



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 16

Bishop Youssef

Introduction



Chapter Main Points:

- The confession of Peter and Jesus' response
- The cost of discipleship

An Overview



- Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus for a sign. Exposing their hypocrisy, Jesus once again offered the sign of Jonah (1-4)
- He then warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (5-12)
- At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying that He was. When asked who they thought He was, Peter confessed Him to be the Christ. Jesus commended Peter and spoke of his role in His church, but then told the disciples to tell no one He was the Christ (13-20)
- Jesus then spoke of His death and resurrection, the cost of discipleship, and coming in His kingdom (21-28)

The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign (16:1-4)



- This is the second time Jesus has been asked to produce a "sign" that His authority comes from God (Mt12:38)
- The Pharisees were the most considerable sect among the Jews, for they had not only the scribes, and all the learned men of the law of their party, but they also drew after them the majority of the people
- The Sadducees had their origin and name from one Sadoc, a disciple of Antigonus of Socho, president of the Sanhedrin, and teacher of the law in one of the great divinity schools in Jerusalem, about 264 years before the incarnation



The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign (16:1-4)

- The Pharisees and Sadducees were opposed to each other in principles and in conduct; yet they joined against Christ
- They are united in their desire to "test" Jesus
- They desired a sign of their own choosing: they despised those signs which relieved the necessity of the sick and sorrowful, and called for something else which would gratify the curiosity of the proud

The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign (16:1-4)



- It is great hypocrisy, when we slight the signs of God's ordaining, to seek for signs of our own plan
- Their purpose is to discredit Jesus in front of the people
- St. Chrysostom is of opinion He would have granted them any sign they wished, had they been willing to believe; but as their object was curiosity and criticism, He refused to comply
- Knowing full well their views, and having wrought sufficient miracles to confirm His Messiahship, He thought fit to give them no other answer than this (16:2)

The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign (16:1-4)



- The meaning of this answer is, “There are certain indications by which you judge about the weather”
- He tells them they apparently know how to read the signs of the weather but cannot read the "signs of the times," meaning they cannot or will not interpret His miracles as signs of His authority and the beginning of the Messianic Age as predicted in the writings of the prophets
- The Jewish people are represented in the Sacred Writings as married to the Most High; but, like a disloyal wife, forsaking their true husband, and uniting themselves to Satan and sin

The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign (16:1-4)



- Our blessed Lord had already made miracles sufficient to demonstrate both His Divine mission and His divinity; only one was farther necessary to take away the scandal of His cross and death, to fulfill the Scriptures, and to establish the Christian religion; and that was, His resurrection from the dead, which, He here states, was typified in the case of Jonah

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)



- The conversation with the Pharisees and Sadducees had been on the western side of the Sea of Galilee
- They crossed from that side again to the east
- Perhaps the disciples were so taken with the company of Christ, that they even forgot the necessities of life
- The teaching and influence which spreads like leaven

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)



- The figure of the leaven was suggested by their need of bread
- Jesus is still focused on His confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees and uses leaven as a symbol of their false interpretation of the Law and their evil influence that spreads like an infection in the same way yeast expands dough
- The disciples, however, are more concerned about the material than the spiritual

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)



- Christ speaks of spiritual things under a resemblance, and the disciples misunderstand Him of carnal things
- He took it ill that they should think Him as thoughtful about bread as they were; that they should be so little acquainted with His way of preaching
- He reminds them of the two miracle feedings and of His creative power, and how it has been put forth
- If He can feed more than five thousand and more than four thousand He can certainly provide for their needs
- The thoughts of the disciples were so fixed upon their failure to supply bread that they thought the remark about leaven contained a rebuke

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)



- How astonishing is it that these men should have any fear of lacking bread, after having seen these two miracles
- That we might know what effect this discourse of our Savior had upon his disciples, the evangelist immediately subjoins, *then they understood*,
- This exposition of Christ freed them from the accusation of the Jews; it made them who were negligent and inattentive, both diligent and attentive, and confirmed them in their faith. (St. Chrysostom)

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- There were two cities in Judea called Caesarea
- One was situated on the borders of the Mediterranean and the other was the one mentioned here
- This city was greatly enlarged and ornamented by Philip the tetrarch, son of Herod, and called Caesarea in honor of the Roman emperor, Tiberius Caesar
- To distinguish it from the other Caesarea the name of Philip was added to it, and it was called Caesarea Philippi, or Caesarea of Philippi

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- This city was located near the base of Mt. Hermon, at a source of the Jordan, and in the northeast extremity of Palestine
- He first withdrew them from the Jews, that they might with more boldness and freedom deliver their sentiments. (St. Chrysostom, hom. lv.)
- He asked His disciples this question, not because He was ignorant what the people thought and spoke of Him; but to have the opportunity, in getting an express declaration of their faith from themselves, to confirm and strengthen them in it

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- Some thought He was John the Baptist who had been killed by Herod a few months before
- That was one popular notion regarding Him, circulating, no doubt, chiefly among those who had never seen him
- It was very generally expected that Elijah was to return to the earth in connection with the Messiah's advent
- The Jews believed that at the coming of the Messiah the prophets were to rise again

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- “You, who have been continually with Me; you, who have seen Me perform so many more miracles; you, who have yourselves worked miracles in My name?”
- Feeling the light of his Master's glory shining in his soul, St. Peter breaks forth—not in a tame, ordinary acknowledgment but in the language of adoration—such as one uses in worship, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!”
- With the spontaneity and impulsiveness that were ever manifested in him, St. Peter replied at once and expressed the faith of all the apostles

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- The confession of St. Peter is the one Christian confession of the New Testament and of the apostolic age, and the very foundation of the church, into which all saints are built as living stones of the temple
- This name, Simon Bar-Jonah, denoting his humble fleshly descent, seems to have been purposely here mentioned, to contrast the more vividly with the spiritual elevation to which divine illumination had raised him
- This is not the fruit of human teaching

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- This holy and blessed confession no one can make from the heart unless he is moved by the Spirit
- This is the first time Jesus speaks of His church, and here, as not yet founded
- Three terms are to be noted:
 - (1) Peter, in the Greek, Petros, meaning a single stone; it was given to Simon by Christ when He called him to be a disciple, John 1:42

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- (2) Rock, in the Greek, Petra, which means the solid, immovable bed-rock, a great mass like a cliff
- (3) church, Greek, ecclesia, those called out, the fellowship of believers, the organized society of Christ, the kingdom of heaven on earth
- And upon this rock ... - There is probably no passage in the word of God that has called forth more discussion

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- This passage has given rise to many different interpretations
 1. That the word "rock" refers to Peter's confession, and that Jesus meant to say, upon this rock, this truth that thou hast confessed, that I am the Messiah and upon confessions of this from all believers, I will build my church. Confessions like this shall be the test of piety, and in such confessions shall My church stand in the midst of the flames of persecution, the wrath of the gates of hell

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



2. That Jesus referred to himself

Christ is called a rock, Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:8

And it has been thought that He turned from Peter to Himself, and said, "Upon this rock, this truth that I am the Messiah – upon myself as the Messiah, I will build my church."

3. Another interpretation is, that the word "rock" refers to Peter himself

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- Since this rock is the foundation of the church, the central principle, the fundamental idea, we are aided to a correct decision by the teachings of the Word elsewhere
- We learn through St. Paul that other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ
- This excludes Peter or any human platform (1 Cor 3:11)
- Christ is often called a stone:
 - (1) the stone that the builders rejected (Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17)

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- (2) the chief corner stone (Eph 2:20)
- (3) the stone that is the head of the corner (Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7)
- (4) the spiritual rock which is Christ (1 Cor 10:4)
- Faith in Christ held in the heart, and confessed with the lips is the very foundation of the spiritual life and of the church
- This constituted the fundamental difference in apostolic days between Christians and unbelievers, the church and the world
- It does still

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- It is the essence of teaching of the New Testament that the platform or foundation of the Christian society, the church, is this belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (see Mt 16:16; Jn 6:69)
- It is then St. Peter's grand confession, faith in the Spiritual Rock, the faith that lays hold of Christ, belief that He is the Anointed of God, the Divine Savior, that the Lord pronounces the rock upon which He will found His church
- He died on the cross, but the gates of Hades did not prevail, for they could not hold Him, and the living Savior, rising triumphant from the tomb, was the unanswerable argument that His own and Peter's confession was a rock that could never be moved

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- His resurrection demonstrated that He is the Rock
- Hades did not overcome
- The powers of darkness, and whatever Satan can do, the whole strength, and all the efforts it can make, will never be able to prevail over the city or Church of Christ
- By this promise we are fully assured, that neither idolatry, heresy, nor any evil error whatsoever shall at any time prevail over the Church of Christ

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- All the apostles, and their successors, partake also of this power of binding and loosing
- The power of binding is exercised,
 - 1st. by refusing to absolve
 - 2nd. by enjoining penance for sins forgiven
 - 3rd. by excommunication, suspension or prohibition
 - 4th. by making rules and laws for the government of the Church
 - 5th. by determining what is of faith by the judgments and definitions of the Church

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- The authority to "bind and loose" will be repeated to St. Peter and to the Apostles (Mt 18:18) and is reaffirmed after Jesus' Resurrection when Jesus breaths the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles (Jn 20:21-23)
- Tell no man that I am the Christ, i.e. the Messiah; as the time for His full manifestation was not yet come; and He was not willing to provoke the Jewish malice, or the Roman envy, by permitting His disciples to announce Him as the Savior

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ (16:13-20)



- He did not forbid them to teach that there was a Messiah a Redeemer, but to declare then that He was the person
- He wished the people to be induced to own Him for their Messiah, not from the testimony of His apostles, but from His miracles and doctrines
- He chose rather to wait, till His resurrection and ascension had set this truth in the clearest light, and beyond the power of successful contradiction

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (16:21-23)



- This is the first of three predictions that Jesus gives concerning His Passion (Mt 17:22-23,20:17-19)
- They were not strong enough to bear this teaching until they were convinced of his divinity
- In sharing this secret with the disciples, Jesus is correcting the common misperception that the Messiah is coming in triumph and glory to vanquish Israel's enemies and to re-establish the Davidic kingdom on earth just as it had been in the past in the glory days of kings David and Solomon



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (16:21-23)

- Jesus' revelation of His suffering and death in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies of the Suffering Servant (Is 52:13-53:12) marks a new phase in Jesus' ministry, as Matthew introduces with the phrase "From that time on ..." (Mt 16:21)

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (16:21-23)



- St. Peter took Him aside, presuming on the distinction just conferred on him; showing how unexpected and distasteful to them all was the announcement
- He could not bear the thought of the crucifixion, and still expected Christ to become a worldly king



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (16:21-23)

- St. Peter now understands that Jesus is the divine Messiah - He is God Himself come to gather His scattered people and fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 34
- St. Peter knows the Temple hierarchy has no power over the Christ and so he cannot comprehend why Jesus would allow Himself to be killed by those in authority when He could simply consume them in holy fire like the rebellious priestly sons of Aaron

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (16:21-23)



- Jesus rebukes St. Peter because he has voiced opposition to God's plan when he should be humbly accepting God's plan and assisting Jesus in His mission
- The Hebrew word *satan* means adversary
- Whenever one stands as an adversary to God's plan for man's salvation that person is indeed acting as Satan in human form



Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (16:21-23)

- Jesus' rebuke of St. Peter is similar to His rebuke of Satan in Matthew 4:10 for He felt in it a satanic lure, a whisper from hell, to move Him from His purpose to suffer
- We do not read of any thing said or done by any of His disciples, at any time, that Christ resented so much as this
- Whoever takes us from that which is good, and would make us fear to do too much for God, speaks Satan's language

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- The conditions of discipleship are presented
- A true disciple of Christ is one that does follow Him in duty
- He is one that walks in the same way Christ walked in, is led by His Spirit, and treads in His steps, whithersoever He goes
- If self-denial be a hard lesson, it is no more than what our Master learned and practiced, to redeem us, and to teach us



Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)

- Let him be prepared to say no to many of the strongest cravings of his nature, in the direction more particularly of earthly ease, comfort, dignity, and glory
- Take up his cross. Luke adds daily (Lk 9:23); not once, but all the time
- The cross is the pain of the self-denial required in the preceding words
- The cross is the symbol of doing our duty, even at the cost of the most painful death

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- To follow Christ is to take Him for our Master, our Teacher, our Example; to believe His doctrines, to uphold His cause, to obey His precepts, and to do it though it leads to heaven by way of the cross
- As if Christ is saying, “Do not expect, O Peter, that since you have confessed me to be the Son of God, you are immediately to be crowned, as if this were sufficient for salvation, and that the rest of your days may be spent in idleness and pleasure. For, although by my power, as Son of God, I could free you from every danger and trouble, yet this I will not do for your sake, *that you may yourself contribute to your glory*, and become the more illustrious” (St. Chrysostom, hom. lvi.).

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- Whosoever acts against duty and conscience to save the life of his body, shall lose eternal life; and whoever makes the sacrifice of his life, or the comforts and conveniences of life for conscience sake, shall be rewarded with life eternal
- He who refuses to deny himself, and makes saving and ministering to his present life his chief object, shall lose his life eternally

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- If a man makes the present world—in its various forms of riches, honors, pleasures, and such like—the object of supreme pursuit, be it that he gains the world; yet along with it he sacrifices his own soul
- Not that any ever did, or ever will gain the whole world, but just a very small portion of it
- What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? What would a man not give? What is there that he can give, if in life he has not followed Christ?

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- Those who lose their lives shall gain life; those who choose the world shall lose all
- As Christ begins to teach of dying on the cross, he begins to give prominence to his coming again
- Jesus Christ wishing to show His disciples the greatness of His glory at His future coming, reveals to them in this life as much as it was possible for them to comprehend, purposely to strengthen them against the scandal of His ignominious death. (St. Chrysostom)

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- The reference in verse 28 is not to His final coming to judge the world
- This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost
- Mark shows the meaning by substituting, Till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power (Mk 9:1)
- The coming of the Son of man in His kingdom means, therefore, the same as the kingdom of God come with power
- Compare Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:49
- The kingdom came with power on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1)

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him (16:24-28)



- According to the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat, the Kingdom of the Son of Man is the world and the Church is the place where His kingdom is manifested
- Jesus' sovereignty over the world will be established in His glorious Resurrection when He has defeated sin and death
- Those who will live to see the Son of Man "coming in His Kingdom" are those who will live to see His glorious Resurrection and Ascension



Conclusion

- Why are the Pharisees and Sadducees asking for a "sign from heaven"/from God and what kind of sign are they demanding as proof that His authority comes from God?
- When asked for a sign, what sign did Jesus say would be given?
- When Jesus warned of leaven, what did He mean?
- Does Jesus ever refer to Himself as a prophet?
- How does St. Peter respond to Jesus' question concerning His true identity?



Conclusion

- What authority did Jesus give St. Peter and the Apostles and their successors in using the metaphors of binding and loosing?
- Why does St. Peter resist what Jesus has told the disciples about His suffering and death, and why does Jesus rebuke him so harshly?
- What is Jesus condition for true discipleship?
- What is "the Kingdom" of Jesus Christ in verse 28?
- In what ways has your commitment to Jesus and His Church entailed a denial of yourself? How have you "lost your life" by denying yourself? How does that compare with what you have gained by taking up your cross?