

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

There is a poignant time in a traditional wedding service, where, at the end of the exchange of wedding vows, that a bride and groom are declared to be 'husband and wife'. At once, two people stop being boyfriend and girlfriend or best friends or even "engaged". After each pronounces "I do", there is a change of status and relational identity, both between the two people, as well as in the eyes of a community.

The concept of "identity" is critical to self-worth. One of the reasons that bullying is so destructive to a person's sense of self-worth, is that can be seen as a rejection of all that a person is and stands for, including their identity. Conversely, affirmation, praise and encouragement are critical for a person to feel accepted. Jesus, however, didn't need the affirmation or praise of the crowd in order to complete his work on earth. He does, though, require us to know exactly 'who' he is and profess that. We are expected to be relationally connected to Him and be "in Christ". From that, we can be firm and solid, of knowing that we are followers of Jesus who are committed to doing what God wants us to do, even in the face of suffering.

GETTING STARTED: If you were asked to give a 30 second 'elevator pitch'¹, to introduce yourself to people in a crowded room, what things would you highlight? Would it be your relationships, including partner and family? Your job? Your favourite hobby or pastime? Which of these things would you say, are the most critical things, in defining your identity?

READ: MATTHEW 16:13-28

TEAR APART THE TEXT

💬 Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" (Matt 16:13)

💬 What is important or noteworthy about each of the people who are mentioned in their answers?

💬 Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples "*But who do you say that I am?*" (Matt 16:15)

💬 What is meant by the words: "*You are the Messiah/ the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" (Matt 16:16) Do you think Peter – or any of the other disciples – really understood what this meant?

💬 In Matt 16:21, Jesus started telling and warning the disciples about his impending suffering. What does Peter's response tell us about his understanding of the role of the "messiah"?

💬 In Matt 16:17-19, Jesus gave Simon a new name "Peter" (or "rock") and a new role. What do you think were the implications for Peter, when Jesus said "*on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it?*" Was Jesus talking about hell not prevailing against Peter? Or against the church?

❗ Throughout his gospel, Matthew repeatedly highlighted Jesus' ministry priorities of preaching, teaching and of going through "*all the towns ...healing every disease and sickness.*" (Matt 4:23, 9:35, 10:1) In Matt 10:2-5, Jesus' response to the disciples of John the Baptist highlights that these acts are not just good deeds, but also point to his identity, as the messiah spoken about in the in book of Isaiah.

² *When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"⁴ Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:⁵ the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."*

In Matthew 15-16, we see a contrast between the faith of a Gentile/ Canaanite woman who literally begged for Jesus to have mercy on her and heal her daughter (Matt 15:21-28) versus the scepticism of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who demanded that Jesus give them "a sign from heaven". (Matt 16:1-4) Jesus also criticised both the teaching of religious leaders and lack of faith by the disciples who had just witnessed the feeding of the 4000, but thought Jesus was commenting on a lack of bread. (Matt 16:7) Jesus highlighted that, if they'd taken notice of what he'd just done, they'd realise that he was more than capable of providing them food. (Matt 16:5-12) They still didn't 'get' who Jesus was.

¹ <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/elevator-speech-examples-and-writing-tips-2061976>

An elevator pitch – also known as an elevator speech – is a quick synopsis of your background and experience. The reason it's called an elevator pitch is that it should be short enough to present during a brief elevator ride.

In 1 Cor 12:3, we read: “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.”

- ☞ When Peter acknowledged Jesus as Messiah and as the Son of God, he probably didn't have a full comprehension of what that meant. However, Jesus commended that profession of faith. What does 1 Cor 12:3 tell us, is happening in a person's life, when they profess Jesus as Lord?

In the last study, we read words from Matt 11:20-21:

20 Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

- ☞ Jesus upbraided the crowd, telling them that if they were wise, they would have listened to the teaching and taken notice of the “deeds of power”, responding with repentance. Why is repentance an appropriate response, when we recognise and acknowledge who Jesus is?

- ☞ In Matt 16:20, we read “Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.” Why do you think Jesus did this?

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

- ⓘ The identity of the Messiah is now linked with the Suffering Servant that Isaiah talks about in Is 53. Jesus here predicts his entry into Jerusalem, suffering at the hands of the Jewish leadership, his death and his resurrection. For both Peter and the other disciples, this is an unthinkable suggestion. However, throughout Matthew's gospel, there is an undercurrent and increasing escalation of anger, jealousy and violence, by the Jewish leaders, towards Jesus. Jesus had criticised them both publicly and privately, not only undermining their authority, but also depicting their teaching as “yeast”. With this, he reached back into Passover history and tradition, to characterise their teaching as something to be eliminated, and possibly as evil.

- ☞ In Luke 9:51, after Jesus started predicting his death, we read “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus knew who he was and what he had come to earth to do. What do you think Luke meant, when he said that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem”? How would Jesus' own self-understanding and calling, have helped him to be so focussed on the job he had to do?

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

- ⓘ In Matt 16:24-26, we learn that the role of a ‘disciple’ and ‘Jesus follower’, is linked to ‘denying self’, ‘taking up our cross’ and ‘following Jesus’. If the prediction of Jesus' death was scary and abhorrent, even more horrible is the requirement that we are to be willing to lose our lives for his sake. Our discipleship was never meant to be cheap, passive or easy. It was never meant to be the way to success, prosperity or fame. Yet, Jesus tells us that the loss of our lives, for the sake of following Jesus, is the means by which we “find” life. By contrast, the pursuit of other things, will mean we forfeit life.

APPLICATION: When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he reframed Jesus teaching, to apply to his own experience of suffering.

- ☞ What do Paul's words tell us, about how he saw himself (and us) as being followers of Jesus?

20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. (Phil 1:20-21) 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:10-11)

- ☞ HEAD – What have you learnt from the study this week?

- ☞ HEART – What has challenged you, personally?

- ☞ HANDS – What are you going to do about it this week?