



Matthew 16:1-20

General Introduction

We are going back to Matthew's gospel for a number of weeks, continuing our series from November. Jesus the King is here, bringing his kingdom, but we have seen various responses to him. This section we will see some resolution to that as Jesus reveals who is part of his kingdom and the upside-down nature of it.

This passage has three clear sections, with 3 responses to Jesus and Jesus' response.

- **1-4 Jesus first meets the Pharisees.** They refuse to believe and Jesus rejects them, leaving us wondering what will happen if Jesus rejects the nation of Israel.
- **5-12 Jesus in the boat with the disciples.** He warns them not to be like the Pharisees and Sadducees yet they worry about bread. They don't seem to get who Jesus is despite all the evidence they have seen, and we should be concerned about their faith if they are so blind.
- **13-20 Later Jesus is again with the disciples, and now they see he is the Christ, thanks to a miracle.** It's a great turning point in the gospel, as Jesus announces that he will build his new community on this confession. In light of Israel's rejection, His new kingdom is made up of those who, by God's grace, confess Jesus as the Messiah.

There is more stuff here about the authority of the church, the keys of the kingdom etc but we'll probably cover that together with the linked passage in 18:15-20.

Questions

1. Ask people to watch the Bible Project's video on Matthew 1-13 <https://youtu.be/3Dv4-n6OYGI>. What do you expect to see in the next section? What questions do you have?

Good to set some quick context when we get back to a book. The king is here, but there are mixed responses. We probably expect some kind of resolution to this. What will Jesus do about the different responses? How will he respond to the different groups?



V.1-4

2. How do we know the Pharisees' request isn't genuine? Where do we see such a response to Jesus today? And perhaps in our own hearts?

Matthew says it is 'to test him' (v1). It is a deliberate refusal to believe. We see it sometimes when we reach out to people but they won't believe until they see more evidence. Occasionally that's genuine, other times it's not.

As Christians we believe though sometimes we refuse to obey. "God, I will keep doing this sin unless you do this for me..." which is a dangerous attitude.

3. How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees, beyond refusing to perform a sign? How significant is this after ch.15 and earlier chapters? How does it make you feel?

Jesus leaves them and departs (v4) – from v.5 it is clear he gets into a boat again. Amazingly, he arrived by boat back in Israel only 5 verses earlier, in 15:39, after a fruitful ministry among the Gentiles. So symbolically he is rejecting Israel, because of their refusal to believe (and hence in 16:18 he will start something new, his church). It is actually quite a solemn moment if you think about it. It should give us pause – Jesus' patience with those who reject him is not unlimited...

V.5-12

4. What do you think of the disciples' worry about bread? Is Jesus right to scold them like this?

Jesus' barrage of questions reveals this is not a minor error. They have seen the feeding miracles, as well as so many others, so they should know by now that Jesus is the Messiah, or at least that bread is not a problem for him. The fact they still worry about bread is basically unbelief.

5. In what kind of situations do you feel anxious or distracted like the disciples? What light does this passage shed on what is going on in our hearts at that time.

I guess deep down this shows what is going on when we feel anxious or distracted. Of course Christians sometimes feel that way, some more than others. Don't take it to mean you can't be a Christian if you feel anxious – it happens. But deep down there is a kind of unbelief, where we don't really trust Jesus is who he says he is, that he cares for us or has the power to help us, or has everything under control, and hence we worry too much or are too distracted by other things.



V.13-20

6. Though we see three responses in the passage, there are only two groups of people. How do you explain the difference between v.5-12 and v.13-20?

The disciples respond in two different ways. At first they're still confused about Jesus, but then they get that he is the Christ. What happened? V17 – The Father revealed the truth to them. The only way people can know Jesus is through a miracle. Without that, no amount of seeing miracles will change anyone, people are blind.

7. How does this make you feel about your own conversion? And how does it make you feel about evangelism?

We should be humble and grateful if we trust in Jesus. It's not through our own skill and intelligence. Rather we have been blessed that God opened our eyes.

When it comes to evangelism, there are lots of applications. We should realise we can't persuade anyone to be a Christian, but we don't despair and instead trust God will open people's eyes. So we pray.

8. If we do confess Jesus as the Messiah, what encouragement is there for us in this passage? How will that help us live for Jesus this week?

13-20 is such a positive passage. If we confess Jesus we are part of his church, his new community. A community that will last forever and Satan can't destroy. A community with an important task in having the keys of the kingdom. We should feel privileged and secure, and that will help us live as Jesus' followers despite the rejection we face.



Matthew 16:21-17:13

A well-known event - Jesus was transfigured on the mountain - but its importance is seen in context.

17:1-8. The main focus of the sermon. This was a huge event - Jesus showing his glory, Moses & Elijah appearing, God the Father speaking from the cloud (only the 2nd time in the gospel, after Jesus' baptism). The point seems to be to back up the difficult teaching in 16:21-28. The disciples must have been so confused that the Messiah claimed he had to die and that his followers would have to give up their life too. The transfiguration confirmed who Jesus is, and that he will return, so we can trust and do what he says, i.e. "Listen to him" (v5b)

17:9-13. The conversation on the way down from the mountain is mainly concerned with the present hidden nature of Jesus, compared to the glory they saw on the mountain. The disciples wonder about Elijah, who was prophesied to come. He came, but in a hidden way, and wasn't recognized, according to Jesus. Same with Jesus himself, which will lead to the cross. So the kingdom and the Messiah are really here, but will only be seen in full glory later.

The questions are straightforward applications but important to do.

1. What struck you from the sermon/passage?

Just an icebreaker

2. How did you feel after last week's sermon, and Jesus' call to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him? What might this look like for you?

Should be a huge challenge. Saying no to ourselves and always putting Jesus first is hard for sinners. People can share specific examples where they have been challenged.

3. The application of the passage is clear - "Listen to him" (v5), take his words seriously. How would the events of 17:1-8 have helped the disciples listen to Jesus' call?

Rehearsing the main point, for the benefit of those not there. By giving the disciples a vision of Jesus in his glory the disciples would be assured that he really is the Messiah. Moreover, it shows his future glory, when he returns (16:27), which is what motivates us.



4. In what ways or situations do you struggle to listen to Jesus? How does this passage challenge you?

5. How should the future and Jesus' coming impact the way we live now? In what ways would your life look different if you really believed this?

If we will have glory later we won't need it now. It is OK to lose our lives for Jesus because we will find life when he returns. It is worth following Jesus despite the cost now. So it should make us willing and able to follow Jesus. This will look differently for each one of us.

6. What kind of things - doubts, fears, idols - stop our hearts from believing this day-by-day? How does this passage speak to them?

The problem is that we lose sight of Jesus' coming, or deep down we're not sure of it. Maybe because it's invisible, we live too much in the present, we want instant gratification, etc. Hopefully this passage and seeing Jesus' glory have been the reminder we need.

7. How can we help each other as a CG to remain more focussed on Jesus and his return every day?

Hebrews 10:24-25 should be our motto: "Let us consider how to spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Heb 10:25). Question is how we can best do this when we don't see each other much, or in a way that is real and authentic rather than forced.

8. How do we see Jesus' grace in the passage? How does it help us as we put this into practice?

Always good to end with a reminder of grace. Taking up your cross comes in the context of Jesus going to the cross for us, and him hiding his glory for a while in order to do that. And Jesus reassuring the disciples he will return shows grace, esp the lovely v7. So depending on whether your discussion felt encouraging or heavy, this might be a good thing to note before praying.



Matthew 17:14-27

The second half of this chapter are a few great stories that show us Jesus again, and what a different king he is to everyone else, as we are encouraged to follow him.

17:14-21.

A man came to the disciples while Jesus was away, and they couldn't heal the man's son. They had cast out demons before, in ch.10, but now they couldn't. Jesus' diagnosis is that they had no faith. Or at least, faith in themselves, but not in Jesus. But we are powerless, only Jesus can save, so depending on and following him is the only thing we can do. Prayer is the key expression of that, as Mark records Jesus as saying on this occasion (Mark 9:29).

17:24-27.

A weird story. All Jewish men had to pay tax to the temple, and the tax collectors asked Peter whether Jesus did so. Jesus says he doesn't - kings don't tax their sons, so the Son of God won't have to pay temple tax. But to avoid offence Jesus miraculously provides Peter with a coin to pay for the two of them. The main point seems to be again about Jesus. Staggering claims - I'm the Son of God, I don't need to pay tax - yet humility as he quietly pays anyway. And more, he pays for Peter. In a way, he pays Peter's debt so Peter can be a son of God.

17:22-23.

In between we see again how Jesus can be the only saviour, and the one who pays our debt to make us sons: he died for us on the cross. It makes sense of the other stories.

Questions

V.14-21

1. Why couldn't the disciples cast out the demon, according to Jesus? (Mark 9:29 could help)

Three times Jesus mentions faith (v17 and twice in v20). There is something wrong with their faith. In Mark's fuller version Jesus says they didn't pray. I.e. they were not relying on Jesus to do it but thought they could do it themselves.

2. In what areas are we prone to trust ourselves? What are signs that we are doing this?

This is a big area of application. It might be for our ministry. We trust in techniques and formulas rather than in Jesus. It might be in trying to manage our job, our finances, or



our family. Basically we try to control it ourselves. A big sign is a lack of prayer. Pride rather than thankfulness when things go well. Or stress, worry, despair rather than calm faith when things go wrong.

3. What consequences can you see of trusting in ourselves? How does it make you feel?

There's our spiritual state - it leads us further away from God. Some of the responses when things go well or badly have an impact on those around us. And of course, a lack of fruit in our ministry - the disciples couldn't cast out the demon after all.

4. How do we see Jesus here by contrast? How does it help us depend on him in those situations?

We see Jesus' power and love. Jesus doesn't need to pray or have faith. He rebukes the demon and immediately it comes out. So different from the disciples who were powerless. And he is so patient with them despite their failures. And of course as usual his compassion and care for this man and his son. It should make us want to trust Jesus. We are powerless but he is mighty to save.

V.24-27

5. This is a weird story, but what do we see about Jesus' character and identity here, and why? How does it make you feel about him?

It's a wonderful picture of Jesus again. He knows about Peter's discussion. He has such control over nature that he can make Peter catch a fish with a coin in its mouth. He arrogantly claims he doesn't need to pay the temple tax, he is the Son of God. Yet he gently and humbly pays anyway, so as not to cause trouble. He was very controversial with the Pharisees but not with ordinary people.

6. How does the passage point to the gospel? What do you find most encouraging?

There are lots of things that point us to the gospel. Chiefly of course, Jesus pays for Peter, who now doesn't need to pay himself. It's the temple tax, so in a way Jesus pays for Peter's relationship with God (which was mediated through the temple). Sons don't need to pay, and now Peter doesn't need to pay - making him a son like Jesus in a sense. Plus the link with Jesus' character. Jesus doesn't need to pay but in humility identifies with others and does so anyway, just like he didn't need to suffer but came down for us in humility and identified with us, and that is how he pays for us.



V.22-23

7. Why does Jesus predict the cross again in the middle of this passage? How does it explain what we see in the other paragraphs?

The other stories point to the cross. Why can Jesus save and the disciples are powerless? Ultimately this is what happens at the cross. We can't deal with our sin, but Jesus is the only one who can. And the cross is how Jesus pays for Peter so he can come to God as a son.

8. How does this passage help us follow Jesus? What will you remember from this passage as you try to live for him this week?

Ultimately this passage backs up that it's worth following Jesus. Only he can save us and make us sons. There is no other way, we can't save ourselves. So it should motivate us to press on with the Christian life.



Matthew 18:1-20

Matthew alternates blocks of narrative with blocks of teaching. After chs. 5-7, 10, 13 the fourth block of teaching is ch.18 (though ch.19-20 will continue similar themes). This discourse is all about the church and church life and has some tricky parts, but it hangs together well when we see how Jesus is the focus of church life.

V.1-4 Seeing the church as Jesus does (ourselves and others): like children. Humble, needy, nothing to offer - as children were seen back then, and how Jesus sees us. If we see the church clearly we can care for it appropriately. Then how we should care comes in two sections

V.5-10 Don't lead people away from Jesus. I think this is the point. We should welcome/receive and not despise any of Jesus' little ones (v5, 10). Every Christian should be welcome at church to grow in Christ and be part of Jesus' body - after all we know how desperately they need Jesus. Not welcoming is possibly to make them stumble, here translated 'cause them to sin'. In context it seems to be the opposite of receiving. If we exclude someone, usually because of their background or because they don't do the same as us, we are blocking them from Jesus, which is a huge sin he hates (v6-7). Or we make them trust in their background or what they do, rather than in Jesus. So we should be ruthless with this (v.8-9) and be radically inclusive.

V.12-20 Pursue those wandering from Jesus. This is the flipside. We want everyone to come to Jesus and make sure no one leaves Jesus and perishes. That's God's heart in v.12-14. What that means in practice is that we are concerned about sin and will talk to someone if they sin (against us, or in general), as sin is deceitful and enslaving. We want to win them back to Jesus (v15) so will warn them. This is a tricky issue and will be addressed more in next week's sermon. But a few important points:

- This is not just any sin - after all, all Christians sin. It's when it is more than you'd expect, e.g. an ongoing issue, a pattern, or a much more serious sin than can be expected given their maturity and situation, as all Christians are different. And the issue is repentance, not sinlessness or a certain standard.
- You address it humbly, patiently, lovingly, asking questions rather than being quick to accuse. We are all sinners.
- It is not punishment but out of love, to win them back. Like God, we pursue people and won't give up on them.
- 15-17 is a process for if someone doesn't listen. First speak to them on your own, if that doesn't work bring a few others along, if they still don't listen tell it to the church. It all adds more weight to the warning.
- Ultimately if someone refuses to repent and give up their sin even if the whole church warns them, Jesus suggests you consider them as a Gentile or tax collector. Someone outside the community. This doesn't mean punishing or excluding them, but treating them differently. Rather than warning a Christian not to leave Jesus, you see them as a non-Christian who needs to come to Jesus.



This is a tough question when to do this, and what repentance looks like, and very much case by case. It is a serious responsibility of the church – welcoming new believers through baptism, but also sometimes disciplining someone. The passage doesn't give many details. What Jesus does do is assure his disciples he is with them in this. V18-20 is full of earth and heaven language. Jesus is with his church, and what we decide will be done in heaven. (Not that we can change God's mind, but what we decide is what God had decided all along). So Jesus assures us in this.

*This is ultimately not a topical study on discipline, but I hope these pointers help. Any questions please ask! A great, short book on the topic is: **Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus** (9Marks: Building Healthy Churches).*

<https://www.amazon.com/Church-Discipline-Protects-Building-Churches/dp/1433532336>

Questions

What struck you from the sermon? (General discussion starter)

1. How do you feel about Jesus' command to humble yourself like a child? What makes this difficult? How does the context of Matthew help?

Maybe we find it easy, but others find it, unsurprisingly, 'humbling'. We don't like to admit weakness and neediness. In a culture of proving yourself it is so countercultural. Plus, admitting weakness means usually you get rejected or taken advantage of. No one wants to admit they are weak and needy, understandably. But in church, we can.

It's good to see the positive examples in Matthew. Desperate people like the unclean Canaanite woman, the woman with the bleeding, Jairus, the man with his son in ch.17 etc – these people come to Jesus and he loves them. Why would we distance ourselves from these great examples?

2. Why is it important we see each other as little ones? What would church life be like if we forget this?

If we see each other rightly we will care for each other rightly. And the church will be centred on Jesus. We won't ourselves go to Jesus, we won't point others to Jesus, if we think it's more about what we do.

Conversely, if we don't accept we're all just sinners in the same boat, we'll focus on being the greatest, feel proud or despair. Your sin is an opportunity for me to shine rather than an opportunity for me to help you etc. We will move from the gospel to our works if we forget how weak and needy we are.



V.5-11

3. In context, what does it mean to make a Christian 'stumble'? Do you think it's as serious as Jesus says? Why?

See above for an explanation. If we don't welcome someone as a church, for them it's like Jesus is not welcoming them. It leads people away from him by putting barriers in the way, or making people trust in something else than Jesus. Of course if Jesus is our greatest need that's very serious - Jesus thinks so at least.

4. What are some possible examples of how we as a church could make someone stumble? Explicitly? Implicitly? How could we address these?

Worth thinking through. The sermon gave an example of someone rescued via Sons & Daughters not feeling like she is part of Jesus' community to her messed up background compared to everyone else.

Being aware of the danger should make us more aware of others' background - a loving thing to do! And knowing that it's not about us but that we are all just a bunch of needy sinners means we are willing to change what we do, if that helps others, rather than insist on our own way.

V.12-20

5. How do you feel about confronting someone about their sin? What kind of things make it hard and uncomfortable (good or bad reasons). How can we overcome these?

No one likes doing this. We feel this is not my business. We feel it is not our place. Often rightly, we feel inadequate, or know our own sin so it feels wrong. We don't want to come across as "holier than thou" or proud or judgmental.

Or more selfishly, we don't like the discomfort, we like to please people, we don't want to have a negative reputation etc. This is ultimately putting ourselves before the good of others. If someone is walking into danger we want to warn them.

Overcoming goes back to v1 - if we all know we are needy sinners. Then we can come humbly, without pride or anything to prove. We're ok to love people because we know they will appreciate our help rather than resist, because they know their need, etc.



6. V17 can seem harsh if it is misunderstood. Discuss why this whole process is an expression of love and care.

Discipline is love. We warn people because we care about them, and we persist in warning because we won't give up on someone, just like Jesus won't give up.

V17 can seem like you're punishing or excluding someone. It's not - it is seeing a person differently. Instead of loving them like a Christian we love them like a non-Christian, by making clear where we think they stand so that hopefully they get the message, rather than giving them a false sense of security by pretending they're still ok. So someone is still welcome to come to church and be part of a CG and hang out, just as someone who is not yet a Christian. But like them, they can't be a signed member or have a leadership role or take communion.

7. Church discipline is a bigger topic than just this passage. Are there any questions you have? Maybe share them together and send them in.

The passage talks about it so we deal with it, but it's a much bigger topic. People often misunderstand, hence please send in any questions. You can try and answer them but don't need to - feel free to just share it with Kevin or Niels and we can help.