

Day 16, Matthew 16

by David Servant

Jesus' teachings often used metaphors to convey spiritual truths, and it's essential to understand these metaphors correctly to avoid misinterpreting His words.

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "False Teachings"

Description

David Servant emphasizes Jesus' frequent use of metaphors in His teachings, highlighting how misunderstanding figurative language has led to misinterpretations of Scripture for centuries. He delves into the significance of Jesus' metaphorical warning about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, urging believers to be cautious of false teachings that can subtly infiltrate and corrupt the church. Exploring the metaphor of Peter as the rock on which the church is built, David Servant clarifies that the foundation of true Christianity lies in the revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. He also addresses other metaphorical expressions by Jesus, debunking misconceptions and emphasizing the importance of interpreting Scripture accurately.

Transcript

Jesus is not only the Messiah, Son of God, and Savior. He is also "Mr. Metaphor." It seems He hardly spoke a sentence that didn't include at least one figurative word, and when He did, even His closest disciples sometimes misunderstood Him. People have been misunderstanding Him for 2,000 years, and it is often due to the error of interpreting literally what was meant to be understood figuratively. Today we read of such an instance.

"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:6). Only one word, leaven, was figurative, and the disciples should have realized that, as it would make little sense for Jesus to warn them about the Pharisees' yeast. They began discussing, however, that they had forgotten to take bread with them! Let us learn a lesson from their error. And let us also realize that we, too, need to beware of false teaching that seems insignificant and harmless at first, but then permeates everything it touches, just like leaven. Every false doctrine that is poisoning the church around the world began as a single sermon.

One such global false doctrine has been spawned by a wrong interpretation of Jesus' words to Peter in 16:18: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Peter, or literally Petros in Greek, means "stone." The word translated "rock" is *petra*, which means "large rock," or "bedrock." The rock of which Jesus spoke as being the future foundation of His church was not Peter, who, incidentally, Jesus was figuratively calling "Satan" just seconds later (16:23). Rather, the foundation rock of the church is God's revelation that Jesus is the Son of God, the revelation that Peter believed and confessed. Everything in true Christianity is built upon that. When a person believes that Jesus is the Son of God, he repents, is born again, and becomes a member of Jesus' church.

Jesus follows His rock metaphor with three more figurative expressions that, when interpreted literally, have resulted in some strange doctrines. The first of those three is Jesus' statement about the gates of Hades not overpowering His church. Within their context, they simply tell us that the church is comprised of people who have believed that Jesus is the Son of God, and when they do, they escape their destiny in Hades/hell. Jesus' words have nothing to do with the church "doing spiritual warfare" by "attacking the gates of the enemy" and so on.

Jesus next told Peter that He would give him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," another obvious metaphorical expression. His words simply indicated that Peter would have the means (the "keys") for people to get into heaven. Surely this was fulfilled when Peter preached the gospel, effectively opening the way to heaven to believers and closing it to unbelievers. This interpretation is underscored by the fact that Jesus told Peter---in the third metaphorical expression---that whatever he would bind (also translated as "imprison") on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever he loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. That is, Peter's "keys to heaven" (the gospel) would work on the earth. Unfortunately, those "binding" and "loosing" words have not only been interpreted literally, but have been also imaginatively enhanced, so that we have folks verbally "binding" and "loosing" angels, demons, favor, circumstances, and thousands of other things, even though there isn't a shred of evidence from the New Testament that anyone in the early church practiced such things.

There are still more metaphors in today's reading, such as "take up your cross" (embrace inevitable suffering), "save your life by losing it for Jesus' sake" (gain salvation by exchanging your personal agenda for Jesus' agenda), and "gain the whole world and forfeit your soul" (pursue selfish gratification at the expense of salvation). These are followed, however, by a statement we should interpret literally: "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (16:27). Sobering words. We will reap as we have sown. Are you ready?

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