

## 20:20 Vision Ministries -- Devotions by Roger Browning Week 11 (March 10-16, 2013)

We will spend the next few weeks walking with Jesus on His journey to the cross. Many professing Christians do not understand the necessity of the event that paves the way for our entry into Heaven.

### **Sunday -- March 10** (Matthew 16:1-4)

In every society, there are those who oppose Jesus. The religious leaders during our Lord's short journey on earth are the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees are super-conservative and very legalistic. They know nothing about God's **grace** so they use Scripture to disqualify almost anyone who is not in their sect. The Sadducees, on the other hand, are liberal and materialistic men who do not believe in anything supernatural. They, like many church leaders today, claim to believe in the Scriptures, but they deny the existence of angels, life after death and resurrection of the body. I often say, "That is why they are **sad you see.**" These two parties dislike each other, but their common fear of this miracle-working carpenter brings them together (v. 1). We will follow the sad story tomorrow.

### **Monday -- March 11** (Matthew 16:1-4)

Religious leaders who love power and prestige will have very little to do with the simple teachings of Jesus Christ. They often demand "sight and sound" miracles because they know nothing about living by faith (v. 1). The world says, "I have to **see it** to believe it," while Jesus teaches, "You have to **believe it** to see it." Our Lord points out that they have become quite good at forecasting the weather, but they are oblivious to the signs of the times all around them (v. 2-3). He then tells them that the only miracle they will see is the sign of Jonah (v. 4). Like so many religious leaders today, they don't really believe that "fish story" from the Old Testament. This story is vital, however, because it pictures the death and resurrection of Jesus (see Matthew 12:39-41). Our Lord gives up on them and walks away. How sad that verse is!

### **Tuesday -- March 12** (Matthew 16:5-12)

On their way across the lake, Jesus warns His disciples about the false teachings (yeast) of the Pharisees and Sadducees (v. 5-6). They think He is talking about **bread** because they do not understand His concern about the misinformation coming from these teachers (v. 7). Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith and reminds them of the miracles they already have witnessed regarding earthly bread (v. 8-11). They finally get the fact that He, the Bread of Life (John 6:35), wants to correct the false teachings and replace them with Truth concerning real salvation. Those of us who expose the false teachings of today's Pharisees and Sadducees are often criticized by our politically correct society that demands "positive only" statements. They often quote, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1 KJV). Most of them do not realize that the very next verse tells us that they and we will be judged by the same standard (the Word of God). I pray that we will learn to take that Word at face value!

**Wednesday -- March 13** (Matthew 16:13-16)

Jesus asks His disciples to tell what they have heard others say about who He is (v. 13). Unlike today's political leaders, the Lord does not worry about polls. He asks this generic question to prepare them for the most important question they will ever have to answer. Their replies involve dead men of faith (v.14). Then He asks the question (v. 15) that all of us are required to answer: "Who do **you** say that I am?" That is Eternity's question! Have you proclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God?" Those who **have** will acknowledge the truth of Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Often I am asked, "Don't you think that sincere people of all faiths will go to heaven?" Those who ask this do not understand God's plan of salvation. Their question shows either ignorance of or lack of faith in John 14:6. Please take Him at His word and acknowledge Him as God's only begotten Son, the only Savior!

**Thursday -- March 14** (Matthew 16:17-20)

Peter gets the answer right (v. 16) only because the Father speaks through him (v. 17). Just like this fisherman, we cannot identify Jesus on our own (see John 6:44); God must draw us! Peter's correct **proclamation** in v. 16 is the rock foundation on which the church of Jesus Christ is built (v. 18). Many people misinterpret this and think that the church is built on Peter. That's why they envision him as the gatekeeper in heaven. All **people** who confess their faith in Jesus are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Receiving His Spirit after our confession is proof that we, too, have the keys to the kingdom of heaven. That same Spirit will teach us His Word so that we can make proper judgments among fellow believers in the church (v. 19). We have no authority to bind or loose anything apart from God's infallible Word. Since this truth is given to Peter directly by the Father, Jesus knows that others are not ready to hear what the disciples now know. That is why He forbids them to tell anyone else (v. 20).

**Friday -- March 15** (Matthew 16:21-23)

I said in this week's opening remarks that many professing Christians do not fully understand the necessity of the cross. Even though Peter correctly answered Eternity's question (v. 16-17), he is not yet ready to hear about the coming sufferings of Christ (v. 21-22). The cross and the empty tomb separate Christianity from all other religions. **Both** are absolutely necessary to our faith, and the presence of both assures that Jesus is the only way to true salvation. Even though our Lord has confirmed Peter's correct answer (v. 17) and has stated that he will be given much authority (v. 19), Jesus now calls him Satan because he rejects the necessity of His death and resurrection. Like Peter, those of us who have received Christ as our Savior spend most of our time thinking about things of men rather than things of God (v. 23). Difficult days are coming our way. I challenge you to keep your focus on the One who died to set you free and rose again to intercede for you in heaven!

**Saturday -- March 16** (Matthew 16:24-28)

Jesus never makes the Christian life seem easy. The self-denial lifestyle He demands (v. 24) will shock many professing Christians who have learned about our Lord from TV ministries. Many of those teachers focus only on the positive because that is what their listeners want to hear. If we have truly given our hearts to Him, it stands to reason that we will forfeit our own life for His life (v. 25). Jesus warns that it is possible to lose our very souls in the process of striving to meet all our personal goals for wealth and power (v. 26). When Jesus returns to earth to set up His kingdom in Jerusalem (v. 27), He will reward His faithful followers who learned to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (see Matthew 6:33). Three of His disciples are about to experience a **preview** of the kingdom (v. 28). That is where we will begin next week's studies.