The weather changes there are so abrupt that the trail to the top has signs warning you of how dangerous the mountain can be and how many people have died climbing it. Such signs only contributed to a 15 year old Chester wanting to take the more perilous route and having me, the dad who still has an adventure in me saying, “Sure, we can go, but let’s take a jacket.”

We climbed 6,288 feet to reach the top of Mt. Washington. It wasn’t an Everest type climb, not even a Pikes Peak or Denali, but for a father and son raised in Alabama, it was a challenge. I’ll never forget how I felt to crest that peak behind my boy. He had passed me scaling some boulders below the crest. I knew physically at least, he had passed me for good. It was bittersweet; bitter to know my little Winchester was becoming a young man. I was losing my boy. The sweetness came from knowing I had raised him well. He had followed me even as I had followed Jesus. The time would come when he would lead. He had walked in my shadow. Now he would walk in the sun, hopefully, prayerfully, with the Son.

What I’ve learned climbing mountains is a lot of what I’ve learned following Jesus. I bet it’s the same thing Peter, James and John learned climbing that lonely peak with Him that long ago day. The truth is simple; climbing mountains and following Jesus are both activities you’ll most often be left doing all by yourself.

I imagined how all the emotions I have felt in my climbs must’ve been felt by Peter, James and John as they clamored after Jesus up that mountain in Matthew 17. For fellas raised by the seashore, just seeing the peak towering up before them and the flatlands, their homes growing small below them, must’ve been a thrill. Hoisting each other up over boulders and jumping over deep ravines no doubt made their hearts beat faster, not just with the exertion, but with a manly pride of, “I beat you,” or, “I bet our friends have never done this.” I can imagine Peter thinking, “I can’t wait to tell the others what I’ve done, where I’ve been.” And why not, it’s fun and exciting and thrilling to climb mountains and follow Jesus. Who wouldn’t want to tell those tales?

Well, the truth is, climbing that mountain was just the beginning of their adventure. You follow Jesus long enough, climb high enough, get alone enough and see what happens. I bet something spectacular will happen. It did in Matthew 17.

Once there on the top, Peter, James and John must’ve been doing what all of us do when we get to the top of mountains, we look around. That’s why there are always, lookouts and cheap telescopes there. So we can have a better look around. The funny thing is, while they were looking around, they almost missed the better sight. Jesus, you see, wasn’t “looking around”, He was looking up, praying (Luke 9:28). It wasn’t like He hadn’t seen the sights before, He’d created them! At some point the disciples take their eyes off of what’s below them and around them to notice Jesus is “transfigured.” Matthew 17:2 tells us they saw His face shining like the sun and His garments white as light itself. One minute they’re looking at a sunset, the next they’re beholding the Son sitting, shining brighter than noonday itself. Plato once said “Light is the shadow of God.” At this moment, these men saw the brighter side of light, and it was shining in the face of their Friend. The mountaintop experience of just a few moments earlier had just been topped by the Mountain Maker’s transformation.

It had been less than a week since Peter had confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Now, when they reach the mountain top, not even his understanding of who Jesus was could’ve prepared him for what he saw. Jesus illuminated, glorified, shining like the sun. The disciples must’ve stood there dumbfounded, no one says anything at first (which is a first for Peter, the Patron Saint of Putting His Foot In His Mouth).

At some point they realize, as unbelievable as all this is, first fishermen climbing mountains and now Jesus with a glow beyond their knowledge to describe, and yet, it gets better. All at once they realize they’re not alone. Moses and Elijah are standing, there with them, talking with Jesus. Both had been dead hundreds of years, yet, here they are, and the disciples know who they are. All their lives they had heard tales of Moses parting the Red Sea, and Elijah being carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire. And now, their childhood heros, the pillars of their faith, were right there on the mountain with them.

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It was all too much for Peter. Right in the middle of the transfiguration, Peter interrupts Moses or Elijah, as they talked with Jesus (I told you Peter was known for opening his mouth too soon, too often). Who knows what they were talking about, but Peter interrupts them and says, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” (Duh!! Talk about an understatement). He’s so excited he tells Jesus, who’s still glowing along with Moses and Elijah, who’ve just come back from beyond eternity, that he’ll build 3 tabernacles for them. Talk about misplaced zeal. Peter thinks he’ll make a church for those whom death can’t hold and He who the sun shrinks back from. Sounds like religion to me. And I must confess I’ve been there too. Who are we to think we can manipulate the Hand that made us? What kind of person are we to dare think we can contain what time and space can not control? God help us! And you know what? He does.

Right in the middle of Peter’s interruption, he’s interrupted. Jesus didn’t rebuke him for his interruption, no, He teaches him something. Teaches us something too. The mountain climb had been surpassed by the mountain top view, which was eclipsed by Jesus eclipsing the sun and now, just when you think you’ve seen and heard it all, God shows up and speaks out. Matthew 17:5 says while Peter was still speaking, (interrupting) a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice spoke out of saying, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; LISTEN TO HIM!” Game-Set-Match!

The disciples who had gawked at Jesus’ glory and interrupted saints, now fell on their faces in awe and reverence. They had heard of God speaking from a cloud, to their ancestors, to Moses who had crossed deserts and now had come back from the dead to stand before them, but to actually hear Him...to see such glory that His brightness, “overshadows” them even as Jesus glows before them...it’s all too much. Too wonderfully, beautifully, awe inspiring much. They finally fell.

A day that had started on their feet, climbing mountains, listening to Jesus talk to their patriarchs, seeing their Friend for who He really was, it just became more than they could fathom and endure. Following Jesus can be like that. Father says, “some days can be like that you know.”

I love those days. I don’t have many like them, well, to tell you the truth, I’ve never had one like it, not anything like it. But I have had some good days following Him. Haven’t you? I’ve come to reckon any day spent following Jesus is pretty darn exciting. These are the reasons God still beckons us, “Come.” This story shows us why Jesus’ first invitation and command to His disciples had been, “Follow Me.” I believe God wants us to “come” and Jesus desires us to “follow” so we can be close to Him and learn to see Him for who He really is, all He is (and, to have an adventure in the journey).

Peter, James and John had followed Jesus for three years by the time they climbed this mountain with Him. Yet, in all their following they had yet to have a day like this one. They had seen Jesus teach with such authority and passion, strangers saw something special in Him, but no one had ever seen Him “transfigured”. They had heard their Master talk with the lowest publican and debate the temple elders, but no one had ever heard Him talk with Moses, or Elijah. John the Baptist had heard God speak down from Heaven when He baptized Jesus. Peter and James and John the Disciple weren’t there that day at the Jordan. So when they hear God the Father speak that same truth, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Listen to Him!” It is a glorious first. The added, “Listen to Him!” was not part of God’s announcement to John the Baptist three years prior. I believe God must’ve added this part just to shut Peter up, who you remember was in the midst of interrupting Jesus when God finally spoke. It worked. Not only did Peter shut up, but he and his buddies, “fell face down to the ground and were terrified.” Not all adventures following Jesus involve wine and weddings. Sometimes it can be WILD beyond your imagination. These times are the best.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME GOD INTERRUPTED YOUR LIFE?

Perhaps your relationship has become so predictable you’ve relegated Him to a tabernacle of your own design. You have a prescribed time of devotion where you allow God to speak to you (which is ok), but when was the last time God interrupted your interruptions and shook your world with a word from Heaven?

Perhaps even now you’re putting the finishing touches on the tabernacle you’ve been building to contain your view of God. I don’t mean to interrupt your theology, your ministry, your new mega purpose driven, video screened church broadcast live from the wherever the new Holy Land is this week, but can I give you some advice, “Tear it down!” Tear down your grand illusions and glorious theologies about who God is and what it means to follow Him. The view you think you have of Heaven might just be a temple seen from some high place. God has a better view, a higher vantage point He wants to draw your dreams to. And the strange thing is, you can only find it following Jesus up to a mountain and then allowing Him to shake you down to your knees.

Look what Jesus does for His disciples as they lie there on their faces, terrified.

Matthew 17:7 “And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.”

That’s the kind of Lord He is. Even after interrupting Him and thinking they could contain Him, control Him, confine Him to a building of their doings, He doesn’t rebuke them, He touches them. He interrupts their fear and flesh and failing with a touch and a word. “Don’t be afraid.” Don’t be afraid of God. Don’t be afraid of your own





embarrassing interruptions. Don't be afraid that your plans to package the Power don't work out. And most of all, don't be afraid of following Me. Don't be afraid of climbing mountains.

Yes, Peter, James and John messed up on the mountain, but give credit where credit is due, at least they made it up the mountain. And even after all their failure, Jesus takes them with Him, this time down the mountain. Their journey carried on. That's the type of Lord He is, when we fall, He picks us up. When we give up, He tells us, "Get up." When you follow Jesus it ain't over till it's over. Come to think of it, when you follow Jesus, it ain't even over then.

As modern day Americans, citizens of the world, we think we have it all figured out. There's nothing mighty we can't match. Nothing terrifying we can't trump. I wouldn't altogether count on it, not if you're going to follow Jesus and climb mountains. Let God show up and shout... you'll shake. You'll fall in His presence and it won't be the side-show trickery of a television preacher. It'll be like nothing you've ever known. It'll be real.

But even as the awesome presence of God rocks your world, you'll find it something more. For the same God that tumbled Peter, James and John to the ground, on their faces, turns to touch them, lifts them, bids them be not afraid and once again invites them, to follow Him. Even after their interruptions, He speaks to them. Despite their cowardice, He calls them. That's the type of God He is and that's why following Him is always worth the price and the effort. Why don't you try it? Get up out of that easy chair or off that pew and take a step. Take a chance. Jettison your doubts and fears and unbelief and journey on. Go further this time. Risk more. Risk it all. It'll all be worth it when you find yourself in His footsteps, climbing mountains or on your knees. It'll be worth the trail, the tears and the trembling, even the tumbling down. And once it's done, when it's all over, it'll be worth the telling to your sons and daughters. It always has been, it always will be, even now...it is.

If you've come to realize your plans of ministry are merely man's meddling's with That too grand to be manipulated, if you're confused, ashamed, embarrassed by both thought and action from your fleshly failings... CONGRATULATIONS!

Even as I was writing this message God kept interrupting me. My plan was to write a message all about following Jesus. The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step and stuff like that. But God interrupted me! He told me what I'm trying to share here with you (though it's sometimes hard to interpret Eternity's voice) there's no doubt in my mind what He wants me to share here in closing with you.

If you've tried to follow Him but have grown tired or weary-Let God interrupt your doubt and apathy. Let Jesus touch you. Hear His voice of cheer, "Get up-don't be afraid." He travels on and bids us to follow.

If you've come to realize your plans of ministry are merely man's meddling's with That too grand to be manipulated, and you're confused, ashamed, embarrassed by both thought and action from your fleshly failings...CONGRATULATIONS! At least you made an effort, at least you got off the bench and took a swing at the fence, so what if you struck out... WELCOME TO THE HUMAN RACE. Look around at all those who've failed before you, Wesley, Spurgeon, and Moody, and ME (certainly, mostly, most definitely Me), and Peter and James and John. Now, shake the dust out of your britches (and the cobwebs out of your head and the fear of future failings out of your heart). Feel His touch upon your shoulder. Hear His voice even now calling "Don't be afraid, come on, let's go, hell and glory yet await us. There are mountains yet to climb."

My prayer for you this Thanksgiving is that God might interrupt you.

As you are reading this, Pastor Rick (and his son, R.C.) is "on the road again" ...in India. Please pray for them November 3-23. This will be long and arduous trip. The dangers of following Christ are very real in this part of the world. They will be ministering to thousands and watched by tens of thousands.

You can be a part of this mission adventure through your prayers and in your giving. As of the date of this printing, they were still a couple of thousand dollars short of what they need. They went anyway. If you can help, send your gift marked, "India".

Kim will try to put up regular reports from Rick on the website, www.harvestevangelism.org
Log on and keep up.

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