

INTRODUCTION

When I was in the second grade, there was a big announcement that during recess, all of the children should stay away from the large piles of dirt that were on the playground due to the construction. You can guess what the kids, particularly the boys heard, “Your favorite thing is on the playground: big piles of dirt, run and go crazy on them.”

I actually did try to stay away, it is just that my “friends,” called me over to come and see something. They cupped their hands like so and said, look what we found. They slowly opened their hands, and then, with all their might, blew the dirt that was in their hands into my face.

After the initial shock of being so gullible, I decided that was a pretty good trick and tried it on some other kids.

Going back into the classroom, the teacher looked at us sternly, and picked out the boys with dirty faces; she said I looked like one of the “ghosts” and made us stay after school. We had to write fifty times, “I will not play in the dirt at school.” So, I began as fast as I could to write, I, I, I, will, will, will, not, not, not, and so on until I was done.

In Matthew 16 today, we are going to encounter different types of people; Some the refused to listen (like my friends) and some like me, that got drawn into trouble by their own gullibility, and some that listened and obeyed (like all the girls in my class).

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

As we have gone through the book of Matthew, one of the things that I enjoy the most, like the other Gospel books, are the portrayals of Jesus.

We are supposed to see Jesus as he is and respond to him by listening to him. The end result is that knowing and seeing Jesus, will change how we worship

him and it will change how we understand that he will respond to us in our need.

All of us, like those guilty little boys, know that we are dirty and that God does not need to respond to us in any positive way. Yet we see in Jesus, that he is compassionate and forgiving and sees in us his children that can learn and grow and honor him, by his grace, to his glory.

Matthew begins by showing that Jesus is the expected Messiah and King of Israel through the various prophecies that he fulfilled. But it becomes clear to everyone that Jesus is not meeting their expectations. He seems to have no inclination to oppose the Romans, and rather is concerned about healing the weak and ministering to the poor and even is accepting of Gentiles (or Non-Jews). Then instead of moving toward his role as conquering King, we see him begin to withdraw. His teachings become more enigmatic, he speaks in parables and explains himself only to the disciples. He withdraws from large crowds rather than inciting them and seeks to minister to individuals and teaches his disciples instead.

OUR CONDITION

Like the people in this chapter, we need to see Jesus as he is and not only as we want him to be.

All of us have a way of deciding what to believe. Some rely on a philosophy; some rely on science and say they will only believe what they can see; they want a sign. Others are skeptical because of some pain or hurt or wrong idea in the past.

MAIN POINTS

In this chapter we will see be people that:

- Do not believe and seek signs.
 - Are uncommitted because of false teaching.
 - Believe in the person of Christ.

- Believe in the work of Christ on the cross.
 - Are committed to follow Christ.
- Only believe at the sign of his return.

SOME UNIQUE THINGS ABOUT CHAPTER 16

In chapter 16 we come to a climax, there are some “firsts” in this chapter; things that are mentioned for the first time and also, we will see some sayings that we are going to have to dig into so that when we read the Bible we will not be jarred by them as if running over a speed bump. Let’s look at our text.

V 1-4 PEOPLE THAT DO NOT BELIEVE AND SEEK SIGNS

Our first example is people that do not believe and seek signs.

1 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.

2 He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’

3 And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

At first, we are encountering those that are not willing to listen to Jesus. In this situation the Pharisees and the Sadducees were aligned together to come against Jesus. They were the conservatives and the liberals aligned together. It would be as if Donald Trump teamed up with Nancy Pelosi on a common cause. They recognized that the teaching of Jesus and his rising popularity were a common threat to them; their places of control were threatened by Jesus. They were the pit bulls and Jesus was messing with their food bowl; and they were coming after him.

People know that the Gospel messes with their sense of freedom; they are not wrong. Even the idea of a personal God has massive implications on a person, so people argue that there is no God. Jesus told his disciples in our text today, that if they are going to follow him, they must pick up their cross, their instrument of death, and follow him; that kind of impinges on your freedom!

But where they were wrong, of course, is their assessment of who Jesus was. If they really believed that he was the Son of the living God, as was portrayed in the ancient book of Daniel, then they would come on their knees to worship.

I often wonder why mere “believing” in Jesus is the means that God chose to save us.

John 3:16 (ESV)

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Why belief? Why not obedience, or good works, like most false religions believe? Those seem so much more direct or logically operative, but belief or faith, not so much.

Well, it is because what we believe will affect everything we do. Who we believe Jesus to be is the most important thing about us. And it is not “mere” belief either. The right type of belief changes what we actually do. I’m not implying that the strength of our faith is the issue, but only the real existence of it.

A common example that perhaps you’ve heard is this: A man walks out on the runway to board a plane up the stairs. The plane is an old DC3, like what Indian Jones would fly on in the 1930s. He notices that under the wing that there is a large puddle of oil and a constant dripping. Now the pilot is standing there and says, “just have faith!” So, it is clear that our faith is no better than the object that we put our faith in; in this case the airworthiness of the plane.

This is why God gave us all of these portrayals of Jesus in the Bible and in the book of Matthew. We realize through his profound teaching and through the

miracles that Jesus worked, and his profound impact on his disciples, the apostles, who gave their whole life even to the death, that Jesus really is the Son of God; and that we can trust him.

But instead of believing, the religious leaders, in their odd liaison, asked for a sign from heaven to “test him.”

It seems to me that Jesus’ response was a little snarky. It is as if he was saying, “You want a sign, I’ll show you a sign from heaven; ok, look at the sky! – there is your sign from heaven...” If it’s red in the morning it means one thing, if it is red in the evening, it means another; but you cannot interpret the signs of the times: the things that are right in front of you... (He continues in verse 4)

4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.

We spoke about this previously, this sign of Jonah, that just as Jonah was swallowed up by the large fish and lived in its belly for 3 days, so will Jesus be swallowed up by death for 3 days and then rise again. The life and resurrection of Jesus are the only “signs” that he will give, and they are enough, but not always believed.

The Bible continually asks us to look at the signs of the times.

Galatians 1:3–4 (ESV)

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, **4** who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

2 Corinthians 6:1–2 (ESV)

1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. **2** For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We live in an evil age, but God's favor is on people. Now is the time to put our faith in Christ!

PEOPLE THAT ARE UNCOMMITTED BECAUSE OF FALSE TEACHING

Next, we encounter people that are uncommitted because of false teaching.

Verse 5,

5 When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread.

6 Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

7 And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread."

8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?"

9 Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?

10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?

11 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

12 Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus listens to the foolish, puzzled banter of his disciples and probably wonders if he is in the movie, "dumb and dumber."

He tells them to watch out for the teaching of Pharisees and Sadducees. These are the religious "authorities" of the day. They had their version of, "listen to the science!"

Many students go to college, and because they have never heard an argument against their Christian faith, they crumble at the first sign of someone that does not believe. We hear the same today from professors that teach the Bible is just a

made-up book, written hundreds of years after the events, not even by the apostles, though the evidence points the other way. Their objective is to undermine the faith of students so they will follow them instead of Jesus.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were preaching against Jesus, that he was just a charlatan, or used magic or powers from Satan to work his miracles. We can see the confusion that was present concerning Jesus in the surrounding culture.

Verse 13,

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Notice that the responses to "who do people say that I am" that you do not hear is, "The Messiah." Even the disciples seem somewhat reluctant to commit to Jesus' identity. Jesus had been proclaiming that he was the "Son of Man," a clearly understood teaching that he was the divine Son of God, but it was not generally understood in the culture at large. Due to the misinformation of the Pharisees and Sadducees, there was plenty of confusion over who he was.

The fact is that most people had never seen Jesus. And the fact that he did not have an Instagram account, might have led people to believe that Jesus was another famous person, John the Baptist. Others said that Jesus was "Elijah" because the last verse in the Old Testament was that God was going to send a prophet in the spirit of Elijah, and this person was John the Baptist, not Jesus.

The end result is that people, even the disciples, may have been uncommitted and doubtful as to who Jesus was because of bad teaching.

Next, we see people who believe in the person of Christ. Verse 15,

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

This is the **first time** in the book of Matthew that a person proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God. I know, I re-read the whole book up to this point.

Peter's response was two-part: That Jesus was the Messiah ("You are the Christ") and that Jesus is divine ("You are the Son of the living God!")

Jesus' response is consistent with the teaching of the rest of the New Testament (of course!) that a person does not come to faith in Christ by their own doing. It takes a work of God to cause a person to believe. Jesus says, ""Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." In, John 6:44 Jesus says,

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

In verse 18, Jesus speaks of something else that is a **first**,

18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Jesus says to Peter, "I tell you that you are Peter..." And Peter thinks, "yep that's my name all right." But he continues, indicating that there is something about the name Peter that has further significance. You are "Petros" (meaning stone) and on this "Petra" (large mass of rock) I will build my church.

This is the first reference to the “Church” in the book of Matthew. This reference to the church is one of only two in all the four books of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). The other is also in Matthew, chapter 18.

Jesus is saying something significant about the “rock” that he will build his church on it and also that the “Church” or ekklesia (assembly or congregation) is part of his messianic plan to save the world. That is significant!

The question is, “What is the “rock” that the church will be built upon and what is the plan?”

The Catholic Church contends that “Peter” himself is the rock. That he was the first Apostle or “Pope” of the church and thus the church was to be built upon Peter.

The Protestant view is that Jesus is referring to “Peter’s confession” that Jesus is “the Christ and the Son of the Living God” is what the church would be built upon. All who enter the church, or God’s true congregation, would come in through believing that same thing: that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God.

Others have said “no,” that we must see Jesus Christ himself as the rock. It may have been that Jesus spoke it something like this, “You are Peter (a rock) but upon “this rock” (pointing to himself) I will build my church. There is much theological evidence that Jesus is “The Rock.”

- 1) Why would Jesus build his church on anything other than himself? He said in the sermon on the mount that the only wise people are those that build their house on the rock (meaning himself).
- 2) Peter preached to the people and the leaders in **Acts 4, 11** “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- 3) There are numerous Old Testament references to God being the “rock of Israel.”

So, it seems to me that whether we go with the second option, that Peter's confession of Christ is the rock or believe the third option, that it refers to Jesus himself, we cannot go far wrong.

And now we have to look at another speed bump for our understanding. Verse 19, Jesus said, *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

As with the previous verse, there are a few different opinions about the meaning.

The Catholic church has interpreted this to mean that the Church, (Peter and his successors) can determine whether a person is saved. A person needs to be in fellowship with the Church, and therefore excommunication or being thrown out of the church is the same as losing your salvation.

The protestant church does not believe this; but rather that a person is saved solely on believing the Gospel. The keys open and shut the door for the Kingdom through the gospel proclamation. This idea is communicated in number 84 of the Heidelberg confession,

84. How is the Kingdom of Heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the Holy Gospel?

In this way: that according to the command of Christ, it is proclaimed and openly witnessed to believers, one and all, that as often as they accept with true faith the promise of the Gospel, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits;

Similarly, there is another opinion that Peter's life was a demonstration of using the keys to open the Kingdom. These were when Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 2 and 4000 were converted. Peter also "preached" to the Sanhedrin, or Jewish ruling council, they wanted to kill him, and also when Peter preached to the gentiles or (non-jews) at Cornelius' house. All of them put their faith in Christ.

Those are a couple of difficult verses, but let's get back to the bigger picture.

We have seen in Peter a person that puts their faith in Christ. If a person is to be saved they must believe that Jesus is God; not just a good teacher or even a miracle worker. We will see next what else a person must believe in order to be saved.

V 18-23 PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

People need to believe in the work of Jesus on the cross. Verse 21,

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Another first in this chapter is verse 21 where Jesus predicts that he will suffer and die and rise again. We've talked a lot about the fact that Jesus as Messiah was not fitting anyone's "grid." The disciples did not understand him, certainly the religious leaders did not, and this statement about him being killed and rising again, completely blew up everyone's idea of what he was going to do.

Peter even rebuked Jesus, "*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.*" Can you imagine rebuking God, the one you just said was the Christ, the Son of the living God?

But this did not go over well, verse 23, *But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

If they had roller coasters back then, then Peter was on it; first he is up, "blessed are you", then he was down, "Get behind me Satan!" Perhaps in this situation, Jesus was reminded of his temptation, when he had heard it once before,

Matthew 4:8–10 (ESV)

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.””

The temptation offered was to have glory without suffering. Jesus knew that his mission on earth was to do the only thing that he could do, to suffer and die on the cross so that people could be forgiven of their sins. He was to be God’s sacrificial lamb.

We can believe that Jesus is a good teacher or that Jesus worked miracles or even that Jesus is the divine Son of God, or even that Jesus’ death was an example for us, but unless we believe that his death was the atonement for our sin, we cannot be saved! There is no other basis to approach a Holy God except through the blood of Christ- a substitutionary atonement for us.

V 24-26 PEOPLE WHO ARE COMMITTED TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

Next, we see what it is when people are committed to follow Christ.

***24** Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

***25** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

***26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*

Not only do we need Jesus to carry his cross, just as we stated, but he said that you need to carry your cross too. We cannot be saved unless we follow Christ through whatever he leads us. It means that we need to take all of our plans and subjugate them to the Lord. If I want to do such-n-such with my life, we need to

be asking, “is that what the Lord wants me to do with my life?” I am not suggesting either that God’s only will for a person is to go to the mission field. He may very well want you to be an engineer, but you can be sure he wants you to be “his” engineer.

V 27-28 PEOPLE ONLY BELIEVE AT THE SIGN OF HIS RETURN

There will be people that sadly only believe at the sign of his return; when it is impossible to do otherwise. Verse 27,

27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

28 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.”

Some think that Jesus is saying that the Son of Man’s coming in his Kingdom refers to his resurrection or the day of Pentecost some days later when the Holy Spirit came to inhabit believers. Some say that it refers to his transfiguration. Others say it refers to when Rome sacked Jerusalem in AD 70 as a sign of God’s judgment for rejecting the Messiah. Others that don’t believe in Jesus’ divinity would say that Jesus was just wrong about the timing.

CONCLUSION

Matthew 16 is a chapter about faith. Some people will not come to believe because it costs them their place of power and control, like the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Others receive bad teaching and believe instead. It better fits their grid of how things ought to be.

Others by God’s grace are given the eyes to see the truth about who Jesus really is, “The Christ and the Son of the Living God.” But as we have seen,

there also needs to be faith in what Jesus did on the cross to be their substitution.

Jesus taught his disciples many things that day; He gave them insights into his own plan and destiny to die a terrible death. He told them he was going to use the church to advance his Kingdom. But he also told them again that they were going to have to die too. They were going to have to die to their own ideas and their own plans in order to follow him.

When we commit ourselves to follow Jesus, he will make his plans for our lives known. Usually just a bit at a time. Like the “lamp unto our feet,” that only throws enough light to get us through the next step.

Jesus calls those who put their faith in him “blessed” and reminds them that they are chosen of the Father to believe.

I can't think of a greater blessing than that!

Pray with me.