

# Matthew 16:1–20

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today we will be reading from Matthew 16 verses 1 through 20. That's Matthew 16 verses 1 through 20.

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. 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.

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

Jesus said to them, Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, We brought no bread.

[ 1 : 08 ] But Jesus, aware of this, said, O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive?

Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?

How is it that you fail to understand what I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of the bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

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

And they asked, And they said, Some say John the Baptist, Others say Elijah, And others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am?

[ 2 : 14 ] Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. 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.

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. 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.

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, let me add the warmest of welcomes.

If you have found your way here for the first time, or maybe for the second, third time, I've been told there are at least three brand new university students in this room, and I would love to greet you in person.

I can't believe you guys still have a whole month of summer if you are at the University of Chicago remaining. And in the coming weeks, I think you will, we will sense a huge surge in this room, just given the university community.

[ 3 : 43 ] But if you are a university student, please do say hello afterwards. Well, this morning we are continuing our series in the book of Matthew.

Matthew. It's a massive series, and so next week we are starting a 15-week mini-series. If the mini-series is 15 weeks, it gives you a sense of what the whole series might be.

But the next 15 weeks, we will focus in on really us as disciples. What does it mean to follow a king? And so I am going to try to... Matthew will shift beginning next week.

And so I want to do my best to bring into conclusion the first 16 chapters. But as we make our way, let's just pause and ask for God's help.

Father, we say with the psalmist, for with you is the fountain of life, and it's only in your light do we see light.

[ 4 : 46 ] And so may we in this room sit under the fountain of life. May we receive life, not only physical life, but spiritual life, not only temporal life, but eternal life.

And may you illumine your word that under your light, under your illumination, we may actually see reality. And so help us to this end, we pray.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I hope your Bibles are open. Matthew 16. I have been given the first 20 verses. Life is filled with questions.

Some are significant, existential, meaning-laden questions. What should I wear today? What's for lunch?

No, I'm just kidding. No, those are meaningful questions to some of us. Would I like to be married? Should I have a family?

[ 5 : 54 ] What will I do with my life? What does my life mean? Who am I? And what is my purpose?

And these questions require answers. Because they give us meaning and they help us understand why life matters. And they're valuable questions for us to answer.

Yet this morning, I want to hold out to you the most urgent, important, and significant question you must answer.

And it is found there in the 15th verse. And it comes not from me, but from the pages of Scripture quoting Jesus Christ.

Who do you say I am? Who do you say I am? It's from the mouth of Jesus directed at the group of disciples.

[ 6 : 59 ] And it confronts all of us. The text gives us initial answers. They're good answers. Jesus, you're John the Baptist, some say.

Others say you're Elijah, the mighty prophet. Or even Jeremiah. Godly men in the hall of fame of Israel's prophets. They were mighty men in integrity, in ministry, in effectiveness, in mission.

And they were good answers. But they weren't the right answer. And today, some will assert Jesus. Historical figure. Moral teacher.

Political activist. Who fought for the lowly and the disenfranchised and the ignored. He was a revolutionary for good. And though good answers and true answers, they were not right answers.

C.S. Lewis in his classic Mere Christianity gives us that trilemma. Jesus is either a liar, he's a lunatic, or he's the Lord.

[ 8 : 05 ] He cannot be all three. He is only one of those. Yes. There is only one answer. And it's found in verse 16. There is only one solution to this problem set.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now, after 15 of 28 chapters of Matthew, it is time for our midterm exam.

And there is only one question on this exam. Who is Jesus?

I've titled this morning's message Jesus is the answer. Yes, Lord. Jesus is the answer. Jesus is God's answer.

And you're probably not even sure what is the question. I would argue the question's irrelevant. Because once you get the answer correct, regardless of the question, you have the answer.

[ 9 : 16 ] And I want to frame this passage, these 20 verses, I want to chop it in half. I want us to see the first 12 verses. And I will tag them simply this.

You see a withdrawal and a warning. A withdrawal and a warning. And I want to view, there's several vantage points we could take when we look at these 20 verses.

We could look at the disciples. We could look at the religious leaders. We could look at the crowd, possibly. But I want us to take our fixed lens. It's not a wide angle lens.

It's a fixed lens. And I want us to look just at Jesus. And we'll see in the first half, there's a withdrawal and a warning. A withdrawal and a warning.

In the second half, 13 through 20, we will find there's a revelation and a declaration. I know, I couldn't alliterate. It was, I tried, I tried, and I tried.

[ 10 : 14 ] A withdrawal and a warning. followed by a revelation and declaration. Chapter 16 gets underway and it's not an unfamiliar confrontation.

The religious body has come up against Jesus again to test him. We saw a familiar scene in the opening verses of chapter 15. A group of religious delegates, namely the Pharisees and the scribes, had come up from Jerusalem to evaluate Jesus' ministry.

Is he legit? Is he credible? Is this real? Jesus was confronted early on in his ministry. As early as chapter 4, he was brought into the wilderness or the desert to be tested by the devil.

Jesus' mission from the outset was an opposed mission and it didn't cease throughout the entire book of Matthew. But what is noteworthy about chapter 16 is the collective opposition from both Pharisees and Sadducees.

Because religiously, ideologically, politically, they were, they couldn't be more different. The Pharisees, the conservatives, they adhered to the law so much so that they would rewrite the law. [11:36] The very law. The Sadducees were progressives. The Romans wanted, or the Pharisees wanted Rome expelled. The Sadducees wanted to partner with Rome.

They only came together in one council, namely the Sanhedrin, the ruling body, or the ruling religious court in Israel. They were equivalent to, at least in this country, the red and the blue. the conservative and the progressive. And they were regularly at odds with one another, except when it came to Jesus. They were united in their opposition because there was a recognition that Jesus was doing something entirely different.

Jesus was not fulfilling their agenda. Jesus was not advancing a political or religious cause. He was on neither side. You see, he was creating a new assembly, we'll find out later, under a new authority, calling a new people that would not be known for their religious party, but faith-filled piety. And together, they come to Jesus and they want a sign, a visible demonstration of sorts, confirm your identity as the promised one, the Messiah. They wanted to see Jesus do something sensational, super, spectacular, special.

[13:04] Show off, Jesus. And if you would, and if you could, we would believe. Well, Jesus is aware of their evil and adulterous hearts.

They are adulterous. You see, Jesus is Israel's divine husband. But they don't want him. They want another lover. And they could interpret the weather, discern the forecast from the color of the sky, and know what to expect.

They could interpret the signs in the sky, but they could not interpret the signs of the times, namely the acts that would, the acts that were already made available to them, whether by witness or through word of mouth.

See, their sign, their request for a sign was an overt rejection of who Jesus was. Plenty had been fed by Jesus. Just read the previous two chapters.

Many had been miraculously healed. According to Matthew, the crowds confirmed the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing.

[14:13] The signs were sufficient. Yet the stingy, stubborn hearts held on to their unbelief. And as a result, Jesus reiterates what he did in chapter 12.

I'm only going to give you one sign, and it's the sign of Jonah. It's one of the better known stories in our Bibles. It records Jonah the prophet as good as dead as he was in the belly of a great fish in the depths of the sea.

In an act of divine intervention, Jonah, after three days and three nights, is vomited back onto the shore in what was from, what was delivered from what was equivalent to death.

It was this resurrected life that Jesus is referring to as the sign. In the same way that Jonah went into the depths of the sea, Jesus would go into the heart of the earth.

As Jonah was vomited back onto dry land after being spared from death, Jesus would be expelled from the tomb. Not spared from death, but resurrecting from death.

[15:21] The single, spectacular, super special sign was this. Supreme sign was this. That it will come, this, Jesus will die and rise again.

This is the ultimate sign. There would be no greater sign. There is no more compelling sign. There would be no further sign necessary. The sign that they were requiring was actually standing before them, unbeknownst to them.

Well, the sign from heaven they demanded was actually the son from heaven who had descended. The sign from heaven that they demanded was actually the son of heaven descended.

It would be the son crucified, buried, risen, ascended, and he would be the all-sufficient sign because Jesus is the answer.

Well, Jesus is fed up according to verse 4 and he withdraws from the religious opposition and though it literally communicates Jesus' physical departure, there's a sense where he is now turning away from Israel's religious body and leaving them.

[ 16 : 40 ] He's further carrying on the sign of Jonah because Jesus is now leaving Israel geographically but he also in a sense is turning from them religiously.

You see, the sign of Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a whale. The sign of Jesus would be three nights or three days and three nights in a grave. But here's the scandal of Jonah.

When Jonah gets vomited back onto the land, he goes to Nineveh. Nineveh. Pagan Nineveh. Gentile filled Nineveh. Wicked Nineveh. And the people received the message, repented and were received by God.

You see, the house of Israel to which Jesus was sent according to last week wanted nothing to do with him. So he up, turned, and left them and was going to Nineveh.

[ 17 : 49 ] As the people of Israel wanted nothing to do with Jesus, Jesus now turns and he will create a brand new people. He withdraws with his disciples and before the climax of these verses issues a warning.

A warning, that's verses five to twelve. Jesus moves from meteorology to baking. I know, this guy is incredible. The disciples are to watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It may seem like a strange metaphor because leaven is a baking agent. But what's actually happening in verses five through twelve is there are two conversations taking place. The disciples and Jesus are just talking past each other.

They're two different conversations. The disciples are concerned about bread. Jesus is talking about belief. The disciples want to know about food. Jesus wants to talk about faith.

And you can imagine, they arrive on the other side of the lake and my imagination goes to probably, I mean, it makes sense in my mind because I would ask the same question.

[ 18 : 53 ] Who brought the bread? I'm getting hungry. It's that time of day. We had seven basketfuls and nobody brought bread.

Any bread? None of it? Well, they look at one another and can't believe it. No one brought food for the trip.

I would have been there. How could you not bring food? Who knows if we'll end up in the wilderness again? Three days starving.

It's comical up to this point, right? Because if you followed along in Matthew, you saw 5,000 fed with five loaves and then you saw 4,000 fed with seven loaves and if you keep on doing the math, you would see 3,000 fed apparently with nine loaves if the pattern continues.

We should have at least brought nine loaves to cover the next miracle. That's what, you know, maybe they were thinking. And no, though that may be the math, that's not the lesson Jesus wants them to learn.

[ 20 : 00 ] The discussion is a foolish one. And why is it foolish? Because they're discussing bread when standing next to them is the bread maker. It's a moot one.

The conversation is meaningless. It's a trivial one. It's ridiculous because they should have learned by now that there will never be a situation.

There will never be a circumstance. There will never be a trial or a hardship in your life, in my life, in their life, where bread would be the issue.

He fed, God fed the nation in Sinai, one million strong. He fed a solitary, depressed prophet.

he fed 5,000 in a remote region who were famished. He fed 4,000 who had not eaten in three days.

[ 21 : 07 ] Bread was never an issue. You see, the question the disciples were asking is where is the bread? The answer is Jesus is the answer. The lesson Jesus hoped they would grasp is that there would never be a circumstance or a lack so great that Jesus did not have the supply.

There would never be a deficiency so substantial where Jesus' power could not overcome. For you and I, there is never a need so great.

There is never a situation so desperate. There is never a darkness so heavy. There is never a gloom that is so hopeless that Jesus cannot solve.

You need to know for all of your days that Jesus will feed every single person gathered around his table.

Always. And it's not just bread. You need joy. You need gladness. You need hope. You need light. Jesus. It's found at the table of the Lord Jesus.

[ 22 : 24 ] And this is the truth of the matter for you and I the believer. The presence of God is always accompanied by the provision of God. And you see, this is what the disciples could not see.

They could not grasp that the most valuable thing that they had was actually Jesus at their side. Well, as they sought to figure out that lesson, Jesus gives them a warning. Watch out. Beware of the teaching and the misleading instruction of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Now, the text doesn't make explicit what the teaching was exactly.

I'm sure you might be able to isolate beliefs that the Pharisees had and the Sadducees had that were contrary to Jesus. Yes, the Pharisees were the legalists and they made tradition into law and they subverted God's word.

Yes, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection and we could say those things but here in this passage, Jesus is warning them to watch out and beware of small deceptions that will taint the whole.

[ 23 : 32 ] Beware of the leaven. Now, I'm not a baker but Wikipedia taught me a few things. During this last pandemic, it seemed like a lot of people were baking bread.

And I would hear, oh, you need a starter? I got a starter? I have plenty of starters. Here, take some of my starter. And I had no idea what that meant. Starter for what? Well, let me, you don't know, then let me tell you what it is.

But apparently, leaven is an active agent in dough that allows it to rise. And you begin with a dough starter. Maybe a small piece of dough and it ferments and it collects bacteria or microbes in the air and it acts as a rising agent for bread.

The most common is sourdough. And before you bake it, what you do is you take some of that active agent and you store it and let it grow and collect more microbes from the air and then you take that and then you replicate it over and over and over and over.

It's a continual process passed down from one batch to another. It's a process that's unseen. But the principle behind it is that a little bit is that a little bit is that a little bit is that a little bit is that a little bit is that a little bit is that one tells the the kingdom of heaven is like leaven till it was all leaven.

[ 25 : 15 ] See, the metaphor is in chapter 13 uses a warning. And what is false that will ultimately lead you to your destruction.

cards incisively the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees is an attitude of unbelief toward divine revelation I don't want it I'll make it up I don't see it and the warning applies to us today because it comes in so many forms it's any form of teaching that fosters and cultivates an attitude of unbelief undermining what God has revealed in Christ and in the scriptures there are ideologies that subvert the sun there are teachings that demean the good news we ought to be cautious what we put into our ears what we observe with our eyes what we take in with our minds because Jesus' warning rings true beware there are things that will cause you to self destruct we do not put our trust in modern day Pharisees or Sadducees they are a religious party with political leanings we do not hold we do not hold to a Jesus that is Republican we do not hold to a Jesus that's a Democrat we do not hold up a Jesus that is American no we hold up this Jesus the Christ the son of the living God yes and so we begin to see

Jesus withdraws and warns them and there are times I would say pastorally the warning has been sounded and you got to withdraw Jesus actually sets for us an example sometimes you got to get out well withdraw and warning transitions into Revelation and Declaration verses 13 to 20 now Jesus takes his disciples there is a change of scene we are still the camera is still on Jesus and he takes his disciples to the district of Caesarea Philippi it is 20 miles north of the Sea of Galilee it is 120 miles north from the capital city Jerusalem we are on the outskirts we are in in the boonies in the sticks in the country I am sorry in the country I mean we are in the city so I guess we could say in the country we are in the northern border of the land of Israel we are in a Roman city as the name of the city suggests there was a temple built there to honor Augustus Caesar his son Philip brought in a lot more money enlarged the temple built himself a palace and hence the name Caesarea Philippi its foundations could still be seen today and here was a region that flaunted the power and the prestige of Rome but not only Rome it is also here where cultic religious temples sat the Greek goddess Pan the Syrian god Baal and the infamous gates of Hades a chasm located at the base of a mountain face there was no other place in the land of Israel like it the coalescing of the entire spirit world with the secular state no religious Jew would venture there it was defiled unholy evil and Jesus brings his people his few to this region and it would be to serve as the backdrop to elicit the answer to Jesus' question and Peter's confession here we are where the entire spirit world the entire

Roman Empire meets and I'm going to ask you when you look at all of that and you're scared of all of that who do you say I am well Peter responds you're the Christ the Messiah the promised one of the nation Jesus you're actually the fulfillment of our national existence you are the fulfillment of all the promises to God's people you are the Christ you are God's very son you are the ultimate one he is saying he's asserting in that confession both his divinity and his duty Jesus' divinity and his duty you are from heaven the son of God you are dispatched on a mission a mission to redeem a people enslaved by a foreign occupant namely Rome ransom a people riddled by sin and suffering and you are to reestablish

[ 31 : 31 ] God's kingdom ruled by God's king Jesus you are the king who saves Jesus you are the answer in contemporary terms Jesus you are the answer you are the point you are the final word you are the meaning you are it you are the salvation and there is a declaration Peter professes Jesus as the Christ but it is brought by God's grace you see that right in verse 17

Jesus answered him blessed are you Simon for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my father who is in heaven Jesus applauds Peter for finally getting it but Peter is shown his savior only because God opens his eyes to see and it is important to pause here and notice that Peter recognizes Jesus through revelation it is recognition through revelation the sign to grasp that Jesus is the Christ demanded by the Pharisees and the Sadducees in verse 1 is somehow divinely granted to Peter in verse 17 and it is important because grasping Jesus is more than a human enterprise it requires more than your physical strength your mental exertion or human inquiry it may require all those things but it is not merely a flesh and blood endeavor it is a divine gift faith in Christ is a gift from God it is this way so that none of us can therefore boast of something we've obtained through our own self-efforts you see it all the time we need equal access to education why? because what you learn and what you acquire and what you can get a hold of can actually have effects later on if the human enterprise is fixed and some people are left out and some people get in then the outcome is fixed and Jesus says it's not going to be that way it's not going to be based on how much you can know what school you can go to how much strength you can exert the bodybuilder and the paralyzed have the same shot the impoverished poor colored child has the same shot as the wealthy white upper class because it's a gift it's grace it would not be merited it would be gifted as one German commentator writes so brilliantly God the Father not only sends his son he sends faith in his son it's a double gift

I'm going to give you Jesus and I'm going to give you the gift to believe in Jesus both Christ and faith both Christ and faith in Christ are God's gifts and it is this revelation that draws out Peter's profession he can only acknowledge Jesus as the Christ because God the Father has shown him Jesus is the Christ and out of this revelation comes a declaration more precisely two declarations and I'm out of time two declarations of what Jesus will do real quickly it's demarcated by the first person singular action you will see it right there I will build and I will give I will build and I will give Jesus you're the Christ the Son of the Living God blessed are you Peter flesh and blood didn't reveal this to you but my Father in Heaven two things that I want to tell you

Peter one I will build my church two I'm going to give you the keys I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it to be honest a series of sermons should emerge out of this singular verse two kingdoms in violent and persistent conflict a heavenly kingdom opposed by the gates of hell a promise that the church the people of God will prevail it's noteworthy that's the first occurrence of the word ecclesia in the New Testament what we translate as church it's used kind of in ancient Greek for a decision making assembly in a city it's a group that was gathered together to make decisions for the well being of the city and here Jesus says well

[ 37 : 10 ] I'm going to build my ecclesia my ruling body my entity my gathering of heaven's citizens call to make decisions on earth this church we say is founded upon Christ and would be furthered by the apostles the church would be the kingdom of God in the midst of the kingdoms of the world and Jesus would build his church and his assurance is that it will stand triumphant secure victorious in the end this does not mean that we will be spared from being bruised and battered in the process but it does mean that it would prevail the church will prevail in the last days it has outlived every empire all regimes all thrones all governments in the end there will be no Rome no Babylon no European

Union no United States of America there will only be one assembly and it will be comprised of the church the people of God who have been redeemed by the son of God do not be mistaken your my measly soul will outlive the most powerful nation because he promised it well Peter is given

assurance that the kingdom will stand and he's not only given assurance but he's also given the keys and real quickly what does this mean I will give you the keys of the kingdom now well you know keys if you carry around keys keys give you access to certain buildings and doors and homes and what not and what it simply means is

Peter is given authority to exercise heaven's authority on earth now let me carefully explain I could get myself in trouble here but what is done on earth through Peter and the apostles is somehow now effective in heaven Peter is I don't have my keys I should it would be a great jingly thing but Peter is wielding the keys now and he has the power to exclude or permit entry into the kingdom now it's here's an example it's demonstrated early on in Acts Peter's sermon at Pentecost sees him exercising this very reality I have the keys I have the message and as I preach the message the gates are flung wide open and if you repent you will receive the forgiveness of sins and through the gates you go

Peter has the keys 3,000 happened to walk into the kingdom that day on Pentecost in the following subsequent chapters in Acts 4 and 5 we see Peter opening and shutting the door he's binding and loosing permitting and forbidding the permitted ones are the ones who repent and are baptized receive the forgiveness of sins the forbidden ones are the ones who refuse to turn from their wickedness and are destroyed you see Peter showcases how the keys are used Peter is primary and formative in the early formative stages of the church he's certainly here center stage is he the rock on which Jesus builds his church he's at least one of the little pebbles his name means little rock he's at least some form of the rock is it his confession certainly there's a facet of it and he's center stage early on he's one of the foundational members in which the church is founded upon the apostles and the prophets according to

Ephesians chapter 2 he is one of the initial spokespeople as we see him as the most visible preacher in the early church and I'll just make this comment I'm sorry I gotta make it because I'm Protestant we see Peter's primacy but it's far fetched to see a full fledged papacy emerge from this text by the end of Acts 15 Peter as soon as Acts the apostle revelation we think that oh here the church is going to flip the world upside down the son of God promised in their power [ 42 : 53 ] God and with them they were visible and had Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Father, we need to see that. Thank you.

Thank you. That regardless of the question we ask, the reality is you ask us this question.

[ 45 : 13 ] Yes, Lord. And if we don't make sense of this question, none of life makes sense. And so help us. Please, sir, Lord.

And see a beautiful Savior in the Lord Jesus.

Yes, Lord.