

John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 16

by John Wesley

Jesus teaches his disciples that to follow Him, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and submit to God's will.

Scripture: Matthew 10:38, Matthew 16, Mark 8:11-38, Luke 9:18-24, John 12:25

Topics: "Discipleship", "Self-Denial"

Description

John Wesley expounds on Matthew 16, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the signs of the times and the true nature of Christ's mission. He warns against the leaven of false doctrine and the spiritual blindness caused by worldly desires. Wesley highlights Peter's confession of Christ and the significance of self-denial and taking up one's cross to follow Jesus. He stresses that true discipleship requires a willingness to lose one's life for Christ's sake to gain eternal life. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the ultimate authority of Christ and the hope of His return.

Transcript

XVI. 1. A sign from heaven - Such they imagined Satan could not counterfeit. Mark 8:11; Matthew 12:38.

Verse 2. Luke 12:54.

Verse 3. The signs of the times - The signs which evidently show, that this is the time of the Messiah.

Verse 4. A wicked and adulterous generation - Ye would seek no farther sign, did not your wickedness, your love of the world, which is spiritual adultery, blind your understanding.

Verse 5. Mark 8:14.

Verse 6. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees - That is, of their false doctrine: this is elegantly so called; for it spreads in the soul, or the Church, as leaven does in meal. Luke 12:1.

Verse 7. They reasoned among themselves - What must we do then for bread, since we have taken no bread with us?

Verse 8. Why reason ye - Why are you troubled about this? Am I not able, if need so require, to supply you by a word?

Verse 11. How do ye not understand - Beside, do you not understand, that I did not mean bread, by the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?

Verse 13. And Jesus coming - There was a large interval of time between what has been related, and what follows. The passages that follow were but a short time before our Lord suffered. Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18.

Verse 14. Jeremiah, or one of the prophets - There was at that time a current tradition among the Jews, that either Jeremiah, or some other of the ancient prophets would rise again before the Messiah came.

Verse 16. Peter - Who was generally the most forward to speak.

Verse 17. Flesh and blood - That is, thy own reason, or any natural power whatsoever.

Verse 18. On this rock - Alluding to his name, which signifies a rock, namely, the faith which thou hast now professed; I will build my Church - But perhaps when our Lord uttered these words, he pointed to himself, in like manner as when he said, Destroy this temple, John 2:19; meaning the temple of his body. And it is certain, that as he is spoken of in Scripture, as the only foundation of the Church, so this is that which the apostles and evangelists laid in their preaching. It is in respect of laying this, that the names of the twelve apostles (not of St. Peter only) were equally inscribed on the twelve foundations of the city of God, Revelation 21:14. The gates of hell - As gates and walls were the strength of cities, and as courts of judicature were held in their gates, this phrase properly signifies the power and policy of Satan and his instruments. Shall not prevail against it - Not against the Church universal, so as to destroy it. And they never did. There hath been a small remnant in all ages.

Verse 19. I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven - Indeed not to him alone, (for they were equally given to all the apostles at the same time, John 20:21,22,23;) but to him were first given the keys both of doctrine and discipline. He first, after our Lord's resurrection, exercised the apostleship, Acts 1:15. And he first by preaching opened the kingdom of heaven, both to the Jews, Acts 2:14 &c., and to the Gentiles, Acts 10:34 &c. Under the term of binding and loosing are contained all those acts of discipline which Peter and his brethren performed as apostles: and undoubtedly what they thus performed on earth, God confirmed in heaven. Matthew 18:18.

Verse 20. Then charged he his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ - Jesus himself had not said it expressly even to his apostles, but left them to infer it from his doctrine and miracles. Neither was it proper the apostles should say this openly, before that grand proof of it, his resurrection. If they had, they who believed them would the more earnestly have sought to take and make him a king: and they who did not believe them would the more vehemently have rejected and opposed such a Messiah.

Verse 21. From that time Jesus began to tell his disciples, that he must suffer many things - Perhaps this expression, began, always implied his entering on a set and solemn discourse. Hitherto he had mainly taught them only one point, That he was the Christ. From this time he taught them another, That Christ must through sufferings and death enter into his glory. From the elders - The most honourable and experienced men; the chief priests - Accounted the most religious; and the scribes - The most learned body of men in the nation. Would not one have expected, that these should have been the very first to receive him? But not many wise, not many noble were called. Favour thyself - The advice of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to every one of our Lord's followers. Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22.

Verse 23. Get thee behind me - Out of my sight. It is not improbable, Peter might step before him, to stop him. Satan - Our Lord is not recorded to have given so sharp a reproof to any other of his apostles on any occasion. He saw it was needful for the pride of Peter's heart, puffed up with the commendation lately given him. Perhaps the term Satan may not barely mean, Thou art my enemy, while thou fanciest thyself most my friend; but also, Thou art acting the very part of Satan, both by endeavouring to hinder the redemption of mankind, and by giving me the most deadly advice that can ever spring from the pit of hell. Thou savourest not - Dost not relish or desire. We may learn from hence, 1. That whosoever says to us in such a case, Favour thyself, is acting the part of the devil: 2. That the proper answer to such an adviser is, Get thee behind me: 3. That otherwise he will be an offence to us, an occasion of our stumbling, if not falling: 4. That this advice always proceeds from the not relishing the things of God, but the things of men. Yea, so far is this advice, favour thyself, from being fit for a Christian either to give or take, that if any man will come after Christ, his very first step is to deny, or renounce himself: in the room of his own will, to substitute the will of God, as his one principle of action.

Verse 24. If any man be willing to come after me - None is forced; but if any will be a Christian, it must be on these terms, Let him deny himself, and take up his cross - A rule that can never be too much observed: let him in all things deny his own will, however pleasing, and do the will of God, however painful. Should we not consider all crosses, all things grievous to flesh and blood, as what they really are, as opportunities of embracing God's will at the expense of our own? And consequently as so many steps by which we may advance toward perfection? We should make a swift progress in the spiritual life, if we were faithful in this practice. Crosses are so frequent, that whoever makes advantage of them, will soon be a great gainer. Great crosses are occasions of great improvement: and the little ones, which come daily, and even hourly, make up in number what they want in weight. We may in these daily and hourly crosses make effectual oblations of our will to God; which oblations, so frequently repeated, will soon amount to a great sum. Let us remember then (what can never be sufficiently inculcated) that God is the author of all events: that none is so small or inconsiderable, as to escape his notice and direction. Every event therefore declares to us the will of God, to which thus declared we should heartily submit. We should renounce our own to embrace it; we should approve and choose what his choice warrants as best for us. Herein should we exercise ourselves continually; this should be our practice all the day long. We should in humility accept the little crosses that are dispensed to us, as those that best suit our weakness. Let us bear these little things, at least for God's sake, and prefer his will to our own in matters of so small importance. And his goodness will accept these mean oblations; for he despiseth not the day of small things. Matthew 10:38.

Verse 25. Whosoever will save his life - At the expense of his conscience: whosoever, in the very highest instance, that of life itself, will not renounce himself, shall be lost eternally. But can any man hope he should be able thus to renounce himself, if he cannot do it in the smallest instances? And whosoever will lose his life shall find it - What he loses on earth he shall find in heaven. Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; ; John 12:25.

Verse 27. For the Son of man shall come - For there is no way to escape the righteous judgment of God.

Verse 28. And as an emblem of this, there are some here who shall live to see tho Messiah coming to set up his mediatorial kingdom, with great power and glory, by the increase of his Church, and the destruction of the temple, city, and polity of the Jews.

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