

## Bible Commentaries

### Coffman Commentaries on the Bible ▾

#### Matthew 16 ▾

#### Verse 1

##### MATT. 16

##### THE PHARISEES ASK A SIGN FROM HEAVEN; THE INFLUENCE OF THE PHARISEES; PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST; THE FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and trying him asked him to show them a sign from heaven. (Matthew 16:1)

This indicates that Christ was at that time back on the west side of Lake Galilee, which was Pharisical territory. The request of those enemies of Jesus for a sign from heaven was actually intended to cast a reflection on the mighty miracles Christ had performed, which, as interpreted by those hypocrites, were not "from heaven."

They were utterly wrong, of course. A sign in the skies, or from above, would have been no more convincing than raising the dead or walking on the sea. As a matter of fact, Satan's destruction of Job's sheep (**Job 1:16**) was explained by some as "The fire of God is fallen from heaven"; but it was no such thing; it was a lying miracle of Satan. Thus, the basis of their request for a sign from heaven was a prior falsehood in the theology of the Pharisees, classifying signs as "from heaven" or from earth. They were wrong on both counts. Origen said:

They erred in regard to both, in regard to signs upon earth as well as to signs from heaven, ... not knowing how to distinguish between the spirits that are working, which kind are from God, and which have revolted from him.<sup>[1]</sup>

Note that longstanding enmity between the Pharisees and Sadducees was submerged and muted while they made common cause against the Lord of glory, a pattern often observed. Herod and Pilate became friends as a result of the common cause they made against Christ (**Luke 23:12**). Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar (**2 Kings 24:7**); Tirhakah and Sennacherib (**2 Kings 19:8**), in spite of being enemies, made league against God's people. Again to quote Origen, "Those who hold the most divergent opinions appear to be of one mind that they may scoff at and attack Jesus Christ in the person of his disciples."<sup>[2]</sup>

[1] Origen, Commentary on Matthew in the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1951), Vol. X, p. 450,

[2] Ibid., p. 450.

## Verse 2

**But he answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the heaven is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the heaven is red and lowering. Ye know how to discern the face of the heaven; but ye cannot discern the signs of the times.**

This was not an endorsement of the Pharisees' method of predicting the weather, but was a glaring contrast, pointed out by Jesus, between their supposed sagacity in material things and their blindness to far more important spiritual things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven.

What are "the signs of the times"? (1) The prophetic weeks of Daniel were about to expire. (2) The great herald of the new age, John the Baptist, had appeared according to prophecy, "in the spirit and power of Elijah." (3) The scepter had departed from Judah and the lawgiver from beneath his feet (**Genesis 49:10**). (4) Even a "sign from heaven" had already been given at the baptism of Christ when God spoke out of heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**). (5) It had been revealed to Simeon that he should not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ; and it must be presumed that Simeon, by that time, was long since dead and buried. (6) All the world was expecting the coming of some Great One. (7) The Christ himself, "that Prophet like unto Moses," had appeared upon the banks of the Jordan and had been identified by John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"! And John was the only authentic prophet Israel had had in half a millennium. Yes, it must be admitted that the Pharisees missed the signs of the times, however skilled they might have appeared as weather prophets!

## Verse 4

**An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of Jonah. And he left them, and departed.**

For notes on the "sign of Jonah," see under **Matthew 12:38-40**. What is called the first announcement of the Lord's passion and resurrection is recorded later in this chapter, but it must be admitted that Christ's "sign of Jonah" is embryonically a statement of the same thing.

The relation between God and Israel had long been described as a marriage contract in which God was the husband and Israel the bride, hence a charge of adultery was a reflection upon Israel's fidelity to God. That unequal marriage God would shortly dissolve through his own death, in the person of Christ, upon the cross (**Romans 7:4**). It is also doubtless true that that generation was "adulterous" in the ordinary sense as well. Christ had already explained the sign of Jonah and did not repeat it on that occasion.

The impact of the word "desired" in **Matthew 16:1** above (King James Version) reveals that the Pharisees had urgently pleaded with Christ to give them one final, decisive "sign from heaven" that he was the Christ. Jesus knew it would be useless, because he knew their hearts; and their request rose from a desire to tempt him (**Matthew 16:1**, King James Version), and not from any honest wish to know the truth. The addition of the words "O ye hypocrites" in **Matthew 16:3** by some of the older versions was in line with the facts of the situation. The utter perversity of those blind, evil

leaders in presuming that God would make them, in all their wickedness, the final arbiters and judges of the Messiahship of God's only Son, is amazing. Christ very properly refused to be placed upon examination by them.

Christ's statement that no sign would be given, except that of Jonah, did not mean that light would be withheld from them or that they were without light; but it meant that more than sufficient light was already theirs. The one cosmic exception to the "no sign" policy would be the resurrection of Christ, which would more than meet even their specifications as a "sign from heaven." To be sure, even that was of no avail because, instead of accepting it, they bribed witnesses to deny it! Christ fully knew the character of those evil men; and the sad words concluding **Matthew 16:4** show the finality of Christ's judgment upon them. He never more worked any miracle or taught in that place again.

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## Verse 5

**And the disciples came to the other side and forgot to take bread. And Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

Christ and the apostles re-crossed Lake Galilee to the vicinity of Bethabara-Julius, where, in temporary safety from the Pharisees, he could continue to instruct the Twelve. Christ's warning of the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" was necessary. They had formed a powerful, socially prominent, politically dominating alliance against him and were advocating his rejection with every cunning and lying argument possible. They argued: (1) that Christ could not be the Messiah, because Elijah had not yet come; (2) that his signs were not "from heaven," but from earth; (3) that the demons he exorcised were, in truth, cast out by the power of the devil; (4) that he was a violator of sacred traditions; (5) that he profaned the sabbath; (6) that the Scriptures "proved" the Messiah could not come from Galilee, but from Bethlehem (**John 7:41**); (7) that none of the rulers of the people believed on him (**John 7:48**); (8) that they **KNEW** him to be a sinner (**John 9:24**); (9) that he was a glutton and a winebibber; (10) that he was a Samaritan; (11) that he was a friend of publicans and sinners; and (12) that he was a deceiver. (For more on this and for Scripture references on the Pharisees' charges, see under **Matthew 11:18,19**). Considering **WHO THEY WERE**, one must allow that they had indeed mounted a formidable attack against the Christ, so strong in fact that Christ saw fit in this instance to warn even the apostles against it.

"Leaven" in this case stands for something evil, the usual meaning in Scriptures, although an exception exists (**Matthew 13:33**). The Sadducees were materialists, denying any spiritual life, any possibility of a resurrection (**Matthew 22:23**), and the existence of angels. The Pharisees were hypocrites, dealing in falsehood. Both were secular, dominated by earthly considerations exclusively. They were full of snobbery and pride and made every possible appeal to selfishness, prejudice, and bias. They even tortured the Scriptures to invent arguments against him; and, finally, they relied upon force to achieve their ends. Even at that moment, they were plotting to kill Christ. No group of leaders in human history ever surpassed their right to be denominated as "the sons of the evil one."

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## Verse 7

**And they reasoned among themselves, saying, We took no bread. And Jesus perceiving it said, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have no bread?**

The need of Jesus' warning appeared in the fact that, even at that late hour, the apostles were far too literal in construing the words of Christ. The Saviour's warning against the Pharisees might have gone unheeded if Christ had not explained it. Far from catching the significance of his words, at first they thought that they were being scolded for forgetting to buy bread.

Just where the above conversation took place is a matter of different opinions. It might have been on board en route to Bethabara-Julius, or after they landed; what difference could it make? Like disciples of old, men can still find a lot to be concerned about, besides the point! Christ knew what was in the disciples' minds, no less than he knew what was in the Pharisees' minds. Only God has such power.

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## Verse 9

**Do ye not yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?**

Christ's mention of **BOTH** the miracles in which so many were fed is certain proof that there were in fact two miracles, however similar, and that these are not merely two accounts of the same wonder. Christ was amazed that after all the disciples had seen, they would still have considered their failure to provide bread a matter of sufficient importance that Christ would have rebuked them for it. "O ye of little faith!"

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## Verse 11

**How is it that ye do not perceive that I spake not to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then understood they that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

Here is an extremely important example of how the word of Christ, or of the Scriptures, should be interpreted. Note that Christ did not change a syllable of what he had said, indicating that the misunderstanding of the Twelve did not arise from any fault in what Christ had said but in their application of it. Note that if he had meant "bread," he would have said "bread." The word he used was "leaven," and his use of it in connection with the Pharisees and Sadducees showed that a literal meaning of the term was not indicated, since a man does not have literal "leaven" in him.

In outlining the qualifications of elders and deacons, the Scriptures speak of "believing children"; to insist that that must invariably mean "baptized children" is to fall into the error of the apostles noted above. Does anyone suppose that the Holy Spirit did not know the term "baptized"? In all cases where the truth of God's word is sought, the strictest attention must be paid to the exact words that are used.

The true understanding by the apostles of what Christ meant was obtained, not by his repeating the admonition in different words, but by their more particular attention to what he had actually said. That proved that what Christ had said was intelligible to them on the basis of what they already knew, provided only that they had applied themselves to know it. The same truth holds today.

## Verse 13

**Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is?**

Dummelow identified Caesarea Philippi as that built by Philip the Tetrarch, situated at the sources of the Jordan, near the foot of Mount Hermon (9,000 feet), in the midst of magnificent scenery. It was a Gentile city, often called Paneas (now Banias), because the god Pan was worshipped there. The other Caesarea on the sea coast, was called, for distinction, Caesarea Palestina.<sup>[3]</sup>

Christ was about to reveal further insight into his glorious identity; and he began by taking the popular beliefs concerning himself as the basis, or platform, from which to elevate their minds to the higher and nobler conception of the Christ as the Son of God.

### ENDNOTE:

<sup>[3]</sup> J. R. Dummelow, One Volume Commentary (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 680.

## Verse 14

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

How amazing that none of the popular beliefs at that times identified Christ as the Messiah! That showed how effective the Pharisees had been in their evil campaign against Christ. Many had at first recognized him as the Messiah (**John 1:42**; 4:30); but Satan, in the manner of the parable, had come and stolen the truth out of their hearts. Satan had sufficiently eroded the image of the Lord that no popular opinion prevailed to the effect that he was the Christ.

Unbelievers still use that temporary advantage which Satan had gained, as noted in the perennial objection alleged by skeptics and infidels that the synoptics are in conflict with John's gospel. As Robertson stated it:

They hold that the other gospels here utterly conflict with John, who represents the first disciples as believing that Jesus was the Messiah. ... But it is easy to suppose that their early faith in his Messiahship was shaken by his continued failure to gather armies and set up the expected temporal kingdom.<sup>[4]</sup>

Dummelow made the same analysis:

This belief (that he was the Messiah) no longer existed. Those who held it had abandoned it because of his continued refusal to declare himself and to do what was expected of the Messiah.<sup>[5]</sup>

That erosion and blurring of the truth that Christ was the Messiah had reached such proportions that Christ, as we have just seen, even warned the apostles to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Even in the remaining popular opinions of Jesus, however, the splendor and glory of his wonderful life were reflected in the fact that popular fancy had recourse to the annals of the righteous dead

to find one worthy of comparison with Jesus. Elijah, John the Baptist, Jeremiah, along with the other prophets, constituted the roll of Jewish immortals, the mighty heroes of the people. Thus, the opinions of the people were unanimous in according high status to Jesus. They failed only in this: they did not accord him the **HIGHEST** status. Satan's devices at that point had triumphed for a while. Satan was perfectly willing for Christ to be "some great one," as long as he remained unrecognized as the Greatest One.

Origen's commentary on Matthew has an elaboration of the false opinions concerning Jesus, showing that if the people had attended what Jesus had publicly said, their errors would have been avoided. For example, those who held that Christ was Elijah should have known that Christ had identified John the Baptist as "that Elijah" who was to come.

[4] A. T. Robertson, *Harmony of the Gospels* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1922), p. 99.

[5] J. R. Dummelow, *loc. cit.*

## Verse 15

### He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am?

Christ in that question came to the heart of his heavenly mission. Everything, repeat, **EVERYTHING** depends upon the answer to that question. Who is he? That was the question asked by Paul on the Damascus road when he said, "Who art thou, Lord?" (**Acts 22:8**). It is the question every man must ask, **AND ANSWER CORRECTLY**, before any such thing as salvation can be had. It is not enough to know the popular opinion of the Christ; the question demands, and will receive, a personal answer by every man coming into the world.

The progression from things general to things particular was a common procedure in Christ's method of teaching. It will be recalled that in the Sermon on the Mount he said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake," and followed a moment later with "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you ..." (**Matthew 5:10,11**). The same pattern is here. "Who do men say that the Son of man is," followed by "Who say ye that I am?"

## Verse 16

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

This is called the Great Confession. It is no mere acknowledgment that Jesus is the Messiah of the Hebrews but also declares Jesus' unique filial relationship to God. Dummelow aptly pointed this out, saying,

Son of God, here, is no mere equivalent of "the Messiah." ... This is shown by the deep emotion with which the speaker makes, and Jesus receives, the confession; and the fact that the confession is perfectly satisfactory to Jesus, and is forthwith made the dogmatic foundation of Christianity ("Upon this rock I will build my church.")<sup>[6]</sup>

The ancients noted the expression, "Son of the living God," making those words the basis of Jesus' blessing of Peter. Thus, Origen said, "He is pronounced blessed not merely because he said, 'Thou art the Christ,' but with the addition, 'Son of the living God!'"<sup>[7]</sup> Origen reinforced his argument by

pointing out that Mark and Luke, omitting the words "Son of the living God," also omitted reference to Christ's blessing Peter on that occasion.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Origen, Commentary on Matthew in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. X, p. 460.

## Verse 17

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

Jesus' confession and blessing of Peter in this place is best understood in the light of a promise Jesus previously made to the effect that he would confess those who confessed him (**Matthew 10:32,33**). Note the parallel: "Christ, Son of God" and "Peter, son of John" (that is the meaning of Bar-Jonah). Note also the attribution of divine initiative in providing Peter that information. The great truth that Jesus is God's Son is not taught by human wisdom but in that wisdom which is from above. To the contrary, human wisdom is ever active and diligent to blur and erase that truth from men's minds and hearts. A witness to Christ's divinity is also contained here. Who but Christ himself had taught Peter and the others this epic truth? Yet Christ flatly declared that God had taught it. This is a powerful, though incidental, corroboration of Peter's confession from the lips of Christ himself.

## Verse 18

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

Some have made much of the fact that the word "Peter" means rock, and from this have affirmed that Christ built the church upon Peter. This text is inscribed in letters of gold four feet high inside the massive dome of the Basilica of St. Peters; and it is feared that many have been deceived by this false claim.

It is true, of course, that the word [*@Petros*] (Greek for Peter) means "stone" (**John 1:42**); but the Greek text itself dispels any possibility of Peter's having been the rock upon which Jesus built the church. In appealing to the Greek, this author does not defer to the opinions of learned men, nor, for that matter, profess any knowledge of Greek; but God's truth is not subject to the arcane and ambiguous dissertations of the learned. Even an ignorant man, in relative terms, can, with the aid of a Greek lexicon or a common device such as the Emphatic Diaglott, see for himself that Christ did not build the church upon Peter.

In **Matthew 16:18**, above, the rock upon which Christ proposed to build the church is not the same kind of "rock" that constitutes the name of Peter. There are several differences of the most marked and significant nature; and attention is called to the little diagram herewith which sets forth those differences, emphasizing the impossibility of their being under any conditions **IDENTICAL**.

Jesus said, "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church."

The words "Peter" and "rock," as used above, are translated from two different Greek words:

&lt;LINES&gt;&lt;MONO&gt;

[@Petros] and [@petra]

This word has six letters This word has five letters

This word is masculine This word is feminine gender gender

This word means **PEBBLE** This word means **LEDGE**SIZE>MONO>LINES>

Yes, the words are similar, but what of it? Similarity of words does not even imply similarity of meaning, much less identical meaning. An old rancher requested his son to take one of his favorite horses and have him **SHOD**. A little while later he heard gunfire back of the corral and learned to his dismay that his son had shot the horse! The son said, "I'm sorry, Dad, I thought you said have him **SHOT**, and I thought I could do it as well as anyone else!" Certainly, there is more resemblance between the two key words in that mix-up than there ever was between the two Greek words noted above. Yet it is on the preposterous premise that those words are **IDENTICAL** that the whole fallacy of the church on Peter is made to depend.

Nor do we allow that the conscience of Rome is easy about this. The well known truth that the Greek text does not allow, and indeed refutes, their contention gives rise to all kinds of speculations and appeals to the so-called Aramaic Original (see introduction); however, it must be allowed by all that the Greek text of the New Testament is all that has come down from antiquity. Therefore, all arguments from the Aramaic should be rejected until it can be produced and authenticated. Certainly, it is evil to make an argument, upon so vital a point as this, from a version that does not exist except in theory, which has never been seen, and which, in all probability, if it were to appear, would doubtless confirm rather than deny the difference in those two words. All appeals to the Aramaic are, by implication, a repudiation of this text; and why repudiate it if, as some say, it makes Peter the rock on which Jesus built the church? He that has eyes to see, let him see!

What, then, is the rock upon which Christ proposed to build the church? It is the supreme fact of faith just confessed by Peter, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God.

A moment later Christ mentioned Peter, giving him (and later the others) the keys of the kingdom of heaven, thus making him, not the foundation, but the door-opener of the kingdom. To have made him both the foundation and the porter of the same building would have been a gross abuse of metaphor.

**The gates of Hades**, mentioned by Christ, is variously understood, as follows: (1) Some believe they refer to death and the fact that death would not prevent our Lord's carrying out the noble design announced on that occasion. (2) Others think they refer to the various sins by which men go to their spiritual doom. Thus, Origen made the gates of Hades to be such things as fornication, blasphemy, and other sins. (3) Another thinks they refer to Satanic opposition to the church throughout history, and that they contain a prophecy that Christ will triumph, not Satan. The meaning and import of the passage are so profound that there is more than enough room for all of these views without violence to the word of God. There may even be other meanings which men cannot know until the judgment.



## Verse 19

**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.**

This promise, emphatically delivered to Peter here, was also the property of the Twelve and not Peter's exclusively (see under **Matthew 18:18**). Origen, under the sub-title, "The promise given to Peter, not restricted to him, but applicable to all disciples like him," asked,

But if you suppose that upon one Peter only the whole church is built by God, what would you say about John the son of thunder or each one of the apostles?<sup>[8]</sup>

"Bind" and "loose" refer to the power of deciding what was lawful or unlawful to be done in the church or what was orthodox or unorthodox to be believed. That power was (and is) exercised by all the apostles, and the New Testament is the instrument by which that binding and loosing are effected.

The objection may be raised that if all the apostles exercised that authority, the words lose their meaning as applied by Christ to Peter in the instance before us. This is not the case. A certain preeminence **DID** pertain to Peter: (1) He preached the first gospel sermon (**Acts 2:14ff**). (2) He unlocked the secret of the Davidic kingdom (**Acts 2:31**). (3) He unlocked the secret of **HOW** people enter the kingdom (**Acts 2:38**). (4) He unlocked the door of faith to the Gentiles (**Acts 10:1ff**). (5) He unlocked the door of return for backsliders (**Acts 8:13,22**). (6) He unlocked the mystery of the new name (**1 Peter 4:16**). (7) He expounded the mystery of the new birth (**1 Peter 3:21**). (8) He revealed the ultimate fate of the earth (**2 Peter 3:11-13**). These remarkable options exercised by Peter might be said to be his use of the keys, solving, unlocking, and revealing great mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in those important aspects. Surely such does constitute great honor and dignity conferred upon Peter by our Lord by reason of his having been the first to ascertain the holy truth of God in Christ, and then confess it; and the distinctions noted herewith are far more than enough to fulfill Jesus' words without resort to the monstrous notion that Peter was to be made, in any sense, the head of the church, which by its very nature can have only one head - **CHRIST**.

### THE PRE-EMINENCE OF PETER

The Scriptures make it clear that, whatever preeminence was enjoyed by Peter, it was well within the framework of his stature as a fellow apostle, and not, as some affirm, as a president over the apostles. Thus: (1) There is not one throne in Christ's kingdom, but twelve thrones (**Matthew 19:28**). (2) The Holy City that comes down out of heaven does not have merely one foundation, engraved with Peter's name, but twelve foundations, engraved with the names of the Twelve (**Revelation 21:14**). (3) Peter himself included the rest of the apostles when he admonished men to heed the commandment of Christ, "through your apostles" (**2 Peter 3:2**). (4) Even when Peter opened the gates of the kingdom of heaven on the day of Pentecost, he did so, not alone, but "standing up with the eleven" (**Acts 2:14**). (5) When the Jewish high priest moved against the church, he moved not against Peter only, but against the Twelve (**Acts 5:17-19**). (6) Peter's authority was actually equaled by that of Paul (**Galatians 2:7,8**). (7) Peter's dignity was, on occasion, made secondary to that of the Twelve, as when, for instance, he was "sent" by the Twelve as a messenger (**Acts 8:14**). (8) Peter's dignity was no greater than that of James (**Galatians 2:9**); and, in fact, James is mentioned first. All of the plain words and necessary inferences of the New Testament are at variance with any supposition that Peter's preeminence contained the slightest vestiges of any authority not conferred upon the other apostles also.

### A SUCCESSOR TO PETER IS NOT SCRIPTURAL

Here is an appropriate place to view the doctrine of a successor to Peter. Note the following:

(1) Peter knew that he would have no legitimate successor and indicated it in **2 Peter 1:13-15** where he **WROTE** the word of God in order for it to be available, as he said, "after my decease"! If a successor had been contemplated, that would have been unnecessary.

(2) No mention whatever of a successor to Peter may be found anywhere in the New Testament, although the successor to Judas Iscariot is named. And, if it is supposed that the difference was due only to the fact that Peter's death is not recorded in the New Testament, then let it be further recognized that James' death is recorded, and that no successor was chosen for him. Why did only Judas receive a successor? Death did not and could not remove an apostle from office. It did not remove Judas, whose removal was not due to death, but to **TRANSGRESSION (Acts 1:25, KJV)**. All of the apostles (except the one removed by transgression) are still reigning with Christ and discharging the office of their apostleship (**Matthew 19:28**).

(3) If there had been a successor to Peter, why was God's Revelation given through the apostle John and not through the successor, especially since the Revelation was written at a time long after the death of the apostle Peter?

(4) What could a successor to Peter do which has not already been done? The Lord guided the apostles into "all truth" (**John 16:13**). Peter himself said "all things that pertain to life and godliness" had already been given (**2 Peter 1:3**).

(5) Christ taught that no earthly head of his spiritual body (the church) was possible, even though that earthly head was Christ himself "in the flesh." He said, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you" (**John 16:7**). If it was expedient for the true head not to remain on earth in the flesh, and if the presence of the Christ himself, in the flesh, would thwart the residence of the Holy Spirit in his spiritual body, how could any successor fulfill a need impossible to be met even by Christ "in the flesh?"

(6) No person in subsequent ages could meet the qualifications of a true apostle. Apostles were primarily "witnesses"; and witnesses, by the very nature of things, cannot have successors (**Acts 1:22**). Moreover, that prime qualification was not waived, even for Judas' successor.

(7) Basic requirements of the apostolic office disqualify any claimant of Peter's office. For example, the apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit to be able to "remember" and faithfully report the words of Christ. See **John 16:13-15**; 14:26. What successor could possibly "remember" anything that Jesus said? As to the heresy that the Spirit would operate independently of the word of Christ, it was struck down by Jesus himself who said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall not speak of himself" (**John 16:13**). The English Revised Version (1885) has "He shall not speak **FROM** himself."

(8) Delegated authority is not transferable. In the very nature of plenary authority, it must originate in each new holder of it with the conveying authority. No ambassador ever named his successor. Overwhelming evidence to the effect that this principle was recognized as valid, even in the apostolic age, appears in the attempt of Simon the sorcerer to purchase the gift of God, not from Philip (who had it and was personally and more intimately known to Simon), but from Peter, one of the apostles who had conferred the gift on Philip.

(9) Historically, the whole idea of a successor to Peter is fantastic in its long progression through the ages, exhibiting two popes on the throne at once, another refusing the office, and with Italians holding a virtual monopoly, and providing practically the whole list upon whom this distinction was said to be conferred by God (!). What have we here, another chosen people?

Many other Scriptural refutations to the great heresy of Peter's successor might be pointed out, but these are sufficient to allow the truth to appear in honest hearts.

**ENDNOTE:**

[8] Ibid., p. 456.

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## Verse 20

### Then charged he the disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ.

This admonition came because any indiscreet disclosure of Christ's true and total heavenly identity would have compromised Jesus' purpose, which was to accomplish his death in Jerusalem in such a manner that the true reason for that death could not be clouded or distorted by Satan. Significantly, at once, after the great confession, Christ began to instruct his disciples concerning the passion and resurrection.

John Locke, whose writings had such influence on Alexander Campbell, noted that the difficulties confronting Christ were almost insurmountable. It was his purpose to die for the sins of the whole world; but if, at the instigation of Satan, evil men could make it appear that he died in an attempt to take Caesar's throne, the will of God would have been circumvented.

Jesus took note of that situation when he said, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (**Luke 12:50**). The exceedingly narrow line that Jesus walked was marked on one side by the fact that all men, insomuch as was possible, should be instructed that he was the Messiah and Savior of the world; and, on the other side, by the danger that they would misunderstand his mission, which they were prone to do, and would crucify him for sedition. Only the wisdom of God could have enabled Jesus to negotiate that narrow road so successfully as he did.

The overriding consideration of Christ to reveal himself, and yet not so ostentatiously as to defeat his purpose, illuminates much of what is otherwise arcane in the gospel narratives. Thus, Jesus told the Samaritan woman plainly that he was the Messiah (her word, as a Samaritan, was not any good in court), but on other occasions instructed his followers to reveal the truth to no man (at that time).

The grand design of Christ's purpose called for him to die, not as a seeker of the secular throne, but as the Son of the living God. Since the Son of God is the rightful ruler of all men, it was hard to distinguish between them, especially in the environment provided by that generation. Christ succeeded so well in achieving his purpose that when the Sanhedrin finally condemned him, their charge of sedition, as alleged before Pilate, would not stand up; and they were compelled to admit at last that their real reason was not a suspicion of disloyalty to Caesar, but "because he made himself the Son of God" (**John 19:7**).

## DIVISION V

### THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST REPEATEDLY FORETOLD; THE SCHOOLING OF THE DISCIPLES FOR THE PASSION (MATT. 16:21-20:34)

In section four, the Messiah's kingdom was accepted by some, rejected by others. A summary of each class in that section is thus:

He was accepted by the disciples (**Matthew 14:33**), by the woman of Canaan (**Matthew 15:22**), by a great multitude (**Matthew 15:30**), by Peter (**Matthew 16:16**); he was rejected by the Nazarenes (**Matthew 13:57**), and by the Pharisees and their sympathizers (**Matthew 15:12**; **Matthew 16:4**).

In section five, the sufferings and death of Christ make up the burden of the message, especially the prophecies of his passion. There are three of these:

First announcement (**Matthew 16:21**); second announcement (**Matthew 17:22,23**); third announcement (**Matthew 20:18**).

## Verse 21

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

### THE FIRST CLEAR PREDICTION OF HIS PASSION AND RESURRECTION

This marvelous prophecy of his own death and resurrection is without parallel in human history. Some have considered the Old Testament prophecies of the resurrection of Christ to be not as explicit as could have been wished, but believers find them adequate. It would be hard to imagine a more categorical prophecy of resurrection than that of **Psalms 16:10**, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol; neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption." Now, pray tell, to whom could such a word apply, if not to Christ? And what is a resurrection unless it may be described as coming out of Sheol (the grave) before the body sees corruption?

But even the suspicion of ambiguity which evil men have alleged against the Old Testament prophecies of the resurrection of Christ was dispelled by Christ, who singled out the Old Testament prophecy of his resurrection, expanded it, embellished it with all kinds of pertinent details, and emphasized it beyond all other predictions concerning himself. Certainly that was an unheard-of thing for one to do if he had not known who he was and possessed absolute certainty of the fulfillment of those things in himself.

For Christ did not merely say, "I will rise from the dead." His graphic description of what would occur included these points:

His death would occur at Jerusalem.

The scribes, chief priests, and elders would have a part in it.

He would suffer "many things" at their hands.

He would not merely die, but "be killed," a far different thing.

He would rise from the dead.

The resurrection would occur "the third day."SIZE>

Proof that this prophecy of Christ was known throughout Palestine before the events took place is manifest in the sealed tomb and posted watch to guard his body and prevent any rumors that such a glorious thing actually occurred. Such a procedure on the part of Christ's enemies stands absolutely alone and unique, throughout the records of history. Where is there another case like it? Oh yes, graves have been sealed and watches set, but not for the purpose of preventing any rumors of a resurrection (see **Matthew 20:17-19**).

## Verse 22

**And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee.**

Peter's intention in this case was commendable; nevertheless, his ignorance made him a tool of the devil, whose double purpose regarding Christ was either to cause the Master to commit sin, or to make his death such a horrible and detestable thing that Christ would reject it (see under **Matthew 26:53**); thus, by one means or the other, Satan would thwart God's purpose of redemption for men.

Peter's rejection of any thought of the death of the beloved Saviour was perfectly in line with Satan's purpose. Note too that in this case Peter assumed a new role, that of an instructor of his Lord. At that point, he appeared no longer as a disciple but as one to rebuke and contradict what Christ had just said. How easily do men slip into unbecoming postures! Nor did Peter easily shake that temptation to get out of line; he did it again and again. We shall note another case in the next chapter; and, in the book of Acts, one finds the words, "Not so, Lord!" attributed to Peter (**Acts 10:14**).

## Verse 23

**But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.**

There was kindness (and a reprieve) for Peter in the Lord's reply. Instead of saying, "Get thee hence? as he said to Satan previously (**Matthew 4:10**), he said, "Get thee behind me!" Peter was commanded to forsake his role as instructor and resume that of a follower. Peter's place was behind Christ, as a devoted disciple, not in front of Christ, a position as assumed when he objected to Christ's words about his approaching death and resurrection. One may feel a certain pity for Peter. With all his God-given insight into the total identity of Christ as God's Son, he must yet awhile remain ignorant of how Christ's death was necessary and was the "sine qua non", without which no man ever born could have the forgiveness of his sins.

Peter was apparently thinking that, from the earthly viewpoint, Jesus surely did not deserve anything to happen to him which the Lord had just mentioned. From the earthly view, Peter was right; and Christ correctly diagnosed his mistake by saying that Peter was thinking of the things of men rather than of the things of God. The things of God would be clear to Peter much later, when he would write, "Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sin, might live unto righteousness" (**1 Peter 2:24**).

One lesson of stark and overwhelming power that flows out of this strange rebuke of Peter is that temptation does not always come through one's enemies, but may also come through the most faithful and intimate of earthly companions. Peter's sad role in this incident shows how easily the best of friends and the most intimate of loved ones may become the instruments of evil, however unintentionally. Jesus' firm words to Peter suggest that the temptation to himself in that case was sharp and persuasive, since it was founded in earthly logic, fortified with the natural repugnance to death in the mind of Christ, and rejected out of hand by his best disciples. The temptation, conveyed through Peter's words here, remained and was present in that bitter cup in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:39**).

## Verse 24

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

Christ had just commanded Peter to get behind him; and immediately, Christ made the cross a necessary condition of discipleship. Not Peter, nor any other man, nor even Christ himself (as a man) can avoid it. Cross-bearing is widely misunderstood. It is not old age, poverty, taxes, illness, or bad weather, or any other discomfiture of life that comes unavoidably into the lives of men. It is the acceptance, for the sake of the will of God, of some burden or burdens, otherwise avoidable, but which are undertaken out of a pure desire to fulfill the Master's purpose. The centrality of the cross in Christ's religion was here affirmed by Christ at the very moment when one of his most beloved apostles had spoken against it.

## Verse 25

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

What emperor or general ever announced a proposition like that? These words forcibly imply, even demand, an understanding that Christ is God. Only God could make good on such a promise.

Origen said:

If anyone, as being a lover of life, and thinking that the present life is good, tends carefully his own life with a view to living in the flesh, ... this man ... will lose it, placing it outside of the borders of blessedness.<sup>[9]</sup>

The total dedication of the total man to God's total purpose, though it might (and sometimes does) result in death, nevertheless leads to eternal life. This is not merely saving one's life but gaining eternal life at the same time.

### ENDNOTE:

[9] Ibid., p. 464.

## Verse 26

**For what shalt a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shalt a man give in exchange for his life?**

The true meaning of this appears clearer in the King James Version which uses "soul" instead of "life." Man possesses a body, but he is a soul. A soul is of more value than the whole world, as Jesus said. The truth of this appears through the application of any of the common criteria for determining value:

<SIZE=4> **COST:** It cost the blood of Christ to redeem one soul.

**PERMANENCE:** A soul will exist until the worlds have passed away.

**AFFECTION:** God loved the soul enough to reclaim it.

**UNIQUENESS:** No two souls are identical.**SIZE**>

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## Verse 27

**For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds.**

Christ stated above that he would come in the glory of God with his angels. Could a mere man have said that? This can be nothing less than a prophecy of the general resurrection and judgment of the last day. The basis of that judgment shall include (1) the word of Christ (**John 12:48**), and (2) the deeds done in the body (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). No number of angels is indicated in this place, but "ten thousand" is the number given in **Jude 1:14**. Even that could be a perfect number signifying an infinitely greater number.

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## Verse 28

**Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.**

Mark's account of this statement is, "Verily I say unto you, there are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (**Mark 9:1**).

Both the Herald and Christ preached the kingdom as "at hand." The passage here supplemented that information by making it certain to appear during the lives of "some" of the apostles. Why not merely "during their lives?" that is, the lives of all of them? That was because both Judas and Christ would die before the kingdom came. Thus, the words are circumstantially accurate and precise.

Incidental to the assertion here, but inherent in it due to the terminology used, is the revelation that the kingdom would not be set up during the personal ministry of Christ, but afterwards. The kingdom did appear on the day of Pentecost, during the lives of "some" of them, just as Jesus had said. The reference to the kingdom in the passage here makes its establishment in the future; but after the day of Pentecost, all references to God's kingdom are in the present tense, speaking of it as a reality, or in the past tense, making it already in existence. See **Colossians 1:13**; **Hebrews 12:28**; **Revelation 1:9** for examples of this. Remember that the church and the kingdom are one.

This chapter brings us to the heart of Matthew's gospel. Christ's deity was recognized and confessed. Satan's effort to thwart the crucifixion was countermanded (even though suggested by Peter), and the cross of Jesus was made central in his holy religion. The outline of the passion and resurrection, as well as a revealing glimpse of the day of judgment, are given by Christ in this portion of his word. This chapter has been called the hub of the gospel of Matthew.

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