

Teaching in Anticipation of Rejection

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in Christ amidst rejection and the true nature of discipleship.

Scripture: Matthew 16:1-24

Topics: "Discipleship Principles", "Church Foundation"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the encounters of Jesus with the Pharisees and Sadducees, highlighting their attempts to trap Him with requests for signs from heaven, showcasing their spiritual blindness and unbelief despite witnessing miracles. Jesus warns against being influenced by the evil teachings of these religious leaders, emphasizing the importance of discernment and faith in Him. He then reveals the foundation of the church, clarifying that it is built upon the confession of faith in Him as the Son of the living God, not on Peter as a pope. Jesus foretells His death and resurrection, teaching His disciples the principles of discipleship, emphasizing the necessity of self-denial, taking up the cross, and following Him, with the promise of future rewards according to one's works.

Transcript

Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign, 16:1-4

The Pharisees, who had questioned the disciples' disregard of their traditions, now joined by the Sadducees, sought to trap Jesus into giving them a sign from heaven. This was the first time the Pharisees and Sadducees, usually in disagreement, joined hands to trap Jesus.⁷² Earlier (Mt 12:38), they had asked for a sign and were given the sign of the prophet Jonah, with its prediction of the death and resurrection of Christ. Their asking for a sign indicated that they were unimpressed by the miracles and teaching of Christ, the very credentials predicted in the Old Testament.

Jesus, in His reply, alluded to their spiritual stupidity. He pointed out that when it came to seeing signs relating to weather, they could understand; but when it came to the signs of the times, they were unable to relate intelligently to them.

In closing His comments, Christ said that a wicked and adulterous generation will not be given a sign, except the sign He had given them earlier when they had asked the same question, the sign of the prophet Jonah. Although the Pharisees were not accused of being adulterers, spiritually, they were in the same state as those who had no morality and no religion. If He had given them some miraculous sign from

heaven, they would have returned to the same accusation recorded in Matthew 12:24, that it was a miracle accomplished only by the power of Satan. Faith is not given to those who are seeking support for unbelief.

Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, 16:5-12

According to Mark 8-10, the Pharisees had questioned Him while in Dalmanutha, located on the west shore of Galilee. Upon conclusion of His exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus and His disciples again proceeded by boat to the eastern shore. When they arrived, the disciples found that they had forgotten to take bread (Mt 16:5). This would not have been so serious near Capernaum, but the eastern shore was relatively unpopulated.

Using this as an occasion for driving home a spiritual point, Jesus warned them against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples thought He was referring to the fact that they had taken no bread. Jesus rebuked them for their concern, reminding them of the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. He went on to state that He was warning them of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Leaven here, as elsewhere in the Scripture, is a symbol of permeating evil. They were not to be influenced by the infection of unbelief derived from these religious leaders.

Prediction of the Church, 16:13-20

Proceeding north and east from the Sea of Galilee, Christ came to the borders of Caesarea Philippi. There He questioned His disciples about their faith in Him, as also recorded in Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21. He drew out of them first what others had said about Him. The response had been varied. Some people had considered Him John the Baptist raised from the dead, others Elijah the prophet, others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. Only Matthew mentions Jeremiah.

Having prepared the way, Jesus then asked the important question, "But whom say ye that I am?" In reply, Simon Peter, frequently the spokesman for the twelve, declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Only Matthew adds the expression, "of the living God."

Pronouncing a blessing on Peter as the one who had received this revelation from God the Father, Jesus made the important announcement about the church, which was not recorded in the narratives of the other gospels. He said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

As The Anchor Bible states, there is a "play on words" in the Greek of Matthew which is not clear in the English translation.⁷³ Peter (Petros) means a loose stone. The "rock" is *petra*, a large or massive rock, like a cliff. The passage has often been cited to indicate the primacy of Peter as the first pope and the justification for the whole system built upon this concept. It is clear from other Scripture, however, that the rock upon which Christ intended to build is Himself, the solid rock, not Peter, one stone in the church composed of many living stones (1 Pe 2:5). What Jesus said, then, was, "Thou art a little rock, and upon this massive rock [pointing to Himself] I will build my church."

It was not Peter upon which the church would be built but upon the person to whom Peter had witnessed in his confession of faith, Christ, the Son of the living God. As Lenski puts it,

The church does not rest on a quality found in Peter and in others like him... The church is not built on the confession her members make, which would change the effect into the cause. By her confession the

church shows on what she is built. She rests on the reality which Peter confessed, namely, "the Christ, the Son of the living God."⁷⁴

Some Protestants, however, continue to interpret this as referring to Peter, not as a pope, but as a believer of the first generation, a stone upon which others can build.⁷⁵ In any case, the evidence in support of Peter as a bishop of Rome is lacking.

The dynamic words, "I will build my church," significantly are found in the gospel of Matthew, which more than the other gospels is given to the explanation of why the promised kingdom of the Old Testament was not brought in at the first coming of Christ. Here Matthew is introducing very simply the concept which is developed in the upper room discourse, John 13-17, and in the Acts and epistles, that God has a present purpose to be fulfilled in calling out His church, before the ultimate kingdom purpose is fulfilled.

The fact that Christ stated it as a future purpose indicates that His present ministry was not building the church, and, accordingly, even the mystery form of the kingdom was not precisely the same as the church.

As H. A. Ironside expresses it, "The building of this spiritual temple did not begin until after He had ascended to heaven, and the Spirit of God came as the promised Comforter."⁷⁶

The word build is also significant because it implies the gradual erection of the church under the symbolism of living stones being built upon Christ, the foundation stone, as indicated in 1 Peter 2:4-8. This was to be the purpose of God before the second coming, in contrast to the millennial kingdom, which would follow the second coming. Against this program of God, the gates of hell (hades) will not be able to hold out. Amillenarians tend to ignore this momentous declaration. Tasker, for instance, leaves it without a comment.⁷⁷

After this great pronouncement, Christ added, "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" (Mt 16:19). In this declaration, Christ was making clear the authority and important place of Peter as having the message which unlocks the entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

This, however, is no justification for attributing to Peter authority which was not shared with the other disciples. Although the singular is used here in the word thee, in 18:18, a similar pronouncement is made using ye, applying to all the disciples. In a sense, every believer who has the gospel has the right to declare that those who believe the gospel are loosed on earth as well as in heaven, and to declare that those who reject the gospel are bound in earth as well as in heaven.

Jesus concluded His discourse on this important theme by charging His disciples not to tell anyone that He was Jesus the Christ. This strange command for silence is probably best understood as meaning that it was not propitious at this point to spread further the claim that He was indeed the Messiah. The time would come when they would proclaim it fearlessly, even though it would lead most of them ultimately to a martyr's death.

Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection, 16:21-23

In anticipation of His ultimate rejection, Jesus repeated here earlier warnings concerning His death and coming resurrection. Mark 8:31-33 and Luke 9:22 refer to the same incident. Peter, having risen to great heights of faith in the preceding context, then demonstrated his lack of understanding by rebuking Jesus. In contrast to Christ's commendation of Peter, in Matthew 16:17-18, Jesus here rebuked Peter, "Get thee

behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." The problem here was lack of spiritual discernment so common to man but not in keeping with Peter's place of leadership among the disciples. Like many modern readers of the Bible, Peter did not want to accept what did not agree with his hopes and ambitions. The disciples who had been led to faith in the person of Christ were not yet prepared to accept His work on the cross.

Earlier, Jesus had spoken of this in veiled language, as when He predicted that if the Jews destroyed the temple, He would raise it again in three days (Jn 2:18-22). This had occurred two years before. To Nicodemus, who came with his questions, in John 3, Jesus had said that He had to be lifted up, even as the serpent in the wilderness, in order to save those who believed in Him (vv. 14-18). In His interchange with the Pharisees, in Matthew 12:38-41, He had indicated that He would spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth. The same thought had been repeated in Matthew 16:4. Now, however, the time had come to speak plainly. Their faith in Him would have to be more than confidence that He was the Messiah of Israel. They would also have to believe that He was the Lamb of God, who had come to take away this sin of the world.

Cost and Reward of Discipleship, 16:24-28

After introducing the fact of His death, Jesus proceeded to teach His disciples the basic principles of discipleship. Parallel accounts are found in Mark 8:34-38 and Luke 9:23-26. He had taught them earlier on the same subject (Mt 10:21-42). Discipleship would not immediately fulfill glorious expectations of reigning with Christ in His kingdom or being in places of power and influence. The road to glory is a road of suffering, He taught them. It is only by losing one's life that one is able to save it. The principles of spiritual triumph differ from the principles of worldly triumph. Negatively, one must deny himself; positively, he must take up his cross and follow Jesus.

As the road to triumph differs for a disciple, so also does the reward. For the world, there is immediate gain but ultimate loss: for the disciple, there is immediate loss but ultimate gain. As Jesus pointed out, ultimately the man who loses his own soul in the process of gaining the whole world is exchanging his future glory for a temporary reward.

Reaching forward prophetically to the time of His second coming, Jesus declared, "Then he shall reward every man according to his works" (16:27). This applies both to the lost soul and to the one who is saved. Having prophetically reached out to the consummation, He then made the present application in the closing verse of chapter 16, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Jesus was not saying, as some have construed it, that the second coming would occur before those of His generation tasted death. He was introducing, rather, the transfiguration of chapter 17, which anticipated, in vision, the glory of the Son of man coming in His kingdom.

Taken as a whole, chapter 16 is symbolic of the broad Christian point of view of life, with its suffering and rejection by the world, the opposition of unbelief, the testing of being a disciple now, and the promise of future glory and blessing. After the cross would come the glory of the resurrection and the coming kingdom. While there are many present blessings in being a believer, the best is yet ahead.

72 Edwin W. Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 163.

73 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible*, Vol. 26, *Matthew*, p. 195.

74 R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 626.

75 Rice, pp. 168-69.

76 H. A. Ironside, Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 206.

77 R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 161.

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