

(Matt. 17:10) – Having just witnessed a revelation of the glory of Christ to Peter, John, and James on the mount of transfiguration and seeing the Lord in this vision speak with Moses and Elijah, it was quite natural that these disciples should mention to the Lord that the scribes taught that the prophet Elijah would reappear before the Messiah would come. Their belief of this was based on a misunderstanding of Malachi's prophecy in *Malachi 4:5* – *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."* The disciples were now convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, but they were confused about the prophecy of Elijah announcing the Messiah's coming.

(Matt. 17:11-12) – The Lord then explained to them what Malachi meant in this prophecy. It was not that the prophet Elijah personally would return, but Elijah represented the tradition and message of all of God's prophets in the Old Testament as they preached the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace and pointed sinners to the promised Messiah Who would come in the future and fulfill all righteousness for God's chosen people. Malachi spoke of the ultimate culmination of all of the prophets that found its climax in John the Baptist and his message ushering in the arrival of Christ Who would *"RESTORE ALL THINGS"* in the salvation of His people by His work of redemption. Thus *"ELIAS IS ALREADY COME"* in the person of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. *"AND THEY KNEW HIM NOT, BUT HAVE DONE UNTO HIM WHATSOEVER THEY LISTED"* – John's message was rejected by many. He rebuked the idolatrous religious leaders and proclaimed the necessity of looking by faith to the Lamb of God (Isa. 52:7; John 1:29). John was eventually beheaded by Herod, and *"LIKEWISE SHALL ALSO THE SON OF MAN SUFFER OF THEM."* As John suffered unto death for preaching Christ, Christ Himself, according to the eternal purpose of God, would be rejected and die for the sins of His people and the establishment of righteousness by which God has justified His people and from which He gives them spiritual and eternal life.

(Matt. 17:13) – Having been taught of the Lord, the disciples now *"UNDERSTOOD THAT HE SPAKE UNTO THEM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST."* For any of us to have a saving understanding of spiritual matters, especially of salvation from our sins, it is imperative that Christ send forth the Spirit to reveal the Gospel to us (Matt. 11:27; John 6:44-45; 1 Cor. 2:6-16). The Gospel is the revelation of the righteousness of God which is the merit of Christ's obedience unto death as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. This was the message of John the Baptist, and it is the message of every true God-sent preacher.

(Matt. 17:14-15) – Matthew now tells us of the Lord healing an epileptic boy (cf. Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-42). The Lord, along with Peter, James, and John, came down from the

mountain and was joined by the other nine who were surrounded by a multitude. A “CERTAIN MAN” came to the Lord and begged for mercy for his son. His son was indwelt by a demon which caused the boy to be a “LUNATIC,” i.e. to have seizures. “Lunatic” means “moonstruck” as the Jews thought seizures were directly connected with phases of the moon. The spasms were uncontrollable and would happen when he was in danger, such as near fire or deep water. Mark tells us the boy was deaf and dumb (Mark 9:17,25).

(Mark 17:16-17) – The other disciples “COULD NOT CURE HIM.” We see in the Lord’s words here both our own natural sinfulness and unbelief and His glorious power to do what we cannot do. “O FAITHLESS AND PERVERSE GENERATION, HOW LONG SHALL I BE WITH YOU? HOW LONG SHALL I SUFFER YOU?”. Our faith must be in Christ and His power and ability – “BRING HIM HITHER TO ME.” Only Christ can and does save us from our sins. It is all by the grace and power of God in Him! So, when we are preaching to lost sinners, we must point them to Christ Who is the one and only Savior of His people.

(Matt. 17:18) – Christ has absolute power and authority over all the powers of darkness. One word of rebuke to the devil and the demon was cast out and the boy was immediately cured. Christ is truly able to save us to the uttermost and free us from the power and deception of Satan (2 Cor. 4:3-6; Heb. 7:25).

(Matt. 17:19-20) – The disciples wanted to know why they failed since they had been given power from Christ. They had been successful doing this very thing (Mark 6:7,13). Christ told them that it was because of their unbelief. We know that the unregenerate are in a state of unbelief, but we also know that even though the regenerate (those who have been born again by the Spirit, given the gifts of faith and repentance) are not in a state of unbelief, there is still unbelief within their flesh. The essence of God-given faith, even faith as small as “A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED,” looks to and depends totally upon Christ for all salvation. When believers give in to their flesh and look away from Christ unto themselves, then they fail. Like a grain of mustard seed, our faith begins very small and grows more and more.

(Matt. 17:21) – God’s work must never be attempted by the arm of the flesh or with careless indifference. These words were addressed as a rebuke to the disciples, who had perhaps become overly confident of their powers as the servants of Christ (Luke 10:17). Scripture does not command Christians to fast, but the Bible presents fasting as something good, profitable, and beneficial as a reminder of our need of God’s grace, power, and goodness so that we do not look to or depend upon the flesh. So long as we are in this world and seek by faith to serve our God and Savior, let us do so “BY PRAYER AND FASTING,” i.e. by faith in Christ, denying ourselves.