



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 16:12-15

“The Year of Opposition, Part I”

TRANSCRIPT

Returning today to The Year of Opposition, the great confession, as we continue our theme of the New Testament Revelation of the Messiah. The Year of Opposition, the last of the years of our Lord’s public ministry, followed his year of ministry in Galilee which had begun promisingly but had turned downward. The enthusiasm for the teacher and prophet had begun to wane. The Galilean ground was stony ground without much earth. When the seed of the word fell in it, it soon sprang up. But when the sun came up it withered away. The Galilean’s had no roots in themselves and when tribulations and persecutions came they stumbled and abandoned him.

Jesus continued his ministry there for another six months but the times were now different. He became a lonely figure followed by fewer disciples and he sought out the more isolated places for ministry. When the six months were up, he left for Jerusalem, spending six months in Perea along the way. He openly began to admonish his disciples that he would meet with final national rejection. Instead of being crowned king he would be killed.

The opposition that arose to our Lord came from the influential classes; the Sadducees, the Pharisees, Herod, as well as from the growing alienation of the common people. It’s been estimated that there were in the land about six thousand Pharisees and

scribes, thought to be the conservators of respectability and orthodoxy. One can see how easily a ground swell of opposition could arise and it certainly did. Stalker spoke of their response to Christ's ministry in this striking way, he brought truth near them but they had not the truth loving ear to recognize the enchanting sound. They were offended by the lowliness of our Lord's origin, by his poor and lowly followers. And by the fact that he and his men did not practice the ritual observances such as the observances associated with the Sabbath, those that were not required by the Scriptures.

The murder of John the Baptist by Herod, surely one of the foulest and wickedness crimes in history, worthy of some on the modern scene, raised the guilt feelings of Herod the king to such a level that when he heard of Jesus, Herod cried out, “It's John whom I've beheaded, he's risen from the dead.” So this evil man became the Lord's enemy also, even though out of curiosity he later wished to see Jesus and observe him performing a sign. It was, as someone has said, the desire of the lion to see the lamb.

The decisive hour came with the Baptist's death. Jesus, disturbed as his hour now began to approach, hurried over to the eastern side of the lake, went up on the side of a hill to quietly meditate and commune with the disciples. Soon, however, an immense multitude of five thousand men and their families gathered to see and hear him. Later in the day there occurred the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, recorded by all the gospels. It was the climax of the public ministry in the north. The people never really caught on to who he was nor to the kind of kingdom that he was bringing. They were looking for a carnal kingdom of bread while he was offering a spiritual kingdom of the bread of life, with worldwide temporal, social, political and economic implications. After the feeding of the five thousand men and their families, the people said, “This is of a truth, that prophet that should come into the world.”

Perceiving that they wished to forcefully make him a king, Jesus left them. He would have none of it for they misunderstood the nature of his ministry. That stuck a

fatal blow at his popular ministry. The sermon that followed the next day caused many to go back and walk no more with him. From this point on Jesus began to devote himself primarily to the instruction of the twelve and it became the emphasis of the last six months in Galilee.

The note of teaching concerning his coming death became more and more prominent. This period of time climaxed with the trip into the region of the gentiles at Caesarea Philippi when Peter made his great confession and our Lord followed with his great revelation of the building of the church. To these things we now turn in more detail, and the passage that we’re studying today is Matthew 16, verse 13 through verse 20. We’ll not be able to finish it today, we’ll continue it in our next study, but we want to make a beginning today.

Notice the situation described in verse 13, the retirement to Caesarea Philippi afforded our Lord opportunity to ask two questions, first, “What did the people think of him?” and second, “Who did the disciples think that he was?” Out of the answers to them have come texts that have become battlegrounds within professing Christendom. The first of these we touch upon in this study. The 18th verse is basic to the theological position of the Roman Catholic Church, a fact suggested by the citation of the text around the interior of the Basilica of St. Peter’s in Rome. The Roman church of ours first that Christ founded a church, which is a truth, and second that the church was given power to govern and teach all mankind, which is a partial truth, and finally that the Roman church is that church, which is not true.

Caesarea Philippi was located about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee in a very beautiful area, the town named in honor of Caesar Augustus and called Caesarea Philippi in honor of its enlarger and beautifier, Philip the Tetrarch, and to distinguish it from the far more important seaport town of Caesarea, is located in what is now southwestern Syria. It’s presently occupied by Israel and situated near one of the sources of the Jordan River and just below majestic Mount Hermon, a year-round snow covered

peak of over nine thousand feet. A lovely place, it was ideally situated for the purpose of instruction and quite reflection on the course of the ministry of the Messiah as well as for the exercise of prayer, which Luke associates with the time of the confession.

One of the significant things about this move on our Lord's part is sometimes overlooked. Caesarea Philippi was a chiefly gentile district and the fact is worth noting. Far away from the temple, the synagogue, the priests, the Pharisees and the scribes, the first intimation of the church is made in its foundation upon the confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The implications, it seems to me, are clear, the fall of the ancient theocracy is immanent and soon the Son will announce that the kingdom has been taken from it and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits.

Edersheim has put it this way, “In that distant and obscure corner on the boundary line between Jew and gentile, had that greatest crisis in the history of the world occurred.” He seems, by the way, to be speaking of the feeding of the five thousand, which he calls Israel's last supper and which did occur in the far north. But he continued, “Which sealed the doom of Israel, and in their place substituted the gentiles as citizens of the kingdom. Only one demurer is necessary, the doom of Israel was not sealed, at least not permanently. But the doom of that generation of Israel was.”

Now we turn to the interrogation that our Lord gave the apostles. The text called his companions disciples but from the accounts it appears that the revelation and teaching given at this time were only given to the apostles. Playing an important role in the conversation here is Peter who has been called the American of the Apostles, no doubt because he was always, it appears, putting his foot in his mouth. We're inclined to think of the great apostle as a colossal blunderer, but we must remember that it is our Lord who said to him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, and then emphasized that his name meant rock, a term with much favorable biblical connotation, the term was applied by the rabbis to Abraham and the bible applies it most significantly to God himself in Deuteronomy

chapter 32. To call anyone a rock was a great compliment and Peter shall always have the remarkable distinction that Jesus called him a rock.

The interrogation opens with the general question in verse 13 and verse 14 addressed to the disciples, Jesus said, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” Addressed to the disciples it seeks an evaluation that men in general have placed upon the identity of the Lord Jesus. To emphasis it the question was, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” The answers are probably to be understood as three specimen answers typical of the kinds of answers that were being given by those, who unlike the leaders, were trying to put him in the context of the biblical revelation in a serious way. And so they thought of him as John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah.

The first was the view that Herod had espoused when he said that he was John the Baptist risen from the dead. There were similarities between John and Jesus, for both had official positions in the messianic program, but there the likeness fades and the superiority and uniqueness of the Son become evident as John himself admitted. John, the ambassador, was an agent in the preparation of men for repentance but Jesus was the king who could give it.

The second suggestion also points to certain similarities between the great Prophet Elijah and Jesus, for the Son was the greatest of the line of prophetic messengers of God. Elijah and he were both men of prayer, men of miracles, and warriors for the truth and conflict with false prophets. Elijah, however, wavered in his faith, but Jesus never did. Elijah won many of his victories by shedding the blood of others, but Jesus won his by shedding his own blood.

The third suggestion is not surprising, and it’s the opinion of more than one, that Jeremiah of all the Old Testament prophets was most like our Lord. He was a living example of the patient endurance and of suffering for the truth that he proclaimed. He came to be known as the weeping prophet. The picture he presented reminds one of the

suffering servant of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus of whom Isaiah speaks in this way, “He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

A true likeness existed between them but there it ends. With a likeness. But while Jeremiah had prophesied of a new covenant to come, it was the man of sorrows who inaugurated that new covenant in his blood, obtaining through his sacrifice the forgiveness of sins for his people. The individual question naturally follows for general answers do not suffice for him. And so he replies, “But who do you (that word is emphatic in the Greek text) who do you say that I am?” And Peter follows, “With the only adequate answer, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter knew that he was not just another one of the prophets, important though they were, he sensed that he was the Messiah and that messiahship was grounded in an even deeper relationship to Jehovah. He was the Son of the living God who knew the innermost thoughts and purposes of the Father and possessed his essential nature.

This insight probably did not come to Peter like a boat from the blue. Tasker put it this way, “Jesus was well aware that this great confession was not made by Peter on the spur of the moment as if he had been stung by the splendor of a sudden thought, nor was he voicing a secondhand opinion learned from some other creature of flesh and blood.” On the contrary, since the day when he stood before Jesus and felt compelled to say, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” and yet in spite of that reluctance had found himself irresistibly led to respond to Jesus’ call and leave his nets and follow him. During all the time that he had witnessed his master’s mighty works and listened to the words of eternal life that fell daily from his lips, the living God, the God who acts and intervenes in the affairs of men had been leading him to see that Jesus was indeed his Son. Jesus, therefore, pronounced him highly favored, addressed him directly as Peter, the man of rock, and made it clear that the faith that was expressed by him was the rock upon which he would build his church, the church of the living God which the forces of death would never be able to overcome.

It was, as John Calvin says, a brief confession but one which contains the whole sum of our salvation. Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In its ultimate bearings it contained all the messianic work that leads to his eternal kingdom with its subjects, the saints of God.

Now in the words that follow, our Lord commends and lauds the Apostle Peter. He says, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed unto thee but my Father which is in heaven.” A remarkable statement. By nature men are blind and dead to spiritual things until they discover the remedy in Christ. Thus flesh and blood could never come to Peter’s confession with its heavenly wisdom. All human senses fail until God opens our eyes to the glory found in Christ and Peter and the other with him are reminded that we must humbly submit to God’s instruction and then praise him alone for what we receive. “We have nothing that we have not received from him,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7.

The foundation of the church is referred to and that brings us to the important part of Peter’s statement, or the Lord’s statement to Peter, one in which he unfolds new truth concerning God’s people. A church, a triumphant assembly of redeemed people, the Lord will build upon this rock. But what or who is this rock? The answers to this question are manifold. We’re going to give three or four of them but today we’ll only have time to deal thoroughly with one of them. And that first, the view of the Roman Catholic Church.

According to the Roman church, our Lord conferred upon Peter apostolic promise. And that promise had been continued in the bishops of Rome. Vatican I in the first dogmatic institution of the church of Christ, formulated in 1870, appealing to John 1:42, Matthew 16:16 through 19, John 21:15 and 17 stated, “We teach and declare, therefore, according to the testimony of the gospel that the promise of jurisdiction over the whole church of God was immediately and directly promised to and conferred upon the blessed Apostle Peter by Christ, the Lord.” The council also defined people

infallibility, stating that the Roman pontiff when speaking *ex cathedra* is shepherd and teacher of all Christians, defining doctrine concerning faith and morals, possesses through a divine assistance, promised in the person of St. Peter, the infallibility Christ willed his church to have.

Such definitions of truth are therefore irreformable. Lesson Matthew 16:18, Peter is the rock, the difference in the two words “*petras*” and “*petra*” is simply because it’s proper to use the masculine form to refer to Peter. I should mention that in the Greek text our Lord said, “Thou art *petras* and upon this *petra* I will build my church. Now what can we say to this? Quite a few things. First the contention that the text rests upon an Aramaic foundation, namely that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and in that language there is nothing corresponding to the wordplay of *petras* and *petra* is not totally convincing, though significant. We’re dealing with the Greek text primarily and we mustn’t forget that.

*Petras*, the Greek word, often referred to a broken piece of rock, a stone, a pebble, that was its common sense. While *petra*, “Upon this rock I will build my church,” frequently referred to a massive rock, a boulder, or a cliff of stone. This difference would be significant if it were always true. But the meanings of the words sometimes overlap.

Second, the word *petra* in the Old Testament is never used of men and this would be something different in usage if it referred to Peter. Third, if Peter were meant by our Lord would it not be much more natural for him to say, “And I also say to you, You are Peter and upon you (not upon this rock) I will build my church.” And fourth it should be mentioned that while this is the official Roman view, it’s not always been the view of the mass of Catholic theologians. A Catholic by the name of Lanoi counted the interpretations of the fathers and discovered this, out of eighty-five, seventeen believe that Peter was the rock, eight believe that the apostles were meant, forty-four believe the confessional statement of Peter was the rock; that is, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that statement is the rock. Sixteen believed that Christ was the rock. It’s clear that the belief that Peter is the rock was a minority view, but made official in 1870.



This is striking in view of the creed of Pope Pius IV, obligatory upon all in the Roman church, for the creed includes these words, “Nor will I ever understand it (that is, the word of God) or interpret it except according to the unanimous consent of the holy fathers.” It’s clear that the fathers were anything but unanimous on this text. Listen to some of the fathers, do they agree with Vatican I? Origen in his on his work in Matthew traces the words to each and all of them; that is, the apostles. Chrysostom comments on the text in this way, “On this stone (that is to say on the faith of this confession) I will build my church.” And this confession is, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” St. Ambrose agrees, and remember, he was the teacher of Augustine. Then the Lord replies to him, that is to Peter, “On this stone I will build my church.” “That is to say,” Ambrose says, “On this confession of the universal faith I will build the faithful, that they may have life.”

Augustine frequently traces the meaning of the word “rock” to the confession and to our Lord. He writes, “On this rock, which thou hast confessed, I will build my church, for the rock is Christ.” Those are some words of his on the Gospel of John. He frequently states that the rock is Christ himself in sermon number seventy-six, one hundred forty-seven, one hundred forty-nine, two hundred thirty-two, two hundred forty-five, and others. And even in his retractions near the end of his ministry he still affirmed the rock was Christ. St. Jerome, the supreme biblical scholar from Rome said in his commentary on St. Matthew, “The rock is Christ.” It’s clear that the present Catholic view was not the unanimous tradition of the fathers.

And fifth, the following context, if our Lord was referring to Peter as the rock, is certainly embarrassing for in a few moments we find Peter rebuking our Lord, even trying to dissuade him from going to the cross. Thus, following the line of Satan himself. And sixth, there is no indication in the remainder of the gospel or in the New Testament of the promise of Peter in the sense that the Roman church teaches. In fact, Peter himself in his first epistle plainly states that he believes that Christ is the rock, 1 Peter 2:8.

And seventh, the fatal flaw in the Roman position is found in these facts, even if we were to assume that Peter is called the rock by our Lord in Matthew 16:18, what evidence is there that this supposed promisy existed beyond the church of the apostolic age? If we were to grant that, what evidence is there that the promisy is to be extended to the entire period of the later church? If we were to grant all of this, which is beginning to have the appearance of the dogmatic castle, constructed from air, what evidence is there that Peter’s apostolic promisy has been transmitted to the office of bishop? Did not the apostles have a unique and unrepeatabe authority? Do we have apostles of Jesus Christ today in the sense that they were apostles? Again, if we grant all of this, what’s the basis of restricting a saying made to an apostle to bishops of a particular city? And if so, of Rome. And finally does the historical role that the Roman church played in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries justify such an absolute position. It certainly was not an important church in the day of the apostles. Of course, for a lighter touch, and I guess we need that, if the church has been founded upon Peter with all his inconsistencies and instability, that might explain it all. In the light of her blunders and failures through the centuries.

There comes to mind an incident related by H. A. Ironside in one of his books. “We were having an open air meeting years ago out west,” he writes. “A friend of mine was preaching most earnestly and a great big Irishman, half drunk, stepped out and tried to break up the meeting. He kept shouting out, as he followed the preacher, with his fists doubled up, ‘What did the Lord to Peter, why don’t you tell us what the Lord said to Peter? That’s what we want to know.’ The man who was preaching did not have wit enough to answer him quickly and tried to go on with his preaching, but a very dignified looking friend, a typical New Englander, standing next to me listened until he couldn’t stand it any longer. He stepped up to this fellow and he said, ‘The Lord said to Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan.’”

Well there are other interpretations of this difficult passage and we’re going to look at them in our next study when we deal with the question of the keys of the

kingdom. We'll look at the interpretations that have been put upon it by others than the Roman Catholic Church. And we'll try to show that in the light of an exegesis or interpretation of this passage, that when the Lord Jesus said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” that he was like Augustine, referring to the Lord Jesus Christ as he is unfolded in the confession that Peter made. The church is built upon Christ as the Son of God.

If you're listening and have been hearing these words concerning our Lord and savior Jesus Christ and God in his grace has shown you that you're just flesh and blood and a sinner as the Scriptures say that we all are, and you desire to have eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you of the fact that he has suffered on Calvary's cross, has shed his blood for the redemption of the sins of sinners, and you may have eternal life bowing in your heart, confessing your sin to him and receiving as a free gift the forgiveness of sins. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

I hope you'll be listening in our next study when we continue and look...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**