

Intro

Sometimes our minds are so stubborn that convincing us otherwise takes a lot of work. Or we've only been taught one way to think so we cannot contemplate the possibility that our theology or practice might be mistaken. I'm not talking about giving up the Bible. I'm asking, do I have it right? Am I missing something? When we're not seeing clearly we need repeated instruction and reinforcement if we are to see another way.

For example, I would say that for a good portion of my Christian life my style of evangelism could be described as confrontational retreat. When around non-Christians be bold and confrontational. After all, we can't be ashamed of the gospel. When you have a choice, avoid being around non-Christians because you might be contaminated by their sin.

It took a while for me to see that being obnoxious \neq godliness. And that God calls us to engage our world instead of retreating from it. Through encounters with Scripture, reading good books, and good examples in the local church over time my perspective and practice shifted.

My point is this: problematic practice and thinking requires repeated reinforcement to be rooted out. So it was with Jesus' disciples. That's why Jesus repeated himself.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Point 1: Listen to him (17:1-8)

Explanation

Six days after saying, *"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom"* (16:28), Jesus took three of the apostles (Peter, James, and John) up on a mountain to prepare them for his impending death.

Jesus was transfigured = his visible appearance was altered:

- 1) *"his face shone like the sun"* – 17:2 (*"the appearance of his face was altered"* – Luke 9:29)
 - when Jesus comes a 2nd time to establish his everlasting kingdom, *"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* – Matt 13:43
 - = a foretaste of our heavenly bodies
- 2) *"his clothes became white as light"* – 17:2

For a brief time these three disciples were likely privileged to see Jesus in his divine glory, the glory he possessed from all eternity, the glory he veiled when he took on human flesh (John 17:5).

At this time Moses and Elijah appeared, talking with Jesus. Luke adds that Moses and Elijah *“appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:31).

Why Moses and Elijah?

- 1) Moses represent the law
 - 2) Elijah represents the prophets
- Jesus came to fulfill, not abolish, the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17)
 - in the law and the prophets there were things written about Jesus which “must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44)
- 3) Moses foreshadows the Prophet

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers- **it is to him you shall listen-** ¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' ¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

- the NT identifies Jesus to be this prophet (Acts 3:18-24)
- 4) Elijah foreshadows John the Baptist who foreshadows Jesus (17:12)
 - 5) Both Moses and Elijah suffered rejection like Jesus
 - 6) Both encountered God on a mountain

Peter wishes to make three tents. One for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah (17:4). Luke adds the editorial comment, “not knowing what he said” (Luke 9:33). In other words, Peter misspoke here. The problem appears to be that Peter wished to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus equally. Peter’s interrupted as he speaks with a response from the Father, who manifests his presence in a bright (shining, radiant) cloud saying:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” – 17:5

God manifesting his glory in the form of a cloud and speaking audibly would have reminded them of several events on Mount Sinai that occurred after the exodus (Exod 24:15-17; 34:5-7). What they had read about was happening right before their eyes. The God who acted for Israel was affirming his Son.

The Father repeats what he said at Jesus' baptism: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* To this is added a command: *"listen to him."* The Father adds more weight to Jesus' claims. As God the Son, Jesus is a Lord to be obeyed. *"Listen to him."*

Despite everything they had seen, Jesus raising the dead, Jesus casting demons out of radically disturbed men, Jesus stilling storms, Jesus feeding 5,000, Jesus walking on water, these disciples hadn't lost their sense of awe. They were overwhelmed by the voice of God:

When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. – 17:6

"Terrified" combines two Greek words. One for fear in general (Joseph's fear of returning to Judea – 2:22; fear when Jesus healed a paralytic – 9:8; fear when Jesus walked on water during a threatening storm – 14:27) and one for the level of fear (a high degree of fear when measured on a scale). They were extremely terrified. They weren't prepared for God's audible voice. Picture little children terrified by a large dog, crying and running away. Picture a child terrified by a movie scene and hiding in their bed with their blanket over their head.

The Father's intent wasn't to instill terror. *But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear"* (17:7). Jesus comforted his terrified people. The vision's purpose wasn't to terrify them. The purpose was reveal Jesus' glory. In revealing who he was, God the Son incarnate, Jesus was ensuring his disciples that he wouldn't be defeated by the schemes of the religious establishment. Resurrection would be the final word. At this point the vision was over.

Application

The Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus revealed he would be killed then raised from the dead. Peter objected, rebuking Jesus for such a thought. Now Jesus reveals his divine glory with the Father giving approval. Because they held mistaken beliefs that were deeply ingrained, they were repeatedly prepared for Jesus' suffering on the cross.

Listen to him could mean obey him because he is Lord, God the Son in human flesh. Follow what he tells you. This is certainly true. But more specifically this could mean, listen to what he's telling you about his upcoming death and resurrection. Pay attention. Listen carefully.

We also see Jesus' care for his people. In our terror, he comforts us. What's the little child's remedy for fear of snakes or robbers or murderers? A good God who cares for them and rules over his creation. If we bring our fears to God, he will comfort us. If we take our eyes off of those things that create fear (for Peter it was the wind – 14:30) and turn our attention to the sovereign God of the universe, if we turn from fear to faith, we will find comfort.

Our hope isn't grounded in the fact that bad things never happen. They do! Our hope isn't that dangers don't exist. Our hope is that dangerous people don't exist. Our hope is God himself! That he's watching over us and cares.

Point 2: Trust in Jesus' victory over death (17:9-13)

Explanation

As has happened before, Jesus commands Peter, James, and John, *"Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead"* (17:9). Because Jesus doesn't want to give credence to mistaken understandings of the Messiah's coming. If the crowds were to hear about the transfiguration they'd envision a Messiah coming in glory to wipe out Rome, not a Messiah coming to die for his people. Luke 9:36 reveals they kept the secret.

Then Peter, James, and John ask an interesting question: *"Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come"* (17:10)? Where did this question come from? Seeing Elijah prompts thoughts about Elijah. They recall what the scribes taught about Elijah, that he must come first. The scribes likely got this from Malachi 4 where Elijah must come before the day of the Lord. They were correct in what they said: *"Elijah does come, and he will restore all things"* (17:11). Jesus then adds, *"But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands"* (17:12).

Jesus explains the fulfillment of Malachi 4, and links the fulfillment of Malachi 4 to his impending death. Then the disciples recall how Jesus had previously revealed the identity of this Elijah to be John the Baptist (Matt 11:12-14). Like Herod put John to death, Jesus will suffer at the hands of Israel's leaders. Jesus keeps the focus on his death. His disciples need to get this!

I'd like to take this opportunity to help us consider the nature of prophecy and fulfillment. I don't like the term "predictive prophecy" because that doesn't describe what's going on in Malachi 4 accurately. Malachi isn't predicting what will be. God is declaring what will certainly be. Additionally, prophecies weren't given to satisfy our curiosity for the details of the events surrounding the 2nd coming. The prophetic messages were given to guide God's people in times rebellion or confusion or despair. In Malachi, the day of the Lord spoke to the unrighteous as a call to repent. To the righteous, the day of the Lord was a message of hope. Evil-doers won't rule forever. God will act for his people. Malachi 4 is more promise than prediction. More warning than prediction. God prefaces Malachi 4 with this statement:

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. – Malachi 3:18

The righteous and wicked are distinguished by whether or not they serve God. Let's read Malachi 4.

Malachi 4:1-6 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

This promise and warning is fulfilled in unexpected ways. There is a day coming.

- "the day is coming" – 4:1
- "the day that is coming" – 4:1
- "on the day when I act" – 4:3
- "the great and awesome day of the Lord" – 4:5

On this day all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be set ablaze (4:1). However, the righteous, defined as those who fear God's name, will experience healing and will tread down the wicked (4:2-3). This explains Israel's hope that the Messiah would come to overthrow Rome.

Since, the righteous will triumph over the wicked on that day, God warns: "*Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel*" (4:4). Given the future blessing of the righteous and punishment of the wicked, obey my law.

4:5-6 reveals what takes place before the day of the Lord. God will send Elijah (4:5). And this Elijah will turn the hearts of the fathers and the children = he'll be used to produce repentance in the hearts of the people.

I want you to see how an OT promise was fulfilled in an unexpected way. If you were a Jew, without the NT, you would have thought the day of the Lord would come something like this. Before the overthrow of Rome Elijah would return, and his message would bring repentance in the people. And at that point God would lead Israel in battle where they would be victorious over Rome. Israel would be restored to power and independence. And if they considered passages like Isaiah 66:15-24 or Ezekiel 37:24-28 or Daniel 12:2-3, they would've concluded some sort of eternal state would be established following their deliverance from Rome. This would have been reasonable given OT revelation. Is this what happened?

No. Elijah did come and he was affective in turning the hearts of some. But Rome wasn't overthrown, and Israel remained under Roman oppression. And no eternal state was established.

Instead, God the Son took on human flesh, began gathering a church, died for sinners, and rose victoriously from the grave.

What was promised in Malachi 4 will take place at the 2nd coming. The righteous and wicked will be divided. God will act! There will be a day of rescue and celebration. But for now, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death and resurrection = events not pictured in Malachi 4. The promise in Malachi 4 will be fulfilled in ways the Jews of Jesus' day wouldn't have expected. We know better because we have the NT.

Application

My point is that God's promises of future deliverance aren't intended to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. They're written to encourage us to live faithfully today. To help us endure opposition for Jesus' sake. The ungodly won't rule forever. Relief is coming. Endure whatever difficulty you face for Jesus' sake because in the end God wins!

To unbelievers

This morning we're confronted with death and resurrection. Jesus isn't a mere man. He's the eternal God, the ruler over history. The God who became man and entered history is the one who has always ruled over history. Jesus died for our sins, which means sin is serious. And Jesus is good. Jesus rose from the dead, which means death has been defeated and only through Jesus comes victory over the grave. The right response to this one who died for us and rose victoriously over the grave is faith and repentance.

Conclusion

How should we respond to Jesus? **Listen to him.** Learn what he says and obey him. **Trust in Jesus' victory over death.** Look forward to Christ's return when he rescues his people. Rejoice in what Jesus has done. Look forward to what Jesus will do.