

TURNING POINT

MATTHEW 16



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Turning Point: Matthew 16
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Matthew 16: Introduction

Jesus' ministry to this point has featured a broad display of teaching, healing, casting out demons, and putting His enemies in their place. He has gathered a group of disciples and, together, they are pursuing the work of bringing near the Kingdom of God.

Now it was time to clarify the mission and point to the future.

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah is a watershed. From that point, the direction is clear: suffering, the cross, resurrection, the Church, and dying to live. In chapter 16, Matthew points us to the long-term purpose of Jesus, a purpose in which He calls us to take up our own cross and follow Him.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Signs of the Times

Pray Psalm 12.1, 2.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.

Sing Psalm 12.1, 2.

(Hamburg: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be!
They who believe in Christ are few.
Falsely the wicked confidently
flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Read and meditate on Matthew 16.1-4.

Prepare.

1. For what did the Pharisees and Sadducees ask? What do you suppose they had in mind?
2. What “sign” did Jesus say He would give them?

Meditate.

Having clarified the true nature of faith in chapter 15, Matthew now sharpens our focus on the Lord and His agenda in chapter 16. This chapter marks a kind of turning point, since from this point forward, Jesus can be seen to be focusing forward, toward the finishing of one stage of His work, and the beginning of the next.

The Pharisees and Sadducees asked for a “sign from heaven.” They were always asking for a sign, trying to make Jesus jump at their bidding (cf. Matt. 12.38). They were probably thinking of something like Elijah calling down fire, or Joshua stopping the sun. This is false thinking on full display: “I won’t believe unless You conform Your ways to my desires and my way of thinking!” It’s easy to fall into this snare and not even know it.

Jesus reviled them as “Hypocrites!” We recall from chapter 15 that a hypocrite is one who professes to believe in God but has no heart for Him. To the hypocrite God is only someone to use for whatever I want, not someone to love and serve even to the point of laying down my life (see on, vv. 24-28). The religious leaders had enough common sense to read the signs of the weather, but then the weather didn’t demand anything unreasonable of them (bring an umbrella, or put on some sunscreen). The signs Jesus was giving, on the other hand, made *serious* demands: set aside your cherished traditions, repent of your pious posturing, lay down your life, and seek the Kingdom of God rather than the favor of Caesar.

They could not read the signs Jesus was performing because they *would* not read them as they were intended. They were so used to making religion work for *them* that they were not prepared to deny themselves and their selfish priorities, join the yoke with Jesus, and learn of Him to be meek, mild, and truly righteous.

To the masses, the Pharisees and Sadducees looked like the real deal. But they were hypocrites.

Those who followed Jesus, marveled at Him, and glorified God, they were the real deal.

Jesus would give them a powerful sign in due course – the sign of Jonah: three days in the earth, then rising from the dead (cf. Matt. 12.38-40). But they *would not* believe that sign, either.

Do we?

Reflect.

1. What signs had Jesus been performing? To what did those signs testify?
2. Why did Jesus call the religious leaders “hypocrites”?
3. What was “the sign of the prophet Jonah”? Is that still a powerful sign in our day? Explain.

Just as that whale was not able to digest Jonah nor was able to keep him alive inside himself for long, so too voracious Death assuredly received the Lord. But since he was not able to keep him alive and in custody inside himself, Death regurgitated him on the third day, just as the whale had regurgitated Jonah. Chromatius (fl. 400), Tractate on Matthew 54.3

Send me forth today, Lord, in the power of Your resurrection, and I will...

Pray Psalm 12.3-8.

Pray for people you know who are so ensnared in the lie that they cannot see the truth that is in Jesus. Ask the Lord for an opportunity to share Jesus with someone today.

Sing Psalm 12.3-8.

Psalm 12.3-8 (Hamburg: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies,
all those who speak with boasting tongue!
See how Your holy Word they despise,
while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all
Your precious children sore distressed.
Save those who faithfully on You call;
grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true,
like silver seven times refined;
You will preserve Your Word ever new,
and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand;
Your indignation builds on high.
Men may exalt their wicked plans,
but You will judge them by and by.

2 Bad Leaven

Pray Psalm 120.1, 2.

In my distress I cried to the LORD,
And He heard me.
Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips
And from a deceitful tongue.

Sing Psalm 120.1, 2.

(St. Anne: [*Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*](#))

In my distress, O God, I cry: Lord Jesus, answer me!
From lying lips, deceitful tongues let me delivered be!

Read Matthew 16.1-12; meditate on verses 5-12.

Prepare.

1. Against what did Jesus warn His disciples?
2. Why did Jesus rebuke His disciples?

Meditate.

I take great delight in watching Susie make bread. We both get excited as the leavened loaf begins to rise. We know the yeast is doing its work, and the outcome is going to be some very good eating.

The work of leaven is to pervade the dough and transform it from something blah and unpalatable to something wholesome, delicious, and good. This is why Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to leaven: It pervades all of life and transforms it from sinfulness to righteousness (Matt. 13.33).

But if the leaven is rotten, it will ruin the loaf, and no one will want to eat it. Jesus likened the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees to bad leaven. He warned His disciples to “watch out” (v. 6) for that teaching, because it sounded religious, came from religious sources, and seemed to be what everybody believed. Jesus may have overheard one of the disciples saying that they had forgotten to take some bread along with them for this phase of their journey. He capitalized on their material focus to drive home a spiritual lesson about keeping a close watch over what you hear and believe.

The disciples were a little slow on the uptake (v. 7). They thought He was on their case because they’d forgotten to bring bread. But Jesus chided them for their “little faith” (v. 8). If they needed bread to eat, didn’t they think He could provide that? Had they already forgotten about His feeding the 5,000 and then the 4,000? Why would He scold them for forgetting to bring bread, when He could make as much bread as they could ever eat?

He wasn’t talking about bread, but about leaven – about the “doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Let that stuff enter your soul and it will ruin you. Feeding daily on the true Word of God is the best protection against false teaching.

To change the metaphor, we need to understand the false doctrines that swirl around us all day long.

They may seem like gentle breezes, but they can become dangerous winds, and if we hoist our sails into them, they will blow us off course from Jesus (Eph. 4.14). Raise the sails of your soul into the winds of God's Spirit, as He blows through the Word to feed you with the Bread of life.

Reflect.

1. What are some false doctrines that Christians need to watch out for today?
2. What's the best way to prepare ourselves against succumbing to false teaching?
3. How can believers help one another to feed only on the true Bread of life?

*Note how intense is his displeasure. Nowhere else does he appear to have rebuked them so much. How does he do this? He is challenging their prejudices about food laws. Already he had said, "Are you still without understanding?" Now in this place, with a strong rebuke he says, "O men of little faith." John Chrysostom (344-407), *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 53.4**

Let no false teaching enter my soul or fill my sails today, Lord. Instead, help me to...

Pray Psalm 120.3-7.

Are you prepared for the "winds of doctrine" (Eph. 4.14) that will blow against you today? Seek the Lord for the protection of His Word and Spirit as you live and speak for Him today.

Sing Psalm 120.3-7; 1, 2.

Psalm 120.3-7; 1, 2 (St Anne: [Our God, Our Help in Ages Past](#))

What shall be done, what shall be giv'n to the deceiving tongue?
Let sharpest arrows, glowing coals at all our foes be flung.

O woe, that where I make my home the foes of God increase.
Against the Lord's shalom they war – Lord, let me work for peace!

In my distress, O God, I cry: Lord Jesus, answer me!
From lying lips, deceitful tongues let me delivered be!

3 Who Is Jesus?

Pray Psalm 138.1-3.

I will praise You with my whole heart;
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.
I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.
In the day when I cried out, You answered me,
And made me bold *with* strength in my soul.

Sing Psalm 138.1-3.

(Regent Square: [*Angels from the Realms of Glory*](#))

I will give You thanks and praise You, God of gods, with all my heart.
I will bow before Your temple, grateful praise to You impart.
For Your Name and for Your glory, You have magnified Your Word!

Read Matthew 16.1-17; meditate on verses 13-17.

Prepare.

1. What were people saying about Jesus?
2. What did Peter say? How was he able to say that?

Meditate.

Everything about the Christian faith hangs on how we answer the question, “Who is Jesus?”

In His day, many people were talking about Him, and a variety of opinions were circulating concerning His identity. Jesus was about to make some big announcements (vv. 18, 21), so before He did, He wanted to make sure His disciples were clear about Him and His provenance.

Jesus colored the answer He was seeking by referring to Himself as the “Son of Man” in His question to the disciples. This would certainly have brought Daniel 7.13ff to their minds, and cued them for how they should answer. They had already acknowledged Him as the “Son of God” (Matt. 14.33), and Jesus seems to have wanted to firm up that belief and combine it with the Person in Daniel’s vision.

So He asked what people were saying about Him, and the disciples answered based on what they’d been hearing people say (v. 14). That many people had a high regard for Jesus was clear – considering Him to be either John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. But a high regard for Jesus is not sufficient to know the blessing of God.

So Jesus asked the disciples about their understanding of His identity. Peter spoke for them all in saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The disciples at this point knew Jesus to be Son of Man and Son of God. This does not mean they understood this mystery perfectly, or that they were ready to put their full weight down on this conviction. But they were correct in seeing Jesus as He was revealing Himself, and as He intended He should be known.

They were “blessed” in so confessing (v. 17). But this understanding of Jesus is not something they had arrived at by their own cleverness or consensus. God the Father had *revealed* Jesus’ identity to them. Unless God Himself teaches us about Jesus, leads and enables us to know Him as Son of Man and Son of God, we will never have anything other than, at most, a high regard for Him. And we will not know the blessings of God until the disciples’ confession is our confession as well.

Reflect.

1. In our day, who do people say Jesus is?
2. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Son of God and Son of Man?
3. Since people can only know and confess this when God reveals it to them, how should this guide our prayers for the people in our Personal Mission Field?

Note that he is not asking them their own opinion. Rather, he asks the opinion of the people. Why? In order to contrast the opinion of the people with the disciples answer to the question “But who do you say that I am?” In this way, by the manner of his inquiry, they might be drawn gradually to a more sublime notion and not fall into the same common view as that of the multitude. John Chrysostom (344-407), The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 54.1

Let my life today bear witness to You as both the Son of God and Son of Man, as I...

Pray Psalm 138.4-8.

Call upon the Lord for strength to serve Him today, and to be His witness in every area of your life.

Sing Psalm 138.4-8.

Psalm 138.4-8 (Regent Square: [*Angels from the Realms of Glory*](#))

On the day I called You answered, made me bold within my soul.

When I walk in troubled places, You revive and make me whole.

For Your hand will gently shield me, and my fearsome foes control.

All the kings of earth will praise You when Your words of truth they hear.

Of Your ways, of Your great glory, gladly they will loudly cheer.

For the proud shall not approach You, yet You hold the lowly dear.

Your Right Hand will save and keep me; all I need You will supply.

For Your love is everlasting, reaching from beyond the sky.

You will not forsake or leave me; You will save me when I cry.

4 The Lord's Agenda

Pray Psalm 122.1, 2

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go into the house of the LORD.”
Our feet have been standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Sing Psalm 122.1-4.

(Nettleton: [Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing](#))

I was glad when they said to me, “To the Lord’s house let us go!”
Holy City, let our feet be firmly planted in your soil.
Jesus builds His Church forever, where His people sing His praise!
As Your Word decrees forever, we will thank You all our days.

Read Matthew 16.1-20; meditate on verses 18-20.

Prepare.

1. On what did Jesus say He would build His Church?
2. How strong would His Church be?

Meditate.

This is a watershed moment in the gospel of Matthew. A corner is turned; a direction is indicated; and a promise is given, which brings together everything Jesus has taught and done to refine the focus of His mission.

Peter and the others have just passed the crucial test: They recognized and confessed Jesus, the Son of Man, as the Son of God and the Christ of Old Testament promise. Jesus heartily endorsed Peter’s confession, assuring him that he had not come to this understanding on his own; rather, God the Father had made it plain to him (v. 17).

Jesus then solidified Peter’s faith by permanently changing his name to “Rock” (Πέτρος, *Petros*, v. 18). Then Jesus used Peter’s name in an expansive way to affirm that it is on the bedrock (πέτρα, *petra*) of that confession that He will do His most important Kingdom work. We’ve seen that word before. In Matthew 7.25 πέτρα is the word Jesus used to indicate the foundation of those who trusted in Him and not in their own works. Peter’s confession – not Peter himself – is the bedrock of Jesus’ great Kingdom work in time.

And what is that work? Given all that Jesus had taught thus far about the Kingdom, we can imagine that the disciples might have been a little confused when He said He would build His *Church*, rather than His *Kingdom*, on the bedrock of confessing Jesus as Son of Man, Son of God, and Christ. But the Church is the in-time agency through which the Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. The Kingdom is a spiritual realm; the Church is a physical entity, but also a spiritual one; thus it partakes of two worlds at once, and is able to channel the spiritual into the physical where the spiritual works to make all things new. The Church is both the *sign* that the Kingdom has come and the *outpost* from which the Kingdom advances in the world.

Jesus says the gates of hell cannot stand against the Church. We should not think of this as is often taught, as if the Church were battering down the gates of hell to occupy that dark terrain. The gates of a city were where the officials – in the case of the Jews, the elders – sat to watch over the city, protect its citizens, make judgments concerning right and wrong, and develop counsels and plans for the prosperity of the city. The Church has more wisdom, more power, more energy, and more light than all the counsels and schemes of the devil and his minions. Nothing they might contrive to stop the Church can succeed.

From this point forward, building the Church becomes the Lord's agenda, the cornerstone of which will be laid in His own death and resurrection.

Reflect.

1. The word *church* means something like “called out ones.” Why is this a good way of thinking about the church?
2. What does it mean to say that the local church is the agent of the Kingdom of God?
3. How do the members of local churches contribute to the church being the sign and outpost of the Kingdom?

This is not the property of Peter alone, but it came about on behalf of every human being. Having said that his confession is a rock, he stated that upon this rock I will build my church. This means he will build his church upon this same confession and faith. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), *Fragment 92*

Use me today, as a member of Your Body, to show and advance the Kingdom as I...

Pray Psalm 122.5-9.

Use today's psalm to intercede for your pastors, church leaders, and fellow church members, that the rule of King Jesus would come increasingly in and through them, and the peace of Jesus would spread throughout your community.

Sing Psalm 122.5-9.

Psalm 122.5-9 (Nettleton: [*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*](#))

On the throne of David, Jesus sits to judge the nations all.

As our holy peace increases we are safe who on You call.

Grant us peace, Lord, by Your favor; for Your people's sake we pray.

For the Church's sake, O Savior, we will seek Your good today.

5 An Offense to God?

Pray Psalm 77.1-3.

I cried out to God with my voice—
To God with my voice;
And He gave ear to me.
In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted.
I remembered God, and was troubled;
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.

Sing Psalm 77.1-3.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

My voice to God shall rise; I seek Him on His throne.
In days and nights of trouble I seek God alone!
When I remember Him, then am I sore distressed!
My spirit faints and longs to find in Him its rest.

Read Matthew 16.1-23; meditate on verses 21-23.

Prepare.

1. What did Jesus explain to His disciples?
2. How did Peter respond to this Word and plan of Christ?

Meditate.

We love the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ, especially when we feel free to interpret it according to our own best ideas about what that salvation involves.

And as we see it, salvation involves knowing that our sins are forgiven, being assured of a place in heaven, being part of a good church, having loving Christian friends, and even perhaps a little time each day reading the Bible and praying.

What we don't like to think about is our salvation being a struggle. Or a fight. Or an inconvenience of any kind to our normal experience in the world. In that respect, we're a bit like Peter, who, all proud and beaming about his confident confession that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel, was unwilling to entertain any idea of suffering or hardship on His part – and, by association, on Peter's part as well (vv. 21, 22).

Jesus had just announced His agenda for the course of history: He was going to build His Church as the agent whereby His Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. Since He was not yet ready to make this widely known, He instructed His disciples not to declare this agenda just yet (v. 20). He needed time to lay the foundation on which that holy spiritual temple would be erected, and He didn't want the disciples or the multitude getting on with trying to build the Church before the solid foundation was laid.

That foundation involved His suffering, death, and resurrection. For there can be no Church where sins are not paid for and forgiven, repentance is not a way of life, and the new life of resurrection in

the Kingdom has not been established.

Salvation is a cross-marked way of life, as we shall see (vv. 24ff). But that was not Peter's idea. He wanted a salvation that led from victory to victory, without ever having to engage the struggle required to increase in Christlikeness. Jesus rebuked him as thinking like any man would think about such matters: It should be all fun and excitement and an easy road. Thinking this way about our salvation makes us an offense to God (v. 23). The things of God – the things of Jesus – are the things of self-denial, cross-bearing, suffering, and loving our unlovable neighbors enough to lay down our lives for them.

If Peter was going to be a true follower of Jesus, he'd have to "get behind" Him and let Him lead the way, rather than jump ahead of Jesus and try to lead Him in the path that he thought was best. The same holds true for us.

Reflect.

1. Do we ever try to fit Jesus into our own ideas about what it should mean to be a Christian? Explain.
2. How can we know when any of our ideas, plans, or ways are an offense to God?
3. Our calling as disciples is to get behind Jesus and follow Him, not to try to lead Him down our preferred path. Explain.

When, contrary to what he had hoped, Peter heard this, he was troubled. For the revelation had exhibited Christ as Son of God and the living God, on the one hand. Yet on the other hand, he was found to be preparing for the dreadful events of the Passion. In rebuking Peter, Christ brings to light his own righteous judgment. When Peter confessed Christ, Christ praised him. But when he was irrationally terrified, Christ rebuked him, acting without respect of persons. Theodore of Heraclea (died, 355), *Fragment 102*

Help me to follow You today, Lord Jesus, in everything I do, including...

Pray Psalm 77.7-20.

Does it seem as though the Lord has cast off His Church? Is He leaving us to languish in our refusal to submit to His Word and plans? Is there anything in you keeping you from following Jesus more fully? Use these verses to listen for the Spirit's convicting and renewing voice.

Sing Psalm 77.7-20.

Psalm 77.7-20 (Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

O Lord, will You reject Your people without end?
Has favor ceased, are You no more our heav'nly Friend?
Your promise and Your love in anger are obscured;
my sin has turned Your hand away, Your beauty blurred.

Now let us call to mind Your deeds and wonders, Lord,
and meditate on all Your works and praise Your Word.
Full holy is Your way, great God of earth and heav'n.
To You, O God of strength and pow'r all praise be giv'n!

The waters and the deeps all tremble 'neath Your hand.
The clouds give forth, the sky resounds across the land.

Your lightning flashes forth and lights the earth around;
we feel beneath our feet the trembling of the ground.

Your way leads through the sea; Your path the waters parts.
Your footprints are to us deep mysteries in our hearts.
As then by Moses' hand and Aaron's law-filled voice,
You led Your sheep, lead us that we may all rejoice!

6 This Way to Life

Pray Psalm 5.11, 12.

But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name
Be joyful in You.
For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous;
With favor You will surround him as *with* a shield.

Sing Psalm 5.11, 12.

(Angel's Story: [O Jesus, I Have Promised](#))

Let those rejoice who seek You and shelter 'neath Your wing.
Their tongues shall rise to speak to Your praise; Your grace they sing.
Your people You will bless, Lord, all those who to You yield.
Preserve them with Your best Word, and guard them like a shield.

Read Matthew 16.1-28; meditate on verses 24-28.

Prepare.

1. What did Jesus say about how to find life?
2. What did He say about the Kingdom?

Meditate.

In the light of Peter's confession and blunder, Jesus lays all His cards on the table: The way to life is through the cross, and there's a cross for everyone who intends to follow Jesus ("his cross", v. 24).

Not necessarily a literal cross, but the cross as a symbol of self-denial, willingness to suffer, love for God and neighbor, and resolute faith. Jesus suffered before He entered the joy that was set down before Him (Heb. 12.1, 2). Why should we think it would be any different for us? The greatest barrier between us and the joy of God in Christ is not the suffering we may have to endure in following Jesus. It's the allure of the world (v. 26), the mocking voice that says suffering is for suckers and simpletons; life is for the taking.

The world looks so bright and attractive, but it is a dark and devouring snare; and the more we dabble in it – the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life – the more we are transformed into its image. Christina Rossetti saw that wooing power in her poem, "The World":

By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair:
But all night as the moon so changeth she;
Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.
By day she woos me to the outer air,

Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety:
But through the night, a beast she grins at me,
A very monster void of love and prayer.
By day she stands a lie: by night she stands
In all the naked horror of the truth
With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.
Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell
My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?

When Jesus comes again, all our works will be revealed (v. 27); and if we have loved the world more than our cross, that will be made known, and we will be exposed for the hypocrites we have been. We must stop trying to save our lives by grabbing for all the worldly gusto we can get. Instead, we must deny the world and its charms, take upon us the calling of Jesus, and follow Him in righteousness, peace, joy, and service.

Verse 28 is most important: It tells us that the Kingdom of God came within the lifetimes of those who heard Jesus. It came in the Son of Man, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, precisely as Daniel had predicted (Dan. 7.13-18). And it came with crosses to distribute all around.

Have you taken up yours?

Reflect.

1. How would you explain the idea of the cross to a new believer?
2. What's the nature of the cross Jesus has commanded you to bear?
3. What are the keys to denying self and the world, so that you can follow Jesus in the way of the cross?

He taught that they should deny themselves for the sake of themselves—that is, they should not wish to be that which they had once begun to be. These things which are held close are accompanied by the enticements of gratifying joy, but they may lead to a wavering and uncertain hope. Therefore it was necessary by the authority of a real and manifest example that he teach them of the loss of present things and place these in the context of future gains. Hilary of Poitiers (31-367), On Matthew 17.1

Give me grace, Lord, that I may take up my cross today as I...

Pray Psalm 5.1-8.

The cross awaits you today, and the Lord is with you to enable you to bear it. Dedicate your day to the Lord, and commit all your activities to denying the world and living for Him.

Sing Psalm 5.1-8.

Psalm 5.1-8 (Angel's Story: [O Jesus, I Have Promised](#))

O Lord, attend and hear me, consider how I groan.
Receive my cries and near be, and love me as Your own.
By morning, Lord I seek You, for You will hear my voice.
My every need You speak to, and make my soul rejoice!

In sin You take no pleasure; no evil dwells with You.

Vain boasts You will not treasure, nor those who boasting do.
Sin kindles Your hot anger, You crush all those who lie.
The violent live in danger of Your all-searching eye.

O Lord, Your lovingkindness escorts me in this place.
I bow before Your highness and praise Your glorious grace!
In righteous ways You guide me; Your pathway I will know.
No good will be denied me as I with Jesus go.

7 Looking Ahead

Pray Psalm 132.6, 7.

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;
We found it in the fields of the woods.
Let us go into His tabernacle;
Let us worship at His footstool.

Sing Psalm 132.6, 7.

(Finlandia: [*Be Still My Soul*](#))

The word throughout the chosen nation spread,
to Ephrata, and in the fields of Jaar:
“Now let us go,” the faithful people said,
“and worship where our Savior’s dwellings are!
Around His footstool let our worship spread.
Come, gather to Him, all from near and far!”

Read and meditate on Matthew 16.1-28.

Prepare.

1. To what is Jesus looking ahead in this chapter?
2. How can we avoid being found where Peter was when Jesus rebuked him?

Meditate.

In Matthew 16, the work of Jesus turns a corner and defines a more precise heading. He will not be distracted by hypocrites or well-meaning disciples (vv. 1-4, 22, 23); and He warns His followers to guard themselves against false teaching (vv. 5-12). Only as they believe in Jesus as Son of God and Christ, and pay close attention to His Word – no matter how difficult it may seem – will they be His disciples, indeed (vv. 13-23). Following Jesus won’t be easy (vv. 24-28), but it is the way of life, and it is what Jesus expects of those who become His Body, the Church.

Jesus is preparing for His suffering. But beyond that, He’s looking ahead to the beginnings of the Christian Church, and to the progress of His Kingdom that the Church will realize through its worship and works. All who want to know true life and the enrichment of their souls will look at themselves and their history through the eyes of Christ. There will be opposition. We will falter and stumble. Hardship, suffering, sacrifice, and self-denial are the order of the day every day.

But *life is the reward!* True and full and glorious eternal life in Jesus, in His third-day resurrection (v. 21), where not even death can keep us from the joy of salvation and the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

So we look eagerly for the coming of His Kingdom, increasingly in our lifetime (v. 28), and beyond that, to the full realization of the rule of Jesus in the resurrection to come. And with those benchmarks as the commanding perspectives of our vision, we get behind Jesus, receive and obey His every word, and go forward together into eternal life with Him.

Reflect.

1. How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what it means to have eternal life?

2. Many false voices will seek to distract us as we follow Jesus. Such as?

3. What does it mean for you to take up your cross daily and follow Jesus?

So he now begins discussing more fully the outworkings of the future, not only with respect to his own suffering and death but with theirs as well. Unwillingness to die is grievous, but to be ready for death is good and of great profit.
John Chrysostom (344-407), *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 55.1*

Help me to follow You today, Lord, into the joy of eternal life, as I...

Pray Psalm 132.11-18.

Commit all the details of your day to following Jesus and seeking His Kingdom. Wait on the Lord for guidance and direction, and prepare your heart to follow Him.

Sing Psalm 132.11-18.

Psalm 132.11-18 (Finlandia: [Be Still My Soul](#))

Remember, Lord, the oath You swore to David;
do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:
“One of your sons, with your throne I will favor,
and He shall keep My cov’nant evermore,
and walk within My testimonies ever;
thus He shall ever rule as Israel’s Lord.”

God dwells among us, and He will forever,
to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.
He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior,
and made us His eternal resting-place.
His foes are banished from His presence ever,
but we shall reign with Him before His face.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What false teachings do Christians need to guard themselves against in our day?
2. How can believers help one another in bearing their individual crosses?
3. How can we know when we're being an offense to God?
4. Why must we deny ourselves to have full and abundant life in Jesus?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 16.1-28? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.