

The Teaching of CHRIST

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PART III

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE REDEMPTIVE PROCESSES – THE CHURCH

“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. 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” (Matthew 16:16-19).

“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 18:1).

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:15-20).

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants” (Matthew 18:23).

“And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise

dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:24-28).

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:21-22).

“Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43).

“But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:8-12).

“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom” (Matthew 26:29).

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:12-13).

“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).

IN order of time CHRIST mentioned His Church before His Cross. In order of history the Cross necessarily preceded the Church.

Having considered His teaching as to the relation of the Cross to the Kingdom, we turn now to that which reveals the relation of the Church to the Kingdom.

There has been a tendency in some modern teaching to place the idea of the Church and that of the Kingdom in opposition to each other. But they are intimately related, and so far as the teaching of our Lord Himself is concerned, during the days of His flesh, His references to the Church were entirely in the realm of His teaching concerning the Kingdom. He only referred to the Church as an instrument towards the establishment of the Kingdom in the world.

Paul's teaching concerning the Church does not contradict that of our Lord. It goes very far beyond it. To Paul was committed what he himself described as the stewardship of the mystery of the Church, and through him the Spirit revealed eternal aspects of the Church's vocation at which our Lord Himself never hinted. These were among the things which the disciples of CHRIST could not bear during the time of His sojourn among them, and for the saying of which they had to wait for the coming of the Spirit, as He distinctly said: "**I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come**" (John 16:12-13).

Our present theme is not that of the Church in those larger aspects revealed in the course of the Pauline writings; but that of the Church in its relationship to the Kingdom of GOD, and that only as the subject is dealt with in the teaching of JESUS.

The records give two explicit references to the Church in the teaching of our Lord; and it is not without significance that both these are found in the Gospel according to Matthew, which is peculiarly the Gospel of the King and of the Kingdom. Had there been anything in the nature of contradiction between the idea of the Kingdom and that of the Church, the one evangelist most likely to omit reference to the Church would have been the man whose passion was that of the Kingdom, and whose vision was that of the King. But this man alone has recorded, as evidently of supreme importance to his own thinking and in his own conception, the two occasions upon which Our Lord referred definitely and explicitly to the Church.

One of these two statements is singularly explicit as to the nature and office of the Church; explicit, that is, in the sense of being a simple statement, waiting for further interpretation and development, but absolutely clear. "**Upon this rock I will build my church**" (Matthew 16:18).

There is nothing more to be said concerning the nature of the Church, if that one saying of JESUS be understood. In connection with that declaration He spoke of the twofold function of the Church in time, and in this world.

- First, "**The gates of hell shall not prevail against it**" (Matthew 16:18). It is an army at war, conquering, and leading an exodus out of all bondage, even that of death.
- Secondly, "**And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 16:19).

The Church is entrusted with responsibility concerning the ethic of Heaven for the government of earth. If these words of JESUS be perfectly apprehended, nothing remains to be said concerning either the nature or function of the Church so far as this world is concerned; but even then there is no hint of the ultimate and eternal values which are revealed by the Spirit through the apostolic writings.

The facts concerning our Lord's teaching on the subject are these.

- First, that after the confession of Peter He explicitly declared His purpose to build His Church; and described its twofold function in the history of the world.
- Secondly, that after that announcement He repeatedly spoke to His disciples in a corporate

capacity; and in so doing He assumed the Church, which He had declared it was His purpose to build. And

- Thirdly, that a careful examination of these references will show how closely He connected the Church with the Kingdom, considering her ever as His instrument for its revelation to men, and its establishment in the world.

After He had made His great declaration at Caesarea Philippi, He addressed them, not so much as individuals, but as a company, a fellowship, an assembly, a corporate body; or to use His word, an *Ecclesia*, a called-out assembly of men. From that time He took for granted, not that they were already the Church in the full sense of the word, but that He was speaking to them as they would be, after the Pentecostal effusion whereby they should be baptized into new union with Himself, and so constitute the Church which He had announced His intention to build.

That is seen in the group of Scriptures prefacing this meditation. In reading them we pass from Caesarea Philippi to the moment of the ultimate commission, noting some occasions on which, under various circumstances and with different intentions, the Lord spoke to His disciples in groups, as to a corporate body.

There can be no selection of passages such as these, which on careful reading does not impress the mind with the fact that while He spoke to them as a Church, He was always thinking of the Kingdom, and was preparing them for very definite fulfillment of a position in the world in the interests of that Kingdom.

Our consideration will gather around the explicit statements and the subsequent references; dealing with the statements only in one regard, that of their relation to the Kingdom, and glancing at the references in the same way.

We come first then to the scene at Caesarea Philippi, and listen once again to the words in this particular way.

Our Lord's confession concerning His Church was made in answer to Peter's confession that He was the Messiah. The whole Messianic hope of the Hebrew people was connected with the establishment of the Kingdom of GOD. That they did not understand the nature of that ultimate Kingdom is no argument as against this fact. That they also had become materialized in their thinking, and were failing to understand that the foundations of GOD's Kingdom, even in material things, must always be spiritual, does not affect the fact. They were all looking for His Kingdom; and they were looking for the King Whose business it should be to establish that Kingdom.

When at last, one of their number, after comradeship with JESUS for two years and a half, looked into His eyes and said, "**Thou art the Christ** [Messiah]"; it was a confession that at last there had appeared in the fullness of times, the King Whose business it should be to establish the Kingdom.

Our Lord immediately accepted that confession; with the pronouncement of blessing upon the man who had thus been illuminated by GOD, "**Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven**" (Matthew 16:17);

and then straightway proceeded to utter these words concerning the Church: "**Upon this rock I will build my church.**"

When one man out of the past economy, illuminated from above, said "**Thou art the Christ**"; which is clearly understood as the "Messiah King"; He said, On the basis of that confession, and upon that eternal fact on which the confession rests, "**I will build My Church.**"

- That was not a departure from the Kingdom ideal.
- It was not an abandonment of the Kingdom purpose.
- It was not a refusal of the Kingly crown.

It was an acceptance of the Kingly crown, "**Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona**"; and now that the crown is placed upon My brow, not merely in the Divine economy, but by the consent of one illuminated soul, I will proceed; "**I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**" (Matthew 16:18).

Observe also in this connection that the terms which He employed to describe the function of the Church are directly related to Kingdom ideas.

What was the meaning of the declaration that the gates of Hades should not prevail against it? Our Lord used two entirely different figures in such close connection that sometimes we have forgotten the difference between them.

- First: "**I will build My Church.**"
- Secondly: "**and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**"

The first idea is that of the building of a house, using the word house in its largest sense. The second idea is that of an army marching forth to war.

This second figure deals with the function of the Church, suggesting the presence of anarchy, and recognizing the opposing forces of evil. We have considered in a previous study how perpetually the Lord was conscious of these facts; how, notwithstanding that the vision of the Kingdom of GOD was ever before Him in all its glory and beauty, He was also conscious of the opposition of evil, and that He was exercising His Kingdom ministry in the midst of anarchy.

On the first occasion of reference to His Church He used a figure that suggests war with the anarchy, opposition to the opposition: "**The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**"

Passing from that figure to the next, the terms again suggest and indeed, actually name the Kingdom idea: "**And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 16:19).

From the midst of the anarchy, appeal was made for a true authority.

I do not suggest that the appeal was intelligent or volitional, but to Him it was none the less real. False rulers and false authority were influencing the people to evil courses, and ruining them;

and JESUS ever saw them distressed and scattered; and heard the unconscious appeal of their agony for a true authority. Therefore when He first spoke of His Church, He said to the representative of the Church, I will give thee the keys of the Kingdom. What you bind shall be bound. What you loose shall be loosed. All these terms move in the atmosphere of the Kingdom idea.

Thus it is evident that when at Caesarea Philippi He was confessed King intelligently by Peter, CHRIST did not abandon the thought of the Kingdom. As He declared that He would build His Church, it is clear that in His own mind the interest of the Kingdom was supreme; and that the temporal value of the Church He would build would be that of its cooperation with Him, in His passion and His mission, for the establishment of the Kingdom of GOD.

Let us take with equal brevity the next explicit reference.

The preliminary question that led up to the reference was asked by His disciples: "**Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**" (Matthew 18:1). In answer to that enquiry He proceeded with His teaching, and ended His teaching by a parable, which commenced, "**Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto . . .**" (Matthew 18:23).

Between this question and parable, we find His second reference to the Church.

It was a mere allusion to what He had already said. The child was set in the midst of them, and He addressed them as a body of men in their more corporate capacity. The very act was symbolic. In the midst the child. Do not be afraid of the pictorial. See Him and His disciples, and the child in the midst. It was singularly suggestive of a corporate relationship, of a responsibility which rested, not upon individuals, but upon the whole of them.

Having put the child there, He proceeded to talk to them about the Kingdom. He gave them the great law of Christian discipline, discipline within the Church. "**Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone**" (Matthew 18:15); and do this in order to gain him, not in order to damn him!

And if you do not gain him, take one or two others of the same circle, always to gain him; but if he will not hear the two, tell it to the Church.

It was only a reference, an allusion; but all the light of the declaration at Caesarea Philippi flashes upon the word, and we have the vision of this new entity, this corporate body. There they are, twelve men, with a child in the midst. And if he will not hear the Church, "**let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican**" (Matthew 18:18).

What sort of man is the Gentile and the publican? A man to be cursed? No. What then? The man for whom CHRIST died! And so, if the brother cannot be won, he is to be treated by the Church as a man for whom the Church will die in order that he may be saved!

All this is the atmosphere of the Kingdom; and the Church is seen as embodying the great facts of the Kingdom.

Moral authority; - **"Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."**

"Spiritual power; - **"That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"** (Matthew 18:18-20).

CHRIST and the child in the midst; that is the Church; and for to-day, that is the Kingdom.

From these words of JESUS we travel back to an old prophecy.

The prophet Zechariah climbed higher than most of his order, and gazing across the centuries and millenniums to the glorious hour when the Kingdom of GOD should be established, he described what he saw in the words: **"And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof"** (Zechariah 8:5).

That is the ultimate Kingdom of GOD on earth. And now, said JESUS, you, My disciples, My *ecclesia*, My Church, having moral power and spiritual dynamic, you are that for to-day; the child is in the midst, and I am in the midst. I have not abandoned My Kingdom; I have come to realize it first within your borders; and I have come to realize it within your borders in order that it may be interpreted to the world.

Let us now glance at some of His subsequent references, in which He spoke to these men as to a corporate body, a Church, and yet constantly concerning a Kingdom.

Ten men were indignant at the request of two. Two had asked that they might sit on His right hand and on His left, when He should come in His Kingdom. I am not interested in their indignation, or even in the request, only in order to emphasize the fact that it was for power as within His coming Kingdom. But how did the Lord answer? By teaching them the law of greatness in the Church, by putting the Church into contrast with the kingdoms of men. In that passage (Matthew 20:24-28) we have a most graphic picture of all human kingdoms, even until this hour, as to order of precedence.

Your great ones exercise authority over you, and their great ones exercise authority over them. That is to say, there are gradations of authority. The mass of the people are ruled by rulers; the rulers are ruled by higher rulers; and greatness is calculated by the grade of authority. **"But it shall not be so among you."**

He that would occupy the position of ultimate greatness among you is not the one who exercises authority, but yields to it!

The lowest grade, - borrowing the phrase from a world that has largely forgotten GOD, - the grade that serves, is greatest in the ultimate Kingdom of GOD. The supreme eagerness of souls in the ultimate Kingdom will not be to rule men, but to serve. CHRIST said that this rule of the Kingdom is to be the rule of the Church. It is to be realized in the Church, and so manifested to

the world. One of the secrets why the Church of GOD has failed, and is failing still, is that in this respect she has never yet realized her Master's ideals.

There had been a symbolic judgment of a fig-tree, on His way to Jerusalem for those last august acts by which He flung the Hebrew nation aside as an instrument of the Kingdom of GOD.

The disciples were astonished, and He said, speaking to them in their corporate capacity, that if they had faith, much mightier things than these should they do. He contrasted the power of faith with the failure of the people who had lost that power of faith, and who therefore were like the fig-tree, doomed to judgment. He put over against the failure of the Hebrew people, with which He was then dealing from the standpoint of an official authority, - this power of faith, this power of prayer (Matthew 21:21, 22).

It was all in the Kingdom atmosphere, but He was talking to His disciples, to the men who were to become the Church.

At last the King did Finally and definitely, and with great dearness, pronounce the word of rejection against the Hebrew people, "**The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof**" (Matthew 21:43).

In that word, full of solemnity, we are at the heart of the present line of thought, for it was the declaration of the transference of Kingdom responsibility, for the time being, from the Hebrew people to the new *Ecclesia*, to the new Theocracy, to the Church which He was about to build.

Later still He gave instructions to His disciples as to their responsibilities, by revealing the failure of the scribes and Pharisees. He first recognized an official position which the scribes and Pharisees had occupied in the economy of GOD. "**The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do**" (Matthew 23:2-3).

Then He spoke directly to His disciples: "**But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ**" (Matthew 23:8).

Thus He revealed to them the order of the new Kingdom, and the secrets of the new authority. One is your Teacher, the Holy Spirit, yet to come.

One is your Father, and the declaration is self-evident, that He was referring to the Father Whom He had come to reveal. One is your Master, and He at once claimed that He Himself occupied that position. All this was teaching intended to show these men that they were to exercise moral authority; not by claiming the titles which the Rabbis had claimed, but by being themselves taught of the great Teacher; not by calling other men father, in some official way, and yielding themselves to a false authority, but by recognizing their relationship to the eternal authority, and their right of access to GOD for the discovery of His will; not by being themselves looked upon as masters of men, but by being yielded to the mastery of CHRIST. Thus they were to learn the secrets of morality, and exercise His authority in the world.

The Olivet prophecy was uttered in answer to the inquiry of His disciples, as to when certain

things should take place that He had predicted. It is a great prophecy, covering three phases, and yet is permeated from first to last with the consciousness of the Kingdom and of the Church:

- Dealing first with that period which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem;
- Dealing Secondly with the period from then until the hour of His second advent;
- Dealing Finally with that august and wonderful day in which He will be the Judge of the nations, testing them by their relationship in that final movement to Israel, but through the long processes by their relationship to the nation that has been responsible for the Kingdom of GOD.

Throughout the prophecy the Kingdom of GOD is the master thought; and the Church is seen as the instrument of that Kingdom in the economy of GOD.

The Lord was present at the final Hebrew feast. His Paschal teaching (Matthew 26) is that of the fact of the transference of Passover. The festival celebrated the hour when the Kingdom was formed by redemption in the old economy.

In a night much to be remembered, GOD broke the power of the oppressor, and led His people towards the sea, and through the sea, and said to them, I have brought you to Myself, a nation. He created the Hebrew people a Kingdom by redemption. Passover celebrated it.

Here let us use a word of Paul. "**Our For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us**" (I Corinthians 5:7).

Let the light of that declaration fall upon what happened. He transferred Passover from that old economy, and from that ancient people who had failed to bring forth the fruits of the Kingdom, to this new economy, and to these new people who were to be responsible for the fruits of the Kingdom; and He instituted a feast in connection with the redemption by which the new Kingdom was to be founded.

In that connection He referred to yet another transference, and another day, which has not yet come, as He said, "**I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom**" (Matthew 26:29).

That was a glance far ahead, to ultimate things, to that hour to which the apostle referred when he said, "**Then cometh the end, when he (the Son) shall have delivered up the kingdom to God**" (I Corinthians 15:24).

The burden of all is that of the Kingdom, the Kingdom of GOD, its establishment, its realization, its victory.

At last we come to Galilee, to the mountain where He appointed to meet them, to the only appearance after resurrection which Matthew records, to the one appearance which is in harmony with all the process of his Gospel. Now He said: "**All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have**

commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen”
(Matthew 28:18-20).

That is the voice of the King, it is the commission of the Kingdom; it is the declaration that His Church is to go to the nations and deal with them as nations, by dealing with the individuals that make up the national life; always remembering the value of the individual to the national life; and forevermore having at heart a passion for the establishment of the Kingdom of GOD, and the bringing of all the nations within that Kingdom. The Kingdom responsibility for proclamation and instruction was thus given to the Church in that final Kingdom commission of our Lord.

From this rapid survey of the teaching of JESUS certain things are clearly evident.

First, that the Church has, for the time being, superseded the Hebrew people in the economy of GOD in the matter of responsibility for the Kingdom of GOD on earth. JESUS said to the rulers, **"The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"** (Matthew 21:43).

After resurrection His disciples said to Him, **"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"** (Acts 1:6).

The bearing of that question is only discovered as we remember His denunciation of the Hebrew people. He had cast them out. That is why His disciples asked Him after resurrection: Has the time come to restore the Kingdom to Israel? He did not say that such a time will never come, but, **"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"** (Acts 1:7-8).

Finally we learn that the Church will fulfill her responsibility for the manifestation of the Kingdom of GOD

- By the crowning of the King;
- By yielding herself to His rule;
- By realizing within her own borders His ideals;
- By manifesting these things to the world without;
- By waging unceasing war against all the forces in opposition;
- By proclamation of His great evangel, whereby men individually may be brought into His Kingdom;
- By testimony to His moral standards; and
- By persistent, perpetual prayer in the secret Place.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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