

[R4644 : page 219]

CONFESSING THE SON OF GOD

- JULY 17. - MATT. 16:13-28. -

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

OUR Master, wisely and with becoming modesty, hesitated to declare his own greatness. He allowed his actions to speak and to tell to his disciples that he proceeded and came forth from God, and that in the performing of miracles, and particularly in his teachings, he was the Finger of God and his mouthpiece. John the Baptist was sent to be his special forerunner. It was he that declared that Jesus was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." It was he that declared that the Master was so much greater than himself that he was not worthy to stoop down and loose his sandals.

But after John had borne him witness, testifying, "This is he," and had declared that he saw the holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, and that this was a sign given him whereby he might know his Messiahship, then came the time for the Master to bring the matter pointedly to the attention of his followers. John had been cast into prison and later had been beheaded. John's prophetic testimony was fulfilled, when he said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The mission of Jesus and his Apostles became more prominent every day, and those who had formerly talked about John were now asking respecting Jesus, whether he was a prophet sent of God, or could it be that he was the Messiah. Do the rulers indeed know whether this is the Messiah or not? Surely "no man [R4645 : page 219] could do the miracles which he doeth unless God be with him" in some special manner.

"WHOM SAY YE THAT I AM"

Our Lord first inquired respecting the general opinion of the people concerning himself. He did this, not because of his own ignorance, but that he might draw [R4645 : page 220] out the thoughts of his disciples. They replied that some thought he was John the Baptist; others supposed he was one of the prophets. The ideas of the heathen were gradually making inroads upon the Jews. The doctrine of reincarnation, wholly unscriptural, is suggested in these answers. All the answers, of course, were wrong, for the prophets were all dead and could not reappear until the resurrection. Then our Lord pointedly put the question to his chosen followers: "Whom do ye say that I am?" The courageous St. Peter promptly answered as spokesman for the whole company, "Thou art the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God." This was the very answer designed to be brought forth. It was the truth, but our Lord hesitated to present it, because it would better come from the disciples themselves and then have his endorsement. His answer to St. Peter was, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

It was not that St. Peter had experienced a special vision or revelation, but such a great spiritual fact as was then under consideration, could be duly appreciated only by those who were specially favored of the Father. Indeed, it is evident that the same principle still operates, for we read, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which sent me draw him." Our primary drawing and calling is of the Father up to the time when we accept his grace in Christ and make our consecration to do his will and receive the spirit of adoption into his family as God's children; we are then put into the school of Christ to learn of him. Let us learn the lesson that the special blessings always come, not only from believing in Christ, but also from confessing him to and before others.

ST. PETER – THE ROCK – THE KEYS

According to the Greek, our Lord replied to Peter, "Thou art a stone, and upon this rock will I build my Church." The rock upon which the Church is built is this confession which St. Peter made. St. Peter himself was not the rock, but he was one of the living stones built by faith upon the rock of truth. It was this same Apostle who so beautifully explained the whole matter, assuring us that all consecrated believers are "living stones" in the temple of God, whose foundation and capstone is Christ, in whom we are builded together through the operation of the holy Spirit. – I Pet. 2:4-7.

The expression, "Upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell (hades) shall not prevail against it," is one that is much misunderstood. The gates of hell are not gates to some place of torture, nor gates to purgatory. They are, in the Greek, "gates of *hades*," and *hades* signifies a state or condition of death. The passage might well be translated, "The gates of the grave shall not prevail against it." That is to say, Christ Jesus invites the Church to *die* with him, to share in his sacrifice, in his death, and while, apparently, the gates of *hades have* prevailed against the Church, against God's people, for more than eighteen centuries, nevertheless, we have the assurance that they shall not forever prevail. The Master's assurance is that by his death he has become Lord of all and has the keys of death and hades. He has the right to open *hades*, the tomb, and to call forth all who have gone down into it. He assures us that he will do this, as he says, "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth."

Nevertheless, for all these centuries it has required faith to believe that, by *dying* with Christ, his followers shall yet live with him – that sharing with him in his death they shall yet share with him in his resurrection to the glory and to the honor attaching to

the divine nature. So, then, our Lord's words mean that there will be a resurrection from the grave, and since the Church is to be "a kind of first-fruits unto God of his creatures" (Jas. 1:18; Rev. 14:4), her resurrection means, indirectly, the uplifting of mankind, the opening of the grave to every member of the human family.

The giving of the "keys" of the Kingdom to St. Peter has no reference to locks and bars of heaven over which St. Peter is the custodian. The Church in the present time is the Kingdom of Heaven in its preparatory or embryotic state, and St. Peter was privileged to do the opening work to the Gospel Church. He opened the door to the Jews at Pentecost, when, as the mouthpiece of the Lord, he proclaimed the meaning of the Pentecostal blessing and the hopes then open to every Jew coming individually into membership in Christ. He used the second "key" to open the same Kingdom privileges to the Gentiles, in that when the due time came for Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, to be received, St. Peter did the work. By preaching to Cornelius the Gospel and baptizing him into Christ he threw open the door to the Gentiles, as our Lord foretold in the words of this lesson.

St. Peter's commission that whatever things he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven and what things he should loose on earth should be loosed in heaven, is the same that was given to the other Apostles. (See Matt. 18:18.) It does not mean, of course, that the Lord has turned matters over to St. Peter and made him Lord of heaven and earth, nor that any or all of the Apostles were so honored. It simply means this: God purposes to use his Apostles and to so hold up their hands, in all their affairs, that the whole Church may have confidence in them, and may recognize their teachings as of God. If they declared that certain of the commandments under the Jewish Law were not binding upon Christians, we must know that their statements were true, and that, similarly, in heaven, the release or change is recognized. And if they bound certain doctrines and teachings, we must know

that those are bound and firmly established in heaven. In other words, we must recognize the Apostles as God's inerrant mouthpieces.

The time for the proclaiming of Jesus as the Messiah did not come until after his death and resurrection. Indeed, his Messiahship properly dates from his resurrection. He desired his disciples to recognize him properly, and he explained to them about his approaching death and resurrection, but he did not wish them to proclaim this to the world until the due time. St. Peter, perhaps elated with the Lord's commendation of his previous speech, undertook now the role of teacher to the one whom he had just acknowledged as the Messiah. In this he erred. It was in *sympathy* that he urged that the Master should not think of any steps which would lead to death, but should think rather of prosperity and earthly favor, yet our Lord's reproof was pointed. He said: You are my adversary, Peter, when you thus speak to me. You would thus endeavor to dissuade me from doing my Father's will, to hinder me from drinking the cup which my Father has poured for me; your counsel is that common to the world and not of God.

Similarly, the followers of Jesus sometimes need to resist their friends, who thus offer counsel contrary to the Divine will and Word and Providence. These should **[R4645 : page 221]** not be encouraged nor their advice followed. They need correction from their fellow-disciples, as did St. Peter.

The words of Peter furnished the Master an opportunity for calling the attention of his followers to the terms of discipleship. Not only must the Master himself suffer, but all of his followers likewise. This course was provided for every one, and whoever would flee from it would lose the eternal life hoped for. Whoever would take up his cross and follow the Master to death would thereby make sure of his share in eternal life on the heavenly

plane. His disciples had already pledged their earthly lives, and for them to withhold them for worldly advantage, would mean that they would lose their souls, their lives. This is not true of the world in general, but merely of the Church, called to be of the elect, Royal Priesthood.

He then assured them of his second coming, and that he would come in the glory of the Father and with his angels (messengers) – not again as a man – as a sacrifice. At the time of his second coming he would reward every one of his followers according to the faithfulness of each. He concluded this reference to the coming Kingdom by the assurance that some of them would have an ocular demonstration of his coming power and glory before they would die. This we will consider in our next study.

