

The Season of Epiphany

The Last Sunday of Epiphany

INTRODUCTION

- A. Walking through the life of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
- B. Wrapping up his Galilean ministry – shortly he will be headed for the Cross
- C. Jesus appears to Peter – the big breakthrough moment

I. FOCUSING ON THE MESSAGE ABOUT HIMSELF (Jesus' Identity)

A. Big Stir

- The Religious Elite come asking Questions:

¹ And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. (Matthew 16)

- The Disciples have seen it all, but not quite connected:

⁹ Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? (Matthew 16)

B. Big Test

- Last chance to get this right:

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16)

- Peter passes with flying colors:

¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16)

C. Big Surprise

- The message of dying to self:

²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. ²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Matthew 16)

- Surely you don't mean it???

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Matthew 16)

- The surprise for all who would be Jesus' disciples:

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16)

II. THE TRANSFIGURATION

A. "No, Peter, I have not made a mistake"

- Just watch and learn:

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. (Matthew 16)

- Privileged access to a mountaintop experience:

¹And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him... ⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. (Matthew 17)

- Insider knowledge of God's plan of salvation:

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead...." ²² As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, ²³ and they

will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.
(Matthew 17)

B. A Final Reassurance Just for Peter

²⁴ When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" ²⁵ He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" ²⁶ And when he said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. ²⁷ However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a *stater* [stater = foreign coin worth 4 drachmas]. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."
(Matthew 17)

III. INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT RESPONDING TO GOD WHEN HE GIVES AN "INSIDE LOOK"

A. How *not* to respond

- Spiritual "One-upsmanship:"

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."
(Matthew 18)

B. The Value of Every Person in the Flock

- The Parable of the Ninety and Nine:

¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18)

C. The Power of Unity

¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18)

D. The Importance of Forgiveness

- The Parable of the Forgiven but Unforgiving servant:

²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.... ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Mat 18)

E. Jesus Begins his Journey to the Cross

¹ Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 19)

IV. HOW OUGHT WE TO RESPOND WHEN GOD GIVES AN "INSIDE LOOK"?

A. Occasionally We Are Blessed to Be Invited to a Special "Mountaintop Experience." It Can Be Unforgettable:

¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1)

B. We Can Fail the "Big Test" by

- Missing the encounter with God
Afraid? Inattentive? Sticking with the Crowd
- Missing God's purposes in the encounter
Knowing the truth! Finding healing and wholeness! Gaining assurance of faith!
- Misusing the experience
For our own personal glory.... Seeking selfish independence

C. We Can Profit Immensely from These Encounters

- Community power in prayer:

¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18)

- Better prepared to do God's work:

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16)

- Deeper love for our Brothers and Sisters:

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart (1 Peter 1)