



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Date: 3rd October 2010

Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

Background of the reading

There are many things I would like to explain in our reading this morning in order for us to grasp the meaning of the Greek text.

In the first place we need to understand that Matthew's Gospel was written to a Jewish congregation who converted to Christendom. They were still very much clinging on to their Jewish outlook and ideas and were finding it hard to come to terms with the radical new outlook of Jesus Christ's teachings. For one, the revelation of God would always happen in the Holy Land. In our reading Matthew is speaking of the revelation of God to Peter *not* in the Holy Land but near a Gentile frontier town located on the southern slope of Mt. Hermon at one of the sources of the Jordan River. The site was known in antiquity as a shrine of the Greek and Roman nature god, Pan. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Caesar Augustus gave the city, to Herod the Great. When Herod's son Philip became tetrarch of the region, he rebuilt the city and renamed it after the emperor and himself to distinguish it from the other city Caesarea on the shore of the Mediterranean Coast.

I think the congregation was quite shocked by this piece of information!

The people and the disciples did not really know who Jesus was. In a rhetorical question Jesus asks who the people think He is. They then say: "John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets! And then Jesus turns to them the disciples and asks them: who do you personally think I am. It is then that Simon Peter says that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is

the first time anyone in Matthew's Gospel has given Jesus the title *Christ* ('the Messiah'), though Matthew himself has used it in several passages.

Then Jesus responded with a typical blessing of those times. The name "Barjonah" is Aramaic for "son of Jonah." Originally in the text it says that this was not revealed to him by flesh and blood. "Flesh and blood" was a typical Jewish phrase for "human being(s)." It was most certainly revealed by God himself although Matthew ignores the word "God" because he is writing to converted Jews who would obey the command not to use the name of God in vain.

Then because of his insight Jesus went on to say that since Peter's name means rock his insight that Jesus is the Christ will be the foundation/rock of his church on earth. Matthew uses wordplay to get his message across. And this message - that Jesus is the Christ will prevail even against "the gates of Hades".

WHAT ARE THESE GATES OF HADES?

In the GREEK TRANSLATION of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament Hades is almost always a rendering of sheoul. In the OT this signifies the dark "realm of the dead" which is set beneath the ocean and which consigns all men indiscriminately behind its portals to an eternal shadowy existence.

Under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic ideas concerning retribution after death the belief arose that the righteous and the godless would have very different fates, and we thus have the development of the idea of "spatial separation" in the underworld between the righteous and the ungodly whereby the righteous will live forever albeit in a heavenly sphere awaiting their resurrection from death. The ungodly will remain forever in the underworld in Hades! According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus the Pharisees held this view. The belief in the immortality led to the idea that the souls of the righteous proceed at once to heavenly felicity after death, there to await their resurrection. In consequence the term Hades came to be used only of the "place of punishment" for ungodly souls in the underworld.

This third development was still taking place in the time of Jesus, as may be seen from the fact that Jesus Himself knows the second conception according to which the souls of the righteous are in the underworld as well as those of the ungodly and yet is also familiar with the third conception now in process of infiltration, namely, that the souls of the righteous are in Paradise. To this co-existence of two conceptions of Hades in the time of the NT there corresponds

a twofold use of the word Hades. On the one side, in accordance with the older view, it denotes the whole sphere of the dead; on the other, it denotes only the everlasting stay of the souls of the ungodly. The fact that there were these different views as to which souls are in Hades, and for how long, meant that there were great variations on this question in the Judaism of NT days.

It was believed that the underworld was protected by strong iron gates. I think the meaning is clear: not even this strong fortification/underworld/world of darkness and death will be able to have an influence on the fact that Jesus is the Christ and anyone that confesses Him as their Lord and Savior.

And this shall be the key for anyone to enter into the kingdom of heavens as it is in the plural Greek form. No one – not even the dark underworld will be able to pluck these keys out of the hands of the followers of Jesus!

The keeper of the keys was one of the most important roles a household servant could hold in those days; a high official held the keys in a royal kingdom and in God's house, the temple. Keys here refer to the authority to admit into the kingdom, based on the knowledge of the truth about Jesus. An ancient sacred community that existed in biblical times, The Qumran community also had officials deciding whether to admit members; the decision was made based on the prospective member's acceptance of the community's rule of life.

Many Jews felt that the Jewish high court acted on the authority of God's tribunal in heaven, in a sense ratifying its decrees. "Binding" and "loosing" were terms regularly used for rabbis' legislative authority in interpreting Scripture ("prohibiting" and "permitting"), and thus could apply to judicial situations as well.

Amen

Sermon

Keys are some of the most irritating things on this earth. If you lose them you are lost and cannot do anything. How many times have you lost your keys? I bet a million times just like me. And there are many forms of keys. You get keys on your computer to unlock your personal details. We, everyone who believes

in Jesus Christ's redemption have also received the key to enter into the eternal kingdom of God.

Now the question is what we do with this precious key that we received in faith as a gracious gift from God.

Do we use it to unlock to others the joys of knowing God, the peace of having His presence every moment of everyday and His love that is everlasting?

Do we use this key to unlock and end each form of abuse and bondage that we see around us?

Do we use it to unlock to others the freedom of having a meaningful relationship with God?

Do we use it to tell others about the fact that God is always and ever present, that He never ever goes on holiday and that He never ever goes back on His word?

Or do we use it as a weapon. I remember in my first year at University – I took Criminology as a subject. We once had a lecture on how to be vigilant and safe in society. I remember that the lady professor told the girls in our class to always use their car keys as a weapon in any event that they are attacked while opening their cars in the dark. And I am quite sure that we sometimes also use our key, our salvation in Jesus Christ as a weapon to either play power games in the congregation (we are so important because we have a super faith and no one not even the minister can tell me how to interpret scripture) or to be selfish with the love that we received from God in Jesus Christ!

And when this happens I can almost hear the horrible creaking sound of the gates of HADES. I must be honest that I heard this horrible sound almost on a daily basis this week:

- in the many telephone calls I had to handle where people of this congregation are unhappy because they cannot understand why some people are doing what they are doing whilst we all know and trust that everyone is called by God for a certain task,
- where our people are gossiping on the street corners of the village trying to undermine the good relationships I have with the admin personnel, organist, the members of the band, the leaders and even the members of this congregation.
- where our people are telling "stories" or actually spreading lies as far as they go just for the sake of a good fight in the church;
- where people cannot see the sun shining on others,

- where people are talking about the things I say in confidence, and using them as a weapon to tell others how important they are;

Now after I studied this text I feel quite uplifted after a terrible week because I know now that not even all the bad things that we do/say to each other in church, or outside the church will “harm” the sure foundation of Christ’s church. Jesus Christ is our sure foundation! He is in control.

If we use our key as weapons, we must surely know/realise what weapons can do. It is negative and destructive. It does not build on the sure foundation of God’s love. If we cannot have compassion between the members of our congregation we cannot have compassion for other people that is literally living lives of hell around the world. Then we are hypocrites!

So let us strive first of all to love each one in this congregation as God first loved us before we do anything else! We are all advocates of God’s kingdom. Let us do what the advocates do of the compassion charity: promoting and living the values of the eternal kingdom of God!

Do you have the “right key” to enter the kingdom of heavens one day? I mean do you confess with your life that Jesus is the Christ, your only Saviour!

Amen