

"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 xvi, 18-19

Jeshua xxiii, 1-11

Matthew xvi, 13-end

Psalm 96

New Book of Worship, Psalm 96, p.72

The words of our text express one of the fundamental truths concerning the Christian Church. By some this passage has been misinterpreted and quoted as teaching that the church would be founded on the Apostle Peter and that to him would be given the power to open or to shut heaven to men. But the church is not founded upon men. It is founded upon the Lord.

The church is the Lord's kingdom on the earth. Abstractly it may be thought of as a system of truth concerning the Lord and the souls of men. Concretely it may be thought of as a body of men and women who acknowledge these truths and seek to live according to them.

There is a clear and sharp distinction between the church and the world. The truths of the church are spiritual truths; they relate to spiritual things alone, to the Lord, to the spiritual world, to man as a spiritual being. Natural truth relates to man as a natural being; it relates to industrial, social, and civil affairs, to life in this world. A purely natural life is one which has no knowledge, no thoughts, no motives, no aspirations beyond this world.

The Lord said, "My kingdom is not of this world." The Lord's kingdom is a kingdom which must be established in the spiritual plane of the mind. The laws of this kingdom must be "put in the inward parts" and "written on the heart" before the man can become a citizen of it. No external organization, no ritual of worship, no confession of the lips makes one a real member of this kingdom. The church is made up of those who hear the Word of God and do it, who know the commandments of spiritual life and live according to them.

This system of spiritual truth has its central principle, its chief cornerstone, and this central truth is the Deity of Jesus Christ. It is not Peter himself but the declaration of Peter to the Lord, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" which is the rock on which the church is founded. This same question which the Lord asked His disciples He asks everyone. If we know nothing of the Lord, we can give no answer. If we have mistaken ideas, our answer will be wrong. The Pharisees and Sadducees said that the Lord was an imposter, a dis-

turber of the people, a blasphemer, and they put Him to death. Some say He was a mere man, although the best of all men; others say that He is a second person in the Trinity; only a few acknowledge Him as the supreme and only God.

When men look to the Lord as their King, their Redeemer and Savior, acknowledging Him to be the way, the truth, and the life, and strive to live according to His commandments, they become citizens of His kingdom, for all the principles by which they live rest upon the Lord as their basis. When one reaches this state, his life is not based upon human opinions or human judgments. The Lord never appointed any man or group of men as His vice-regents on earth, to determine right and wrong, to absolve men from sin, or to condemn them for it. This would be as absurd as appointing a vicar over the laws of nature, giving him power to determine when the sun shall shine, when and where it shall rain, who shall suffer for violating the laws of nature and who shall be absolved.

The first thing that is recorded of Peter after the incident of our text is that he tried to correct the Lord Himself. When the Lord began to foretell His sufferings and death, "Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." The Lord's church is not founded upon a man of whom the Lord said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

We ourselves, as well as all things in nature, may be good at one time and bad at another. So in the Word each person and thing may have two meanings, a good meaning when they are serving the Lord and the opposite meaning when they are being misused. The characters in the Bible story have a good meaning when they are doing right, and the opposite meaning when they are doing wrong. Peter, among the twelve Apostles, represents faith. When he made his declaration that the Lord is the Christ, he represents true faith, but in his attempt to correct His Lord and Master he represents faith separated from its allegiance to the Lord, a faith that rejects the Lord under the pretence of serving Him. This is the characteristic of every false religion which has prevailed upon the earth. The false apostles say "Lord, Lord," but do not the things which He commands. Faith without humility and obedience is not true faith. Peter later denied the Lord three times during His trial. He was more incredulous than the other disciples, with the exception of Thomas, about the Lord's resurrection. He was the first to propose to the disciples that they return to their old occupations, as though he had abandoned all hope of the Lord's kingdom.

Paul is right when he says, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." When we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our God, as He has revealed Himself in His Word, we build upon a rock, and no floods of evil and falsity can ever overthrow the house of our character. In his good sense Peter stands for the truths of faith, the truths that the Lord reveals in His Word. So

he was called the rock on which the church is founded when he declared the fundamental truth of the church.

And what are the keys? Truth is the key that unlocks the entrance to every good that it is possible for any human being to obtain. Truth is the great liberator of humanity. It removes the obstacles in the way of every human attainment. Truth binds evil and falsity. This is a universal law, which applies equally to natural and to spiritual things. A knowledge of scientific truth gives man power over nature. With the key of science in his hand he can unlock all her doors and explore her hidden secrets. He can bind and unloose her forces and make them bear his burdens and do his work. The increase in scientific knowledge has made the obvious difference between the past and the present. We see all about us the power of truth to bind and loose natural forces.

But there is another and higher realm than the natural. There is the spiritual plane. Life is eternal. Why do men fear death? It is because they have not found the key which unlocks its mysteries. Why do men think of God as vengeful and stand in fear of Him? Why do they think of Him as like themselves? Why do men bow down to graven images or look to some indefinite creative force as an object of worship? It is only because they do not know that He who created the heavens and the earth took upon Himself our nature and dwelt among men in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He might reveal Himself to His children and put in their hands the key of knowledge with which they could open the gates that lead to heaven. If one learns and understands the principles and laws of spiritual life, as intelligent scientists know the laws of nature, he will find this knowledge the key to his happiness. A true knowledge of God is the key which gives us access to the infinite treasures of the Lord's love and wisdom, and to every secret and to every good.

Our text continues: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It is true that no man can either condemn another or remit another's sins, and even the Lord Himself cannot keep us from suffering the penalties of wrong doing. Yet there is a meaning here even in the letter that applies to us. Each of us has responsibilities to others. We can lead people into sin, by enticing them, or by instilling false ideas and false principles into their minds. And everyone can help other people to repent and to give up bad ways of living. This assistance to others, helping them to see the truth and to see higher and better ways of life is a work which the Lord commissions every disciple to do. But primarily each of us must do this work for himself. What we bind on earth is bound in heaven. If we confirm evil in our lives here, it remains with us to eternity. If we free ourselves from evil here, we are forever free of it. Whenever we have come to see that something we have done is wrong, have fought persistently against the temptation, and with the Lord's help have reached the point where we will not do the same wrong again, that sin is remitted and will never be called to our remembrance. We make our choices in this world, and we possess the power to choose rightly according to the measure of our knowledge and love of the Lord. Amen

*Matthew 11:28-30.*