

# Matthew 16: 13-26

By Tom Deaderick

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Lesson: But whom say **ye** that **I am**?

A brief story, read slowly.

Your life is a road trip and your father is driving. It's a long trip, but you are glad because it's a good trip and you're enjoying so much of it. You pick up food and eat it as you ride, laughing and pointing out hillsides of golden aspens and fields of peacefully grazing cows.

There are spans on the way when you all stare wide-eyed at wrecked cars on the roadside, with people standing slumped in the rain.

The miles pass. Traffic slows and speeds up, and you see the same cars that you've passed before passing you. Everyone seems to be going to the same place.

You've come a long way and so much of it has been good, but now you're nearly there. The road divides. You see the faces in the other cars change. As the distance between you grows, their eyes widen at the road ahead.

There's a great chasm. It's so wide you can't see the other side. There is no bridge before them, only the end of the road and the great chasm.

But there's a bridge before you and the spans make soft claps as you speed past.

When people follow the wrong leader, they form **cults**.

**Jim Jones** preached about racial equality and social justice. His followers gave thanks to him daily for the food that he supposedly provided, even while they labored all day in the fields and building the settlement.

In 1978, over 900 people drank cyanide disguised as Kool-Aid and died.

**Marshall Applewhite** founded a cult called Heaven's Gate. They convinced their followers that they were the two witnesses in the Bible. Their followers said Applewhite gave them purpose and belonging. The 39 cult members gave up all their possessions and took poison in 1997 believing that a spaceship that followed the Hale-Bopp comet would take them up and advance them to the next evolutionary level.

**David Koresh'** followers believed he was a Biblical prophet. Wives and daughters were given to Koresh. They stockpiled weapons creating an "Army of God" in a compound in Waco, Texas and 86 people, including 28 children died in flames and gunfire.

Q: Does everyone make a choice to follow someone?

Yes. An atheist's decision to follow no God, is a decision to follow themselves. Doing what seems right to you seems reasonable to many people, but they and their families still end up in the car that's going over the cliff.

Q: What is more important than deciding who you will follow?

Matthew 16: 13-20

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

The city, Caesarea Philippi, shows the sad nature of man. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, roughly from 300 BC to 200 BC, the city was called "Paneas". It was named for a cave shrine that was dedicated to the Greek god Pan.

Q: What did Pan look like?

Pan was half-man, and half goat, with his lower half being goat's legs. Pan's cult appealed to rural folk, shepherds, and those drawn to nature. It emphasized freedom, instinct, and the "wild" side of life, often with a humorous or irreverent tone.

Around 20 BC Herod the Great built a temple near Pan's cave and dedicated it to Cesar Augustus. When Herod died, his son, **Philip** renamed the city Caesarea **Philippi**.

When Jesus asks Peter who does he think he is, he's standing in a city that was named after the Greek god Pan, with a temple dedicated to Caesar.

This moment captures the whole of our existence. With all the world's offerings, the wild natural world, and the advancement of the material world – all in one place, Jesus asks Peter to make the same decision that every person must make – **who do you think I am?**

**Your own** answer to this question, with all the world's fascinating distractions around you, will decide your fate. It decides the fate of every person.

### **Who do you think I am?**

But first, Jesus asks Peter a less direct question. "who do (other) **men** say that I am?". Peter answers that some think he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, some Jeremiah and others thought he was one of the prophets.

All of these options reflected a positive view of Jesus, even his detractors recognized that he was at a level above just a normal man.

John the Baptist would have died sometime between a few months to two years before this.

The people were looking for Elijah because of **Malachi 4: 5-6**.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Elijah had not died but was taken to Heaven in the chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). The rabbis believed that Elijah would come before the Messiah, so they **wanted** to see him.

Jesus Himself clarified that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophesy "In the spirit and power of Elijah", but the crowds didn't understand.

Even believing in these great men, would lead to doom. How sad it is to believe in the wrong person. Even when the person is a good person, not a Jim Jones or Charles Manson – it leads to death.

Then we reach the great moment, not just for Peter, but for all of us.

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.

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

Peter put his faith in the right person, and Jesus said that he was blessed that this decision had been revealed to him, not by any evidence around him, but by God. This is a verse that shows us both the sovereignty of God and the choice of men. God revealed Himself to Peter. God was also revealed to Satan, but unlike Satan, Peter chose to follow Him.

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.

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.

Jesus' plan is not a defensive one, the gates are not built **around his church**, but around hell.

Jesus and the church will conquer hell, likely referring to the conquering of death. He speaks of giving the church the keys to the kingdom of Heaven.

The keys are the gospel, the good news. The church shares this good news, and the good news unlocks the chains holding people to death here on earth, and those who are freed here on earth will be free in Heaven also.

Matthew 16: 21-23

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.

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

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.

Jesus lays out the future for them, telling them that he will be killed and raised again the third day, and it goes right over their heads that He will rise again. They do not want to contemplate the immediate bad news, even to reach beyond it.

We are like this. We don't want to suffer, even when we know the outcome is good. We face medical treatments to get better, and we dread them. Try telling a child that something that will hurt them will ultimately be good for them. We still do this as adults.

If we could only follow Jesus' path, always, we would be better off on earth and Heaven, but do we? No. We veer off.

Jesus has the clear understanding, and He knows that the pain ahead will be bad, **and** He knows the outcome is so important. He speaks to Satan, not Peter, when he calls out Satan's own mistake – breaking away from God to lead men astray.

There have been many times that I've thought what I was doing was right but learned later that I was completely wrong. It's common for all people to go in the wrong direction. What sets us apart as Christians is not that we make no mistakes, but that we learn when we are wrong and repent. That repentance, readjusting continually to follow Jesus' example is what defines us as Christians.

Matthew 16: 24-26

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.

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?

We must deny ourselves. We must work to make God's path, our desire. Set aside the life that we would choose that leads to doom and stay on the path that Jesus set for us. Follow Him, make the choices that He would make. Spend our time and resources in the way that Jesus would.

There are two ways to read verse 26.

One way is to ask yourself if the actions you would choose are worth your immortal soul? We can see that children will always choose the immediate pleasure, so we know that when we walk away from Jesus' path we are essentially doing the same thing, trading immediate pleasure for a far greater joy in the future.

The other way to read verse 26 is, "what would a man who has just arrived in hell give to get his soul back?". Clearly, at that moment, no one would make the choices that delivered them to hell, they would be desperate to undo those choices, but by then, of course, it is too late.

We should live our lives remembering the way children trade immediate pleasures for future ones, and we should focus on aligning our own desires with Jesus'.