

In our first section established that we are set in the basic relation to Christ as the Church. All this depended on how God had, before the creation of the world, seen us in His eternal Son. This Son having come to us in history as the Christ of Israel, is the person God appointed for us, through Whom, and in Whom God has worked our salvation.

In our second section we considered what it means to live in relation to a head. How were we to understand how this shaped our corporate attitudes and approach to the Lord.

Here we consider that He is building us as his people, called out from the world. We also see that, in the light of the Ascension of our Lord, in what way we may begin to understand that our binding and loosing can have a commensurate reciprocal answer in heaven.

## **1- The Development in Matthew**

In Matthew 10, we find Jesus sent out the 12 disciples into the surrounding countryside. He told them to speak exclusively to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' [10.6] He prepares them for persecution and a poor welcome and response to their preaching.

In Matthew 11, it is recorded that Jesus himself, went on to preach in the Galilean towns. While doing that he was approached by messengers, sent from John Baptist, asking him whether he was the "one who is to come". He teaches them to consider what they are seeing that he is doing, and also interprets John's ministry as the messenger who came before himself. As to John's place Jesus makes clear that he is the last of the prophets and the greatest.

Nevertheless, he was not received for who he was by Israel. John was a Nazarite who neither ate excessively nor drank alcohol; yet he was taken as being demonized by the people. Conversely, Jesus came eating and drinking and they called him a glutton and a drunkard. So much for their wisdom and insight!

Anticipating his teaching about Jonah being a sign for this adulterous and sinful generation [Matthew 12.38-45] our author records a statement that Jesus made denouncing the Galilean towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because they did not repent at the preaching of John Baptist and Jesus [Matthew 11.21-24].

He then goes on to record an audible confession Jesus said to his Father in the light of what he was seeing about the local response to his teaching.

## **2 - Only God can reveal God - Matthew 11.25-27//Luke 10.21-22**

1. There is a hiding, a withholding of revelation by the Father from the wise and the learned, and yet an open revelation taking place to men and women who are seen as 'little children' [nhpivoi] in Jesus eyes. This was, as Jesus understands, purely a matter of the Father's pleasure.

2. Jesus knows that all things have been given to him by his Father for the purposes of the mission he has in coming for our sakes.

3. He asserts that there is an exclusive, mutual and reciprocal knowledge of the Father by the Son and the Son by the Father.

4. No one is able to know the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. This makes clear that it is impossible to penetrate into the knowledge of the Father unless such a revelation is made by the Son and that this is central to the "all things" that have been given to Jesus for his mission.

5. The Jesus speaks an offer to those who would approach him. It is cast in the language of a rabbi – a teacher.

6. As a teacher, those who are the sorts of people he has in mind are the exhausted lost sheep of the house of Israel. They are weary and burdened by the burdens that have been placed upon them by blind guides whose seemingly authorised keys have locked them out of the kingdom and have bound them with heavy sets of rules and regulations for their lives [Matthew 23]. They desperately need the rest Jesus brings in himself for them.

7. Jesus, like a rabbi, invites them to take his yoke upon them. A rabbi's yoke was his way of life;

it is a free invitation to walk together in tandem, like two oxen in a working harness. To take up this yoke means that they will learn from him.

8. What they will learn from him is not a method, or a way to walk. They will learn what is intrinsic to his person – for he is humble and lowly of heart. The outcome of this learning, walking with the humble and unpretentious person of Jesus, is that their life is restful. There will be an absence of striving and ambitious push.

9. Jesus insists that this yoke is an easy one and constitutes a light burden. His commandments are not burdensome because they come with united life and walk with himself. Jesus is easy to walk with when we have become burdened by many matters that have tied up our life that are not Jesus.

### **3 - Jonah as a Sign -**

#### **Matthew 12.39-42//Luke 11.29-32 and Matthew 12.43-45//Luke 11.24-26**

Matthew records that some burdensome “Pharisees and teachers of the law” asked Jesus for a sign. They wanted to authenticate his teaching to themselves by requiring him to meet their criteria.

Jesus makes clear that:

1. Only a wicked and adulterous [one that is cheating on God] asks for a sign. Back of this idea is that the lack of repentance that is evident in the response to him makes it clear that they are blind and do not see. This blindness is a result of their own wickedness and spiritual adultery to their God.

2. No sign will be given but one – and we presume because it is a very appropriate one – it is the sign which is Jonah himself. There are two facets to this sign.

3. The first is with regard to his own person. Jonah was in the belly of the fish and this will find a parallel in the life of the Son of man, his favourite name for himself. The parallel is one of contrast however. Jonah as a rebellious prophet who would not accept his commission; he is forced into a hard situation from which his being in the belly of the fish is a merciful deliverance in answer to his desperate prayer. The Son of man will voluntarily find himself delivered out of a death to which he submitted for our sakes. Their attitudes and work, in this sense, is a contrast.

4. The appropriateness of such a sign to such a generation is that the meaning and power of the sign to signify comes after the rejection of Jesus which is the situation leading to his being in the tomb so as to be raised.

5. The second is with regard to Jonah's ministry and its results. Sent to foreigners – for whom Jonah had no desire that the intended mercy of God should come to them – he found that they repented of their sins and accepted the offered mercy of God. They believed the prophet/messenger. Not so here among the scribes and Pharisees. But a Centurion had it [8.15-13]!

6. In sharp contrast, Jesus makes clear that he, himself, is a greater issue than Jonah. Similarly with the high accord and honour that the Queen of Sheba – another foreigner – paid to Solomon; Jesus is also greater than Solomon.

### **4 - Peter Declares that Jesus is the Messiah**

#### **Matthew 16.13-16//Mk 8.27-29//Lk 9.18-20**

1. Jesus begins the questioning of his group asking what they have heard others say of him. He already has a second question in his mind however.

2. Their reply is to gather up the local gossip of Jesus, which also reflects the attempts of the crowd to come to terms with what they are encountering with Jesus.

3. The crowds' answers are understandable. Some started with John Baptist and thought of Jesus – as we have on record Herod did – that Jesus is really John [resurrected?]. Others think of Elijah, the one prophet who troubled the establishment of his day and was taken up to heaven. Still others think of a troubling prophet like Jeremiah, who was saying counter-intuitive messages to those who saw their future in alliances with political events.

4. Jesus initiates the second question of his disciples. It seeks for a perception concerning himself which will be peculiar to his own disciples/learners. He does not want to know now what others say. He seems to expect that his own people will have another perception. After all, the crowd are outsiders, and their general reaction of non repentance and unbelief indicates they don't know something. This is a question for the inner group. "Who do you say me to be?" They are in relation to him already – to them has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God. Something is going for his group that is not for others.

5. Peter expresses the secret when he declares Jesus to be [a] the Christ [Messiah] and [b] Son of the living God.

6. It is a declaration concerning Jesus' identity. His own group now know who He is but do they understand it? It is one thing to know who a person is, it is another to know his ways and how he will express who he is – to learn Him [Ephesians 4.20].

7. Peter has told Jesus who he is; Jesus now tells Peter who he is. He tells him a number of things concerning himself:

8. [a] he is a blessed man. This blessing consists in knowing that he has not been the recipient of revelation from flesh and blood; that is, it is not from a source of human ignorance and fleshly understanding [1 Cor 15.50, Gal 1.16; Heb 2.14]. Rather, the source is from Jesus' Father in heaven. This is consistent with only God can reveal God. Jesus has the confidence to state that such revelation about himself only comes from one Source.

9. [b] Further, Jesus does not speak of him as Simon, son of John [which is what John's Gospel makes clear was his father's name Jn 1.42; 21.15-17]. He speaks of him as Simon son of Jonah. This may reflect that Peter is as the OT calls the "sons of the prophets"; that is, he too will become a prophetic person as they were destined to become. It may reflect that Jesus knows of Simon's ultimate destiny for martyrdom [John 21.17-19]. In which case it points to his destiny as a Jonah type experience which will be like Jesus' experience that he will now state is coming. It also may reflect what is that general suffering - of which Peter will be a sample - that Jesus had forecast for his disciples as he sent them out to Israel, and which he will now repeat to Peter that the gates of death will not prevail against his church.

10. [c] He is Peter [Πέτρος] and it is upon this stone/bedrock [ἐπὶ ταύτῃ πέτρᾳ] that Jesus will build his church [μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν].

The building upon the bedrock [πέτρα] is the word used in Matt 7.24 for the wise man who does Jesus words and builds his house upon the bedrock and not on the sand.

The implication there was that, in the teaching of Jesus for his hearers, was that anyone who hears Jesus' words and put them into practice was not a foolish builder of his house but a wise builder who built his house upon the bedrock of hearing Jesus' words and practiced them. Such a house endured the great shocks that come to a house.

Here the exchange between Peter and Jesus is that Peter has uttered words. And Jesus will take those words and build his house. That is, what Jesus will build is that as his church – the ones he calls out from the world and gathers to Himself – confesses back to him who He is, on the basis of the revelation of his Father, it is upon these words of men and women Christ's church will be built and will prevail. They "overcame...by the word of their testimony and did not live their lives unto death" [Rev.12.11].

11. Jesus goes on to teach the disciples about his own suffering which awaits him It includes elements quite other than the normal suffering that he underwent in simply carrying out his presence among us. [A distinction between active suffering/ passive suffering]. It involves such things as that he will be: Killed, Buried, Rise again, Suffering and rejection.

## **5 - Post resurrection - Peter, the apostle, is the mature disciple of a rabbi - teacher, elder [John 21.15-25]**

There is a clear record within the Acts of the Apostles that, as the word of God goes forward, and the churches are established, the leading of the Spirit causes the church to have a way to

order themselves in line with what the Head of the church is saying through the Spirit to the assembled people.

The foundation of the connection between heaven and earth is the ascended Lord. This is what is developed in the period R4oA - between the resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus.

And yet, as we shall see, this is a matter that Jesus teaches is also true of any disciples about their life as they gather together [Matthew 18.15-20].

Returning to Peter, Jesus makes clear to him that he is going to give to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven/God [Isaiah 22.22]

Keys are for authorised persons who can then use these for the locking or unlocking of doors. That is they open a way for a person into a house, or they debar them from entry. This is certainly the way that Jesus uses this picture in a perjorative sense against the Scribes and the Pharisees [Matt 23.13].

As a mature disciple Peter will exercise the authority of a mature disciple of his ascended Lord. He will "bind and loose" - as the rabbi does and then his disciples later also do - and what he does shall already be bound in heaven. That is, Peter will act to lead, discipline and order the life of the church. Another way of saying this is that Jesus as the head shepherd makes it clear to Peter that he is to "feed my sheep". He does this beside the Galilean lake as Peter, having returned to catching fish is re-instated and called to fulfill what Christ said to him about his authority, work and destiny for the church Messiah is building.

Peter understands that as the false shepherds of Matt 23 also did, that correcting elders will need to exercise great care to remain humble and gentle of heart [1 Peter 5.1-10].