

Sermons on Matthew

Some Doubted

Matthew 28:16, 17

With Study Questions

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Matthew 28:16, 17

**Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain _
_which Jesus had appointed for them. ⁻¹⁷⁻ When they saw Him, they
worshiped Him; but some _doubted (Matthew 28:16, 17).**

Introduction: Pastor Paul's Favorite Passage (at least in his top ten or twenty)

Sometimes I wonder if there is something wrong with me based upon my favorite events or passages in the Bible. One of the top ten, without a doubt, is one recorded by the Apostle John. John records a miracle Jesus performed by the Sea of Galilee during a time when a **"great multitude"** was following Him. They were following Jesus, John informs us **"because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased"** (John 6:2). A (perhaps) greater miracle was about to take place.

Five thousand men (not including women and children) sat in a big grass field. Jesus managed to feed them all with two small fish and five barley loaves (John 6:9). And there were leftovers!

Shortly after the feeding of the multitudes, John records another highly impressive miracle—Jesus walking on water (John 6:19). (These are not the recorded events that are my favorite, just in case you were wondering.) John then tells us that on the following day Jesus gave a message that the people either didn't understand, or didn't like, or complained or grumbled about (John 6:41).

The message Jesus gave was that He was the "bread of life" (John 6:35) and any who "eat this bread...will live forever...and the bread," Jesus explained was His "flesh" (John 6:51). And the drink that went with the bread was His blood (John 6:53). Jesus taught that He was the true bread which came down from heaven. Far superior to the manna which their ancestors had eaten, who had died, **"He who eats this bread will live forever"** (John 6:58). We still haven't reached my favorite, but we'll get there soon.

John recorded that Jesus knew His disciples were struggling and complaining about this teaching (this "hard saying"). Jesus then asks them how they would respond to seeing Him ascend to heaven (John 6:62). He answers their grumbling by telling them His words are "spirit and life" (John 6:63), and that He knew from the beginning that there were some who did not believe (John 6:64). He then gave a lesson on God's sovereign

power in salvation—a lesson that to this day, even church people struggle with—Jesus said, **“Therefore _I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (John 6:65).**

The scene is now almost set for (one of my top ten) favorite passages.

John then records these words: **“From that *time* many of His disciples went _back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66).** So everyone was following Him for the big miracles, but a couple of hard lessons and they had to return the deposit for the basketball arena they were planning on using for their next spiritual extravaganza. Okay, we’re here. This is my favorite (at least top ten, or so):

-Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” ⁻⁶⁸⁻ But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have __the words of eternal life. ⁻⁶⁹⁻ __Also we have come to believe and know that You are the _Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:67-69).

Jesus sees everyone leaving. He doesn’t say, “Hey wait, let me explain! I thought we had something special!” When you know the truth as Jesus knows the truth, you trust it is sufficient to accomplish what God ordains for it to accomplish. Instead of addressing those who left, He addresses those remaining. Do they want to leave too? Peter’s answer is my favorite part—because it seems to be a combination of his feeble humanity with the grace of God in his life.

Peter doesn’t respond (as he would later) with “I will follow you to my death” or “Absolutely not!” or “I’m your guy!” Peter’s response is “Lord, to whom shall we go?” Not exactly the words of someone who is a paragon of faith. Is that the kind of answer you’d want to hear from your spouse? “Honey do you want to leave?” “Where would I go?” That’s not the correct answer! The answer is, “Of course not—absolutely not!”

By the grace of God Peter knew that Jesus had the “words of eternal life” (cf. Matthew 16:17). But the “to whom would be go” answer Peter gives reveals something. It’s as if Jesus asks the question and Peter rifles through the rolodex of rabbis in his mind—only to come up empty. In other words, Peter’s faith in Jesus may not have been paragon, but it was greater faith than he had in all the alternatives. Peter may have had a mustard seed of faith in Jesus, but he had dust-particle faith in everything else. It is precisely here that Peter becomes my bowling partner.

How does this weave into this morning's two verses?

Numerous events had taken place between what Matthew had recorded last and this. Matthew leaves many things out. He, of course, records the resurrection of Jesus and all its attending wonders (angels, earthquakes, resurrections, etc. [Matthew 28:1-5]). He mentions the women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses and the mother of Zebedee's sons [Matthew 27:56]).

Matthew also records how the women, in obedience to the angel, encounter Jesus. They worship Him and He encourages them to fear not. Jesus tells the women remind the brethren to meet him in Galilee (Matthew 26:32; 28:9-11). What Matthew doesn't record are the meetings Jesus has privately with the apostles (John 20:19) and the fishing incident of John 21 or the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13).

Matthew chooses to record things that would be especially significant to his primary readers, which were the Jews.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain __which Jesus had appointed for them (Matthew 28:16).

Galilee of the Gentiles

Matthew records that there were eleven, Judas having betrayed Him, who went away into Galilee. It is here that Matthew seems to be emphasizing something unique to the New Covenant—that there was no longer a Jew/gentile distinction. The national identity of Israel, as God's covenant people, had come to an end (Matthew 21:43; Galatians 3:28). Matthew had already identified Galilee as Galilee "of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:15).

A side point here: the apostles may have wondered why they had to go to Galilee since they were going to soon come back to Jerusalem. The bottom line seems to be obedience—even if, at the time, you're not really sure why. But more to the point of my long, long introduction...

When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some _doubted (Matthew 28: 17).

Worshiping Jesus

Like the women, the apostles now worship Jesus. If Jesus were not God, this would be idolatrous. As Jesus reminded Satan: **“For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’”** (Matthew 4:10). Even Peter, the premier apostle, would not allow such reverence when **“...Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ⁻²⁶⁻ But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man’”** (Acts 10:25, 26).

The God-hood of Christ and the authority that comes with it will be utilized by Jesus to address the doubts that Matthew records in this verse. To deny the deity of Christ is no small theological variance. It does not fall into the “agree to disagree” fraternity of Christian brothers and sisters. To deny the deity of Christ dismantles the faith—not the least of the issues being the authority that Jesus gives His church to redeem the world (which we’ll pursue in the verses to come).

Some Doubted

But now to the doubt.

Matthew records that some doubted. The nature of this doubt isn’t entirely clear. They may have doubted that this was even Jesus (some didn’t recognize Him after the resurrection); perhaps they were doubting how they should respond now that Jesus was resurrected (maybe they thought their mission was over); perhaps they were doubting whether or not Jesus should be worshiped (maybe they weren’t confident of His deity); perhaps they were just confused about how to behave.

There are many words in the Greek language for doubt: *aporeo* means to be without a way or without resources; *diaporeo* means to be perplexed; *diakrino* means to dispute; *meteorizo* signifies ‘in mid air’ of wavering between hope and fear; etc. But the word Matthew uses is *‘edistan’*, which means to be of two minds about something (*dis*, “double,” *stasis*, “a standing”). This is not the double-minded man James talks about (*dipsychos*—two souls).

The word refers to the quivering motion of a balance when the weights on either side are approximately equal. Perhaps they were going through their rolodex of rabbis. Here we are at the apex of God’s accomplished work of redemption and, understandably so, there is some introspection taking place. This risen Christ changes everything and they were weighing things out.

This type of doubt, one great commentator suggests

...tended much to the honour of Christ, that the disciples *doubted* before they *believed*; so that they cannot be said to be credulous, and willing to be imposed upon; for they first *questioned*, and *proved all things*, and then *held fast* that which was *true*, and which they found to be so.¹

Whether this type of doubt, a thoughtful weighing of a presented reality, is noble or not, I cannot say. But I can say that it is a human inevitability. But on the scales of balance, what could possibly outweigh Jesus, His blood, His body, His redemption, His gospel, His truth? How you answer that question will reveal who your god is.

How did Jesus respond to this doubt? We'll talk about that next time.

¹Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 28:16). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. Why were so many people following Jesus (page 2)?
2. Why did they stop following Jesus (pages 2, 3)?
3. Discuss Jesus' question of Peter and Peter's response. What does it tell you about Peter? Are you anything like that (pages 3, 4)?
4. Why was Galilee significant (pages 4, 5)?
5. What do we learn about Jesus when we see people worshiping Him (page 5)?
6. What are some different things the word 'doubt' can mean (pages 5, 6)?
7. What kind of doubt is Matthew addressing in this passage? Do you ever experience that? How do you respond (page 6)?
8. What weighs heaviest on the scales of your heart and why and explain (page 6).