

The Church As Community In the Synoptics

Matt. 16:18-19

Introduction:

1. In previous lessons we have learned that the church is those people who confess Jesus as the Son of God, thus recognizing Him as God's king and submitting themselves to His authority.
2. This includes those in ancient Israel who submitted to God as King, people like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and so many others who gave God authority in their lives. After Pentecost those who submit to God as King are those called out of the world and joined together in God's community or church. These are those who accept and submit to the kingship of Christ. In the future all those who submit to the authority of God constitute the kingdom of heaven.
3. While the rule of Christ is primary the community concept is not absent in the synoptic gospels.
4. In this lesson we will focus attention on the place of the apostles in this community; we will discuss the great commission as it relates to the enlarging of this community; we will address the role of baptism in the establishment of the community; and consider the role of the Lord's Supper as part of the procedure of the community.

Discussion:

I. The place of the apostles in the community.

A. The apostles occupied a place of delegated authority (Matt. 16:18; 18:18-20).

1. "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (NASB). The NASB follows the tense of the original language in its translation.
 - a. It makes it clear that the apostles do not have personal authority "to bind and loose." This right belongs exclusively to the King.
 - b. This fits the context. "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
2. This same kind of delegated authority is inherent in the broader community (Matt. 18:18-20).
 - a. Note: "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."
 - b. This community does not have the right to define who is in and who is out.
 - c. It does not have the right to define, nor to change the doctrines/teachings. All authority belongs to the King, to whom all in this community have submitted in allegiance. This stands in contrast to denominational loyalty, the authority of popes, denominations and religious institutions. Heaven is the only authority in this community! Cf. Matt. 28:18.

B. The keys given to Peter involve him in being the first to proclaim the loosing from sin (Acts 2:38) and a bind of sin in Acts 5:3.

- C. In all of this there is NO ecclesiastical authority in evidence!! There is no church, no denomination, no institutional entity defining doctrines, telling people

what is right and wrong, who is in and who is out, who can teach and who cannot. Who defines such things? Only the King!!

II. These same principles are in evidence with Jesus' commission to His disciples. Jesus commissions His disciples on two occasions. One has traditionally been termed "the limited commission" because it was to the Jews only. The other is called the great commission because it is extended to all nations.

- A. In the limited commission Jesus sent His disciples to the Jews (Matt. 10:5-15; Lk. 9:1-6).
 - 1. He gave them power and sent them out.
 - a. The power to cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, etc. were indicators of the "kingdom of God having come upon you" (Lk. 11:20).
 - b. These were the evidences Jesus presented to John that "the Expected One" had arrived (Matt. 11:3-5; Lk. 7:19-22).
 - 2. He sent them out to proclaim "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 - 3. He did not send them out proclaiming "entrance into the church." However, their commission does suggest that a community is beginning and it is in the early stages of establishment.
- B. In the great commission Jesus sent His disciples into all the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:44-49).
 - 1. Observe the statement: "All authority has been given to Me"
 - 2. The commission is founded on authority having been given to Christ, the King.
 - 3. The disciples are to baptize and teach "all that I commanded you."
 - 4. Signs were demonstrations of this authority (Mk. 16:17-18).
 - 5. That repentance and forgiveness of sins are proclaimed "in His name" is reflective of His authority over sin. That we should "repent" or turn to Him for this forgiveness is appropriate since He is the one with authority from God to forgive sins (Matt. 9:2ff; Mk. 2:1ff).
- C. All of this presupposes a community of disciples resultant from this preaching. However, no ecclesiastical organization (as characterized by denominationalism) is implied.
- D. It seems reasonable to suppose from this evidence that Jesus had in mind a community of His people who would be taught His commands, who would be bound together by a common allegiance to Him evidenced by baptism, and who would regard it as their responsibility to reach out to others (regardless of nationality) so that they too might be added to their number.

III. What is the role of baptism in the establishment of the community? First, we will consider the role of John's baptism and then the role of the baptism of the great commission.

- A. John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" in anticipation of the One coming after him (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:8).
 - 1. John's purpose was to turn the people's hearts toward the coming King (Lk. 1:16-17).
 - 2. John's baptizing was not a completely new innovation, for there is evidence

that Judaism practiced proselyte baptism for the admission of Gentiles into Judaism.

3. Ritual washings were also practiced routinely to cleanse oneself before worship (in the temple).
 4. John's baptism was new in that it involved preparation for the coming King, necessarily involving submission to Him as evidenced in the requirement of repentance.
 5. This is evidenced further in the ethical demand to "bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8).
- B. The baptism of the great commission also required repentance for forgiveness as a result of accepting Jesus as Lord and Christ (i.e., King) (Lk. 24:45-47).
1. Through repentance and baptism individuals voluntarily accept the reign of the King in their lives, submitting their will to His, thus turning from sin and being washed from it (cf. Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:1ff; Col. 2:12-14; 3:1ff).
 2. Therefore there is a special sense in which it can be said that when one repents and is baptized they have become citizens of the kingdom.

IV. The Lord's Supper was part of the procedure associated with the coming community.

- A. In Matthew's account of the establishment of the Lord's Supper there is no statement of perpetuity (26:26ff), except the statement that Jesus made that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He did so new with the disciples in His Father's kingdom.
1. I take this to mean that after Pentecost He joined with the disciples in the partaking.
 2. Note that it is "My Father's kingdom."
- B. A similar statement is made in Mark's and Luke's accounts (Mk. 14:25ff; Lk. 22:14ff).
- C. Luke notes Jesus' statement, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." This was something that Jesus intended to be perpetuated in the community of believers. This is supported by 1 Cor. 11 and Acts 20:7.
- D. Since the Lord's Supper is a memorial perpetuated into the future this implies that Jesus expected the existence of a community to celebrate the memorial.

Conclusion:

1. The apostles occupy a place of delegated authority. An authority delegated by the King to bind what has been bound in heaven and to loose what has been loosed in heaven.
2. He commissioned them to make disciples, teaching and baptizing them by His authority into relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
3. Thus they become a community united in their submission to Him as God's King.
4. Their participation in the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him reflects their devotion and loyalty to the King and identifies them as a community founded upon what He has done for them.