

SESSION 3

# *Following Jesus*

MATTHEW 16:13-26

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD SENT BY GOD.



The world is made up of leaders and followers. The majority are followers. As followers, it is important who we follow. History is replete with people who followed others to destruction and death. Leaders like Jim Jones of the Jonestown massacre and David Koresh of the Branch Davidian tragedy led their followers to disaster. Each of us must choose leaders wisely. Follow those who lead to life and not to death.

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WHAT ARE THE TRAITS OF LEADERS YOU WANT TO FOLLOW?

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## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Matthew 16 begins with another confrontation. Matthew introduced another group who opposed Jesus: the Sadducees. These leaders of Judaism were the wealthy aristocrats. Their political party oversaw the temple. From this group came the high priest and the high priestly family. They were the power-brokers of Judaism. They were conservative in their approach to Scripture and rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees. They sought to follow only the writings of Moses.

These Sadducees had teamed up with the Pharisees, their archenemies, to trap and eliminate Jesus. In verse 1, they asked Jesus for “a sign from heaven.” Although Jesus had performed many miraculous signs, they were not really interested. They simply wanted to get rid of Jesus.

After a scathing condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 2-4), Jesus withdrew with the disciples to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 5). Their journey would take them north to the area of Caesarea Philippi, where the events in

this week’s study take place. Thus began a new phase in the ministry of Jesus. From Caesarea Philippi, Jesus would travel south directly to Jerusalem. This move signaled the end of the Galilean ministry and the beginning of the final weeks of Jesus’s earthly life, culminating in His arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem.

At some point on the trip to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus warned the disciples about the teachings, “the leaven” (v. 6), of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples missed the intent of Jesus and thought He was chiding them for not bringing food with them for the journey. Jesus reminded them of the baskets of leftovers from the two miraculous feedings He had performed. Matthew used two different terms for “baskets” (vv. 9-10), pointing to the probability that the feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21) took place among Jews, while the feeding of the four thousand (15:32-39) took place in Gentile territory.



**13** When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the **Son of Man A** is?”  
**14** They replied, “Some say **John the Baptist; B** others, **Elijah; C** still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** “But you,” he asked them, “who do **you D** say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter answered, “You are **the Messiah, E** the Son of the living God.” **17** Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because **flesh and blood F** did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. **18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this **rock G** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. **19** I will give you **the keys of the kingdom H** of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.” **20** Then he gave the disciples orders to tell no one that he was the Messiah. **21** From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was **necessary I** for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. **22** Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!” **23** Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.” **24** Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. **25** For whoever wants to **save his life J** will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. **26** For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?”

**A.** A favorite term of Jesus for Himself. The term affirms both His deity and humanity.

**B.** Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29). Upon hearing about Jesus, he thought John had been raised from the dead.

**C.** Malachi 4:5 identified Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus later clarified that this referred to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14).

**D.** The placement of “you” in the original language is emphatic, revealing Jesus’s desire for a personal response.

**E.** Literally “Anointed One.” This is the first time the disciples acknowledged Jesus as Messiah.

**F.** Jesus emphasized that Peter’s confession had a divine origin.

**G.** A Greek play on words with Peter’s name highlights the significant role he and his proclamation would play in church history.

**H.** A reference to authority. This authority is exercised in the preaching of the gospel.

**I.** Jesus’s death and resurrection were no accident, but central to the plan of God (Acts 2:23-24).

**J.** To seek your best life here on earth (cf. 16:26) is pointless if you forfeit eternal life, which can only be found in following Jesus.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

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## 1. Know the Messiah

(Matt. 16:13-20)

We cannot follow Jesus fully until we know and accept His true identity.

- **Why is it important to understand who Jesus is?**

## 2. Embrace His Mission

(Matt. 16:21-23)

We cannot follow Jesus fully until we accept His mission as Messiah and Savior.

- **How do we let our own agendas replace God's greater plans?**

## 3. Become His Disciple

(Matt. 16:24-26)

We cannot follow Jesus fully until we sacrifice our personal agendas to Him.

- **What does it mean to deny ourselves and to carry our cross?**

## Apply the Text

- **Discuss in your group about the various contemporary opinions regarding Jesus. Why do you think people hold these opinions about Jesus? Ask your group members why they hold their opinion about Jesus.**

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### KEY DOCTRINE:

#### God the Son

In His substitutionary death on the cross Christ made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Isaiah 53:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

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### BIBLE SKILL:

**Read, reflect on, and apply a Bible passage.**

Focus on Matthew 16:24. Identify the three qualifications for becoming a true disciple of Jesus. Reflect on the meaning of each qualification by responding to these questions: What does it mean to deny oneself? What are some things that hinder me from denying myself? What does it mean to take up your cross? What does it mean to follow Jesus? For you, what is the next step in following Jesus?



## DAILY EXPLORATION



### Day 1: Matthew 16:13-14

*Note the various opinions about Jesus.*

The title “Son of Man” speaks of Jesus’s dual nature of being fully God and fully man. Jesus used it to point to His identity as God’s Messiah. He asked the disciples the question in verse 13 to sharpen their understanding of who He is.

The disciples gave a variety of answers they had heard from the crowds. John the Baptist had been executed by Herod Antipas some time before this, thus the identification that this was John the Baptist raised from the dead. The same would be true of the other names mentioned. Malachi prophesied that Elijah would appear before the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). Jeremiah, who preached judgment and was oppressed by his enemies, was also mentioned as well as one of the prophets. Obviously, the crowds were trying to comprehend who Jesus really was. He spoke for God, He performed miracles, and He rebuked the current religious establishment. Yet He had not given any indication that He would soon lead a revolution against Rome on behalf of the Jewish people.

The common belief was that one or more of these prophets would serve as a forerunner to the Messiah. Thus, the crowd most likely thought Jesus was a forerunner to the Messiah and not the Messiah Himself. They struggled to embrace Him as Messiah because He didn’t fit their profile.

**Who do people today say Jesus is?**



### Day 2: Matthew 16:15-18

*Identify the promise in verse 18.*

Jesus turned to the opinion of the disciples. Peter answered on behalf of all the disciples. He acknowledged that Jesus was uniquely “the Messiah.” Peter also acknowledged that Jesus was “the Son of the living God.” The use of the definite article “the” pointed to the fact that Jesus is uniquely the Son and there is no other. Jesus called Peter “blessed” and declared that his answer was given under the Father’s inspiration.

Not all Bible students agree on the interpretation of Jesus’s statement, “on this rock I will build my church.” Following the conventional rules of Greek grammar, the words “you are Peter” immediately followed by the declaration “on this rock” would indicate that Peter is the rock. The Gospels and the first chapters of Acts point to Peter as being the recognized leader of the apostles. Peter, however, most certainly was used as a representative of all the disciples. They were the ones Jesus was training to continue the movement He had begun. While Peter and the apostles would be foundational to the church in a unique sense, Jesus is uniquely the cornerstone of the church. (See Eph. 2:20.)

The church that Jesus builds will withstand any onslaught from Satan. This is seen in the statement “the gates of Hades” cannot destroy Christ’s church. Nothing will be able to stop the growth of the church.

**Who do you say Jesus is?**



### Day 3: Matthew 16:19-20

#### *Identify the meaning of “the keys.”*

Peter again is representative of all the disciples, and for that matter all believers. Jesus has given to the church He established the “keys” or the authority to “bind” and to “loose,” or to close and open. Note that the keys are to the “kingdom of heaven.” This, of course, represents the rule and reign of God in the hearts of men and women who are a part of God’s family.

The idea, then, of binding and loosing relates to entrance into God’s kingdom. The apostles and prophets, and for that matter all believers, open the kingdom or close the kingdom to others through witnessing and proclamation of the good news of Christ. Such action will also involve assurance of forgiveness to those who were enslaved to sin (see John 20:23).

Here is another instance Jesus gave the command to tell no one concerning His identity (Matt. 8:4; Mark 7:36; 9:9). Jesus was aware that He was part of a timetable that must play out during His time on earth. This particular moment was not the proper time for revealing Jesus’s identity as the Son of God. There would be time for that later.

**What are you doing with the “keys of the kingdom”?**



### Day 4: Matthew 16:21-23

#### *Circle the word “necessary” in verse 21.*

“From then on . . .” This was the turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Not only is this the transition point between the Galilean ministry and the events in Jerusalem, but it is also a shift in focus for Jesus. No longer are His teachings about the kingdom and His compassionate healings the central thrust. Now Jesus’s life moved rapidly toward the real reason He came. It was “necessary” for him to suffer and be killed and then be raised from the dead.

Presumably, Peter thought he knew what was best for Jesus and took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus for speaking of His impending death. This may have arisen from Peter’s brash personality, or his supposed “authority” he had received from Jesus calling him the “rock.” Or it could have arisen out of love for Jesus and fear of the future.

Jesus rebuked Peter using very similar words of rebuke given to Satan in Matthew 4:10. Peter took the perspective of Satan in trying to keep Jesus from carrying out God’s plan of salvation. In rebuking Peter, Jesus was really, once again, rebuking Satan and denouncing this latest temptation thrown His way.

**How have you let your own agenda replace God’s greater plans?**



## Day 5: Matthew 16:24-26

### *Contemplate the meaning of the paradox in verse 25.*

Jesus set His face toward the suffering that awaited Him. He also knew that the path of following Him would lead many of His followers to suffer also. Those who follow Him must “deny” themselves. This points to a denunciation of self being on the throne of one’s life instead of God.

The one who follows Jesus must also “take up his cross.” The cross was an instrument of death. The follower of Christ must be ready and willing to pay any price that following Jesus might bring. It involved suffering and even the possibility of death. Many of those following Jesus would experience this all too soon.

Following Jesus involves a paradox. Through a willingness to lose his life through unconditional obedience to Christ, one will find life. The one unwilling to sacrifice all for Jesus in an effort to “save his life,” will ultimately lose the abundant and eternal life promised through Jesus. The paradox is that life comes through death and self-denial; death, on the other hand, comes to those seeking to live.

The ultimate question in life is simply this: what are we willing to “exchange” to experience life to the fullest, now and for eternity? Don’t settle for anything short of a total sell-out to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

**What does it mean to deny yourself and to carry your cross?**

## APPLY THE TEXT

Jot down the costs of following Jesus. Then create a list of the costs of not following Jesus. Which will you choose?

## JOURNAL

