

# The Power and Authority of Heaven on Earth

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Date: 30 October 2005

Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, do turn with me, please, if you would, to Matthew 16, and we look at this second half of the chapter. And it's all about the power and the authority of heaven on earth.

Seems these days, doesn't it, that our world is a very fragile place, a fearful place, if we're to believe all the voices chattering around us on the airwaves, the radio and the television with their messages of doom.

I don't know if you're like me, but the alarm goes off at quarter to seven in the morning, and I'm not really a morning person, so I tend to lie in a state of semi-consciousness listening to the Today program. And the other morning, it seemed to be nothing but predictions of doom and disaster and panic.

There was, I think, Prince Charles waxing eloquent about mankind's greatest and most pressing need to come to terms with global warming. Then there was somebody else speaking about the bird flu pandemic that's about to engulf the world and kill either 10 million or 100 million or whatever it is.

Then somebody else was on immediately speaking about the danger of nuclear holocaust in the Middle East, with Iran making these noises about Israel being wiped across the map, all in the space of about 15 minutes.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] When you're half asleep, it's really quite frightening. But our world can seem to be a very precarious and uncertain place, can't it?

All around us, commentators and scientists and politicians and artists, they're all trying to struggle to explain history, to predict history, in the midst of the shifting sands of our changing world.

Where is it all going? What is going to happen to us all? And that seems so impossible to answer, doesn't it? Because our world seems to be changing so rapidly. Last week when I was on holiday, I was reading a Tom Clancy novel written in the 1980s, all about the World War III that was going to happen between the Soviet Empire and NATO.

And even 20 years later, it seems so hard to even take that seriously, doesn't it? The world has changed so much. Human history seems to be built on shifting sands of so much uncertainty.

And that causes us so much anxiety. Ours is an anxious world, a worried world. That percolates down into our everyday lives, doesn't it?

[ 2 : 3 1 ] It explains why our society is perhaps the most medicated society in history. Whether it's prescribed antidepressants, anxiolytics, and all sorts of things.

Or whether it's self-administered, calming, sedatives, drugs, alcohol, all these things. And friends, the truth is that this world will always be a fearful place.

Unless we can understand what it really is all about, where it is all going. And that's what Matthew's Gospel is all about. He's telling us what the world is all about, what the world means, where the world is all going.

And our passage today lies right at the very heart of that story. It's the great rock that is unmovable and unshakable on the shifting sands of time and history.

The solid rock of Jesus Christ and his kingdom at the heart of our passage today. And the message is that that kingdom is being built even now, today, by the power and authority of the King of the universe, the Lord of time himself, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

[ 3 : 40 ] And what a rock of security and safety that is in the midst of a worried world. If you want to understand human history, the past and the present and the future, you can't do it unless you've understood and grasped the goal of human history.

The climax, the ultimate purpose of human history. And that lies in verse 18 of our passage today. Just look at it. I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The church of Jesus Christ is the goal of human history. It's the focus of the attention of Almighty God from the very beginning, from before eternity. And nothing will ever stop that project.

And we must understand that. Otherwise, we'll never understand the world. And we will never understand our part in the world. And so it's just as important for those who are inside the church of Jesus Christ as it is for those who are outside it and looking in and wondering what the church is all about.

That's why Jesus devotes so much of his teaching of his followers to this subject. We've seen that these central chapters of Matthew are all about this theme of the church.

[ 4 : 58 ] It's all leading up to chapter 18 when he speaks about the conduct of the church. How we're to live, how we're to behave, how we're to be seen in the world now. Last time, a few weeks ago, we looked at the second half of chapter 15 and the beginning of chapter 16 where Jesus is showing us the extent of his kingdom, the extent of his church-building exercise.

He's gathering his family from all the peoples of the earth, not just from the Jews, not just from the natural house of Israel, but from among the Gentiles, the nations of the world. Remember?

His grace is lavish, it's abundant, it's flowing over. He has compassion for the crowds who are outside. The message is, so must his followers.

They too must be taken up with the things that heaven is taken up with. They must be taken up with the heavenly bread of life that saves people, that sanctifies people. Do you remember at the end, at the beginning of chapter 16, he rebukes his disciples.

Don't be like so many of those religious people, taken up with religion, but really in their hearts, totally unconcerned about the things that concern Jesus, that take up his heart.

[ 6 : 10 ] No, your task as the church is to take the bread of life to the world. That's what the church is for, says Jesus, to gather in all my household.

But, of course, the question arises, well, what authority do we have? What kind of power do we have in the church of Jesus Christ to do these things?

And that's what Jesus turns to now in this passage. It's a great turning point in Matthew's gospel. Remember back to chapter 4, verse 17, right at the beginning? We read, from that time on, when Jesus began his ministry, he began to preach, repent, for the kingdom is at hand.

Remember back in chapter 4? Look at chapter 16, verse 21. From that time on, signaling a new phase in his ministry, Jesus begins to teach the disciples that the Christ must suffer.

He starts to teach them how his kingdom is going to come through his own death and his resurrection. So, verses 13 to 20 here are the climax of everything that's gone before. Jesus' proclamation and his demonstration in word and deed of who he is, his identity.

[ 7 : 21 ] The climax comes in Peter's words in verse 16. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And immediately, in verses 21 onwards, Jesus begins to interpret himself what it means that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

It means he has a work to accomplish. He must suffer. And the whole of the rest of Matthew's book explains what that suffering is to be. But you see, these two great themes of Jesus' identity and his work come together here in the context of Jesus teaching us about his church.

And about how the blessings of the kingdom of heaven are going to reach the world in this age through his church. What Jesus is telling us is that the church is to intimately bind up with himself, with his identity.

You can't separate the church from Jesus' person. You can't separate Jesus' person from the church. You can't have Jesus without having his church. Some people would like to.

They don't want anything to do with the church. But I love Jesus. No, this is Jesus. What Jesus is teaching us here is that Jesus' person is at the very center of everything in the church.

[ 8 : 35 ] He alone is the builder of the church. He alone is the authority in his church. But also that the work of Jesus is at the very center of his church.

His cross alone is the foundation of his church. And the gospel of the cross and no other is the power in his church. Always. There is no other.

Now this is a passage that has often been misunderstood and indeed abused in the history of the church. So it's really very important that we understand it properly. We're going to look at it carefully now under two headings.

First of all, the first section, verses 13 to 20, under the heading of the powerful authority in Christ's church. And then the second section under the heading of the authoritative power in Christ's church.

So first then, the powerful authority of the church of Jesus Christ. These verses proclaim with absolute clarity the unique authority of Jesus as the king of the universe.

[ 9 : 39 ] As the lord of time, as the lord of space and of history. He alone is the Christ, the messianic king. He alone is the son of the living God, the only God.

And by his own authority as king of heaven, he alone is the builder of the church on earth. But, he gives his own powerful authority and rule to his church through the unique ministry of the apostles.

Who themselves will be the foundation of this new covenant community. It will be their message. It will be their authoritative apostolic interpretation of Jesus' person and his work.

And theirs alone, which will be the foundation that Jesus builds his church upon. And through which Jesus will continue to build his church until he comes.

The authority of the kingdom of heaven will be exercised on earth until the end of the age in one way alone. Through the authentic apostolic gospel ministry of the New Testament.

[ 10 : 51 ] That is the message of these verses. And nothing else is. It anticipates the very last few verses of Matthew's gospel, the great commission. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

You therefore go. And make disciples of all nations. Teaching them to obey what I have commanded you. That's the authority that Jesus is passing on here to his apostles.

So everything, of course, then hinges, first of all, on a true recognition of who Jesus is. Who is this one who claims to have authority? And that's still the key question for every human being today.

It's there in verse 13, do you see? Who do people say the Son of Man is? Notice, not do you believe in God? Or do you believe in life after death?

Or things like that. Sort of things we get in surveys. No. It's a very specific question. Who is Jesus of Nazareth? And what's the people's verdict in verse 14?

[ 11 : 54 ] Well, in fact, it's a very shrewd one. It's a much more informed verdict than the average man in the street today would give you. Why? Because these are people who have been confronted with the evidence.

Most people today are so ignorant about Jesus and what his claim is that they can't give you any sensible answer at all. They've never even bothered to look into the evidence. But these people had seen it with their own eyes.

And when you do look into the evidence about Jesus Christ, it is impossible not to realize that he is something very special. And that's what they say in verse 14.

Some think he's John the Baptist. Or he's Elijah. Or he's Jeremiah. Now these men were all great monumental figures of Israelite history.

These were the great men. But what's common to all of them? Not just that they were great. They're all dead. Now these people aren't fools.

[ 12 : 54 ] They know that dead people don't rise. We must get this clear. It's very common sometimes for people to look with scorn at the New Testament accounts and say, Well, these people were just peasants. They were uneducated.

They were idiots. They would be taken in by that kind of nonsense. Just not true. The people that Jesus was speaking to were highly educated people. Many of them spoke many languages.

Hebrew and Greek and Latin. Aramaic. How many languages do you speak? These were educated people living at the heart of the trade routes of the ancient world. They knew dead people don't rise.

But they also knew that no natural explanation for this man was adequate. At the very least, something supernatural has to be resorted to to explain him.

Somebody raised from the dead. But notice verse 15. Jesus doesn't stop at generalities, does he? He's never one to say, Well, what's the general feeling about me?

[ 13 : 53 ] No. What about you, he says? Puts them on the spot. You here is plural. He's speaking to all his disciples. It's exam time. You've seen everything I've done.

You've seen more than anybody else. You've heard much more than everybody else. Now is the moment of truth. What do you think? Well, the context isn't very encouraging, isn't it?

Look back to verse 9. Do you not yet perceive, he said to them? Verse 11. How is it that you fail to understand? This is a picture of the remedial classroom.

It's not the swatters in the library he's speaking to here. And yet, look at verse 16. Isn't it extraordinary? Peter answers on behalf of them all, and he gets it 100% right first time.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Yes, it's true, he says. Everything we've seen that only the Lord God can do.

[ 14 : 51 ] Calming the wind and the waves. Banishing disease and demons and death itself. Everything we've heard that only God himself can say.

Commanding our worship. Pronouncing forgiveness of sins. Yes, you are the Messiah, aren't you? You are. You are the Lord himself.

That's what Peter's saying. That's what it means. The Son of Man is the Son of God. He's God himself. And immediately in verse 17, Jesus says, yes.

That's right. Blessed are you. Do you remember that word from the Beatitudes? Blessed. It's the mark of God's approval. God's acceptance. Yes, God has revealed this to you, Peter.

It's a mark that he has favored you. Of course, not without evidence. It's not a leap of faith that Peter's making here. A leap in the dark.

[ 15 : 49 ] It's been made plain and obvious to him. Everything Jesus has said and done. But still, the truth is that finding God in Jesus Christ is always really a case of being found by God through Jesus.

It's an act of divine eye-opening. It's revelation. The Father in heaven has made you see this. Mark's gospel, he makes it very vivid in this portion.

He puts in the story of the man who is blind being healed, having his eyes opened to make it explicit. It's a very important lesson for us to remember today, isn't it? We don't seek to win people to Christ by deceit or by pressure.

No, we present the evidence about Jesus. The evidence recorded for us in scripture. We reason, we persuade, we argue, we exhort. But nevertheless, at the end of the day, it must be the Father in heaven who opens blind eyes.

Eyes that are blinded by sin, by the world, by the devil. We can never bring the dead to life. Only the power of the Father in heaven can do that.

[ 16 : 54 ] So we must do our work, of course, present the evidence. But we must cry to God to do his work, to open eyes. But you see that as soon as Peter confesses Jesus' identity, as soon as he's done that, Jesus immediately speaks of his unique authority and what it is he's doing on the earth, verse 18.

He's building his church. That word church, the word ecclesia, where we get our word ecclesiastical from. It's the word in the Greek Old Testament that translated the congregation, the gathering, the people of God, God's household.

What Jesus called in chapter 15, verse 24, the house of Israel. Nothing new in the idea about God's church. What's new here is the idea of what Jesus says about it.

It's his church. Do you see that? It's his family. God's household is Jesus' household. It's his church. He is the head of the household.

That's the staggering thing that Jesus is saying here. And once again, Matthew's pointing us to these two great themes that we've seen again and again throughout his gospel. This continuity with everything that goes before.

[ 18 : 11 ] It's not new. It's God's household. It's his Israel. It's his people that Jesus is claiming. But it's not just continuity, is it? There's a climax here.

God's household is being redefined by Jesus. He is at the center of it. He is the head of this household, the church.

The whole order of history is passing away. We've seen that in these chapters. Now that Jesus has come, he alone is the true builder. He alone is the unique authority that gathers those from his church to himself.

It's his call. Jesus is the unique authority in the household of God. And faith in him and obedience to him is the door of his kingdom.

And there is no other. So you see, there's no way of getting around it. It is an exclusive message. And therefore, obviously, it's a divisive message.

[ 19 : 16 ] Then, as it is today. Because if you refuse Jesus, you're refusing God and his kingdom. There's a parting of the ways. And that's the reality.

We've seen in these chapters as the natural house of Israel. The Jews and their leaders increasingly reject the head of the household. And therefore, as verse 4 makes clear, Jesus has to reject them, doesn't he?

He left them and departed. There's a parting of the way. But on the other hand, others do receive him. They do trust him. There are many outsiders, many Gentiles, many sinners.

The most unlikely candidates of all. And of these, Jesus says, I will build my church. And he promises the gates of hell will never prevail against it.

His church will never, ever falter or fail through all time and through all eternity. It will never die. Whatever the cynics say, whatever the scorn the pundits love to heap upon the church, Jesus has promised it will never die.

[ 20 : 27 ] And moreover, no power of hell will ever overcome it. Or those in it. Because the safety and the security of Jesus' church doesn't depend upon the strength of those who are inside.

But it depends upon the power and the authority of the builder and the keeper. And he's king of the universe. He's the son of the living God. Friends, isn't that a great comfort to you?

In the middle of a world of swirling anxiety and fear and foreboding. That there is total and ultimate safety and security in the household of God, in the church of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that a great rock to anchor your life upon? The one thing that you can be sure of amidst everything else? And isn't it a wonderful joy for you to know when you feel weak?

Or when you feel foolish? Or when you've been sinful? When it feels as though the powers of hell are winning in your life?

[ 21 : 37 ] No, Jesus says. We sang the words. He whose word cannot be broken formed you for his own abode. On the rock of ages founded.

What can shake your sure repose? The answer is nothing. Not even the gates of hell. Not even the devil himself. With salvation's walls surrounded, you may smile at all your foes.

Whoever they are. Nothing can assail the church of Jesus Christ or those in it. Jesus Christ has authority in heaven and on earth over every power of darkness.

Nothing shall ever destroy his true church. That's the first thing we must grasp about Jesus' powerful authority.

And the second is this. The kingdom of heaven, Jesus has told us many times again and again in this gospel, is a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one. But his kingdom has begun on earth with his coming.

[ 22 : 39 ] And he is manifesting his kingdom even now through the community of his kingdom, that is the church. Remember the Lord's prayer, thy kingdom come.

How? Thy will being done in earth as it is in heaven. And the church of Jesus Christ is the arena on earth where heaven's values are cherished.

Where heaven's words are spoken. Where heaven's authority is found. But how does that come about? Well, verse 18. Jesus is the builder.

He is the founder. He is the authority. But he's founding his church on earth on the apostolic witnesses that he's chosen. Peter and the twelve.

We've already seen in chapter 10, the chapter on mission, how he's shared his mission with these men. And that's why, verse 18, it's on this rock, on the foundation of the apostles and their unique delegated authority from Jesus, that the church will be built.

[ 23 : 41 ] Sometimes there's been a lot of confusion about this passage. For example, the church of Rome lays its whole claim to the papacy and the primacy of the bishop of Rome.

And Peter is the first pope and bishop of Rome on this verse. It seems extraordinary, but that's true. But with respect, when we look at the text, if we actually look at it, we don't find anything whatsoever about Peter's primary authority.

Peter's answering here as a spokesman for the twelve. That's quite clear. Jesus is addressing the twelve. He addresses them again collectively in verse 20. Just look over to chapter 18, verse 1, where he speaks to them again.

Look at the question they ask. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Well, if Jesus had pronounced Peter as the supreme infallible authority among them, they would never have asked that question, would they? Down in verse 18 of chapter 18, Jesus addresses the same words as he addressed to Peter, to the twelve.

Binding and loosing. If you look in church history, there's no evidence whatsoever that Peter was ever the leader of the church in Rome. That shouldn't surprise us when we read the rest of the New Testament.

[ 24 : 57 ] We find Peter nowhere claiming infallibility or supreme authority. We've read Galatians chapter 2 quite recently, where Paul has to give Peter a complete dressing down because he's quite wrong.

Clearly, there's no foundation whatsoever for any such claim in these verses. And yet, look at verse 18. Jesus does, quite clearly, I think, without question, refer to Peter as the rock.

It's a play on words in the Greek. Petra, rock. Petros, Peter. Why does he do that? Well, because here Peter is representing the apostles as a whole. And critically, he is representing the apostolic confession of Jesus.

You can't separate the man here from his words. It is Peter as confessor of the true Christ who is the rock on which the church is built.

Peter, the man by nature, is quite another thing. Just a few verses later on, he's being rebuked by Jesus as the devil. Now, Peter was the natural leader.

[ 26 : 00 ] He was the spokesman of the band. If we read the book of Acts, it's quite clear that he had great importance, very particularly in the earliest days of the church's mission.

And that's what verse 19 illuminates for us here. Jesus talks about giving the keys of the kingdom to Peter in especial, but as we pointed out to the apostles as well in verse 18 of chapter 18.

Well, what is that? What do keys do? Keys open doors, don't they? What he's saying to the apostles is that their unique role in history will be to open the doors of the kingdom of heaven to the whole world in their apostolic witness.

They are to be the opposite of the teachers of the natural house of Israel. In chapter 23, verse 13, Jesus says, Woe to the scribes and Pharisees! You shut up the door of heaven in people's faces.

In Luke chapter 11, verse 52, he says, Woe to you because you take away the key of knowledge. But no, you, the apostles, are to be the opposite.

[ 27 : 07 ] You are to be the ones who open the door of the kingdom of heaven to the world. In fact, Peter himself had a pivotal role. It's a matter of history. In the very early stage of the gospel.

Do you remember in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, they're told, You will preach the word in Jerusalem and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Well, on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem, it is Peter at the center of the preaching.

In Acts chapter 8, when the Samaritan Pentecost happens, it's Peter who's at the heart of it. In Acts chapter 10, when the first true Gentile mission begins to take place with Cornelius, it's Peter who's at the center.

That was the great beginning. But now, now the keys of the kingdom open the kingdom of heaven to all peoples everywhere, wherever the apostolic gospel is proclaimed.

That's heaven's authority wielded on earth to open the doors of the kingdom of heaven. In addition, in verse 19, Jesus gives to the apostles authority to bind and loose.

[ 28 : 11 ] That's terminology used by the rabbis to permit and to prohibit. He's giving the apostles the authority to order and regulate how the church is to be, to decide what does happen and what doesn't happen, what is forbidden and what is permitted.

And that's just what we see in the letters of the New Testament. The tenses here are interesting. They're actually the future perfect. We should read it literally like this. Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven.

Whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. In other words, the apostles will be given the authoritative divine revelation once and for all for the church to regulate it, to order it according to heaven's ways.

Just what Jesus says in John 16, after he has ascended, the Holy Spirit will guide you, his apostles, not us, not you and me, you, the apostles, into all truth. And that's where authority has been placed in the church of Jesus Christ forever.

In the apostolic testimony to the gospel of Jesus and in the apostolic authority in their writings. The true apostolic succession isn't passed on by the hands of a pope or of bishops or of presbyters or anybody else.

[ 29 : 36 ] No, the true apostolic succession is passed on in faithfulness to the apostolic teaching, to their writings as we have them in scripture. Peter himself is perfectly clear about that.

He had no sense at all that he was the infallible corrector of the church. Just read his letters, 1 Peter 2. Absolutely explicit. Christ alone is the living stone.

Christ alone is the chief cornerstone on which the church is built, not him. And yet at the same time he is also very clear that the apostles speak with the authority of Jesus.

2 Peter 3, chapter 2, he's writing, warning the people about how they're to be after he has died, after the other apostles have died. He says, I want you to remember, quote, 2 Peter 3, verse 2, remember the commandment of the Lord our Savior through your apostles.

The apostles. The apostles speak with the authority of the Lord of the universe. And friends, we today need to remember that too, don't we?

[ 30 : 47 ] We need to remember that when their letters in the New Testament tell us things very plainly about what must and must not be in the church, what must and must not be in our behavior, that they speak with the authority of the King of the universe.

Even when it's things that we don't like, maybe. Matters about sexual conduct. Matters about the role of men and women in the church, for example. The apostolic witness is Christ's powerful authority in the church now and forever.

And we must be clear on that. But the powerful authority of Christ's unique kingship isn't the whole story. Look at verse 20.

Isn't it strange? Isn't it peculiar? You'd think Jesus would say, hurrah! You've got it at last. Now get out and tell the world.

That's not what he says, is it? It's the opposite. Tell no one. Why on earth would he say that? Well, the answer is because they haven't got it all yet.

[ 31 : 56 ] Not even Peter. There's a second lesson that's vital for them to learn. And without which, you cannot yet dare to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They need to learn, secondly, the authoritative power in Christ's church. Jesus and his church does have power on the earth.



But it's not the power of the earth. Jesus has unique authority as the king of heaven, as the son of God. But he has unique power to save as the servant of the world.

As the son of man. And so the disciples must learn that the church is born through the power of a crucified savior. And that the church lives and grows and advances through the power of crucified people.

That's the power of heaven at work on earth. The authoritative power in the church of Jesus Christ is found only in the cross.

[ 33 : 04 ] And only in the gospel of the cross. And from verse 21 on, Jesus has to drum that into his followers again and again and again. Because it's so hard for them to grasp.

So hard for them to stomach. And so hard for us. He must, he must, he says. Because of who he is, not despite who he is.

He must go to Jerusalem. He must suffer. He must be killed and raised. Because that is the power of God at work to bring his church into being.

A Christ, a Messiah and a message about a Messiah without a cross, without his death for sins, must not be proclaimed. That's what he's saying to the disciples.

Don't tell anyone that. Tell them only the full story. The whole truth. And Peter in verse 23 learns a bitter lesson, doesn't he?

[ 34 : 02 ] A lesson that many need to learn. That Messiahship without a cross isn't just an inadequate gospel. Not just something a bit more modern and liberal and palatable today.

No, it's demonic. Get behind me, Satan. Bishop Ryle puts it this way. The truth is that our Lord would have us regard the crucifixion as the central truth of Christianity.

Right views of his vicarious death, that is, his atonement, lie at the very foundation. If we're wrong here, we're ruined forever. A message about Jesus that does not center on his death for sins may sound like a gospel, may look like the gospel, but no, it's not the gospel.

Jesus may be an example, a friend, a teacher, a leader, even some kind of Lord, but if he is not a savior from sins and from the wrath of God, it's no gospel at all.

It's demonic. Matthew 1.21 begins, he came to save his people from their sins. And Jesus says to his disciples, until you preach that, shut up.

[ 35 : 18 ] Anything else is a lie of the devil. Doesn't matter who says it, whether it's Peter, or anybody else. Doesn't matter what the motive is. Peter's motive was very sincere, very well-meaning.

Jesus is absolutely clear, doesn't matter what your motive is, that's demonic. And that's what man-made gospel is, ultimately.

Jesus calls it in verse 23, the things of man. The things of man are ultimately the things of the devil. If there's no cross, there is no mercy.

There is no forgiveness. People are left only with the cup of God's wrath. Later, of course, the apostles were absolutely clear. We preach Christ crucified.

Yes, it's foolishness to the Greek philosophers of the Western world as it is today. Yes, it's a scandal to the Jews as it is to this day. But, to those who are being called, it is the power and wisdom of God.

[ 36 : 26 ] The power in the church is the power of a crucified Savior and the message of the gospel of the cross and nothing else. And friends, if Messiahship without a cross is a demonic idea, so too is the idea of discipleship without a cross.

Do you see verse 24? That too is a message that must be muzzled, says Jesus. Before you proclaim me Savior, you must also proclaim what you're calling people to.

You're calling them to take up their cross and follow me in the same way. You can't be a Christian, he says, without your own crucifixion. You can't find the power of eternal life through Jesus without losing your life in this world.

That's the opposite of all the thinking in our world about power. It flies in the face of all the categories of our world's thought.

Our world says the way on and up is on and up. materially, a better job, a better house, a better car, a better pension, whatever. You think in terms of education, better education, better experience, more papers, more grants.

[ 37 : 43 ] But Jesus says the way up is the way down. The way of life is the way of death. The way of power is the way of the cross. outwardly, scorn, derision, hatred, flogging, spitting, certainly figuratively, maybe even in reality.

Inwardly too, death to ourself, to our pride, to our ambition, to the prophet of the whole world, refusing everything but the call of the way of Jesus Christ.

And that may mean for us admitting that every single thing in our life in the past has been on the wrong track. A bitter, bitter pill to swallow.

But Jesus says in this, that is your message. I don't want you to open your mouth. Don't tell anyone about me. No cross, no Christ. No cross, no crown for his disciples.

It's often true, you know, that those two things go together. Those who hate the cross and their theology won't have it as part of their belief. Talk about barbarity of primitive sacrifices and things.

[ 39 : 00 ] It's because they won't have the cross of Jesus in their experience. There's something they're not willing to lose for the sake of Jesus.

They want to have a foot in both camps, Jesus and the world. I spoke to somebody just recently who told me that a pastor had said to them, no, you don't need to give up doing something which they knew was wrong to be a Christian.

It's no accident. The same pastor has certainly lost the cross from his theology. But no, verses 25 and 26 are clear. Just look at them.

You can't have the rewards of this world and the rewards of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it because the power of heaven at work in this world is the power of crucifixion.

It's the power of death. It's the power of sacrifice. So it was for Jesus who brought his church to birth through the cross. So it is, verse 24, for anyone who would follow after him.

[ 40 : 10 ] Jesus said in another place, in this world you will have tribulation. That's the message of the cross.

But he also said, be of good cheer for I have overcome the world. And do you see verse 27? That is a promise. That day is coming. The Son of Man is going to come with the angels and the glory of his Father and then he will repay every person according to what they've done.

And if what you have done is taken up your cross and followed Jesus, that day will bring joy unspeakable. Many of those, Jesus said, listening to him, lived to see the power of Christ's kingdom unleashed, to see his rule begun through the gospel.

That's, I think, what verse 28 means. Not Jesus' second coming, but his triumph in his ascension. Chapter 26, verse 64, verse 64, Jesus says to the high priest, from now on you'll see the Son of Man in power and glory.

And they shared in the advance of that glory by the authority of the apostolic gospel proclaiming the message and by the power of crucified lives, lives abandoned to Jesus Christ and his cause, following him back to the world.

[ 41 : 32 ] And friends, that power and glory of the kingdom of Jesus Christ is still advancing today and it's advancing just the same way. All over the world it is this gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ proclaimed by men and women carrying their cross, bearing the shame and the spitting, dead to the ambitions of this world, proclaiming it in the power of the Spirit.

that is the power and the authority of heaven on earth. So let us rejoice in the sole authority in Christ's church, in the apostolic gospel of his cross.

And let us fully embrace the power in Christ's church, the power of a crucified Savior leading crucified people. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?

What shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of the Father and then he will repay each person according to what he's done.

That's the promise of what Jesus Christ began then and is doing now. He's building his church. Don't you want to be a part of that?

[ 43 : 01 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that like Peter we are frail flesh and too often our thoughts and our hearts are on the things of man but we thank you that you are a God who opens the eyes of the blind, who brings the dead to life, who fills us with the light of the glory of the gospel of the Son of your love.

Help us, we pray, to know and to understand the power and the authority of your death and resurrection and its message and may it take root deep in our hearts, we pray.

for the glory of our Savior in whose name we pray. Amen.