

Matthew, chapter 16

The Looming Shadow of the Cross

As the public opposition of the religious leaders toward Jesus intensifies, He begins more earnestly to prepare His disciples for His impending death.

CONTEXT & MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

1 / We have been following Matthew's master writing plan which is leading up to the end of the Gospel in **ch 28.16-20**. The master theme of Matthew is "Making Disciples." That's what Jesus will command His disciples to do when He gives them [us] their Mission Mandate, or what we call The Great Commission. He will command them to **"Go, make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you."** And so, here in Matthew, what Matthew records is how Jesus Himself made disciples and what He commanded them to observe and teach—so they could make disciples the way He made them disciples.

2 / We have also been pointing out how Matthew is tied together around the five major teaching discourses Jesus delivered to His disciples. These are 'masterclasses' in what disciples must be, what they must know, and how they should conduct their disciple-making ministry. We have already worked through three of them [**chs 5-7, 10, 13**] and we have two more to go [**chs 18, 24-25**].

3 / Now, as we come to **ch 16**, there is another major literary turning point in the narrative writing plan we need to note. In a larger view, Matthew divides the teachings of Jesus into two distinct teaching 'packages,' and both of them are introduced by the words **"From that time, Jesus began to..."** [BTW, these are the only two times this phrase is found in all of the New Testament.]

[1] The first of these two larger teaching 'packages' is in **ch 4.17**: **"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'"** Then He began to teach them and us, His disciples, what the Kingdom of Heaven is.

[2] The second major teaching 'package' is here in **ch 16.21**, **"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."** And so, the primary focus of this teaching 'package' is to prepare His disciples for His impending death on the Cross and His resurrection. As we will say, they sure needed to be prepared—this was the last thing they expected or wanted to expect. BUT, THIS IS THE GOSPEL! Without Jesus' death and resurrection, there is no Gospel! They would come to accept and understand this essential message ONLY AFTER His resurrection.

4 / So, in the beginning of **ch 16**, Matthew begins to describe the dynamics of the contexts surrounding Jesus' ministry that led up to Jesus' focused emphasis on His impending death. That's why I'm calling this lesson *"The Looming Shadow of the Cross."* KEEP IN MIND: we are now within the last year of Jesus' ministry—and only a few months from His crucifixion. That's why we note the increasing intensity of opposition to Jesus [**see ch 12.14**] and the corresponding increasing urgency of Jesus to prepare His disciples for what He knows is impending ahead and looming over Him. The time is growing shorter and shorter...and His disciples are oblivious and clueless. He must 'hone in' to 'get them on His page.'

I | ch 16.1-4 | The Pharisees and Sadducees [a weird coalition] once again attempt to publicly discredit Jesus and undermine His growing influence among the crowds [their power base and influence bloc]...

1 / I say the alliance of the Pharisees and Sadducees in a 'weird coalition' because they were diametrically opposed to the other in so many ways. The Pharisees were supernaturalists—they believed in the spirit world, miracles, and resurrection. In fact, in many ways, in their own religious culture, the Pharisees were the 'conservatives and fundamentalists' of their religious belief systems. And, they also were inveterate opponents of the Greco-Roman influences that were being imposed on them by their Roman occupiers.

On the other hand, the Sadducees did not believe in the spirit world, miracles, or the resurrection [see Acts 23.6-8]. They were what we would call the ‘religious secularists’ of their day. But now, both parties have a common enemy—Jesus. And so, ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend.’ Jesus threatens the power base and influence of both parties. So now they ally with the other to attempt to ‘test’ Jesus in their effort to publicly discredit and undermine Jesus.

2 / What they demand is: **“they asked Him to show them a sign from Heaven.”** The Pharisees and scribes had tested Jesus the same way, with the same question, in **ch 12.38-40** with Jesus giving them the same ‘**sign**’ there as He does here. The purpose of this ‘**sign**’ is for Jesus to ‘give them credible credentials’ that He is who He says He is—the Son of God, their Messiah. What makes this demand even more incredulous is that Matthew connects this ‘test’ with the two miracles Jesus had just performed in **chs 14-15**—the feedings of the 5000+ and 4000+! It’s not that they needed any more ‘proof-signs;’ they had made up their minds to deny them—they must just destroy Jesus!

3 / Jesus soundly rebukes them for their rebellious unbelief and rejection of Him by giving them a simple lesson in their own inconsistency of observation: they could ‘**interpret the physical weather prediction signs in the skies,**’ but ‘**you cannot interpret the signs of the times.**’ The ‘times’ Jesus refers to is ‘the arrival and appearance of the Kingdom of Heaven’ in Himself! So, He gives them the only ‘**sign**’ that will indisputably vindicate and authenticate that He is ‘**from Heaven**’—they will kill Him, and He will rise again from the dead! Again, this is ‘**the sign of Jonah**’ that He delivered in **ch 12.38-40**. NOTE HERE: Jonah himself WAS the sign. Jonah didn’t work any miracles—Jonah himself WAS the miracle! Jonah just went and preached the Gospel to Nineveh and demonstrated by his own ‘death and resurrection’ that his message was God’s Gospel!

4 / AND this is another sharply focused announcement of His impending death and resurrection—**The Looming Shadow of the Cross!**

II | ch 16.5-12 | Jesus warns His disciples to ‘beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,’ that is, their evil and corrupting teachings and influence—and chides them for not learning to trust Him from His just-previous miracles...

1 / These encounters were in regions on one side of the Sea of Galilee. Then they got into their boat again and returned to ‘**the other side.**’ Matthew notes [he was there, remember] that ‘**they had forgotten to bring any bread.**’ In all the intensity of their confrontations, they failed to pack traveling food. Jesus uses this opportunity to warn his disciples to ‘**beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**’ He knew what He was doing, but the disciples were totally disconnected from His lesson. Jesus was warning them to discern and not be seduced by the teachings and influences they had just witnessed [see **vv 11-12**]. They were thinking only about bread-making leaven/yeast. They thought Jesus was chiding them for forgetting to pack travelling bread.

2 / Jesus uses this for another ‘teaching moment’—a very fundamental and serious one. He had earlier, in the beginning, taught them to not worry about what they would eat...but ‘**seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be provided for you [ch 6.33].**’ Jesus will take care of the ‘bread’ if we commit and devote ourselves to His mission. We must trust Him to feed us and take care of us! AND BESIDES, had they not just witnessed how He had fed the multitudes on two different occasions with the little provisions they had on hand?

3 / And so, Jesus peppers them with a series of rhetorical questions to expose their ‘**little faith.**’ They had **weak faith** and **thick heads.** [See also “**O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe...**” in **Luke 24.25**] *‘What have you just witnessed Me doing? Do you think I’m in dire straits because you didn’t bring a little bread? Do you think I and you are dependent on bread you guys should have made with leaven you got from Pharisees and Sadducees? Have you so quickly forgotten that I can make bread with my own power and hands if we need bread—and we sure don’t need to go the Pharisees and Sadducees to get yeast to make it? I’m not talking about grain-bread at all! I’m warning you to beware of the evil and corrupting influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees that is in what they believe and teach!’*

4 / The disciples may have said something like: “Oh, we get it now! We see what you are saying!” And, for that moment, they did. However, as we shall see in the next conversations, they still had ‘blind spots’ that needed to be enlightened—gaps in their **‘little faith.’** NOTE the kindness and gentleness of Jesus toward them—and us. He patiently chides them for their **‘little faith,’** but acknowledges that they do have faith. But He is willing to bring us along to a fuller understanding of what we need to know.

III | ch 16.13-20 | Jesus takes His disciples north—again into predominantly Gentile and pagan regions—to question them about His Messianic identity and make promises about the inevitable conquest of His church and Kingdom...

1 / In order to get the full significance and impact of this next teaching session—especially as it relates to The Kingdom of Heaven—we need to get into the context of **Caesarea Philippi**. This city is located 25 N of the Sea of Galilee. As you can tell from its name, it is a predominately Gentile city and region. Its very name is dedicated to Caesar Augustus and Philip, one of the sons of Herod the Great. [Its former name was Paneas in honor of the Greek god, Pan.] It was saturated with Greek and Roman culture and pagan worship. There was a long history also of the worship of the Canaanite god Baal from early OT times. There were also caves there that had streams of water flowing out of them that were believed to be dwelling places for their gods—and even entry portals to the regions of the underworld, **‘the gates of Hades.’** It is THERE that Jesus goes to make this proclamation, announcement, and promise of the invincible and inevitable conquest of HIS church and Kingdom!

2 / Jesus once again identifies Himself as **‘the Son of Man’** from **Daniel 7.13-14**—the One to Whom **‘was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.’** We need to keep this in mind as we follow this pronouncement...

3 / Jesus is once again confirming and establishing His Messianic identity and mission to His disciples—to be sure they know who they are following. **“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”** And the disciples answer with what the people on the street are speculating. Then Jesus locks in on them with a double ‘you’: **‘But you...what about you? Who do you say I am?’** Peter speaks for them all, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”** There is a full recognition, attribution, and confession here to the Deity of Jesus and His fulfillment of all the OT prophecies and promises of their **‘Christ, Messiah, Anointed One’!**

4 / Jesus responds to Peter personally since he is the one doing the speaking, and assures him that his confession doesn’t come from himself or any other human source or influence: **“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven!”** Here is a clear statement to the absolute sovereignty of God in faith and salvation. **See Matthew 11.25-27; John 1.12-13; 6.37, 44, 65; et. al.** God reveals Himself to those whom He chooses to know Him; and He gives them to the Son to reveal Himself through Him [see **John 1.18; 17.1-3, etc.**].

5 / Then follows the **‘upon this Rock I will build My church...’** Jesus calls him by his family name first, Simon Bar-Jonah ... but then addresses him by his Jesus-given Kingdom name: **‘And I tell you, you are Peter...’** [see **John 1.42**]. Peter’s Kingdom name [*Petros*] means ‘rock,’ but it is diminutive [smaller]. However, what Peter has just confessed about the Christ is the ‘rock [*petra*]’ upon which Christ’s church and Kingdom will be built. Christ Himself is the one and only Cornerstone/Foundation of the church and His Kingdom [see **Matthew 21.42; Isaiah 28.16; Psalm 118.22; 1 Corinthians 3.11; Ephesians 2.19-20; et. al.**]. Everything Christ will do to build His church and advance His Kingdom will be through the proclamation of Him and His Gospel!

6 / Furthermore, **“...and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it.”** We need to understand the specific significance of **‘the gates of Hades.’** Remember that Jesus is standing in the regions of the pagan ‘gates of Hades’ in Caesarea Philippi. This was their local shrine dedicated to the power base of their pagan kingdom of darkness. Their pagan gods lived and operated from there. But Jesus had come to declare war against them, invade them, plunder their goods, and deliver His people from their power [see

ch 12.22-29]. ‘Gates’ are not offensive weapons—the enemy does not mount an offensive attacks by throwing gates. Gates are defensive weapons—to strengthen and solidify defenses against the invasion of the enemy. Jesus boldly and confidently proclaims: “My church will victoriously invade, dismantle, and conquer the kingdom of the Evil One—I will save my people and bring them out! The gates of Hades will not prevail against my Kingdom!”

7 / What does Jesus mean by saying: **“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”?** The **keys to the Kingdom of Heaven** obviously mean ‘the means to enter...,’ and the right and authority to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those **keys** are the same as **‘upon this Rock,’** and that, in turn, refers to Peter’s confession of Christ; and that, in turn, is **THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM!** Further, the phrases **‘shall be bound...shall be loosed’** are in the perfect tense—an action that has been performed in the past, but with continuing effects or state of affairs. So, what Jesus is saying is that as Peter, and the other apostles—and we—preach the Gospel as Jesus delivered it to us, the effects and results in the hearers and respondents will be what Heaven has already prescribed it will be. If they believe, Heaven has already decreed they will be saved; if they reject, Heaven has already decreed they will be damned.

8 / Then when Jesus **“strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ,”** it was because there were so many misunderstood visions and concepts of what **the Christ** would do when He came, what kind of Kingdom He would bring, and so forth. **AND,** as we are going to see next, *even Peter and the other disciples still hadn’t arrived at a crystal-clear understanding of Jesus’ Messianic mission and ministry—and how He would inaugurate and establish it...by His death and resurrection.*

IV | ch 16.21-23 | Jesus urgently, for the first of three separate occasions, begins to foretell to His disciples about His impending death and resurrection—‘The Looming Shadow of the Cross’...

1 / NOW we come to that transition phrase that I told you about in the introduction—where Matthew begins with Jesus’ second teaching ‘package,’ **“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things....”** The first ‘package’ began in **ch 4.17,** and Jesus was emphasizing **‘the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand...’** Now, in this ‘package,’ Jesus will begin to zoom in on His ultimate ‘hour’ or purpose for which He came. This is still about **‘The Kingdom of Heaven,’** but now Jesus will begin explaining in bold, clear, and urgent terms that He will establish His Kingdom by His death and resurrection—The Gospel!

2 / All of religious Israel’s leadership will be allied in lock step and purpose: **elders, chief priests, and scribes [Pharisees].** Jesus will **‘suffer many things, be killed, and on the third day be raised’** [this is **‘the sign of Jonah.’**]

3 / And then, to show us how off-the-mark the disciples still were, **“Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!’”** As Jesus rebuked Peter, He reminded Him that His death and resurrection was the Father’s will and why He had come! To try to distract or dissuade Him from that mission was to act as an agent of Satan who tempted Jesus in the wilderness to save Himself from that death, and go at building His Kingdom another way!

V | ch 16.24-28 | Jesus reiterates and re-emphasizes that His disciples must prepare themselves to walk the same path He walks if they [we] ‘come after Him’ and ‘follow’ Him...

1 / This next section is Jesus’ call for His disciples to be willing and commit to **‘come after Me’** and **‘follow Me,’** which means: we must walk the same path He walks. Peter got this message loud and clear after Jesus’ resurrection, and writes in **1 Peter 2.21: “For to you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.”**

2 / That path includes: **‘deny himself...take up his cross...follow Me...lose his life for My sake.’** If we do that, we will **find our life and gain the whole world.**