



## Chapter 16

\_\_\_\_\_ *is believing. I'll believe it when I \_\_\_ it.* We place a lot of credibility on *seeing*. Our eyes tell us what's true. They can validate or refute our suspicions. Yet, in spite of all the evidence they give us, we also know that our eyes can play tricks on us.

The artist M.C. Escher has fascinated people since the mid-20th century with his two-dimensional illusions. Escher forces our minds to argue with our eyes as we stare at [hands that draw each other](#) and [staircases that don't quite make sense](#).

### Icebreaker:

1. [Click here to check out a sample of Escher's work](https://www.mcescher.com/gallery/impossible-constructions/), appropriately titled *Impossible Constructions* [https://www.mcescher.com/gallery/impossible-constructions/]. Which do you find most intriguing?

Escher's work is an easy reminder of how, sometimes, seeing *is not* believing! We're convinced in our minds that something can't be true and so we dismiss anything that would tell us otherwise, even including what we're seeing.

Chapter 16 begins with an epic example of how easily our minds can override what our eyes are telling us. Sometimes—like when we're looking at Escher's work—this is helpful. Other times, like in chapter 16, it's tragic.

### Verses 1-4

As Israel's power brokers, the Pharisees and Sadducees stood to lose most from Jesus's advancing Kingdom. They didn't even like each other, but found common ground in the threat of Jesus's growing popularity. In v. 1, their demand for a sign is absurd.

2. Glance back at the miracles of chapters 14 and 15. How does this context help us see that the Pharisees and Sadducees aren't really open to belief in Jesus?

The Pharisees and Sadducees refuse to believe what's in plain sight, as they have since Matt. 12:14. Jesus has unmistakably demonstrated His divine power, yet these plain-sight miracles are not enough to overturn their hard-heartedness and plot to murder Him.

3. It's easy to sympathize with people who are looking for Jesus to "show them a sign from heaven." How does this passage warn us, though, about whether such "on-demand" signs are likely to lead skeptics to believe?

In the language of Matthew, we would be wise to pray that unbelievers would *have eyes that see and ears that hear* (see Matt. 13:13-17). The "sign of Jonah," as it did in 12:40, refers to Jesus's death and resurrection.

## Verses 5-12

By journeying across the lake, Jesus is separating Himself from those who have rejected Him. It's fitting, then, that He would warn the disciples about these religious leaders. The only problem is, they don't get it!

Jesus's role as teacher is never finished. As commentator Grant Osborne observes, there are two different levels of conflict going on: "first in Jesus' indictment of the leaders for their evil teaching, and second in Jesus' indictment of the disciples for their lack of understanding." Imagine how exhausting this must have been for Jesus!

The disciples miss what Jesus is saying because they're so preoccupied by how they forgot to bring bread, even after the two "feeding" miracles. Jesus has demonstrated in supernatural fashion that a lack of available food is no problem!

4. Think of a time when you lacked something you needed (e.g., money, food, gas, a job, etc.). Was it easy for you to trust God during that time, or was that need an obstacle or distraction to belief as it was for the disciples?

## Verses 13-20

The true identity of Jesus has always been *the* core issue. Your answer to the question "Who do you say Jesus is?" is the most important answer you could give! That's exactly what Jesus is asking here.

5. Who do you know who would not answer this question the correct way? If you're willing, talk about this with your group and pray for them, that they would know Jesus's true identity.

Peter's answer is met with praise from Jesus. These verses have spawned debate, mostly in the form of a Catholic vs. Protestant battle over what Jesus meant. The Catholic Church has found basis here for the office of the Pope with Peter as the first. Protestants, at times, have argued that "this rock" refers only to Peter's answer or confession. Perhaps it's best to see that Jesus *is* affirming Peter as "this rock." The Book of Acts demonstrates Peter's central and early role in the establishment of the Church. This doesn't imply, however, that Jesus intended for Peter to be first in a long succession of Popes!

These verses can be perplexing in other ways. Without getting into the weeds, it's clear that Peter and the community of Jesus-followers (i.e., the Church) have a heavenly derived authority on earth. The Church exercises this authority, at least in part, as it teaches and practices what it means to live under the rule and reign of King Jesus.

6. How does this description of the Church's authority and mission strike you? Does your experience with the Church reflect this kind of can't-fail, eternally consequential and cosmic-scale endeavor? If not, why not? Compare notes with your group!

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***"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." v. 21***

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## **Verses 21-28**

Thematically, we're crossing into the second half of Matthew. Everything is now pointed toward the fulfillment of v. 21. Peter, having just been affirmed by Jesus, is now rebuked. Ouch!

Commentators point out how Peter—the foundational rock for the Church—had become a “stone of offense and a rock of stumbling” (Isaiah 8:14). It reveals how out-of-step was the disciples' understanding of the Messiah. In fact, it was a view corresponding to Satan's temptation back in Matt. 4:1-11.

7. We're all naturally good at setting our minds on the things of man. What practical steps can we take together to help forge a mind for the things of God?

Let verses 24-27 soak in. The imagery is shocking and paradoxical. This is life in the starkest contrast to “the things of man.” In Jesus's economy, those who try to save will lose and those who willingly lose will gain. We should keep in mind the recent parables about buried treasure and the pearl (13:44-46), as well as the Sermon on the Mount (6:25-34).

8. Jesus grounds this teaching in His still-future return at the end of the age. That final day of reckoning is to focus our present-day perspective. Similar to the previous question, what can we do to help each other fix our perspective on Jesus's return?

In a chapter of difficult verses, we end with a final challenge in verse 28. Commentators propose various options for what Jesus has in mind, including the Transfiguration in chapter 17, the fall of Jerusalem, and/or the expansion of the Church as recorded in the Book of Acts. Each of these can be seen as manifestations of God's Kingdom that occurred within the lifetime of some or all of Jesus's disciples.

## **Tying the Bow**

Verses 24-27 are a moment of clarity for us. They reorient us to the big picture of what is required to follow Jesus. They also should bring us to our knees as we consider how contrary a self-denying, cross-carrying, life-losing-for-Jesus's-sake path is to our American Dream. We're kidding ourselves if we don't think a life of ease, independence, and self-satisfaction is alluring. Many spend entire lifetimes working toward it. The way of Jesus is very different; so also is the way of those who truly follow Him.

9. What's your reaction to these verses? Do they inspire you? Do they terrify you? Do they tick you off?! Talk about this and then pray with your group that the Lord would move each of you to discover new ways of self-less, faithful living for Jesus's sake.