

Matthew 16:1-28      “The Son of God and the Gates of Hell”  
Judges 15:9-16:3  
Psalm 49

June 14, 2015 (Peter)

Jesus said to Simon Peter,

“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,  
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

You see a picture of this in Judges 16.

Samson is certainly a flawed hero.

The text does not say what Samson was doing with the prostitute,  
but given what we know of Samson’s character,  
it’s probably exactly what it looks like.

But Samson is the one whose birth narrative reminds us a lot of Jesus –  
even down to the line, “he will begin to save his people from the Philistines” –  
which is echoed in Matthew’s “he will save his people from their sins.”

Here, Samson takes hold of the doors of the gate of Gaza and the two posts,  
and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders  
and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

Hebron is nearly forty miles away –

but Hebron is the city where David will first reign over Judah.

Gaza is one of the chief cities of the Philistines.

This is the city where Samson will die at the end of the chapter.

From the perspective of Israel – and David – the gates of Gaza are the gates of hell.

Pulling gates up, posts, bar, and all, is not something an ordinary mortal could do!  
City gates are designed to withstand an army.

So, perhaps it’s no surprise that the party of ambushers remains silent  
while Samson walks away with their city gate!

After all, in the previous chapter,

Samson killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey.

Just imagine how much damage he could do with a city gate as his weapon!

Will you attack him with a sword or spear?

You can’t get close to him before he smacks you with the gate post!

How about a bow and arrow?

He’s got a shield the size and thickness of a city gate!

No, thank you, we’ll just sit here and watch as our city gate walks away!

But this is a great illustration of what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 16:

The gates of hell will never prevail against the church of Jesus,

because Jesus is the divine warrior who has descended into hell,  
plucked up the gates, was raised from the dead,  
and ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father.

But the only way to glory is the way of the cross.

That was true for Jesus.

It is true for us as well.

“For whoever would save his life will lose it,

but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

We sing about that in Psalm 49.

Sing Psalm 49

Read Matthew 16

Are you ready to die?

I suspect most of us have a lot of things that we want to do first.

And it is a good thing to be useful in the kingdom of God while you are alive.

But the challenge of death is a good reminder to us –

It makes us ask ourselves, “whose kingdom are you seeking?”

Are you trying to “gain the whole world”?

Chapter 16 is the hinge of Matthew’s gospel.

In 4:17, we heard that “from that time Jesus began to preach, saying,  
‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

And for the last dozen chapters, we have heard about the Kingdom –  
and about the identity of the King –

but only now do we learn about his coming death and resurrection.

Now, in 16:21, Matthew uses the same formula:

“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.”

Everything in Matthew 5-15 is driving towards Matthew 16:21.

Most importantly for our text today,

Matthew 16:21 is what the Sign of Jonah is all about.

If you are going to understand how to listen to Jesus,

then you need to see the importance of the *cross* –  
and the importance of the *resurrection*.

## **1. Understanding Jesus’ Signs: How to Listen to Jesus (16:1-12)**

### **a. The Sign of Jonah (v1-4)**

*And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.*

We're back to this again!

People want a sign.

But as Stanley Hauerwas says, "They want a sign that can confirm Jesus's status without a sign requiring their lives to be changed." (147)

Jesus fed the 5,000 (a Jewish crowd) with five loaves.

He fed the 4,000 (a Gentile crowd) with seven loaves.

Those are pretty impressive signs.

But the Pharisees and Sadducees weren't there to see it!

So they're saying, "Hey, do that again!"

They want Jesus to show off his power –  
they *do not* want the power of Jesus to change *them*.

In other words, they do not wish to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

You cannot separate the message of Jesus – the good news of the kingdom –  
from the call to discipleship.

If you will not follow Jesus, then you will not understand the gospel.

If you insist on standing outside and judging the gospel message,  
then "you will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive." (Matthew 13:14)

Or, as Jesus said in the last chapter,

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (15:8)

Those who insist on a "sign from heaven" want Jesus to be their circus performer.

<sup>2</sup> *He answered them,*<sup>[a]</sup> "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'  
<sup>3</sup> *And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.* <sup>4</sup> *An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.*

Jesus has already mentioned the sign of Jonah, back in Matthew 12:39.

"Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,  
so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

The outward sign of Jonah is simply found in the burial of Jesus.

But what does that *mean*?

What is the *meaning* of the sign of Jonah?

Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach repentance to a *Gentile* city.

The sign of Jonah is going to mean salvation for the Gentiles – something that the Pharisees and Sadducees do *not* want to hear!

**b. The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (v5-12)**

<sup>5</sup> When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>7</sup> And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In chapter 12, Jesus spoke of the sign of Jonah.

In chapter 13, Jesus began to teach in parables – stories with hidden meanings.

In chapter 14, Jesus fed a Jewish crowd of 5,000 with five loaves – and with 12 baskets leftover (twelve and five are very Jewish numbers – twelve tribes of Israel/five books of Moses).

In chapter 15, Jesus fed a Gentile crowd of 4,000 with seven loaves – and 7 baskets leftover (seven and four are very universal numbers – seven days of creation, four ends of the earth).

Now, Jesus draws together the sign of Jonah and the feeding of the crowds: “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

The Pharisees and the Sadducees had very little in common.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body – the Sadducees did not.

The Pharisees were the party of strict legal observance.

They were the “conservatives” of their day.

The Sadducees were the party of compromise with Rome.

They were the “liberals” of their day.

But Jesus says that they have something in common that you must beware.

They want to make Jesus fit into their various political agendas.

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees think that what *matters* is the future of Jerusalem – the future of the earthly city.

The Pharisees think that Israel needs to be faithful to the Law of Moses – and then God will restore the Kingdom of David.

The Sadducees think that Israel needs to compromise with Rome – and that is how God will protect Jerusalem.

Both want to co-opt Jesus into their political vision of the future of Jerusalem.

And so Jesus says, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees –

beware of the teaching that tries to fit Jesus into the political agendas of this age!

So, how should we understand the sign of Jonah?

How should we listen to what Jesus is saying?

That is where Jesus turns next:

## 2. The Christ and the Cross (16:13-23)

First, we need to understand *who* Jesus is.

### a. Jesus Is the Christ – Peter the Rock (v13-20)

<sup>13</sup> *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* <sup>14</sup> *And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* <sup>15</sup> *He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”* <sup>16</sup> *Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

You are the Messiah – the Anointed One.

You are the Son of the living God.

For once, Peter gets it right!

At the baptism of Jesus, the Father declared:

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Now, Simon Peter recognizes Jesus as the Son of the living God –  
and Jesus answers:

<sup>17</sup> *And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*

Others had already figured out that Jesus was the Messiah – the Christ.

But Peter is the first to figure out that Jesus is the Christ, the *Son of the living God*.

Peter does not yet necessarily grasp the full doctrine of the Trinity,

but he does understand that Jesus is divine in a way  
that no son of David had been before.

And this revelation was not something that Peter “figured out.”

It was revealed by “my Father who is in heaven.”

God chose to reveal this to Peter because God had a special purpose for Peter.

Peter’s name, after all, was *Simon* –

but Jesus gave him a new name: Peter (which means “rock”).

<sup>18</sup> *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock<sup>[b]</sup> I will build my church, and the gates of hell<sup>[c]</sup> shall not prevail against it.*

“You are Petros, and on this petra I will build my church.”

Some people try to say that the “rock” is not Peter, but Peter’s confession.

In one sense, yes, obviously it is Peter’s confession – the message of the gospel –  
that is at the heart of the church.

But anyone who heard Jesus’ words –

and anyone who read Matthew’s gospel –

would immediately think that *Peter* had something to do with this “petra.”

And this is true especially because of verse 19:

*<sup>19</sup>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<sup>[d]</sup> in heaven.” <sup>20</sup>Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

The “you” in verse 19 is singular.

Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom to *Peter*.

Roman Catholics like to make a big deal about this,

but I don’t see why,

since the Bible *never* suggests that the Bishop of *Rome*

has any special place in the church!

The fact that Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom to *Peter* is very important.

What are keys for?

Keys are for locking and unlocking.

Binding and loosing are a slightly different thing.

Binding and loosing has to do with church discipline.

But the keys of the kingdom are used to unlock doors.

What doors do they unlock?

Well, the book of Acts speaks of how the apostles will be Jesus’ witnesses  
in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In Acts 2, Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost –

and the Spirit is poured out on the Jews.

In Acts 8, Philip preaches to the Samaritans,

but the Spirit is only poured out on the Samaritans when *Peter* arrives.

In Acts 10, Peter is sent to Cornelius – the Gentile –

and the Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles when *Peter* preaches to them.

The keys of the kingdom were given to Peter –

and Peter has opened the door of salvation to the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles.

The door of salvation is now open to the whole human race.

In Matthew 18 we’ll hear Jesus extend the power of binding and loosing to the Twelve –  
and, indeed, to the church as a whole.

So the power of binding and loosing – the power of excommunication and restoration –

belongs to the whole church.

But the basic power of the keys was entrusted to Peter alone.  
Jesus gave it to Peter.  
Peter did what Jesus commanded.  
And it's done.

Anyone who claims to have the power to unlock or lock the kingdom of God  
is an imposter and a fraud.

All you have to do is look at the epistles:  
in 1 Corinthians, Paul shows us that the church *should* discipline  
those who stubbornly and impenitently remain in sin.

The power of binding and loosing continues to operate in the church.

But you *never* see any of the apostles speak of people groups who remain “outsiders”  
because of their ethnicity.  
Even the barbarians – even the Scythians –  
are included among those who are now one in Christ by faith.

So we should not hesitate to say that Jesus called Peter (because of his confession!)  
the *rock* on which he would build the church.  
Because scripture itself makes clear that Peter *was* the one  
who used the keys of the kingdom  
to open the door of faith to the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles.

But that day is still a long ways away!

In verses 21-23, Peter demonstrates that he still doesn't *really* understand what is going on!

#### **b. Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection – Peter the Satan (v21-23)**

<sup>21</sup> *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.*

<sup>22</sup> *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord!<sup>[e]</sup> This shall never happen to you.”* <sup>23</sup> *But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance<sup>[f]</sup> to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

Peter may be a rock,  
but sometimes a rock is something that you trip over!  
And in verse 23, Jesus says that Peter is a stumbling block!

Peter is beginning to understand who Jesus *is*,  
but he does not yet understand what Jesus must *do*.

Verse 21 is a hinge in Matthew's gospel that begins to make that transition.

In Matthew 4:17, we heard,

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying,  
‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

And for the last 12 chapters we have heard about the kingdom of heaven –  
and about who Jesus *is*.

Now, in Matthew 16:21, we hear,

“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 for the next several chapters this will be the central theme.

Jesus has hinted quite a bit at the importance of *suffering*.

But this is the first time that he comes out and says  
that he must die and be raised from the dead.

Peter seems to take to his newfound role with great gusto.

“Well, now, Jesus, you've appointed me as your right hand man,  
so it's my duty to tell you that this is *not* the right way to establish your kingdom!”

Peter does not yet understand the way of the cross.

He still thinks like a Pharisee or a Sadducee.

He still thinks that power and glory come by *action* and taking charge.

In other words, he thinks like Satan...

Satan, who had tempted Jesus to take the active route to glory –

“turn these stones into bread”

“cast yourself from the pinnacle of the temple”

“worship me, and I will give you the kingdoms of the earth.”

Do anything you want – just do not go to the cross!

If you set your mind on the things of God, then the way of the cross makes sense:

### **3. “Deny Yourself, Take Up Your Cross, and Follow Me” – The Way of the Disciple (16:24-28)**

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

The cross was a common way for the Romans to execute political prisoners.

They especially liked using it for *Jews*

because of that line in Deuteronomy,

“Cursed be anyone who is hanged on a tree.”

Since the Jews believed that those hanged on a tree were cursed by God,



the Romans had figured out that if you *crucify* Jewish rebels,  
then the Jews do not think of those rebels as *martyrs*!

So, even before Jesus himself had been crucified,  
this call would have meant something significant.

“Take up your cross” –  
Are you ready to be cursed by God?  
Are you ready to follow me to a horrible death at the hands of the Romans,  
that will result in your families considering you accursed by God?

That’s why Jesus says in verses 25-26:

*<sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life<sup>[g]</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*

The Pharisees teach that strict observance of the Law will redeem Jerusalem.

A strict moral code is what will protect our country.

The Sadducees teach that cooperating with Rome will save Jerusalem.

Just go with the flow and God will work everything out.

The politics of this age would push you to sign up for one agenda or the other.

But Jesus will judge according to an entirely different standard.

*<sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. <sup>28</sup> Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*

We’ll come back to this next time – at the Transfiguration!

But the fundamental point is that the Son of Man is coming in the glory of his Father,  
and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

The preposition is important.

Scripture regularly speaks of a judgment *according to* what you have done.

Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:10,

“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,  
so that each one may receive what is due  
for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:17,

“if you call on him as Father who judges impartially  
*according to each one’s deeds...*”

Jesus says in Revelation 2:23,

“I will give to each of you according to your works.”

And John says in Revelation 20:12,

“the dead were judged by what was written in the books,

*according to what they had done.”*

The preposition “according to” is important  
because it emphasizes the “fittingness” of the judgment.

We are not judged *based* on our works.

The basis for our justification before God is the imputed righteousness of Christ!

But at the final judgment, the verdict will be *according to what you have done*.

Those who are in Christ, of course, have had their sins forgiven –

so the only thing that God will see at the final judgment

are those good works that God created you for in Christ Jesus

as Revelation 19:8 says,

“it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure –

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

How can the Bride be dressed in fine linen – in “righteous deeds”?

Because she has been washed in the blood of the Lamb!

Because Christ *is* our righteousness –

therefore God justifies both us *and* our deeds,

so that when we are judged *according to what we have done*,

we will be openly acknowledged and acquitted before God.

This is why it is so important that you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

The resurrection was not good enough for Peter.

Peter wanted a “better” outcome for Jesus.

But Jesus tells you that there is no better outcome!

If you seek to save your lives using the means that the world offers,  
then your lives will be lost.

“Jesus is not telling his disciples that if they learn to live unselfishly  
they will live more satisfying lives.

Rather, he says that any sacrifices they make must be done for his sake.

The crosses they bear must be ones determined by his cross.” (Hauerwas, 153)

“What Jesus asks of his disciples makes no sense if Jesus is not who he says he is.

You do not ask those who follow you to follow you to a cross

unless you are the Son of God.” (H, 153)

But Jesus demands that you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him.

There is no time to “ask for signs.”

There is no room for “let me think about it for a while.”

Jesus calls.

Will you follow?