

JANUARY 22, 1995

CHALLENGED TO HEAR

There are many voices in the world telling what to do, what to say, how to behave, how to succeed, how to get rich, and much more. Leading up to every election, there are multitudes telling us how to vote. We can hardly get through an evening meal without the phone ringing and someone wanting to tell us which long-distance carrier we should use. The television ads tell us what car to buy. The loan companies tell us how to pay for it. We can buy advice from a counsellor and we get all sort of free advice from our friends. It is not surprising that no one is listening anymore.

If you have ever watched one of those day-time talk shows, then you know how many really strange people and ideas are around. Sorting through it all can be confusing. Many people **are** confused by all the different ideas. I've heard people say "I just wish God would tell me what to do." The great news is that God HAS told us what to do! The question is "Have we been listening?" It is really a challenge to hear what God is saying to us in the cacophony of all the clamor of the crowd what wants to tell us what to think, say and do.

The good advice from the Bible in Psalm 1:1 is that we are "walk not in the council of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of the sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful, but our delight is to be in the law of the Lord and in His law we are to mediate day and night." Is this advice impractical or does it just require discipline? It certainly requires discipline. If we have the discipline, then the impracticality disappears. Should we expect Christians to have such discipline? Let me ask another question first: What did Jesus tell us to do in the Great Commission? Was it to go into all the world and make *converts* or make *disciples* of all nations?

Jesus and His disciples had been in the area of Caesarea Philippi and He used that opportunity to clearly reveal to them His identity. You remember how He challenged them to tell Him what people were saying about Him. "Who do people say that I am?" They gave several answers and then He restated the question. "Who do you say I am?" We know the story of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God. It was important to establish that fact to these men. If they were going to change the world, then they needed to know Jesus was worthy of being heard. They had further discussion about taking up their cross and following Jesus. Then Jesus made a statement regarding something some of them would experience. He said "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom."

MATTHEW 17:1-2 Jesus was approaching the end of His earthly ministry. It was time to give confirmation to His followers so there would be absolutely no doubt as to His identity. Because of this confirmation, Simon Peter was able to write "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." Peter, James, and John were there and witnessed the event. This was a supernatural occurrence and its purpose was to set the stage for the events that were to come about in the next few months of Jesus' mission. He was not just another person on the scene of human history. This was God (God the Son) among us. At that particular point in time of His ministry Jesus took on the Shekinah glory He had taken off to come dwell among humanity.

MATTHEW 17:3 What was the purpose of the appearance of Moses and Elijah? Many have speculated about this. It is generally thought that Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets. According to Jesus (Luke 16:16), "the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John (the Baptist). Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, . . ." Of course, Jesus was the *complete* fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Many scholars of that day taught that Moses and Elijah would return before the Messiah would come. Some teach that both these (as in the case of Enoch) did not experience death but had gone directly into the heavenlies (the spiritual realm). (Need to note that Deut 34:5-6 clearly state that Moses died and God buried him but no one knows where.)

What were they (Jesus, Elijah, and Moses) talking about? We are not told and apparently do not need to know. Their appearance was a strong witness of the fulfillment of all the Scriptures regarding the work and person of Jesus.

MATTHEW 17:4-8 Mankind is incurably religious. We build edifices, institute programs, and carry out events and special emphases. Simon Peter knew this was a significant occurrence they had just witnessed. He was sure something needed to be done of a religious nature. His suggestion was to build something to commemorate the transfiguration of Jesus. We see this same tendency being carried on as shrines and buildings have been erected at places where miracles had happened.

God had a different idea. The outcome of encounters with God is not that we become more *religious* but that we become more *relational* with Him. The encounters we have with God are never as spectacular as the transfiguration; however, each encounter is designed to help us know Jesus better and to hear Him speak to us. "This is My Beloved Son. Listen to Him."

When the episode had ended, the only one left with them was Jesus. He told us He was the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. When we take inventory of our lives and prioritize everything that is essential, then all that will remain is Jesus. We need to come to the point that when we "open our eyes, all we see is Jesus." We can come to see that God is "over all and through all and in all." (Eph 4:6)

MATTHEW 17:9-13 Jesus instructed Peter, James and John to wait until He had risen from death before they told anyone about what they had seen on the mountain. If people had heard about this, it would have generated a lot of excitement. However, Jesus came to give Himself as a sacrifice for sin. He was going to be rejected and die. The majesty of the moment on the mountain would have been lost in the agony and confusion caused by the crucifixion. After the resurrection, the whole series of events would make a lot more sense and the transfiguration would provide an essential piece of the puzzle to complete the picture of what God was doing in Christ.

After the transfiguration in which Elijah and Moses appeared and talked with Jesus, the disciples asked Him "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him. . . They understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist." An obvious question is "Was John the Baptist the promised Elijah?" The answer is "Yes and No." John was not the physical appearing of Elijah, but he did come as a type of Elijah in the spirit and power of Elijah as the angel told Zachariah (John's father).

In another verse, Jesus said "And if you are willing to accept it, he (John the Baptist) is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear." In saying "If you are willing to accept it" [as we might state it, "If you want to believe it"] Jesus was telling us even though John came **according to** the prophecy it was not in **fulfillment of** the prophecy. The thing that is missing to cause John **not** to be fulfillment is the proximity to the *great and terrible day of the Lord* (Mal 4:5). That DAY is yet to come. Before that awesome time, the 144,000 will go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah (See Rev 11:5,6) and will tell the world about the coming of the Lord from heaven. They will bear the witness of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to present the truth to every person on earth so that all will be without excuse.

In our time, the challenge to hear what God is saying is truly great. Let us make sure **we** are listening to Jesus.