



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 16:13-20

“The Year of Opposition, Part II”

TRANSCRIPT

Our series of studies has been gathered round the theme the New Testament Revelation of the Messiah. We're looking specifically today at the Year of Opposition and the remarkable statement that Jesus made to Peter and to the apostles concerning the keys of the kingdom.

If you have your New Testament with you, turn to Matthew chapter 16, and we'll be looking at verse 19 where Jesus says, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Our Lord's ministry in Galilee had begin very promisingly and public favor was with him. The enthusiasm for the teacher and the prophet, however, began to wane. The Galilean ground had turned out 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 Galileans had no root 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 on 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 crucified.

The opposition to our Lord that arose came from the influential classes; the Sadducees, the Pharisees, Herod, as well as from the growing alienation of the common people. It has been estimated that there were in the land as many as six thousand Pharisees and scribes and they were thought to be the conservators of respectability and orthodoxy. One can see how easily a groundswell of opposition could arise and it did.

James Stalker, the Scottish expositor, 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.” Upon the decisive hour of John the Baptist's death, Jesus made his way to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and went up on the side of hill to quietly meditate and commune with his disciples. Soon, however, there gathered to see and hear him an immense crowd of five thousand men and their families. Having compassion upon them he performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, recorded by all of the gospels, incidentally.

But the multitude never really caught on to who he was, nor to the kind of kingdom that he was bringing. They thought he was simply a prophet and wished to forcefully make him a king after that miracle, but Jesus would have none of it. That struck the fatal blow at his popular ministry. The sermon that followed the next day caused many to go back and walk no more with him, so John the apostle said.

So with his men Jesus went north to the region of Caesarea Philippi, a very beautiful region about twenty-five miles from the lake. There he asked them what they thought of him and Peter made there his great confession, “Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God,” Matthew 16, and verse 16. To Peter's confession, Jesus replied, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

In our last study we looked at Peter’s confession and concluded that our Lord did not say that Peter was the rock and that the church was built upon him. We examine the position of both Protestant and Roman Catholic interpreters and found no convincing reason to say that Peter was the rock upon which the church was built. And further, even if one were to grant that Peter was the rock upon which the church was to be built, there is no evidence whatsoever that the supposed promise it was transmissible beyond the apostolic age to the office of bishop of a particular city or of Rome. Therefore it seems much better to take the rock that Jesus speaks about to Peter to be Christ himself as revealed in the confession of Peter. It has the advantage of preserving distinction in the Greek words, for *petras*, the word for Peter, refers to the pebble, a loose rock, while *petra*, used in the phrase, “Upon this rock I will build my church,” is a massive live rock, cliff or a cave. The latter would be a vivid way of distinguishing the little pebble, Peter, from the massive rock, the Lord, Jehovah Jesus himself.

Further, this appears to be the view of Peter himself where in his first epistle in the 2nd chapter he denies that he’s the rock and points to Christ as the rock. And the apostles also, otherwise, the same thing. One might turn to Romans 9:33 and Paul’s words there and see that Paul did not regard Peter as the rock.

Finally, as we noted, it’s the view of the leading Catholic interpreters too, including Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. In one of Augustine’s sermons he says, interpreting our Lord’s words, “Because I am the rock (*petra*), thou art Peter, for the rock is not from Peter but Peter from the rock since Christ is not from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ, and upon this rock I will be build my church. Not upon Peter,” Augustine says, “Which thou art, but upon the rock, which thou hast confessed.” The church is that which came into existence on the day of Pentecost. The people of God, who on that day entered into a new form of existence, explained clearly by Paul in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Now the Lord Jesus goes on in the 18th verse to say some words about the exultation of the church. He states that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So this momentous statement to Peter concludes with a prophecy and assurance of the ultimate victory of the church. There are different ways of interpreting the last clause but the most likely is that he's promising that the powers of Satan and his legions, the kingdom of evil and death, shall never overcome the church of Jesus Christ. As our Lord said elsewhere, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying he shall never see death,” John 8:51.

The government of Hades is powerless before the one who has overcome death in resurrection and conveys that same overcoming life to others who trust in him as their divinely appointed representative. There comes to mind a story about the rock on which the entire church can rest in safety. “Are you sinking?” a clergy man once asked beside the bed of saint near death. Getting no reply he stooped closer and said again, “Are you sinking?” Gathering all her strength as she gazed intently into his face, the dying saint of God lifted herself up a bit and said, “Sir, did you ever hear of a saint of God sinking through a rock? No, I'm not sinking, I'm on the rock.” And if we're not on the rock may God enable us if we never have to pray with the psalmist, “From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

But our Lord had other hard words to say at the time, speaking still to Peter he said in the 19th verse, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Now that was stated to Peter. What does it mean? We turn to that now. And first we look at some of the major interpretations.

Many of my listeners or readers have at one time or another been informed by a friend or acquaintance that the church to which they belong is the only true church, and that forgiveness can be found only through it. And that's not true simply of the Roman

Catholic Church, it's through our Protestant churches also. Julius Mantey, a well-known Southern Baptist professor of New Testament interpretation wrote a quarter of a century ago of such an experience. “Several years ago in Alaska,” he said, “I was informed by a teenaged girl that her church was the only true church and that it alone was authorized by Christ to forgive men's sins. Her reason was that Christ said to Peter, ‘Upon this rock I will build my church, and I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Since that day I have often heard and read similar statements by members of that same denomination.” Dr. Mantey continued, “The sweeping nature of such a claim should at least arrest ones attention. If it can be substantiated as valid historically and scripturally, the members of the numerous other denominations are at once proved to be without the pale of God's mercy and pardon.”

I think we can all agree with Mantey's concluding words, accordingly we should gladly welcome any clear light that may be available upon the subject. That concludes Mantey's statements.

The early permanent members of the church did not seem to know this view of things. For example, Tertullian, the North African church father from the 3rd Century, points out in his *scorpiace* or *scorpiake* that the keys were given to the church and in his treatise on modesty he explicitly denies that Peter could forgive sins, commit it against God, saying, “For the right and arbitrament is the Lord's, not the servants; God himself, not the priest's.” The church father Cyprian in his work on the unity of the church, assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as Peter, endowed with a like partnership, both of honor and power. And in a later letter wrote, “So that the church is settled upon the bishops and every act of the church is controlled by these same rulers.” That's the conclusion of Cyprian's words. Cyprian, incidentally, was highly regarded in the early Catholic church. So Peter was not a pope nor a bishop over the apostles, according to Cyprian, but an apostle among them.

The 3rd Century Alexandrian, Origen, a noted church father in the east, claimed that binding and loosing was exercised by all godly people whenever they give judgment in accordance with God’s word. Thus it’s clear that there is no unanimous consent of the holy fathers that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, nor that to Peter was given the ultimate authority to forgive sin. But what of the text? The common Romanist view is that authority was given to Peter and to his successors to admit and exclude from the church by capitalizing upon this fear of eternal loss, the churches often through the centuries used its binding and loosing powers as a club over individuals and even nations. A classic illustration of this is found in the conflict between Henry IV of Germany and Pope Gregory VII in the 11th Century which finally led to the popes anathematizing of the king in these words, “I deprive King Henry who has rebelled against thy church,” he had addressed himself, incidentally, in this anathematizing of the king to Peter, “with unheard audacity of the government over the whole kingdom of Germany and Italy and I release all Christian men from the allegiance which they have sworn or may swear to him, and I forbid anyone to serve him as king. I bind him in the bonds of anathema in thy stead (the “thy” refers to Peter) and I bind him thus as commissioned by thee, that the nations may know that thou art Peter and upon thy rock, the Son of God has built his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

What may we say to this remarkable claim? First, it runs counter to Matthew 9:6 in which it’s stated that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins. And second, the word whatsoever probably points not to persons but to things; that is, to certain teachings concerning the truth. In chapter 18, in verse 1 would seem to be an explainable, if Rome’s claims were true. In Revelation 1:18 our Lord is said to have the ultimate keys, the keys of death and Hades. Finally and most convincingly in chapter 18, in verse 18, this authority is given to the entire body of the church in the words, “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye (notice the plural) shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Again, notice the plurals.

The church is in view and if so then Peter does not have the authority alone. Finally as one reads the New Testament one discovers there is no instance where Peter or any other individual possessed the sacred power to forgive. No one confessed his sins to an apostle and received his forgiveness and absolution. In fact, just the opposite takes place. When Simon the sorcerer asked for the power of the Holy Spirit, flagrantly sinning against the Lord, did Peter forgive him? Listen to him, “Thy money perish with thee because thou has thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven Thee,” Acts 8:20 through 22.

Now surely if Peter had the right to absolve from sins. Should he not have said to Simon the sorcerer, “Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray me if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” But Peter says, “Pray God.” He does not speak as if he has the authority to forgive sins at all.

Another group of Protestants teach that the Lord has given ministers the authority to pronounce the forgiveness of sins according to the terms of the gospel of Christ or otherwise administer the gospel in the world. This idea may be found in John chapter 20, in verse 23. But it's not the sense of the text here. The connection of the passage in Matthew chapter 16, in verse 18, with Matthew chapter 18, in verse 18, and the church discipline sentences that are found in the latter passage is overlooked and the sense of binding and loosing is missed. Our Lord's words to Peter have to do with church discipline. Other Protestants have made such suggestions as authority is given by the Lord Jesus to Peter to open the kingdom to the Jews as in Acts 2, and to the gentiles, as in Acts 10 in Cornelius's house. But this authority has not been transmitted to others. Generally these views disconnect the verse either from the immediate context or from the context of Matthew 18.

Let's look for a moment at the meaning of the terms that our Lord used. We have a clue to the meaning of the expression, “The keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,” in Luke 11, verse 52, where we read, “Woe unto you lawyers! For ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and then that were entered in ye hindered.” The figure of the keys suggests the idea of teaching, for it's by the teaching of the word of God that the gate to life is open to us. The keys then would pertain to the administration of the kingdom, the sphere of the divine activity on earth. Morgan suggests that the key is the insignia of the office of scribe, the teacher of the law of God. Here the subject of the kingdom is in view and it reminds us of chapter 13, and verse 52, he says. IN other words, the Lord according to Morgan, is simply saying to Peter, you are my scribe and thus have authority to interpret the word of God. The apostles had apostolic authority to do that.

Since Peter's commission is expanded to include the entire church in chapter 18, we must conclude that Peter here in Matthew 16, 18, and 19 is seen as the representative of the church of Jesus Christ, of those who have confessed his messiahship and Sonship. To him and to them is given the authority to instruct or to legislate in the Kingdom of Heaven. What do the terms “bind” and “loose” mean? Among the rabbis the terms were technical terms for decisions on the law. To bind was to forbid while to loose was to allow.

Look at Matthew 23, in verse 4, for a parallel passage. For example, one of their decisions reads, “To them that take a hot bath on the Sabbath day, they bind.” That is, they forbid washing and they loose, that is they allow, perspiring. That sounds like, incidentally, a dispensation made especially for summer in Texas. These meanings are in perfect harmony with the notion that to the church is given legislative authority over divine things.

A final point is extremely important. The tenses of the verbs translated, “Shall be bound,” and, “Shall be loosed,” are future perfects in the original text. If we are to give

them their literal significance then this is the correct translation, “And whatever you forbid on earth, must be what is already forbidden.” That is, will have been forbidden in heaven. “And whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted.” Or literally, will have been permitted or loosed in heaven. If this rendering is correct and it’s supported by first class scholars and is in perfect harmony with the Greek text then the meaning is that Peter and the church are authorized to ratify the truth of the word of God but not to determine the truth. Truth as its source, an authority in God.

So when we read, “Whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden.” What our lord is simply saying is that Peter, “What you forbid on earth to be valid must be what is already forbidden in heaven. And what you permit on earth will be that which will have been permitted, or loosed, in heaven, or otherwise it will not be permitted.” If this, I say, rendering is correct that’s the source of the sense and that’s the meaning.

Now what’s the general meaning of the whole verse? Well the Lord Jesus, having announced the founding of the church upon his messiahship and Sonship, grants to Peter and the entire church for whom he stands as representative the authority to legislate according to God’s word. That is, to declare the terms of salvation and to define proper conduct within the Kingdom of Heaven. To exercise discipline as well.

So in the light of the use of the same terms of binding and loosing in chapter 18, verse 18, in the context of church discipline that legislation includes the power to discipline within the local bodies. In chapter 21, verse 43, Jesus takes the authority to administer the kingdom from Israel and gives it to a nation, bringing forth the fruits of it, an apparent reference to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, in chapter 16, in verse 19, we have in effect advance notice of that. And when Paul calls the church the pillar and ground of the truth in 1 Timothy chapter 3, in verse 15, he’s alluding to the same authority given by Christ to the church. Authoritatively interprets the word of God

and also authoritatively exercises discipline as long as the church is in harmony with the written word of God, the divine revelation given to us by inspiration through the apostles.

In the historical outworking of this there is definite progression. Peter on Pentecost declares the terms of salvation to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem. Then to the Jews in Acts chapter 3 at the time of the healing of the lame man, and then to the gentiles in Cornelius's house. One might think that Peter has indeed been given the supreme power among the apostles until we read on in the Book of Acts. In the later chapters, however, it's Paul who emerges as leader, declaring the terms of salvation to the Jews in Antioch, chapter 13, verse 16, and verse 41. And in fact is able to rebuke Peter in Antioch later on, Galatians chapter 2, verse 11 through verse 21.

Peter retains his authority as an apostle but has no special promise among them, 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 1 through verse 4. The sacerdotal claims then of the Roman church or of any other church are not substantiated by the text of Holy Scripture. We must avoid the doctrinal inventions of men such as absolution by ministers or priests, prayers for the dead, the making of the sign of the cross, the adoration of Mary, that lovely saint and mother of our Lord, or of other human saints. Any sacrifice other than the once for all sacrifice of our Lord, for they deprive him of the full glory of our salvation. Lent, images, relics, holy water, and other accretions to the faith as it is found in the Scriptures, we must stand upon the word of God alone. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the church of Jesus Christ, the true believing church, not some denomination or local body, has had entrusted to her the word of God and the responsibility of instruction and legislation under its inspiration and authority. It is our responsibility to preach the way of salvation, reminding the world as Peter did at the time of the healing of the lame man, “Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you well.” This is the stone which was said not of you builders which has become the head of the corner. Neither is there

salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. And it's the churches responsibility to carry out discipline in the body that is brought into being by the preaching of the word and the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration in faith. May God enable us to be faithful to our commission.

If you do not know Jesus Christ, I remind you again that he has offered the saving sacrifice and through him one may have the forgiveness of sins. Come...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]