

Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

Matthew 16:1-20

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Start - <http://www.brewster.ca/activities-in-the-rockies/brewster-attractions/glacier-skywalk/>

The Glacier Sky Walk is located about 5 hours from here in Jasper National Park. Opening in 2014, the sky walk allows visitors to walk out over a valley that drops 300 m or 918 feet down. The actual floor is 3.18 cm thick which is just over one inch of glass. Plenty to hold you up. You can walk out and look down through the glass to the rocky valley below, as you saw in the video.

To go on the skywalk requires a little bit of faith. You have to trust that the engineers designed the thing properly. You have to trust that the builders met all the specifications in building. And you have to trust that the national park or whoever owns the skywalk properly maintains it. But I suspect these factors still might not convince everyone here to take a walk on the skywalk.

So let's take a survey. How many of you would without question try the skywalk if you had opportunity? How many of you might try to skywalk if you had some time to examine it and ensure you're confidence in its stability? How many of you would say you couldn't pay me enough to go out on that skywalk? There are different levels of faith in the skywalk engineering and maintenance.

We can also find different levels of faith in Jesus. Imagine a scale today that measures levels of faith in Jesus. 0 is no faith in Jesus. 1-4 would be a fledgling or small faith in Jesus. 5-7 would be a growing faith in Him. 8-10 would be a mature faith in Jesus. By faith, I mean confidence in Jesus; trust in Him for salvation, life, hope, security and peace. But where would you put yourself on this scale? How confident are you in Jesus today?

This question comes to us in the next section of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' encounters with different people reveal their level of faith in Him. Today we have opportunity to examine some different levels of faith people have in Jesus. We will see how Jesus responded to each one. Then we will have some time to reexamine our own level of faith in Christ before we meet Him at His table.

Matthew 16:1-20 (ESV) (Page 691)

16 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ²He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' ³And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot

interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.

⁵ When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. ⁶ Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.” ⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, “O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹¹ How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

What kind of faith do people have in Jesus?

We find one kind in the Pharisees and Sadducees. We’ve seen the Pharisees throughout. They were a religious sect of Judaism connected to common people and the synagogue. They followed the “tradition of the elders” back in Matthew 15:2. It’s now known as the Mishnah and if you don’t have summer reading plans, it’s about 800 pages of rules on how to apply the Old Testament Law in everyday life. Instead of helping the people draw closer to God, this tradition imposed a heavy burden upon them. The Pharisees concluded Jesus was a false teacher and certainly not the promised Messiah.

The Sadducees were another Jewish sect. They held power through the high priest and chief priestly offices. They were well connected with wealth, royalty and power. The Sadducees concluded Jesus threatened their hold on power. These two factions bitterly opposed each other and taught different doctrines. Yet here they come together in an unholy alliance against a common enemy named Jesus.

Matthew tells us they came to test Jesus and ask Him to show them a sign from heaven. This indicates the type of faith they had towards Jesus. They did not come to trust Him. They did not come to sincerely ask questions about

life and spiritual things. They came to test with the purpose of tripping Him up and exposing Him as a fraud. Their request a sign that communicated an unmistakable message. They may even be asking for a literal sign in heaven or sign in the sky. So they come to Jesus and ask or demand – “show us a sign from heaven.” They reasoned that if Jesus refused their request, it would dampen His credibility. If Jesus accepted their request, they were convinced he couldn’t do it and would be exposed. **The Pharisees and Sadducees had no faith in Him.** This is faith at the 0 level on our scale. They did not believe Jesus to be anything more than a teacher with a following. Since He made claims that sounded more and more like Messiah, they saw a threat to their security and power. These Pharisees and Sadducees were not the only people to have no faith in Jesus. Many people today do not believe in Jesus or put their faith in Him.

Some of you here today, if you are honest, might say “I don’t really have a faith in Jesus,” or “I don’t believe that Jesus was anything more than a founder of religion.” Or you know people who don’t believe, maybe people who are very close to you.

Why don’t people believe in Jesus? Some don’t believe for intellectual reasons. They believe there’s not enough evidence for God or that science has disproved Him or that science and religion don’t mix. If that is really your issue, maybe you could check out RZIM or Reasonable Faith as places to further and examine some of your questions.

Some people don’t believe for theological reasons. Maybe they don’t believe that it’s possible for God to have a son. Or they don’t believe in the Triune God. Or maybe they don’t believe in Jesus because they think there are many ways to God and don’t like what Jesus said about Himself being the only way.

Some don’t believe in Jesus because of moral or lifestyle reasons. Maybe they don’t like the implication of admitting that Jesus is Son of God. It might require a change of lifestyle. Some don’t believe because of emotional reasons. Maybe you or someone in your family had a bad experience in a church or with another Christian. You’ve concluded that if that’s what God’s people are like, I want nothing to do with God or Jesus. Some don’t believe because of social reasons. If you come to Christ, it might affect your friendships. You might lose friends and believe that’s too high a price to pay. Or some don’t believe for practical reasons. Becoming a Christian would mess up your schedule. All of these reasons add up to zero faith in Jesus. The Pharisees and Sadducees had no faith in Jesus at least at this point for theological and political reasons.

How does Jesus respond? First, He picks up on their request for a sign from heaven. He reminds them of their ability to interpret the sky for weather. If it's red in the evening, it means fair weather. If it's red in the morning, it will be stormy. Apparently, there is a nautical saying that says "red skies at night, sailor's delight; red skies in the morning; sailor's warning." They can interpret these signs in the sky but they cannot interpret the signs of the times. The greatest sign stands right in front of them. They seem to be so blinded by their hold on power or their desire to be right that they cannot see it.

And this is no minor dispute. Jesus does not just laugh it off with them. He declares "an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. But none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus explained this back in Matthew 12:41 where he said "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." That means when Jesus rises from the dead, they will have the ultimate sign. **So Jesus rebukes them and leaves them.**

We can learn from this Jesus always seems to have time for those who genuinely seek him and want assurance of God's promises. But He will not remain with those who seek Him only to find grounds to disbelieve in Him. He will leave to go to others who seek Him.

He and the disciples get into a boat and cross the Sea of Galilee. But when they get to other side of the lake, the disciples realize they have forgotten bread for their journey. This is clearly on their minds. But on Jesus' mind is the encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus believes there is an important point of instruction to make.

He says, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Remember a couple of weeks ago in Matthew 15:14, Jesus instructed the disciples to leave the Pharisees. "They are blind guides leading the blind." So now he reinforces that point with a warning about the leaven or yeast of the Pharisees. Yeast is that agent we place in dough to make bread rise and spread out. A little yeast affects the whole loaf. So a little of the Pharisees or Sadducees influence can affect a whole person or group of people.

But the disciples totally miss this. They say to one another, "we brought no bread." Now again, here's another example of the authenticity of the Gospels. If you wanted to present a movement of winners that everyone should join, you wouldn't include dunderheaded comments like this. What were the disciples thinking? How could they so badly mistake what Jesus has said?

This leads us to a second kind of faith in Jesus. **The disciples had a fledgling faith.** Fledgling means to be young, beginner, inexperienced or untried. In this moment, the disciples demonstrate this kind of faith in Jesus. So this is faith in the 1-4 category of our scale. Yes they believe in Him. But it is a young faith that can miss something basic or let ordinary things blind them to what's most important.

The disciples were most concerned about Bread – material provision – food. We can shake our heads at their silliness. But haven't we allowed some material concern to blind us to the words of Jesus. We can get so wrapped up in our house or some technology or making money or having enough food that we miss what Jesus has for us.

Jesus responds to the disciples in a similar way to the Pharisees but with one important difference. **Jesus rebukes the disciples and stays with them.** Unlike the Pharisees who looked for grounds to disbelieve him, the disciples believed him. Jesus rebukes them for having little faith. But he will stay with them because their fledgling faith was a real faith. Friends, you may have a fledgling faith in Christ. You may be a beginner. Or your faith hasn't grown much in years. Jesus will not leave you. But He wants you to grow in your faith and trust in Him. Jesus will not let the disciple's faith remain fledgling.

He first rebukes them for their forgetfulness. Not for forgetting bread, but for forgetting his abilities. Jesus has just provided mountains of bread for the crowds of 5000 and 4000. So there would be no problem with bread. Then Jesus restates his point to them. The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees had nothing to do with literal bread. It was their teaching that could spread. What's really interesting about this is the Pharisees and Sadducees taught some very different doctrine. So Matthew could be referring to the point of the agreement between their teachings. Jesus was bad. Jesus was dangerous. Jesus was false and untrustworthy. The disciples and we Christians have to guard against letting this kind of teaching come into our hearts and minds.

So the Pharisees had no faith. The disciples had a fledgling faith. The passage continues with Jesus taking the disciples to a place called Caesarea Philippi, 25 miles or 40 km north of Capernaum. This place had a long history of pagan worship. First it was a center for Baal worship in the Old Testament. Then it became a center of worship for the Greek god Pan. Now the worship centered on Caesar. It became an important Greco-Roman city and was populated by Syrians and Greek. So again, Jesus has withdrawn to a Gentile region. But this time, it's to get His disciples alone for a very important question.

He asks “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples would walk around the crowds. They might go into a town to buy food and hear people debate Jesus’ identity in a marketplace. The disciples share what they’ve heard. Some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah. Others say Jeremiah. Others say the prophets. Well one thing the crowds agreed on. Jesus was at least a prophet for all these guys were prophets of God.

But then Jesus directs the question to the disciples. “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answers with the clearest confession stated thus far by a human being in this Gospel. “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” Here we see a third kind of faith directed towards Jesus. **Peter had a growing faith.** This is faith in the 5-7 category of our scale. Perhaps other disciples had this same conviction. But Peter is the one who expresses it. The Christ was the Greek form of the Hebrew Messiah. Messiah or anointed one occurs at least 39 times in the Old Testament speaking of a coming deliverer from God. But Peter not only calls Jesus the Christ. He declares that Jesus is son of the living God. Maybe in this center of worship to gods carved in stone or caves, Peter was struck with the dead gods this city worship. Well, Jesus is the son of the living God. Jesus is God’s unique Son who walks and lives before them. This is the confession of one with a growing faith. Peter still had much growing to do in faith. But at this moment, he courageously expresses the reality about Jesus.

Jesus responds by blessing and announcing Peter’s role in the kingdom of heaven. First, Jesus reveals that Peter did not come up with this confession on his own. He did not just figure it out one day when he was out a sea fishing. He did not come up with this conclusion after his own extensive study of the Scriptures. He was not a brilliant scholar who put all the prophecies together. Jesus recognizes the blessing of God upon Peter. “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood (people or you) have not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven.”

Then Jesus utters some words that have been fiercely debated throughout history. It will be good to get to heaven some day and just clarify what exactly He meant here. After recognizing the blessing Peter has received from the Father, Jesus states “And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell or Hades shall not prevail against it.” What does Jesus mean by “this rock”? The Roman Catholic Church takes this verse as foundational for the establishment of their church. We know from church history that Peter eventually ended up in Rome and was executed there by upside down crucifixion. But before that, the argument goes, Peter established the

church in Rome and became the bishop of Rome. Ever since then, a succession of bishops has served the church from Rome. They now call them popes.

In reaction against the Catholic interpretation, some Protestants came up with an alternative. They argue that since Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, He cannot be saying that Peter will be the foundation of the church. Therefore the argument goes that Jesus pointed to Peter saying you are Peter but then pointed to Himself when He referred to rock. "So you're Peter but upon this rock, me, Jesus, I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." A third interpretation is that the rock is actually Peter's confession of faith. Upon this confession, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God," I will build my church.

But there's another possibility. I think that Jesus does refer to Peter as the rock. After all, his name means rock. So it's like Jesus is saying "You are Rocky, and on this rock, I will build my church." You are Peter and on this Peter I will build my church. But that doesn't require Peter to become the bishop of Rome and establish a succession of bishops. It requires Peter to play a central and foundational role in the birth of the church.

What do we learn from the last chapters of the Gospels and the opening chapters of the book of Acts? Jesus appears to Peter alone after the resurrection according to Luke 24:34. Jesus appears to Peter and instructs him to feed His sheep in John 21. Peter holds a leadership position among the disciples prior to Pentecost. Peter preaches the message at Pentecost where 3000 come to Christ. Peter is present when the Holy Spirit comes upon the Samaritans and Gentiles. It is Peter who receives the vision of the sheet filled with formerly unclean foods. He brings the message to the church in Jerusalem that God has clearly extended the kingdom to Gentiles. All of these foundational pieces for the establishment of the church involve Peter. Then he fades from the picture and Paul takes over.

Upon the rock called Peter, Jesus founded the church and the gates of hell or more literally Hades would not prevail against it. Hades was the realm of the dead. So the gates of death and the threat of death would not extinguish the church. Even though many of the disciples present that day would die a martyr's death, the church would continue.

Then Jesus makes Peter the key holder. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed on heaven. Key holders open doors. Peter would open the door to the kingdom of heaven through the proclamation of the Gospel. Peter, who gives the

first declaration of the Messiah's identity is the one who opens the door of the kingdom to the Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

I wonder what that moment was like. Were the disciples stunned and awed at this revelation? Were some jealous of Peter's place? Did they realize that a great revelation longed for by generations of people had just been unveiled before their eyes?

But then Jesus pours a little cold water on the moment. "Then he strictly charged them to tell no one he was the Christ." Why? Well they still had a fledgling and growing faith. The word Christ or Messiah meant a lot of things to a lot of people. If you just mentioned Christ, you could stir up a revolution. This is not what Jesus came for. So it was not the time to proclaim this yet.

So we have seen three kinds of faith directed towards Jesus in this passage; no faith; fledgling faith; growing faith. What kind of faith do you have in Jesus today?

Wherever our faith is at today, Jesus calls us to keep growing in faith of Him. Some of you might be saying "Why?" What difference does it make in my life today, if I put my faith in Jesus? Sure, I might gain heaven when I die, but I'm living in what's close to Hell today."

Well, I can't comprehensively declare what difference faith in Jesus would make in your life. Nor would some of the experiences and blessings I've received from God necessarily be your experiences. But there are some blessings that apply to every Christian. We have them regardless of wealth, health, good times or bad. If you're a Christian, maybe you want to just close your eyes for a moment and take in some of the blessings we have in our lives because of Christ. If you don't know Christ, these blessings can apply to you if you put your trust in Christ.

- We are reconciled to our heavenly Father through faith.
- God pours in His saving and healing work in my life.
- We have a Shepherd who constantly looks out for and leads us.
- We know God walks with us through my suffering. He keeps count of our tossings in bed. He gathers our tears in his bottle. He records our tears on His scroll. He walks very closely with us through dark valleys.
- We have a hope that goes beyond the grave. We will one day receive resurrection bodies.
- We can participate in something that will last for eternity – God's kingdom.

- We live forgiven based on Jesus' blood and grace. Ephesians 1:7
- Even if we have little or no money in the bank or no property to our name, we look forward to an eternal inheritance. Ephesians 1:11
- We have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who guarantees our inheritance. Ephesians 1:14.
- We are beginning to know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might. Ephesians 1:19.
- We serve the one raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
- We get to be part of His church of which He is the head and through which He brings the message of hope to the world. 1:23.
- We have been rescued from walking in our sins and following the pattern of this world. 2:1
- We have been made alive in Christ.
- I have received the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. 2:7
- We can receive strengthening with power through His Spirit in my inner being. 3:16
- We gain strength to comprehend the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. 3:18
- We are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, with a great hope in the end.

Will you put your faith in this Christ or put more faith into this Christ?