

February 14, 2010/ Matthew 16:13-27 (ESV¹)

we pick up the story of Jesus after a confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders ... He is taking the disciples aside, away from the Jewish crowds, up into a predominantly gentile area ... the disciples have been with Him over 2 years at this point, growing in their understanding of who He really is ... it is time for Jesus to teach them very explicitly about who He is and what is soon to come for Him and them ... it is significant in our day of confused religious "pluralism" and secularism, where most people seem unable to see how anything could possibly be objectively and universally true, that Jesus takes the disciples to the region of Caesarea Philippi, and in that place draws from Peter the magnificent confession of Him as the Christ ... in terms of religious claims, this region was it ... it was a region loaded with (14!) temples of Baal worship, the Greeks maintained that the "god" Pan had been born there, Herod the Great had built a magnificent and extremely visible white marble temple there in honor of the godhead of Caesar ... there, in the shadow of the shrines of competing pagan and secular religions, Jesus brings the disciples to the point of confessing His Messiahship!!! ... the picture is one of 12 ordinary men, in the shadow of all the religious and secular claims of the world of their time, confessing the Lordship of Jesus ... not a bad example for us in 2010 ...

Mat 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

in asking this question Jesus is purposely employing the Messianic language of **Daniel 7:13-14**

Dan 7:13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

Dan 7:14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

He is implicitly claiming His place as the Christ, the anointed One ...

Mat 16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

there's general agreement that Jesus must be something out of the ordinary ... maybe John come back to life, or maybe one of the prophets returned ... perhaps even Elijah, the forerunner of Messiah ... or perhaps Jeremiah ... the Jews had an extra-Biblical legend that just before the exile to Babylon, Jeremiah had taken the ark of the covenant and the altar of incense out of the temple and had hidden them in a cave on Mount Nebo, and that before the coming of Messiah, he would return and produce them and God's glory would return to the nation ...

Mat 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

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the issue is never what everyone else is thinking in their ignorance ... it is instead "you've been graciously given a measure of light by God ... what are you personally going to do with it?" ... the grammatical construction emphasizes the "you" ... YOU (plural), who do you say? ...

Mat 16:16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Peter, speaking on the behalf of all, nails it ... he clearly doesn't understand the full implications of what he's said, but he gets it exactly right ... this is not simply some Jewish prophet or even one of many competitors for the attention of man in a place of "religious diversity" like Caesarea Philippi ... this is instead the Christ/Messiah/God's promised One ... the One who has rightful claim to the throne of David ... and, the Holy Son of God, the One who has exclusive right to the exclusive worship of every creature in the Universe ... this is a magnificent confession, completely emphatic and completely on target ... apparently in Greek it is ten words that includes the definite article 4 times ... it is literally something like "you are *the* Christ, *the* Son of *the* God, *the* living One" ... get this right and live consistent with it, and there is life ... get it wrong and you have nothing ...

Green commenting on the phrase title "Christ" or "anointed one" notes that 3 sorts of figures were anointed with oil in the OT economy, prophets, priests, and kings ... Jesus is all of these ...

Mat 16:17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

it is the work of God that we come and bow the knee before His Son ... it's absolutely essential, but not something that Peter or any of the rest of us would come to on our own ... absolutely no human being comes to a real understanding of who Jesus is except through the revelation of the Father ... it is all of grace ... we saw that Jesus (in **Matthew 11:27**) said that only the Father reveals Him (Jesus) to a person, and only He (Jesus) reveals the Father to a person ... it is indeed, all of grace and all God's doing ...

Mat 16:18 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.

there is (both in Aramaic and Greek) the famous play on words here ... the meaning of Peter's name is "rock" ... Simon, son of John, from now on you're "Rocky" ... and with rocks such as you, I'll build My Messianic people, My community of those called out by grace ... you're the first to fully confess Me, and so you're the first stone in my building to built of living stones ... the gates of death and hell will not stand against that community of faith ... death won't be able to hold Me or My church ... the gates of hell is better rendered "the gates of death" ... the idea is that the church is an eternal one ... it will not die and be shut in by the gates of death ... the people of God, Christ's church will live forever ...

notice that Jesus, Messiah, is inextricably linked to His people, His assembly, His church, those who are His by virtue of their confession of who He is ... it's significant that Jesus says it is His community ... He thereby again claims to be one with the Father ... otherwise it would be God's community ...

Mat 16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Peter is here singled out for responsibility, that Jesus in **Matt 18:18** clearly indicates is also given to the rest of the 12 and the church more broadly ... (**Mat 18:18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind**

on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.) ... Peter will bind and loose in several senses ... in one sense, wherever the Gospel is preached it frees some and consigns others (via their rejection of the Truth) to eternal punishment ... Peter is the first preacher in the early church ... in another sense, Peter is called on in the early church to declare what kinds of actions are in line with the Christian revelation ... the Rabbis commonly used the terms "bind and loose" in this sense, in the sense of declaring what was forbidden and what was allowed ... Peter was in some ways "chief among equals" (in the 12 and the infant church) when questions such as what was to be required of gentile converts were discussed (see **Acts 15**) ...

the church and its God-ordained leadership must have authority in our lives ... post-moderns resist that, to their terrible detriment ... this statement (of course) says nothing close to God being obligated to follow through with whatever Peter (or any of the rest of us) independently declares ... what it says, is that what Peter (and the rest of the 12 and the church more broadly) set out in accord with the will of God in terms of prescriptions for conduct, has eternal consequences and God-given authority ... Peter and the church act as stewards of what is true and has been passed to us by the God of the Bible ...

Mat 16:20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

the time has not come for what they know to be spread abroad ... they must first really understand what the Messiahship of Jesus means, before blabbing it around ... they expect things quite different from the plan of God ... think what a mess of things the masses would have made if they were "sure" that this guy Jesus was their long-awaited political liberator ... even the disciples are not going to see the whole picture until after the resurrection ... Jesus must prepare them for His suffering as Messiah ... Green: (the popular expectation) "... was too small, too nationalistic, too materialistic and earthbound." ...

Mat 16:21 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 on the third day be raised.

Peter has correctly identified Jesus ... now Jesus explains the nature of His sacrifice on our behalf ... this is central ... He's Messiah ... He's the Son of God ... but if that's all there is, you and I are doomed ... His identity is essential, it is completely necessary, but it is not sufficient for our redemption without His work ... Ryle: "On matters of church government, and the form of worship, men may differ from us, and yet reach heaven in safety. On the matter of Christ's atoning death, as the way of peace, truth is only one. If we are wrong here, we are ruined forever. Error on many points is only a skin disease; error about Christ's death is a disease of the heart. Here let us take our stand. Let nothing move us from this ground. The sum of all our hopes must be that 'Christ has died for us.' (**1Thess. 5:10**) Give up that doctrine and we have no solid hope at all."

this suffering is miles from what was the popular expectation for Messiah ... to be someone like the Isaiah "suffering servant" passages prophesy? ... no way! ... the Jews were looking for someone that would liberate them from the Romans and return them to national glory ... the disciples may have been slightly more enlightened by this time, but they certainly weren't ready for Jesus to be killed ...

Mat 16:22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

this is so like us and so wrong-headed ... here's Peter, a mere mortal, wanting to protect and give advice to the One he's just acknowledged as the Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe ... absurd ... Peter has signed on with Jesus, but still thinks that he knows best and is in charge ... there is warning here ... Boice: "It is easy for us to be exactly right one minute and terribly wrong the next. One minute Peter is a prophet, a true spokesman for God. The next minute he is advancing the agenda of the devil, not realizing that in trying to deflect Jesus from the cross, he is actually asking for his own damnation since apart from Jesus' death neither he, nor any of us, can be saved. ... If we are going to be right in spiritual things, it will only be to the extent that we study the Bible and grow in understanding." ... Green: "Whatever spiritual experiences we may have had, we remain just as fallible and weak as ever before. There is no plateau of spirituality to which we can ascend and be for ever thereafter raised above the weaknesses that assail others. Sin and failure are to be found in all the saints. In this lifelong spiritual battle, victory is achieved only through ceaseless vigilance." ...

Peter's wrongheaded statement here is no small thing, no laughing matter ... Jesus' reply is sharp ...

Mat 16:23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Rocky, you're another kind of rock at the moment ... you're a big rock that I might trip on ... remember that in the wilderness, Satan came to Jesus with the "easy way," with plan B, a way that would avoid all this pain and suffering ... Jesus' reply in the wilderness was in some of the same words He speaks here to Peter! ...

Mat 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

it is important for us to see, however, the difference between Jesus' reply to Satan and His reply to Peter ... to Satan he says "be gone" ... to Peter he says "be gone behind me" ... the first banishes Satan from His presence ... the second tells Peter, who has been thinking and talking like Satan, to fall in behind Him like the follower he is, not to continue to assert his independence ... Satan is beyond redemption ... fallen men who will repent and assume their right place as creatures are redeemable ...

Mat 16:24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Hendrickson's paraphrase (paying special attention to the tenses) is: **Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wishes to be (counted as) an adherent of mine, he must once and for all say farewell to self, decisively accept pain, shame, and persecution for my sake and in my cause, and must then follow and keep on following me as my disciple."** ... Green: "... No fight, no victory; no cross, no crown. Followers of Jesus must not forget that there is inevitably a lifelong battle to fight. They are called to follow their Master in suffering, but are promised a share in his triumph." ...

Mat 16:25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Mat 16:26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

as part of this whole sequence of events, these verses make perfect sense ... Jesus has said to the disciples that for Him to submit Himself to the will of the Father will result in suffering and death at the hands of the Jewish leaders ... Peter has exemplified our human rebellion and said he has a better idea ... Jesus rebukes him and now says, "If you're to have any part of me, you must submit your will entirely to God, put your own selfish ambitions to death, and follow Me as I obey the Father" ... not popular stuff ... but the only way ... in any other way lies destruction ...

this "deny yourself" business is not to be heard to be as trivial as abstaining from this or that for a period ... the point is rather one of obliterating "self" as the ruling principle of one's life, and putting in its place the will of God ... that's the kind of stuff that made Jesus willing to suffer and die ... that *same* stuff is required of real disciples ... and if we will see clearly, it is the only attitude that makes any sense in the light of God's great mercy toward us sinful creatures ...

think again of the call of this very same Matthew that is writing here ... Jesus came by the tax collection station and said "Matthew, drop everything and right now run along after me, no questions asked ..." ... and that is exactly what Matthew did ... he completely obliterated "self" as the ruling principle of his life, and ran along after Jesus ... that is true of every real disciple of Christ ...

the taking up the cross is not simply bearing the hard things that come to all of us in life ... it is rather, voluntarily taking on death to our apparent temporal self-interests ... it is purposely taking the hard way for the glory of God and the benefit of others ...

Mat 16:27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

repay each person according to what he has done ... these are not matters of idle philosophy, they are matters of reality ... we will either truly believe that Jesus is both Christ and God and come along after Him, living consistently with His own self-denial, or we will not ... that real choice will be seen in actions ... post-modern foolishness attempts to substitute warm feelings and "knowledge" for right actions, "thinking"/"feeling" one way, "acting" another, having it both ways ... that is a delusion ...

verses 25 and 26 say that to some degree, it is possible live skillfully in temporal self-interest and more or less "come out ahead" in this life, dying with the most stuff ... but it's a bad bargain ... human beings can't both live for self and for God ... it's one or the other ... and the former perhaps "works" for a few years, but then turns to eternal misery ... the latter is joy eternal ...