

### Matthew 16:13 – 17:13

<sup>16:13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ <sup>14</sup> And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still 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 answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’ <sup>18</sup> I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.’ <sup>20</sup> Then he warned the disciples that they should tell no one that he was the Christ. <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 be raised up on the third day. <sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’ <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life 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 will a man give in exchange for his soul?’ <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds. <sup>28</sup> Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’

<sup>17:1</sup> Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them; and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him!’ <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, ‘Get up, and do not be afraid.’ <sup>8</sup> And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.’ <sup>10</sup> And his disciples asked him, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ <sup>11</sup> And he answered and said, ‘Elijah is coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup> but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

## Cultural Background

- What does the crucifixion mean?
  - The cross was an instrument of punishing revolutionaries against Rome. When Judas the Galilean revolted in 6 AD, the Romans crucified 3,000 Jews and hung them publicly. That was the most recent event that had happened, and would have surely been on the Jewish disciples' minds.
  - Most Jews expected a military Messiah who would triumph over the Romans, like Judas Maccabeus triumphed over the Greeks in 163 BC. He liberated Jerusalem and cleansed the temple.
- What does the transfiguration mean? A hint that Jesus' body will be cleansed and purified through death and resurrection.
  - The Greeks believed that the body was a prison for the soul: 'The soul is a helpless prisoner chained hand and foot in the body.' (Plato, *Phaedo* 839) Most Greeks expected the soul to escape the body at death.
  - The Jews believed that the body and soul were both originally good (Gen.1:26 – 31), but corrupted by sin (Gen.3). Jews therefore believed in cleansing and resurrection: 'Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...I will put My Spirit within you... I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life...' (Ezk.36:26 – 37:14; see also Isa.25:6 – 8; 26:19; Hos.6:1 – 2; Ps.16:8 – 11; 49:14 – 15; Job 19:25; Dan.12:2 – 3; and also 2 Maccabees 7:5 – 23 for how militant Jews thought of resurrection as a reward for militancy)
- 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased': God the Father also said this when Jesus was baptized and evidenced the anointing of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 3:13.
- Moses and Elijah: Two of the major Old Testament figures who symbolize the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). Both of them anointed successors who completed their ministry by entering the Promised Land and proclaimed God's conquering presence. Jesus therefore sees this pattern:
  - Moses → Joshua
  - Elijah → Elisha
  - John the Baptist → Jesus (see also Luke 4:14 – 30)

## Questions

1. (To leader) Things to hold off on:
  - a. Peter's role – Does this make him a 'pope'?
  - b. Binding and loosing – what is that? We'll revisit that in Mt.18:1 – 18 more fully, but see below.
2. How did the disciples define Jesus' job description?
  - a. They knew that Jesus wasn't just John the Baptist remixed, or another of the prophets remixed.
  - b. They believed he was going to be the king. 'Christ/Messiah' (which means 'anointed one') referred to being 'the king of Israel.' So did the title 'Son of the living God.' See Psalm 2:7.
  - c. The location of this conversation must have been exciting. Caesaria Philippi was north of Galilee. It was a Roman outpost.
  - d. But even though they had the right job title, they had the wrong job description. They thought he was merely human 'like' the other prophets in some sense. They thought he was a military revolutionary that was going to oust the Romans and liberate Jerusalem and usher in a golden age of God's presence and God's blessing.
3. Why is it hard for them to swallow Jesus' understanding of the job description?
  - a. What is a cross?
    - i. An instrument of punishing revolutionaries against Rome, traitors to Rome. When Judas the Galilean revolted in 6 AD, the Romans crucified 3,000 Jews and hung them publicly.
    - ii. If Jesus had said, 'Take up your electric chairs' how would we hear that?
    - iii. Or maybe, 'firing squad' because traitors are executed by firing squads.
  - b. Why is there this connotation to being a traitor, for Jesus?
    - i. Jewish: Because the Jewish disciples are going to embrace the Gentiles. Recall how in Mt.14 – 18, Jesus is training the disciples to serve the Gentiles, and in Mt.28, Jesus will send them out into the whole world. The rest of the Jewish community will not like them for doing this. 'We're oppressed by them – how could you go and proclaim God's grace to them???'
    - ii. Roman: Because the disciples will bow to Jesus as the sole authority, not to Caesar. They will be considered traitors.
  - c. What does it mean for us to 'take up our cross'?
    - i. Individual hardship and suffering and sacrifice
    - ii. Community implications, shift in group identity: Jesus will cause us to care for people outside of our family, ethnic group, nationality, etc. Others in those groups will think that we are traitors.
    - iii. Apply: How does this pertain to us now? What is a next step in caring for the whole world like Jesus cares about it?
4. Now, revisit the questions about v.15 – 19 if necessary
  - a. What does it mean 'upon this rock I will build my church'?
    - i. On the rock he was standing on in Caesaria Philippi.
    - ii. On Peter? His name means 'rock'
    - iii. On Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah? The rock of that truth, so to speak.
  - b. What does it mean that 'I will give you the keys...'?
    - i. Peter is the holder of the keys?
    - ii. The disciples are the holders of the keys: Is 'you' singular or plural?
  - c. What does the binding and loosing mean?
    - i. The kingdom of God vs. the gates of Hades
    - ii. The Holy Spirit's movement
    - iii. The church as the earthly manifestation
5. Ok. Next is a really strange episode, called the Transfiguration. What would you think of this if you had seen it? What are some adjectives that you would use to describe the disciples' reaction to this?
6. What did the Transfiguration mean to the disciples?
  - a. It was really important. Peter says later that it was anchoring to his faith, in 2 Peter 1:16 – 18.
  - b. It was a time-bending moment. Moses and Elijah were there???
  - c. It was a comfort to them, since Jesus had just talked about dying and coming again in glory.
  - d. It was a comfort to them, as Jesus had just said that the Father will repay each according to our deeds. We will be like him, and that will be our reward!!
7. What did the Transfiguration mean to Moses and Elijah?

- a. Since they symbolize ‘the Law and the Prophets’, they now see the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets!! They wanted a new Israel, a new humanity. Now God unveils what He’s doing in Jesus!!
  - b. Notice that in 16:14, Jesus was being compared to the Prophets of old: Elijah, Jeremiah, etc. This shows that Jesus is far beyond them. He fulfilled them. This pretty much seals the fact that Jesus is not merely a prophet!!
8. What did the Transfiguration mean to Jesus?
- a. It was a taste of the resurrection life he would receive after the cross: immortal, eternal, physical, embodied.
  - b. It was a taste of what he was struggling hard for: a new, healed, God-soaked humanity. Recall that Jesus is cleansing his own humanity, struggling with the self-centeredness and fallenness embedded in his own humanity.
    - i. Like Frodo, taking the Ring to Mordor, Jesus was taking his humanity to be cleansed and purged through death
    - ii. Like Harry Potter, dying to kill the piece of Voldemort’s soul in himself, Jesus was dying to kill the rebellious humanity he was wearing, to resurrect it new, fully realigned with God.
9. What does the Transfiguration mean to us?
- a. Hope that we will be raised into resurrection life, too.
  - b. The reward for following Jesus and sacrificing ourselves for Jesus is to share in his very life. Our humanity will become the full dwelling place of God and God’s glory!! The reward for following Jesus is...Jesus!!
  - c. Hope that our struggle against sin – internal and external – will be rewarded.
  - d. Hope that our life will be transfigured by the power of Jesus. This is what Peter said about this in 2 Peter 1:1 – 18:
    - i. <sup>1:1</sup> Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; <sup>3</sup> seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup> For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, *so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust... <sup>15</sup> And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. <sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup> For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’-- <sup>18</sup> and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.