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The Promise of Jesus to Build His Church

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THE PROMISE OF JESUS TO BUILD HIS CHURCH

The Probing By Jesus

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?" (Mt. 16:13-15)

- How are we to account for the various rumors concerning Jesus' identity? Some, influenced by Herod Antipas, confused Jesus with John the Baptist, whom they felt had been raised from the dead (Mt. 14:2). Others identified Jesus with the prophet Elijah, whose coming had been predicted by Malachi (4:5-6). The apocryphal book 2 Esdras predicted the return of Isaiah and Jeremiah (2:18). It was commonly believed among the Jews that at the Messiah's coming the prophets would rise again. "The nearer still the 'kingdom of heaven' came, by so much the more did they dream of the resurrection of the prophets."
- Note the phrase, *"But whom say ye?"* Jesus both was, and is now, far more interested in what His people think about Him than what the world might say about Him.

The Person of Jesus

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 16:16-17.

- Luke provides for us the reason for this timely revelation, namely, the request of Christ to His Father:

"And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?" (Lk. 9:18)

The Promise of Jesus

"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. 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" (Mt. 16:18-19)

- Was Jesus building His church upon Peter and planning to make him its first pope? It may be clearly stated that He was not, for the following reasons:
 - A. Christ later gave the same responsibilities to the other apostles which He here gives to Peter. (Compare Mt. 16:19 with Jn. 20:22-23.)

- B. The New Testament clearly presents Christ and Christ only as the foundation of His Church (see Acts 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:4-8).
- C. The New Testament clearly presents Christ and Christ only as the Head of His Church (see Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:18-19).
- D. In the Greek language, there is a play upon words in this verse. Jesus said, "*Thou art Peter [petros, a little stone,] and upon this rock [petra, massive cliff or rock] I will build my church.*"
- E. Peter's testimony denies it (see 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- F. James and not Peter later officiated at the Jerusalem Church (see Acts 15:13, 19).

- What then, was Christ doing? The answer is given in Ephesians:

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22).

- What did He mean by "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*"? J. Vernon McGee wrote:

"The gates of hell refer to the 'gates of death'." The word used here is the hades and sheol of the Old Testament, which refers to the unseen world and means death. The gates of death shall not prevail against Christ's church (Matthew, Vol. II, p. 23).

This glorious event is called the rapture (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-57).

- What were the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" that Jesus gave Peter? A key, of course, unlocks doors and makes available something which was previously closed. Jesus here predicts that Peter would be given the privilege of opening the door of salvation to various peoples. This he later did.
 1. He opened the door of Christian opportunity to Israel at Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42).
 2. He did the same thing for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17).
 3. He performed this ministry to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house at Caesarea (Acts 10).
- What did Christ mean by the binding and loosing of Matthew 16:19? This authority was given to all the apostles as well as to other believers (see Mt. 18:18; Jn. 20:22-23). W. A. Criswell writes:

"In Greek the future perfect tense is used to express the double notion of an action terminated in the past but whose effects are still existing in the present. 'Having been bound and still bound,' and 'having been loosed and still loosed.' The meaning is: if the disciples act in their proper capacity as stewards, they will be acting in accordance with the principles and elective purposes ordained beforehand in heaven." (Expository Notes on Matthew, p. 101)

In other words, all the actions of the Spirit-filled believer, whether positive or negative in nature, will carry with them the awesome authority of heaven itself.

The Prohibition By Jesus

"Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ" (Mt. 16:20).

The Passion of Jesus

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Mt. 16:21).

- This shocking and sobering truth would be hammered home repeatedly by the Savior.

Examples:

"And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry" (Mt. 17:22-23).

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again" (Mt. 20:18-19).

The Plot Against Jesus

"Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Mt. 16:22-23).

- Here Satan employs a familiar tactic, using a secondary source through which to spew forth his poison. The first successful attempt occurred in the Garden of Eden:

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1)