

PETER'S CONFESSION OF FAITH.

A

Sermon

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Preached by Mr. HAZELTON,

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AT MOUNT ZION CHAPEL, CHADWELL STREET, CLERKENWELL,

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ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, 18<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1887.

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am ? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living Cod. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."— Matthew. 16: 15—17}.

Peter was an extraordinary man, and he often spoke for his brethren, and was mouth for them on this particular occasion. His Master said, "I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this Rock [which you have now confessed] I will build My church" and thou shalt be a living stone thereof, and occupy a place upon Myself as its firm foundation, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Now, I say this portion of the Word of God has been fulfilled from year to year, and from one month to another, until the present moment. The gates of hell have attempted to prevail against the church, and rivers (so to speak) of blood have been shed in connection with a public profession of religion. The gates of hell and the powers of darkness

have always been opposed to God's dear Son, and His cause and interest in the world; but we leave that, however, and glance at the fact, " I will build My church upon this Rock." Where is the church of God now? In God the Father, and in His Son Jesus Christ. The church is upon Christ, the Rock of eternal ages; and let us bless God, dear friends, for this. Whatever may happen in the world, Christ's church is safe. Kingdoms may fall, politics may change, and change greatly too, and thrones and empires may tumble down, the church of God will stand firmly until the end of time ; and then it will appear in full perfection and glory in a better world for ever. The Scriptures cannot be broken; for He who said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," will see that this word be fulfilled unto the end.

*"What though the gates of hell withstood,  
Yet must this building rise;  
'Tis Thy own work, Almighty God,  
And wondrous in our eyes."*

Families are dissolved, societies are breaking up, and all nature is changing; but the church of God is saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and can never, never be destroyed. Let us, however, confine attention to the words we have read.

There are four points to be noticed; I will mention them as I proceed, and offer a few remarks upon each of them. In the first place we have an important question: He saith unto them, not unto Peter singly or separately: "But whom, say ye that I am?" Let us tarry here a few minutes, and try to look at this great question. In general affairs public opinion goes for something, I dare say; but it goes for little or

nothing in the things of God. The Saviour had previously put a question to His disciples; "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man am?" Not that our Lord thought or cared for public opinion; and yet, determined to pave His way to this question, He asked of His disciples, " Whom do men say that I am?" In the first question He introduces the words, "the Son of man," but in the text that phrase is left out. "Whom say ye that I am?" In answer to the first question, the disciples said, "Some say that Thou, art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias or one of the prophets. That is the opinion of the people. "But whom say ye that I am? What think ye of Christ? Let us not go out of doors into the world for a correct view of the Saviour. Let us look at the Word of God, and hold it up to our experience, and see how we compare with the gospel. If that Christ who is formed in our hearts, the hope of glory, is the Christ who appears in the glorious gospel of God's grace, we are safe to all the intents of bliss. " Whom say ye that I am ?" The thought strikes me here, that our dear Lord always turns His mind, as it were, towards and upon Himself; He always directs our attention to Himself; He always makes Himself very prominent and conspicuous, and is always determined to magnify Himself. It was perfectly right that it should be so on His part; for He was, and is, and ever will be, the greatest being in the universe. It is your privilege and mine to magnify Him, to speak well of His name, and to see that He is exalted, if possible, not only above all that is within and without, but above all blessing and praise in heaven. I should be a happy man if I could lift or raise the Saviour in my own heart above all the evil that dwells therein ; and if I could set

my Lord above all the circumstances which surround me, and keep my eye steadily fixed upon Him. My days would pass quietly away, and my nights would be calm and serene. Is it not a fact in connection with our experience, that we are so prone to magnify the creature, and our troubles, and to so magnify the nature and consequences of sin, that we almost lose sight of the great and glorious Immanuel, the blessed, the ever-reigning Christ of God. He is greater than the greatest, and higher than the highest, and stronger than the strongest; are these contradictions, or am I using superfluous words? There are men that are of the strongest; but our Lord is stronger than they. Devils are stronger than men; but our Lord is stronger than they. There are thrones which are comparatively high here, but His is the highest throne; and there are crowns that glitter much in this world; but on His head are many crowns, and it is our mercy that it is so. Brethren, let Christ be magnified in our life, our experience, and our progress through the world, as He will be in eternity. Yes, the Saviour turned His eyes upon Himself, and it was perfectly just on His part to do so, and ask the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" I should not like to ask my friends for their opinion of myself as a man, as a Christian, or as a minister. It is for me, for you, and for all God's people, to turn their attention away from themselves as much as possible to the dear and blest Redeemer; but it was the grand prerogative of Jesus Christ to stand out prominently before everybody and everything, and to place Himself above all, and say, " Whom say ye that I am?" If we have low ideas of our Lord, we are in a strange position; but if He is our dear Lord, and we have been bought with His

blood, and have some humble knowledge of that fact, our ideas and estimate of Him will not be low. We shall labor under the weight of His great name, and feel how heavy is His glory, and lament our weakness and inability to raise Him to the position which He has a right to occupy.

Now, I take it, my friends that in the first place our Lord appealed to the faith of His disciples. "Whom say ye that I am?" We read in the 53rd of Isaiah, that when Jesus Christ should appear, the world, and especially the Jewish world, would see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. I am glad that the Holy Ghost has been pleased to add these words, "that we should desire Him;" for otherwise in this wonderful day of ours the world professes to see moral beauty in the character of the Messiah. They express this very guardedly, for they do not know Him, and their utterances are as dry as chips, if I may so speak. The infidel sees it; for a celebrated man who died a few years ago admitted that the character of the Messiah was very beautiful. Therefore the Holy Ghost has been pleased to add the words, "that we should desire Him." Our Lord appealed to the faith of His believing disciples. Their faith was not very deep, or vigorous, or strong; nevertheless they did believe in God, and in their Lord and Master; and He appealed to their faith: "Whom say ye that I am?" What are your convictions, your thoughts, your feelings, your experience? "For, as believers in Me you have convictions, and they are deep, and concerning My person they are correct and true; therefore, whom say ye that I am, O that our faith may be of that kind which animated the heart of Peter, and which elicited from the Master

this benediction, — “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.” The people of God sometimes wonder whether their faith be a saving faith or not. The devil is permitted at times to cover their minds with darkness, and to utterly conceal from their eyes the nature of the good work which is going on within, and they stumble and draw conclusions which are as far from the truth as the heavens are from the earth. My dear friends, we cannot do without a living faith in the heart, and we can no more do without its great Author than the world can do without the influences of the natural sun. The soil which produces what man requires, may in itself be good and rich; but however excellent it may be, it requires the sun, the wind, and the rain, and other influences must be in perpetual operation, or all will become barren and desolate. As it is in nature, so it is in grace in this respect. Your heart may have been changed, and a living faith rooted therein, and that faith may have embraced the Saviour again and again; yet you are not independent of the great Author of faith, nor of the influences of heavenly love and rich and reigning grace. These are absolutely necessary; for if God hides His face we die; at least, our pleasure dies, and our spirituality withers. Therefore may the Sun of Righteousness ever shine, may His warming influences ever enter and ever pervade our hearts and minds, and may that faith which worketh by love embrace the dear, and sweet, and precious name of Jesus; so that we may be always ready to give a reason of the hope that is within us, with meekness and fear.

Then again, I think our Lord appealed to the experience of His

disciples. This as to its spiritual power and reality perhaps was not very deep, yet, inasmuch as they believed in Christ, they had a measure of what is designated Christian experience. "Whom say ye that I am?" Who am I, and what am I to you? The Master would know from their own lips what He was in their estimation, and to their hearts. What am I in myself, and what am I to you? I do not suppose the words occurred to the mind of Peter, but methinks if they had he would have given utterance to them: "Thou art the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." Why, it was Peter, who said, after our dear Lord had delivered certain truths, and many of His followers left Him, and walked no more with Him, and He had said, "Will ye also go away?" "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

*"Depart from Christ! 'tis death ! 'tis more!*

*'Tis endless ruin ! deep despair !*

I may hold my Saviour in a very awkward manner, and exercise my little faith upon His name very incoherently; yet, if I love His precious name, and have a measure of holy experience of what He is, and can say at times with the church of God, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem!" perfection will come by and bye. I may be cast down and distressed because I am not perfect here and now, yet perfection certainly will come; for sight must follow faith, and fruition must follow hope. Turn your eyes within—I do not often invite you to do this—look into the deepest recesses of your soul, and say what Jesus Christ is to you? A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, a perfect character, an amiable Being, that

Being who gave rise to Christianity, and upon whose name the church of God is built. Ah, my friends, can you not go a little deeper? Does not the name of Jesus Christ go through and through your heart? Are there not moments when that dear name absorbs you altogether, and you are completely lost for a few moments in the great and glorious name of the Saviour? As the fish in the sea is at home, and remains there until it be caught or die, so the child of God would ever be immersed in the great name of the Redeemer. In the glorious ocean of everlasting love He would dive, and bathe, and live; and as the fish finds its food in the ocean which is its home, so the believer finds his satisfaction and his all in the Christ whom his heart desires to love. O that we could love Him more, and serve Him better; lift Him higher, and realize more of the infinite sweetness and boundless preciousness of His great and holy name.

Now, our knowledge of Christ has a considerable influence in forming our character. Religious knowledge, as it is called, always exercises a powerful influence upon character. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. Their doctrine was leaven, which diffuses itself through the whole mass, and doctrines diffuse their influence through the character. If our knowledge of Jesus Christ be true and spiritual, our character will be true and spiritual also. Persons repudiate doctrines in the day in which we live, but be sure you never do so; for notwithstanding their position and the manner in which people speak against the doctrines of grace, the doctrines one holds always have their influence upon character. The Pharisees and Sadducees were what they were owing to the influence of the



doctrines they held; and hence the Master says, "But whom say ye that I am;" knowing well that their knowledge of His name had a great influence upon their whole life. Let me ever know the Lord as saved sinners know Him, and know Him so as to love Him intensely and increasingly, and my character will be acceptable in the sight of God. I want you to notice another point for a moment. Your estimate of Christ will influence you in forming an estimate of other matters. "Whom say ye that I am?" Thou art my all in all. Well then, what do you think of sin? I hate and loathe it. No being hates all sin unless he knows and loves the Lord. What is your estimate of yourself? A man's foes are those of his own household. Self I would tread under foot and never follow it. It is a mischievous power; Lord save me from myself. Enter my heart Thyself, and reign supremely and for ever there. What is your estimate of the world? "Well, I see no harm in spending an evening in the theatre, or in the dancing room, or in the music hall, or in this, that, or the other entertainment." I rather think, my friends, that if your estimate of the Saviour were higher than it is, your estimate of theatres, dancing halls, and so on, would be very low. You would have low ideas, opinions, and feelings, in regard to them. Let Christ sit high in my heart, and occupy the best seat therein, or let Him have my best and noblest affections, and you may have all the theatres, entertainments, and their worldliness for me.

*"Let worldly minds the world pursue,  
It has no charms for me."*

I once loved it, but I have been taught and brought to love another. I once saw beauties in it, but then I did not see the world from a proper

point of view, nor had I ever seen the greatest beauty in the universe. But having seen Christ, and having had to do with Him, the world has lost its charms. Self, I would trample in the dust; sin, I would divest myself of it, if I might and I could ; and I sometimes long for the time when I shall be wholly stripped of it, for mine eyes have seen the King in His beauty, and beheld the land that is very far off.

In the second place, observe the important confession of faith. It comes as an answer to this question. "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." What did the Saviour ask the question for? Not for information; He knew what their feelings were, and what their utterance would be. What may we suppose the Lord put the question for? To elicit this confession and to draw forth is expression of faith and experience. And Simon Peter, not merely for himself personally, but as mouth for the rest, said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Short but weighty; a very few words, but every word is full. "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." Here we have an important confession. They all believed the thing, and I suppose their faith was pretty much the same as to its measure in all their hearts. However, there was no dissentient, no difference, not one of them held back any portion of his faith. The whole eleven, excluding Judas; whether he was silent or not I do not know—the whole eleven godly men threw themselves for eternity upon that person who was their Master, and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." First, in this confession of faith the divinity of Jesus Christ is brought out prominently. "The Son of God?" When I was a younger man, I used to speak with a great deal of

fervour and zeal against Unitarianism and Socinianism. I suppose this is as a rule characteristic of young men; but I may be permitted to say to-day, though I am hardly such an one as John the aged, yet I am getting into years, and going down the hill, I am ready to say to-day with all the feeling I can command, that I do reject Unitarianism and Socinianism, and shall loathe it for ever. If I rob Christ of His Godhead, and reduce Him to a mere man, there is nothing in Him to save me. If He is only a man, a good man, a great man, the best man,—and I admit all that, yet He cannot save guilty sinners if He is no more than a man. I loathe the sentiment, and had almost said something more; but let me not express myself too strongly here. I loathe a sentiment, the result of the influence of which is to take the crown of divinity from the glorious head of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Secondly, not only did they believe in the divinity of the Lord, they believed that He was a divine person in the Godhead, the Son of the living God. If that does not indicate personality, where shall we look for it? What does indicate it? Christ was, and is, and ever will be one of the glorious persons in God, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Wonderful that Peter should have learned so much, and that the disciples should have seen so much in Him. Equal with the Father and with the Spirit. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Thirdly, it included His official work. Christ is Divine, and a Divine Person, but He is Christ the Anointed, the Messiah, the Mediator between God and man. The confession comprehends all the Gospel. The Mediator between God and man. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And what is

Christ to God and to His people? The great outlet of grace and mercy. Some of our towns have names which end with the word "mouth," to indicate that their rivers are connected with the sea, such as Yarmouth and so on. Now what the river is to that part where it is connected with the sea that the Lord Jesus Christ is to this poor desert world and His dear people that are in it. Christ the Mediator is God's gracious mouth, through which He pours all His spiritual blessings into this poor dying world of ours. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter saw God in the man Christ. He saw Deity in Him behind His flesh, His human nature, His poverty, and His humiliation. His deity was veiled; but every now and then His Godhead broke out, "And they beheld His glory, (the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." The important confession.

Thirdly, the important revelation : " Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." . Bar-jona, the son of Jona or Jonas. Our Saviour referred Peter for a minute to His natural name and state. I do not know whether Peter's father was a good man or otherwise. The Lord Jesus Christ did not say how it was; but He knew his father and said, " Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona but when you were educated, trained and instructed, the revelation of Myself formed no part of the work of teaching ; "for flesh and blood hath not revealed this fact unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." We are told that children come into the world perfectly pure and clean, and that they are just ready to receive like a clean sheet of writing paper what parents and others may impart to them.

Well, whatever a child may bring with itself into the world, it brings no grace, nor the germ of saving religion, for that is subsequently revealed and given. "My Father which is heaven has revealed it to you, and not flesh and blood." Human nature can never discover the Saviour, nor find Him, can never get to love Him, nor come by its own power to rest upon Him for eternal life. Hear that trembling one as he stumbles along towards Christ, listen to him and mark him well, for he is a child of God though he stumbles.

*"Lo! glad I come, and Thou, blest Lamb,  
Shalt take me to Thee as I am :  
Nothing but sin I Thee can give,  
Nothing but grace shall I receive."*

The power of flesh and blood does not bring poor sinners here. This is the result of a Divine revelation. Revelation is an uncovering, and the discovery of something that had been hidden and concealed. It is not creation. Distinguish between revelation and creation? My Father in heaven has revealed it, not created it. Christ was in existence before the Father revealed Him; and He was lovely, glorious and sweet, before we saw His loveliness, or realized His sweetness. Now there is the eye, and the object, and the light. The eye is faith, and the object to be seen is Christ, the Son of the living God. What is wanted but light? Not any light, artificial, educational, moral, intellectual or rational light merely ; the light required is heavenly, special and divine, conveyed by the Spirit into the heart; flesh and blood cannot reveal the Lord. Here is the altogether lovely Christ, and here is the altogether sinful creature; and there is the Father on the

throne, looking with approbation upon His dear Son, and with love upon the sinner that wants to see Him. The heavens are open, and light divine falls upon the scene, and to the sinner Christ is revealed in the heart, the hope of eternal glory. "You preach mysteries, and go in your experience so far in one direction that we cannot follow you." The Lord the Holy Spirit help you to follow me at some future time, if I now go a little too far for you. If the preacher knows anything of the Father's revelation, this is how it takes place. Now this revelation does not give us an interest in Christ, nor is it the cause of relationship. The theory, the doctrine of the present day is, that something must take place within, before we can be said to be interested in Christ. My beloved friends, revelation follows interest and proves relationship. If there had been no connection between you and Jesus Christ before He was revealed to your heart, there would never have been a revelation of Him to your poor soul. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." How can the Father draw one unless something is presented wonderfully powerful in its attractions. Well, the attractions of Jesus Christ are wonderfully powerful, and God says, He has loved, and therefore He has drawn. He reveals His Son; and we, feeling the power of His attractions, as the objects of His grace, sing,

*"Gently He draws my soul along,  
Both with His beauties and His tongue."*

Fourthly and lastly, the important benediction: "Blessed art thou,

Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." "Blessed art thou." Christ had blessed him, and then pronounced him blessed, and I think I had some little sweetness in thinking over this part of the subject when it presented itself to my mind in this form,—that when Jesus Christ pronounced the words, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona," He was at that moment full of spiritual blessings for Peter, for God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ. Christ, if I may so speak, spoke in relation of what He Himself held for Peter. He had all the fullness of Peter's grace in Him, or all the grace Peter required to save Him. All the love of God towards Peter was in him; and, speaking experimentally, for I love the experience of My Lord,—the Master said, "Blessed art thou in Me, Simon Bar-jona." Now this blessedness is the best. We have other blessings; they are all good, but the best of other blessings is inferior to this one. Temporal things are mercies. We thank our Lord for temporal good, but they are not our God. Peter was blessed with the best of all blessings. Another thought is this, that the blessing was a present one. Now look at the words of the text again. "Blessed art thou," not, Blessed shalt thou be by and bye; but thou art blessed to day. Blessed art thou even now. Was Peter, then, without sin? No, yet he was blessed, though sin dwelt within. Take courage, then, my dear friend; you may be a blessed man or a blessed woman, although sin dwells within. Did the Master—and let us tread softly here—did the Master see any error in Peter's mind? Yes, Peter had carnal views of the kingdom of his Lord, and his faith did not go far into the spirituality of His kingdom; yet he was a blessed man. Did the

Master foresee Peter's fall, and how far his sin and cowardice would carry him? Yes, but the Master did not withhold the information on account of that. Did blessings continue to follow Peter? Yes, for the curse never follows the saving blessing of God. The world may curse you, the devil may curse you, and you may be almost ready to curse yourselves sometimes; but if God has blessed you with spiritual blessings to-day, He will bless you for ever and ever. The Lord add His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.