

Who is Jesus, and what did he come to do?

Matthew 16

The Pharisees and Sadducees demand signs (Matthew 16 v 1 to 4)

“The Pharisees *and* Sadducees” (v 1) – this is a strange alliance, since the Pharisees were the extreme conservative, ultra-religious Jews, whereas the Sadducees were the more liberal materialists, who did not believe in miracles or the resurrection, and who collaborated with the Romans for political gain. Normally these two groups were in opposition, but here we see them united against a common enemy – Jesus...

- What did Jesus mean by “the signs of the times” (v 3)? Why did he condemn the Jews for their failure to interpret them? See Luke 19 v 41 to 44. Why is the “sign of Jonah” (v 4) significant?

The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16 v 5 to 12)

The ‘law of expositional constancy’ in Scripture means that a term or idiom tends to retain the same meaning throughout the Bible. ‘Leaven’ (yeast) is an idiom for sin (particularly the sin of pride, which ‘puffs up’ in the same way that yeast puffs up dough), or corruption of an insidious nature – see 1 Corinthians 5 v 6 to 8.

- What specifically was the “leaven’ of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (v 6, 11)? What did the disciples fail to understand and why?

Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16 v 13 to 20)

- Why would people think that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or some other prophet? What answers do people give today when asked who Jesus is? So, who really *is* Jesus?

There is a play on words here: in verse 18 Jesus calls Simon Πέτρος (*Petros*, or Peter), meaning ‘that which is hewn out of a rock’ i.e. a stone; but then (perhaps pointing to himself) he goes on to say that he will build his church upon this Πέτρα (*Petra*), meaning ‘the rock out of which a stone is hewn’. So who is this Rock? See 1 Corinthians 3 v 11, 1 Corinthians 10 v 4, Ephesians 2 v 20, 1 Peter 2 v 4 to 7. Why is this last reference (from 1 Peter) so significant?

The idea behind the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” is not that Peter will admit people into heaven, but that by preaching the gospel Peter will open heaven’s door to both Jews (Acts 2 v 38, 39) and Gentiles (Acts 11 v 15 to 18). The charge Jesus gives Peter to ‘bind’ and ‘loose’ (v 19) he later gives to *all* the disciples – see Matthew 18 v 18.

Jesus foretells his death and resurrection (Matthew 16 v 21 to 23)

- Immediately following Peter’s declaration, Jesus explains what must happen to him. Why does Peter react so strongly to what Jesus has said? Why does Jesus respond to Peter so harshly?

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Take up your cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16 v 24 to 28)

- What does Jesus say is the cost of true discipleship (v 24)? How would the disciples have interpreted the words “take up his cross”? What rewards does Jesus promise (v 25 to 28), and what encouragement would this give? Seeing the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (v 28) probably refers to the Transfiguration in Matthew 17.

Are you self-centred or Christ-centred? Here Jesus presents us with a ‘grown-up’ gospel – one that does not pander to our desires, but which challenges us at the deepest level. Jim Elliot was an American missionary to the Waodani Indians in Ecuador. In 1956, at the age of 26, he was killed by the people he sought to evangelise, along with four fellow missionaries.

A few years previously he expressed in his journal his belief that missions work was more important than his life; he wrote: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.”