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~ **Standing by the Gates of Hell** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Matthew 16:1-23.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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New Living Translation (NLT) *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation.

Matthew 16:1-23 NASB	Matthew 16:1-23 NLT
<p>The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. ² But He replied to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘<i>It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.</i>’ ³ And in the morning, ‘<i>There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.</i>’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot <i>discern</i> the signs of the times? ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away.</p> <p>⁵ And the disciples came to the other side <i>of the sea</i>, but they had forgotten to bring <i>any</i> bread. ⁶ And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷ They began to discuss <i>this</i> among themselves, saying, “<i>He said that</i> because we did not bring <i>any</i> bread.” ⁸ But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? ⁹ Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets <i>full</i> you picked up? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets <i>full</i> you picked up? ¹¹ How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.</p> <p>¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He <i>said</i> to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal <i>this</i> to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall</p>	<p>One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority.</p> <p>² He replied, “You know the saying, ‘Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow; ³ red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.’ You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but you don’t know how to interpret the signs of the times! ⁴ Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Then Jesus left them and went away.</p> <p>⁵ Later, after they crossed to the other side of the lake, the disciples discovered they had forgotten to bring any bread. ⁶ “Watch out!” Jesus warned them. “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”</p> <p>⁷ At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn’t brought any bread. ⁸ Jesus knew what they were saying, so he said, “You have so little faith! Why are you arguing with each other about having no bread? ⁹ Don’t you understand even yet? Don’t you remember the 5,000 I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of leftovers you picked up? ¹⁰ Or the 4,000 I fed with seven loaves, and the large baskets of leftovers you picked up? ¹¹ Why can’t you understand that I’m not talking about bread? So again I say, ‘Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’”</p> <p>¹² Then at last they understood that he wasn’t speaking about the yeast in bread, but about the deceptive teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.</p> <p>¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”</p> <p>¹⁴ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”</p> <p>¹⁵ Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”</p>

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have been loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should 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 be raised up on the third day. ²² Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall 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 not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

²⁰ Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

²¹ From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

²² But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”

²³ Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- At the foot of Mount Hermon which rises 9232 feet above sea level is a 6-miles stream that flows into the Jordan River. It is one of four sources for the Jordan River.
- But this place is known for something else. The stream issued from a cave and in ancient times Canaanites worshipped Baal at this place and the Romans worshipped Pan, the god of pastures, flocks, and shepherds.
- There was a town there called Panias and Herod the Great built a marble temple to Augustus Caesar. His son Philip further beautified the place and called it Caesarea in honor of Caesar. To distinguish it from another Caesarea on the coast it was called Caesarea Philippi.
- This is the furthest northeast Jesus went in his ministry.

These insights were taken from Wycliffe’s Historical Geography of Bible Lands

- The weather conditions Jesus described in verses 2-3 would be commonly understood. If a breeze was coming from the west, it would be signaled with a red sky and come with moisture from the Mediterranean Sea as far as the Judean hills. If a breeze was coming from the south, it would bring dry heat from the desert and the temperature could rise as much as 30 degrees in one hour!

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- When yeast is added to dough, it causes the dough to ooze out of its container, i.e., it is spreading beyond its boundaries. Bad teaching is that which goes beyond the boundaries God sets.
- New names were given to people at significant times in their lives, especially if they were prominent in a group, as was Peter among the Twelve.

These insights were taken from A Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels by Bruce J. Malina.

- A sign from heaven could mean, simply, a sign from God or it could have meant that they wanted Jesus to predict some type of celestial event such as an eclipse.
- Sadducees and Pharisees would work together only when they had a common mission or enemy.
- The title, “Son of the Living God”, or “Son of God” would be a title for one in the line of King David who was the ultimate ruler. See 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7. This title was also used for the Messiah, the King, in the Qumran scrolls.
- Church meant “community”. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word “church” was normally used to refer to Israel.
- Palace keys were large and carried only by important court officials.

These insights taken from The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible.

Answer these reflective questions.

Why was it so hard for the religious leaders to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah? After all the signs he performed, why did they want another sign?

Jesus said his men had little faith because they were talking about physical bread when he was talking about spiritual bread. Do you believe that unbelief and lack of trust in God affects our ability to understand the things of God? If so, are there areas of unbelief in your life that are hindering you from understanding the things of God?

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Jesus revealed himself fully to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi which is where a pagan temple stood. Why do you think Jesus chose this place and why was it important for the mission he would send the disciples on?

Jesus said that God in heaven revealed to Peter Jesus' identity. Why did God reveal it to Peter and not to the other disciples at this time? Has God revealed Jesus to you?

Jesus said the Gates of Hell would not stand against God people. In what ways can you unite with God's people to bring down the Gates of Hell? Do you know anyone in a spiritual prison that you can help to set free?

Why was it hard for Peter to understand that Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to die? Why was this setting his interests upon the things of man instead of the things of God? Are you setting your interests on the things of God?
