

In this passage Jesus tests His disciples' understanding of His identity as the Christ and begins teaching them about the suffering and death that lay before Him. When Peter attempts to reject that future for Jesus, the Lord rebukes Satan through Peter for attempting to persuade Him to avoid the cross in disobedience to His Father. Jesus makes it clear that following Him also involves suffering and death.

Verses 1-12: The Pharisees and the Sadducees come to Jesus and demand that He give them a miraculous sign from heaven to give credibility to the things He has been teaching. Jesus refuses on the basis that such a request does not come from faith but from a wicked heart of unbelief. When the disciples rejoin Jesus they realize that they had forgotten to bring food. Jesus, with His encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees still on His mind, warns them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Confused, the disciples think He is speaking of literal bread but Jesus corrects them by reminding them of how He had fed both the 5,000 and the 4,000. Obviously He was not referring to literal bread. The disciples then realized that He was speaking of the doctrine (teaching) of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

“When Jesus came into the coasts [district; region] of Caesarea Philippi” – The region of Caesarea Philippi was about 25 miles north of Galilee and was populated mainly by Gentiles. This area represents the most northerly point that Jesus traveled during His earthly ministry. It is in this region, with the most distance between Himself and the core habitation of the Jews (Jerusalem), that His ministry takes a different turn. Jesus has spent most of His ministry in the Galilee region but now He will begin ministering more and more in the area of Judea and Jerusalem as the time of His crucifixion approaches.

“he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” - Jesus asks what the popular theories are that the public has as to Jesus' prophetic identity.

“And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” – Some, like Herod, believed that Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist (Matt. 14:2). Others believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies predicting the coming of Elijah as the forerunner of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6). Still others believed that Jesus might be Jeremiah or one of the other OT prophets that had been resurrected by God. It is noteworthy that the disciples did not mention a belief that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ) among these popular theories, likely indicating that few Jews truly believed that Jesus was the Christ. This implies that despite the vast multitudes that followed Jesus, those that truly believed He was the Messiah were in the minority.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?” - Jesus now moves to the true point of His query. What do the disciples believe about Him? Have they been swayed by public opinion or are they convinced of the truth that He has been demonstrating before them?

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” – Peter speaks for the twelve as he often did and answers the question. He nails it with the best possible answer that could have been given to the question at that time since Jesus was indeed the Christ (the promised Messiah). The expression “the living God” is an OT name for God, contrasting Him with the dead idols which had no life. To describe a person as “the son of” something was a Jewish expression indicating that the person had inherited or shared the nature and attributes of whatever they were the son of, just as a son inherits the characteristics of his father. For example, in the OT some men were called “sons of Belial” (“Belial” meant “worthless; wicked”) indicating that they had the characteristics of being worthless or wicked individuals. Jesus often called Himself “the Son of man,” indicating His human nature. Peter's description of Jesus as “the Son of the living God” indicated his belief that Jesus was God and shared all the attributes of deity that His Father possessed.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona” – Jesus responds with a comment of how Peter has been blessed by God to be able to answer the question as he did. The “Bar” part of the surname “Bar-jona” is Aramaic and means “son” and so the name “Bar-jona” means “son of Jona.” Jesus is acknowledging Peter by his birth name: Simon, the son of Jona (Jonah).

“for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” – The reason Peter is blessed is because God has enabled him to recognize the truth of Jesus. Most people who had heard Jesus teach and saw His miracles were still oblivious to the truth that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. However, Peter and the other disciples (except Judas) were recognizing the true nature of Jesus because God the Father had opened their eyes and given them the spiritual discernment to understand. They had not figured it out using human reasoning (their own or that of others) and the testimony of others had not been the root cause of their belief. We can witness to people and explain the gospel repeatedly to people but until God opens their eyes they cannot truly believe.

Luke 8:10 (Jesus speaking to the disciples about why He taught publicly with parables) *“And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.”*

Phil. 1:29 (Paul encouraging the Philippian in the face of persecutions for the sake of Christ) *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;”*

1 Cor. 2:14 *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

2 Tim. 2:24-26 *“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”*

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Roman Catholics use this verse to claim that Peter was the first Pope and that Christ built the Catholic church on him. However, this is not what Jesus is saying here. The Greek word for “Peter” is “*petros*” (a small stone) but the word for “rock” is “*petra*” (a foundation stone). Since the NT makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church (Acts 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 3:11), it is obvious that Jesus is not referring to Peter as the foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11 “*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*”). Jesus is using Peter’s name in a play on words to contrast Peter (a small stone) to Himself (the foundation stone) as the foundation of His church. It is His church and Satan will never be able to defeat it because it is under our Lord’s protection and care.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

“**And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven**” – This verse is likely the source of the mistaken idea of Peter standing at the pearly gates of heaven deciding who will enter heaven and who will be sent to hell. Roman Catholics also use this verse to argue that when the pope (who they claim as successors to Peter’s office) makes declarations concerning the church he is using the keys of the kingdom. Although there are various interpretations of this verse, it seems that Jesus is giving Peter and the other disciples (and, by extension, all believers) the authority to declare on earth what God has already determined in heaven.

“**and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**” – Many commentators point out that the original Greek favors the translation “whatever you bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven...” The binding and loosing seems to carry the idea of giving or revoking permission and gives the church the authority for church discipline. The church has the authority to apply scripture to a situation to determine God’s will in dealing with it.

20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

This seems to be an odd restriction that Jesus has placed on His disciples. After making sure that they do understand that He is the Christ (the Messiah), He commands them to keep it a secret at this time. After the resurrection He will command them to go into all the world proclaiming that He is the Christ, but at this time they are to keep silent. The most likely reason is so that they don’t upset the timing of the crucifixion. The crucifixion must happen at the proper time and the public proclamation that Jesus is the Christ might accelerate it.

21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Jesus is now entering the latter portion of His earthly ministry and is starting to close in on the time of His arrest and crucifixion. Thus He starts teaching and preparing the disciples for what is to come. We can only assume that He is also explaining the reason He must die.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Peter “took him” (took Jesus aside) and began to assert what he believed should be the Lord’s future. No doubt Peter meant well because he wanted to protect Jesus from the fate that He had been describing. However, Peter was looking at things from a human perspective for he believed that killing Christ, the Son of God, even if it were possible, would be a catastrophe that should not be permitted.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

“**But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan**” – No doubt Peter was unprepared for the response He got from Jesus. Jesus said “Get thee behind me, Satan,” indicating that Peter was giving voice to an idea from Satan intended to tempt Jesus.

“**thou art an offence [trap; obstacle] unto me**” – Such an idea was an obstacle to obeying the will of God. Jesus knew His Father’s will was that He go to the cross and He did not want anything to stand in the way of His obedience to His Father.

“**for thou savourest [to be in agreement with] not the things that be of God, but those that be of men**” – Peter’s intentions were in agreement with the way men think and thus was contrary to the will of God. What we think is best may not be what God has decided is best because our ideas, if not based on scripture, come from a heart and mind tainted by sin. **Rom. 8:7** “*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*”

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Peter expressed his idea that Jesus should not have to suffer but now Jesus says that not only will He have to suffer but that anyone who would follow Him must also suffer. A follower of Christ must live a life of self-denial (seeking God’s will above his own). The cross was an instrument of torture and death and so Jesus is saying that we must be willing to endure whatever suffering that might come our way because we are a follower of Christ. The path that lay before Jesus would involve persecution, suffering and death. Anyone who would be a follower of Jesus must be prepared to also walk a path that may involve persecution, suffering and death.

26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Jesus puts things into perspective for someone who is not willing to give up the things of this world in order to walk this path of persecution, suffering and death for Christ. Is it worth the price of one’s soul if they were able to trade it for all the wealth and power that the world has to offer? This world is temporary but the fate of one’s soul is eternal.