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GOOD CONFESSIONS AND LATER TRIALS.

– MATTHEW 16:13-28. – JUNE 10. –

Golden Text: – "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

IN THE VICINITY of Caesarea Philippi, on our Lord's most northerly journey in Palestine, just at the headwaters of the river Jordan, where it issues in great volume from a cave, our Lord put a question to his disciples which was full of meaning to them. This has been a weighty one ever since wherever his Word has gone. More than this, throughout the coming age, the Millennium, it will still be the all-important question.

"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"

Our Lord had been teaching the apostles and the public for about three years, and although he had frequently referred to himself as the "Son of Man," a title recognized among the Jews as appropriate to the Messiah, a title applied to Messiah by Daniel the Prophet (Dan. 7:13,14), our Lord had never positively declared himself to be the Messiah. He had allowed his words, "such as never man spake," and his works, such as never man performed, to testify for him. He merely declared that he had come forth from the Father to be the Savior of men, that in due time he would ascend up on high where he was before, that through faith in him eternal life was obtainable, etc. He had talked about his Kingdom, too, and taught the apostles [R3788 : page 172] to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." Still, as already stated, he had never positively declared that he was the Messiah – he had left it to inference; if his character and works would not testify to the hearts of his disciples any words on the subject would be vain, empty, powerless.

By way of bringing the matter gradually before their minds, assisting them to see the general confusion prevailing, our Lord first asked the apostles respecting the general opinions of the people regarding him – whom they thought him to be. The answer was that there was confusion, some claiming that he was Elijah, others that he was John the Baptist returned with greater power, others that he was one of the ancient prophets who had reappeared. With this leading of the mind up to the central thought our Lord put the important question directly, "Whom say ye that I am?" What view of me is entertained by you who are my followers, you who know me most intimately, you who have heard my teachings and seen my daily life? At once came a noble confession from the Apostle Peter, who, while expressing his own sentiments, evidently expressed the minds of the entire discipleship, for there was no protest on the part of any and their silence gave assent.

**"THOU ART THE CHRIST, THE SON OF
THE LIVING GOD"**

It should be noticed that the Scriptures are consistent with themselves throughout, that nowhere is the Lord Jesus spoken of as his own Father, the Almighty, Jehovah, but appropriately he is recognized as in his own statements as being the Son of God – the offspring of the Almighty, full of the Father's spirit, grace and power – God manifest in the flesh – the best possible manifestation of the Father amongst men, of that heavenly Father of whom it is declared, "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6:16.) The Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, represent him and the glorious qualities of his character to humanity. The apostles discerned this, and honored the Son accordingly as the Father had already honored him.

Our Lord promptly acknowledged Peter's confession as being appropriate, correct, truthful, and he added a blessing, saying, "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas, because flesh hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Here again our Lord disclaims being the Father, and declares that the Father is in heaven – was not on earth except representatively. The same thought our Master gave to Mary after his resurrection, saying, "I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God." (John 20:17.) We honor the Lord most and have clearest views of the meaning of his words when we accept them simply and truthfully, without attempting to be wise above what is written or to add to the divine revelation or the honor of our Lord by inconsistent claims contradictory to the revelation which has been given us.

"THOU ART THE CHRIST"

This was a part of Peter's reply – "Thou art the Messiah. We accept you as being the one in whom center all the promises – the one who is to redeem and to bless the world." How we wish that all of the Lord's professed people might clearly discern what is implied by Peter's good confession! It implies faith in Jesus, not merely as the Savior of the Church which is his body, his Bride, but as the Savior of the world – the great Messiah, the seed of Abraham, through whom with his elect Bride all the families of the earth will be blessed with gracious opportunities for escape from the thralldom of sin and death to the liberties of the sons of God.

"What think ye of Christ?" This question, which came to Peter and his fellow-apostles, has been rung down through the centuries from that time until now, wherever the knowledge of the Lord Jesus has gone. It is a question which each one must eventually answer for himself. Thank God for this: the benighted heathen shall not be left in darkness, in ignorance of the only name

given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12.) In due time this true Light shall lighten every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:9.) And with the question and with the light which makes possible an answer to the question comes a responsibility which none may shirk. Eventually every son and daughter of Adam must decide respecting the great Savior whom God has provided – each must accept or reject him as his Redeemer, his Savior, his Teacher, Priest and King, if he would enter into life; or, rejecting him intelligently and wilfully, must die the Second Death – utter destruction.

The question has come to us who are the Lord's followers, and we, like Peter and the apostles and all the faithful since, have accepted the Son of God as our Savior, realizing that he bought us with his precious blood, and that we have peace with God through a realization that the divine sentence against us has been met, so that God can now justly accept us to himself, forgiving our sins – not imputing them to us, but accepting satisfaction through our Surety and his precious sacrifice. On the strength of this faith that he was the Son of God, that he died for our sins, we have also accepted him as the great King of Glory, whose Millennial Kingdom is surely to bless the world by establishing the reign of righteousness, by binding Satan and all the powers of evil, by causing the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole earth and by instituting a great reign of judgment, of justice, in the world, under which every unrighteous deed shall receive a just recompense of reward, and every good endeavor receive encouragement and blessing, and bring a corresponding uplift, mental, moral and physical, to the obedient.

By faith we now believe and accept the message that those who hear now in advance of the world have a special call to joint-heirship with their Redeemer in his glorious Kingdom, and shall share with him in his grand work of blessing and restoring the willing and obedient of mankind. What joy follows in the wake of

this knowledge and its good confession only the elect can fully appreciate. And in proportion as these confess their faith that same faith grows, and the blessings and privileges connected with it grow, and gradually their joys become full to the overflowing of their earthly vessels in the present life and to their preparing the more for the glorious fulness of joy into which they will be ushered in their glorious resurrection change, when the Master himself shall say to them, "Well done, good and faithful [R3789 : page 173] servant; enter thou into the joys of thy Lord." – Matt. 25:21.

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

This same question confronts others who see with considerable clearness the mercy, the grace of God in Christ, and the glorious plan which centers in him, but who for the present are withholding a confession, who have not thus far taken their stand on the side of Christ, to confess him before men and to follow him in their daily life. To these we give a word of encouragement and a word of warning as well. They should be encouraged with the evidences they have of the Lord's favor, in that they have been permitted to come to their present position of knowledge of Christ and the gracious plan of God centering in him. They should realize that while they have already appreciated much, still there is more to follow of grace and joy and peace and blessing and knowledge to those who go on, who take the important step of public confession, who enter into a covenant of sacrifice to be followers in the footsteps of Jesus. They cannot go on to belong to his disciples unless they confess him; they cannot hope to share in the glories that belong to the faithful who walk in the narrow way unless they take up their cross to follow.

But they should know that while the cross of the Lord is not a light one, nevertheless his yoke is easy and his burden is light because he yokes himself with us in our trials and difficulties of

life. With him as our companion and burden-bearer the cross is light, the burden is easy and the joys and peace resulting to his faithful are indescribable, even as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the blessings by and by to be conferred on them. (1 Cor. 2:9.) The day of opportunity for accepting Christ under present conditions is rapidly speeding away. Soon the door of present privilege will close; and even though another door of gracious favor will open thereafter, its blessings and rewards cannot be considered with those which are now before us. Let us lay aside every weight and every besetting sin and enter the race and run patiently to its end, hoping for a share with our Redeemer in his glorious Kingdom work.

ROCK-FOUNDED LIVING STONES

Peter, the mouthpiece of the disciples, was especially addressed by our Lord, although the blessing spoken to him was in a measure shared by the others also. Our Lord here gave Simon his surname, Peter, which signifies a stone, declaring, "Thou art Peter [a stone], and upon this rock [this great truth which you have enunciated] I will build my Church." Peter subsequently writing refers to the matter in this manner, saying of all of the Lord's true followers, "Ye, also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:5.) Peter and the other apostles are presented to us as foundation stones built upon this great truth, that Christ is the Redeemer, the Savior, the Messiah. Note how our Lord presents this matter in Revelation, in the picture of the New Jerusalem, representing its walls as having twelve foundations of precious stones, in which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. – Rev. 21:14.

"What think ye of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,

Unless you think rightly of him.
Some take him a creature to be,
A man or an angel at most;
Sure these have not feelings like me,
Nor know themselves wretched and lost.

* * *

"Some style him the pearl of great price,
And say he's the fountain of joys,
Yet feed upon folly and vice,
And cleave to the world and its toys.

* * *

"If asked what of Jesus I think,
Though still my best thoughts are but poor,
I say, He's my meat and my drink,
My life, and my strength, and my store;
My Shepherd, my Husband, my Friend,
My Savior from sin and from thrall,
My hope from beginning to end,
My portion, my Lord and my all."

Of this Church whose foundation was laid by the Redeemer himself and which was to be built thereupon our Lord declares, –

"THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL"

This statement seems to some to favor the theory that eternal torment is the fate of all except the Church: yet such must view the text very superficially indeed, for with their view what picture would the words convey? In what sense would it be true that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church? If we suppose a fiery hell such as many teach, and a barred gateway leading

thereto, and the Church on the outside of those gates, we would be obliged to imagine the Church trying to break through the gates to get into the fire, and that the gates would not be strong enough to hinder the rash act. Or, on the other hand, we should be obliged to imagine the Church on the fiery side of those gates and trying to burst them open and succeeding in so doing. Surely neither of these views represents properly the condition of the Church as viewed from any standpoint.

But now note the reasonableness and beauty of the true interpretation of this language. The word hell here is in the Greek, hades, the same word that is elsewhere translated grave. For instance, in the Apostle's declaration respecting the resurrection and the deliverance of the Church from the grave, he exclaims, "O hades, where is thy victory?" He pictures thus the Church triumphing over hades, coming out of hades, out of the grave, out of the state of death. The same thought is connected with our Lord's resurrection: he is represented as bursting the bonds of death, bursting the restraints of sheol, of hades – by the Father's power. The gates of hades, the gates of the tomb, the strength of death which restrained him three days, was broken in his resurrection. This is the picture which our Lord presents. The Church in common with the world would go down into death, and this was an assurance to the apostles of the abundant deliverance which will be granted to the Church in the First Resurrection to glory, honor and immortality, to the conditions where the Second Death will have no power. **[R3789 : page 174]**

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

A key implies a lock, and the thought here is that God's Kingdom was locked that none could enter it. Our Lord alone was able to keep the divine Law and to inherit the divine promise. To him alone, therefore, belonged entrance to the Kingdom. He was recognized as the Anointed from the time he received the holy

Spirit at his baptism, and in the fullest sense in his resurrection from the dead, a spirit being. "With all power in heaven and in earth." – Matt. 28:18.

But neither before his death nor during the forty days after his resurrection could our Savior open, unlock the Kingdom to his followers, though he promised them ultimately a share with him therein. He put his Spirit upon them, by which they in his name performed many wonderful works, but they could not be recognized by the Father nor receive the begetting power of the holy Spirit, the anointing of the Father, at that time. They could not then be ushered into the Kingdom privileges and relationship until Christ had ascended up on high and appeared in the presence of the Father on their behalf, presenting the merit of his own sacrifice as the condition upon which they might be accepted. It was after our Lord had done this that he permitted Peter to use the first key – to throw open the door of the Kingdom to all of his truly consecrated followers.

The door thrown open at Pentecost was only to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Peter preached only to the Jews and proselytes, inviting them and them only to become sharers in the Kingdom of God's dear Son. When, three and a half years later, the Lord's due time had come for throwing open the other door into the Kingdom – the door for the Gentiles – Peter again was given the key, the right, the authority, to open that door. He it was who was sent to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, to explain to him the conditions of relationship to Christ in the Kingdom and to initiate him that he might receive the holy Spirit. The two keys having been used there is nothing further to unlock respecting the Kingdom, and the Jewish institutions having passed away there is now but the one door, and it, we are told, will be closed perpetually when all of the wise virgins shall have gone in to the wedding. – Matt. 25:1-10.

The declaration respecting Peter's authority to bind and loose was a common form of expression in those days, to indicate forbidding and permitting. One writer declares, "No other terms were in so constant use in Rabbinic Canon Law as those of binding and loosing. They represented the legislative and judicial powers of the Rabbinic office." This authority was shared by all of the apostles (Matt. 18:18,19), and it is because of our belief in this that we hold to the exact presentations of the apostles as representing the divine will, and allow no testimony by subsequent followers of the Lord to have the same weight or influence. Respecting the apostles alone we have the assurance that they were divinely supervised – that whatever they forbade or allowed was under heavenly guidance and sanction. [R3790 : page 174]

"THEY SHOULD TELL NO MAN"

Our Lord enjoined upon the disciples a measure of secrecy respecting his Messiahship because it was not yet due time for this to be made generally known. Its publication by Jesus and his disciples would have stirred up the public mind and have interfered to some extent with the divine program respecting his crucifixion – either by hastening it or by hindering it. But after our Lord's death and resurrection this was the entire theme of all of his representatives, his messengers – Jesus the Redeemer of the world, the Messiah, whose coming at the end of this Gospel age shall bring in times of refreshing and restitution for the uplift of the groaning creation.

Our Lord did not even pointedly draw this to the attention of his disciples, as we have seen, until the due time – until the approaching end of his career made it necessary for them to be forewarned that they might not be deceived, that they might know how his death was a part of the divine program. It was from this time on that Jesus began to explain to his close followers that he

was to suffer death at Jerusalem at the hands of the religionists of that day, and that he would be raised from the dead on the third day thereafter.

BLESSINGS BRING TRIALS

The noble Peter had scored a great success in faithful and prompt acknowledgment of the Master, and he received special favors and blessings and promises as a result. Perhaps this helped to make him somewhat heady and self-opinionated. It is so with many of the Peter class (a noble class) from that time until now. Many admitted to the Lord's favor and privileged to confess him before men have stumbled over their own honor and exaltation. No wonder then the Apostle admonished, Be not many of you teachers, brethren, knowing that a man who is a teacher has severer trials, temptations. – Jas. 3:1.

Peter, in his love for the Master, and intoxicated somewhat by the honors bestowed upon him already, undertook to be the teacher – "not holding the Head" in proper reverence. Alas, how many treat the Lord's Word in the same manner today – ignoring his own statements and distorting his words in a manner which they are pleased to consider better than his, more honoring to him and to the Father. What a great mistake! Let us, dear fellow students, always recognize the headship of our Lord, and always remember that we are to listen to his Word and not to attempt to correct him or to substitute ideas of our own as being either better or as good. If we consider him worthy of the Father's honor and confidence, let us also consider him worthy to be our teacher, and from this standpoint let us take his every word seriously, carefully, implicitly.

Although Peter did not so intend the matter, his efforts were in the direction of turning the Lord aside from the fulfilment of his covenant. And so we think it is with some who, Peter-like, do not give sufficient heed to the Master's teaching – their influence

at times upon their brethren and the Church is to hinder the sacrificing rather than to assist the sacrificers in the good way. They are stumbling-blocks instead of stepping-stones, and it is the duty of all who would be faithful footstep-followers of Jesus to kindly but emphatically treat the advice of such as our Master did, to ignore it and to press along the line according to our covenant. Our Lord declared Peter to be an adversary [Satan] a hinderer of the work.

Thus we see how those who are good and well intentioned may unwisely become hinderers of that they desire to assist. Let us be on our guard as respects ourselves and **[R3790 : page 175]** our influence upon others. Peter reasoned from the human standpoint, not from the divine. Happy would it have been for him if he had taken this lesson very thoroughly to heart; but through failure so to do he was unprepared for the later testing, when he denied his Lord and brought upon himself bitter weeping. Our Lord's life was an illustration, and put emphasis upon the words which he then addressed to the apostles, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." Discipleship meant the very reverse of what the apostles had naturally expected. They thought of the Kingdom glory and honor, and were desirous of attaining those blessings.

The disciples were now learning that their attainment meant severe testings, disciplines, trials, which would demonstrate their worthiness or unworthiness of a place in the Kingdom. Self love and earthly loves, outweighing devotion to the Lord, would mean unfitness for a share with him in the Kingdom. On the contrary, such a love for the Lord and the truth and the privileges of service as would lead to self-denials, earthly sacrifices, etc., even unto death, would imply the possession of the character which our Lord

sought in those whom he would make his joint-heirs in the Kingdom.

GAIN THE WORLD, LOSE HIS BEING

Our Lord stated a general truth when he declared that a selfish love of life under present sinful conditions would signify the loss of life eternal – would signify ultimately the Second Death. This applies to the Church in the present time. We have covenanted with the Lord to leave all and follow him; we have exchanged our earthly hopes and aims for heavenly ones; and now, if we fail of the heavenly, all will be gone. Yes! it is a case of losing our earthly lives and gaining the heavenly, and no amount of earthly gain can compensate us for the loss of the life eternal hoped for.

Somewhat similar principles will apply to the world during the Millennial age, for they also will be required to break away from sin and cultivate righteousness if they would attain to life; and those who will not forego the sins and not battle against the weaknesses will never attain to the restitution perfections and everlasting life. The matter then resolves itself into this, for us now and for them by and by: Do we prefer everlasting life in harmony with the divine Law and righteous requirements, or do we choose the contrary, with the penalty, Second Death?

"THY KINGDOM COME"

All this, respecting the necessity of suffering and death on the part of those who would be sharers with the Lord in his Kingdom, was evidently a new thought to the disciples. It had been partially stated previously, but in dark sayings which they did not comprehend. Evidently even yet they did not grasp the situation clearly, but our Lord proceeded to clinch the matter in their minds by assuring them that they would not get the Kingdom inheritance until some period in the future – when the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall render

unto every man according to his deeds. To those who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality he will render the reward of eternal life on the spirit plane; but chastisements, punishments, corrective in their nature, and purgatorial to all others whose evil deeds, preferences for sin, unfaithfulness to light and knowledge and truth, mark them as out of accord with the great principles of righteousness. To these will be given experiences in the time of trouble which will mean sorrow, disappointment, grief, etc. We are glad to have the assurance from other Scriptures that these corrective judgments of the Lord as they come upon the world will mean blessings in disguise, for, "When the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." – Isa. 26:9.

The statement of verse 28 has been the cause of considerable confusion. It reads, "There be some standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom." This is what might be termed a "dark saying," an obscure statement. The key to it is found in the first nine verses of the succeeding chapter. The chapter division, which was not of inspiration but was made centuries after Matthew was dead, has served to separate the Lord's words from the explanation of them.

Connecting the matter we see that our Lord meant that some who were there with him would see a demonstration of his statement about his second coming in power and great glory in a vision, and that vision was given a little later on in the Mount of Transfiguration, when the entire Kingdom was represented in tableaux to Peter, James and John, three of those who were with him at the time he uttered the words of our lesson. In that panoramic vision our Lord was transfigured so that the disciples saw him radiant with glory, and as nearly identical as would be possible to show them the glories of the Kingdom; and with the Lord in the vision were seen Moses, a representative of Israel, and

Elijah, a representative of the Church. St. Peter, one of the three who witnessed this exhibit of the Kingdom glory in vision, mentions it in his epistle, saying, "For we were eyewitnesses of his majesty...when we were with him in the holy mount." – 2 Pet. 1:16-18.

If that vision was such a testimony to the Apostle Peter and his associates, and through them was applied to all of the early Church as an assurance of the blessing of the Lord which would ultimately come at the second advent of Christ in his Kingdom, how much more assurance have we now in the fact that we by the grace of God have been enabled to see the spiritual glories of the Lord through the opening of the divine Word, the breaking of the seals upon the scroll of divine revelation! "Wonderful things in the Bible we see." Wonderful love and exceeding great and precious promises for the Church, wonderful love and an ancient Covenant for **[R3791 : page 175]** Israel, wonderful love and a New Covenant for all the families of the earth. Those who see this vision of the Kingdom, and who discern its rapid arrangement and the preparation for its glorious revelation to the whole world, have the assurance that they are not following cunningly devised fables; that the Higher Critics are greatly mistaken in their judging of the Word of God along the lines of external testimonies and evolution theories. We have much advantage everyway over the remainder of mankind, and we may well say to ourselves, What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation, living and godliness! – 2 Pet. 3:11.
