"Jesus, Our Champion"

Matthew 16:13-17

STRENGTH for the Journey with Joe Stowell
Part of the RBC family of Ministries

Group Study Introduction

Use the following questions and exercises as your group time allows. Feel free to skip one or more questions in each section as necessary. If you have less then thirty minutes for group discussion, we recommend skipping the "Getting Started" section. Be sure to save time for prayer at the end of your meeting, using the "Strength through Prayer" section.

Getting Started:

Joe Stowell opens his sermon with some words about the NFL. The NFL has a rule against "piling on," but unfortunately this rule can't be applied to the rest of life. Often it seems our troubles come in that very way—they seem to pile on us all at once.

- Have you had a day recently when everything seemed to go wrong? As you think back, what kinds of things happened that day that made you feel like the linebackers and safeties were piling on? Tell the others about your day.
- Joe tells how he struggled with a bully in school when he was a teenager. He needed a "champion" to stand up for him during those hard days. Can you remember a time in your childhood when you needed a champion? What kind of help did you need?

Strength through Scripture:

Open your Bibles to Matthew 16 and have a volunteer read verses 13–17 out loud.

1) Do you agree with Joe that Jesus—"the Son of the living God"—already knew the answers to the two questions that he posed to his disciples? If so, why did he ask them?

2) Joe described the situation in Caesarea Philippi while Jesus was on earth. What situations in our world today might be similar? What groups of people today are experiencing oppression that is similar to what Israel was experiencing under Rome?

Notes:

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Matthew 16:15

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3) In what way did Jesus become Israel's Champion? Did he match their expectations for a Champion? Why or why not?

4) Does Jesus always match our expectations for a Champion? Why or why not?

5) How easy is it for you to think of Jesus, using Joe's terms, as "a nice guy, a good teacher, who died on the cross for me," while forgetting that he is also "Superman"—our "conquering king"?

Digging Deeper:

If your group has enough time (i.e., you've listened to the audio on your own), answer one or more of these optional questions.

1) Why do you think Jesus asked these two critical questions at Caesarea Philippi ("darkness personified for a Jew")—a town which had long been a center of pagan idolatry and had more recently been renamed after Caesar and dedicated to his worship?

2) Joe points out that the disciples would have understood the "Christ," or the "Messiah," as encompassing the roles of prophet, priest, and king. What would be the basis for Joe's contention that Peter's declaration focused on the "king thing"?

3) What is the significance of Jesus' response to Peter that "this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven"?

Strength through Sharing:

1) When have you been most keenly aware of needing a Champion—that is, your back was against the wall and you were up against something way bigger than you?

2) What situation in your life now is making you feel the need for a Champion? Share with the others as you are able. As each one shares, offer suggestions as a group on how Jesus may be standing ready to help and act as Champion in this situation.

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Strength through Prayer:

Spend some moments now as a group in silent, personal prayer, acknowledging Jesus as your personal Champion and inviting him to teach you and show you the ways he will rescue you. You may want to link hands, as a way of remembering that Jesus uses others as part of his saving work in our lives.

You may want to begin your prayer with these words:

"Jesus, you are my Champion. Thank you for your power in saving me from what seems like an impossible situation."

When you are finished with this time for silent, personal prayer, you may want to move into a time of group prayer, praying for one another.

Closing Call to Action:

"But what about you?" Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?"

When I am up against it, when life is piled on: Am I able to look in the face of Jesus and say, "You are my conquering king. I will not bail. The victory has been won"?

Notes:

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