

# Matthew 16

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now open your Bibles up to Matthew chapter 16. Matthew chapter 16. Which if you've got a black church Bible.! It's on page 821.

I just am reminded that Shemesh's funeral is on Friday. It will be here at 12.30pm. And at 2 o'clock in Charleston Kensington Cemetery in Hanwell.

So please do pray for that. I think it will be a full house. If you can come I think that would be wonderful. There's going to be need for refreshments and different things. We'll be in touch about that.

And I do pray that the Lord will bring great good out of this. Matthew 16. I do think that Jesus would ever turn his back on someone and walk away from them.

Would he ever do that? Would he ever turn his back on someone and walk away from them? And maybe you've done that at some point. You've been arguing with your spouse or your parents or children or a friend.

[ 1 : 18 ] And the stress of the situation is just a bit too much. And you've turned around and you've walked out of the room. And that happened to you. Somebody walked out on you. And you pressed their buttons.

And they just turned and walked. And typically we react like that because we have got infinite reserves of patience. And a moment comes, doesn't it, when we're worried that we're going to say or do something that we might regret.

And we're really frustrated so we walk away. But thankfully Jesus is not like us. Jesus is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably patient.

He displays perfect patience. You look at how he deals with the disciples. He sticks with them, doesn't he? Even when they get it wrong again and again and again.

Which is even more clearly in the way that he treats us. And those of us who are his disciples today. Lots of times when you and I have made a complete mess of living as a Christian.

[ 2 : 23 ] And when we're ashamed of what we've done and how we've lived and what we've thought and what we've said. And the Lord Jesus, he abounds in love. And he's always willing, always willing to give a fresh outpouring of grace to his failing followers.

That's no excuse, is it, for ignoring his will deliberately. That would be to throw his death back in his face. But the Lord Jesus is wonderfully patient as we fail.

So do you think he would or could ever get to a stage where he'd deliberately turn and walk away from someone? And if so, what would it take for Jesus to do that?

What level of provocation would it take? Well it happens, doesn't it, in verse 4. Jesus tells these Pharisees and Sadducees, both religious leaders of his day.

He tells them what he thinks of them and then he walks away. And he walks away, not in a fit of pique or impatient, proud anger. But it is a decisive moment in Matthew's Gospel.

[ 3 : 33 ] It marks something. It's a dramatic step. It's Jesus' last meeting with these opponents in the Galilean area.

He's debating on and off with them for the last few chapters. But this is the moment when he walks away. That's it. And so what prompts him to take such a dramatic step?

And the passage centers around, doesn't it, two key statements. Can you see them in verse 4? He denounces the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And the second is in verse 6 where he warns his disciples about the danger of his opponents' teaching.

And the tone of the passage, which I think we've got to ask ourselves again and again in Matthew's Gospel. What's the tone? What's the feeling of this passage? Well, do you remember last week?

It was one of joy, wasn't it? It was one of super, abundant, generous grace. Grace that makes our hearts warm. And makes us leap and makes us sin.

[ 4 : 33 ] We talk about the kind of people Jesus loves. And there's enough grace to go around. That he performed miracles. And healing.

Many people. And he was full of compassion. And grace. And he extended his love. To outsiders. To outcasts. To the nations.

The tone last week is a tone of joy and celebration. But today we see another side of his character. And as Jesus draws a line in the sand that says, enough is enough.

There are some uncomfortable truths here. And this side of Jesus isn't so popular. This morning. Two points. First point. Number one.

The case for Jesus is already proven. The case for Jesus is already proven. Look at verse one. The Pharisees and the Sadducees.

[ 5 : 29 ] They came to Jesus to test him. And they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. The Pharisees and the Sadducees. They are the two dominant groups of religious leaders.

But they're hardly friends. They disagreed about all sorts of stuff. They couldn't stand each other in many ways. But here they lay aside their differences. And they work together. It was at that moment, wasn't it?

When the Tories, the Conservative Party and Labour had talks over Brexit. Two sides that can't agree on anything. And yet came together. It was newsworthy. It would be like Leave and Remain getting together.

Unimaginable. And everybody takes note. Because it's so rare, isn't it? When two opposing sides agree on anything. The last time the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they worked together.

Was when they travelled together from Jerusalem. To pass judgement on the ministry of John the Baptist. They united together then. Because they were anti-John the Baptist. And do you remember what happened to him?

[ 6 : 36 ] Well he ends up dead a few chapters with his head chopped off. And here again things feel ominous. Verse one. And they came to test him. And that's the same word.

We've seen that word before, haven't we? We've seen that in Baptist Gospel. Well do you remember? The devil came to test Jesus. To tempt him in the wilderness in chapter 4.

And that incident, by now, is deliberately being echoed. To say something shocking. That these religious leaders.

Despite all of their credentials. Are in fact engaged in the same work as the devil. And what they want is a sign from heaven. They want a sensational miracle.

To prove his authority and identity once and for all. And I say that the tactic is identical as the devil. You'll listen to the devil as in Matthew chapter 4. Do you remember what the devil said?

[ 7 : 36 ] He said, if you really are the son of God. I'll tell these stones to become bread. They say, in Matthew 16. Give us a sign from heaven. Different words, exactly the same argument.

And they think that they're in a win-win situation. Because either Jesus will try. And try and do a really big miracle and fail. Or he will refuse.

And either way, his popularity starts to fall into a win. But because we've read Matthew's Gospel. We are in no doubt about his power, are we?

I hope we're not. Let's go into chapter 1 and verse 23. They are the early chapters of Matthew. And in those early chapters. We are introduced to the big themes.

So look at chapter 1 and verse 23. We've been in on the secret, haven't we? Right from the start. Chapter 1 and verse 23. What's Matthew's Gospel about?

[ 8 : 33 ] Behold, the virgin Mary shall conceive and bear a son. And they shall call his name, Emmanuel. Which means, what does Emmanuel mean?

God with us. We've been in on the secret ever since. Chapter 1 and verse 23. And so in the intervening 15 chapters. As you read Matthew's Gospel. And we'd love you to take Matthew's Gospel home with you and read it.

We've seen Jesus authenticating that claim. He has made God-like claims. He has backed them up with God-like conduct.

And he has matched it all with God-like character. So that it's already been proved beyond any reasonable doubt in Matthew. That the carpenter's son really is Emmanuel, God with us.

But none of the build-up of the evidence which we've noticed has been enough for the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Here they are demanding yet another sign.

[ 9 : 36 ] And it's a clever request as if it's at first it sounds so, so spiritual. They are saying, we are very open-minded to Jesus. You must want us to believe, don't you?

So give us a sign. But behind the veil of their request. These guys aren't sincere and open-minded at all. They're not pursuers of truth. They are deliberately despising the signs that Jesus has already given.

The ones that have met and relieved the needs of the desperately sick and needy. And they are insisting on a sign to gratify the curiosity of the crowd.

They're behaving like children in the playground who block their eyes. And put their hands over their ears. And say, I can't see you and I can't hear you. They're blind and deaf to the truth that's staring them in the face.

And they make this request out of malice and spite. But Jesus isn't into the game of performing little magic shows. For those who have already set their hearts against him.

[ 10 : 39 ] Verse 2. Verse 16. He answered them, when it's evening, you say it will be fair weather, the sky is red.

And in the morning it will be stormy today. For the sky is red and threatened. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky. But you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

Red sky at night, shepherds delight. Red sky at morning, shepherds warning. That's basically it. But Jesus is making two slightly different points here. The first point is in verse 2 and 3, it's that you're not very clever. And then in verse 4, you're actually wicked.

And the principle in verse 2 and 3 is one we're really familiar with. We know how to interpret the skies. And it's children we talked about in Sunday school. And you go out into the playground and there's one of those really black, heavy, thick clouds.

[ 11 : 44 ] And a little wind blowing. And what do you think? You think it's about to rain, don't you? I mean, you know that. And people do that in the city, don't they? Some of you work with economic data.

And you can see with economic data what is going to happen. In work you have sales, sales forecasts. And so that you can see what it will look like in the next few months.

We do this in sports, don't we? So a football team spends tens of millions of pounds in the summertime. And then they lose their first eight games on the bounce. Well, if they carry on losing the games, what is going to happen?

What will happen? The manager will lose his job, won't he? We know that. We do this all the time. We look at things around us and we draw the appropriate conclusion.

And that's what makes the ignorance of the Pharisees and the Sadducees all the more surprising and culpable. They've been completely unwilling to interpret the signs of the times in front of them.

[ 12 : 44 ] The data that Jesus has given them of who he is. He's been tested and verified even with the most basic analysis. Even the most basic analysis would have told them that this is a man who is very, very different.

This man is Emmanuel, God with us. But somehow they've missed the point completely. Notice with me that Jesus doesn't tell the crowds that the pathway to belief involves closing your mind to the irrational.

I think we've got to keep saying that. Jesus says to believe in him is not so that you just start to believe something irrational. It's not a leap of blind faith.

It's certainly not a leap in the dark. The only thing you get from a leap in the dark is a broken ankle. You don't leap into the abyss of ignorance. Some people have got that impression of Christianity. I could never be a Christian because I'm the kind of person that needs evidence before they believe something.

I hear that often. But you know Jesus' complaint is not that they refuse to suspend their desire for evidence. It's that they refuse to believe what the evidence tells them.

[ 14 : 00 ] And that Jesus shows is that they're not as clever as they think they are. And it means actually that they're wicked. Look at verse 4. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.

What we've seen as we've gone through Matthew's Gospel over this past year is the Lord Jesus keeps telling us you're either with Jesus or you're against him this morning. There is no middle ground.

There is no fence to sit on. There is no no man's land. And Jesus is the good God to whom we should be faithful.

And he has proven it time and time again. So if we don't accept him on his terms then we are not on the side of good. We are on the side of evil. And we've shown ourselves to be wicked and adulterous before God.

They're very strong words aren't they? And there comes a point when you will refuse to know Jesus for the last time.

[15:12] And he will turn his back. And he will walk away. And that happens when somebody refuses and refuses to accept the evidence of history.

Accept the evidence of a changed people. Accept the evidence of his word. And when somebody persistently refuses to recognize Jesus as their Lord.

And the Pharisees and the Sadducees they reach that point in this passage. And in Jesus' mind the case has already been proven. They had access to more than enough evidence.

And they will not accept it. They say no we do not want anything to do with it. And so he walks away. And it's really interesting the way that Matthew structures his gospel. And that from now on there are very very few miracles.

And there are a couple of additional miracles. And they are healings for a very specific purpose. But in large part from here on in the miracles stop. They're not needed.

[16:20] Because 15 chapters have been sufficient evidence. There is though, as he indicates in verse 4, one more sign. Just one. Just one.

For them it was in the future. For us it's in the past. And Jesus calls it the sign of Jonah. The story of Jonah from the Old Testament. A prophet of God who ran away.

And when God told him to go and preach in Nineveh. He took a boat in the opposite direction. And the key details of the story are this. Jonah died. I think he does.

Lots of people think he nearly died. But he spent three days buried in a large fish. And then finally he returns from death. Or his brush from death. And the fish spits him out.

And he proclaims to Jonah to Nineveh to repent. And there's this incredible revival from it. And so there's this pattern of Jonah. Who is a little picture of Jesus.

[17:21] Three days in the big fish. And then resurrected. To life. And so the sign of Jonah is what?

It is. Well what was Jonah's message? It was repentance. It was repentance. Turn to God. Turn from your sin and turn to God. The repentance might be preached in his name. To all the nations. Well Jesus spent three days in the tomb. And he is risen from the tomb. He bursts out of the tomb. He's vomited out of the tomb. And repentance is preached in his name to all the nations.

So do you see what Jesus is saying? He's saying that the sign of Jonah is the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus. The sign of Jonah is the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus.

It is the crowning proof of the Christian faith. For the Christian faith. I'd love to talk to you about that. I'd love to talk to you about the evidence. And we could discuss it. I could give you the evidence that people are better qualified to read than I am.

[18:24] We could get Joanna to take you to the British Museum. And show you some of the evidence. We could get you to read books written by lawyers who wrote books who were determined to disprove the resurrection. Like Frank Morrison.

Like Lee Strobel. And as they looked at the evidence of the resurrection they were wonderfully convinced by the evidence. The evidence is right there in front of you. And of course it is brilliant. It is really right for you to ask a thousand questions on that. It's a really, really good thing. And I hope you do that. I hope children of this church. I hope you think.

I hope you realise that we want you to ask questions. We don't want you to just blindly accept everything. We want you to have an inquisitive mind. But after all of that.

We still close our eyes to Jesus and refuse to accept Him. Then eventually you will walk away. And the fault of our unbelief will not lay with Him but with us.

[19:23] That's the first point. The case for Jesus is proven. Secondly. The second point is in verses 5-12. The denial of Jesus is dangerous.

The denial of Jesus is dangerous. The scene changes. And so Jesus is now alone with His disciples across the lake. And He takes the opportunity to warn them about the perils of false teaching.

The warning comes twice. Can you see it in verse 6? Watch and beware. There's a double warning there. Watch and beware about the yeast of the Pharisees.

The leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And then again in verse 11. And the second warning. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Be on your guard. It's not the first time that Jesus has told His followers to be on their guard. His disciples. About something. In fact He's said it three times. Already.

[ 20 : 24 ] And on each occasion it's very serious indeed. There are people out there. Who are very, very overprotective. You know when you go to someone's home.

And they're just very, very protective of their stuff. And kind of terrified that your children are going to trash it. Or something like that. Or you go to the playground after school.

And there's a man. And she's rightly nervous about her child. But she's very, very overprotective. But we know what that's like, don't we?

We understand that. And we know that there are people who are irrational. And paranoid. Over their fears of what will happen. And so they become overprotective.

We know that. But Jesus is no paranoid fantasist. He only tells His disciples to be aware. When there's a serious threat to them. And so far in Matthew.

[ 21 : 23 ] He has warned them about self-righteous spiritual pride. At the start of chapter 6. And he's warned them about false prophets. That would devour them. Halfway through chapter 7. And about enemies of the gospel. Who would have them flogged in chapter 10.

And now he says. Beware of the yeast. Beware of the leaven. Beware of the teaching of the Pharisees. And the Sadducees. And it's not uncharacteristic.

Is it? The disciples missed the point at first. And they say. Well we thought he was talking about bread. Andrew says.

John. Did you bring the path lunch? And he said. No. Judas has got it. And Judas says. Well no. I thought Bartholomew had it. What do you mean? I didn't have it. I thought you brought it. There's this funny little argument. That goes on.

Where they're completely misunderstanding. Well who brought the bread? It's bizarre isn't it? They seem to have forgotten. That in the previous section. And in the chapter 4.

[ 22 : 19 ] Here's a man who feeds 5,000 with. Five fish. A couple of loaves. And 4,000 with seven loaves. And a couple of fish. With almost nothing.

It's a sign isn't it? Of how his followers have got so much to learn. And Jesus rebukes them. Can you notice that? But he doesn't turn away from them. Do you notice that distinction? They've still got loads and loads to do.

And they should have learnt this by now. In many ways. And Jesus does rebuke them. But he doesn't turn his back on. And walk away. He works with those who are his disciples.

Is this about your testimony and mine? But the big lesson is this. He's warning us about the teaching. Of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And there's no doubt.

This warning from Jesus was brutal. So remember he's talking about the most highly respected. The most well qualified spiritual authorities of the time. It's the equivalent of a council of the leading churchmen.

[ 23 : 22 ] And academic. And bishops. And archbishops. And cardinals. And moderators. And lecturers. And professors of theology. And they all arrive.

To put Jesus on trial. To test them. But he responds by telling his ragtag band of followers. To disregard their teaching. And to give their exclusive attention and allegiance to him.

Now that would be a big enough thing to say. But in describing their teaching as leavens. Jesus is going even further. Elsewhere he uses the metaphor of the yeast. Positively.

To describe the influence and the growth of his kingdom. But here it's described entirely negatively. He's saying their teaching is like cancer. He's saying it is deeply toxic.

And that even a little bit of it. Even a little taste of it. Can take hold. And it will be deadly. Just one spark on a dry field.

[ 24 : 21 ] Of grass. And the whole thing can go up. He says beware. Guard against it. Guard against it every bit. As much as you would defend your sheep against the wolf.

So two implications as we close. The first implication is this. Number one. That doctrine matters. That doctrine matters.

One of the things that winds me up. Is I'm idea people say well. Christ unites. But doctrine divides. I'll hear it at the funeral.

On Friday from different people. God doesn't really believe in. God isn't really interested in. What you believe is the kind of person you are. And we're all united.

Of course biblically speaking. Unity is always in the truth of the gospel. And the reason why that statement winds me up so much.

[ 25 : 24 ] That Christ unites. That doctrine divides. Is it is dangerously misleading. It is possible isn't it. To obsess so much about little points of doctrine.

And to look for things. To argue with others. And to separate others. From others in an overzealous way. In an ungracious way. That is possible. You'll have to search that hard as you.

But that is a million miles away. From saying Christ unites. But doctrine divides. People who say that. Means something much stronger. That whether somebody believes.

In the teaching of God's word. Whether they believe in. The key doctrines. Of scripture. In salvation. Well that doesn't matter. You have to leave. Robust.

Theological conversation. At the door. For the sake of the broadest. Coalition of unity. But Jesus thinks differently. He cares enough. About true doctrine. To warn his disciples.

[ 26 : 19 ] About those who. Teach false doctrine. And clearly. He wants them. And you and I. To be able to spot the difference. And it's a warning. That comes. Right the way.

Throughout the New Testament. So Jude calls. People who teach falsely. Godless men. Whose condemnation. Was written about long ago. Peter calls. Those who teach falsely.

About Christianity. Brute beasts. And springs without water. Paul calls them. Savage wolves. And mutilators of the flesh. John calls them. Deceivers. And antichrists.

And so that is why. We're unashamed. I hope. In saying. That it's quite wrong. To try and separate. A deep understanding. Of God's word. On the one hand. From a deep love. Of Jesus. On the other. They're not two different things. They are two sides. Of the same coin. And both sides. Are indispensable. You cannot reach. God's word. Properly. Without it leading you.

[ 27 : 19 ] To an ever. Deeper love. For Jesus. And you can't. Grow. In deeper love. For Jesus. Apart from. God's word. Because that is where.

We need to. And studying. God's word. Without love. For Christ. Is arid. Barren. Intellectualism. And trying to love.

Jesus. Without God's word. Is sentimentalism. And neither. Is authentic. Christianity. Because doctrine. Matters. The final implication.

Is this. That Jesus. Is everything. He is everything. I've tried to ask this week. What is it. About the teaching. Of the Pharisees. And the Sadducees. That believe.

Very different things. That got Jesus. So worked up. What was it. What is it. About the different teaching. Of the Pharisees. And the Sadducees. That made.

[ 28 : 15 ] It. So dangerous. And in the context. Actually. It's quite obvious. Because for all of their differences. The thing that these two religious groups. Had in common.

Is that they had taken. Against. The person. And the work. Of Jesus himself. They'd written him off. They'd shut their eyes.

To his signs. They'd block their ears. To his teaching. They aren't with Jesus. And for Jesus. They are against Jesus. And the reason.

That that is so serious. Is because Jesus. Is everything. He is the beginning. And the end. He is the alpha. And the omega. He is. The image. Of the invisible God.

He's God with us. And to reject him. Is to reject God. Matthew's. He's taught us. That he is the center. Of the universe. He is the center.

[ 29 : 11 ] Of everything. That God is doing. In his universe. And everything. That God has ever planned. To do. In his world. Centers on him. And so anyone. Who says anything. That pulls you away. From Jesus. The Jesus of the gospels.

The Jesus of the bible. Their views. Are incredibly dangerous. And their views. Are not just. A different interpretation. Or tradition. They are deadly. And toxic. They are spiritual cancer.

And history shows. That there will always be people. In the church. And around the church. Who seek to draw. Our hearts.

And our minds. Away from the simple. Gospel. Of Jesus Christ. That has been taught. And believed. For 2000 years. And very.

Very often. Those people. Will seem. Deeply intellectual. And enormously. Authoritative. Just as they did. In Jesus day. And sometimes.

[ 30 : 07 ] They will deny. The basic. Truths. About. Who Jesus is. And what it means. To follow him. And other times. They will redefine. What the message.

Of the kingdom. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is. And they will always. Sound plausible. And they will always. Sound credible. But they will leave you.

Feeling. That you are not allowed. To believe. The simple gospel. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Emmanuel. God with us.

Of a saviour. For sinners. Who calls you. To follow him. And he says. Those people. Are very. Very dangerous. And so.

Beware of them. Let's pray. Let's pray.