

***Gospels: Lesson Four,
Training of the Disciples, Part 1
Matthew 10-17, John 6***

Subject: Jesus trained His disciples through missions, miracles, and self-revelation.

Main Idea: Jesus challenges His disciples' view of Him.

Principles:

1. *Identification with Jesus and His mission is costly.*
2. *Although miracles still occur, the most common way the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus' identity today is through His written word (including the names it gives Jesus).*
3. *Beholding Jesus requires knowledge of God's word and a non-fiction imagination.*

Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's family was famous for their heritage in the field of theology and he was certain of his own calling to that discipline at a young age. However, Bonhoeffer was in for some real surprises about Jesus. After receiving a doctorate from Berlin University, circumstances led him to Union Theological Seminary in New York. At the invitation of an African American student, Bonhoeffer visited Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, NY. There, for the first time, Bonhoeffer somehow saw "something that the world of academic theology – even when it was at its best, as in Berlin – did not touch very much."¹ Dietrich's thinking about Jesus was shaken, and he determined to know Jesus' person and power in a personal way, as he never had before. Today, Bonhoeffer is remembered for influence in Germany during the Second World War and his willingness to stand for Christ in the face of raw evil. Many continue to be blessed by his writings. But none of this would be if his view of Jesus hadn't been challenged.

Jesus did not fit the mold of the Messiah the Jews expected. Often, He even surprised His own disciples. The Jews had largely ignored or misunderstood Old Testament prophecies that speak of the Messiah's suffering. Instead, they expected Him to free them from their oppressors and establish a physical kingdom on earth immediately. That was the kind of Messiah for which they were looking. Additionally, the monotheistic Jewish community had never considered that Messiah could be divine. Therefore, Jesus the Messiah had much to teach His disciples about His true identity and mission. He shook their thinking about the Messiah. It was critical that He do so, since they would become His first ambassadors to spread His message throughout the world. The training of Jesus' disciples was a very important part of His ministry. Although their understanding remained limited until after Pentecost (when they had the Holy Spirit within them) we see them slowly beginning to grasp certain truths beginning in Matthew 10. Jesus shook Bonhoeffer's view of Him. He shook His disciples' view of Him. How has He been challenging the way you view Him?

The training of Jesus' disciples is the subject of this lesson. By piecing together the four Gospels, it seems that after roughly a year of inauguration in ministry, a second year of general popularity followed. It was probably during this second year that Jesus appointed twelve apostles from among all His followers. Jesus' third and final year of ministry was a year of opposition. Many of His followers (those called "disciples," but not including the Twelve) abandoned Him because His teachings were too hard, too offensive. Jesus' focus seems to have shifted from public ministry to more intense training of those who remained faithful to Him, the Twelve and other faithful disciples.

The events described in Matthew 10-17 probably occurred between the end of Jesus' second year of ministry and sometime near the end of His third and final year. We will spend three lessons in these chapters, covering them topically. Although we see Jesus' disciples being trained throughout all of these chapters, their training is the special focus of this lesson (and also Lesson 7). As we will see, doing so involved challenging their view of Him. We begin in Matthew 10, where Jesus gave His disciples surprising information about being in His service. Perhaps this mission on which He sent His apostles happened sometime near the end of His second year of ministry.

I. Training Regarding the Mission: Sending Out the Twelve – Matthew 10 (Sending Out the Disciples)

A. The Twelve Called – 10:1-8

- i. Selection of Twelve: Verses 1-4 tell us that Jesus chose twelve from among all His disciples and delegated special authority to them as His apostles. Luke tells us that He spent the previous night praying to God. Surely He had been searching the crowds for those the Father had chosen to be His closest companions and special representatives. He chose twelve, the same number as the tribes of Israel. These men were not special in any way by the world's standards. According to the rulers, elders, and teachers of the day, Peter and John were "unschooled, ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). Matthew, the tax collector, would have had no choice but to cooperate with the Roman government he served, while Simon the Zealot would have been part of that class of men who actively sought to throw off Roman oppression. The tender and thoughtful John contrasts in personality with rough and impulsive Peter. Altogether, no one would have thought to put together a band of men with such broad interests and differing personalities. When Jesus chose them, they must have looked around at one another in some amount of disbelief. What kind of a Messiah would want men like these as His inner circle? It was a surprising move on Jesus' part, yet these were the men through whom God changed the world!

- ii. “Sent”: The word “apostle” means “sent.” In this chapter, we see the apostles actually being sent out by Jesus. Their instructions, at least in part, concern a particular mission to the Jews. The fact that Matthew listed their names in pairs probably reflects Mark’s comment that they were sent out “two by two” (6:7). This early on, the apostles did not have the experience to minister cross-culturally. Therefore, although Jesus later commissioned all of His disciples to go to “all nations” (Matthew 28:19), they began by learning to minister at home. There may be a lesson for us in that we cannot expect to represent Christ effectively in broader circles when we haven’t learned to do so in our closer circles of influence. Additionally, the Jews had the Old Testament scriptures and should have been the most prepared of all people for news of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- iii. Word and Deed: Jesus sent them out to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom and to heal, raise the dead, and drive out demons. Through proclamation, the disciples learned to preach. The power they were given to perform miracles authenticated their message. They were to minister in word and in deed.

B. Logistics of the Journey – 10:9-16: The Sermon on Mount was the first of five discourses of Jesus presented in the book of Matthew. The second is here in chapter 10. The instructions in verses 9-16 pertain to the particular mission on which the apostles were being sent at that time. For example, Jesus instructs them not to take any pay for their service. Later, Paul says that a Christian worker is worthy of financial support (1 Corinthians 9:7-12).

C. Warning Concerning Persecution – 10:17-42: Beginning in verse 17, where Jesus warned His disciples to expect persecution and arrests, He must have been preparing His disciples for what service to Him would entail after His return to Heaven, for there is no indication in the Gospels that this occurred while Jesus was still with them, but this is exactly what we see in the Book of Acts.

- i. Arrest (verses 19-20): Jesus told His disciples not to worry about what to say when arrested, for the Holy Spirit would speak through them. Some ministers have wrongly applied this promise to preaching and public ministry as an excuse not to diligently prepare, but the promise specifically applies to defense when arrested.
- ii. Not Finish Going through the Towns of Israel (verse 23): A particularly puzzling comment is the one Jesus made in saying, “You will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” Did Jesus expect to return in power and glory during the apostles’ lifetime?

No, it probably means “the evangelization of Israel will not be completed before the end of the present age, which comes with the advent of the Son of Man,”ⁱⁱ although some have applied it to the evangelization of Israel just prior to Christ’s return.

- iii. Not Peace but a Sword (verse 34): When Jesus said that He did not come to bring peace but a sword, He did not mean that the Gospel is to be spread by violent means, but rather that violence will *result* from the sharing of the Gospel. He said that persecution may even come from one’s own family.
- iv. Fear Not (10:26-31): Jesus said, “Do not be afraid” three times in these few verses (verses 26, 28, and 31). Despite persecution, the message they brought would be made known, their bodies could be destroyed but not their souls, and they are never outside the care of their Heavenly Father.
- v. Take Up Their Cross (verses 38-39): Jesus told His disciples they must take up their cross and follow Him. At this stage, His disciples had no idea that Jesus would be crucified, but crucifixion was a common form of capital punishment under Roman rule. The disciples knew that criminals were often required to carry their cross to the site of their crucifixion. In the context in which Jesus made this statement, He may have meant that they needed to be willing to endure shame, physical pain, and even sacrifice their lives for Him if necessary.

Summary Statement: Jesus trained His disciples by the mission He assigned them, warning them that following Him would be costly. Personal advantages, peace, or even safety were not more important than accurately representing Him and His message. His candor must have surprised them, since talk of arrest and being hated isn’t the usual way to motivate people.ⁱⁱⁱ What kind of Messiah was this Jesus?

Principle: *Identification with Jesus and His mission is costly.*

One individual who took Jesus’ mission seriously despite the cost was Amy Carmichael, who served in India for 55 years without furlough. In her work *Things As They Are*, she vividly illustrated her motivation:

The tom-toms thumped straight on all night, and the darkness shuddered round me like a living, feeling thing. I could not go to sleep, so I lay awake and looked; and I saw, as it seemed, this: That I stood on a grassy sward, and at my feet a precipice broke sheer down into infinite space. I looked, but saw no bottom; only cloud shapes, black and furiously coiled, and great shadow-shrouded hollows, and unfathomable depths. Back I drew, dizzy at the depth. Then I saw forms of people moving single file along the grass. They were making for the edge. There was a woman with a baby in her arms and another little child holding on to her dress. She was on the very verge. Then I saw that

she was blind. She lifted her foot for the next step . . . it trod air. She was over, and the children over with her. Oh, the cry as they went over! Then I saw more streams of people flowing from all quarters. All were blind, stone blind; all made straight for the precipice edge. There were shrieks as they suddenly knew themselves falling, and a tossing up of helpless arms, catching, clutching at empty air. But some went over quietly, and fell without a sound. Then I saw that along the edge there were sentries set at intervals. But the intervals were far too great; there were wide, unguarded gaps between. And over these gaps the people fell in their blindness, quite unwarned; and the green grass seemed blood-red to me, and the gulf yawned like the mouth of hell. Then I saw, like a little picture of peace, a group of people under some trees, with their backs turned towards the gulf. They were making daisy chains. Sometimes when a piercing shriek cut the quiet air and reached them it disturbed them, and they thought it a rather vulgar noise. And if one of their number started up and wanted to go and do something to help, then all the others would pull that one down. "Why should you get so excited about it? You must wait for a definite call to go! You haven't finished your daisy chains yet. It would be really selfish," they said, "to leave us to finish the work alone." There was another group. It was made up of people whose great desire was to get more sentries out; but they found that very few wanted to go, and sometimes there were no sentries set for miles and miles of the edge. Once a girl stood alone in her place, waving the people back; but her mother and other relations called, and reminded her that her furlough was due; she must not break the rules. And being tired and needing a change, she had to go and rest for awhile; but no one was sent to guard her gap, and over and over the people fell, like a waterfall of souls. Once a child caught at a tuft of grass that grew at the very brink of the gulf; it clung convulsively, and it called—but nobody seemed to hear. Then the roots of the grass gave way, and with a cry the child went over, its two little hands still holding tight to the torn-off bunch of grass. And the girl who longed to be back in her gap thought she heard the little one cry, and she sprang up and wanted to go; at which they reproved her, reminding her that no one is necessary anywhere; the gap would be well taken care of, they knew. And then they sang a hymn. Then through the hymn came another sound like the pain of a million broken hearts wrung out in one full drop, one sob. And a horror of great darkness was upon me, for I knew what it was—the Cry of the Blood. Then thundered a Voice, the Voice of the Lord: "And He said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brothers' blood crieth unto Me from the ground."^{iv}

Application: What about us? Are we willing to take up our mission as sentries? What cost are we willing to pay to turn people back from the gates of hell? If we're not willing, could something be lacking in our understanding about Jesus and the importance of the mission?

Transition: Jesus shook His disciples' thinking about identification with Him and His mission. His miracles also challenged their view of Him.

II. Training through Miracles: Miraculous Feedings and Walking on Water

– Matthew 14-15: We will cover chapters 11 and 12 in the next lesson and chapter 13 in the following lesson, but in order to keep our focus on the training of Jesus' disciples, we will skip to chapter 14, where Jesus has just learned of John the Baptist's beheading, and according to Mark, the apostles had just returned with reports from their mission.

A. Feeding of 5000 and 4000 – Matthew 14:13-18 (John 6:1-15), 15:29-39

- i. Jesus' Compassion: The demands of the sensation-seeking crowd (John 6:2) were so great that the group had not even had a chance to eat. So Jesus called the Twelve away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place (Mark 6:30-32) for refreshment. How weary Jesus must have been, yet when He saw the crowd had followed Him, He drew the strength He needed from His Father and out of compassion for them, He once again resumed His ministry of healing the sick.
- ii. The Apostles' Test: As a further act of compassion, but also for the training of His disciples (John 6:6), Jesus told the Twelve to feed the crowd. They looked and found only five loaves of bread and two fish among 5000 men, plus women and children. Jesus then took the meager portion, thanked the Father for it, and broke the loaves. The food multiplied as it was distributed among the crowd so that, when all had eaten and were satisfied, twelve basketfuls were left over. The text does not say what happened to these leftovers, but it is interesting that the number of baskets was the same as the number of apostles. Was this a special sign just for them? One can imagine the impact it would have had on each of them to see that Jesus' resources were endless and always more than sufficient for their needs. *Who was this Jesus who could overrule the laws of nature?* No mere man could do such a thing!
- iii. Feeding of 4000 (Matthew 15:29-39): It is clear from the details that the feeding of 4000 was a different occasion than the feeding of 5000 (see also Matthew 16:9-10, Mark 8:1-13). However, the disciples were involved in both feedings. This is the way of ministry. Only Jesus can do the impossible, but He expects our participation. We are not to sit back and just wait for Jesus to evangelize the world. He asks us to take risks to do what we can and then He takes our meager efforts and miraculously multiplies them.
- iv. Intention of Forcing Jesus' Political Rule (John 6:14-15): John tells us that after the feeding of the 5000, the crowd tried to make Jesus king by force. They expected the Messiah to re-establish the prosperous kingdom with plenty of wine and bread, as in the days of Solomon, and considered this miracle proof that Jesus was the One for whom they had been waiting. Knowing their intentions, Jesus put His disciples on a boat and withdrew by Himself to pray (Matthew 14:23).

B. The Yeast of the Religious Leaders – Matthew 16:5-12: Here we will briefly include Jesus words of warning to His disciples in Matthew 16:5-12 to guard against the “yeast” of the religious leaders. The disciples misunderstood and thought He was referring to their failure to bring enough food with them. Reminding them of His recent provisions of food aplenty for the large crowds, Jesus told them directly that the yeast to which He referred was these leaders’ false teaching. A small amount of yeast permeates an entire batch of dough. A small influence for good or evil has the same power to permeate a culture. Thus, Jesus warned them against the teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees because of the potential impact. The apostles were being trained to spread the news of the Gospel throughout the world. It was important that they scrupulously guarded the doctrines of the faith. Even a slight error in teaching can have devastating results. The same is true today and as Christ’s representatives, we too must guard against error in teaching.

C. Walking on Water – Matthew 14:22-36

- i. Lessons for the Apostles: Here we find a private lesson for the disciples that (again) shaped their thinking about Jesus’ identity. Jesus met His disciples shortly before dawn as they rowed against the waves by walking on the lake. When Peter bravely attempted to walk out to Jesus, Jesus gave another lesson: keeping our eyes on Jesus is essential if we are to participate in His work. In future years after Jesus returned to Heaven, the fact that Jesus was able to reach them from anywhere must have given them great comfort. No barrier could separate them.
- ii. The Apostles’ Response: When the apostles saw Jesus walking on water, they worshipped Him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33).

Summary Statement: Jesus’ miracles shook up His disciples’ view of Him.

Principle: *Although miracles still occur, the most common way the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus’ identity today is through His written word (including the names it gives Jesus).*

The apostles called Jesus the Son of God. In the Bible, we read that He is “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (1 Timothy 6:15), the “Only Wise God” (Romans 16:27), our “Sun and Shield” (Psalm 84:11), and so on.

Yet another individual whose view of Jesus was shaken was the 18th century slave-trader-turned-Christian-minister, author, and hymn writer John Newton. He wrote:

*Oh my Savior, Shield, and Sun,
Shepherd, Brother, Husband, Friend,*

*Ev'ry precious name in one,
I will love thee without end.^v*

By the daily discipline of focusing on the names of Jesus, Newton discovered Jesus' all-sufficiency for everyday living. Whatever Newton's current need, some name of Jesus expressed His sufficiency to meet that need.

Application: What name of Jesus challenges you to embrace His sufficiency to meet your current needs? Will you meditate on the richness of that name every time your difficulty comes to mind this week? This daily discipline will shake and reshape our thinking about Jesus' adequacy to meet all our needs.

Transition: The disciples were embracing the idea that Jesus was Messiah and it was beginning to dawn on them that this Messiah was more than just a remarkable prophet or leader. But when Jesus announced that He had come down from heaven and was going to suffer, die, and be resurrected, their response tells us that their understanding was still very limited.

III. Training about the Role of Messiah: Peter's Confession and the Transfiguration of the Heavenly Bread of Life – Matthew 16-17, John 6

A. The Bread of Life Discourse – John 6:25-59: According to John, the day after Jesus fed the 5000, He had a discussion with the Jews that included what we sometimes call His Bread of Life Discourse.

- i. First Question and Response – 6:25-27: Finding Jesus, the crowd asked when He arrived. This was the first of five questions they asked. In essence, Jesus told them that they were looking for another free meal when they shouldn't work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life.
- ii. Second Question and Response – 6:28-29 His comment about working for eternal life caused them to inquire about the means of salvation: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered that *belief* was the means by which anyone is saved and more specifically, belief *in Him* was what God required.
- iii. Third Question and Response – 6:30-40
 1. If the crowd was to believe in Him, they wanted proof of His worth. How fickle were the people, who had been ready to enthrone Him just the previous day! Moses, they reminded Him, had provided manna (a heavenly bread) as proof that he was worthy of their confidence.
 2. Jesus responded that He was the sign God was giving. He was the true Bread of God that came down from heaven.

- iv. Fourth Question and Response – 6:41-51 The crowd was incensed that Jesus would claim that He came from heaven. He was claiming deity! How could He, the local carpenter whose father and mother were known to them, make such a claim?
1. *Trinity*: The concept of a “trinity” was, and has continued to be, a stumbling block to the Jewish community, who holds fast the words of Deuteronomy 6:4 that “the Lord is one.” “Trinity” is not a word found in scripture; it is the name for a concept that evolved as the early church fathers contemplated Jesus’ claim that He was the Son of God and is one with God. The term means that God is three distinct persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Many analogies have been used to try to help us understand the Bible’s teaching about this. Some have illustrated it by the three parts of an egg (shell, white, and yolk) or the three states of water (ice, liquid, and steam), but none adequately explains the mystery. Jesus is God’s Son but also fully God Himself. His work is to bring glory to the Father and make way for the work of the Spirit. The Father and the Spirit each have their own distinct role in exalting the Son.
 2. *Jesus’ Response to the Question*: Jesus answered that, unless the Heavenly Father enabled them, they would not believe. No one can reason his or her way to saving faith in Jesus. God the Father must regenerate us so that we have spiritual eyes to grasp such spiritual truth.
- v. Fifth Question and Response – 6:52-59 Jesus continued to shock the crowd by declaring that they must *eat* the bread, which is His flesh, if they wanted eternal life. The Jews final question was, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” (John 6:52). It is not hard for us to understand their confusion. What was Jesus saying?
1. *What Jesus Did Not Mean*: First, He was not referring to what we currently know as Communion. The Lord’s Supper was not instituted until later and therefore, the Jews would have had no basis for obedience to Jesus’ command to eat His flesh. Additionally, Jesus has already told them that they should be seeking spiritual food, not physical food. So what is this flesh and blood of Jesus that He tells us to eat and drink?
 2. *The True Meaning*: Jesus has already told the crowd that *belief* in Him is what is required for salvation unto eternal life (6:29, 36, 40, 47). Feeding on Jesus involves active faith in His atonement for our sins. This is more than a one-time look of faith; it is a daily discipline of looking to Him for forgiveness of sin, healing, hope, and spiritual power for holy living. In John 1, the apostle calls Jesus the Living Word of God. The scriptures are the written word of

God. When we meditate on the Bible and appropriate its doctrines and promises by looking daily to Jesus, we are feeding on Him.

- vi. Summary: As the disciples listened to Jesus' interaction with the crowd, their thinking was certainly challenged about the identity of this true Bread of Life. Jesus' claim to deity was so offensive that according to John 6:60-66, from that time forward, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. They found His teachings too hard (offensive). Jesus asked the apostles if they too planned to leave Him. Dear Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68). This brings us to the high point of the lesson.

B. Peter's Confession – Matthew 16:13-28

i. Jewish Messianic Expectations

1. *Prophecy*: By way of review, the general understanding of orthodox Jews was (and still is) that when Messiah comes He would immediately establish a political, physical reign on earth. The Old Testament contains many Messianic prophecies that refer to the glorious kingdom He would establish, as well as prophecies that speak of His suffering. From our vantage point in history, we who embrace the teachings of the New Testament can look back at these prophecies and see that these prophecies must refer to the differing roles Jesus would play on two different occasions in history. The Jews of Jesus' day had no framework from which to make this distinction, and as we humans tend to do, they focused on the news they wanted to hear (deliverance from their enemies and a new, restored, glorious kingdom) and ignored what confused or concerned them (that Messiah would suffer). The Jews' problem with Jesus was that He shunned popularity and opportunities to be made a political king. Jesus was surely tempted over and over to forego the Cross and establish Himself as the recognized King of Kings and Lord of Lords during His earthly ministry. He had every right to establish a physical kingdom and possessed the power to do so, but if He forsook the Cross, He would return to Heaven alone, without the myriads of people throughout history that He came to save.

2. *Impact on Jesus' Disciples:* After Jesus returned to Heaven, His apostles would be the closest eyewitnesses and authorities concerning His life and teachings. Therefore, it was important that they gradually came to an understanding of the true purpose of His first advent: to suffer and die for the sins of the world. Thus, as the time for Jesus to go to the Cross approached, He openly asked them who they thought He really was (Matthew 16:15).
- ii. "You are the Son of the Living God" – 16:13-16 Peter realized that Jesus had thus far shunned the role of political deliverer. Nevertheless, he answered that Jesus was indeed Messiah and Son of the Living God. Jesus commended Him for this profession of faith.
 - iii. Peter the Rock – 16:17-18: Jesus' statement, "You are the rock (Peter) and upon this rock I will build my church" has been variously interpreted. The sentence contains a play on words since in Greek, "Peter" is *petros* and "rock" is *petra* (masculine and feminine forms of the same word).
 1. Some say Peter's *apostleship* was the rock, the foundation of the Church. This understanding has led to the papal succession of the Roman Catholic Church.
 2. Some say the truth of Peter's Spirit-enlightened *confession* is the foundation upon which the church is built, as personal confession of Jesus as Savior and Lord is the means of salvation. As F.F. Bruce has stated: *Now that someone has been found who is prepared to confess Jesus as what He really is, and not try to fit Him into some inherited framework, a start can be made with forming the community of true disciples who will carry on Jesus' mission after His departure.*^{vi}
 3. This use of the word "church" in Matthew 16:18 is the first time the word appears in the Bible text.
 - iv. Keys to the Kingdom – 16:19-20 The next verse also raises questions. Jesus told Peter He would give him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatever he bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever he loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. Binding and loosing were rabbinic terms for forbidding or permitting. David Schroder explains, "As leaders of the church they would be put into a position to make decisions about orthodoxy [the approved version of understanding] based on their historical and organic connectedness to Jesus."^{vii} Jesus granted His disciples stewardship over the new community of believers (Matthew 18:18) and Peter was chief among these stewards (just as he is depicted in the early chapters of Acts). An example of Peter exercising his authority to "bind or loose" can be found in his declaration of heavenly judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11).

v. Jesus' Prediction of His Death – 16:21-28

1. As we are about to see, Peter's understanding of Jesus' role as Messiah was far from complete, but his confession opened the door for Jesus to further His disciples' understanding. Jesus began to explain to them the true plan of God for Messiah's first advent, that He would suffer, die, and be resurrected (16:21).
2. Peter scolded Jesus for saying such a thing. Jesus' harsh rebuke, "Get behind me Satan," makes sense when we consider the great ongoing temptation it must have been for Jesus to avoid crucifixion.
3. Jesus explained that His suffering, death, and resurrection were a pattern anyone who wanted to be His disciple must follow.
4. According to verse 27, Jesus also spoke at that time of His glorious Second Coming. He was continuing to stretch the thinking and beliefs of His disciples about the person and work of Messiah.
5. At the end of chapter 16, Jesus made the mysterious statement, "Some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." It is likely that Jesus was referring to Peter, James and John witnessing His Transfiguration since Matthew describes that event immediately after in chapter 17. In the Transfiguration, the truth of Jesus' words in Matthew 16:24-27 were driven home: beyond death lies glory!

C. The Transfiguration – Matthew 17:1-13: Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him up a high mountain and there they witnessed Jesus transformed into His glorified state. The radiance around Him reminds us of the "Shekinah" glory that appeared from time to time in the Old Testament (Exodus 16:10, 40:34, 1 Kings 8:11).

i. Moses and Elijah

1. Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. They are the primary representatives of the Old Covenant (Law [Moses] and Prophets [Elijah]) Jesus came to fulfill and replace. Seeing them face-to-face must have greatly encouraged Jesus, who was completely alone on earth with regard to the full understanding of His mission.
2. Although here Elijah was actually transfigured, the disciples' question about Elijah coming back was based on Old Testament prophecy and Jewish tradition (which continues to this day) that Elijah himself will come back to earth prior to the arrival of the Messiah. Jesus told His disciples that with regard to that prophecy, it was fulfilled prior to Jesus' coming to earth in the person of John the Baptist.

ii. Encouragement for the Disciples:

1. The Father's words in 17:5, "This is my Son," confirmed the disciples' growing understanding that, although the Messiah was not who they had expected Him to be, *Jesus actually was* God's chosen Messiah.
2. Hearing God's voice and witnessing Jesus in the state of His future glory had to have been a tremendous encouragement to the faith of Peter, James, and John, especially since Jesus had recently foretold His death. Although His work on earth was to be different than they had expected, they knew with certainty that Jesus was Messiah! As we will discover, they were still short of the full picture of what would take place, but never again could they look at Jesus in the same way. They had seen Him in His glory and had been told by God to hear and obey Him. Surely He was the unique Son of God!

Summary Statement: The disciples' understanding of the identity of Jesus and the role He would assume in His first advent was developing. Beholding Jesus' glory as He was transfigured allowed them to know Him as He was in eternity past and as He presently is in heaven. Paul tells us that we too are transformed as we "behold the Lord's glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Since Jesus is in heaven today, how are we to "behold" His glory?

Principle: *Beholding Jesus today requires knowledge of God's word and a non-fiction imagination.*

Amy Carmichael gave us an example of using her imagination. What she described was a vivid illustration of the seriousness of our mission to lost sinners. John Newton, Oxford Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis,^{viii} and others have found that *beholding Jesus* also requires imagination, an imagination *based on truth* from God's word or as one man has called it, a "nonfiction imagination."^{ix} Mental images will fall short, but nevertheless, using the mind's eye to see Jesus as the Bible describes Him will change us! Newton gives us an example:

Look unto the Lord Jesus Christ; look until Him as He hung naked, wounded, bleeding, dead, and forsaken up the cross... Look unto Him again as He now reigns in glory, possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, with thousands of thousands of saints and angels worshipping before Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand ministering unto Him; and then compare your sins with His blood your wants with His fullness, your unbelief with His faithfulness, your weakness with His strength, your inconstancy with His everlasting love.^x

Application: Peter, James, and John witnessed Jesus' glory. Calling on our nonfiction imagination can help us "behold His glory," as we are instructed to do. Jesus wants us to know Him as He truly is: the risen and glorified, all-sufficient Savior, Shield, Sun, Shepherd, Brother, Husband, and Friend. Will you use your imagination to behold His glory and experience His adequacy to meet your every need?

Conclusion

Jesus challenged His disciples' view of Him. If you follow Him, expect some surprises. He will challenge you to apply what you learn about Him in His word to all of your daily circumstances. Think about your present circumstances. Which aspect of the person and work of Jesus is He challenging you to understand and embrace more fully? He challenged His disciples' view of Him and He continues to shake and reshape our view of Him today.

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- ⁱ Metaxas, Eric (2010). *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (p. 110-111). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- ⁱⁱ Bruce, F. F. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 377). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Plummer, Alfred (1982). *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (p. 152). Grand Rapids. Baker Book House.
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