

16:1 *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees*- The force of *kai* ("also") is that they were united. Here we see the theme being developed of how groups who were otherwise against each other united against the Lord as their common enemy. This came to its ultimate term in the Lord's crucifixion, where even Pilate and Herod became friends (Lk. 23:12). Acts 4:27 comments that not only Pilate and Herod, but even Jews and Gentiles, were gathered together in unity against Him. This of course was a parody of how in the sphere of God's Kingdom, Jew and Gentile were brought together in Christ- for Him, rather than against Him. All that is true of God's sphere of operation appears to have its parody in the system of the world.

Tempting... Him- This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system.

A sign- This appears an exact repetition of the situation in 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims based on the similarity with 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

From Heaven- The implication was that the Lord's miraculous signs were from 'satan', from beneath rather than from above. This was tantamount to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. See notes on 12:38,39.

16:2 *The sky is red*- The Lord's examples relate to reading the appearance of the sky. This is His answer to their request for a "sign *from Heaven*"- bearing in mind that in Hebrew and Aramaic, the words for 'sky' and 'Heaven' as in the abode of God are the same. They realized that the same sign- the redness of the sky- could signify two different things. The sign is specifically defined as being the sign of Jonah- the resurrection of Christ (12:38,39). If they perceived the sign of reddened sky in the evening, then it was a sign of "fair weather". The word "weather" is an insertion from the translators and reflects no original Greek word. Most other usages of the Greek for "fair" refer to acceptance with God: "*Well done* (s.w. "fair") good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21,23); "*Well* (s.w. "fair"), you good servant" (Lk. 19:17; and see Acts 15:29; Eph. 6:3). If they read that sign right in the evening, then their morning would be 'fair'- acceptance with God. But if it was in the morning that they saw the sign, then there would be "foul weather" (:3). Again, "weather" is an insertion by the translators, but the Greek really refers to heavy rain- it is translated "tempest" or "storm" in Acts 27:20, and where it is elsewhere translated "winter", the literal sense would be 'rainy season'. The language of rain, storm and tempest recalls Noah's

flood and is a clear metaphor for condemnation. The Lord is observing that the same sign can portend two different destinies- depending upon when it is perceived. The sign is that of Jonah, and the resurrection of Jesus. If they perceived that in the evening, before the night time and darkness of death- then that sign would mean their salvation and blessing. But if only in the morning, after His resurrection- then it meant the rainstorm of condemnation for them.

16:3 *Foul weather*- See on 16:2.

Hypocrites- Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive that they were Nineveh with Jonah in their midst; and according to their response to the Lord's resurrection, their eternity would be decided. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

The signs of the times- The "sign[s] of the times" which they wanted but couldn't discern can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the resurrection of Christ [cp. that of Jonah], because it portends the return of Christ in judgment. And the outcome of that sign was either to their blessing ["fair weather"] or condemnation [rainy / foul weather]. There is no reason to think that "signs" and "times" have to be read as plurals. They could just as easily refer to the one great sign of the one great and ultimate time. The one great sign would then refer to the Lord's resurrection, perception of which (and *when* it was perceived) would lead to either acceptance or rejection at the ultimate "time" of the last day. This is how the Lord elsewhere uses the word *kairos* ("times") : "The time of harvest" (Mt. 13:30); "the time of the fruit" (Mt. 21:34); "you know not when *the time* is" (Mk. 13:33).

16:4 See commentary on 12:38,39,45.

The sign of the prophet Jonah- This sign is defined in 12:38,39 as his figurative death and resurrection, symbolic as it was of the Lord's. But seeing the Lord only appeared to His followers, how was His resurrection such a compelling sign to the Jews? Likewise, the

resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance “to all men” (Acts 17:31). But how? They hadn’t seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men and a sign to the Jews? Surely in that the disciples (and ourselves, in this age) are the risen Lord’s representatives “to all men”, and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God’s plan for them. This explains how the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn’t see the risen Lord Himself. But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

Left them and departed- The original words suggest that this is more than a mere notice of the Lord moving on. The Greek for "left" can imply a more conscious and formal abandoning (see examples in 19:5; Lk. 5:28; Acts 18:19). This would be in line with how in the similar incident in 12:38-45, the Lord had decided to 'leave' the masses of Israel and instead focus upon a minority. He 'left' the majority in the wilderness and went after the one lost sheep until He found it (Lk. 15:4 s.w.). In Matthew 12, the Lord made clear His change in policy- that He was leaving a wicked and adulterous generation and focusing upon the few who had truly responded, i.e. the group of disciples. But here He is again reasoning with the Jews and again formally leaving them. This is not inconsistency, but rather is such behaviour typical of the love that always hopes, that draws a line and yet revisits it in the hope that some will still change. Paul's behaviour to the Jews was the same- having turned away from them and towards the Gentiles, he still revisits the Jews in hope they will yet respond to Christ (Acts 13:46).

16:5 *When His disciples-* The style of reporting this doesn't say 'When *they*...'. And yet presumably the Lord went with them. Hence the impression is given of a mental separation between the disciples and the Lord. This would have been all the more painful for Him because He had just 'left' the Jewish masses to focus upon them (see on 16:4)- and even they were now somewhat 'off' with Him, and still caught up in hardness of heart, not perceiving the wonder and meaning of the feeding miracles (:9).

To take bread- This is the very same Greek phrase used about the Lord ‘taking the bread’ in the feeding miracles (Mt. 14:19; 15:36). The phrase occurs five times in the next verses (16:5-10- “loaves” is s.w. “bread”). The phrase is used a total of 23 times- here, about the taking of bread in the feeding miracles, and about ‘taking bread’ at the breaking of bread service. The only other use is directly in the context of the feeding miracles (see on 15:26). To ‘take bread’ therefore refers to an act of religious significance- for the ‘taking of bread’ in the feeding miracles was clearly invested with deeper meaning, as brought out in John 6. The disciples at this point seem to have sensed that there was something significant in ‘taking bread’- but they had not figured out what. Because when the Lord warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they assume He is referring to their failure to ‘take bread’. Their slowness to understand is really

brought out in the record. The Lord had earlier used yeast as a symbol of influence and effect worked by teaching (13:33). But they didn't grasp that He meant 'beware of the influence and teaching of the Jewish leaders' - even though that had been such a major theme of His teaching from the beginning. Instead, they superstitiously felt that they must be at fault concerning 'bread' because the Lord had mentioned yeast, and so they concluded that the Lord considered their forgetting to 'take bread' as being somehow sinful. They were really so far off in understanding, and yet the Lord elsewhere speaks so positively about their understanding of His message.

16:6- see on Mt. 15:2.

Then Jesus said- "Then" is a misleading translation and can make us think that the Lord said this after becoming aware that they had forgotten to 'take bread'. *De* could be left untranslated, it is a simple connecting device. The disciples heard the Lord's warning about yeast, missed the danger of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and therefore wrongly assumed the Lord was saying something about the bread they had not taken.

Beware of the yeast- Their fear that they might have done something ritually wrong regarding bread was an outcome of their being influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their doctrines led to folk like the disciples becoming paranoid and self-suspicious over issues which were irrelevant, and indeed a distraction from the thrust of the Lord's teaching and intended way of life for His followers. The same effect can be observed in sincere believers who have fallen under the influence of Christian legalists.

The yeast of the Pharisees- Here, yeast is used in a negative sense. The preaching of the Kingdom by us is also likened to yeast- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the metaphor is simply of 'spreading'. Or maybe the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the 'lump' of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

16:7 *They reasoned-* Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall

be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes "reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

Among themselves- The impression is given of the disciples away from Jesus, huddled together keeping out of the Lord's earshot- and He perceives what they are whispering, and raises the issue with them (:8).

It is because...- See on :5 *take bread*.

16:8 *Little faith-* Note the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding. *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*. Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (Is. 43:10).

16:9 One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord's struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had wrought (Mt. 16:9). His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone.

16:11 The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it (Mt. 16:11,12).

16:12 *Then they understood-* On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord's words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus they failed to see after two miracles relating to bread, that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord (Mk. 8:19-21). It's possible that "then they understood" doesn't necessarily mean that finally, they got what the Lord was on about. Because on another occasion He identifies "the leaven of the Pharisees" as "hypocrisy" (Lk. 12:1), rather than their teaching generally. So perhaps they still did not totally get the drift of the Lord's thinking.

Beware of the doctrine- The Lord's teaching to the disciples about this came directly after He had told the Jews that they would be given no sign apart from that of Jonah. I have suggested above that He foretold that the Jews would fail to perceive the meaning of His resurrection; and He feared that the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees would lead the disciples likewise to not perceive this. We see here a classic example of where wrong teaching about apparently smaller issues can lead to.

16:13 *When Jesus came-* Again we get the impression that the Lord was working to educate the disciples according to some kind of program. He surely would have loved to ask them this question earlier, but He waited for some reason until they were in Caesarea Philippi. What that reason was isn't clear. Perhaps He wanted to wait until they were back in Jewish territory after their excursion into Gentile territory, the purpose of which had been to get away from the spotlight of publicity and teach the disciples. And like a good teacher, now the Lord tested their apprehension of His teaching.

He asked- Erotao can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.

Whom do men say- This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do you say I am? (:15). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

I the Son of Man- This is how the Lord saw Himself. Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him?

That I the Son of Man am- An awkward phrase, until we perceive that the Lord is juxtaposing His humanity as "son of Man" and His Divine aspect, as the 'I am', the revelation of Yahweh in human flesh (see on :17 *Simon Barjona*). Often we encounter this in the New Testament, especially in John's Gospel. The most highly exalted language about the Lord is to be found nearby to other statements of His absolute and total humanity. The Lord's words here lay the ground for His question to the disciples as to whom they thought Him to be. He has led up to that question by describing Himself as "the Son of Man". This was His preferred self-perception. Peter's response: "The Son of the living God" was therefore especially gratifying to the Lord, because Peter didn't merely repeat the Lord's own phrase "the Son of Man". Peter shows that he perceived the Divine side to Jesus, despite His evident humanity. Perhaps Peter was joining in the implied dialogue set up by the Lord juxtaposing His humanity ("son of Man") and Divine side ("I... am") in the phrase "I the Son of Man am". The Lord says that He is "Son of Man", and asks the disciples whom they think He is- and Peter gives the other side of the story, by saying that He is "Son of... God". Perhaps Peter was responding to the Lord's hint at this when He asks "Whom do you say that *I am*?" (:15), for this could have been heard as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. We see this kind of dialogue ("banter" would not be too coarse a word) going on in the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. And He seeks to lead us in such dialogue, speaking personally to us through His word and life experiences, as we respond in the words of prayer and life decisions made for and to Him.

Another possibility is to translate the phrase: "Who do men say that I am? The Son of man?". This would be tantamount to asking the disciples whether people generally believed He was Messiah. As made clear at the end of chapter 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord knew full well that the majority did not accept Him as that, because they had effectively rejected John's message about Him. The crowds had simply liked his hard line about sin and his invitation to recognize human sinfulness. They had not gone further in accepting the solution he had proposed, which was acceptance of Jesus as Messiah. The Lord knew full well the answer to His question, but He wanted the disciples to consider it in order to elicit from them the recognition that John's ministry had not been accepted by Israel, and that their belief in Him as Messiah left them standing with their backs to the Jewish world. Compromise with that world, intellectual or social, was impossible.

16:14 *John the Baptist*- Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

Elijah- John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. See on 11:3. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of Elijah- and not Messiah.

Jeremiah- Why was Jeremiah a popular candidate? Was the persecution of Jeremiah by the Jerusalem leadership seen as a common theme with Jesus? Or the urgency of his appeals for repentance before the day of judgment came? Or the depth of his grief for Israel?

Or one of the prophets- Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God, Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

16:14-18 The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming

to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

16:15 *Whom say you...*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

Whom do you say that I am?- See on 16:13. "Say", *lego*, means to talk out loud, and is the same word used in 16:13. The Lord may have been asking whom they talked about Him as. *Lego* means specifically to talk about; the Lord chose not to use words like 'understand' or 'believe'. Maybe He is alluding to His principle that words express inner thoughts and beliefs. And so instead of asking them whom they *believed* or *thought* Him to be (although that is the essence of His question), He asks them whom they talk about Him as. Because spoken words do ultimately reflect inner faith and understanding.

16:16 *Peter answered*- Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way

Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

You are the Christ- The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are also juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark's records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

The Christ- Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with

so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death (:14), it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on :14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession before baptism that he believed that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11)

Son of the living God- We naturally enquire as to the significance of "the *living* God". In Mt. 22:32 the Lord seems to connect this with resurrection; He says there that God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because He will ultimately resurrect and immortalize them, seeing He is 'not the dead God but the living God' (Gk.; see Lk. 20:38). His 'living' becomes ours in that He will give us life; "living water" refers to water which gives life (Jn. 7:38), and "the living God" likewise (see another hint of resurrection by "the living God" in Rom. 9:26). "The living *bread*" meant 'the bread which gives life', and this is paralleled by the Lord with "the living *Father*" who also gives life (Jn. 6:51,57). Having taught that, Peter had gone on to state that Jesus was indeed "that Christ, the son of the living God" (Jn. 6:69). This would suggest to me that Peter perceived this connection with resurrection, and when here in Mt. 16:16 he uses the same phrase again, we may be justified in seeing within it an understanding of how the Lord would not only be resurrected but would be the source of life to others. The phrase "living God" was used in Judaism, e.g. the High Priest adjures the Lord Jesus "by the living God" (Mt. 26:63)- but more in the sense that the living God sees and knows all things. Again, we note that it was John the Baptist who preached (AV "bare record") that Jesus was the Son of God (Jn. 1:34). Yet after his

death, it was only Peter, the disciples and a few others who accepted this- for :14 has made it clear that most people considered Jesus to be some reincarnation of a previous prophet, but not "Son of God". In commenting upon the end of Matthew 12 and the meaning of the parables about poor response to the word in Matthew 13, I suggested that the Lord recognized at that point that the Jews had been unresponsive to John apart from the circle of disciples- and He switched focus at that point onto them. See on 16:18 *gates of hell*.

Even before this the disciples on Galilee had confessed: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!". Peter's confession was evidently of an altogether higher level. The titles we apply to God and Jesus come to have more meaning to us over time. But straight after his confession, he showed his complete misunderstanding of the Lord's death, and the whole message of following Him to that same end. He was rebuked: "Thou savourest not the things of God", straight after having been told that his understanding of Jesus' Sonship was given to him of God. If he savoured that knowledge, he would have understood the message of the cross which his Lord so insistently preached. But he wasn't yet at that level. He had to be told at the transfiguration: "This *is* my beloved Son... hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). It was as if the Father was emphasizing the imperative which lay in the fact that Jesus really is Son of God: if that is truly comprehended, we must hear Him. The implication is surely that Peter had almost painlessly confessed the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Perhaps the Father had in mind the way Peter, for all his acceptance of that Sonship, would later forget the Son's words and mindlessly deny Him. Straight after this incident, Peter says that his Master pays taxes, as if this is something the Lord just had to do. But the Lord seems to rebuke Peter, by reminding him that if He is truly Son of God and Lord of all, then it is quite inappropriate for Him to have to pay such taxes; for the Father's children are free (Mt. 17:24-27). This evidence all indicates that there are different levels in knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God. 1 Jn. 5:13 says as much: those who believe on the name of the Son of God must come to believe (i.e. on a higher level) on the name of the Son of God. We must ask ourselves of our own degree of appreciation. For every member of the ecclesia is built up on the foundation of faith that Christ is the Son of God.

16:17- see on 13:11.

Blessed- The Lord is thrilled that although John's teaching about Him as Son of God had generally been ignored or rejected (see on :14), Peter had grasped it. He had earlier explained that although the preaching of the word by John had generally not brought forth a permanent response in Israel, the disciples were "blessed" because they *did* understand (13:16). The idea of being "blessed" with an understanding suggests that the understanding was a blessing given- see later in this verse on *not revealed*.

Simon Barjona- Simon, son of John. The Lord is contrasting Peter's natural origins, speaking of Peter's old name and his natural father, with Peter's high spiritual status as one of the few who perceived the Lord as being the Son of God. This juxtaposition of the natural and spiritual sides in a person is exactly what the Lord had just done with regards to Himself- see on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

Flesh and blood has not revealed it- The correct understanding of the Lord was a "blessing", something given. Earlier the Lord had taught that the Father through Himself had chosen to "reveal" Himself [s.w.] to the spiritually immature disciples ("babes"), and not to the Jewish religious leaders who studied every letter of the Old Testament from dawn to dusk (Mt. 11:25,27). John's equivalent of this is his record of the Lord's comment that the Jews generally did not believe because Isaiah had prophesied that the "arm of the Lord" had to be "revealed" [s.w.] to people, and it was revealed only to a few (Jn. 12:37,38). And our spiritual birth is not of "flesh and blood" but by the sovereign will of God for us (Jn. 1:13). Paul surely has all this in mind when he writes that the things of God "are revealed unto us by His spirit" (1 Cor. 2:10 cp. Gal. 3:23; Phil. 3:15). Faith in Christ therefore requires 'revelation' from God. There was an element to which the disciples, and all of us who have truly responded to the word of Christ, have chosen to do that, and this is pleasing to the Lord. But if that was where the story ended, then salvation would be a matter of human works and intellectual tenacity and correctness in interpretation. Grace would be out of the equation, and God would face off against man over an open Bible which man must correctly interpret and live by if he is to be saved. The will of the Father for human salvation, and the depth of human moral and intellectual weakness, is such that this cannot be the way to salvation. Paul in Romans starts talking about predestination and election in the context of demonstrating that salvation is by grace, and therefore such metaprinciples exist- so that human works and correctness of understanding is only *part* of the final, invisible equation which finds its sum in human salvation. And so it has to be so that there is *some* element of God revealing Truth to us, blessing us with that revelation. Hence the Lord tells Peter that it is God's grace in revelation, His 'blessing', rather than "flesh and blood" which has revealed this to Peter. And yet the Lord says this against the backdrop of having spoken about the mixture of flesh and spirit in human salvation- see on *Simon Barjona* and on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

My Father which is in Heaven- Luke's equivalent seems to be that the Father which is in Heaven gives the Spirit to His children (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). Again, the emphasis is on God's part- our part is to request and then to be receptive and responsive.

16:18 16:18 *Also*- The theme of :17 has been that human action, faith and response is only part of the overall picture of spiritual work and human salvation. The church is to be built- by Jesus- upon the rock of faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Again, the two aspects come together. Flesh

and Spirit, Son of Man and Son of God, "flesh and blood" and Heaven.

I say unto you- The idea was perhaps that the Lord was going to build His church upon Peter and the confession of faith which Peter had made, but the Lord was going to be the builder and not Peter. This would instil into Peter an appropriate humility for his later work of bringing thousands to Christ so publically.

You are Peter- In response to Peter's 'You are the Christ'. We note here the mutuality the Lord was seeking to build up in His dialogues with His followers, and that sense of mutuality between us and our Lord can be felt today too.

Upon this rock- The term could refer to Peter personally, as his preaching was chronologically the basis upon which the church began. Perhaps the Lord held the shoulders of Jesus and spoke those words to the disciples- that upon the rock of Peter ["rock"], the future community was to be built. But the context is of declared faith in Him as God's Son. If this confession of faith (see on :16 *The Christ*) is the basis upon which the community was and is built, then we need to ask what else is really required as the basis for Christian faith. That confession is only a beginning- the Lord will build upon it. The Lord is surely alluding to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham was the rock upon which the community of Israel was to be built- and showing that each believer in Him as Son of God was no less than Abraham in the new Israel.

I will build- The idea of building upon a rock naturally recalls the Lord's parable of Mt. 7:24-26. As so often, the Lord told that parable to Himself as well as to us; He Himself built a house upon a rock, and He therefore knows how very slow the progress is. In that parable, the ability of the house to withstand the testing storm of judgment day depends upon the builder. We must take the step of faith, and yet the Lord builds upon that and our final passing through judgment day is partially dependent upon His building of us. And yet the metaphor of building is taken over by Paul as referring to the work that *we* do in building others up (Rom. 14:19; 15:2,20; 1 Cor. 14:4,17 Gk.). The clear implication is that our efforts for others are partially responsible for their entry into the Kingdom. I keep saying 'partially', because as we have seen throughout this chapter, the human factor works together with the Divine factor to achieve ultimate salvation for individuals. The Jewish religious leaders are likened to builders who built without a true foundation (Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11)- and so the Lord is saying that He has taken over that job, and the leaders of the ecclesia share with Him in doing it (the 'masterbuilders', 1 Cor. 3:10; 2 Cor. 10:8). But not only the leaders- for we each are to build each other up (Rom. 15:2; 1 Thess. 5:11 s.w.). And yet it was Peter himself who speaks of how we are "built up" by the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5)- it's just that in practice He works through others, so that the church in a sense builds itself up (Eph. 4:16).

My church- The first reference to *ekklesia* in the New Testament. The only other usage of the

word in the Gospels is in Mt. 18:17, where the Lord speaks of a process of telling a matter unto "the church" in the case of interpersonal disputes. The Lord implied, therefore, that He was confident that despite the failure of John's ministry, the minority who had responded and believed in Him as God's Son would provide the basis upon which He would successfully build a community of believers. Every reference to "the church" in the later New Testament needs to be understood in the context of how the *ekklesia* is first introduced in the Gospels. It is a community built by the Lord Jesus personally. The Septuagint had used *ekklesia* concerning the community of Israel; the Lord's talk of building another *ekklesia* based around faith in Him was radical stuff- for the obvious objection of Judaism would have been that the *ekklesia* already existed. The Lord's use of *ekklesia* in this sense was radical, and an effective rejection of the old Israel in order to build a new one- not on Abraham personally, but on faith in Him (which Abraham exemplified through his faith in the promised seed). The LXX of Gen. 28:3 speaks of an '*ekklesia*' (AV "multitude") of people' being created from Abraham's seed. And the Lord is now redefining this- as those whom He would build up into a new nation, based upon faith in His Divine Sonship.

The Gates of Hell- An allusion to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham sat at the gates of hell to prevent the circumcised falling into it (mentioned by Edersheim in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*). The Lord is saying that faith in Him is what shall save us rather than descent from Abraham. And yet the Old Testament speaks of the gates of death as being under God's control (Job 38:17; Is. 38:10), and He can "lift me up from the gates of death" (Ps. 9:13). The "gates of hell" can only not prevail against us through resurrection of the body. Peter's confession of faith was that Jesus was "Son of *the living* God", and I outlined the connections between "the living God" and the idea of resurrection under 16:16 *Son of the living God*. We should note that there were many wrong beliefs about "the gates of hell". The Lord doesn't specifically dismantle nor criticize them, just as He doesn't do so with the wrong idea of demon possession. Instead He places emphasis upon belief in Him and the hope of resurrection, which meant that death, and whatever "the gates of hell" were imagined to be- simply had no power over the believer in Him. His repeated 'casting out of demons' showed the same- however 'demons' were understood, the Lord's power was so great over them that they remained no credible worry for the believer in Him.

This may also be an allusion to a cavern in northern Palestine known as "the gates of hell". The Lord had just been in that area instructing the disciples- it's likely they had heard of it, or even made a tourist excursion to view it. The Lord is saying that even that much feared precipice, into which the locals threw sacrifices to ward off the powers of the underworld, had no power against faith in Him as the Son of God.

Shall not prevail- The only other time the word is used is in Lk. 23:23, speaking of how the

voices of the Jews "prevailed" to get Christ crucified. He must have recalled His own words here, that the gates [or gatekeepers / rulers] of the grave would not ultimately prevail against Him.

16:19 *The keys of the Kingdom*- The root word for 'key' means literally to close or shut. The Scribes "shut up" the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13 s.w.) - the job of Peter was to use the Gospel to open the way to salvation to ordinary people and those otherwise shut out by the Jewish leadership. The same word is found in Mt. 25:10 where the Lord speaks of how He will shut the door to the Kingdom at judgment day to those who didn't want to be there in this life (and again in the context of final condemnation in Rev. 20:3). The parable of Lk. 11:7 adds an interesting insight- even if in this life the door is shut [s.w.] to a person, if their way of life warrants condemnation, such is the Lord's grace that it can be opened in response to the intercession of others on behalf of that person. The key to entry or exclusion from the Kingdom was given to Peter in the sense that the Gospel of Jesus as Son of God could open the Kingdom to people, and if they hear that message and reject it, then the Kingdom is closed to them. It doesn't mean that Peter could just chose to condemn or save individuals. Rather does it show that the keys to eternity are in our hand, and we should therefore be devoting our lives to opening the doors for others to that eternal future. The keys of knowledge were given to Peter, and through his preaching they opened up the closed door of salvation to many who would not otherwise have entered (Mt. 16:19). Losing bonds is the language of bringing salvation and forgiveness (Is. 51:14; 58:6; Mt. 13:30; 18:27; 22:13; Lk. 13:16). And those keys are likewise in our hands too. If we introduce the Gospel of salvation to a man, the door is opened to him; if we don't, it remains closed for him. In this sense what we bind and loose is automatically confirmed by God, in that He has delegated to us the preaching of entrance into His Kingdom. Because the salvation of others is in our hands, both in and outside of the ecclesia, we are held responsible for their eternal loss if we do not minister to them. "Rescue those being led away to death [if we don't, then they will die]... if you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards *your* life [as you keep your brother's life] know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? [at judgment day]" (Prov. 14:11,12 NIV).

Whatever you shall bind...loose- The promise is repeated to all the disciple in 18:18, disproving Roman Catholic interpretations of Peter. There is here a continuation of the idea of the Gospel as being the keys to the Kingdom. "Whatever" could equally be translated "Whoever". The idea of binding is connected in the Lord's thought with condemnation (s.w. Mt. 12:29; 13:30; 22:13 cp. Rev. 20:2). The idea isn't that Peter arbitrarily had the power to condemn someone, and have his decision confirmed by Heaven. Rather is this almost hyperbolic language an encouragement to us as to the eternal power of the Gospel we also preach. By men rejecting it, they are bound in condemnation; by accepting it, they are loosed. Their response to the Gospel we preach is to their condemnation or salvation, and what goes on here on earth is reflected in Heaven. We can think that if we offer the Gospel to a man and he shrugs and walks on in his life, somehow the passing

of time after the encounter makes it less eternally meaningful. But not so. He encountered the offer of salvation from us, and the choice of rejecting or accepting it is reflected and noted in Heaven. This is the intense significance of our witness, the eternal moment of every encounter. Another time the words for binding and loosing occur together is in the account of the disciples being sent to loose a donkey that had been tied (Mk. 11:2-5). One wonders if the Lord intended them to perceive in that simple domestic task an acted parable of their possibilities- through unloosing that which had been bound, the way was enabled for the Lord to enter into Jerusalem. The hint might be that the witness of His people in the last days is what can enable His return and triumphant entry to Jerusalem. So very much has been delegated to us.

Binding and loosing were terms widely used amongst the Rabbis with respect to the force of their commandments and judgments having God's agreement (even in the NT record, 'binding' means 'to decree' in Mt. 23:4). They had the keys to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), and shut it up against men. Now, in the Lord's new Israel, Peter was to have that power. An uneducated fisherman was to have the place of the learned Scribes; it would have seemed so much more appropriate if Paul took this place. James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain.

16:20 *He charged them*- The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels.

That they should tell no man- "Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ (:16). The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of chapter 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spent time more intensely with them, He asks them not to fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

Jesus the Christ- An unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's

Messiahship.

16:21 *From that time*- Again we see the Lord educating the disciples according to a timetable. Now He was satisfied that they were convinced of His Messiahship and Divine Sonship, He felt He could move on to teach them more about His death and resurrection. This is how we were likewise taught the components of the Gospel; but we should not think that the Lord's teaching process ends there for us. He is continuing to teach us, in accordance with how quickly we have grasped the preceding elements.

He began- Matched by Peter 'beginning' to argue with the Lord (:22).

Unto His disciples- Mk. 8:32 adds that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in :20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

How that- The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

He must- The usage of *dei* is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death. See the digression about "The Compulsion of the Cross".

Go unto Jerusalem- *Eis* has more the sense of 'into Jerusalem'. Perhaps He foretold the 'triumphal entry' and how so quickly, things would unlovely themselves. Such explanation was necessary, otherwise the euphoria of the triumphal entry being dashed by what then happened would've been perhaps too hard for the disciples to cope with.

Suffer many things- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

Mark and Luke (Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22) add here that the Lord added that He would be "rejected" by the Scribes, elders and Priests. The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual

people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

Elders- Presbuteros is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

Chief priests- Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

16:22 *Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee*- Peter is quoting verbatim here from Is. 54:10, which speaks (in the Septuagint) of showing mercy to oneself. As an illiterate fisherman, he must have meditated and meditated upon the words he heard spoken to him in the synagogue readings. Let's be aware that in the preceding verse 21, Jesus had been explaining that passages like Is. 53 pointed forward to Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter is responding by quoting a verse a little further on, in the same context. If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

To rebuke- Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

Be it far... Gk. 'Be merciful to yourself' (s.w. only Heb. 8:12 "merciful").

This shall not be- The suggestion could be that Peter thought that by his own strength and use of force he could stop this happening. By saying this he not only over-estimated his own strength, but showed his naivety about the strength and nature of the opposition to the Lord. He likely still didn't appreciate how evil were the Jewish religious leaders.

16:22-25. The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk.

7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus “turned, and said unto Peter”). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: “Get thee *behind me*... if any man will come *after me* (s.w. ‘behind me’), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)”. The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn’t want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: ‘Don’t think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross’. John’s record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord’s words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn’t hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus’ Messiahship that He *mustn’t* die or suffer.

16:23 *Turned and said to Peter*- The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way the Lord “turned” and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61 ; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

Said unto Peter- Mark says the Lord “rebuked” him (Mk. 8:33). But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be “the Christ of God”. The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: “And [Jesus] strictly charged them [s.w. “rebuked”] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing”, and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord “strictly charged” [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn’t perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness “Lord and Christ”.

Get behind Me- When He said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

Get- The same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation, hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in :24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

Behind Me- The same word translated "come after Me" in :24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

An offence- The Greek *skandalon* literally means a trap or snare. But the Lord Jesus saw the snare and therefore didn't fall into it. Peter's attitude was a snare to the Lord in that it was attractive to Him- a savouring of the flesh rather than of Godly things was therefore attractive to the Lord. Some reflection on this will surely find in this a profound evidence of the Lord's utter humanity. For 'very God of very God' would no way have reasoned like this nor found the things

of men an attraction over the things of God. Peter's fleshly thinking was a trap or snare to the Lord Jesus in that it was found superficially attractive by Him.

16:24 *Take up his cross*- The disciples had a psychological barrier in understanding the teaching of the cross, just as we can likewise. Often when He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

Lk. 9:23 adds that the Lord asked us to take up our cross *daily*. Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV "soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

Mark, who as we have suggested elsewhere was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk.	10:32

		9:30	
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Luke gives more detail about this saying about carrying the cross (Lk. 9:23-26). In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross. Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins. We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the

phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people. Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I get?', but, 'How much can I give?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?'" (1). The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

16:25 *Will save his life*- The Lord is speaking also to Himself here- see on :23 *Get*.

His life- I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is therefore more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*,

life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some* ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

Lose it- Luke's record speaks of forfeiting life or self. Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35). Being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father (Mk. 8:38). There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred. The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness;

but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if he is ashamed of His words and seeks to gain the world for himself in this life. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. But in Mt. 10:28,39 the Lord teaches that men cannot take that "life" from us- only God can, at the day of judgment. He clearly doesn't simply have mortal life in view, because this can be taken from us by men. Perhaps the idea is that for those written in the book of life, they 'have' eternal life, as John's Gospel makes clear. No man can take that from us. But if we spend our lives trying to find the ideal life for ourselves in this life (the coolest place to live, high income, fulfilling career etc.), we are in fact losing or destroying that eternal life, and therefore there is such a thing as names that were once written in the book of life being erased from it. In Luke's record, the Lord goes on to say that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the cross: "He that loves his life shall lose it" (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like 'Spoil yourself!', 'You deserve it!' and 'Have a fun time- you only live life once' are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot's wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and

lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

Lose his life- I mentioned above that the Greek for 'losing life' has been used by the Lord in 10:28,29,39 to speak of losing or destroying life in the condemnation of the last day. Perhaps the idea is that we resign not only any attempt to materially turn this life into the eternal life, our small world into God's Kingdom- but we also condemn ourselves now, so that we shall not be condemned in the last day. Flesh must be condemned, and it is our wisdom to do it now.

For My sake- Mk. 8:35 adds: "And the Gospel's". The Lord envisaged that the preaching of the Gospel could likely involve the loss of life. For many of us today, that is not the case; and in fact it has usually not been the case for the majority of Christ's followers over time. But the idea is that we are to sacrifice life for the Gospel; be it momentary embarrassment, social death, defriending on social networks or sacrifice of career and wealth. This is the large part which "the Gospel" was envisaged as playing in the life of a believer. Mk. 8:35-38 records the Lord's teaching here slightly differently: "For whoever would save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it! For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life? For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed". The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation.

Shall find it- 10:39 has made it clear that if we find our lives we shall lose them. This finding of life likely refers, therefore, to finding it in the day of judgment. However, according to John's Gospel, the essence of the eternal life, the kind of life we can eternally live, can be lived right now in Christian experience today. So this is an element to which we who have forfeited having the Kingdom now, in all the apparent possibilities for self-fulfilment which there are today, can find the eternal life now in that we can live the Kingdom life today. Likewise if we take the Lord's yoke upon us, we shall "find rest unto [our] lives / souls" (Mt. 11:29 s.w.). And the implication is that that experience begins now, having shed the heavy burdens of guilt and legalism.

16:26 *What will it profit*- Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: “What *will it* [future] profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?”. Mk. 8:36 has: “What *does it* [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”. Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord’s next words make the same point: “What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?” (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: “What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?”. The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally... this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

Profit- The metaphor is clearly of trading: profiting, gaining, exchanging, losing. The parable of trading the talents uses the same metaphor. Mt. 25:17,20,22 speak of ‘gaining’ more talents- the same word used here about ‘gaining’ the world. And yet the intended paradox is that by losing materially, declining to profit and gain in the material things of this world, we shall gain eternal things. The idea of not being profited by gaining the things of this life is recorded in all the Synoptics (Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25). John’s equivalent is to record the Lord’s teaching that the flesh can “profit” (s.w.) nothing, whereas His words are spirit and life (Jn. 6:63). The spiritual life, lived in response to His word, is the true profit. There can be no ultimate profit in any fleshly, worldly enterprise.

Gain- See on *profit*. We are to ‘gain’ more talents for the Lord, not the world for ourselves (Mt. 25:17,20,22 s.w.). We ‘gain’ our brother (Mt. 18:15)- not for ourselves, but for the Lord; Paul wanted to ‘gain’ men by all means for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-22 s.w. four times). Unspiritual husbands are to be ‘gained’ by the spiritual efforts of believing wives (1 Pet. 3:1). The first century believers likely memorized the Gospels, and so Paul’s repeated usage of the word ‘gain’ regarding gaining others would’ve been easily connected with the ‘gaining’ of talents in the parable, where the same word is also repeatedly used. Instead of gaining the world for ourselves, we are to gain people for Christ. Instead of careers and long hours at work to fund a cool lifestyle, we are to spend time visiting, phoning, writing, emailing, arranging things... for the gaining of individuals for Him. The contrast is between gaining *persons* for *Christ* and gaining *things* for *ourselves*. Paul had clearly meditated upon the Lord’s teaching here because he says that whatever things were once “gain” for him [s.w.] he now counted as *loss*, and even saw his death, the loss of this present life, as “gain” (Phil. 3:7; 1:21). The “things” he no longer wished to “gain” refer to his life of legalistic obedience and condemnation of others (Phil. 3:4-6). The call to no longer gain but lose is not simply an invitation to unload our wealth in monetary terms. If it were, then it would only apply to the minority of believers over time who have been wealthy. More essentially, the call is to lose whatever human advantage we have had, even spiritual power and advantage over others, in order to align ourselves with the life and death of our Lord. Paul continues the allusion to this section by saying that he has counted all such human advantage as “loss” (Phil. 3:8)- the same word used in “lose his own soul / life”- in order that he might “gain”

Christ. The gaining of life which the Lord spoke of is described by Paul as a gaining of Christ- for He is our life (Col. 3:4). Our existence is eternally intertwined with His.

The whole world- An allusion to the Lord's wilderness temptations. Yet again, He speaks largely to Himself in His teaching of others, as every true teacher does. The parallel records in Mark and Luke speak of suffering and loss in order to not be ashamed of the Lord's words and to preach those words. The work of witness is the 'gaining' of people for Him. It is not incidental, therefore, that the only other reference in Matthew to *holos kosmos*, "the whole world" is in the context of speaking of how the Gospel is to be preached to "the whole world" (Mt. 26:13). With this in mind, it may also be that the Lord is warning that a preacher may indeed gain the whole world for God in a spiritual sense- and yet be cast away himself. In this case, He was more than ever speaking to Himself, He who did die in order to gain the world. What we do for others is no replacement for personal spirituality. If this is a valid interpretation, perhaps subtly built in by the Lord into His appeal to not gain the material world for ourselves, then we must re-examine the common assumption that a person must be good and spiritual because of all the good they have done for others. That good may indeed have been done, but is no guarantee of deeply personal integrity before God.

His own life- The allusion to Mt. 10:28,29 means that no man can take life from us, but God can, at the condemnation of the last day. Therefore the "life" in view is not simply mortal life, which can be taken from us by men. Rather does it refer to our eternal life, potentially given to us from the foundation of the world in Christ. We cannot give anything for that, it is priceless. We are to accept it, but if we accept it, then we will not seek to gain the world for ourselves in a material sense in this life. Note the emphasis upon his "own" life. The eternal life which we shall eternally experience is personal to each of us. The Bible teaches personal salvation. You, and me, as the sum total of all we have experienced, we as persons... shall personally be saved. The eternal life is not therefore merely a biophysical state which can no longer die; immortality is not merely the absence of death. It is more personal than that. It is about you and me personally existing for eternity; we ourselves as persons shall be saved and eternally continue. This of course highlights the eternal importance of character development in this life; for we shall eternally be who we develop into.

Give in exchange- The Lord is perhaps envisaging how some might think to offer their wealth in order to buy eternity at the last day- verse 27 goes on to speak of the day of judgment as if this is the scene which the Lord has had in view throughout this section. Surely nobody will actually do that- at that day. But effectively, that is how so many live today, thinking that their attempts to acquire this world can somehow be compared to the riches of eternity.

For his soul- The Greek and Hebrew words translated "soul" have a very wide range of meaning. The idea is usually of the person, the life, often the natural life. But here we have one of a few usages where the word is used about the person and their life in the sense of the person and life

which they could eternally be in God's Kingdom. The use of "soul" here rather than "life" is perhaps because the Lord has been emphasizing personal salvation- see on *his own life*.

16:27 *For*- There is a powerful practical result of the connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "*For* (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now.

Luke adds that the Lord will be "ashamed" of those who have been ashamed of Him in this life. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

In the glory of His Father- The intention of this phrase may be to demonstrate that the Lord will execute judgment with the full authority of the Father. Or perhaps the language is to remind us of the awesomeness of the day of judgment, and how inappropriate it would be to stand there and think that before the light of that moral and physical glory, with all the Angels present, we could suggest giving our wealth as an exchange for our soul.

He shall reward- The Greek refers to payment, and this is how the word is usually translated in the Gospels. And this is in keeping with the metaphor used here- of trading, gaining, losing and exchanging. The payment to us is for our loss of material advantage in this life; the attitudes which led to this are therefore the "works" which shall be paid back. It could be argued that the idea of paying a reward implies that the "every man" in view here refers to the group of faithful believers. For it is those accepted into the Kingdom who shall be given payment. In one sense, the penny a day refers to salvation, which all the same requires us to resign seeking the reward of this world. Or it could be that in another sense, the nature of eternity will indeed be according to the works we have done, in that one star differs from another in glory, and the servants were rewarded with different levels of reward according to their trading on their Master's behalf.

According to his works- The 'works' of the context refer to taking up the cross, not wanting to gain the world for ourselves but seeking to gain men for Christ. These 'works' appear largely to be mental attitudes rather than deeds physically performed. The work of God is to believe in Christ (Jn. 6:29). The outcome of the day of judgment is according to human works in the sense

that it is only a confirmation of the decision and judgment about ourselves which we ourselves have decided in this life- see on 16:25 *lose it*.

16:28 *Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom*- Mk. 9:1 records that He also said: "The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 27 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 27 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of '*Some* here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:27). I note under 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words in 16:28. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of

death" uses the same word as in 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'?. That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would? It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will "see" Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return, they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the

Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

The Son of man coming- The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

Notes

(1) William Barclay, *The Gospel Of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 122.