



## Group Discussion Guide

*For group meetings from December 13 afternoon through December 20 morning*

### **Matthew 16:1-12**

Jesus had returned to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and here he was confronted by some Pharisees and Sadducees who had traveled to question him. These two groups of religious leaders disagreed on several issues, but they were now united by a common enemy in Jesus. Here, they asked Jesus to prove his identity by showing them a sign from heaven. Jesus responded by referencing their knowledge of the skies and pointing out that they could interpret these signs to predict the weather but did not recognize the signs that pointed to him as being the Messiah. His response in this situation was similar to that of Matthew 12, when the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign from him. Again he called them “an evil and adulterous generation” for seeking a sign, and again he told them the only sign they would receive was that of Jonah (a reference to his death, burial and resurrection).

Jesus and the disciples left the religious leaders and made their way to another location around the Sea of Galilee. While the disciples were concerned about their lack of food, Jesus focused on sharing truth about the teachings and attitudes of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He told them to be cautious about these men, because their teachings and attitudes were like leaven in that they could spread to large groups of people and cause them to reject what God was doing. The disciples confused Jesus’ reference of leaven with what they perceived was the more immediate problem of having no bread. Jesus confronted them for their lack of faith and reminded them how he had fed the large crowds twice with just a small amount of bread. He also questioned why they did not understand his reference to leaven, and then reminded them again to beware of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

### **Matthew 16:13-20**

When the group arrived at their next destination of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples a poignant question: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They gave him a variety of answers. Then he asked them directly, “Who do you say that I am?” As Peter often did, he spoke up first. He responded with the statement that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus then told Peter that God had revealed this truth to him, and that he was now the foundation upon which the church would be built. While some have argued that this places Peter as the primary leader of the early church, others have proposed that the “rock” which Jesus referred to was that of Peter’s faithful declaration. However, there exists an obvious play on words that connects the word “rock” to the meaning of Peter’s name (it literally means, “rock”). In addition, Peter had made a statement about Jesus and here it would seem Jesus in return made a statement about Peter (and not just Peter’s faithful declaration of Jesus as the Messiah). Truly there is no reason to reject Jesus’ statement about building the church on Peter, when we understand that Jesus was not so much giving Peter more authority than others

but rather stating the reality that Peter would be instrumental in the birth of the new testament church (as seen in Acts 2). It was not Peter's power or authority that would be on display, but rather God's power and authority. Such was this power that even death itself could not conquer the church. Jesus' next statement regarding Peter is directly related to his work as an evangelist: the result of his Gospel work on the earth would be mirrored in heaven as people either accepted or rejected the truth of Jesus as Messiah.

### **Matthew 16:21-28**

Jesus had now transitioned to a private time of teaching his disciples. He shared in general what would happen to him in Jerusalem: he would suffer, die and raise again from the dead. As he did before, Peter again spoke up. This time, however, he was wrong. He tried to tell Jesus this would not happen. Peter's motive for this statement is not clear; what is clear is that Peter did not want to see Jesus suffer and die. And yet, Jesus strongly rebuked Peter for this statement, because it was his suffering, death and resurrection that would be the means through which his mission of salvation would be accomplished. Jesus said Peter's mind was on the things of man rather than the things of God.

The teaching in verses 24-25 is a repetition of Jesus' teaching to the disciples in Matthew 10:38-39. He told them that denial of selfish desires was necessary to follow him and his ways. Those who sought after the things of the world and ignored their own need for salvation would regret doing so on the day of judgment. The final verse of this chapter has led to a variety of interpretations due to the obvious problem that none of those standing before Jesus on that day would live to see his second coming. This commentary note may prove helpful in understanding the nature of Jesus' statement in this verse:

*It seems best to take 16:28 as having a more general reference—viz., not referring simply to the Resurrection, to Pentecost, or the like, but to the manifestation of Christ's kingly reign exhibited after the Resurrection in a host of ways, not the least of them being the rapid multiplication of disciples and the mission to the Gentiles. Some of those standing there would live to see Jesus' Gospel proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire and a rich "harvest" (cf. 9:37–38) of converts reaped for Jesus Messiah. This best suits the flexibility of the "kingdom" concept in the synoptic Gospels (see on 3:2; 10:23; 12:28) and the present context.*

*D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 382.*

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you apply Jesus' warning in verses 6 and 11 to your life today? What do you think is a modern day equivalent of the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees"?
2. The disciples had participated in the miracles Jesus worked to feed thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread and a few fish, and yet they were concerned about not bringing bread on their journey. What does this tell us about the importance of remembering how God has worked in the past?
3. What does it mean to you to know that Jesus continues to build his church and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"?
4. Why do you think Peter rebuked Jesus after he told the disciples he would be killed in Jerusalem? Why do you think Jesus so sharply rebuked Peter in response? How was Peter setting his mind on the things of man, rather than the things of God?
5. What does it mean to deny ourselves and take up our cross as we follow Jesus? What does this mean for you, personally?
6. How are you moved by verse 26?