

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DIVINE REVELATIONS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE THREE: PETER'S APPLICATION OF THE VISION HE RECEIVED

In the previous two messages we have considered the revelation of Christ and the church as received by Peter, Paul, and John. Now we will begin to examine how this revelation affected their life and labor. In what way did they apply the revelation of Christ and the church they received?

PETER'S REVELATION: JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD AND THE CHURCH THE LORD WOULD BUILD

What Peter saw of Christ was relatively simple and straightforward. In this initial revelation, Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus joyfully responded to Peter's declaration by saying, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." Thus it can be seen that, from the beginning, this revelation of Christ and the church has God's economy in view.

The Lord's statement that He would build His church was not something of doctrine to Peter. Peter was faithful to the revelation he received. In Peter, that revelation became effective.

Peter was Faithful to the Vision He Received

I believe that many times we receive the Lord's speaking and revelation, and we see something. Even when you don't understand all that is being spoken in a meeting, you still see something. In that environment you are very joyful. But how do

we apply what we have seen? Often we go home and turn on the television, and the vision we have received disappears. You may have seen a vision, but you may not have been faithful to the vision that was given to you. The Lord gives us to see something, and then expects that we would be faithful to what He has shown us. We may not have seen that much, but we must learn to be faithful to what we have seen.

When we see the Lord, we will have to answer to Him for what we have received. To those whom much is given, much is expected. We should not think that on that day, we all will fare about the same. No! Some will shine greater, and some will shine less. The Lord will ask us, “How faithful have you been to the revelations you have received.” You may say, “I was in this conference and gave a good testimony, and in this meeting I was quite excited and happy, and upon hearing this word I made a vow,” and so on. But what the Lord will want to know is: Have we lived according to what He has revealed to us? Or have we given in to compromise? Though what Peter saw may have been less than what Paul or John eventually saw, he remained faithful to the vision he received throughout all his life. To do so, he often had to endure hardship and suffering. It is not a small thing to a human being to live uncompromisingly according to what God has shown him.

We should note that, while Peter’s revelation may not have been as profound as those received by Paul and John, but he did receive a special gift. The keys of the kingdom of the heavens were given unto him. Perhaps his glory will not match Paul or John’s in the coming kingdom (though it may), yet neither Paul nor John opened the door of the church life to the Jews and to the Gentiles. That was given to Peter, who used the first key for the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and the second key for the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. Paul taught us that “star would differ from star” in the coming age (1 Cor. 15:41-42), but I believe that we will all continue to grow in glory as we enjoy the Lord throughout eternity. So eventually we may all grow to the same degree of glory. We will have an unlimited amount of time to know the unlimited Christ and His unlimited supply of riches.

We Should Not Compromise When It Comes To What We Have Seen of Christ

The human life is a life of compromise. When raising children, we are told to “pick your battles.” In other words, learn to compromise. When you are in a class, and the teacher is wrong about something, you learn not to “rock the boat.” We compromise. At work, in order to get along with others, you learn not to raise certain issues. Even in the church life, we may compromise on certain matters. But in the life of faith, there can be no compromise.

Peter’s Ministry Focused on the Crucified Jesus and Resurrected Christ

Peter’s ministry focused on Jesus being crucified and being made Christ. This was the substance of his messages in Acts. And through Peter’s preaching, thousands were added to the church. His message was direct and powerful: “This Jesus, whom you have crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ! You killed the Author of Life, but God raised Him from the dead and we are His witnesses!” His message was very clear. His message was based upon the revelation he had received. Jesus Christ was revealed to him, so Jesus Christ is who he preached, and nothing else. Oh, it is not an easy thing to preach Jesus only; it is much easier to preach Christ “plus”! It should be your vision that decides your message. Those who are spiritual bear this mark.

Because of his revelation, Peter was a person who became bold to the uttermost. On the day of Pentecost, when he walked out to face that huge crowd, the other apostles may have expected to be stoned to death. Peter didn’t care. He stood up and said, “You crucified Him. God has raised Him. You want to kill me also?” Eventually three thousand repented, and his teaching became the teaching of the whole church (Acts 2:42). We must learn to be faithful to what God has revealed to us, regardless what confronts us.

Peter's Living was in and for the Local Churches

Peter applied what he saw of Christ in his ministry. What, though, became the sphere of his living? The local churches.

When Peter first lived among the saints, he performed many notable miracles. To one who was crippled he said, "Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). I like this kind of person. He may not be able to give you money, but he can give you Christ! And when he gives you Christ, you will no longer be under the bondage of money! You will no longer be under the bondage of sin! You will no longer be under bondage to the world! You will be released to walk, jump, dance, and praise God!

Peter was so prevailing that people even laid the sick in the streets hoping that his shadow might fall upon them so they might be healed (Acts 5:15). This never even happened with the Lord when He was on the earth (cf. John 14:12).

Sometimes when we are with a spiritual man we have this experience. We may come with many questions, but when we come into his presence, our questions disappear. I had this experience with Brother Lee. I had a lot to ask, but when I came into the room and saw him there smiling at me, all my questions disappeared!

Peter Was Initially Prevailing as He Applied His Revelation

This was Peter's situation. His preaching was the most successful. His teaching was the most prevalent. His works of power were the most miraculous. And his leadership was unquestioned. The church, under his leadership, was at peace. It was a wonderful time. The saints were fellowshiping from house to house and were enjoying the fellowship and teaching of the apostles according to Peter's revelation. New ones were being added to the church daily. We can only guess at how many

thousands of believers there were in the church at that time, for in the first instance when Peter spoke, three thousand were baptized (Acts 2:41), and on the second instance it seems another five thousand were saved (Acts 4:4).

Everything seemed so prevailing in the church life. Peter had used the keys delivered to him by the Lord to unlock the truth of the Body of Christ to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Through him, the door of salvation had been opened so that they might both brought into one Body. Peter accomplished this with his visit to Cornelius' house in Acts 10. Right after this, however, the Bible reveals that something was beginning to change in the church life. In Acts 11:1, Luke writes, "And the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God." Now another influential group appears in the church life besides the apostles, called here "the brothers." It was those of this group "who were of the circumcision" who disputed with Peter about his going to the Gentiles with the gospel (v.2).

Eventually, as we will see, this Jewish influence continued to grow until we read only about "brothers," and no longer about any apostles. This all took place within a few years.

Peter's Operation in the New Situation in the Church in Jerusalem

Were these "brothers" joyful when they heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God? No! They disputed with Peter. Perhaps they said, "How dare you preach to Gentile dogs!" Those of the circumcision were those who believed in Jesus, and yet also insisted on Jewish practices such as circumcision and keeping the observances of the Law. And who was the one this group most respected? Undoubtedly it was James. He was likely this group's chosen leader. In the beginning, the twelve apostles were the undisputed leaders in the church in Jerusalem. Gradually, however, James' influence began to grow. This was very likely due to his relationship with Jesus, for he was Jesus' brother (Gal. 1:19; Matt. 13:55).

James could tell people stories about growing up with Jesus and all the things Jesus said and did the first thirty years of His life. Those who believed in Jesus would have been impressed by hearing that James ate the same dinner table with Jesus all those years, and how Jesus took care of James, his younger brother. Peter would have no such testimony. He could not even testify that he had followed the Lord as long as John had!

James' influence in the church life came to challenge that of the apostles. He began to teach in the church. Perhaps he told the saints, "You know, Jesus always went up three times a year to Jerusalem to keep the set feasts." If someone questioned circumcision, James might have said, "Jesus Himself was circumcised!" Peter could have reminded everyone how the Lord had accompanied his ministry with so many works of power, but Peter was not interested in struggling for power in the church.

It was Paul who fought the fight for the faith among the churches. If it were not for him and for the revelations he received, we might all today be but a branch of Judaism. Peter did not have the ability to refute the Judaizers in the church life, but Paul did. We shall see more of this later.

Eventually the church in Jerusalem became a great society. Paul was even told, "observe, brother, how many tens of thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20). Perhaps there were fifty thousand believers in Jerusalem at that time. But were they still going on steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship? Were they breaking bread from house to house? Were they still seeing people being added daily? All these things had become secondary. What had become primary was, "Who is circumcised, and who is uncircumcised? Who is keeping the law of Moses, and who is not?" I believe it was this religious element that drove out the apostles and many of those who had believed in the first days of the church. This is why, in Acts 11, some would dare ask Peter why he went to visit a Gentile. How ugly this is! This should be a warning to all of us, for when someone gets caught up with religion, they seem to lose some of their reason.

The more we love the Lord, the more we have to cling to Christ Himself. We must keep our focus firmly fixed on Christ alone. Otherwise, so many other things might come in to replace Christ and carry us away.

Peter's report to the church in Jerusalem about the Gentiles receiving the gospel should have been received with joy. There should have been a delegation of leading brothers and saints there at the gate to greet him when he returned. But there was no welcoming committee when he arrived. He probably realized that something was wrong, but he still went dutifully to the elders' meeting, where he found himself in the hot seat.

To me, this is nearly unbelievable. Should not every believer rejoice when they hear another soul has found the Savior? This was the beginning of Peter's experience of persecution from within the church. And once people lose their respect for someone in this way, even when you convince them in one matter, they will find other matters with which to accuse you.

Who are those "of the circumcision" (Acts 11:2)? They are any who lay hold of something in the church life besides Christ alone. If we hold on to any teaching or doctrine in the church life that is apart from Christ, we are liable to become such a disputer. Christ alone must be the unique source and person in the church life.

In a period of just a few years, the church life had changed greatly in Jerusalem. Another group had arisen which began to insist on things other than Christ. In chapter 12, Peter encountered political persecution as well. Both those in the church and those outside the church were now seeking his demise. Nobody seemed to be standing with him. He found himself again in jail. An angel came to release him, and when he came to himself, he did not go as he did the first time into the temple to preach the gospel. Peter's reaction this time indicates he had become a different person. He has lost his buoyancy, his boldness. He could only say, "I now know that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me out of the hand of Herod, and from the

expectation of the Jewish people.” Then he went to Mary’s house, where they at first supposed it was his ghost! He motioned to them to be silent, perhaps because he was afraid of being found out again. He told them how the Lord had delivered him from prison. Then he said, “Report these things to James and the brothers,” and immediately went to another place (Acts 12:17).

In Spite of the Situation, Peter Kept the Oneness

To my feeling, this is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Where were the apostles the Lord had raised up? They likely had been driven out, or perhaps had simply lost their effectiveness. Now those in the lead were those James had raised up. Their word was now what counted in the church in Jerusalem. Yet Peter accepted the situation. It was not right for James to have taken over the church life as he did. But Peter desired to keep the oneness of the Body.

He would keep the oneness, even if it meant his death. He would still love the brothers. He would not cause any division in the Body even though he be the one who was wronged. Therefore I feel this verse reveals something so spiritual to us.

We often sing songs about how we are one, but the true oneness comes only when you know how to die. If you do not know how to die, there can be no oneness. Oneness is the fruit of your death in Christ. Here Peter experienced it. Where were the apostles? They seemingly had disappeared from the church in Jerusalem. So he said, “Report these things to James and the brothers.”

Then he escaped. He immediately moved to another location. He probably realized that if he remained in Jerusalem, he probably be hunted down and killed by Herod, and none would intervene. How far off the church life had become from the original situation!

Most scholars feel Peter was gone from Jerusalem for about five years. He possibly returned when Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to take part in the council that discussed what should

be required of the Gentile believers. He could no longer operate in Jerusalem, but he still loved the church. He still cared for the Lord's testimony. Therefore he was present to give his testimony, arguing that nothing should be demanded of the Gentile believers beyond their salvation through grace (Acts 15:7-11). But he had no say in the final decision. It was James who made the decisive concluding remarks. Peter's leadership in the church in Jerusalem was over.

Can anyone understand this? The brother who had brought three thousand and five thousand into the church life through his preaching, the brother who worked such works of power, the brother who established the testimony in Jerusalem as the leading one among the Lord's twelve apostles - this brother eventually had to leave Jerusalem due to changes that took place over a short span of about ten years.

**In Spite of All that Happened to Him,
Peter Never Stopped Operating in the Church Life
According to the Revelation He Received**

After this record of his appearance in the council in Jerusalem, there is no further record of Peter in the book of Acts. He seems to have disappeared, but praise the Lord for his Epistles! In the last verse of his first Epistle we find that he is still in the church life. He tells us, "Don't think I've left the church life. I have left the so-called central line; I may not be in the "flow" anymore, for I am no longer in Jerusalem. I am sorry, I am not able to help the saints in Jerusalem anymore, for I am not able to carry out what the Lord revealed to me in that place. But I am still with the saints and ministering in the church life."

PAUL'S EXPERIENCE CONFRONTING THE JUDAISTIC INFLUENCE

The situation in Jerusalem becomes even clearer when we read of Paul's visit in Acts 21. It was then that Paul was told that many thousands in the church there were zealous for the law of Moses (v. 20). Why would they not say, "they are all zealous after CHRIST"? Why weren't they lovers of Christ? Why couldn't they say there were pursuing after Christ? In that atmosphere, even Peter became affected. Paul tells us that he was visiting Antioch and enjoying dinner with the saints, but changed his seat at the table to get away from the Gentile believers when it was learned that some had come from James (Gal. 2:11-15). Paul rebuked Peter in front of the entire assembly right as he was carrying his plate to another table. He had been enjoying fellowship with the Gentile believers. What had happened to him? He was no longer the bold Peter we read of in the early chapters of the book of Acts. He became weak in the presence of this powerful group, those who were from James.

This group of people traveled from church to church just to check on people, and some among this group even purposely tracked Paul so that they could visit the new churches he established in order to tell them, "What Paul has taught you is not enough. In addition to believing in Jesus, you need to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses." This is why Paul had to write Galatians and other Epistles. In them he made it so clear that we should not care for the Jewish observances any longer. If it were not for Paul, the testimony of faith in Christ alone would have been lost.

Although Peter did not fight as Paul did, we should remember that Peter had no one who stood with him in Jerusalem. It seems as if all the apostles had been exiled, or perhaps simply left. It is hard to say what happened to them. Peter himself might have been to Corinth, although the remarks concerning him in that book may be due to some who appreciated him, or some who labored with him. But we do know that at least he was still standing for the Lord in Babylon with others who were also "co-

chosen”. Praise the Lord! Peter had been through so much, and was still in the Lord’s recovery. He was still struggling and fighting for what the Lord was after. It seems he had regained some of his buoyancy.

**PETER’S EPISTLES REVEAL THAT HE STILL
MINISTERED CHRIST, THE CHURCH, THE WORD,
AND THE DIVINE NATURE FOR A PROPER HUMANITY**

More of the operation of Peter’s ministry can be seen when we read his two Epistles. Peter testified that all the saints were living stones who were to be built into a living house (1 Pet. 2:5). He also testified how he had seen Christ in glory, and had heard Him (2 Pet. 1:17). Thus, Peter is still exercising under the controlling vision of Christ and the church he received in the beginning at Caesarea Philippi. He also told the saints that they needed to long after the guileless milk of the word like newborn babies (1 Pet. 2:2). No matter how long we have been saved, we still need the pure milk of the word. We need to enjoy the pure milk of the word daily that we may grow unto salvation. Peter also tells us that we must practice the church life as those who are partakers of the divine nature of God. (2 Pet. 1:4) Because He has given us His divine nature, we should live out so many human virtues (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

When Peter teaches, he focuses upon four things - firstly, Christ; secondly, the building up of the church; third, the pure milk of the word; and fourth, taking care of our humanity. We have the divine nature already. Since we possess such a rich divine nature, we can add into it and develop out from it so many human virtues for our living in the church life. In this way we can become well-pleasing to the Lord. We thank the Lord that Peter, in his ministry, remained faithful to the revelation he originally received from the Lord.

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