

Lesson #17- Matthew Chapter 16 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. Did Jesus grant the request of the Pharisees and Sadducees and how does His answer impact the world today?

Help for Teachers:

At first glance it appears Jesus is denying their request (even though the request was really an attempt at discrediting our Lord), but looking closer, there is a “but” that Jesus adds after the “no sign”. For indeed He will soon give them the most astounding sign imaginable. This is the second time He promises to give them this sign, “the sign of the prophet Jonas” (review lesson #13- Chapter 12, page 4).

Jesus announces that the sign He will give them will be so clear that if you have the capacity to look at the sky and predict what the general weather is going to be like for the next few hours, there is no excuse for missing this much greater sign He is about to give. He is about to do what only the God that controls even life and death can do- rise from the dead by His own power. 2,000 plus years later this fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ stands alone in all history. No other religion, person, or institution credibly claims that they or their champion came back from the dead. Even after all this time Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection remains the most known and definable event in all history.

The sign granted to the Pharisees and Sadducees is the sign given even for us today. (John 12:32)

2. The disciples are confused by Jesus’ command to “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” What did Jesus finally have to explain to the disciples, and what might we need to take heed and beware of today?

Jesus wasn’t at all concerned with their physical need for bread. The whole teaching of Jesus throughout the gospel continually warns of the heart of man, the naturally degenerate heart that cannot see and is dead, that if it is to enter the kingdom of heaven must be regenerated (born again, John 3:3). The heart that, once regenerated (born again), turns to Christ in God-given faith. This new heart still lives in a “body of death” (Rom 7:24) until the day that we receive a glorified body. During this time of waiting and hope, Jesus warns to be ware of doctrines (teachings) that are wrong and if accepted, pollute your heart. What was the doctrine of the Pharisees? Was it not their prideful insistence that the gateway to heaven was the keeping of the law and ancestral connection with Abraham and the prophets?

Leaven (yeast) in a small amount added into a large lump of dough, will cause the bread to swell as it ferments. The influence of the leaven radically alters the whole loaf of bread. Even a small amount of us thinking we are in some way “good” is anti-gospel. We must never forget that we are made righteous by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom 4:8-24).

Because Jesus is teaching His disciples, it seems the above is the primary lesson Jesus has for those that are His. It may be also noted that the Pharisees rejected the Lordship of Jesus, denying that He was the Messiah in their public teachings. Certainly, for those hearing the gospel and not yet in the faith, accepting a doctrine of unbelief in the deity of Jesus Christ would be something to take heed of.

3. Verses 13-20 are about identity.
 - a. Why do you think Jesus doesn't plainly ask “who do people think am I”, but asks “Whom do men say that I ***the Son of man*** am?”
 - b. How do the disciples report that the world perceives Jesus? How does our world perceive Jesus?
 - c. How does Peter personally respond to the question of Jesus' identity and what does Jesus have to say about that? Discuss why this was such a big deal and why it is still the big deal of our age.

Help for Teachers:

- a. “Son of Man” is a term used of Jesus 88 times in the New Testament. It was the most common way Jesus described Himself. Son of Man is literally another way of saying human, and the complete humanity of Jesus is a critical doctrine. So much so that John says, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” (1 John 4:2-3). Just as important as the complete humanity of Jesus is the fact that He is completely God at the same time. Of course, everyone identified Jesus as a man. Those of His hometown rejected his Messiahship saying, “Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?” As evidenced by Peter's answer, coming into the kingdom of heaven requires a revelation from God the Father that the “Son of Man” is much more than just a man.
- b. The acts of Jesus and the authority with which He taught were undeniably miraculous. The Pharisees, according to Nicodemus in John 3, knew that He was

“a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” Per the disciples, the popular consensus was that Jesus was either John the Baptist (Herod’s fear) or one of the major prophets of the Old Testament. They seemed willing to accept anything short of Jesus being their Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

- c. Jesus now shifts from a general question of His identity to a personal question that each of the disciples, and every man, must answer, “But whom say ye that I am?” As the usual first among the group to speak (right or wrong 😊), Peter announces “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus applauds his answer and replies, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Why was Simon (given name), son of Jona (a man) blessed? Because that knowledge did not come from any earthly source (like Simon’s father), that knowledge was revealed to him by “my Father” (making Jesus also God) which is in heaven. Simon Peter is blessed because God the Father had chosen to open his heart and reveal to him this truth (Matt 11:27, Luke 10:22). Unless and until God, in His sovereign will and amazing grace, opens our eyes to the truth of Jesus Christ, we will be like the “men” in this passage that couldn’t deny that Jesus was different, but couldn’t come to a right conclusion. Jesus’ ministry on earth was full of raising the dead and opening the eyes of the blind. Consider this, the dead are dead, they cannot make a choice to be alive again. Borrowing from a song by Ghost Ship, “the blind won’t gain their sight by opening their eyes- Son of David, have mercy on me”.

- 4. Is the church built on Peter? Explain your answer. What about “keys of the kingdom of heaven” and binding and loosing?

Help for Teachers:

No, Peter is not the foundation that the church is built upon. The language here is difficult and so this passage has been a point of contention for centuries.

According to some authorities on language studies (please feel free to do your own research- always), the word “Peter” means rock and the word “rock” also means rock in Aramaic, same word; Jesus spoke Aramaic. However, the New Testament wasn’t written in Aramaic, it was written in Greek. In the Greek language “Peter” means a stone (cepha). Remember Jesus nicknamed Simon, calling him Peter, or in the Greek, Cephas. A stone is a fragment of a rock. The other (different) word used in the Greek is translated “rock”. So, Jesus is the rock and Peter is a stone from the rock.

To take this passage another way, as in that Peter is the foundation upon which the church is built, is to create a major conflict with other Scripture (Luke 6:47-49, 1 Cor 3:11). If in any way our understanding of a passage conflicts with another portion of Scripture, the issue is our misinterpretation. Rather, Peter is a building block, as a representative of the church, on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. Though the forces of wickedness, Satan's kingdom, personified as the gates of hell, attack the church, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Jesus Christ is the rightful possessor of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Rev 3:7). Because God receives glory by the church, Jesus is giving to Peter (soon to be a pastor at the Jerusalem church) and the church, as made plain in Matthew 18:18, authority to do kingdom work as the authorized, recognized, commissioned representatives of Jesus Christ until His return. The "keys" to the kingdom are symbolic of that given authority, as a servant has delegated power to carry out actions on behalf of the master of the house.

The binding and loosing has nothing to do with forgiving of sins, as some teach. Only God can forgive sins. The church and elders of the church have the responsibility to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). As stewards of the kingdom, we are to interpret and teach the truths of Scripture. When Peter refused to allow the efforts of the legalists to "put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples" in Acts 15:10, he "loosed" (freed) what was already loosed in heaven. When Peter writes in his epistles commands concerning how we are to live in a holy manner as obedient children, he "binds" on the hearts of Christians what is bound in heaven.

5. In verse 20 Jesus begins a period of focused training with His disciples, starting with His imminent death, burial, and resurrection. Peter immediately fires back that , “No way, that can’t be what’s going to happen!” (paraphrase). Discuss Jesus’ response. Why do you think it was so harsh, after all, Peter was just expressing His love and loyalty? Use the remainder of the chapter (24-28) to support your answers.

Help for Teachers:

Having recently expressed a truth that only the Father in heaven could reveal, Peter’s “son of Jona” side suddenly popped out. This is not the last time Peter will struggle with the necessity of Christ’s death (the sword incident in the garden when Jesus is arrested). Jesus makes it plain in verse 23 that He is offended when we value the things of this life (things of men) more than the priorities of God. Jesus’ words here are stronger than that, it’s an all or nothing statement that Jesus makes, “thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Matt 6:24).

Pay close attention to how quickly we can fall prey to the enemy. It seems Peter’s natural desire to be some sort of savior himself (we see it again when Peter pulls a sword to “protect” Jesus and cuts off Malchus’ ear, John 18:10), which by all human standards appears so noble, is condemned by Christ because it is not rooted in kingdom purposes. When Peter argues with Jesus about His imminent rejection and death, ***Jesus turns and looks directly at Peter, but addresses Satan; Jesus finds Satan an offence, He condemns Satan as the one who doesn’t love the things of God but those that be of men!*** (Rom 8:29-33- particularly 33, Rom 7:14-25)

In verses 24-28 Jesus tells His disciples that following Him means releasing the idea that they can somehow be their own savior and build their own life, to do that is to utterly fail and lose real and eternal life. On the contrary, when we abandon hope in self, and in faith and repentance realize He is our great hope, we gain real and eternal life in Him.

Jesus first gave up His life for us (Phil 2:5-11). He left the splendors of heaven to take up life as a Man. He gave up His life as a Man so that we could gain the splendors of heaven. Look what God has done! (2 Cor 5:21)