MATTHEW
Chapter 16

The Demand for a Sign

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. 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.

16:1 *test* – Jesus' opponents, like Satan (4:1, 7), tempted Him to prove His identity by doing something miraculous. (TLSB)

sign – Repetition is the mother of learning, and Matthew is not shy about repeating his themes or reporting parallel incidents. In his brief description of this second request for a sign from Jesus, the evangelist subtly underscores how the resistance to Jesus from Israel's religious leaders is increasing. (CC)

When we compare this account to the previous request for a sign (12:39-42), three features stand out, and each reveals that the opposition to Jesus is mounting. First, in the earlier, similar account, "some of the scribes and Pharisees" asked Jesus for a sign (12:38). Given the context of chapter 12, there is no real doubt as to their ill will and opposition to Jesus, but the reader still has to infer their evil motive. Here in 16:1, Matthew overtly states that the religious leaders' purpose is "in order to tempt" Jesus. (CC)

Second, in this new request for a sign, Matthew narrates that an unexpected combination of "the Pharisees and Sadducees" approach Jesus together. It is possible, given the Sadducees' likely base of influence in Jerusalem and the temple environs, that these leaders have come to the northern regions from the south in order to confront Jesus (cf 15:1). Even more significantly, representatives of these two groups, who disagree with each other about many things, present themselves as a united front against Jesus, just as they had earlier opposed th ministry of John (3:7). (CC)

Third, the fact that these authority figures blindly oppose Jesus is made all the more reprehensible by Jesus' acknowledgement of their ability to see and discern the signs of the weather. Playing off their request for a sign "from heaven/sky" (16:1), Jesus chastises them by citing their ability to discern meteorological signs in "the heavens/the sky" (three times in 16:2-3). On the one hand, they are perfectly able to read "the heavens/sky" for signs of coming weather of various kinds. By contrast, they are not able to discern the kind of times they are now witnessing, right in front of their eyes – in Jesus. (CC)

What they want is for Jesus to predict that God will provide a specific event, not necessarily of spectacular proportions, that will come to pass immediately and so validate the claims that Jesus has been making about Himself and His significance. In response to the earlier request, Jesus refused to provide anything other than the sign of Jonah, and He had gone on to explain (even if somewhat cryptically) what that sign would be. Here, Jesus offers even less to the leaders. He

repeats his denunciation from 12:39, calling them "an evil and adulterous generation," and curtly tells them that no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah (16:4). (CC)

16:2–3 *sky is red* – Common and helpful way to anticipate fair weather or a storm. (TLSB)

interpret the signs of the times – Jesus' opponents were blind to the spiritual signs of the times: the advent of the Messiah and the nearness of God's kingdom. (TLSB)

16:4 *left them and departed* – Because Jesus was again confronted by His enemies on His return to Jewish territory, He crossed the sea by boat (Mk 8:13) on His way to the district of Caesarea Philippi (v 13). (TLSB)

16:1–4 Jesus points the Jews of His day to the sign of Jonah, His death and resurrection. St Paul wrote that the "Jews demand signs … but we preach Christ crucified" (1Co 1:22–23). When plagued by doubts or fears, look to this sign of assurance. The sign of Jesus' cross and resurrection sustains us in our faith and is the sign to which we must point in our witness (Ac 2:23, 31–32). • Ascended Lord, when I falter, comfort me in faith with the sign of Jonah. Amen. (TLSB)

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

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.

16:5 *other side*. Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida (Mk 8:22). (TLSB)

bread. The disciples' thoughts were focused on their failure to bring bread. (TLSB)

16:6 *yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* esus' thoughts were focused on how the Jewish religious leaders continued to reject Him (vv 1–4). (TLSB)

Jesus wants to make them think, and so He communicates indirectly. Are the disciples aware of just how dangerous the opposition of the Pharisees and Sadducees will become? They likely are not aware. Jesus then, call the Jewish leaders' united from against Himself "leaven," something small that can grow and have a great and damning effect (cf 13:33). (CC)

16:8–10 *little faith*. Jesus did not reproach His disciples for forgetting bread, but for forgetting His miracles. Jesus urged them to remember how twice He had fed thousands with a few loaves of bread. (TLSB)

16:12 Matthew often explains the meaning of Jesus' words (cf. 17:13). (CSB)

The disciples finally understood what Jesus meant by leaven. Jesus warned against skeptics like the Pharisees and Sadducees, who seek signs but "cannot interpret the signs of the times" (v 3). (TLSB)

Jesus is not warning the disciples in general about Jewish oral tradition or about the way the religious leaders interpret this Scripture passage or that one. The two groups appeared together in 16:1-4 because they were agreed in wanting to tempt Jesus, to trap Him (16:1). This, specifically, is their teaching that is the deadly leaven that could spread and destroy everything: it is their view of Jesus. (CC)

16:5–12 The disciples worried about their failure to bring bread rather than guarding against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which should have been their primary concern. Too often, like the disciples, earthly needs and worries distract us. Jesus makes it clear that one thing is necessary: a focus on His teaching (Lk 10:38–42). When we abide in the Word of Jesus, we will know the truth (Jn 8:31–32). • Lord Jesus, help me to hear Your Word and gladly keep it. Amen. (TLSB)

Peter's Confession of Christ

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." 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. 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.

16:13 *Caesarea Philippi.* To be distinguished from the magnificent city of Caesarea, which Herod the Great had built on the coast of the Mediterranean. Caesarea Philippi, rebuilt by Herod's son Philip (who named it after Tiberius Caesar and himself), was north of the Sea of Galilee, near the slopes of Mount Hermon. Originally it was called Paneas (the ancient name survives today as Banias) in honor of the Greek god Pan, whose shrine was located there. The region was especially pagan. (CSB)

This text places Jesus with his disciples up in the region of Caesarea Philippi, a city some distance from the usual area of Jesus' ministry, and deep in the territory of the Gentiles. The text does not explain why he is there, but the location is important. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

At some distance from the pressures of his Galilean ministry, Jesus asks his disciples an interesting and leading question. We who have heard this before know where it is heading, but try to imagine what it must have been like when the questions were first posed. Jesus asks his disciples what people are thinking about him. We know that throughout Jesus' ministry the disciples had different ideas about him than he himself did (recall, for example, Acts 1:6). You can almost sense their hearts start to race at this question. Is Jesus finally testing the waters? Will he finally declare himself as a messiah and lead the Jewish people? Is he asking the pollster question, the sort of question that potential presidential candidates ask before they launch a campaign? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

do people say – "The people" (oi anthropoi, who saying the things mentioned in verse 14 probably include the general crowds in Galilee as well as various figures with political and/or religious power. Herod Antipas, for instance, has already opined that Jesus is John the Baptizer, whom Antipas beheaded, somehow revived to life again (14:1-2). (CC)

son of man – Outside the four gospels the term "Son of Man" is found only twice in the Scriptures (Acts 7:56; Dan 7:13-14). Jesus, who alone uses the title in the synoptic gospels, preferred this messianic title to any other; but gave it a meaning vastly different from any known understanding. By calling himself "Son of Man" Jesus paradoxically combines the figure of the Suffering Servant, as set forth particularly in Isaiah 53, with the Danielic description of a royal personage. In other words, by using this term regularly of Himself Jesus was stressing the fact that this rule was being established by his becoming a servant – not to God but to human beings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

16:14 *John the Baptist* – People like Herod thought Jesus must be John the Baptist brought back to life. At least they recognized that John and Jesus both proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God and called people to repentance. (PBC)

other say Elijah – They were familiar with the words of the prophet Malachi: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5). (PBC)

still others, Jeremiah – Those, not so sure of themselves, thought Jesus might be another of the OT prophets, perhaps Jeremiah. (PBC)

one of the prophets – The disciples are familiar with current speculations regarding Jesus' identity. In popular belief Jesus is regarded as one in the succession of OT prophets, much like John the Baptist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

People in Jesus's day expected the reappearance of some notable prophet, but opinions differed as to who this would be (Dt. 18:15; Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6). (TLSB)

The opinions of the people showed that they regarded Jesus very highly as a special man of God, but they did not regard Him highly enough. They did not know Him as the one and only Son of God, Himself true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. They were not much different from many people of our own day who praise Jesus as a great teacher but don't know Him as their Savior and the only Savior of the world. (PBC)

Most people, according to the disciples, seem to put Jesus into a prophetic mold, but beyond that agreement, there are a variety of answers. This verse offers a salutary reminder that there was no single, uniform messianic expectation in Judaism in the first century AD. (CC)

It is important to note that, despite similarities between the careers of Israel's prophets and the ministry of Jesus, it is in no way satisfactory or sufficient to name Jesus merely as a prophet of the kind God sent in the OT. (CC)

16:15 *who do you say I am* – The *you* is plural. "Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles, as appears from the text itself. Christ does not ask Peter alone" (Tr 23). (TLSB)

They had been Jesus constantly for more than two years. They had observed how He lived and had witnessed His mighty works, and they had heard Him teach about the kingdom of God and about Himself. (PBC)

Jesus turns the question on the disciples and suddenly the reader understands: this is not a presidential candidate testing the waters, but this is a Savior testing faith. The new question focuses on the disciples. The "you" (*humeis*) is in an emphatic position grammatically, beginning Jesus' sentence. In fact, the Greek here does not need the pronoun at all, so its inclusion is highly emphatic. "But *you*, who do *you* say I am?" Jesus has turned the question into a different sort of thing. The issue is not really what the crowds think; Jesus is really interested in what *they* think, what is in *their* hearts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

16:16 *Peter replied* – His was speaking in behalf of the disciples.

Peter blurts out his famous confession, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is not just a prophet, but the one of whom the prophets are but representatives. Jesus is not just another David, but the King after whom David was patterned. Jesus is not even another Moses, but the one who spoke to Moses out of that burning bush those many years ago. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

the Christ – Jesus was anointed by the Spirit as the Messiah at his baptism. This revelation was confirmed at the Transfiguration. Combined are words for Ps 2, a royal psalm, and language from Is 42:1, the first servant song. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Matthew clearly identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah (1:1, 16, 18). John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Christ (11:2-3). Now Peter, as representative of the Twelve, boldly confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. Hus: "Faith, which properly is the foundation of the church, excelled in Peter" (The Church, p. 84). (TLSB)

It soon became evident, however, that is Peter's understanding of the person and the work of the Messiah left much to be desired. (PBC)

Now, Matthew emphasizes not once (through Simon's words in 16:16) but twice (also through Jesus' concluding command to silence in 16:20) the breakthrough importance of knowing that Jesus is "the Christ," the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. Although our historical knowledge is limited and any answer I might suggest must be only tentative, the question that the text invites us to answer is this: Why is this so important? What is the significance of Simon's open, deliberate declaration that Jesus of Nazareth, the unique Son of God, is the Christ? (CC)

I might suggest two things. Perhaps for the first time, Simon has been shown that all of the varied and variegated and (at times) contradictory hopes that are swirling around among the lost sheep of the house of Israel have their true and proper focus in Jesus. "Christ" seems to be a term in Judaism that could be understood quite differently by different parties. It was possible to think (and various groups and individuals in Judaism were thinking) of a royal Christ or a priestly Christ, or maybe even a prophetic one. Whatever the imaginings or wonderings that have sprung up, Jesus is the one who truly fulfills all of Israel's yearnings and gives them their proper shape. I am suggesting that Matthew would have his hearers/readers think of Simon's confession in terms analogous to Paul's statement in 2 Cor 1:20: "for all the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (ESV). Peter has acknowledged that all the hopes of Israel come true in Jesus, God's Son, whom God the Father has anointed. This might be the first new thing about Peter's confession. France has stated it carefully and well: (CC)

> But, however limited his grasp of Jesus' actual mission, he has gone beyond the popular acclamation of Jesus as a prophet to the point of recognizing him as not just one among many, not even, like John the Baptist, the greatest of prophets (11:11), but as the one climatic figure in whom God's purpose is finally being accomplished. In that he has made the crucial breakthrough. (CC)

The second possibility flows directly from the first, and I can say it quickly. If Simon is declaring that Jesus is God's Anointed – the one for whom all have been looking, even when they didn't know it – then Simon has also acknowledged that Jesus has been put into a special office, to accomplish the will of God. Kings, priests, prophets – they were all anointed to do something. That is to say, Peter's words are not just about who Jesus is, but they also signal his understanding that if Jesus is the Anointed One, then God has a special work for Jesus to perform. (CC)

Son of the living God – After Jesus came walking on the sea to His disciples, they confessed that He was the Son of God. "Living" emphasizes God is the source of life, as later evidenced in Christ's resurrection. Bede: "He calls Him the "living" God by way of distinction from the false gods which heathendom in its various delusions made to itself to worship, either of dead men, or - greater folly still - of insensate matter" (VB, p. 15). This passage is the climax of chapters 4-16. (TLSB)

16:17 *blessed are you* – Simon is not praised for his great insight; he is pronounced blessed because God the Father has revealed the Son to him. (CC)

Simon son of Jonah – This is Peter's birth name. (TLSB)

revealed...Father – Peter's blessedness is the result that Peter is among those to whom the Father reveals the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. Peter's confession is not of human origin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Peter's confession did not result from his request for a sign (v. 1) or his own superior understanding. He was one of the "little children" to whom the Father had revealed this truth. Hilary of Poitiers: "The Father revealed to Peter that he should say, 'You are the Son of the living God.' Therefore, the building of the Church is upon this rock of confession. This faith is the foundation of the Church" (Tr. 29). (TLSB)

Jesus delights in Peter's answer. He calls it a gift from above, an answer that was put in Peter's mouth by God himself, a divinely inspired answer. This is interesting because in the very next pericope, to be considered next week, we find Peter had this all wrong. He had his own sort of Messiah in mind, most likely a political ruler, a liberator from Roman oppression. When he expresses this, Jesus calls him "Satan" and casts him aside and behind him. But today, Jesus delights in Peter's words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

Jesus knew just how conflicted and confused Peter was about this confession. The words were true, but the man speaking them hardly knew what they meant. It is like a sixth grader reciting $E=mc^2$. He may have the syllables right, the syntax right, the words correct, but does he really grasp what he just said? The following pericope makes clear that Peter does not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

Yet, Jesus accepts his confession, yes, even delights in it. It reminds of the familiar situation when after we hear a catechumen make the promises of the confirmation rite, our first impulse is to pray. We hear that young person promise to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from this faith, and we turn to God and beg him to help because we really have no idea what might be involved. Still we delight in the promise the young person makes. What is even stranger, God delights in the promises of the confirmand that day, even though he knows that many of those promises will not be kept. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

And in truth, doesn't this reality of Peter's confession make sense to us from our own experience? Who can say they have ever promised something to God with a completely pure heart? The old man clings tenaciously to us, and we are always muddled in our motives. But God delights in what we have said in our confirmation vows, baptismal promises, and confessions. He rejoices when we confess Christ to be the Son of God and the solution to our deepest and most profound problems. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

In the same way, those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior have not come to that conviction by figuring that out for ourselves or by making a conscious decision to believe in Jesus. We know Jesus as our Savior only because God the Holy Spirit, through the power of the gospel, has graciously created saving faith in our hearts. (PBC)

Jesus' teaching here does not negate the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Father's truth about His Son. Jesus teaches that no merely human source, but only divine revelation, can impart true knowledge of the Son. (CC)

Luther's Catechism Third Article – 1 Corinthians 12:3b

16:18 *Peter … rock … church.*† In the Greek "Peter" is *petros* and "rock" is *petra*. The rock on which the church is built is Peter's inspired (v. 17) confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, "the Son of the living God." The Greek *petros,* basically a pebble, is here distinguished from *petra,* a solid rock. Peter, with all his shortcomings, and the disciples (for whom he speaks in his confession) occupy a fundamental position in establishing the church (Eph 2:20). Their position is not one of lordship but of ministry; they are to serve (2Co 1:24; Mt 20:26; 1Co 3:5). (CSB)

Peter's rock-like confession of faith was the solid foundation on which Christ would build His Church (7:24–27; Eph 2:19–22). "Certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of a man. Rather, it has been built upon the ministry of the confession Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Tr 25). Hus: "Christ is therefore the foundation by whom primarily and in whom primarily the holy catholic church is founded, and faith is the foundation with which it is founded—that faith which works through love" (*The Church,* p 73). (TLSB)

The text goes on to make an astounding promise to us. Upon Peter's words, the Church will be built and not even hell's gates will prevail against it. Perhaps we picture this as hell attacking us and our being able to withstand its onslaught. But the text is the other way around. Gates are defensive. The *Church* is on the offensive here; hell's gates are a useless defense against it being plundered by God through us. Surely this is every time a Christian loves with Christ's love and speaks of him and his kingdom and God works faith in that person through our words. Hell loses another of its victims that day; its gates are broken; another poor person is set free. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

This indicates that the rock on which Jesus will build his church is Peter's confession, not his person. The content of this confession is Jesus himself, so that he is finally the foundation. Jesus builds his church through the means of grace. It is not a human creation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

1 Corinthians 3:11 "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

A remarkably strong case can be made that Peter stands here (as elsewhere) as a representative of other disciples, and specifically, as the representative of the twelve apostles. Consider the following observations: (CC)

In the first place, 16:13-20 itself contains three indications that Peter is acting as a spokesman or representative for the larger group of "disciples" (16:13). (1) All the disciples answer Jesus' first question about who "people" are saying that the Son of Man is. (2) Jesus' next question is emphatically directed to the disciples in the plural, using two Greek second person plural forms: "but you – who do you say…? (3) Finally, after Jesus finishes speaking to Peter, he orders the entire group of disciples that they tell no one. Presumably, then, Peter's confession was, or had become also theirs (16:20) (CC)

Second, the larger portrait of Peter in the Gospel of Matthew supports this view as well. To be sure, Peter is the leader of the apostles. He is named not only first in order, but is also explicitly called "first" (protos) in 19:2! A survey of the narrative, however, will show how Peter is firmly embedded in the larger company of the disciples. (CC)

church. In the Gospels this word is used only by Matthew (here and twice in 18:17). In the Septuagint it is used for the congregation of Israel. In Greek circles of Jesus' day it indicated the assembly of free, voting citizens in a city (cf. Ac 19:32, 38, 41). (CSB)

The Church is the assembly, or gathering, of all believers. Christ is the builder of the Church, and each individual member is a living stone (1Pt 2:5). This passage and 18:17 are the only times "church" is used in the Gospels. (TLSB)

For this reason Christ addresses him (Peter) as a minister: "On this rock," that is, on this ministry. Furthermore, the ministry of the NT is not bound to places or persons like the Levitical ministry, but is scattered throughout the whole world and exists wherever God gives God's gifts: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers (cf Eph 4:11). That ministry is not valid because of the authority of any person but because of the Word handed down by Christ. Chrysotom declares: "Christ says 'on this rock," not 'on Peter.' For truly He has built His church not upon the man but upon Peter's faith. But what was that faith? "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And this from Hilary: "The Father revealed this to Peter so that he might declare: 'You are the Son of the living God.' Upon this rock of confession, therefore, the church is built. This faith is the foundation of the church." (LC) (CC)

Hades. The Greek name for the place of departed spirits, generally equivalent to the Hebrew *Sheol*. The "gates of Hades" may mean the "powers of death," i.e., all forces opposed to Christ and his kingdom (but see note on Job 17:16). (CSB)

Christ acknowledges that during the time when He is building His church upon the apostles and their confession of His, this assembly of disciples will find itself under assault. (CC)

Figure of speech, meaning what causes a person to enter hell (Ps 9:13; 107:18). Bede the Venerable: "The gates of Hell are wicked doctrines, which seduce men and bring them to Hell" (VB, p. 154). Death will not overcome the Church because it rests on the living Son of God (1 Tim. 3:15). "God's eternal election does not just foresee and foreknow the salvation of the elect. From God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus, election is a cause that gains, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what belongs to it. Our salvation is so founded on it that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18)" (FC SD XI 8). (TLSB)

This promise does not, of course, guarantee that any particular congregation or denomination or historical manifestation of visible Christian fellowship or confession will never pass away. Christ's assembly is here thought of in general terms, as we might say, the una sancta, "the holy catholic church." (CC)

16:19 *keys.* Perhaps Peter used these keys on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2) when he announced that the door of the kingdom was unlocked to Jews and proselytes and later when he acknowledged that it was also opened to Gentiles (Ac 10). (CSB)

The door of heaven is opened through the forgiveness of sins. (TLSB)

Just as in Is 22:22 the Lord lays the keys of the house of David on the shoulders of his servant Eliakim, so Jesus commits to Peter the Christian – hence to the whole church – the power to loose and bind. Distinguished from the judicial understanding of the rabbis, the power to loose and to bind is the authority to forgive or not forgive sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Keys serve two purposes, to lock and to unlock. Here Jesus speaks of binding and loosing. There is really only one key, and the plural indicates the twofold use of the key. The key is the gospel of Christ. That is the only power that frees people from their sins and opens the gates of heaven for them. (PBC)

bind … loose. Not authority to determine, but to announce, guilt or innocence (see 18:18 and the context there; cf. Ac 5:3, 9). (CSB)

To forgive or to refuse to forgive sins. "Our people are taught that they should highly prize the Absolution as being God's voice and pronounced by God's command" (AC XXV 3). "The Keys are an office and power given by Christ to the Church for binding and loosing sin" (SA III VII 1). "These words show that the Keys are given to all the apostles alike and that all the apostles are sent forth alike" (Tr 23). Bede: "Without the slightest doubt it is given to the other Apostles also. Christ Himself bears witness to this, for after the triumph of His Passion and Resurrection He appeared to them, and breathing on them said 'Receive the Holy Ghost [Jn 20:22]' " (*VB,* p 156). (TLSB)

The authority is given to Peter, but we may confidently state that he represented all the apostles when he spoke to Jesus and when Jesus spoke these words to him. Elsewhere Jesus clearly gives this same authority to the rest of the apostles – and to the whole church on earth. This is what our catechism calls the Ministry of the Keys and defines as the special authority that Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners and to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. Any Christian who assures a penitent sinner that Jesus died for all his sins and freely forgives him or her is properly exercising this ministry. (PBC)

16:20 *not to tell.* Because of the false concepts of the Jews, who looked for an exclusively national and political Messiah, Jesus told his disciples not to publicize Peter's confession, lest it precipitate a revolution against Rome. (CSB)

There were two reasons for this. First, the people were not ready for this message because they had too many false ideas about the promised Messiah. They expected Him to be an earthly king who would free them from the rule of the Romans and establish a glorious earthly kingdom of Israel. Second, the disciples were not ready to go out with that message because they themselves still shred too many of the erroneous ideas about the person and work of the Messiah that were current in the land. After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the apostles were ready to tell the whole world about Jesus, the Son of God, the only Savior of sinners. (PBC)

Because so many people thought that the Messiah would be a political leader to free them from Roman domination, Jesus likely wanted His disciples to refrain from proclaiming Him as the Christ until after His death and resurrection (Lk 24:46–48). (TLSB)

16:13–20 Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God was a key event in Jesus' ministry. To confess Jesus as Savior and Lord is also essential in every believer's life. Some Christians will remember the very moment this first happened. Other Christians, baptized in infancy, have made this confession again and again in worship and daily life. Like Peter, none of us can by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel (SC, p xxxvii). As royal priests of God, we "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1Pt 2:9). • Grant us grace, heavenly Father, to confess Jesus and so remain on the unshakable rock of our salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Predicts His Death

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." 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."

16:21 *from that time on* – Jesus now set His eyes on Jerusalem, where He must suffer, die, and on the third day be raised in order to fulfill His Father's will (first Passion prediction recorded in Mt). (TLSB)

The pace and direction of the conversation now becomes more focused and rapid. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

It will take some time for the disciples to realize what Jesus is saying. They will not, in fact, be able to grasp it until after the plan is carried out. (CC)

began. The beginning of a new emphasis in Jesus' ministry. Instead of teaching the crowds in parables, he concentrated on preparing the disciples for his coming suffering and death. (CSB)

from the elders...chief priests – These are spiritual leaders, the very people who should be leading the people to the Messiah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Jesus' ministry has evoked many reactions, including the hatred and opposition of influential people in Israel. Arrayed against Him are the like of Herod Antipas (14:1-2), Galilean Pharisees (12:2, 14, 24), Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes (15:1), and Sadducees as well (16:1) Always before, when the opposition had arisen, Jesus had chosen to withdraw and defer the moment of final conflict. Now, however, He declares that He must provoke and confront His enemies in Jerusalem, that is, the city where God's Christ, the Messiah of Israel, should rightly be received with faith and acclaimed with joy, but where He must die. (CC)

be killed – This grabbed the attention of the disciples, who caught their collective breath, looking at each other in disbelief. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

third day be raise – The disciples were still thinking about had just been said. "Must be killed" was still going through their minds, not hearing the "third day be raised to life." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Death will not be the end, however. Jesus will be raised to eternal life on the third day. Judging by Peter's response, the disciples are not able to get past the words about Jesus' suffering and death. Their categories simply do not allow for such a thing, and so they give no evidence here (nor in reaction to the two later passion predictions, 17:22-23 and 20:17-19 that they even have heard what Jesus said about being raised from the dead. (CC)

It will take some time for the disciples to realize what Jesus is saying. They will not, in fact, be able to grasp it until after the plan is carried out. (CC)

16:22 *never happen* – Peter's harsh rebuke resulted from his failure to envision a Christ who must suffer and die. Such a Messiah was not part of Jewish thinking at that time. (TLSB)

This is from the lips of the same man who made the confession "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," perhaps just moments ago. Jesus told Peter at that time that this confession was revealed to him by the Father. But now this phrase is revealed by Satan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Yes, Peter believes that Jesus is the Anointed One, the man who is uniquely God's Son. If such a one is to go to Jerusalem, however, then surely he should go up in triumph to be received as Messiah. To be sure, Peter cannot be unaware of the opposition to Jesus on the part of the "blind guides" (15:14) and those whose teaching is a harmful "leaven" (16:6, 11-12). In the face of that opposition, however, will not God be "merciful" to Jesus in Jerusalem? After all, God's dwelling place – the Jerusalem temple with the altar for sacrificial atonement for sin – is the place where, more than any other in the world the mercy of God is to be found. (CC)

Peter's extravagantly mistaken response to Jesus gives telling evidence of something key, both historically and theologically. The Jewish messianic expectation is in Israel at the time, it seems to have no room for a suffering and dying Messiah. (CC)

To be sure, Peter likely does not consciously realize the full implications of what he is saying to Jesus. Jesus realizes it, however, and His rejoinder to Peter's response is savage and unyielding. In the wilderness temptation of 4:1-11, Satan had tried to lure Jesus into a path of power, toward the goal of seizing glory away from lowliness and obedience. (CC)

16:23 *get behind me Satan* – Peter, who so beautifully made the confession of faith, was now being used by Satan to encourage Jesus to turn his face from Jerusalem and from doing "the things of God" that must be done. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

Jesus addressed Peter as Satan's spokesman because his counsel would keep Jesus from fulfilling God's purposes. (TLSB)

Satan. A loanword from Hebrew, meaning "adversary" or "accuser." (CSB)

hindrance. Gk *skandalon.* Peter, whose name means rock (v 18), had become Peter the stumbling block. (TLSB)

things of God … things of man. Peter's thoughts were governed by human values rather than divine values. He did not yet understand the theology of the cross. (TLSB)

16:21–23 Peter genuinely thinks he is helping Jesus when he tries to talk Him out of suffering and death. At times, we also fail to understand God's ways, thinking we know better. Jesus knows that He has to take up the cross for our salvation. Peter will learn that truth later, a truth that continues to give us comfort and peace. • Lord, thank You for being willing to suffer and die that I might be forgiven. Lead me to speak Your Word aright. Amen. (TLSB)

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus

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? 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."

16:24 *if anyone would come after me* – Jesus now turns to the disciples, the people gathered around him asks them what they want to do now that they know who he is and what he has to do. If that is the case, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

deny himself – There probably is no limit to the specific application of what it means to deny oneself as Jesus here teaches and commands. There are so many sinful desires in our hearts! The context here in Matthew 16, however, emphasizes two related tendencies that are alive and well in every fallen human creature who, by God's gracious invitation, wants to be Jesus' disciple. (CC)

> Origen, Commentary on Matthew, 12:24, says, "on this account let every thought and every purpose and every word and every action become a denial of ourselves, but a testimony about Christ and in Christ. (CC)

The first tendency is to think – and insist – that God's way of dealing with the world and its evil, should conform to our way, that is, a way of power and success. If evil really is evil, should not the God of Israel, the Creator of all things, simply come forth in might and overcome it? Moreover, shouldn't Jesus' disciples be allowed to be participants in such work, separating wheat

from chaff and uprooting the sons of the evil one (13:28)? God's mysterious answer is, simply, no. (CC)

The second tendency, related to the first, is for the a disciple personally appropriate the insistence that God work in humanly powerful ways, so that the disciple desires to exercise power over others, especially over fellow disciples, so that he can accomplish what he believes should be done. Living in each disciple is the dark conviction that can destroy unity and do untold damage to the cause and name of Christ: "put me in charge, and I'll set things aright." Ambition, comparison, and criticism are all ways of embracing and exalting oneself, rather than denying oneself. (CC)

Instead, Jesus chose the way of service and obedience and suffering for the sake of Israel and the world. Now He calls every disciple – every Christian – to look at the darkness within, at the desire for power over others, and to deny that desire whenever and wherever it shows itself. If any of us wants to come after Him, let us deny ourselves. (CC)

To affirm that the self has no claim or value worth comparing with Christ (Php 3:8–9). (TLSB)

take up his cross. Jesus led and taught by example. When Jesus called disciples, His usual invitation was "Follow Me" (4:19; 9:9). "Without faith, human nature cannot, in any way, do the works of the First or Second Commandment [1 Corinthians 2:14]. Without faith, human nature does not call upon God, nor expect anything from Him, nor bear the cross" (AC XX 36–37). (TLSB)

Again, the applications are many and varied. It seems likely that this second imperative would follow from the first, almost as the inevitable consequence. In the most general terms, then, the daily struggle with sin and self-denial is a form of taking up the cross. More specifically, however, as Jesus' disciples live their lives and speak in His name, they will come up against the trouble and evil in this world. By eschewing the way of power in these situations, Jesus' disciples will open themselves to various kinds of attack and shame and harm, depending on the context. (CC)

The cross that any given disciple may carry – that is, the suffering that he or she experiences for the sake of Christ – will vary. The point here is not to attempt to determine in advance the kind of difficulty or suffering or even martyrdom that the life of discipleship may bring. (CC) (Marshfield Youth Chancel Drama)

> One often hears Christians apply the phrase "carrying the cross" to all manner of sufferings and hardship in this life. Jesus' saying here does not refer to the general difficulties of life such as illness, unexplained tragedies, the destructive convulsion of the creation (natural disasters), and so forth. He is referring to suffering that comes to disciples because they are disciples of the Christ. (CC)

In Galilee during Jesus' ministry and in the days in which Matthew would likely have been writing his Gospel, disciples would have been opposed by others chiefly because of their devotion to Christ as Lord and Savior. In Jewish contests, the worship of Jesus would have been offensive and cause hatred and rejection. When the Greco-Roman world was encroaching on the lives of the disciples, it would have been the exclusive allegiance to Jesus (and the renunciation of other gods and the Roman civil cult) that gave rise to cross-bearing. (CC)

Many Christians in the world today are quite clearly and painfully confronted with the reality of cross-bearing in their lives as disciples. In North America and especially the United States, the situation has been different, although it is changing. Christianity has been the dominant religion in Western society, and that fact has, until recently, minimized the imposition of the cross in civil realm. Obviously, there are many personal situations in which believers experience difficult times because they follow Jesus. On a larger scale, however, the exclusive claims of Jesus very well could give rise to increasing times and circumstance for cross-bearing. When "truth" is democratized and relativized, then the absolute divine truth of Jesus, which society deems to be intolerance, alone is intolerable. The exclusive call of Jesus' disciples to "follow me" is increasingly offensive to religious pluralism. (CC) (See article on "A Faith Debate: Is Bin Laden in Hell? – USAToday – May 23, 2011 below.)

A faith debate: Is bin Laden in hell?

By Thomas S. Kidd

Because of the strange coincidence of two recent events — the killing of Osama bin Laden, and the publication of Rob Bell's Love Wins, a book which advocates the principle of universal salvation for all people — Americans of faith are taking a fresh look at hell and eternal damnation. Who is hell-bound, after all, and who is likely to escape this final fiery plunge?

> Many Americans — perhaps even some who had given the afterlife little thought — take some comfort in the idea that the terrorist monster bin Laden is now facing the wrath of God. But Bell, a cutting-edge megachurch pastor from Michigan, suggests that because of God's great love, he will condemn no one to hell. Presumably this includes people like bin Laden.
>
> The book has caused an uproar among evangelical Christians, for whom the doctrine of hell has long been a theological certainty. Upon learning of the book, leading evangelical pastor John Piper succinctly tweeted "Farewell, Rob Bell," reflecting the conviction among many conservative believers that Bell's views are beyond the pale.
>
> **'OBL, you're in hell!'**
>
> Notions about hell also framed many Americans' reaction to the killing of bin Laden. Well *of course* this despicable fiend would be destined to hell! The widespread approval of the al-Qaeda leader's termination quickly spun off into questions about where his departed soul resides (assuming there is an afterlife — for those who don't believe in one, the whole discussion may seem pointless, at best).

Crowds celebrating outside the White House reportedly chanted "OBL, you're in hell!" Fox News show host Mike Huckabee addressed the deceased terrorist directly, telling him, "Welcome to hell."

These anecdotes reflect a majority assumption, as a CNN survey showed that 61% of Americans believe that bin Laden is in hell. Pastor Bell apparently still represents the minority view.

But today's popular approaches to hell have, each in their way, actually discarded traditional Christian beliefs. Many like Bell believe that progress in ethical understanding requires modification of precepts such as hell. The Bible repeatedly refers to hell, and the idea of hell has a longstanding place in not only Christianity, but Islam and some traditions within Judaism. Still, Bell argues that a loving God would never cast people into everlasting perdition.

Then we have Huckabee and many others. The operative assumptions in this camp are that 1) righteous people can know for sure who goes to hell, and that 2) really bad people are especially deserving of divine judgment. But, though they are often espoused by Christians, these beliefs do not easily accord with traditional Christian faith, either.

Or are we all in danger?

The colonial-era pastor Jonathan Edwards, the most celebrated (or notorious, depending on your perspective) preacher on hell in American history, took a different approach. To Edwards, the reality of hell threatened all people, no matter how good they seemed in the world's eyes. God is perfectly holy, he said, and we have all fallen short of his standard, therefore all are subject to divine punishment.

All of us are, in Edwards' phrase, "sinners in the hands of an angry God." But in love and mercy, God made a way of salvation through Jesus and his death on the cross.

We'll never know for sure who will finally accept God's forgiveness, perhaps even in the last moments of life. Some notorious criminals would find God's grace, Edwards believed, while some hypocrites who had seemed to be saints would be turned away at heaven's gates.

Edwards spent his final years ministering to Native Americans, among the most reviled people in the colonies. But Edwards told them (amazingly, for his time) that

their sins were no worse than English colonists'. We all need God's grace, he said. Edwards would undoubtedly caution us against putting our own righteousness before God above even that of a murderer like Osama bin Laden.

American believers, then, need both clarity and humility about hell. Denying the reality of hell might suit modern tastes, but it doesn't stand up to the overwhelming weight of the Christian scriptures and historic tradition. But confidently asserting that bin Laden is now in hell also treats this fearsome, mysterious reality with far less sobriety than it warrants.

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follow me – Here is the power and motivation for Jesus' disciples as the Lord shapes and remolds their thinking in ways that are strange and likely frightening. Jesus' call has, within itself, the power to create and sustain the faithful response it desires. His Word enables His disciples to follow Him wherever He goes. The Christ is going to the cross, on behalf of and in the place of all. The Son of the living God will be raised to resurrection life, the firstfruits and guarantee of the final day of victory for all in Him. (CC)

16:25 *save his life* – This is a paradox. Reject death of this world for a life everlasting. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

The two ways are like oil and water, light and darkness, life and death. Jesus' disciples cannot calculate and plan ahead to preserve themselves. On the other hand and paradoxically, when one loses one's life – that is, trustingly relinquishes control and power and simply follow Jesus – then one finds life, indeed and forever. (CC)

16:26 *forfeits his soul* – It all slips through your fingers as they relax in death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

give in return – How many people have tried to buy their way, no longer remembering that it has been paid for on the cross of Christ with his precious blood? They are blinded by the falsehood of Satan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 3)

The answer to these rhetorical questions is "nothing." In both questions, Jesus referred to eternal life. (TLSB)

16:27 *come with His angels*. When Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, His angels will accompany Him (13:40, 49; 25:31). (TLSB)

glory of His Father. Jesus' heavenly glory and divine nature will be clearly evident at the final judgment. (TLSB)

repay. Those who lose their life for Jesus' sake will receive public vindication on the Last Day (25:31–46). (TLSB)

what he has done – The preceding context (16:21-26) has been full of polar opposites: death and resurrection, God versus Satin, "the things of God" verses "the things of men," and saving one's life verses losing it. In light of these black and white alternatives, with no gray area or middle ground in between them, it seems virtually certain the "work" o each person is either discipleship or apostasy. Either a person has taken up the cross or has not, has followed Christ in faith or believes in another, has attempted to save his own life or has lost it for the sake of Christ. This does not involve a sliding scale or a graded comparison. A person does one or the other, just as one either does the will of the Father or not. Jesus' words here should not be heard as a call to be "faithful enough" or "better" in one's life of discipleship. (CC)

16:28 There are two main interpretations of this verse: 1. It is a prediction of the transfiguration, which happened a week later (17:1) and which demonstrated that Jesus will return in his Father's glory (16:27). 2. It refers to the day of Pentecost and the rapid spread of the gospel described in the book of Acts. The context seems to favor the first view. See note on 2 Pe 1:16.

The first has to do with the meaning of the phrase "to taste death." I can readily say that I am in full agreement with the standard view that this does not mean "to almost die" or "to come close to death," but simply is an idiom for "to die." Jesus' saying, then, declares that some of the people who are listening to Him as He utters these words will not physically die until they see something happen. (CC)

The second question concerns the force of the "until" clause, to wit, whether the clause implies that there will be a reversal of the main clause, which states that "some…will certainly not taste death," that is, "some…will certainly not die." In other words, after some see the Son of Man is coming with His reign, will those people, who are now standing here with Jesus, then dies sometime? As I note in the discussion of 1:25 and 10:23, "until" clauses are grammatically ambiguous, and the question is only able to be answered after the third and most difficult questions receives attention. (CC)

Matthew 16:28 is a genuinely difficult saying, and confident conclusions about what Jesus is referring to may elude us. For my own part, I have argued elsewhere that certain Matthean connections suggest that, after finding a kind of partial or initial fulfillment in the transfiguration, we should look to the scene of Jesus' agony in Gethsemane as the paradoxical time of fulfillment when "the Son of Man is coming with His reign" (16:28). (CC)

> One of the most obvious connections between the transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane is that Jesus "took along" the same three disciples, both to the mountain and into the garden. (CC)

This coming is not the same as the coming in glory to which Jesus referred in v 27. Jesus assured His little band of followers that some of them would see His kingdom come in His resurrection, Pentecost, and the growth of the Church (cf Col 1:6). The disciples were not to expect the end of the world until "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world" (24:14). (TLSB)

16:24–28 Talk of suffering and death, taking up one's cross, and losing one's life sounds strange and foreboding to Jesus' disciples. It does to us too. Yet the end is not the cross; the end is life in God's kingdom. To live in His kingdom must be our ultimate purpose. Many of the first disciples saw the glorious unveiling of that Kingdom when Christ rose from the dead. Peter saw the fulfillment of the promise on Pentecost. We continue to behold the spread of the message of

Christ's cross into all the world. • Blessed Savior, give me the will and strength to take up the cross and follow You to life eternal. Amen. (TLSB)