

Heavenly Things Introduced

F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 39, 1956-8, page 177.)

When the Lord Jesus had come "into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi" (Matt. 16: 13), He was at the furthest limit of Palestine and nearest Gentile territory, and it was then that He raised with His disciples the question of who He was. He had been presented to the Jews then in the land as their God-given Messiah, but as the early verses of the chapter show, their leaders asked for a sign, when the trouble was they had no eyes to see the many signs given, though they could discern the face of the sky, giving signs of the weather. Only the sign of the prophet Jonah was left for them: which was the sign of Christ's own death and resurrection.

The religious leaders did not know who He was. The mass of the people only surmised He might be some ancient prophet appearing. Who was He?

Peter it was, who gave the right answer. He was truly the Christ but also "the Son of the living God." This answer declared our Lord, was the fruit of revelation from "My Father which is in heaven." We may therefore truly say that the announcements made in this remarkable passage all originate from the **Heavenly Father**.

From Him there was granted to Peter the revelation of the **Heavenly Person** - not merely the long promised Messiah for the establishment of God's earthly Kingdom but "the Son of the living God."

In answer to Peter's confession the Lord gave His first intimation of a **Heavenly structure** which He now purposed to build, and which He called "My Church." Not that He revealed at that moment its heavenly character and destination; that we find revealed in the Epistles, after the Holy Spirit was shed forth. What is revealed here is that against His Church all the power of the adversary would not prevail, and that Peter himself was a stone, destined to be incorporated in the structure. The Lord had envisaged this at the outset, as recorded in John 1: 42; and on it Peter himself enlarged in 1 Peter 2: 4, 5.

Then further, the Lord told Peter that he should be given "the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven," that is of a **Heavenly Kingdom** to be established on earth. As recorded in Matthew 13, the Lord had instructed the disciples in the mysterious or secret form this Kingdom would assume, as the result of His being refused the Kingly place at His first advent, and while we have to wait for His second advent.

That Kingdom exists today in secret form, for in receiving the Gospel we are brought under the rule and dominion of Heaven vested in "the Son of His love" (Col. 1: 13, margin). Peter used the "Keys" in opening it to Jews in Acts 2 and to Gentiles in Acts 10. In that Heavenly Kingdom we are today, as having believed the Gospel.

At this point the Lord cancelled the earlier instructions given to the disciples to announce His Messiahship and the nearness of that dominion on earth, centred in Jerusalem, which the prophets had predicted. This we see in verse 20.

And from that time forth, as we see in verse 21, the Lord began to lay emphasis on His impending death and resurrection, which as He knew, was to be the righteous basis on which both the Heavenly Church and the Heavenly Kingdom, would come into existence. Not realising this, Peter spoke, as recorded in verse 22. By revelation he knew the greatness of the Person, but he did not yet know the wonder of His work.

The speed with which Peter descended from the heights of Divine revelation to the depths of the thoughts of men, behind which Satan is lying, furnishes a very impressive lesson for us. It may remind us of the apostle's reproachful word to the Galatian saints, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh" (Gal. 3: 3). The flesh in Peter and in every one of us shrinks from the cross.

But as the Lord indicates in the verses that follow, the cross is the way into the **Heavenly things** He was about to establish, not only for Himself, but also for all who would follow Him. A man may avoid the cross and gain the whole world, and yet lose everything worth having.

The taking of the cross entails the losing of the life of this world, but it is the door of entrance into the life that is life indeed — into that "eternal life" which is the fruit of death and resurrection. Here is found a **Heavenly Life** indeed, though that exact expression does not occur in the passage we are considering. Three disciples were permitted to see a sample of that Heavenly life by the Transfiguration scene, which the verses that follow put on record.

Thus Heavenly things were indicated by our Lord Himself in germinal form, and His death and resurrection shown to be the basis of their introduction. "These things," He spake, "being yet present" (John 14: 25), but when the Holy Spirit was come He would teach them, "all things," as the next verse says.

Thus we are brought into the full light of the Heavenly things that our Lord Jesus introduced in Matthew 16.