

Guest Preacher Rev. David Macleod (North Harris)

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Preacher: Rev. David Macleod

[0 : 00] If you could turn back, please, to the passage that we read in Matthew chapter 16.! We confess with the psalmist that we are those who are transgressors.

We are those who are sinners. But we thank you that we can and we must be turned unto thee. And we pray, Lord God, that you would turn us to yourself just now.

We pray that our eyes and our minds would be turned away from ourselves. And from the things in this world that may be legitimate, but may in the hour of worship be a distraction.

Take our vision off these things, we pray. And help us to fix our eyes upon Jesus. So help us, we ask, as we bow before you.

And again, Lord, we pray for the young ones who've gone through to their Sunday school class. We pray that you would enable them to hear and believe the gospel message as it's shared with them, in a simple way.

[1 : 51] Minister to them, we pray, as you would minister to us. We pray for the churches around us. Different denominations, different locations. Whatever Christ crucified is preached.

We ask, Lord God, that you would add your blessing. Lord Jesus, that you would continue to build your church. We pray for congregations that may be connected with us today.

Visitors, you may be here. Who are thinking also about the congregations that they belong to. And we ask, Lord, that you would be working there. As we pray that you would be working here.

So go before us, we ask. We acknowledge that apart from you, Lord Jesus, we can do nothing. We cannot preach. We cannot listen.

We cannot respond. So we pray that we would not be apart from you. But that we would be close to you. That we would be connected to the vine.

[2 : 54] And that we would know that life-giving touch of Jesus upon us. Hear our prayers. Take away our sin. Teach us from your word, we pray.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if we were to record our conversations.

Our polite conversations. You know, the kind of conversations we have at the door to the church. Or at the shop when we bump into somebody that we know. I wonder if we were to look at a transcript of our conversations over the last week or the last few weeks.

And we were to scan through them and think about the subjects that we most commonly talk about. What would be there? I imagine if we were to think through our conversations, we would often talk about our families.

Those that we love the most. We bring them into our conversations. Or we may talk about our work situation.

[4 : 07] For the young ones, you might be thinking about school. How much you're excited about going back there on Thursday. That might be part of your conversation.

Or it might be the opposite of that. With the football season coming close to starting again. It may be that football and sport features commonly in our conversations.

All these things tend to creep into our conversations. But I think probably it's fair to say that the thing that we talk most commonly about in our polite conversations is...

And Harris, they finished it for me. But it's the weather. As Hebrideans... I'm half a Nishoch, half a Stor Norwegian. But as Hebrideans, whether it's Harris or Uist or Lewis or whatever, the thing that we never stop talking about is the weather.

The wind's fierce as it's blowing through at Harris last week. And that was a conversation topic day after day. I wish the wind would die down.

[5 : 22] But once the wind dies down, we're talking about the Mizzies. We have a beautiful day. And somebody says, what a glorious day it is today. We say, isn't it just that there's bad weather

coming, so enjoy it.

We're forever talking about the weather. And that's actually not a new thing. It's actually something that we read here that Jesus mentions as we come to the passage in Matthew 16.

There's even a talk there about the skies, about the weather that we anticipate. I want to look at the passage under four headings if we have time this morning.

The first thing we'll see in chapter 16 and the opening verses of it is we'll see, first of all, point one, opposition. Opposition to Jesus.

The second thing we'll see is repetition in terms of the question that Jesus has asked, the request that comes to Him, and His response to those who ask the question.

[6 : 21] The third thing we'll see is confusion on the part of the disciples as they're trying to understand what Jesus says and teaches. And the last thing we will touch on and then come back to this evening is the profession of faith that comes from Peter as he speaks, probably on behalf of most of the disciples.

So the first thing we see here is opposition. So picking up at verse 1, and if you've got your Bibles open in front of you, you'll find it helpful just to step through the verses with me.

So the first thing we see is opposition. Verse 1 says, And the Pharisees and Sadducees came. They come to Jesus, and we're told in verse 1, the reason they come is to test Him.

So the first thing that strikes us in this passage is opposition to Jesus. And we could flick back through previous chapters, and we can fast forward into future chapters, and it doesn't matter where we go in the life and ministry of Jesus.

He was always facing opposition. Opposition. We go back to the time of Jesus' birth. There is the most violent opposition to Jesus from King Herod as he tries to locate and tries to kill this child who has been born, the King of the Jews.

[7 : 50] That's Matthew chapter 2. Opposition to Jesus as a baby. And then as ministry begins, sometimes the opposition to Jesus comes even from within his own family.

For a long time, they didn't believe in Him. They're trying to stop Him, in some senses, going forward in ministry, as we see them on occasions trying to pull Jesus out of a house as he's ministering, because he's missed his dinner.

Sometimes the opposition to Jesus came from his own disciples. We see this in the future verses. Jesus, as he listens to Peter's profession of faith, very quickly after that, faces opposition from Peter, as he tries to steer Jesus away from the course of the cross.

But the most common opposition to Jesus came from those who were in religious and civil authority.

And that's the case in verse 1 here. We see the Pharisees and the Sadducees making their approach. And it wasn't unusual to see the Pharisees making an approach in opposition, and it wasn't unusual to see the Sadducees coming to Jesus in opposition, but what was unusual was to see them coming together.

[9 : 12] Usually the Pharisees and the Sadducees were quarreling with each other. They were apart. But in this instance, they joined forces against Jesus.

J.C. Arroyo says, As a general rule, these two sects were at enmity between themselves. But in persecuting Christ, they made common cause.

Truly, this was an unholy alliance. So the first thing to note is opposition to Jesus.

And if we are with Jesus, if we are Christ's ones, if we believe in Him, we can expect the same opposition.

We need to be realistic about that. We love the promises of Jesus, don't we? And it's right that we do. We go through Scripture.

[10 : 18] We delve into the Scriptures looking for these jewels of promises that Jesus gives us. And sometimes we take the promises of Jesus and we'll have a watercolour painting.

And our verse will be along the bottom of it. Promises like, I will be with you always. So you'll see a picture of a beach in Ness or Harris. The verse at the bottom.

A promise of Jesus. And we cherish it. We look at it as it's pinned on our walls. But it strikes me that a promise of Jesus that we don't hang on our walls, a promise of Jesus that we don't use as the screensaver for our phones, is a promise that Jesus gives us in John 16.33.

And that promise is, in this world, you will have trouble. And then Jesus goes on in that chapter to make clear that if we follow him, there is opposition.

There is persecution. So, if you are here today and you're a Christian, then you and I need to know that we will face opposition.

[11:35] For Jesus' sake, that shouldn't alarm us. It shouldn't knock us off balance. We have to expect it. But we don't need to be scared by it.

We don't hear Jesus saying, as he sees the Pharisees and Sadducees coming together, we don't hear Jesus saying, oh no, I'll never be able to cope with the joint forces of these two.

He's not perturbed by them. He's not scared by them. Because this is God the Son. This is the one who inspired Psalm 2, where we see all the nations of the world uniting against God's anointed one.

The one in heaven looks. He sees the joint forces of world history against Christ. The one in heaven looks and laughs.

Because it's such a mismatch. The power of Christ against the forces of the world are nothing.

[12:50] And so the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as we continue to see going through Matthew's Gospel, they're no match for Jesus. He faces them. He overcomes them.

And that's actually part two of the John 16, 33 promise. Remember what Jesus says? He says, in this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, Christian.

I have overcome the world. Opposition is the first thing we see. The second point, the second thing we can note, is the repetition that we hear in this dialogue.

Verse 1, The Pharisees, the Sadducees, came and to test them, they asked them to show them a sign from heaven. Jesus answered them, verse 2, When it's evening, you say it will be fair weather for the sky is red, and in the morning, it will be stormy today for the sky is red and threatening.

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

[14:06] So he left them and departed. So you might ask the question, well, where is the repetition? And the repetition comes firstly from the Pharisees with their question.

They're asking in verse 1 for a sign. They're demanding that Jesus would perform some wonder that will confirm his identity as the Christ. That in itself was a nonsense.

Because scan back to the verses, and Jesus has just fed 5,000 men and 4,000 women and the children. He has healed the sick. He's cast out demons. He has raised the dead. There is no shortage of signs. So to come asking for a sign was madness. But that's what they do. They come asking for a sign in this dialogue here in Matthew chapter 16. If you would go with me, please, for a moment back to Matthew chapter 12.

[15:13] in your Bibles. Keep one finger in Matthew 16. And one finger in Matthew 12.

And if you look at verse 38 and following of Matthew 12, we see the same people, the Pharisees. Sadducees aren't here on this occasion, but the Pharisees.

And it says in verse 38 of Matthew 12, then some of the scribes and Pharisees answer Jesus saying, we wish to see a sign from you. They're asking for exactly the same thing in just a few chapters in just a short space of time after that.

So there's repetition in the questions, the requests they keep coming to Jesus with. And then there's repetition also from Jesus in his response to the religious leaders.

Chapter 12, verse 39 and 40. Jesus answered them, an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

[16:24] Compare that to the verses we just read in Matthew 16. It's word for word the same. The only difference between these two conversations is Jesus' message about the weather.

Jesus says to them, you can read the signs in the sky, red sky at night, shepherd's delight, red sky in the morning, fisherman's warning. That dates all the way back to this kind of scenario.

Jesus says, you can read the signs in the sky that help you to know the weather, but you can't, or rather you won't, read the signs that I perform to help you to see that I am the Savior.

And then Jesus says, no more signs except the sign of Jonah. And Jesus had already explained in Matthew 12 that the sign of Jonah was a sign that pointed the people to himself.

Charles Price, the commentator, says the sign of Jonah was pointing to Jesus' own death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. We can never make sense of Christ, says Price, without understanding the cross.

[17 : 39] So Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, I am the sign. Stop asking for all these things.

I am the sign. And specifically, he's saying to them, as he references Jonah, my death and resurrection will be the sign.

And that is the message that is replete, that is repeated throughout all of the Bible. Every page in the Bible is pointing us to Jesus.

Alistair Begg says, we find Christ in all the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, he's predicted. In the Gospels, he has revealed.

In the Acts, he has preached. In the Epistles, he has explained. And in Revelation, he has expected.

[18 : 56] And it makes perfect sense when we think about it, that this call to look to Jesus is a call that is on repeat throughout the Bible.

because if you and I are to be saved from our sin, if we are to escape judgment, if you and I are to avoid hell, if we are to be assured of a place in heaven, we need to look to Jesus.

There's no other name. There's no other way. If we want to be saved, we need to believe in Jesus and the fact that he died for our sin that we confess.

And he rose from the dead for our salvation. We sometimes sing a hymn that says, my faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine.

Now hear me as I pray. Take all my guilt, all my sin away and let me from this day be wholly thine.

[20 : 20] Opposition, repetition. Third point as we look now at the disciples and their response to Jesus, confusion. Verse 5 through to verse 12.

When the disciples reach the other side, they'd forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And they began discussing it among themselves saying, we brought no bread. But Jesus, aware of this, said, O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?

Do you not yet perceive, do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered, or the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many baskets you gathered?

How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

[21 : 26] So as we listen in now to this conversation between Jesus and his disciples, it's very clear that amongst the disciples there's confusion.

And I don't know about you, but for me, the disciples are such an encouragement in a tragic kind of way.

because so often they're confused. So often they have to come to Jesus and say, can you help me to understand this?

And we see the disciples here and the first thing we see in the verses is that they've forgotten to bring the bread. And for someone like me who's always forgetting to bring things, we take some encouragement even from seeing that the disciples are just like us.

When we went on holiday, the girls went ahead of me and so I had to stay behind to do various things before I could go away. So they shot off ahead and I was going to take the car afterwards.

[22 : 37] I had one instruction. Take the case, the big pink case that's at the front door, take the case, put it in the boot of the car and take it to Inverness.

No problem, I said. And I got on with life and work and everything. Cases at the front door, I tripped over the case three times in the course of a week. This big luminous pink case.

And on the day that I went away on holiday, I took almost everything, there's only one thing I forgot. And it was the one case that I was told to remember. And yet, the disciples, we see them, they're just the same, they're a bit slow.

they forgot, verse 5, to bring the bread. But when it came to the things of faith, it seems that they were actually even slower.

Jesus, in verse 6, talks about leaven. And immediately, you think about bread. We see the disciples working themselves into a state because they think that Jesus' words about leaven must be connected with the bread.

[23 : 45] and they're all looking at each other saying, why did you forget the bread? Who forgot the sandwiches? As if a lack of bread was a big problem for Jesus. But Jesus wasn't talking about bread.

Jesus, who had just fed 4,000 men plus women and children from seven rows and a few wee fresh, wasn't stressed about a lack of bread.

Jesus, who had fed 5,000 men and a woman and children from five little rows and two wee fish, he isn't stressed about a lack of lunch.

The disciples should have grasped that. But they didn't. The reality is they didn't. John MacArthur says, when the disciples became hungry after rowing to the other side, their thoughts did not turn to Jesus' provision, but to their own lack.

As Jesus frequently did, says MacArthur, the Lord took their extremity as a divine opportunity to teach his truth. So, what was the spiritual truth that Jesus was teaching?

[25 : 01] What was Jesus getting at when he talks about leaven? what was the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees that Jesus was warning them to beware of?

Well, you can read commentaries yourself this afternoon, and you can find that there's a whole lot of things written about what the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees may be. It could be legalism on the part of the Pharisees, it could be secularism, rationalism, worldliness on the part of the Sadducees.

But I think in the most simple distilled form, the thing that unified the Pharisees and the Sadducees in this situation was unbelief.

It was a determination not to believe in Jesus. The Sadducees were powerful politicians, they were often aristocrats, they were the liberals, they were the secularists of their day.

But the reality is, without faith in Jesus, for all their high places and councils, without faith in Jesus, they would be lost.

[26 : 26] The Pharisees were very religious men, they were very serious about God's law, they knew their Bibles, they could sit comfortably in many of our churches. They were the conservative theologians of their day, but without faith in Jesus, they would be lost.

Eternal life depends on believing in Jesus. We have to hear that again and again and again.

One name, one way, Jesus. And Jesus wanted his disciples back then, and Jesus wants us today to have absolutely no confusion over that point.

So to use Jesus' illustration, if our lives are a bit like a big lump of dough, the leaven that you and I are to be aware of is any influence or any relationship, any place that we frequent, anything that we regularly watch, any podcast that we subscribe to, any YouTube channel that we might follow, any voice that we listen to that seems to steer us away from Jesus, that's the leaven.

So maybe with me, think just now, very practically, think just now about your life.

[28 : 18] Think about the things that we are listening to, the places that we are going, the music that we allow into our hearing, the things that we read, the people who are speaking into our lives, whether it's on an iPad or whether it's in real life.

Think about these influences. Are these voices causing us to look to Jesus? Or are these voices steering us a little bit away from Jesus?

If it's away, that's the leaven that we are to be aware of. And just like a little leaven goes through the whole batch, a little unbelief, influence, a little influence that pulls us away from Jesus can lead to great confusion, huge spiritual damage.

So we're to be aware. Opposition, repetition, confusion, that Jesus addresses amongst the disciples.

And finally, and we'll just touch on this and return to it this evening, profession. Verse 13, now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say the Son of Man is?

[29 : 54] And he said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered them, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven, and so on.

To here we see the disciples who were often confused. They often battle with doubts. Jesus, in verse 8 of the chapter, describes them as having little faith.

But it was saving faith, because their faith was in Jesus. And it's Christ who saves. It's not faith that saves.

We can have vast faith in the wrong person, or the wrong philosophy, or the wrong religion, the wrong thing, and be lost. Or we can have little faith in the Savior, Jesus, and be secure.

[31 : 18] the disciples' faith. And this is the first time of the Jesus. And this is the first time that Peter really professes saving faith in Christ.

I don't want to go into this this morning, we'll come back to this evening, morning, but I want to just close this morning by listening to Jesus ask that direct question in verse 15.

Jesus says in verse 15, who do you say that I am? And that was a question that was for the disciples back then, but it wasn't just for them back then.

This is a question, it's a personal question, it's a direct piercing question. It is posed to you and it's posed to me.

It is posed to every single one in this building. And it requires a response. There are many things we can listen to in this world, many sermons, even you might listen to and you think, well that's not to do with me.

[32 : 46] That's a subject that doesn't affect me. That's an area of application that doesn't affect me. This affects and applies to every single one of us here, because every single one of us one day will stand before Jesus.

And how we answer this question will determine whether we are with Jesus eternally in heaven, or whether we are apart from him eternally in hell.

We will all answer this question, but if we want to be sure that we are saved, we must answer it today by believing in him.

There's coming a day when there will be no need for faith, because every eye will see him, every tongue will confess that he is Lord, but on that day for some it will be too late.

We need to believe. And so Peter responds to this question by professing faith in Jesus.

[34 : 07] Simon Peter replied, verse 16, you're the Christ, the Son of the living God. So we hear profession.

The question that we end with today is will we follow Peter? In professing faith, in Jesus as the Christ, the promised Savior, and my Savior, as God the Son, who came into this world to live and die and rise for us.

Profession. Peter makes it. Peter makes it. Well, you and I make it. As we think about this question that hangs in the air, even now, who do you say that I am?

God, let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus Christ, your Son, the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of sinners, the Son of the living God, who came into this world to live for us, that righteous life that we could not live, and die for us on the cross, the sinner's death that we deserved.

And we thank you that death could not hold him, but having defeated death, having overcome sin and Satan, we thank you that he rose and promised eternal resurrection life to all who believe in him.

[36 : 12] Help us to believe, help us to profess, we pray, as we hear that question that comes to us. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We'll sing to conclude a psalm that can be a response to the call of Jesus.

Psalm 23. Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. 229 in the psalm. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want, he makes me down to lie, in pastures green, he leadeth me, the quiet waters by.

I stand to sing to God's praise as we close. verse. The Lord's my shepherd, I do not watch, he makes me turn to lie, in pastures clear, he leadeth me, the quiet walk that fight.

my soul, the death restore again, and be to water made within the powers of righteous righteousness, in for his own name sake.

[38 : 18] Ye know I walk and deaths are pale, yet will I fear not ill, for thou art with me at thy road has stopped me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished in presence of my face my head the dust with oil an night and my cup over floors!

Goodness mercy will and in God's heart forever more my dwelling place shall be and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more Amen Amen