

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

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MESSAGE ONE: THE COMPLETION OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS: FROM CHRIST TO THE LOCAL CHURCHES (1)

These messages are on Christ and the Church according to the revelations received by Peter, Paul, and John. Each of these apostles intimately experienced Christ and each had a profound realization concerning His Church. What was revealed to Paul, however, was something further than what was revealed to Peter, and what was revealed to John was still something further than what was revealed to Paul. Hence, the title, “The Advancement of the Divine Revelations and Their Applications.”

The Bible is a book of progressive revelations. For instance, the first response by God to man’s sin was to clothe Adam and Eve with animal skins (Gen. 3:21). This was the initial revelation concerning Christ’s death as the Savior of the world. Throughout the Bible this is dealt with in a manner that unfolds more and more the unsearchably rich aspects of Christ’s redemptive work, and its application to us.

The revelation contained in the New Testament far surpasses that of the Old Testament. This is especially true when we come to the writings of the apostles, and the greatest of the apostles (according to the revelation they received) were Peter, Paul, and John. As in the order they received their revelations, Peter’s was great, Paul’s was greater, and John’s was greatest.

This may be surprising to some of us, because we typically have spent most of our time appreciating Paul and his revelations. However, with John, the revelation concerning Christ and the church advanced. The basic revelation these brothers received was the same: each focused upon Christ and the church. In each case, however, there was an advancement of what was seen.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PETER'S REVELATION IN MATTHEW 16

Peter saw Christ and the church in the stage of its initial declaration. What Peter saw in his revelation, however, became the controlling factor of his life. He realized that his living had to be according to Christ, the Son of God, and that his work had to fulfill Christ's desire to build His church, which could only be built upon the revelation of Christ.

Paul saw something further. No longer was Christ merely the Son of God who would build His church: Paul saw Christ as the One in the heavens who possessed the church as His Body. He further saw that the Church as the Body of Christ was expressed locally in the many churches.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S (SAUL'S) REVELATION IN ACTS 9

What was revealed to Paul was a great advancement over what was revealed to Peter. Paul saw an enlarged Christ. Paul saw a Christ that had become heavenly. Paul saw a Christ who bore His testimony and who built up His church in localities. Saul, as he was still called when the Lord first appeared to him, received so much when he saw Christ while on his way to Damascus to persecute the believers there. The heavens opened, and Christ Himself appeared and said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The Lord responded, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute." Then what did Jesus tell Saul to do? He told him to go into Damascus and wait until someone would come to him and tell him what to do.

Certainly no young brother likes to hear such a word. When we are first called by the Lord, we desire to follow Christ Himself and to be directed by Him, not by someone else. We would much rather say, "I received it from the Lord" than "I received it from the brothers." But the Lord told Saul to wait for one of His believers in that city. This brother who was sent to Saul, Ananias, was possibly not a charismatic or otherwise attractive

brother. Yet this brother in the church in Damascus was the next thing Saul saw after seeing the heavenly Christ. It was at his word that the scales fell from Saul's eyes. What began as a heavenly vision of Christ became an earthly vision of a brother.

When I was young, I saw something of Christ, and told Him that I wanted to be greatly used by Him. But the Lord tells those who want to serve Him: learn first to be a brother in a local church. This is the significance of Saul's experience here.

AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN'S REVELATION IN REVELATION ONE

In John's revelation, Christ is seen as the One walking among the churches in a priestly garment girt with a golden girdle, and having white hair, flaming eyes, and the appearance of bronze fired in the furnace. He is such a marvelous person, yet He walks on the earth in the midst of seven local churches. The heavenly Christ Paul saw was seen by John walking among the churches, which were standing for the Lord's testimony upon the earth.

The number seven in the Bible is significant, for it indicates completion. Therefore the seven churches Christ walked among represent all the local churches in the church age. Christ is walking in the midst of all the churches. This is another great advancement. What began with Peter's declaration of "You are the Christ" eventually became, in John's revelation, seven local churches which are one entity with Christ. The very fact that local churches are mentioned in Revelation should indicate to us how important they are.

According to John's revelation, apart from the local churches the Lord has no place to walk. Christ operates as the Son of Man today among the local churches. Therefore, do not depart from the local churches, no matter how weak you may feel, for they are where Christ is building His church; they are where the heavenly Christ is expressed in His Body; and they are where Christ as the Son of Man is walking and speaking on the earth.

THE APOSTLE PETER'S REVELATION: THE CHRIST AND THE BUILDING OF HIS CHURCH

Seeing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God

Simon Peter is an interesting character in the Bible. He was one of the first that the Lord Jesus called, but because of his personality, he did not respond by following the Lord right away. Jesus named him Peter perhaps a year before he became His full-time disciple (John 1:42). It seems it was after the Lord healed his mother-in-law that he was called again by the Lord. At around that time the Lord asked Peter if he could use his boat to speak to the crowds, and afterwards was rewarded with a big catch of fish (Luke 5:1-7). Peter's equipment was probably not that good, for his nets began to break! Upon reaching shore, Peter fell at the Lord's feet, realizing he was a sinful man, and not someone qualified to follow Him. The Lord's word to him was interesting. Jesus told him, "You are just catching fish now, but if you follow Me, I will show you how to catch men instead of fish." This word no doubt encouraged Peter to follow the Lord. For at least the next two years, Peter remained the Lord's close companion and began to grow spiritually.

Just a couple of years after following Jesus, Peter had his revelation. Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" (Matt. 16:13) The twelve were probably circled around Him on the mountain. Some said, "John the Baptist" (which doesn't really make sense, seeing how differently John and Jesus dressed and lived). Some said, "Elijah" or "Jeremiah" which was more reasonable. Others said, "one of the prophets." In other words, none of the disciples knew what to say to this question. Then all of a sudden, like a bolt of lightning out of the blue, Peter said, "You...You know who You are? You are...You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" In other words Peter said, "You are the One anointed by God to carry out His economy, and You are the expression of God Himself."

I believe all the other disciples were stunned at Peter's word. Perhaps they wondered, "Has the Lord been telling Peter things He hasn't been telling us?" Or they might have thought, "Why is it Peter was able to say such thing, and not me?" Peter himself must have been apprehensively mopping his brow, thinking, "I can't believe I said what I just said, but I sure hope it means something." Then the Lord got excited. The Lord responded to Peter, "Simon Barjona, you are blessed! No one of flesh and blood could have taught you this! You received this revelation directly from God my Father, who is in the heavens! These are not your words; this revelation has been given to you by God." God chose Peter to be the first one to say of Jesus, "You are the Christ."

**Seeing the Church as What is Built
by Christ Upon "This Rock"**

Giving New Meaning to an Old Word

The Lord continued by saying, "and I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My church." The word "church" was not a brand-new word, because it was used many places in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) for God's called-out people in the wilderness. The Lord's use of this word, however, gave it new meaning. Whether or not Peter knew this word is hard to say, but he may have understood it as "congregation." Due to the Lord's word, however, Peter understood "church" to mean something more than a group of people God called out and worked with. Now to Peter it meant something the Lord would build using the same revelation Peter had just received of Christ Himself.

***The Recipient of the Revelation:
Simon the Son of Jonah***

To whom did the Father reveal Christ, and to whom did Christ reveal His church? To this one who gave Him so much trouble. To this one who initially refused to give up his soggy boat and

old nets to follow Jesus. I do not believe Simon Peter was even that successful as a fisherman. Yet he was the one who later said to the Lord, “We have left all to follow You. What do we get?”(Mark 10:28) Doesn’t this sound ridiculous? Even on earth, Peter was rewarded by getting to accompany Jesus in His earthly ministry, and by being recognized as the leader among this notable band of disciples. If I were Peter, I would be ashamed to make the statement, “We have left all to follow You.” We should be encouraged that it was to such a one that the Father revealed His Son, and to whom the Son revealed His church.

***The Church Being Built upon
the Rock of the Revealed Christ***

What did Jesus mean when He said, “upon this revelation I will build My church”? First of all, it became clear that “the church” no longer could merely mean a group of people banded together. This group had now become something organic, for the Lord would build it as Eve had been “built” from Adam (Gen. 2:22 , original). Secondly, it was declared that all that Christ would work among this people would come solely out of what was revealed of Himself. The church Christ would build could never deviate from Himself. Nothing of human culture would be allowed to replace the revelation of Christ.

This is a great matter. We must realize that the church can never be built upon anything other than the revelation of Christ. We may appreciate certain brothers, but the Lord will not build the church with anything other than the revelation of Christ they minister. The Lord does not build the church upon them. The Lord did not say to Peter, “I will build my church upon you.” This may be what the Catholic Church teaches, but it is not what the Bible teaches.

The name “Peter” means “a stone” in Greek, whereas “rock” in Matthew 16:18 is a different, though closely related, word. It refers to something large that possesses the quality of rock, such as a foundational bedrock. This foundational “rock” is the revelation of Christ Himself. We thank the Lord that in the church there can be no other foundation. If we merely said this rock was Christ, that might be too doctrinal. That is why we must see that the rock with which Christ builds the church is the revealed Christ.

Therefore we should ask ourselves, how much has Christ been revealed to me? Some believers, after having had something of Christ revealed to them on the day they believed Jesus, never progress any further. That is all the revelation of Christ they have experienced. Although all believers are saved, and all believers have Christ, not all believers possess the same amount of the revelation of Christ.

Our usefulness to the Lord for the building up of His church is not strictly based upon our zeal, our character, our giftedness, or our knowledge of the truth. It is rather altogether a matter of how much revelation of Christ we have experienced. The Lord builds the church with the revealed Christ. What we have seen of Christ should be the very element that controls our lives.

Everyone wants to be appreciated and desires to be useful in something. For instance, we can become useful in an organization in the same manner that we can become useful in the church life. The church is not built up through such exercise if it is something apart from the revelation of Christ. The church can only be built up through what has been revealed of Christ to us. When our operation in the church life becomes something out of Christ’s revelation in us, then the church is being built up.

Some people love money. If offered three million dollars to move to a place in Alaska where there is no church, many would take it. Which would you choose: Christ or three million dollars? You have to say, according to the revelation of Christ I have seen in my spirit, I choose the church. But if I am in my flesh, I

might choose the three million dollars. Therefore we must have Christ unveiled to us, for apart from the unveiled Christ, we have no way to live the church life. And, the richer the Christ we experience through our revelation of Him, the more we will be able to follow Him and live our life according to Him. In this way, He will be able to build His church.

Brothers and sisters, we must help the saints to see Christ. Don't be bothered when they are drawn off by other things. Simply help them to see Christ. Once they see Jesus, they will drop the other things and choose Him. I left a good job to follow Christ, but I did not have any sense that I had lost anything, for I had seen Christ. I had become His follower.

Such revelation is not something you can arrive at from reading books or from meditation. Jesus told us that flesh and blood do not reveal to us who He is. It is the Father in the heavens who gives us the revelation of Christ. Only through such revelation can everything we know about Christ become real.

The Apostle Paul's Revelation: The Heavenly Body of Christ and the Local Church

Saul, a Person on Fire with Religious Zeal

In Acts 9, we are told what Saul experienced while he was on his way to Damascus, "breathing threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). It is difficult to believe that Saul at that time was so determined to wipe out the churches that he would even murder the Lord's followers!

Saul was witness to Stephen's murder. Perhaps he even played a part in instigating his stoning, for he was extremely zealous, and a leader by nature. He might have kept his hands clean by guarding the clothes of those who did the actual stoning, but he was there approving it.

Seeing the Heavenly, Great Corporate “Me”

From this we can see that it is more serious to be religious than it is to be worldly. Those in the world realize that “the love of the Father is not in them.” When you watch a movie, you probably know that you are not doing the Lord’s will. A religious person, however, may in name of God zealously carry out things totally against God while thinking he is doing God’s work. Saul was such a zealous person. As he drew near to Damascus, however, a heavenly light shined all about him, and he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4) The voice did not say to him, “Why are you persecuting my saints?” In this very word Saul saw a great light. In the light from the heavens, there was a voice, and certainly behind a voice, there is a person. And this person was saying, “Saul, you persecuted Stephen. Saul, you are now persecuting many others. Yet those you are persecuting are ME. You are breathing out threatening and murder against ME. Those you persecute are part of ME.”

What a light this is! And what a great advance from what Peter saw! Peter saw an individual Christ who would build His church. Paul’s revelation was much more concrete. Paul saw that Christ was one with His believers, who were now His organic Body. In Paul’s vision, Christ has become enlarged. He is no longer just the individual Christ. Through resurrection, He has begotten all His believers, who have become the members of His Body. Saints, we should appreciate who we are! We are Christ’s Body!

If Saul had not been so subdued by this revelation of the heavenly Christ in glory, he might have been tempted to argue, “Lord, how can You say these who believe in You are You? Are they as perfect as You are? Are they living as You all the time?” To this the Lord might have responded, “Well, they are on their way, and My blood covers them.” Saul could have said then, “Well, I should be rewarded, then, for my persecution has caused them to turn to You and grow more.” But he was not in this realm. When we consider the saints in the church life, are they not all headaches? Doesn’t every one of us have problems and weaknesses? Are we not many times natural and even sinful? Yet

it seems as if the Lord does not care about this, for He says, “When you touch this believer, You are touching Me. When you persecute this brother or sister, you are persecuting Me. You must respect not only Me, but also all My members.”

Jesus says, “When You touch one of My believers, You are touching me.” But from another angle, Saul persecuted those who were standing for the Lord. It may be that Saul would not even consider persecuting some of us, for we may not have such a testimony that we are one of the Lord’s people. Our manner of life may instead disqualify us from being persecuted by Saul; he might have just passed us by if he saw us on the street. Saul sought out those who called on the name of the Lord. He was after those who stood with the Lord for His testimony.

Follow Christ, Share in the Persecution of Jesus

In this there is one matter of which we must be very clear. When we follow Christ, we will experience Jesus. The Lord did not say to Saul, “I am the resurrected Christ.” Instead, He said, “I am Jesus under your persecution.” Here the revelation has advanced in such a sweet way, for in it we see not merely the Body being one with Christ, but also enduring persecution as the followers of Jesus. The Lord desires that we would all be overcomers standing with Him and gaining Him in this process that involves suffering for His name’s sake.

Whom do we follow? We follow Christ. Whom do we experience as we follow Christ? We experience Jesus, the One who left everything for the sake of God’s will, who sought nothing for Himself, who existed only for the purpose of satisfying God’s heart. This is Jesus. You have to be His follower and stand with Him. If this is your testimony, expect to be identified as one of His followers by those who are His persecutors, for you are not only a member of the Body of Christ; you have the reality of the Body of Christ.

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