

THE WORDS AND WORKS OF KING JESUS

PART 12: THE KING AND HIS CHURCH

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Matthew Chapters 16-17

Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" It was fine for the disciples to know what others thought about Jesus. But Jesus had to ask them, as individuals, what they believed about Him.

The disciples said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

I. COMMENTS

They want a sign (16:1-4)

Jesus had already done many signs but the Pharisees and Sadducees remained unconvinced. They looked for a sign from heaven such as calling down fire from heaven, preferably against a Roman legion. Apparently, they were not convinced by the signs "on earth" Jesus had already done.

- Jesus points out to them that they already have enough signs, but they cannot interpret the signs of the times.
- Although they can perform a primitive weather forecast such as red sky at morning, shepherd's warning, they cannot draw the proper conclusions from the miracles of healing that Jesus did.
- Effectively, Jesus was saying why should I give another sign when you can't interpret them. You can't "connect the dots."

Beware of the leaven (16:5-12)

To the Jewish mind, leaven was always symbolic of evil...leaven stood for an evil influence liable to spread through life and to corrupt it." In this case, Jesus was referring to the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees as leaven.

- In baking, leavening is the air that causes bread, cakes, and other baked goodies to rise when they go in the oven
- When referring to yeast, the disciples thought Jesus was rebuking them for forgetting to take bread.
- Jesus was telling his disciples to guard against the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
- Note: see Question No. 2.

Who is the "rock"? (16:13-20)

The words "this rock" have been the source of much controversy. It is best to see them as referring to either Jesus Himself (perhaps Jesus gesturing to Himself as He said this), or as referring to Peter's confession of who Jesus is.

- (16:18) Jesus was most likely not referring to Peter as the foundation of the church for the following five reasons:
- 1) Jesus was making a distinction between *petros* (a small rock) and *petra* (a huge rock). Peter being a small stone but the church (*ekklesia*) will be built on the *petra* (big rock).
- 2) First Corinthians 3:11 makes it impossible for Peter to be the foundation of the church (Jesus the only foundation).
- 3) Ephesians 2:20 refers to Jesus as the cornerstone of the church.
- 4) Peter himself calls Jesus the foundation (1 Pet. 1:4-8).

- 5) Peter never claimed to be the foundation (bishop) of the church.
- Conclusion: That Peter and his successors (apostolic succession) had infallible authority over the whole church has no biblical or historical basis.¹
- 16:20 Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah². Jesus still does not want his Messiahship to be publically proclaimed because this would cause problems and the appointed time for his death had not arrived.³

Jesus foretells his death (16:21-23)

The disciples were probably so shocked when Jesus said He would be killed in Jerusalem that these words didn't sink in. Later, an angel reminded them of these words (Luke 24:6-8).

- Jesus was getting the disciples prepared for this remarkable event...not only his death but also more importantly his resurrection.
- Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him for saying these things. This was a purely human reaction since Peter could not envision his Lord suffering and dying. Perhaps he was expecting instant success from Jesus.
- In response, Jesus sees Peter doing Satan's work of trying to divert Jesus from the necessary path of suffering.

Gaining the whole world (16:24-28)

Jesus himself had the opportunity to gain all the world by worshipping Satan (Luke 4:5-8), but he found life and victory in obedience instead. Amazingly, as we live this way before Jesus we are the ones who are really, genuinely happy. Giving our lives to Jesus all the way, and living as an others-centered person does not take away from our lives, it adds to it.

- The pattern for Jesus is also the pattern for his disciples. Later, Peter affirms this to his readers in 1 Peter 2:21.
- This goes against "prosperity gospel" preaching.⁴
- (16:28) "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. 16:28 NIV)
- In each of the synoptic Gospels, the next event immediately six days after this promise from Jesus is the transfiguration. Rather than interpreting Jesus'

¹ (Legg 302)

² This sometimes called the "Messianic Secret" which is the disproved theory put forth by a German Lutheran theologian named Wilhelm Wrede who stated that Jesus was denying that he was the Messiah <<https://www.gotquestions.org/Messianic-secret.html>>.

³ (Legg 305)

⁴ The prosperity gospel (also known as the "health and wealth gospel" or by its most popular brand, the "Word of Faith" movement) is a perversion of the gospel of Jesus that claims that God rewards increases in faith with increases in health and/or wealth. <<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-you-should-know-about-the-prosperity-gospel/>>.

promise as referring to His coming to establish His kingdom on earth, the context indicates that Jesus was referring to the transfiguration. The Greek word translated "kingdom" can also be translated "royal splendor," meaning that the three disciples standing there would see Christ as He really is—the King of heaven—which occurred in the transfiguration.⁵

Transfigured (17:1-13)

Jesus' face shined like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. It was his face that shined like the sun. He wasn't transformed into another being with another body; it was his face that shined brightly. Remarkably, Moses and Elijah spoke with the transfigured Jesus. Moses had lived some 1400 years before; Elijah some 900 years before; yet they were alive and in some sort of resurrected, glorified state.

- Transfigured (Gk. μεταμορφόω; to be changed in appearance)⁶
- This was done for the sake of the disciples, Peter, James, and John (James and John, sons of Zebedee, not the James son of Alpheus).
- God again affirms his Son, "This is Son whom I love."
- Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets, which witness to Jesus the Messiah, the one who fulfills the OT (see Matt. 5:17).⁷

Mustard seeds (17:14-21)

The faith that we must have has more to do with what *kind* of faith it is than with *how much* faith there is. A small amount of faith, even as small as a mustard seed (a very small seed), can accomplish great things if that small amount of faith is placed in the hands of the great and mighty God.

- A man comes to Jesus asking for him to heal his son who is possessed by a demon which was giving him seizures. Jesus' disciples could not do this because they had "little faith."
- Jesus reminds them that service and the exercise of gifts depend on faith for their effectiveness.
- "Little faith" is not a description of the amount of faith that we must generate within ourselves but a faith that rests solely on Jesus Christ. It's not a "try harder" faith but a "who" faith.
- It is the object of our faith that counts, not the intensity of our faith.
- I can have complete faith in a chair made of paper – but it will collapse nonetheless.
- The object of our faith is Jesus Christ!

⁵ (Houdmann, S. Michael)

⁶ BibleWorks™ Copyright © 1992-2015 BibleWorks,

⁷ (ESV Crossway Bibles 1856, note on 17:3)

Jesus and the third day (17:22-23)

Jesus told his disciples that he is about to be killed. Though they were frequent, these reminders about Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection were disbelieved and forgotten by the disciples until after His resurrection (Luke 24:6-8). Jesus rarely told his disciples about His coming death without also telling of his coming resurrection. We know that the disciples didn't fully understand the glorious triumph of the resurrection, because they were exceedingly sorrowful ("distressed").

- The prospect of Jesus' death overwhelms them. Once again, they do not notice the prophecy of his resurrection.

Taxes and a fish (17:24-27)

This was a normal tax or fee applied to every Jewish man. Faithful Jewish men paid this obligation; others sought to escape the responsibility. In order to pay this temple tax, Jesus trusted in the miraculous provision of God. It's not every day, or any day, that someone catches a fish and takes a coin out of its mouth. But Jesus used God's provision to pay His taxes.

- The origin of the tax is found in Exodus 30:12-16 where each person had to pay a half-shekel for the needs of the temple and its services.
- In Jesus' time this amount was two drachmas, although such a coin was not readily available so two people joined together to pay the tax with a four-drachma coin.⁸
- In the 5th century BC a drachma had a rough value of 25 U.S. dollars.⁹

II. DISCUSSING THE TEXT

1. The Pharisees tested Jesus by asking for a sign from heaven (16:1-4). Does this mean it is wrong to ask God for a sign when seeking his will? Explain your answer.

- There have been times in the Bible when people asked God for a sign to know his will correctly (e.g. Gideon and the fleece)
- There are precautions when asking God for a sign:
 - 1) People can become overly dependent on signs which is dangerous because they will always need to see proof before they will trust God.
 - 2) You can interpret everything you see as a sign (e.g. a shooting star, a phone class, a billboard on the highway, etc.). We have all known people who think they have received a message from God, like the farmer who saw "G P" in the clouds. He interpreted it to leave the farm and "Go preach." After he

⁸ (Legg 323)

⁹ Wikipedia, < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_drachma>.

preached his first sermon, the congregation told him the sign was actually telling him to “Go plow.”

2. What do you suppose was “the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:12).

- The teaching that Jesus is not the Messiah.
- The teaching that one gains righteousness before God by keeping the laws.

3. Jesus told his disciples that he would be killed but that he will be raised on the third day, yet his disciples were distressed. Why do you suppose they were distressed about this even though Jesus told them he would be raised on the third day?

- They may have been more familiar with dying than being resurrected.
- Perhaps they did not see how Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection would overcome not only the Roman enemy but over sin itself.

III. CHALLENGE FOR NEXT WEEK



Read Matthew Chapters 18-20. Do you suppose Peter had a special reason for asking how many times he needed to forgive his brother and if so, what was it (18:21)?