

The Book of Matthew

Peter and the Rock

Lesson #8 for May 21, 2016

Scriptures: Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 7:26; Matthew 16:13-27; 17:1-9; Ephesians 2:20.

1. Jesus had completed one and one-half years of working in Judea and then one year of ministry in Galilee. After feeding the 5000 and, then, the next day having that very frank discussion about His mission as recorded in John 6, Jesus had another conflict with the scribes and Pharisees. Then, He took His disciples and left Jewish territory for the next six months.
2. This six-month period is referred to as *His retirement*. It was a time when He focused on His disciples, taking them to Tyre and Sidon, then across to Caesarea Philippi, and then to Decapolis. Why did He do that?

Matthew 16:21 (GNB): From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life."

3. Why do you think it was so difficult for the disciples to understand Jesus as He explained to them what was going to happen to Him? Repeatedly, He told them that He must go to Jerusalem, be arrested by the Jewish leaders, and be handed over to the Romans and that He would die. But, they could not believe it. Read Luke 18:31-34. That story takes place as they were on their final journey from Jericho up to Jerusalem. How could it possibly be that the world's best Teacher was not able to explain to His disciples clearly enough so they understood what was going to happen? **Did He ever try to explain to them why He had to die?** Was God intentionally blinding their minds? (John 16:12) That seems doubtful because Jesus had repeatedly tried to explain it to them. The only obvious answer is that they were so set in their beliefs that Jesus was going to become the new king of the Jews and rid them of the Romans that they simply could not comprehend the fact that Jesus might actually die at the hand of the Romans!
4. It is very clear from the Gospels and from the rest of the New Testament that Jesus "had to" die. It is not that He was looking forward to that event! John 12:27-28 describes how He felt about it. Try to imagine what was going on in the mind of Jesus as daily He got closer and closer to that fateful event, knowing exactly what was going to happen and yet realizing that was one of the purposes for which He had come to this earth.
5. In fact, Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9 make it clear that had been God's plan since "before time began!"
6. So, why was it absolutely necessary that Jesus go to Jerusalem and die? Obviously, His divine power could have prevented His death even at Jerusalem. But, the Scriptures made it clear that He *must* face these things. (See Romans 3:25-27.)
7. Why was that true? Would God have done it that way if there had been any other way to accomplish what needed to be done? That was Jesus's question. The questions that had been raised when Lucifer/Satan rebelled in heaven about God's character and the way God runs His government had to be answered. Read also Genesis 2:17 and 3:1-4. God had said that sin leads to death; Satan told Eve that was a lie. Who are we going to believe? Can Satan prove his claims? Adam and Eve did not die right away. When humans began to die, Satan claimed that they were dying because by sinning that had angered God; Satan claimed that God was killing them! Can God prove His claims? Has He done so? Jesus died of sin, being separated from His Father, the Source of life. (See Isaiah 59:2.) He did not die of beatings, crucifixion, or the crown of thorns. His cry on the cross just before He died tells us so:

Matthew 27:46 (GNB): At about three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

Separating humans (including Jesus) from the source of life is the inevitable and final result of sin! Only Jesus could die as a Human Being and come back to life as God. (DA 753.1)

8. After going to the territory of Tyre and Sidon and healing the demon-possessed daughter of that Canaanite woman, Jesus and His disciples worked their way east and arrived somewhere in the area of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi was under the control of Herod the Great's son, Philip, from whom his brother Herod Antipas had stolen his wife, Herodias. In Caesarea Philippi there were many different temples to various pagan gods. Many of those temples or portions of those temples are still visible today. Perhaps, Jesus and His disciples walked through the city observing all of those pagan shrines. In any case Jesus determined that it was time for Him to start asking some really important questions.
9. Read Matthew 16:13-17. Impulsive Peter had seen the healings, the exorcisms, the feeding of the multitudes, the amazing teachings, the acts in which Jesus with a few words controlled the forces of nature, the dead being raised, and the time when Peter himself walked briefly on the water to meet Jesus. In contrast to all these amazing events, he must have been troubled by the beheading of John the Baptist.
10. How do you suppose you would have related to someone like Jesus who was indeed God in human flesh. (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 7:26; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:10-11) There is no question about the fact that the disciples witnessed things that no human being had ever seen before. When Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying that He was, the names of John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and "that prophet" came up. *That prophet* probably is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15 in which Moses had predicted that a prophet like himself was coming.
11. Then, Jesus asked the disciples directly, "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15, GNB) Simon Peter in his usual impulsive way answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16, GNB)
12. How do you suppose Peter came to that conclusion? Jesus suggested that information had come to him directly from God the Father. Was that an answer to some prayer that Peter had offered? Had the disciples honestly prayed to God to reveal the truth to them about who Jesus was? Would you have done that?
13. Unfortunately, that open confession of the identity of Jesus Christ did not make the impact on the thinking of the disciples that it should have. The fact that Jesus immediately told them not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah is proof that their idea—and certainly the ideas in the minds of virtually all the other Jews—was very different from the true message that Jesus had come to present about the Messiah.
14. It must have been the farthest thing from Peter's mind, from the disciples' minds, and certainly from the minds of the Jewish people that this Messiah that they wanted to free them from the Roman yoke would soon be crucified on a cross by those same Romans!
15. Paul repeatedly made the point in his writings that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. How do you understand Galatians 3:16? What passage in the Old Testament was Paul referring to? The truth is that there is no passage in the Old Testament which directly relates to Paul's statement in Galatians. Is it possible that some inspired passage has been lost and we do not have the passage to which he was referring? Perhaps the closest fit to Galatians 3:16 are the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: "Instead, he will send you a prophet like me from among your own people, and you are to obey him."

16. We need to remember that Caesarea Philippi was not Jewish territory but rather Gentile territory. The disciples were beginning to see that Jesus was determined to minister to Gentiles as well as Jews. Thus, His ministry would extend far beyond the ministries of John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah, or, for that matter, any of the other Old Testament prophets. Jesus's favorite title for Himself was *Son of Man*. What is implied by those words? Clearly, Jesus was intending to suggest that He was fully human. He was also trying to identify Himself very closely with the human race.
17. Can you mention some things that Jesus has done for you personally? When we seek to witness to others, the one thing that is incontrovertible is our own personal testimony. People you talk to may argue with you about the meaning of scientific facts or your understanding of Scripture; but, it is hard for them to argue with you about your personal experience. Jesus demonstrated the power of personal testimony when He sent those two—or maybe it was only one—formerly-demon-possessed men/man from Gadara back to tell their/his story to the people of Decapolis. What was the result? Thousands of people came to discover the truth about Jesus for themselves. It was at that point that Jesus fed the 4000 who were mostly Gentiles, not counting women and children. Some of us may not feel like our personal testimony would be very convincing. But, what kind of testimony do you think the two demoniacs were able to give? (See Mark 5:18-20.)
18. Read Matthew 16:18-20. After stating that these words from Peter had come from God the Father Himself, Jesus went on to say:
- Matthew 16:18–20 (GNB): ¹⁸And so I tell you, **Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church**, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” ²⁰ Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. [Bold type is added.]
19. The phrase *on this rock* has been very controversial within the Christian church. Roman Catholics claim that *this rock* refers to Peter himself; and, thus, Jesus was proclaiming Peter to be the first Roman Catholic pope. Protestants, of course, disagree with that. The weight of biblical evidence is clearly in favor of the idea that the Rock Jesus was referring to was Christ Himself and not Peter. Peter himself referred to Jesus as the Rock on more than one occasion. See Acts 4:8-12; 1 Peter 2:4-8. Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 when he said Jesus is the One of whom Scripture said (GNB): “The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all.” Later, in his first epistle as recorded in 1 Peter 2:4-8, Peter quoted the Septuagint version of Isaiah 28:16 and after quoting Psalm 118:22 again he quoted Isaiah 8:14-15. Repeatedly, these verses suggest that Jesus Himself as the Messiah was the stone being referred to. We should also note that throughout the Old Testament, God and Christ are referred to as Rocks or Stones. By contrast, we humans are weak and untrustworthy. (Psalm 103:14; 146:3; John 2:25; Matthew 26:34)
20. Matthew and Paul made it very clear who the real Rock is. See 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Ephesians 2:20; and Matthew 7:24-25.
- How feeble the church appeared when Christ spoke these words! There was only a handful of believers, against whom all the power of demons and evil men would be directed; yet the followers of Christ were not to fear. Built upon the Rock of their strength, they could not be overthrown.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 413.3.
21. As you look back at your own personal experience and the experiences of those with whom you are familiar, do you see fallibility and weakness? Or, permanence like a rock?

22. Read Matthew 16:21-23. Suddenly, Jesus seemed to turn on Peter with a very different attitude. Why was that? When Jesus first mentioned the fact that He would be going up to Jerusalem to suffer and to be put to death and then three days later to rise to life, Peter took Him aside and begin to rebuke Him. So, Jesus turned around and said to Peter: "Get away from me, Satan!" What was Peter trying to do at that time? Wasn't he actually trying to tell Jesus what to do and how to conduct His life? When something like that happens, God must rebuke human beings who try to do it. Read Mark 8:33. Jesus looked at all the disciples when He spoke to Peter and said: "Your thoughts don't come from God but from human nature!" (GNB) Obviously, Peter's ideas were shared by the other disciples.
23. Read Matthew 16:24-27. Where did the idea of a cross come from? What was Jesus trying to tell us in these verses? In what sense do we lose our lives? And in what sense do we find them? We are surrounded by people who think that they just need to dream big and follow their dreams and they can become great. By contrast, Jesus said it is not our dreams we need to follow but rather His dream for us. It is so hard for naturally-selfish human beings to recognize that God's plans for us are ultimately better than our plans for ourselves. But, not all of our dreams are selfish. If we dream about winning others to Christ and hastening the coming of Jesus, (2 Peter 3:10-12) we never need to give up that kind of dream.
24. Think back to your own experience or to the experiences of others around you. What kind of dreams did you have growing up? Did you dream of being famous? Of having great wealth? Or, maybe holding a very powerful position among men? God has better plans for you than that!
25. Read Matthew 17:1-9. What happened at that time? Why was it so important for those disciples? These verses describe what is often called the transfiguration. God Himself came down, invaded the body of Jesus Christ, making His whole face and body shine with the brightness of the sun. It reminds us of the time when Moses's face shone after coming down from the mountain. See Exodus 34:29-35.
26. It seemed like Jesus was ready to become king.

But before the crown must come the cross. Not the inauguration of Christ as king, but the decease to be accomplished at Jerusalem, is the subject of their conference with Jesus. Bearing the weakness of humanity, and burdened with its sorrow and sin, Jesus walked alone in the midst of men. As the darkness of the coming trial pressed upon Him, He was in loneliness of spirit, in a world that knew Him not. Even His loved disciples, absorbed in their own doubt and sorrow and ambitious hopes, had not comprehended the mystery of His mission. He had dwelt amid the love and fellowship of heaven; but in the world that He had created, He was in solitude. **Now heaven had sent its messengers to Jesus; not angels, but men who had endured suffering and sorrow, and who could sympathize with the Saviour in the trial of His earthly life. Moses and Elijah had been colaborers with Christ. They had shared His longing for the salvation of men.** Moses had pleaded for Israel: "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." Ex. 32:32. Elijah [425] had known loneliness of spirit, as for three years and a half of famine he had borne the burden of the nation's hatred and its woe. Alone he had stood for God upon Mount Carmel. Alone he had fled to the desert in anguish and despair. These men, chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven. The hope of the world, the salvation of every human being, was the burden of

their interview.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 422.2-425.0. [Bold type is added.]

27. Why do you think God chose to send Moses and Elijah to encourage Jesus instead of sending someone like Gabriel or one of Jesus's angel-friends who surround His throne in heaven? Was it because Moses and Elijah as human beings had faced some of the same problems that Jesus was then facing?
28. Read Luke 9:31. Clearly, Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His coming sacrifice. Did the disciples hear and understand what was being said?
29. Suddenly, a voice from heaven was heard proclaiming the truth about God's only Son. The disciples fell face down onto the ground. Why is it that repeatedly in Scripture when human beings hear the voice of God or even the voice of an angel, they fall on their faces in the dirt? Are they scared to death? Are they just overwhelmed? What was happening?

The Transfiguration narrative contains several allusions—possibly missed by modern readers but nevertheless recognizable to Jewish readers—to God's glorious self-revelation before Moses at Sinai. (1) The six days recorded in Matthew 17:1 alluded to Exodus 24:16, when clouds enshrouded God before His glorious revelation. (2) Jesus' facial transformation ("shining/beaming") reflected Moses' facial transformation (radiant glory), caused by exposure to God's divine glory. (*Exodus 34:29*). (3) Both Elijah and Moses experienced Jehovah firsthand at the mountain (Sinai) (*Exodus 24:15-17, 1 Kings 19:8-14*). (4) The Israelites had lived in tabernacles during their wilderness travels surrounded by God's presence. (5) God's voice called Moses from the cloud, while God's voice affirmed Jesus from the cloud (*compare Matthew 17:1-9 with Exodus 24:15-18*). (6) The disciples fearful reaction reflected the wonderment experienced by ancient Israel whenever encountering God.—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* page 109.

30. Shortly after this experience, Jesus and the disciples returned to Capernaum. Read Matthew 17:24-27. The Pharisees were constantly thinking of ways in which they could trap Jesus. In this case, they asked Peter instead of Jesus if Jesus would pay the temple tax. They were hoping to get Jesus to say either yes or no. If He had said, "Yes," they would have said: "This is proof that He admits that He is no different from any other ordinary human being." If He had said, "No," they would have said, "He is not loyal to the temple." Thus, they would accuse Him of not supporting the temple in Jerusalem. Peter, of course, not understanding the intricacies of their question, assured them that Jesus would pay the tax.

But Peter only partially comprehended the purpose of his questioner. There were some classes who were held to be exempt from the payment of the tribute. In the time of Moses, when the Levites were set apart for the service of the sanctuary, they were given no inheritance among the people. The Lord said, "Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance." Deut. 10:9. In the days of Christ the priests and Levites were still regarded as especially devoted to the temple, and were not required to make the annual contribution for its support. Prophets also were exempted from this payment. **In requiring the tribute from Jesus, the rabbis were setting aside His claim as a prophet or teacher, and were dealing with Him as with any commonplace person. A refusal on His part to pay the tribute would be represented as disloyalty to the temple; while, on the other hand, the payment of it would be taken as justifying their rejection of Him as a prophet.**

Only a little before, Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God; but he now missed an opportunity of setting forth the character of his Master. By his answer to the collector, that Jesus would pay the tribute, he had virtually sanctioned the false conception of Him to which the priests and rulers were trying to give currency.

When Peter entered the house, the Saviour made no reference to what had taken place, but inquired, "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" Peter answered, "Of strangers." And Jesus said, "Then are the children free." While the people of a country are taxed for the maintenance of their king, the monarch's own children are exempt. So Israel, the professed people of God, were required to [434] maintain His service; but Jesus, the Son of God, was under no such obligation. If priests and Levites were exempt because of their connection with the temple, how much more He to whom the temple was His Father's house.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 433.2-434.0. [Bold type is added.]

31. Why do you think Jesus did not make a big deal out of that trap in which they tried to catch Him? Jesus was very gracious. But, of course, by paying the temple tax with the coin found in the mouth of the fish, it would be very clear when the full story came out that Jesus was not an ordinary human being!
32. This miracle is quite unusual because it is apparently the only time Jesus performed a miracle seemingly for His own benefit. But, in actual fact, it was not for His own benefit. He needed to make it very clear that He was not an ordinary human being. Try to imagine the experience of Peter. Peter was accustomed to fishing with nets; but, on this occasion, he was told to throw a line out to catch the first fish and take the money out of its mouth to pay the tax. Does this remind you of Isaiah 40:13-17?
33. Some biblical scholars try to suggest that this story about getting a coin from the mouth of a fish is "just a bit of a folktale." But, this story took place for a very specific reason. Anyone who learned the truth of the whole story would have to admit that Jesus was no ordinary Jew. It was not the first time that unusual but simple miracles took place for the benefit of a few people. Compare the floating axehead, (2 Kings 6:2-7) and the wet fleece and the dry fleece for the benefit of Gideon as recorded in Judges 6:36-40. We know that there were certain groups—the priests and the Levites and religious rabbis—who were exempted from paying the tax. How much more so Jesus Christ for whom the temple was His Father's house!
34. In this lesson, we realize that Peter struggled to understand and submit his will to the will of God. Something similar can be found in Malachi 1 regarding the Jewish people. They were instructed that they should never bring a diseased, crippled, or lame animal as a sacrifice to God. Why was that forbidden? There are, no doubt, two prominent reasons: 1) God asks us as a symbol of our willingness to submit to Him to give our very best to Him—what we most want to hold onto; and 2) Those sacrifices were supposed to represent the perfect Lamb of God!
35. It should be very clear that the disciples needed to have a very clear understanding of the identity of Jesus before they were ready to spread the gospel to the world. The church has always claimed to be built on the foundation of the Rock, Jesus Christ. What will you do when a national Sunday law makes the Seventh-day Adventist Church illegal?

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