



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for February 14, 2010  
Released on Wednesday, February 10, 2010**

**"Declared by Peter"**

**Lesson Text:** Matthew 16:13-27

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 16:13-27

**Devotional Reading:** John 10:22-30

**Matthew 16:13-27**

13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?

**14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.**

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

**16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

**18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

**20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.**

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

**22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.**

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

**24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**

25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

**26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?**

27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

**Lesson Aim**

**Facts:** to understand the divinely approved estimation of Christ, how His church is built upon that, and what the cross meant to Him and should mean to us.

**Principle:** to realize that our identification with Christ by faith leads through suffering to victory.

**Application:** to tell how his or her life will demonstrate self-denial to exalt Jesus as Lord in the coming week.

## **Introduction**

### **What It Takes to Know a Person**

What does it take to know another person truly? We may be introduced to someone and right away learn something about that person's work, home, or family. We might then draw conclusions about that person's character, based on what we associate with a particular profession, place, or family situation. But with time, we learn more about that person and are driven to other conclusions. People can defy our "first impression" expectations.

Today's lesson concerns what Peter knew about Jesus. By declaring Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter declared what Christians ever since have affirmed as the central tenet of their faith. But by itself, Peter's confession is not sufficient to tell us who Jesus is. He is indeed the Christ, but we also must know the kind of Christ He is. We need to know that He willingly went to the cross for the sake of sinners. Jesus defied Peter's expectations. Perhaps we will need to revise our expectations of Jesus too.

### **Lesson Background**

Today's story is at the very center of the plot of Matthew's Gospel. Prior to this story, Matthew presents Jesus performing miracles, teaching, meeting the challenges of His opponents, and issuing calls to repent of sins and follow Him. Notably Jesus has spoken and acted with authority that some recognize can belong only to God. Yet to this point in time, Jesus has not spoken clearly and directly about His identity. He has left provocative hints but has made no explicit statements.

Most prominent among those who follow Jesus is Simon, also called Peter, which means "Rock." He is the first of Jesus' followers to be named in Matthew's Gospel (4:18) and the one most often named thereafter (8:14; 10:2; 14:28, 29; 15:15). He is usually bold, but sometimes in a foolhardy way.

Today's story is set in Caesarea Philippi, a town on the northern edge of Israel's territory in Galilee. The town was famous in Jesus' time for a shrine to the Greek god Pan. It was as pagan a place as one could find within Israel's borders, a symbol of the conflict between the God of Israel and a hostile, sinful world.

Our text divides naturally into two parts. The first is focused on Peter's statement about Jesus and Jesus' response to it. The second centers around Jesus' statement about His future, Peter's response to it, and Jesus' rejoinder. We must couple the two parts together to grasp who Jesus really is.

## **Probing (Matthew 16:13-17)**

### **1. Why was it important for Jesus to question His disciples about who others thought He was? (v. 13)**

This exchange between Jesus and His disciples marks a critical time in their relationship. As will be seen later in this text, the time had come for Him to begin preparing them for His departure—something they were not expecting. Their faith needed to be solidified as much as possible before that departure came, for it would be a test to them unlike anything else they had yet experienced.

To prepare them for this test, he asked the probing question, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” The purpose of this question was to get the disciples to reflect on the deity of Jesus. It is likely that Jesus uses *Son of man* to connect himself to a figure in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7:13, 14, “one like the Son of man” appears in Daniel’s vision, defeats the evil kingdoms dominating the world, and establishes God’s everlasting rule. By calling himself *Son of man*, Jesus invites people to think about whether He might be the one who is fulfilling this promise.

But what do people think of that? How do they evaluate Jesus the teacher and miracle worker?

### **2. What was the problem with the answers they gave, and what was His personal question to them? (vs. 14,15)**

We can imagine the disciples (*they*) one after the other making various replies to this question. The disciples said, some say Jesus was John the Baptist. Probably, because both are famous for their message about the nearness of God’s kingdom (Matthew 3:1, 2; 4:17); by this point in time John the Baptist had been executed (Matthew 14:1–12).

*Elijah* is another easy comparison: Jesus’ miracles resemble Elijah’s miracles. *Jeremiah* was known for preaching about God’s imminent judgment on His people, a theme that Jesus sounds as well.

So taken together, these opinions boil down to the last one: that Jesus is a prophet sent by God. That evaluation has a strong basis in fact since Jesus’ preaching and teaching clearly resembles that of *the prophets*.

The problem with these responses was that the responses did not acknowledge who Jesus was. Though He is a prophet, He is much more than that. This leads to Jesus’ question to the disciples, “But whom say ye that I am?” Now it was time for the disciples to reflect on their understanding of Jesus. What had they learned from all His teaching and ministries of healing? Are they content to see Jesus just as a prophet?

### **3. What did Peter’s answer reveal? (vs. 16,17)**

Peter correctly responded by saying that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 9). Peter’s words brought a response of blessing from Jesus, but He also

quickly assured him that he could not have come to that conclusion on his own. Jesus' Father in heaven had revealed the truth to him. Whether Peter spoke on behalf of all the disciples we cannot tell, but at least he personally was reaching the right conclusion about Jesus. Jesus' response of blessing would have immediately caught the attention of the others, and they would have learned from it.

### **Preparation (Matthew 16:18-21)**

#### **4. What might Jesus have meant by saying He would build His church on the "rock" (Matt. 16:18)?**

The proper interpretation of Jesus' reply to *Peter* is one of the most disputed in the New Testament. For centuries interpreters have argued about whether this statement commissions Peter as the head of the church on earth.

We start by noting that everyone recognizes that Jesus is using a play on words, since the name Peter means *rock*. But does that automatically mean that Jesus is referring to Peter personally as the rock on which Jesus will *build His church*? Is it more likely that Jesus is referring to something besides Peter (such as Peter's confession) since Jesus says "this rock" while speaking directly to Peter? And since the rock at issue is the foundation of Jesus' own church, is it more likely that the proper interpretation has more to do with Jesus himself than with Peter?

This first mention of the church by Jesus was a revelation of something not previously known. It was accompanied with the assurance that the gates of hell would not destroy it. That is a tremendous statement of assurance!

#### **5. What is the meaning of the "keys" (v. 19)?**

The proper interpretation of this statement is also disputed. The *keys of the kingdom* have nothing to do with Peter standing at the gates of Heaven. Rather, the expression implies that Peter will provide access for people to enter the promised rule of God. Unlike the religious leaders who reject Jesus and so shut the door of God's kingdom (Matthew 23:13), Peter will open entry to God's kingdom by preaching the good news of Jesus. It is therefore no accident that later Peter delivers the first gospel message on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and opens the door of salvation to the Gentiles by preaching to Cornelius (Acts 10).

The second part of this verse makes a related point. What Jesus says clearly does not give Peter or the other disciples the authority to do whatever they want. In the original language, the statement is more literally, "what you *bind on earth* will have been *bound in heaven*, and what you *loose on earth* will have been *loosed in heaven*." We can compare this statement with this famous line from the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). God's promise is that His will should be done everywhere, just as much on earth as in His very presence. Jesus now promises that the church, which is made up of those who confess Him as king, will achieve this. They will accomplish on earth what God has decreed in Heaven.

## **6. What did Jesus command His disciples at this time, and why did He do this? (vs. 20, 21)**

After such an impressive declaration, we hardly expect *Jesus* to tell *his disciples* to keep quiet about His identity! But this is exactly what He does. Until the disciples understand more about what it means for Jesus to be God's promised king, they will only spread misunderstanding if they speak about it. What the disciples need to learn Jesus explains next. He immediately began their preparation by telling them what was coming.

Previously, Jesus has spoken only rarely and indirectly about His death. But now that Peter has declared Him as God's Son, Jesus begins to speak frequently and directly about His coming death and resurrection.

It included the necessity of going to Jerusalem; the fact that He would suffer greatly at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes; the revelation that He would be killed; and the reassurance that He would rise again on the third day after His death. We can only imagine the stunned looks on their faces as He spoke. This was a turn of events they had not anticipated and was perhaps shocking beyond belief.

## **Priorities (Matthew 16:22-27)**

### **7. How did Peter react to the new information Jesus gave them? (v. 22)**

This may be the most surprising verse of the whole passage. Why does *Peter*, who has just declared Jesus to be God's Son, now contradict what Jesus says?

For Peter and the other disciples, the idea that God's anointed one will be killed is simply unthinkable. Jesus himself has just declared that His church will prevail against all opponents. The prophets had promised that God's king would establish an everlasting kingdom. So how can Jesus be killed, and by the very religious leaders who should submit to His authority?

It appears that Peter was so shocked by what he had heard that he completely missed the last point about Jesus coming back to life on the third day. When he said that these terrible things would not happen to Him, he was demonstrating the same kind of support he later showed when he drew a sword in the garden. He was not going to allow any of it if he could help it.

### **8. How did Jesus respond to Peter, and what did it mean? (v. 23)**

Just six verses before, Jesus had told *Peter* that Peter says what *God* says. Now Jesus tells him that he speaks the opposite of what God says. Peter speaks from a purely human standpoint—or worse, he speaks from the standpoint of the devil himself!

Jesus' designation of Peter as *an offense* (or a "stumbling block") helps us understand why Peter's statement is so starkly condemned. If Jesus accepts Peter's

idea, Jesus will stumble and turn aside from the very purpose of His coming to earth, which is to die for sinners. In that case, the entire mission will fail and so will the purpose of God.

What Peter and the other disciples need is a reorientation away from conventional thinking and toward God's real plan. That is what Jesus supplies next.

### **9. What are some of the ways the Lord corrects us today?**

Feelings of guilt are sometimes (but not always) an indication that we have displeased the Lord; however, a lack of a feeling of guilt does not mean that we haven't displeased the Lord. Our emotions need to be checked against the truth of God's Word, which is a sharp sword that reveals our inmost being (Hebrews 4:12). Scripture is our primary means of finding out what pleases the Lord. It acts as a mirror that helps us see what needs to be corrected in our lives (James 1:22-25).

Sometimes God uses other believers to help us see difficult truths about ourselves or how we have offended others (Matthew 18:15, 16). Though such correction is painful, we should appreciate it (see Proverbs 27:6).

### **10. What does it mean to deny oneself in order to follow Jesus, and how did He explain the importance of this act? (vs. 24,25)**

The *disciples*, as Jesus' followers, need Jesus' outlook. Jesus states this challenge in three parts. The first is the need to *deny* oneself. In Jesus' teaching, this does not mean giving up comforts or ambitions, as if such things are evil in and of themselves. Rather, Jesus tells His followers that they should deny themselves in order to serve others (Matthew 20:25-28).

The second part is the need to *take up* one's *cross*. This is not just a call to bear difficult burdens. The cross is an instrument of torture and death. The person who bears a cross is going to his or her own execution. Jesus challenges His followers to deny themselves to the point of surrendering their lives.

The third part of the statement is to *follow* Jesus. The first two commands make sense in light of the third. Why should anyone be so seemingly foolish as to go to his or her own death willingly? Only because that person follows Jesus, the great king sent by God, the very Son of God. And Jesus shows the way by His own life.

That might explain Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:25 (cf. 10:39). If a person wastes this life by seeking only to fulfill his own desires, he will lose not only the joy he could have now but also eternal rewards. But if he seeks to fulfill the will of Christ now, he will receive both present joy and future rewards.

### **11. How did Jesus explain the importance of receiving Him? (vs. 26, 27)**

Imagine the horror of being able to obtain every thing one's heart desires in life only to awaken after death in torment. It is possible for a believer to be so focused on fulfilling his own desires that he misses out on the joy of the Lord. It is much more costly to not know the Lord at all. Once this life is past, there is no possible exchange for what has been lost.

Jesus declares with His words and deeds that the way to eternal life is in giving of oneself to serve Him. By giving our lives, we receive them back again. (The word *life* in v. 25 and the word *soul* here are translations of the same Greek word.)

Jesus brings the discussion to a close with the note of triumph that He sounded before. Though He goes to His death, He will return triumphantly as the king He truly is. As the triumphant king, He will distribute His *reward* to His loyal subjects. Those who have done what He has commanded, those who have followed Him in giving their lives for the sake of others, will share in His triumph. Make Jesus Christ the focus of your life. Serve Him with all your heart.

### **Practical Points**

- 1.** The better one knows Jesus, the more convinced one becomes that He is God (Matthew 16:13-16).
- 2.** Truly knowing Jesus Christ is a special revelation from God the Father (v. 17).
- 3.** The church of Jesus Christ is built upon the foundation of His apostles' testimony (Matt. 16: 18a; cf. Eph. 2:19-21; Rev. 21:14).
- 4.** Christ's church was founded to defeat the very strongholds of hell (Matthew 16:18b-20).
- 5.** Anyone who denies the necessity of Christ's atoning death is serving Satan (vs. 21-23).
- 6.** The road of salvation is paved with self-denial and sacrifice (vs. 24-27).

### **Conclusion**

#### **What It Means to Believe in Jesus**

In many ways, today's passage is the tipping point in the story of Jesus. It confronts us with the central question: Who is this Jesus? It demands that, like Peter, we take a stand on that question. It challenges us to trust Jesus enough to believe what He says about His death and resurrection and even to follow Him on the same path.

Believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, is the essence of the Christian life. Such belief is more than mere intellectual assent. It means that we are willing to have our lives turned upside down, that we are ready to give up seeking our own pleasure and prosperity. It means that we give our time, energy, and resources—our very lives—to serving others. The Jesus we confess as Christ is the Jesus of the cross. When we follow Him, we go where He goes: to give ourselves and thereby to receive our lives back again.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, challenge us, as You did Peter, to consider who You really are. Give us the vision to see that as we give ourselves, we receive our lives back from You in greater measure than ever before. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Thought to Remember**

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" (Jim Elliot).

### **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

What happened to Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration reveals what believers can expect when they receive glorified bodies at His second advent. Our aches, pains, and problems will vanish as we shake off these mortal bodies. Study Matthew 17:1-12 "**Witnessed by Disciples.**"

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