



# Following Jesus

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SAVIOR OF  
THE WORLD SENT BY GOD.

## **MATTHEW 16:13-26**

The world is made up of leaders and followers. The majority of us are followers. As followers, it is critically important who we follow. History is replete with people who followed others to destruction and death. Leaders like Jim Jones of the Jonestown massacre, cult leader Charles Manson of the murderous Manson family, or David Koresh of the Branch Davidian tragedy, all led their followers to disaster. Each of us must choose leaders wisely. Follow those who lead to life and not to death. You'll be glad you did!



**What are the traits of leaders you want to follow?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## MATTHEW 16:1-28

Matthew 16 begins with another confrontation. Matthew introduced another group who opposed Jesus: the Sadducees. These leaders of Judaism were the wealthy aristocrats. Their political party oversaw the temple. From this group came the high priest and the high priestly family. They were the power-brokers of Judaism. They were conservative in their approach to Scripture and rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees. They sought to follow only the writings of Moses.

These Sadducees had teamed up with the Pharisees, their archenemies, to trap and eliminate Jesus. In verse 1, they asked Jesus for “a sign from heaven.” Although Jesus had performed many miraculous signs, they were not really interested. They simply wanted to get rid of Jesus.

After a scathing condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 2-4), Jesus withdrew with the disciples to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 5). Their journey would take them north to the area of Caesarea Philippi, where the events in this week’s study take place. Thus began a new phase in the ministry of Jesus. From Caesarea Philippi, Jesus would travel south directly to Jerusalem. This move signaled the end of the Galilean ministry and the beginning of the final weeks of Jesus’s earthly life, culminating in His arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem.

At some point on the trip to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus warned the disciples about the teachings, “the leaven” (v. 6), of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples missed the intent of Jesus and thought He was chiding them for not bringing food with them for the journey. Jesus reminded them of the baskets of leftovers from the two miraculous feedings He had performed. Matthew used two different terms for “baskets” (vv. 9-10), pointing to the probability that the feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21) took place among Jews, while the feeding of the four thousand (15:32-39) took place in Gentile territory.



**Read Matthew 16:13-26. Contrast the opinion of the Pharisees and Sadducees and the opinion of the disciples regarding Jesus.**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## KNOW THE MESSIAH (MATT. 16:13-20)

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

<sup>14</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.

<sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah.

### VERSE 13

The ancient city of •*Caesarea Philippi* was prominent for its many shrines and worship centers of a variety of pagan gods. Later it became an early center for the beginnings of emperor worship for the Romans. Quite possibly Jesus intentionally used the backdrop of all this religious fervor to ask the disciples their opinion of Himself.

The phrase *Son of Man* was the most-used designation of Jesus to point to His identity as God’s Messiah. Jesus clearly embraced this title for Himself. It speaks of His dual nature of being fully God and fully man. Jesus used His question and this occasion to sharpen the understanding of the disciples concerning who He is.

### VERSE 14

The disciples gave a variety of answers they had heard from the crowds. *John the Baptist* had been executed by Herod Antipas some time before this, thus the identification that this was John the Baptist raised from the dead. The same would be true of the other names mentioned. Malachi prophesied that *Elijah* would appear before the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). John the Baptist also spoke of this anticipation but denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21). *Jeremiah*, who preached judgment and was oppressed by his

enemies, was also mentioned as well as **one of the prophets**. Obviously, the crowds were trying to comprehend who Jesus really was. He spoke for God, He performed miracles, and He rebuked the current religious establishment. Yet He had not given any indication that He would soon lead a revolution against Rome on behalf of the Jewish people.

The common belief was that one or more of these prophets would serve as a forerunner to the Messiah. Thus, the crowd most likely thought Jesus was a forerunner to the Messiah and not the Messiah Himself. They struggled to embrace Him as Messiah because He didn't fit their profile.

### VERSES 15-16

Jesus turned to the opinion of the disciples. **But**, in contrast to the crowds, **who do you say that I am?** The pronoun *you* is emphatic and plural. This was a question for all the disciples. By now, they ought to have had a clearer understanding of Jesus than the multitudes did.

Peter answered on behalf of all the disciples. This is the only place where Matthew calls him **Simon Peter**. This more formal sounding name prepares the reader for the twist on Peter's name that Jesus used in verse 18.

Peter declared that Jesus was **the Messiah**. In the Greek, this word means "the Christ." The name *Christ* (taken from the Greek *Christos*) means "the Anointed One." Peter acknowledged that Jesus was uniquely the Messiah; there is one and only one Messiah. The name pointed to the Deliverer who was coming from God.

Peter also acknowledged that Jesus was **the Son of the living God**. The use of the definite article "the" pointed to the fact that Jesus is uniquely the Son and there is no other. *Living* points to the perpetual nature of God—He has always existed and will always exist.

### VERSES 17-18

Jesus called Peter **blessed** and declared that his answer was given under the Father's inspiration. There was no human intuition or consultation used, nothing of **flesh and blood** (meaning from human resources).

Verse 18 is one of the most debated passages in the Gospels. The debate centers around the interpretation of Jesus's statement, **on this rock I will build my church**. The issue revolves around who or what Jesus was referring to with the term *this rock*.

One explanation uses the difference in the name **Peter** (*petros* in Greek, meaning an isolated rock or small stone) and the Greek term *rock* (*petra*, meaning cliff or massive rock). Using the difference in these two terms, the thought is that the “massive” rock Jesus referred to was either Himself as the foundation stone for the church (see Acts 4:10-12) or the confession of Peter that Jesus was the Messiah. However, the play on words *Peter* (masculine form of *petra*) and the root word *petra* (feminine) is not present in Aramaic, which is most likely the language Jesus spoke. Aramaic only has one word for rock.

A second interpretation is that Jesus was speaking of Peter as the rock. Following the conventional rules of Greek grammar, the words **you are Peter** immediately followed by the declaration *on this rock* would indicate that Peter is the rock. The Gospels and the first chapters of Acts point to Peter as being the recognized leader of the apostles. Peter, however, most certainly was used as a representative of all the disciples. They were the ones Jesus was training to continue the movement He had begun. While Peter and the apostles would be foundational to the church in a unique sense, Jesus is uniquely the cornerstone of the church. (See Eph. 2:20.)

This is the first usage of the term *church* in the New Testament. Matthew will use the term two more times in Matthew 18:17. These occasions are the only use of the word in the Gospels. The word *church* means “called-out ones.” The picture is that Jesus called His followers out of the kingdom of darkness and out of the world to be His unique family. Note also it is *my church* that Jesus would build. He is the head (Col. 2:19) and the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20) of the church.

The church that Jesus builds will withstand any onslaught from Satan. This is seen in the statement **the gates of Hades** cannot destroy Christ’s church. The meaning behind **overpower it** is to “have strength against” or “to prevail against.” Nothing will be able to stop the growth of the church.

## VERSES 19-20

Peter again is representative of all the disciples, and for that matter all believers. Jesus has given to the church He established the **keys** or the authority to **bind** and **loose**, or to close and open. Note that the **keys** are to the **kingdom of heaven**. This, of course, represents the rule and reign of God in the hearts of men and women who are a part of God’s family.

The idea, then, of binding and loosing relates to entrance into God's kingdom. The apostles and prophets, and for that matter all believers, open the kingdom or close the kingdom to others through witnessing and proclamation of the good news of Christ. Such action will also involve assurance of forgiveness to those who were enslaved to sin (see John 20:23).

Here is another instance Jesus gave the command to **tell no one** concerning His identity (Matt. 8:4; Mark 7:36; 9:9). Jesus was aware that He was part of a timetable that must play out during His time on earth. This particular moment was not the proper time for revealing Jesus's identity as the Son of God. There would be time for that later.



**Why is it important to understand who Jesus is?**

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## **EMBRACE HIS MISSION** (MATT. 16:21-23)

<sup>21</sup> **From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.** <sup>22</sup> **Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!”** <sup>23</sup> **Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.”**

### **VERSES 21-23**

**From then on.** . . . This was the turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Not only is this the transition point between the Galilean ministry and the events in Jerusalem, but it is also a shift in focus for Jesus. No longer are His teachings about the kingdom and His compassionate healings the central thrust. Now Jesus's life moved rapidly toward the real reason He came. It was **necessary** for him to **suffer** and **be killed** and then **be raised** from the dead.

Presumably **Peter** knew what was best for Jesus and took it upon himself to **rebuke** Jesus for speaking of His impending death. This may have arisen from Peter's brash personality, or his supposed “authority” he had received from Jesus calling him the “rock.” Or it could have arisen out of love for Jesus and fear of the future.

Jesus rebuked Peter using very similar words of rebuke given to Satan in Matthew 4:10. Peter took the perspective of Satan in trying to keep Jesus from carrying out God's plan of salvation. In rebuking Peter, Jesus was really, once again, rebuking Satan and denouncing this latest temptation thrown His way.



## How do we let our own agendas replace God's greater plans?



### KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His substitutionary death on the cross Christ made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

## BECOME HIS DISCIPLE (MATT. 16:24-26)

<sup>24</sup> **Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.**

<sup>25</sup> **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it.** <sup>26</sup> **For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?”**

### VERSE 24

Jesus set His face toward the suffering that awaited Him. He also knew that the path of following Him would lead many of His followers to suffer also. His warning to them was that following Him would involve self-sacrifice and even suffering.

Those who follow Him must **deny** themselves. This points to a denunciation of self being on the throne of one's life instead of God. God comes first. The follower seeks to live life fully under the lordship of Christ in following God's will in all aspects of life.

The one who follows Jesus must also **take up his cross** in absolute abandonment to whatever lay ahead. The cross was an instrument of death. The follower of Christ must be ready and willing to pay any price that following Jesus might bring. It certainly involved suffering and even the possibility of death. Many of those following Jesus would experience this all too soon.

## VERSES 25-26

Following Jesus involves quite the paradox. Through a willingness to **lose** his life through unconditional obedience to Christ, one will find eternal life. The one unwilling to sacrifice all for Jesus in an effort to **save his life**, will ultimately lose the eternal life promised through Jesus Christ. The paradox is that life comes through death and self-denial; death, on the other hand, comes to those seeking to live.

Verse 26 reinforces what Jesus taught in the prior verse. Using an amazing hyperbole, Jesus pictured a person gaining all that the world has to offer in riches, fame, security, and pleasure. Tragically none of this will rescue them at the end of life. Death and judgment will not be delayed by the accumulations of life.

The ultimate question in life is simply this: what are we willing to **exchange** to experience life to the fullest, now and for eternity? Don't settle for anything short of a total sell-out to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.



### What does it mean to deny ourselves and to carry our cross?



#### **BIBLE SKILL:** *Read, reflect on, and apply a Bible passage.*

Focus on Matthew 16:24. Identify the three qualifications for becoming a true disciple of Jesus. Reflect on the meaning of each qualification by responding to these questions: What does it mean to deny oneself? What are some things that hinder me from denying myself? What does it mean to take up your cross? What does it mean to follow Jesus? For you, what is the next step in following Jesus?

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + We cannot follow Jesus fully until we know and accept His true identity.
- + We cannot follow Jesus fully until we accept His mission as Messiah and Savior.
- + We cannot follow Jesus fully until we sacrifice our personal agendas to Him.

 **Discuss in your group about the various contemporary opinions regarding Jesus. Why do you think people hold these opinions about Jesus? Ask your group members why they hold their opinion about Jesus.**

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 **Jot down the costs of following Jesus. Then create a list of the costs of not following Jesus. Which will you choose?**

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**Memorize Matthew 16:24.**

*Prayer Needs*

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