

Following Jesus

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

Matthew 16:13-26

13 When Jesus came to the region of **Caesarea Philippi**, **A** he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the **Son of Man** **B** is?” **14** They replied, “Some say **John the Baptist**; **C** others, **Elijah**; **D** still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** “But **you**,” **E** he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter answered, “You are **the Messiah**, **F** the Son of the living God.” **17** Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because **flesh and blood** **G** 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** **H** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. **19** I will give you **the keys of the kingdom** **I** 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** **J** 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** **K** him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!” **23** Jesus turned and told Peter, “**Get behind me, Satan!** **L** 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** **M** 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?”

Exploring Key Words

- A** About 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, this city was named after Philip the tetrarch and in honor of Tiberius Caesar.
- B** A favorite term of Jesus for Himself. Jesus’s use of the term affirms both His deity and humanity.
- C** Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29). Upon hearing about Jesus, he thought John had been raised from the dead.
- D** Malachi 4:5 identified Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus later clarified that this referred to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14).
- E** The placement of “you” in the original language is emphatic, revealing Jesus’s desire for a personal response.
- F** Literally “Anointed One.” This is the first time the disciples acknowledged Jesus as Messiah.
- G** “Human being” (NLT). Jesus emphasized that Peter’s confession had a divine origin.
- H** A Greek play on words with Peter’s name highlights the significant role he and his proclamation would play in church history.
- I** A reference to authority. This authority is exercised in the preaching of the gospel.
- J** Jesus’s death and resurrection were no accident, but central to the plan of God (Acts 2:23-24).
- K** Correcting with authority. Peter thought he had authority to correct Jesus, but the tables were turned on him quickly.
- L** Jesus’s rebuke of Peter reflects the same rebuke He gave Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:10).
- M** 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.



NOTES

Know the Messiah (Matt. 16:13-20)

- Outside Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was. He also challenged them to consider what they believed about Him.
- Peter responded by acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. Jesus affirmed this response as an insight provided by God and one that would provide a foundation for the church.

Embrace His Mission (Matt. 16:21-23)

- Having established Himself as the Messiah, Jesus announced that He would suffer and be prosecuted in Jerusalem. Ultimately, this would lead to His crucifixion and resurrection.
- Peter rebuked Jesus for speaking this way, but the Lord rebuked him for focusing on human desires more than God's desires.

Become His Disciple (Matt. 16:24-26)

- Jesus explained the standard for His disciples. Following Jesus requires self-denial and self-sacrifice for His sake.
- The Christian life is a paradox where death produces life and sacrifice provides great gain.

Summary Statements

Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world sent by God.

- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we know and accept His true identity.
- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we accept His mission as Messiah and Savior.
- We cannot follow Jesus fully until we sacrifice our personal agendas to Him.

Memory Verse

Matthew 16:24

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.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [goExploreTheBible.com](https://www.goExploreTheBible.com).

ENGAGE

What are the traits of leaders you want to follow? (PSG, p. 27)

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

Bonus: Who is the best leader you've ever followed? What did you learn from that person?

EXPLORE

KNOW THE MESSIAH (MATT. 16:13-20)

Bonus: When have you experienced a case of mistaken identity? How did you resolve it?

- Caesarea Philippi was prominent for its many shrines to false gods. Later, it became an early center for emperor worship. This hub of pagan fervor was the backdrop for Jesus's questions about how people perceived Him.
- The disciples gave a variety of answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other prophet. The common belief was that one or more of these would serve as a forerunner to the Messiah. Thus, the crowd likely saw Him as a forerunner to the Messiah, not the Messiah Himself.
- Jesus turned to the opinion of the disciples. The pronoun "you" is emphatic and plural. This was an important question for all the disciples. Peter answered for the group, declaring that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the unique Son of God.
- Jesus affirmed that Peter's answer originated in a source other than "flesh and blood." It was a divine insight.
- The Gospels and the first chapters of Acts point to Peter as a recognized leader among the apostles. However, here he was a representative of all the disciples. They were the ones Jesus was training to continue His mission on earth. (See "Dig Deeper" on p. 20.)
- Binding and loosing relates to God's kingdom. Believers open the kingdom or close the kingdom through their witness and the proclamation of the gospel.

Why is it important to understand who Jesus is? (PSG, p. 32)

EMBRACE HIS MISSION (MATT. 16:21-23)

Bonus: What does it feel like to be rebuked? How is it helpful? How is it discouraging?

- After Peter's confession, Jesus shifted His focus from a ministry in Galilee to the sacrifice He would make in Jerusalem. So, He shared with His followers why it was "necessary" for Him to suffer, die, and rise again.
- Peter assumed that he knew what was best for Jesus. So, he rebuked his Master, possibly because he felt a new sense of authority after his great confession.
- Jesus rebuked Peter using words similar to the rebuke to Satan in Matthew 4:10. In rebuking Peter, Jesus was really rebuking Satan again and denouncing this latest temptation to stray from God's plans.

How do we let our own agendas replace God's greater plans? (PSG, p. 33)

BECOME HIS DISCIPLE (MATT. 16:24-26)

Bonus: What is the highest price you've ever paid for an experience? How did you decide the price was worth the value?

- Jesus knew He would suffer and that the path of following Him would lead His followers to suffer as well. His disciples also must deny themselves. They must reject being on the throne of their lives instead of God.
- They also are called to take up their cross and follow Him. Jesus's disciples must be willing to pay any price for His sake.
- The Christian life is a paradox. Those who surrender their lives to Christ will find eternal life through Him. Those who try to save their own lives will die spiritually.

What does it mean to deny ourselves and to carry our cross? (PSG, p. 34)

CHALLENGE

As a group, list and discuss various contemporary ideas about Jesus. Discuss how they are similar or different from the ideas held by adults in your Bible study.

Why do you think people hold these opinions about Jesus? (PSG, p. 35)

Encourage adults to spend time reflecting on the costs of following Jesus.

Create a list of the costs of not following Jesus. Which will you choose? (PSG, p. 35)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 34)

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?***

Direct the group to read Matthew 16:24 and to identify what's required of Jesus's disciples, as instructed in the Bible Skill activity on page 34 of the PSG. Provide each adult with a sheet of paper and pencil and challenge them to answer the questions included in the activity. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their responses. Lead a brief discussion about what would be most difficult about adopting the attitudes and actions commanded in verse 24.

OBJECT LESSON: KEY

Encourage adults to list some things that prove ownership in our culture. Ask: ***How could a key demonstrate ownership?*** Discuss responses.

Hold up the key to your car. Say: ***You may need to borrow my car sometime; but even if I give you the key, the car is still mine. You have my permission to use it, but I'm still the owner.*** Help adults understand that Peter did not own the authority of heaven, but his confession of Jesus as Messiah gave him and the other disciples access to God's authority.

Point out that this authority was something they would need as they spread the message of the kingdom across the known world. Affirm that believers possess this same authority today. Say: ***Just like the apostles in the first century, we rely on Jesus's authority every time we share the gospel with someone else. We open the door to heaven, leaving it up to them to make a decision to enter or not.***

BUILT ON A ROCK

What did Jesus mean when he said, "On this rock, I will build my church"? Is Peter the rock? Is Peter's confession the rock? For centuries, scholars and theologians have debated this passage.

Roman Catholics believe Jesus's words are the foundation for papal authority. Some Protestants interpret them as an affirmation of Peter's confession as the bedrock of the church's mission. Regardless of the controversies, two key truths emerge from Matthew 16:13-20. First, Peter would have a pivotal role in supporting the early church. Second, Peter's role is connected to his confession of Jesus as the Messiah.

Peter's foundational role is evident in Acts 2, where he boldly proclaimed the gospel at Pentecost. That sermon led three thousand people to accept Jesus and enter the church (Acts 2:14-47). Paul later would clarify that Peter's confession—along with the proclamations of the other apostles and prophets—serves as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-20). Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Peter emphasized this truth in his own writings. His role did not involve a perpetual office, but an ongoing ministry of sharing "the prophetic word

strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it" (2 Pet. 1:19). In other words, it is not his authoritative role that is pivotal but his proclamation of Christ, the true Rock of the church, which is now recorded in the Scriptures.

While Peter had a unique, foundational role in establishing the early church, the church today continues the same mission of proclaiming Christ. In Matthew 18:18, we see that the responsibility given to Peter is given to every follower of Christ. God has entrusted the church with the authority to loose and bind, announcing God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

The church exercises this authority today through preaching the gospel. We demonstrate it every time we share the good news about Jesus and invite people to trust in Him.

BONUS CONTENT



Three Predictions

Jesus foretold His death three times in Matthew's gospel. Scan this QR code to deepen your understanding of His journey to the cross.