

MATTHEW 16 SIGNS, SUFFERINGS, AND SELF-DENIAL

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were two different sects among the Jews of Jesus' day, and their beliefs were very opposite to each other; but it is remarkable to see that they put aside their differences and heartily agreed in their efforts to persecute and tempt the Savior (verses 1-4). O that the Lord's people – who ought to work together for good – would be as often and as thoroughly of one mind, as those who are in league for evil! Let us pray that there may be much harmony among Christians, so that we may not be outdone by that unity which always seems to exist among our enemies.

These tempters of Christ asked Him for a sign from heaven – that is, for such a visible manifestation of heavenly power, that it would leave them no room for doubt as to whether or not He was really the Messiah. What fools! Had they not seen an abundance of miracles already, which could certainly not have been performed by any mere man? Jesus reminds them that they had already been given enough signs to convince them of His Messiah-ship, or else to convict them to their ruin because of their rejection of Him. Even in such an uncertain thing as the weather, they were able to determine – from the appearance of the evening sky – whether the next day would be fair or foul. In a similar manner, they were certainly able to conclude – from what they had already seen of Jesus – whether or not He was truly the Christ. Therefore, He called them hypocrites, because they pretended to ask for a sign from heaven so that they might be convinced, when in reality, they did not want to be convinced! One sign only, He tells them that they would have – not a sign from heaven, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. He had already proposed this to them in chapter 12:40 – adding that “as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” He does not explain this sign any further now; for He had said enough already to prove to them – when He had risen from the dead – that He now foreknew what would then take place.

Having departed from the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus took the opportunity to warn His disciples against their perverse disposition; He bid them to beware of their “leaven.” As it happened, however, they had forgotten to take any bread with them when they crossed the lake. And from Jesus' mention of the word *leaven*, they hastily and mistakenly concluded that He must be referring to this neglect of provision for the body. Alas! How quick we are to think of food for the body rather than the nourishment of the soul. See how our

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus for a sign – verses 1-4
- ❖ Jesus cautions His disciples against the doctrine of the Pharisees – verses 5-12
- ❖ Peter testifies that Jesus is indeed the Christ – verses 13-20
- ❖ Christ foretells His sufferings and speaks about self-denial – verses 21-28

Lord reminds the disciples how speedily they had forgotten His two miracles of feeding thousands of people with just a few loaves and fishes! Let us never fail, in our too-anxious provision for the body, to remember that God cares for us!



The true nature of our Savior was made known to His disciples slowly and gradually (verses 13-20). At first, they took Him for a distinguished prophet. But when they had seen His many miracles and heard His Divine teaching, they became aware that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. While some still thought that He was the resurrected John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other prophet; Simon Peter was enlightened by the Holy Spirit to reply, on behalf of the rest of the Apostles, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" And for this public confession of faith, Peter was very highly praised by Jesus.

As Christians mature and grow up, both in years and in grace, new views of their Lord's character are continually made clearer to them. But in order to be truly converted, they must confess Him to be Who He Himself says He is: the Son of the living God! Not only is He the Prophet Who teaches and instructs them – but He is also the Priest, Who has made full and final atonement for their sin; as well as the King, Whom they must obey in all things.

As soon as the Apostles were enlightened to know that Jesus was indeed the Christ, He put their faith to the test by assuring them that He must "suffer many things" and even "be killed" at Jerusalem (verses 21-28). The disciples – like many other Jews in their day – were under the false notion that the Messiah would liberate them from the yoke of Roman authority and restore earthly power and dominion to their own nation. And now Peter – under this mindset – comes forward again with the same zeal as before, but with a far different judgment; for he took it upon himself to say, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee!" To this speech, Jesus replies as if it had been uttered by Satan himself. And He told Peter that he was no longer, as before, under the influence of Divine revelation; for now he was speaking according to the manner of men. Then, in order to prevent His disciples from thus reckoning on temporal prosperity, Jesus declared, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me!"

As the Savior drew this conversation to a close, He said, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it." The person who grudges health, strength, or life itself in Christ's service shall lose the reward of eternal life in heaven. "And whosoever will lose his life, for my sake, shall find it" – that is, he shall find it forever in heaven. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Thank You, Lord, for the revelation of the Holy Spirit, Who manifests the Son of God to our hearts, causing us to declare that He is indeed the Christ! Amen.