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## INTRODUCTION

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Two of the most important questions we can ask about the Gospel is: “*Who is Jesus*” and “*What has He come to do*”? These two questions are as relevant today as they were in the 1st century when Jesus walked the earth. How you answer these questions is not a matter of academic interest or something to stimulate conversation. The answer to these two questions will impact the entire course of your life and carries eternal significance. It will not just impact you personally, but also our entire church community. It will shape how you relate to every person around you.

In many ways, the Gospels aim to unpack Jesus’ identity and mission; specifically in relation to God’s covenants and promises as revealed in the Old Testament. Matthew is no exception. From the start, Matthew states that this account is about: “*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (1:1) who is also “*Immanuel (which means, God with us)*” (1:23). His mission will be to, “*save his people from their sins*” (1:21). The rest of Matthew’s Gospel unpacks these claims.

During the Christmas of 2019 we started our journey in Matthew’s Gospel. We have completed two sections of Matthew (Matthew 1-7 and 8-13). Now, in 2022, we recommence our journey, exploring Matthew 14-18.

Many of the themes in Matthew 14-18 have already appeared in Matthew 1-13. Yet, Matthew 14-18 zones in on two major themes. You can break Matthew 14-18 into two parts ...

- i. Matthew 14:1-17:13 focuses on **Jesus' identity and mission** (Who is Jesus, what has He come to do and how do people respond to Him?). The focal point is Matthew 16:16 - "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"
- ii. Matthew 17:14-18:35 focuses on **Jesus' people (the church)**. If you want to become a follower of King Jesus, then what does that imply?

Knowing Jesus' identity and mission shapes who we are as His people (the church). Jesus' third block of teaching (Matt. 18) focuses exclusively on the church as the continuation of Jesus' mission. If Jesus' mission is "*the forgiveness of sins*" (Matt. 26:28), then that should be the heartbeat of His church's mission too: "*forgive your brother from your heart*" (Matt. 18:35).

It is our prayer that as we discover who Jesus is and what He has come to do, we will also see who we are as a church family and what we are called to do here in the deep south of the Cape Peninsula.

In Christ,  
Carel Pienaar  
Phil. 1:21

**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 13:53-14:12**

# Who is Jesus? Rejection and Confusion



Matthew 13:53-14:12

# Who is Jesus? Rejection and Confusion

## STUDY 1

*“The one who speaks truth would be expelled from nine villages”* (Turkish Proverb)

1. What do you think of this proverb? How do you think it is applicable to talking about Jesus?



## Investigate

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### Read Matt 13:53-14:12...

1. Where is Jesus teaching? (13:53-54)
2. How was Jesus received by the people? (vv. 54-57)
3. Why did Jesus not perform miracles for them? (v. 58)
4. In 14:1-2, what is the newest misconception about Jesus' identity?
5. What parallels are there between what happened to John and what is happening / will happen to Jesus? (14:3-11)
6. We see misconceptions about Jesus' identity in our passage. Why are people unable to accept Jesus' identity? Think: Parable of the Sower (cf. Matt. 13:18-22).



# Thinking & Living

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1. Note how the people in 13:54-57 were amazed by Jesus' teaching, but still rejected Him...
  - a) What does this teach us about witnessing about Jesus?
  - b) What does it teach us about people?
  - c) What is needed for someone to see, believe, and follow Jesus? (cf. Matt. 11:25-27; 16:17)
2. The people were happy to listen and be amazed, but not so quick to take Jesus' words seriously. In what areas of your life do you tend to agree with Jesus, but not necessarily take Him seriously? Why is that the case?
3. John the Baptist in 14:3-12 faced some harsh consequences for standing up for the truth, and Jesus promises that, as His followers, we can expect rejection too (10:34-39). What kinds of rejection have you experienced for the Gospel?
4. In Matt. 13:53-14:12, Jesus is rejected and misunderstood. We can expect the same (cf. Matt. 10:24-25). How can the parable of the Sower encourage us to keep witnessing about Jesus? What can we expect? (cf. 13:23)

**FAMILY QUESTION:** Keeping this passage in mind, how would you explain to a child why people reject Jesus? And as followers of Jesus, what can we also expect?

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray for each other as you share the gospel – especially any in your group who might face opposition/rejection in doing so. Pray for boldness and clarity, as well as perseverance in sharing the Gospel.
- 2.** Pray for our church as we study God's Word together. Pray that we would not have misconceptions, but rather that we are able to accurately understand the Bible and the person and work of Christ - through diligent study, discussion, and faithful application.
- 3.** Pray for those who come into our church, that they are able to understand the amazing truths of God's Word.
- 4.** Pray for Jon, his family, and the rest of Southreach church in Muizenberg. Pray that they are prepared for any opposition they may face, and that they can continue to trust in Christ as their solid rock in these early stages of the church plant.
- 5.** Please pray for Friday night youth, that the kids who come (having never heard of Jesus before) will come away with an understanding of who He is and what He has done for them.





# Jesus' Yahweh-like words & works

One of the most important questions we need to answer is: "Who is Jesus?" How people have answered this question throughout the centuries has determined whether they are orthodox (believe the truth) or heterodox (believe heresy). The 'stumbling block' regarding Jesus' identity is His nature: is Jesus just a human being or is Jesus God as well?

In our contemporary society, most people can accept that Jesus was an influential human being or teacher. What they struggle with is the idea that Jesus is God as well. If Jesus is just a teacher, then we can dismiss Him or view Him as we would view any other teacher (just one voice among many). As Mahatma Ghandi put it: ***"Jesus, to me, is a great world teacher among others"***. One argument sometimes used to defend that Jesus is only a human being is that Jesus never claimed to be God: ***"Jesus never said: 'I am God'"***.

It is very clear that Jesus is a human being. Jesus grew up and learned wisdom (cf. Lk. 2:40). He was weary and thirsty (Jn. 4:6-7; cf. Lk. 4:2). He wept and felt the pain of loss (Jn. 11:35). He ate and drank (Matt. 11:19). He suffered and died (Lk. 22-23). Yet, this is not the full picture of who Jesus is. Jesus did not just show His humanity, but also His divinity. He continually testified that He is God. Here are two ways you can see it: His words and works ...

## **Jesus speaks like Yahweh – the God of Israel (words)**

In Matthew 5-7, Jesus speaks in a way that no prophet has spoken before. Jesus did not start with the pronouncement: ***"Thus says the LORD"***. He starts with: ***"I say to you"*** (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). Jesus made His words equal to God's words, claiming that our eternal destiny depends on whether we listen to Him (Matt. 7:21-27). Jesus claimed authority in forgiving sins (Matt. 9:1-8) and He has the sole authority to reveal God the Father (Matt. 11:27). Jesus claimed to be the final judge of all humanity at the end of the age (Matt. 25:31-46). At the end of the Gospel, Jesus points out that He (the Son), the Father and the Spirit have one "name" and that we are called to teach others to obey Him (Matt. 28:19-20). He promises to be ever-present with His people (Matt. 18:20; 28:20).

John's Gospel gives us various instances where Jesus claims to be God (though not as bluntly as some would like). For example, in Jn. 8:58, Jesus made the radical statement: ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am"***. Any Jew who knew their Old Testament would know that ***"I am"*** is a reference to the name of Yahweh: ***"I AM WHO I AM"*** (Ex. 3:14). The Jews interpreted Jesus' claim to mean this, since "they picked up stones to throw at him" (Jn. 8:59). They knew He was claiming to be Yahweh, which would be viewed as blasphemy (punishable by death).

John 10:30, Jesus tells the Jews, ***"I and the Father are one"***. In response, the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus. They also gave their reason why they wanted

to stone Jesus: *“for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God”* (10:33). They knew exactly what Jesus was claiming (cf. Mk. 2:5-6). They will ultimately crucify Jesus for blasphemy – claiming to be God’s Son (cf. Mk. 14:61-64).

In the words of C.S. Lewis: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to” (Mere Christianity, Book 2, chapter 3).

## **Jesus performs miracles like Yahweh (works)**

Here are two examples from Matthew’s Gospel...

### **1. The calming of the sea**

In Matthew 8:23-27, Jesus calms the storm by rebuking the winds, and the sea. In response, the disciples marveled saying: *“What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”* Jesus is breaking all their categories of what a man should be. No human being could command the elements and they obey him. Only Yahweh in the Old Testament has mastery over the sea. Only God brought order from the watery depths at creation (Gen. 1:1ff) and the flood (Gen. 6-8). Yahweh opened and closed the Red Sea (Ex. 14:1-31). He alone commands and silences the oceans (cf. Psalm 89:9; 107:28-29; Jonah 1:15-16). Now Jesus does it.

Later in Matthew 14:32-33, Jesus silences the wind and the sea again. It is here that the disciples make the correct conclusion: *“Truly you are the Son of God”*. In fact, they worship Jesus (and Jesus does not prevent them from doing so).

### **2. Feeding thousands**

In Matthew 14:13-21 and 16:32-39, Jesus is with His disciples and the crowds in a desolate place. Miraculously, Jesus feeds thousands that have gathered around Him. Like the calming of the storm, Jesus is performing a miracle only Yahweh did in the Old Testament. When Israel journeyed through the wilderness (a desolate place), God provided them manna to eat (Ex. 16:1-36). Through the miracle of feeding thousands in the wilderness, Jesus is making a claim regarding His identity: He is Yahweh.

So, as you read the Gospels, look out for these Yahweh-like moments. They point to Jesus’ identity. The man Jesus is also Yahweh, the God of Israel. He is “Immanuel” (God with us) (Matt. 1:23) and He demands our absolute obedience: *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”* (Matt. 17:5; 28:18-20).

**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 14:13-36**



Who is Jesus?  
God among us

# Who is Jesus? God among us

**STUDY 2**

- At which point(s) in your life did you recognize Jesus for who He is? What caused this?

## Investigate

**Read Matt 14:13-36...**

Jesus heard about Herod executing John the Baptist (14:1-12), and so *“He withdrew from there”* (v. 13). This will be Jesus’ pattern prior to Peter’s confession that He is *“the Christ”* (16:16). Yet, *“the crowds... followed him on foot from the towns”, bringing “their sick”* (vv. 13-14).

- Despite the danger Herod poses, how does Jesus respond to the crowds? (v. 14)
- Notice the situation and events of vv. 15-21. Compare with Exodus 16:1-36...

Matthew 14:15-21	Exodus 16:1-36
Location: <i>“This is a desolate place”</i> (v. 15)	Location: vv. 1-2
The problem: “food” (v. 15)	The problem: v. 3
Who provides: Jesus (v. 19)	Who provides: v. 4
How much was provided: <i>“they all ate and were satisfied. And they took twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over”</i> (v. 20)	How much was provided: v. 35
Who is Jesus?	

- Notice the situation and events of vv. 22-32. Yahweh brought order from the depths (Gen. 1:2). Yahweh caused the oceans to flood the earth (Gen. 6:9-9:19). Yahweh opened and closed the Red Sea in rescuing Israel from Egypt. Compare...

Matthew 16:22-32	Old Testament
What is happening?	What does Yahweh do? (Psalm 89:9; 107:28-29; Jonah 1:15-16)
What does Jesus do?	
How did the disciples respond?	

4. Who is Jesus? Why is this the correct response? (v. 33; cf. Matt. 1:23)



## Thinking & Living

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Remember the context. Jesus was in danger from Herod (14:1-2) and the disciples were in danger from hunger (14:15) and the sea (14:24)...

1. How has Jesus used these situations...
  - a) To reveal His identity (v. 33)
  - b) His heart for His people (v. 14)
  - c) To show why we should not “be afraid” (v. 27, 30-31)
  - d) How we should respond to Him (vv. 27, 31, 33)
  
2. Think of your present circumstances (concerns, dangers etc.). Mention some of these situations in the group and discuss. If you follow Jesus...
  - a) Who is with you in this situation? (Matt. 28:20)
  - b) What is Jesus' heart towards you?
  - c) Why should you not be afraid?
  - d) What should you be focusing on? (cf. Matt. 14:30; 6:31-33)
  - e) How should you respond in your current situation?
  
3. As a Fellowship Group, how can we better emulate the compassion of Jesus, both inside and outside the church?

**FAMILY QUESTION:** How can you use Matthew 14:13-33 to explain to a child why he/she doesn't need to be afraid (of the dark, school, tomorrow etc.), if he/she trusts and follows Jesus?

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

- 1.** Praise God for His compassion revealed in Jesus, but also His response to our fears and cries for help (Matt. 14:14, 27, 30-31).
- 2.** Pray for each other, specifically regarding the situations mentioned in the discussion. Pray that your focus would be on Jesus, and that you would not be overwhelmed and distracted by the situation.
- 3.** Pray that as a church, we continue to trust God to provide for and sustain us through all our needs. Pray especially for faith and generosity, that we can give and share with one another, knowing that Christ will supply all of our needs.
- 4.** Pray for Bheki and the Ubabalo neThemba church plant in Masiphumalele. Pray also for continued faith and encouragement for them as they navigate the difficulties of venue, workload, admin, and opposition.
- 5.** Pray for those coming into our church, that they may turn to and acknowledge Christ in true worship, having understood who He is and what He did.



**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 15:1-20**



Who is Clean?

Matthew 15:1-20

# Rejected by the Teachers (who is clean?)

## STUDY 3

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1. People often talk about starting a new chapter with a “*clean slate*” or wanting their “*slate wiped clean*”. What does this phrase mean and how can you have a “clean slate”?

## Investigating

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### Read Matthew 15:1-20

1. What are the Pharisees accusing Jesus of? (vv. 1-2)
2. How does Jesus respond to this accusation? (v. 3)
3. What does Jesus accuse the Pharisees and scribes of? (vv. 4-9, 13-14)
4. According to Jesus, what is the real problem? (vv. 10-11, 17-20)



## Thinking & Living

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Jesus makes it clear that human rules/traditions have no power to make a person clean. They have no effect on the state of our hearts. We might think that the rules of the Pharisees are silly, but we make our own human rules as well...

1. Can you think of examples in your life where you relied on human traditions/rules/rituals/tips to give you a “clean slate” with God? How is this passage a warning?
2. Jesus says the problem is the heart, but He did not explain how the heart can be made clean. He has given us “hints” throughout the Gospel... What happens when the “unclean” encounter Jesus?

*A man with **leprosy** came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me **clean**.” Jesus reached out his hand and **touched** the man. “I am willing,” he said. “**Be clean!**” Immediately he was **cleansed** of his leprosy. (Matt. 8:2-3)*

*“My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live”. And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples... when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. (Matt. 9:18, 25)*

3. How does this give us hope for our unclean hearts to be cleansed?
4. Look at the list of sins in v. 19. If these are problems of the heart, why do the following responses to address these sins fall short? Why can't these responses make our slate clean?
  - a) “Here are five tips to prevent you from committing adultery/sexual immorality”
  - b) “The Bible says: ‘You shall not steal’ (Ex. 20:15), so stop it”
  - c) “So, you lied, everyone does it, so it is OK. In fact, sometimes lying is good.”
  - d) How do you apply the Gospel to these problems of the heart?
5. How can you explain to your child why we need Jesus to “clean” our hearts?

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Pray for God's wisdom in showing you where you might be relying upon human traditions/rules/rituals that nullify God's Word and not upon Jesus as revealed in the Gospels.
2. Pray that our leaders would not fall into the trap of exalting human ideas and interpretations above the words of God, that they would have wisdom and discernment to stay true to God's word.
3. Praise God that He has given us a solution to the issue of our unclean hearts. Praise God for the Gospel. Consider and pray through these passages from Romans...
  - a) *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith"*  
(Rom. 3:23-25)
  - b) *"For the death he (Jesus) died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 6:10-11).
  - c) *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you"* (Rom. 8:11)



**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 15:21-39**



Compassion on the “unclean”

Matthew 15:21-39

# Compassion on the “unclean”

## STUDY 4

An historical fact: by 100 A.D. the church was almost 100% gentile  
(Bray 1993:28)

1. Why did this happen? Isn't Jesus' mission for: *“the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt. 10:6)?

## Investigating

### Read Matthew 15:21-39...

Jesus enters *“the district of Tyre and Sidon”* (15:21). This is the region from which Jezebel (the enemy of God's people) came (1 Kings 16:31). Yet, it is also the region where Elijah healed a Canaanite woman's child (1 Kings 17:8-24) ...

1. Who does Jesus meet here (v. 22)? What does she call Him (cf. 9:27)?
2. How does Jesus respond (vv. 23-26)? Why would He respond in this way (cf. 10:5-6)?
3. How does she respond to Jesus (v. 27)? Why would she respond in this way? What do these Old Testament passages say about the nations?

*To Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”*  
(Genesis 12:3)

*“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations... I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”*  
(Isaiah 42:1, 6)

4. Jesus remains in a gentile region (cf. Mk. 7:31). While in this gentile region “*great crowds*” came to Jesus. How does Jesus respond to them (v. 32)?
5. Notice: Jesus sat down on a mountain (15:29). He feeds them in the wilderness (15:37). How does this affirm His identity as “*Immanuel, which means God with us*” (1:22)? For whom is Jesus also “Immanuel” (cf. Matt. 28:18-20)?



## Thinking & Living

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Jesus’ lineage has two Canaanites (Matt. 1:3, 5). The gentile Magi come to worship Jesus at His birth (2:11). In Matthew’s Gospel, The Gentile Centurion and Canaanite woman express the greatest faith (8:5-13). It is the broken, unclean and blemished gentiles that come to Jesus...

1. How has this passage help you understand ...
  - a) Who Jesus is and what He has come to do?
  - b) Who the Gospel is for? (cf. 28:19)
  - c) Why our church is a gathering of people from different cultures/backgrounds?
  - d) How we receive the blessing of the Gospel?
2. How do the narratives of Matthew 15:21-39 help you understand why the church was almost 100% gentile by 100 A.D.?
3. Notice the disciples’ response: “Send her away” (15:23). We might not be so blunt towards someone coming to church, but ...
  - a) In what ways have you possibly indirectly said to someone, “you are not welcome at church”?
  - b) What have they (and you) misunderstood about Jesus’ mission?
  - c) How does Jesus’ response correct yours?

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

- 1.** Praise God that Jesus came for the broken, unclean, blemished and outcasts, Jews and Gentiles... People like us. Praise God for the people who took the time to share the Good News of Jesus with us and not send us away (Matt. 28:19).
- 2.** Praise God for all the various outreach ministries at St. Peters (LIFE, Winterlife, Friday Nights, Sunday services etc.). Pray that God would use our church family to call the broken in our community to come to Jesus.
- 3.** Pray for our missions partners who seek to witness to Jesus among the nations. Specifically, pray for Rod and Glenda Thomas who have served Jesus in Sendai Japan for many years (consult website for the latest prayer requests).
- 4.** Pray for Ubabalo neThemba Church (Masiphumalele) and Southreach (Muizenberg). Pray that through their ministries many would also turn to Jesus, experiencing His mercy and grace through His people.
- 5.** Pray for everyone in your Fellowship Group. Pray for Gospel opportunities in sharing the Good News of Jesus at work, home, our neighbourhoods, and schools.



**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 16:1-12**

Signs of the Times



Matthew 16:1-12

# Signs of the Times

## STUDY 5

1. Do you know of examples where you (or someone) have misinterpreted the signs in a) the weather, b) economics, or c) politics? Tell the group.



## Investigating

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### Read Matthew 16:1-12

The Pharisees and Sadducees *“asked him to show them a sign from heaven”* (v. 1)...

1. What signs has Jesus given so far? Give some examples... (cf. Matt. 2:1-2; 11:4-6; 15:36-39)
2. How have the Pharisees and Sadducees responded to these signs? What is ironic about Jesus' accusation in vv. 2-3; what were they “experts” in (cf. 2:3-6)?
3. What is the real problem here? (v. 4; cf. 12:33-35; 15:19)
4. Jesus will only give them one sign: *“the sign of Jonah”* (v.4) What does it mean? (cf. 12:38-42)
5. Having witnessed Jesus' interaction with the religious leaders, what does Jesus warn the disciples of (vv. 6-12)? Why does Jesus use the metaphor of “yeast”?



# Thinking & Living

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Jesus warns us that we must be careful to listen to people around us. Teaching can either be in service of the Kingdom of Heaven, growing the Kingdom (13:33), or it can be in service of Satan, attacking the kingdom (16:5-12). Like yeast, it might start small, but eventually permeates all of life. So...

- 1.** The Pharisees and Sadducees knew the Bible (2:1-6). Satan also knows and quotes the Bible (4:5-6). How do you discern when someone's teaching is dangerous?
  - a)** Consider Matthew 7:15-20
  - b)** Consider Matthew 15:6
  - c)** Consider Matthew 23:1-5
  
- 2.** Can you think of examples where you have seen the type of teaching/life described by Jesus today? Why is it important that we don't tolerate this type of teaching?
  
- 3.** People still demand "signs" and "proofs" in order to believe in Jesus. Jesus says that the only sign necessary is "the sign of Jonah".
  - a)** How has this passage helped us understand why someone might persistently be sceptical about Jesus?
  - b)** Why are the signs of the death and resurrection of Jesus enough?
  - c)** How does this shape our witness/ evangelism? What should be the focus in our evangelism?
  
- 4.** We live in a world where your kids are constantly influenced by the culture, media and what they learn at school. How can you use this passage to help your kids to be careful of what they believe? How can this help them deal with doubts about Jesus?

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

- 1.** Pray that as a church we would continue to preach the Gospel faithfully. That we would not give people the expectations that they need anything else other than the death and resurrection of Jesus to be saved.
- 2.** Pray individually and for those in your fellowship group that you would be discerning about what you believe and that you would be able to confidently trust in Jesus.
- 3.** Pray that when we are in difficult times, we would not feel the need for signs or miracles. That we can have peace and confidence knowing that Jesus is our Messiah who will continue to look after us. (John 14:26-27)
- 4.** Pray that we can have confidence in our faith and when we evangelize because Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross is enough for us to be firm in our faith.
- 5.** Pray that as our kids grow up in a world that is influenced by culture and media, they would be careful about what they believe and stick firmly to Jesus.





# What Does ‘This Rock’ Refer to in Matthew 16:18? By Gregg R. Allison (The Gospel Coalition)

Few verses have caused more controversy than Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says, *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* It has led to disagreement over the proper type of church government, the role of the pope (along with papal infallibility), apostolic succession, and more.

In context, Jesus probes His disciples for what the general public thinks about the identity of *“the Son of Man”* (v. 13). Their response indicates the breadth of the popular understanding of Jesus: He is John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet (v. 14). So Jesus redirects His probe: *“But who do you [plural = the disciples] say I am?”* (v. 15). Peter responds for the Twelve: Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, God the Son incarnate (v. 16). Jesus approves Peter for rightly identifying Him, underscoring that His disciple didn’t humanly figure out this truth. Rather, it came as divine revelation—from Jesus’s heavenly Father (v. 17). Using a play on words, Jesus renames His disciple Peter (Greek petros) and promises to found Messiah’s church on “this rock” (Greek petra).

So what does “this rock” refer to? Let’s look at a few wrong answers before turning to what I think is the right one.

## Rock as Peter and His Roman Successors

The Roman Catholic Church interprets “this rock” in reference to Peter as the first pope and the beginning of apostolic succession: Jesus authoritatively instituted an unbroken line of successors from Peter and the other apostles to the current bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. In this view, Pope Francis is now the vicar (or earthly representative) of Christ who, together with the other bishops, exercises Christ’s authority in teaching, ruling, and sanctifying the Church.

This interpretation arose centuries after the event and the writing of Matthew’s Gospel. From a Roman Catholic view, this passage is like a seed that only later flowered into the Church’s interpretation. So for Roman Catholics, the lack of mention of successors to Peter, bishops, and a hierarchical ecclesial structure—along with Jesus’ later giving of the keys not to Peter but to the church (Matt. 18:15–20)—is no deterrent to this understanding.

Additionally, the Magisterium—or teaching office of the Catholic Church—claims to possess Christ’s authority to provide the official interpretation of Scripture. And since they’ve officially interpreted Matthew 16:18 this way, this understanding stands as the authoritative and true one.

Historically, Protestants have rejected this interpretation of Jesus’s words. So how do Protestants interpret it?

## Rock as Jesus or Peter's Confession

One common Protestant interpretation says that whereas Peter is *petros*, a small stone, Jesus is *petra*, the rock. Thus, Jesus's affirmation isn't about a special role for Peter, but about Jesus himself as the cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:5-8). But this view seems to be more about steering clear of the Roman Catholic interpretation than a plausible exegesis of the text itself.

A second popular Protestant interpretation says that "the rock" isn't Jesus, but Peter's confession about Jesus's identity. But this truth is then shorn of any connection with the person of Peter: it is the confession itself, not Peter as confessor, that is emphasized as the foundation of Messiah's church.

There are two major problems with these interpretations. First, in this context Jesus affirms that He is the builder of his church, not its foundation. Indeed, He promises that He will build His church on the foundation of "this rock." Second, these interpretations tend to drive a wedge between the person of Peter and his divinely revealed confession.

## Rock as Peter By Virtue of His Confession

A better interpretation holds these two prominent textual elements together: The rock is Peter by virtue of his confession.

The main support for this view can be seen in the prominent salvation-historical role that Peter plays in the New Testament (especially the Gospels and the first half of Acts). His prominence is seen in various ways. He's the first to announce the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2:14-41). Together with John, he confirms the inclusion of the Samaritans in the church (Acts 8:14-25). Finally, he is instrumental in the conversion of the first Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

This vivid narration in the book of Acts shows how the keys of the kingdom were used to build the church. And though all the apostles were active (cf. Matt. 18:18), Peter's prominence at various key points is unmistakable.

Matthew's Gospel certainly situates Peter among the Twelve (like them, he grasps something of the import of Jesus and His ministry while also misunderstanding a great deal). But a proper interpretation of Jesus' affirmation should appreciate the privilege enjoyed by Peter among the disciples. He can be a spokesman for and a leader among the Twelve. And so he is, as Jesus singles him out for commendation (and renames him!) because of his confession.

## Building the Church

Accordingly, "this rock" is indeed Christ's renamed disciple Peter (*Gk. petros*). Yet it's Peter by virtue of his confession that leads to Christ's promise to build His church on "this rock" (*Gk. petra*). And this building project uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven as the gospel is announced throughout the world.

The phrase doesn't support the Roman Catholic interpretation that Peter is the first pope, the vicar of Christ, the infallible head of the Church that rests on apostolic succession and wields divinely conferred authority by virtue of its possessing the keys of the kingdom. Rather, "this rock" is the foundation of the church that Jesus has been building and continues to build.

As articulated by Peter, the confession of the identity of the Messiah, God the Son incarnate, is part and parcel of both the gospel message itself and also the proper appropriation of the gospel: to all who, through the Holy Spirit, confess "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3), the Son gives eternal salvation for the glory of God.

**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 16:13-20**

# Who is Jesus? The Christ



# Who is Jesus? The Christ

## STUDY 6

1. What is a church? How do you “build” a church?

## Investigating

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Although Jesus is identified by Matthew as “the Christ” (Matt. 1:1), no one has explicitly confessed this in the Gospel. The Magi seem to get Jesus’ identity (Matt. 2:1-8). The two blind men and the Canaanite woman see Jesus as “*the Son of David*” (Matt. 9:27; 15:22). The disciples have called Him “*the Son of God*” (Matt. 14:33)...

### Read Matthew 16:13-20...

1. Jesus asks: “Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?” (v. 13). What responses have the disciples (and we – the readers) seen so far (v. 14)? How close to the truth are they?
2. Jesus asks His inner circle, “who do you say that I am?” (v. 15). How does Peter answer (v. 16)?
3. Jesus says four things that are key for us to understand (vv. 17-20). Each is a puzzle (so you need to know something of Matthew 1-15) ...

<p><b>How did Peter receive this? (v. 17)</b></p> <p><i>“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will... no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Matt. 11:25-27)</i></p>	<p><b>What does it mean for Peter (rock) to be the “rock”? (v. 18)</b></p> <p><i>“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on <b>the rock.</b>” (Matt. 7:24; cf. 28:19-20)</i></p>
<p><b>What does it mean to bind and loose? (v. 19)</b></p> <p>Hint: A major theme in Matthew’s Gospel is entering God’s Kingdom. Consider Matt. 7:13-14, 21-23 regarding Jesus’ teaching and Matt. 23:13 regarding the Pharisees’ teaching.</p>	<p><b>Why does Jesus forbid them to teach about His identity now? (v. 20)</b></p> <p><b>Hint:</b> Look at Matt. 16:21-23</p>

4. These are complex (but very important) verses. Try to sum up their meaning, in your own words.



## Thinking & Living

1. People today are just as confused about the “Son of Man” as Jesus’ contemporaries were. Who do people say Jesus is today?
2. Who do you say Jesus is? How did you get to that conclusion?
3. Re-read v. 18. Can you think of at least 2 implications from this verse for any Christian today?
4. What happens if we withhold the truth that Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the Living God”*? How important is our witness (v. 19)?
5. Knowing Jesus is the line between being overwhelmed and bound in Hades (death) or overcoming death. As a Fellowship Group...
  - a) Discuss people you know who don’t know Jesus. What can you do to witness to them?
  - b) Close your time praying for them, but also for boldness in witnessing to them: *“grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness”* (Acts 4:29)

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Praise God that He has revealed Jesus' identity to you: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16)
2. Praise God that nothing (even death) cannot prevail against His people who witness to Jesus: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell (Hades/Sheol) shall not prevail against it." (16:18)
3. Jot down the people you discussed in your Fellowship Group. Pray that they too would come to know, believe and follow Jesus as the Christ and Son of the Living God.

**Name:**

**Name:**

**Name:**

**Name:**

**Name:**

**Name:**





# A Historical Reflection on Jesus' command: Take up your Cross

In Matthew 10:38 and 16:24, Jesus calls His disciples (anyone who wants to follow Him) to *“deny himself and take up his cross”*. We might read these words and not really feel the weight of what Jesus is saying here. We make cross-shaped jewellery items, print it on T-shirts, and have cross-shaped tattoos. Today it is a fashion statement. What does the “cross” represent to a 1st Century hearer? What would His disciples be thinking of when He calls them to picking up a cross?

## **Crucifixion in the 1st Century ...**

The famous Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero (a contemporary of Caesar Augustus mentioned in Lk. 2:1), once wrote, *“Crucifixion is the most cruel and terrifying penalty”* (In Verrem 2:5:165). It was a cruel form of punishment the Romans applied to anyone who opposed their rule. The Peace of Rome (*Pax Romana*) was a bloody peace. For example, when Spartacus (a leader of a rebellion against Rome around 73-71 BC) died in battle, six thousand of his followers were crucified in one day; being lined up along a road that stretched about 193km.

Jewish historian Josephus (a contemporary of Jesus) records that after the death of King Herod (mentioned in Matt. 2:19) a Jewish revolt occurred against Roman rule. In response, as Josephus writes, *“Varus (governor of Syria) sent a part of his army into the country, to seek out those who had been the authors of the revolt; and when they were found, he punished some of them that were most guilty, and some he dismissed; now the number of those who were crucified on this account were two thousand”* (Wars of the Jews, 2:5:2)

What Jesus and His contemporaries would have seen is well described by French theologian Maurice Goguel in his book 'The Life of Jesus': *“Nothing could be more horrible than the sight of this living body, breathing, seeing, hearing, still able to feel, and yet reduced to the state of a corpse by forced immobility and*

*absolute helplessness. We cannot say the crucified person writhed in agony, for it was impossible for him to move. Stripped of his clothing, unable even to brush away the flies that fell upon his wounded flesh already lacerated by preliminary scourging, exposed to insults and curses of the people... the cross represented miserable humanity reduced to the last degree of impotence, suffering and degradation”* (1944:535-536). Crucifixion was a living hell. Our English word “*excruciating*” (from the cross pain) was invented to try and describe this pain.

To the Jews, another dimension could be added to the cross. In Deuteronomy 21:22-23, the Law explains, “*if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God...*” (Deut. 21:22-23). To the Jew, the cross was not just a symbol of Roman rule and cruel punishment. It was also a symbol of divine judgment. To be hung on a cross is to be cursed by God.

So, what is Jesus calling His disciples to here? Jesus is underscoring the cost of what it means to follow Him. There isn't a more scandalous, horrific, and repugnant symbol to a 1st Century hearer than the cross and Jesus picks it as the symbol of discipleship. It means being willing to let those around you: “*revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account*” (Matt. 5:11). It means embracing the possibility of being stripped of everything you have, to be ostracised by your family and judged as cursed/demonic by society (Matt. 8:18-22; 10:16-25). It means accepting the possibility of death in following Jesus.

Even so, Jesus is not calling us to something He was not willing to do. He embraced the Father's will of suffering the cross Himself, drinking the cup of judgment (Matt. 26:39). Jesus willingly suffered the scandal, horror, and offense of the Cross. Jesus willingly suffered the penalty of His enemies, the living hell, and curse of God. The wonder is... He did this for us (cf. Matt. 1:21; 26:28).

**SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 16:21-28**

# The Cost of Following Jesus



Matthew 16:21-28

# The Cost of Following Jesus

## STUDY 7

1. When you hear the word “Satanic”, what do you associate with the term?



## Investigating

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Jesus has just been revealed as “*The Christ*” (Matt. 16:16), yet He also forbade His disciples teaching anyone about Him being the Christ (16:20). Matthew 16:21-28 will begin to reveal why...

### Read Matthew 16:21-23... Jesus must die

1. What does Jesus reveal will happen to him (v. 21)? List the different details he gives.
2. How does Peter respond to Jesus’ revelation?
3. Why does Jesus accuse him of being like Satan? How is Peter in line with Satan (cf. Matt. 4:10)?

### Read Matthew 16:24-28... You must be ready to die

1. If Jesus’ path is v. 21, what does it mean to follow Him? (v. 24)
2. Why should we follow Jesus? What three reasons does Jesus give? (vv. 25-27) Try to put each one in your own words...
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## Thinking & Living

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1. What is the danger of teaching the Gospel without the path of the cross?
2. What are the “things of man” that are often in line with the Devil's deception? What might hinder us from following Jesus?
3. What does it mean to “*deny himself*”? How does that apply to you today? In what areas are you challenged to “*deny*” yourself and “*pick up*” your “*cross*”?
4. What can we expect if we follow Jesus in this life? (cf. Rom. 8:17; Acts 14:22)
5. “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*” (Jim Elliot - Missionary martyred in Ecuador reaching out to the Huaorani in 1956). How does this quote reflect what we have just discussed in this passage?

# Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Praise God that *“whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Matt. 16:25). Praise God that in Christ Jesus: “God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me” (Psalm 49:15). This is the greatest hope Jesus has given us (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1ff).
2. Praise God that Jesus came to *“save his people from their sins”* (Matt. 1:21). Jesus suffered and died (absorbing the penalty for our sin), forgiving us (Matt. 26:28), so that we can enjoy eternal life with Him.
3. Pray that God would help you reveal where your thinking, desires and motives are focused on “the things of men” and not *“the things of God”* (Matt. 16:23). Pray that God would enable you *“to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires”* (Eph. 4:22; prayerfully read Eph. 4:17-24).
4. Pray that God would *“stamp eternity on my eyeballs”* (Jonathan Edwards). Pray that we would see the wisdom and live by what Jim Elliot succinctly said: *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose”*.
5. Pray for Southreach Church (Muizenberg) and Ubabalo neThemba Church (Masiphumalele). Pray that they would be communities of Christ-followers as described in Matthew 16:24-28), but also stay faithful in teaching the Gospel as Jesus declared it and lived it (Matt. 16:21).



Rod and Glenda Thomas

Monday, 20 June 2022



Nice roses at Gamo!

Dear Praying Friends,

On Saturday during our evangelistic mini-concert I was listening to the Christian music and thinking of Isaiah 42:4 “He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.” Surely this promise is yet to be fulfilled in the area where we work, and although no one visibly came to faith I sensed that Christ was present: if he never grows faint or discouraged it will yet be fulfilled in his time, and we should continue telling the gospel.

Mrs Stonemouth is doing baptism classes and is showing good understanding. Please pray for her to have genuine faith in Jesus for salvation, and for God to raise up many believers.

After the service recently we took all the believers to a large empty plot next to the local JR station. It has been unused for decades and would be perfect for a church site. So we prayed earnestly that God would give it to us if it was his will. We were encouraged how enthusiastic the believers were. You’ll know how to pray!

Events in July are Gamo outreaches on 7th, 14th and 17th, Yuriage outreach 16th, Yamamoto 21st, and weekly ministry at Nishi Nakada at church. In addition Rod is doing a Creation Science seminar in a large public hall in Sendai on 15th. Please pray for strength for all this!

Thank you for your prayers and support!

love in Christ  
Rod and  
Glenda



Flyer for 15th



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