

Matthew 16:1-20 | “Who Do You Say That He Is?”  
*Preached on November 12, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles to Matthew 16 today.

We will be going from verse 1 through 20 this morning. *[pause]*

We have been looking at discipleship in the book of Matthew, and this text is important for us, for it reminds us of Jesus’ identity. *[pause]*

You see, the most important thing for a disciple is: do you get Jesus’ identity right? *[pause]*

Your eternity hinges on whether you get Jesus right.

How you live depends on it.

It is one of the most important things because if you get Jesus wrong, then most everything is affected. *[pause]*

Let’s say that you think Jesus was a mere man and that’s it.

That’s going to affect not only your eternal destination, but also, how you live now. *[pauseeee]*

So the question is: who do you say that He is?

Just ponder that question for a moment, and answer it in your mind. *[pauseeee]*

We will be looking at 3 different stories this morning from the Bible, and all 3 revolve around people’s view of Jesus and whether they trust in Jesus’ identity.

So I want you to bring your answer about Jesus to this text and see where you fit.

Are you like the Pharisees and Sadducees and their view of Jesus?

Are you like the ‘little faith’ disciples?

Or are you like Peter and his confident profession? *[pause]*

May each of us let the Word of God conform our view of Christ to be more in line with the truth today, as we let His Word search and shape our hearts. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s READ verses 1-4. *[READ]*

The Pharisees and Sadducees come to Jesus, and this is shocking in itself for usually these two groups hated each other.

But here they are, united against Jesus, and they come to test Him. *[pause]*

So right away, we see that their intentions are not noble, but wicked.

They don't genuinely ask for a sign, but do so, so that they can use it against Jesus in some way. *[pause]*

But the thing is that Jesus has continually given them signs with His miracles, but they have missed the point.

In fact, Jesus makes this clear, for He essentially tells them that they are good weathermen, but horrible truth discerners. *[pause]*

“[They] know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but [they] cannot interpret the signs of the times.” *[pauseeee]*

They were able to predict the weather the next day, but they missed the Messiah standing right in front of them. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus then calls them evil and adulterous, for He says, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.”

And he leaves them. *[pause]*

Jesus didn't take the bait, but turned their desire for a sign against them, and declared them evil and adulterous.

They had all that they needed, and the resurrection would be the definitive sign that they would be given...

...For just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days, so Christ would be in the grave for 3 days.<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

*This short little story shows us that...*

### **I. Some don't want to trust in Christ's identity. (1-4)**

The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't lack evidence that Jesus was the Messiah.

It's not like they are these people who haven't seen anything of Christ.

No, they didn't need another sign -- they needed to believe the signs around them. *[pause]*

Their problem was not a lack of ability to interpret, for they could easily interpret the sky.

Rather, their problem was a heart that wanted to reject Him, for why else would they come to test Him? *[pause]*

They were blind to the obvious truth around them in Jesus because they didn't want to trust Him.

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 12:40.

This is why He calls them evil and adulterous because they had signs, yet asked for more.

*[pauseeee]*

This truth causes each of us to reflect upon this question: do I believe the revelation that I've been given or am I always asking for more? *[pause]*

This is like someone who has the completed Bible in their possession, but says to God, "Speak to me."

You have what you need! God has spoken in the Word!

You can't reject what you have and then demand more and more and more.

For what do we see here?

For rejectors, Jesus doesn't just keep providing more and more endless evidence, but instead, He pushes you back to trust what you have been given. *[pauseeee]*

Will you trust what you have?

Will you trust the Word or will you keep looking for more and more revelation? *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you are here today, and you have never trusted in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins.

What's the reason? *[pause]*

Really think about it.

What's hindering you from believing in Him? *[pause]*

Are you still waiting on more evidence and proof that He is who He says He is?

Read the Bible and see who He says that He is - that's all that you need.

He died and rose again 3 days later, what greater sign do you need? *[pauseeee]*

You see, there's hope for people like this -- you have all that you need.

You don't need a sign in the sky, for you have the sign of the resurrection.

But the question is, will you believe it or will you harden your heart? *[pause]*

Ask God to open your eyes to see who Jesus is in His Word. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus' identity and His momentous resurrection demand a response.

To fail to repent and believe is disastrous, for it means Jesus calls you evil and adulterous and leaves in judgment like these leaders of Israel.

So repent and believe today in Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross for your sins and rose again 3 days later, victorious.

He is the Son of God, the Messiah, who is the only way to be saved. *[pauseeee]*

You don't want to get to the end of your life and say, "I could interpret the meaning of English literature...I could interpret what it means when a car makes a certain noise..."

...I could interpret stats to predict who would have a good sports year or how my business would do"...

...Or, "I could interpret what to do in baking when this or that happens, but I missed the signs all around me of Jesus Christ." *[pause]*

You don't want to get to the end of your life and say, "I could interpret the sky and predict the weather, but I missed who Jesus Christ was."

What good will that be?

You may have been ready to know what to wear the next day, who would have a good year, what was happening with your car, but you missed out on eternity with God.

So turn to Him today, for everyone who looks on the Son and believes will have eternal life, and everyone who goes to Him will never be cast out.<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

The Pharisees and Sadducees are examples of people who reject Christ's identity because they don't want to trust in Him, but we see another category of people next...

Let's READ verses 5-12. *[READ]*

Have you ever taken a trip and forgotten to bring something important?

You and your spouse then have a discussion about *who* forgot to bring it, and really, it's pointless because it's not like it will bring the item to you. *[pause]*

Well the disciples have a moment like that when it comes to bread.

They had forgotten to bring bread for their trip. *[pause]*

So see?

It even happened to the disciples, so next time you forget something, remember how the disciples forgot to bring food for their trip. *[pause]*

But what leads them to this discussion is Jesus saying, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." *[pause]*

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<sup>2</sup> A reference to John 6:37, 40.

The disciples start discussing bread, for they think that Jesus is talking about being on the watch out for literal leaven of bread.

Yet Jesus is of course meaning something deeper, and He calls them out for their little faith. *[pause]*

His point is that they should have remembered how He miraculously provided bread for thousands of people, so He obviously wasn't worried about physical bread...

...And they shouldn't have been worried about bread either, for they should have trusted that He would and could provide. *[pause]*

They should have seen the deeper, spiritual meaning in what He was calling them to beware of...

He was alerting them to the subtle, dangerous teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. *[pauseeee]*

The Pharisees and Sadducees were just shown to be hostile towards Jesus and doubted Jesus, and that is probably what Jesus was calling them to beware of.

This hypocrisy looks good and religious, yet it is that which rejects Christ. *[pauseeee]*

So the disciples were to be on high alert to this dangerous influence.

Their teaching could lead them to slowly and subtly influence the disciples, like leaven does in bread. *[pause]*

This is why we must watch out for false teaching, too, for it's like leaven.

It is sometimes very subtle, and it can permeate a whole church or a whole group of people quietly and yet destructively. *[pauseeee]*

But let's go back to the disciples and their focus on forgotten bread.

What do they show us about how they view Christ's identity? *[pause]*

*They demonstrate that...*

## **II. Some struggle to trust in Christ's identity. (5-12)**

Do you ever struggle to trust Christ?

You are not alone, for the disciples do the same here, as they show 'little faith'. *[pause]*

In the past Jesus had miraculously fed 5,000 plus people and then 4,000 plus people in another instance with barely anything, and provided tons of leftovers.

He had shown that He was powerful, and had proved time and time again who He was.

Yet they were acting like Jesus was just like them in every way, and so Jesus must be talking about forgotten bread, right? *[pause]*

But they should have reasoned that Jesus would never worry about not having enough, and so they shouldn't either.

And so what we see is that the disciples thought that their biggest problem was forgetting bread, but really, it was forgetting who Christ was. *[pauseeee]*

Haven't you ever witnessed an amazing work of God in your life, but then months later a scary situation arises, and you think, "How is this going to turn out good?" *[pause]*

What happened?!

In the moment, you are focused on what you can do, instead of what God has done.

So we see here that little faith is characterized by *forgetting*.

It's not that we have literal amnesia, but it's that we don't recall the past acts of God in faith. *[pauseeee]*

In a way, we are saying, "I know He did it back then, but I don't think He can do it again." *[pauseeee]*

We do this all the time, don't we?

Think about what Christ has done through His death and resurrection -- powerful stuff, right?

He has provided us with salvation, forgiveness, eternal life, and more.

But what happens when you face that feeling of not having enough money? *[pause]*

You fret, don't you?

Why? We serve the same Christ who conquered death, and has provided us with eternal life!

What is a little money to Him?

You don't think He can provide for your needs? *[pauseeee]*

The disciples should have continually recalled the miraculous feedings in their minds.

They should have thought, "Jesus fed 5,000 people, so he can feed our little group even though we forgot bread." *[pauseeee]*

Faith *remembers*.

Faith recalls the past days of provision and trusts God for the provisions of today.

It believes that the God of yesterday is still the God of today.

So we must constantly recall the past works of the Lord and then trust Him for the present.

*[pauseeee]*

How have you seen God work in the past? Why aren't you trusting Him for today?

Are you forgetting who He is because you are so focused on what *you* need to do? *[pauseee]*

Along with this, we also see that little faith is concerned with the things of this world and misses important spiritual truths. *[pause]*

By being consumed with their lack of bread, the disciples had missed what Jesus was seeking to teach them.

Jesus was teaching them about a spiritual danger, but all they could think about was food!

*[pause]*

It's sort of like if you were taking your son on a hunting trip and you were seeking to teach him about being careful doing this and that, but all he could think about was what he was going to eat for a snack on the trip. *[pause]*

His focus on something trivial led him to miss out on your important teaching, and opened himself up to danger.

And I wonder if we miss out on what Jesus is seeking to teach us by our focus on the things of this world.

Little do we realize that by doing this, we open ourselves up to spiritual danger. *[pauseeee]*

If all you can think about is making the most money possible, gaining material possessions, seeking entertainment, and things like that, then you are going to miss what Jesus is seeking to teach you. *[pause]*

If all you can think about is your physical needs, then your focus won't be on Christ.

Your mind is elsewhere. *[pauseee]*

We all have had days where our mind was consumed with worry over something, or with a focus on trivial things or the things of this world.

And by the end of the day, we think, "I haven't thought about Christ at all today." *[pause]*

What things that day did we miss that Christ desired for us to learn?

By being consumed with thoughts about other things, we have missed critical learning moments. *[pauseee]*

I wonder if that's why many haven't grown much in their walk with the Lord.

They are so focused on the things of this world that they aren't ready to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn. *[pause]*

For some of you this happens regularly as you listen to the Word of God preached.

Jesus is desiring to teach you something great and important from His Word, but all you can think about is, "What am I going to eat for lunch?"

Or maybe you are focused on what you are going to do when you get home, or some other things like that, all the while Christ is speaking to you in His Word saying, "Listen! This is important!" *[pause]*

Oh we of little faith!

Our lack of trust leads us to miss what Christ is teaching us, but thankfully, Christ works with slow learners. *[pause]*

Notice how Jesus doesn't simply get mad at the disciples, and say, "You guys just don't get it. You missed what I said, so I'm not going to explain it to you."

No, He works slowly with slow learners, and we are all slow learners. *[pause]*

Like the disciples, we struggle to trust Christ's identity and power.

Like the disciples, we forget His past work and worry about our present needs.

Like the disciples, we often don't "get it" the first time, and so He must repeat it a second time. *[pauseeee]*

This doesn't mean that we should just be content in our slow learning, for even Jesus admonishes them for their little faith.

Yet He also didn't give up on them, and He won't give up on you. *[pause]*

He wants you to learn and grow through your moments of little faith, so that He can move you along in your faith journey. *[pauseeee]*

Aren't you grateful that you serve a Christ who works with slow learners?

We are people who fail to understand and perceive at first, but Christ is gracious, and works with us to move us to a place of understanding. *[pause]*

He doesn't disregard the struggler, who struggles with trusting His identity at times.

He doesn't walk away from the slow learner, who desires to grow and learn.



So keep going back to Him, looking to Him for help.

Go to Him in faith, trusting His identity, and remembering what He has done.

He wants to move you along in faith and understanding. *[pauseeee]*

So we learned about those who reject and do not want to trust Jesus' identity, and also, those who struggle to trust in His identity, but now we will find something else...

In the third story, we find someone who confidently professes Christ's identity.

Let's READ verses 13-20. *[READ]*

In this story, Jesus asks the disciples who others say that He is, and then asks them who they say that He is.

And Peter speaks up, and gives a very good, clear profession of Christ's identity.

He says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." *[pause]*

That's when Jesus goes on to talk about how Peter is blessed because of this knowledge, and teaches us about the church. *[pause]*

*So we see that, though there are some who don't want to trust in Christ's identity, and some who struggle sometimes to trust Him, but really...*

### **III. All of us are to profess Christ's identity. (13-20)**

There are some wrong beliefs about Christ out there, aren't there? *[pause]*

Notice the wrong beliefs about Christ in Jesus' day...

Some thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. *[pause]*

Isn't it striking that the understanding of many people of Jesus' day wasn't necessarily negative towards Jesus.

I mean, they thought He was a good, godly prophet like some well-known ones of the Old Testament.

What's so wrong about that? *[pause]*

Isn't that a positive view of Jesus? *[pause]*

It's not like they were the Pharisees who claimed that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Matthew 12:24.

No, they thought that He was a prophet.

Yet, it's only Peter's confession that Jesus affirms. *[pause]*

This is because their view of Jesus may have been positive, but it was inadequate.

And any inadequate view of Jesus is a wrong view of Jesus, no matter how positive it sounds.  
*[pause]*

This is just like today.

There are many people out there, who have a positive view of Jesus.

They think that He was a good, godly man, who had good teachings.

Some even think that He was a prophet, like Muslims do.

But that positive view of Jesus is not an accurate view of Jesus, and it will leave you in your sins.  
*[pauseeee]*

Sometimes we ask people if they believe in Jesus, and when they say 'Yes' then we just think, "OK good."

But what if they have an inadequate view of Jesus? *[pause]*

What if you find out that they think He was *only* a prophet?

What if they think He was *only* a good teacher or miracle worker?

Then they aren't actually believing in Christ, the Christ of the Bible. *[pause]*

So let me ask you: who is the Jesus that you believe in?

If you can't say like Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," then you have missed the mark. *[pause]*

He is the promised Savior, the Messiah, who brings salvation and who is the promised Davidic king.

He is the very Son of God sent to redeem us.

That's Jesus' identity, and like Peter, we should all confidently profess that. *[pauseeee]*

After Peter makes this profession, Jesus calls him 'blessed'.

And this means that if we truly believe and profess who Christ is, we are the blessed ones of the world.

We have God's favor, and are in an extremely good state in life. *[pauseeee]*

The world may say that they are blessed, and we are not, but what matters is what Christ declares and He declares those blessed who accurately profess from their hearts who He really is.

*[pauseeee]*

**The world may try to shame you because of who you believe Jesus to be.**

They may ostracize us, and try to declare us to be the scum of the earth, but God declares us the blessed ones, for we accurately know who Jesus is.

**And so your view of Jesus is of utmost importance.**

Our belief in Jesus' identity affects our eternity, relationship with God, and blessedness. *[pause]*

**So do you correctly profess and believe in Jesus' true identity?** *[pauseeee]*

Now being called blessed could be a temptation to become prideful.

**We could easily think, "I'm blessed because I worked so hard to get here."**

Or, "I'm blessed because I'm just inherently intelligent enough to figure this out."

**But Jesus makes it clear that our blessedness isn't based on our work, intelligence, or amazingness, but it's based on grace.**

He tells Peter that this accurate profession wasn't revealed by flesh and blood, but by the Father.

*[pause]*

**So we don't get this right knowledge of Christ from our minds.**

We don't get it from trying hard enough.

**But by grace, the Father reveals who Christ is to us.**

He opens our eyes to see Jesus' true identity. *[pauseeee]*

**Jesus goes from just simply a good teacher, miracle worker, or prophet to the glorious Messiah and Son of the living God, when God opens our eyes to see Christ for who He is.** *[pause]*

We couldn't get to that place on our own, but it was all of grace.

**So we know that we are blessed by grace, and only because of grace, and so we have no room for boasting in ourselves.** *[pauseeee]*

It is on Peter and this amazing profession that Christ builds His church, so we see that true churches of God are based on this accurate profession of Jesus.

**And Jesus loves the church, promises to build it, not let it be destroyed, and gives it Heaven-backed authority.** *[pause]*

*You see...*

**Disciples profess who Christ is and are to trust Him.**

There are some in this world who refuse to trust in Jesus' identity, like the Pharisees and Sadducees.

*They had what they needed to believe, but they didn't want to. [pause]*

Others struggle sometimes to trust Christ's identity when they go through circumstances, like the disciples (and us sometimes).

*But thankfully, He works with us in grace and patience to grow our 'little faith' and move us along in our trust and understanding. [pause]*

Yet really, all of us are to profess Christ's identity openly like Peter.

*That's what a disciple does and that's what true churches do. [pause]*

We boldly proclaim that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

*He is the hope of the nations, the King, the Savior, and the Lord.*

Only through Him is salvation found, for He died for our sins and in our place, and rose again the third day.

*And so we base our lives and our churches on Him, who He is, and what He has done on the Cross and in the Grave. [pauseeee]*

Other people may refuse to believe in Him, others have incorrect views of Him, but we profess who He is, for He is our Lord and Savior.

*May we trust Him more.*