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The Gospel According to Matthew

Jesus' Rebuke of Peter – The Danger of a Worldly Mindset

July 14, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 16:21-28

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1

Before we turn to Jesus' rebuke of Peter which immediately follows Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, we need to consider two more important points in that section:

Mat 16:18-19 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and **the gates of hell shall not prevail** against it. (19) I will give you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

First then, just what are *the gates of hell*? People often think that hell is run by the Devil. That it is his kingdom. He is down there with his fire and pitchfork doing all he can to get people's souls so he can torment them forever. Is this not the thinking behind most of the pictures you have seen that people have drawn in order to depict hell? But Satan is not in charge of hell. God is!

Luk 12:5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

But the Bible does, on occasion, use "hell" as a title for the Devil and his demonic hordes – the kingdom of darkness. For example:

Jas 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

This does not mean that the devil rules over hell. No, James uses this title to represent Satan and his kingdom because he and all who belong to him are headed for hell.

And this is what Jesus is doing here when He says He will build His church and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. City gates in ancient times were like the city hall, the governmental center of the city, representing the authority of the place. The gates of hell then is a term for the rulers of the kingdom of darkness. Jesus promises that His victory is certain.

And then we have this matter of the *keys*. Once again, Rome has twisted this Scripture and made preposterous claims about her authority, through apostolic succession from Peter to the Popes. She claims that Rome is the only church and that anyone who would enter Christ's kingdom must enter through Rome. The key to the door of heaven, you see.

But the keys of the kingdom of heaven is not the Pope. It is the gospel. William Hendriksen cites the Heidelberg Catechism on this point:

“How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel? The Heidelberg

Catechism (Lord's Day 31, Answer to Question 34) states: ‘By proclaiming and openly witnessing, according to the command of Christ, to believers, one and all, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, by proclaiming and witnessing to all unbelievers and such as do not sincerely repent that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted. According to this witness of the gospel, God will judge, both in this life and in that which is to come.’”

We see this playing out in the book of Acts as the apostles began witnessing and preaching the gospel. People came into the kingdom by faith and others were shut out of the kingdom by their unbelief. And this all continues today. The key to the kingdom, the key by which the door is opened, is repentance and faith in Christ. Likewise, it is unbelief and hardness of heart that close the door.

Joh 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

me.

There is one door. Only one.

Let's move on now to Peter's spiritual face plant which follows immediately on the heels of his confession of Christ:

Mat 16:21-28 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

(22) And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." (23) But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

(24) Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

(26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and

then he will repay each person according to what he has done. (28) Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Christ's kingdom is not of this world. That is to say, His goal has never been to be just another king over another kingdom – not even a worldwide kingdom. No, Christ's purpose is to bring about an entirely new creation –

1Jn 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

2Pe 3:7-13 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. (8) But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (9) The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any

should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (11) Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (13) But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

This redemption of Christ's people and of the entire creation is far, far, far more than any of us could ever dream of. It still is. No human being has ever even imagined or had even a brief idea of what Christ has in store for us. Paul got perhaps a glimpse, but whatever he saw he couldn't even put into words.

Listen to this:

1Co 2:9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

I want you all to think about this carefully. I think that much of what we have been taught in, for instance, children's SS classes and in shallow preaching and teaching, has even further clouded our view of our real life and home. Because it all falls so far short. Imagine this: imagine the unimaginable. God in His great goodness and love for us is, in Christ, "preparing a place for us." That place is the new heavens and earth.

What is it like? Well, I know that it has some parallels with the original creation – Eden. But I also know, because of what the Lord tells us, that this new creation has everything He could possibly give us. And you cannot imagine that. The very idea of it has never entered your mind. "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined.*"

Consider this – imagine it were up to you to design heaven – the new earth, the new universe. We watch a lot of movies in which the producers attempt to visualize such things. Think of how Star Wars ended when the Empire was destroyed. *But NONE of these things even begins to approach what God has prepared for those who love Him.* Your idea or ideas of that place are nothing in comparison. So great is God's infinite power and wisdom and love for us, that this new creation is NEVER going to stop amazing us in

all eternity. NOTHING is going to be missed. We will never say “I wish He had....”.

Peter, like all of us, needed to get his thinking straightened out regarding this. Peter’s notions about the kingdom of God were earthly and man-centered. Jesus’ rebuke of him surely caught his attention:

(22) And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” (23) But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

The cross was foolishness to Peter. It was inconsistent with his notion of God’s kingdom – which of course was wrong because it was an earthly notion. Peter was thinking “here and now.” This present world. Pretty much the same but with Christ as king and Christ’s followers His favored people. Out with the Romans. Jerusalem the center of the world. That sort of thing.

So the cross was absolutely inconsistent with Peter’s idea of the kingdom. You can’t have a kingdom if the King is killed!

Most shocking is the rebuke Jesus responded with – “Get behind Me, Satan.” How could Jesus call Peter, Satan? I think He did it for at least a couple of reasons:

1. For shock effect, to get Peter’s and the other apostles’ attention.
2. Because Peter’s thinking was aligned with man, with this present world, and Satan is the god of this world.

And we cannot rule out that Satan was actually actively influencing Peter. We know that the devil did so later:

Luk 22:31-34 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, (32) but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (33) Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” (34) Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

But all of us must realize this – either we are setting our minds and purposes and lives upon the things of God, or we are setting them upon the things of man, and ultimately then, of the devil.

Now, notice carefully that Peter's words sound logical. That it is Christ's words that seem foolish:

Mat 16:21-22 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

(22) And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

But we know now that in fact if Peter's idea had been followed, there would have been no cross, no gospel, no salvation.

And now Jesus goes on to teach the disciples and US a vital, vital lesson:

(24) Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and

then he will repay each person according to what he has done. (28) Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Let's see if we can pull out the major points:

- Not only was it necessary for Jesus to die, WE must die. He carried His cross to Calvary, and so must we.
- This means that it is necessary for us to *deny ourselves*. Peter was not doing that. He was pushing his own program.
- If our goal is to save our present, earthly life and make it the center of our thinking, we will lose our real life.
- If we are willing to follow Christ and lose all the things this world offers us, even our very lives, then we will find out that we have obtained real life.
- This world is ending. It is temporal. Our souls are eternal.
- Judgment day is coming. Christ is coming with His angels to render perfect justice to every human being who ever lived.

Peter's mindset did not have any of

these elements. In reality, like all of us when we think in a worldly manner, Peter was being very selfish and self-serving. His words *sounded* noble, but they weren't.

We see this very thing all the time played out against people who desire to follow Christ. What happens so often in the experience of people who truly set out to follow Christ? Their "Christian" friends and family try to stop them.

- That's crazy. That's too radical
- You can't do that. What about your job?
- What about us? You can't move away.
- You used to be a really fun person. You can still have fun and be a Christian like us.

And on and on it goes. We must be wise and we must not yield to this kind of thing. We must follow Christ and that means dying and becoming a brand new creation. Face up to it – many if not most of your old friends and family members are NOT going to like who you now are and what you are doing.

I have experienced this many times. When my parents were still alive, they

often put the guilt on me and Verla because we didn't go to the big family reunion my cousin put on each year. Well, my cousin is an evil, evil, evil man and the very property that he was hosting those reunions on was a house and property that he essentially stole from a man whose wife he also stole. And he had done that very thing many times over the years. Yet my parents just thought it was very wrong that we didn't go there. That is the thing. Peter had to face up to these things and stop promoting man's agenda.

Finally, notice Jesus' closing words:

(27) For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.
(28) Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

This seems confusing, doesn't it? Christ hasn't come in His kingdom yet, has He? Yet all the people he was speaking to have died. What did He mean?

What we have here is what is often called the "already but not yet" aspect of biblical eschatology (ie, the doctrine of last things). Jesus HAS already

come. His kingdom HAS already come. That is what we have been seeing in Matthew. His birth, His baptism, His miracles and His power. But He has not yet fully and finally come. He does not tell the disciples that they will not die until they see Him coming with His angels to render final judgment. No, He tells they they will see Him coming in His kingdom.

What Jesus meant was that the disciples would see –

- His crucifixion
- His resurrection
- His ascension

In addition, and I suppose this may have been even more pointedly what Jesus was referring to, the disciples witnessed Pentecost:

Act 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. (2) And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (3) And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. (4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The coming of the Spirit was in fact the coming of Christ:

Joh 14:28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, **and I will come to you.**’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

None of this would ever have happened if Peter’s way of thinking had been followed. Peter’s mindset needed a lot of work. And so does ours:

Rom 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.