

Peter and the Keys

Matthew 16:13-19

13. *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

14. *And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."*

15. *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*

16. *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

17. *And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

18. *"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

19. *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."*

Near the end of this dialogue with His disciples, Jesus indicates that Simon Barjona (Peter) will be given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus states, *"I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven"* (v. 19). This is a most significant statement!

Worldly movies often portray Peter with wings and white clothing, standing on a cloud next to the gates of heaven--like some sort of doorman. On the other hand, religious organizations have built upon the man Peter claiming that he is the rock. In the same manner almost all Christian denominations have a physical man as their leader; much like ancient Israel needed a king. At the same time they ignore the inspired words of Peter as Jesus' chosen apostle, who has the "keys." Truly there is nothing new under the sun!

But such deviations serve to underscore the importance of Jesus giving *"the keys"* to the man Peter. First of all, the kingdom would be on earth. As Jesus prayed, *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on **earth** as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:10). Jesus also stated clearly that the kingdom would come with power within the lifetime of some of His disciples. Matthew 16:28 and Mark 9:1 verify this.

What is most important in understanding Christ's giving the keys to Peter, is that Peter would be inspired with the message of Christ to access the kingdom of heaven, both with regard to the kingdom on earth and the subsequent entrance into heaven itself! As the angel directed Cornelius: *"Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is called Peter, brought here; and **he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved . . .**"*

Having the keys, Peter becomes the primary messenger or forerunner for the kingdom, much like John the Baptist had for Jesus himself. Personally, I appreciate Jesus' wisdom in selecting Peter. Peter is a fisherman by trade--a lowly "blue-collar" working man in that society. He was recognized as being *"uneducated and untrained"* by the

religious rulers of his day (Acts 4:13). He was not a scholar, so he spoke directly to the common folk; much like Jesus, who was a carpenter by trade.

Several specific questions arise from Jesus' pronouncement in v. 19:

- 1) How can we be sure that Peter and Peter alone was promised the keys to the the kingdom?
- 2) What does Jesus mean by the term "keys"?
- 3) What exactly is the kingdom of heaven, as referred to in this passage?
- 4) When did Peter receive the keys?
- 5) Most important, what are the keys, and where do we find them?

Obviously, there are some very important, primary truths borne out in this verse that deserve close examination.

How can we be sure that it was Peter who was promised the keys?

Contextually, Jesus is speaking specifically to Peter in the two verses prior to v. 19: *"And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it'"* (Matt. 16:17-18).

When Jesus says *"I will give you. . ."* in verse 19, He is speaking directly to Peter. The grammar of the Greek language bears this out in two ways. Pronouns in the Greek language always refer back to the last previously cited person in the text. That would have to be Peter in v. 18. Whether God meant it as a pun or not, Jesus says, *"I also say to that you are Peter. . ."* Regardless, the first "you" in v. 19 refers to Peter grammatically!

Also, the first pronoun "*you*" in verse 19 is written in the singular form in the original Greek text. Therefore Peter, and Peter alone, receives the promise of the keys. Interestingly, the second and third "*you*" contained within verse 19 are in the plural form. This indicates all the disciples gathered with Jesus at this time (v. 13) would be involved in "binding" and "loosing" things on earth that had been "*bound*" and "*loosed*" already in heaven. Personally, I believe this refers to the inspired writing of the New Testament Scriptures by the apostles and prophets (See Eph. 2:20, I Cor. 3:11). But without question, the first you refers to Peter and Peter alone.

What does Jesus mean by the term "keys"?

In verse 19, Jesus promised to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. In context, what then are the keys? Literally, a key is a "metal instrument by which the bolt of a lock is turned." As such a key is "a means of gaining entrance, possession, or control." In the figurative sense, "key" is defined as "something that gives an explanation or provides a solution." These definitions come from Webster's 7th New Collegiate Dictionary, under "key" (noun), definition numbers 1a, 2, and 3a respectively.

A key, in context with Jesus' usage of the term in v. 19, could denote several things. Most importantly, the "keys" would certainly include information or procedures on how to gain **entrance** into the kingdom of heaven. Unlocking or explaining prophecy or even the words of Christ could be a function of the keys. Also, solutions to personal problems could be a function of the keys. Interestingly, the term "keys" is plural, which indicates many possibilities for the keys.

What is the kingdom of heaven?

To the casual reader, the question "What is the kingdom of heaven?" may seem obvious. But with all the confusion concerning these last days and the various millennial theories circulating, some specific clarification in the Word of God may be prudent.

The kingdom of heaven is designated by different names in the New Testament Scriptures. A comparison of Matthew 13:11 and Mark 4:11 will reveal that the kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God. A comparison of Mark 9:1 with Matthew 16:28 show that the kingdom of God and Jesus' kingdom are the same. Now check out Colossians 1:13, 14: "*For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Here we find that Christians have been "*transferred*" to the kingdom of His beloved Son. This verse of Scripture clearly states that Christians were already in the kingdom during the first century, Colossians being written by Paul about 55 A.D.

Therefore, what we now commonly know as the Church today, Jesus referred to as the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 16:19.

When did Peter receive the keys?

Scripture indicates that Peter did not receive the keys before Jesus' ascension. To follow Peter's directives or example before the ascension of Christ would not be consistent with Christ's desires or goals. Several incidents make this obvious. First, shortly after receiving the promise of the keys, Peter receives a stern rebuke from Jesus: "*He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'*" (Matt 16:23). The night before His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter uses physical violence to try to prevent the arrest of Jesus, cutting off Malchus' ear (John 18:10). Then of course Peter denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed on the night of His arrest, just as Jesus had prophesied in Matthew 26:33-35. Therefore, Peter's words and actions before the resurrection of Christ indicate that he did not yet have the keys to the kingdom.

Jesus instructed His chosen disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. Immediately before His ascension, Jesus stated: "*And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49). The apostles waited in

Jerusalem, being in the temple each day (Luke 24:52, 53) until the day of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, they received the baptism with the Holy Spirit and power, as promised by Jesus earlier in Acts 1:5. Acts 2:2-4 give the physical evidences of this baptism: a noise like a violent rushing wind, tongues as of fire distributing themselves and resting on each one of them, and speaking in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

At this time Peter stood up and preached a stirring message, Acts 2:14-36. First he clarifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with the prophecy of Joel. Then he makes a case for Jesus being Lord and Christ using Old Testament Scriptures and the facts of His resurrection, appearance, and subsequent ascension to heaven. Peter being inspired by the Holy Spirit is evident, as is the fact that he now has the keys.

The audience was "*pierced to the heart*" by Peter's message and asked Peter and the rest of the apostles, "*What shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37). Peter then answers: "*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). Here a definite key is realized: the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are accessed through repentance and faith at immersion in water (baptism). Acts 2:39 goes on to clarify that this entrance procedure is open for all peoples until Christ returns. As a result of Peter's statement, about 3,000 people were immersed that day. The narrow gate into the kingdom was opened!

Many scholars and Christians mark the Day of Pentecost, when He sent His Holy Spirit to the disciples and Peter preached, as the beginning of Christ's Church. This corresponds perfectly with Peter's using the initial key of Acts 2:38 to proclaim how to enter into the kingdom. So, in God's infinite wisdom and timing the beginning of the church coincides with the giving of the key for the initial entrance into the kingdom.

What are the keys and where do we find them?

For the truth-seeker, searching for the keys of the kingdom excites like digging for hidden treasures. Actually there are three areas within the New Testament where we find Peter. And if you track Peter, you are liable to find keys. The historical account of the book of Acts, written by Luke, follows Peter quite often in the first 12 chapters. Peter himself also wrote two short letters, I and II Peter, which are written specifically to Christians.

In a very real sense Acts 2:38 is the "front door" key to the kingdom of Christ and can be considered to be the first of the keys. But in Acts 2 only Jews were immersed into Christ. Later, Peter opens the door for the Gentiles to enter the kingdom, initially with the household of Cornelius, in Acts 10 and 11. Not coincidentally, an angel tells Cornelius to send for Peter for he would speak words to them by which they would be saved (Acts 11:14). This initial entrance into the kingdom for the Gentiles is also preceded by the baptism with the Holy Spirit followed by water baptism.

Once a person enters into the kingdom, the keys found in I and II Peter become very pertinent to his continued growth and progress in the Lord. These letters, written specifically to Christians, contain keys that will enable the Christian to know and do God's will while on earth. And in doing so, he prepares to enter into heaven. Jesus' prayer is thus fulfilled: "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matt. 6:10).

I Peter 2:2 has a key for the new Christian: "*like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*" Here new Christians are likened to newborn babes, and the Word of God is likened to pure milk. Growth, which is essential to life and salvation, depends upon taking in the Word. I often ask new Christians, "How often do babies need to nurse?" Those who have had babies consistently answer, "About every two or three hours." To which I reply, "Go and do the same."

I Peter 3:1-7 had keys for married couples on how to affect positive change and harmony in their relationship. Verses 1-6 carefully detail the solution for women with husbands who are "*disobedient to the Word,*" describing how they can win their men to the Lord. Interestingly, this is exactly the opposite tactic used by most women! Husbands are given one verse, I Peter 3:7, which comes through powerfully to those who have ears to hear.

I Peter 3:21 makes the blunt statement: "*Baptism now saves you.*" This important key clarifies the fact that immersion in water is essential to salvation. In an age when so many religious leaders are teaching that baptism has nothing to do with salvation, being an outward sign or symbol, this key may be the only word capable of unlocking blinded hearts and otherwise deaf ears. Verse 20 verifies water baptism as being the subject here.

II Peter 1:5-11 contains a comprehensive set of keys which have become known as "the stairway to heaven." Here Peter gives the stages of development for the Christian to progressively grow and acquire the spirituality necessary to enter into heaven itself! After a listing of sequential character traits, beginning with faith, the passage ends with this statement: "*for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you*" (II Peter 1:10b,11).

Many people say that the Word of God is not absolute. Therefore, everyone can have their own interpretation. They insist that any person's interpretation can be valid; it's all a matter of personal opinion and understanding. To this position, Peter wields a very powerful key: "*But know this first of all, that no prophesy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophesy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*" (II Peter 1:20,21).

II Peter 2:20-22 unlocks the truth and torpedoed the Calvinistic doctrine of "eternal security." Many people today are taught that once you are saved you cannot be lost--

regardless of what you do or say. Peter's keys found in the last section of the second chapter in II Peter clearly state that a person can turn back to the world after being in Christ, sad but true.

One of the last keys given by Peter regards Paul's writings: II Peter 3:15-16. Peter warns his readers that Paul's letters, especially the parts dealing with salvation, are "*hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction*" (v. 16). Paul's writings are scholarly, and written solely to people who are already Christians. It's incredible that in the light of this key, many "Christian" organizations teach non-Christians how to be saved with portions of Paul's writings; especially Romans and Ephesians.

It is important to note that within Peter's warning, the letters of Paul are verified to be Scripture. What an important key! Those who are "*taught*" understand that Peter's statements in Acts and his writings in I and II Peter are the pre-requisite material for correctly understanding Paul's inspired, scholarly writings. And as Peter warns, this is especially the case regarding salvation doctrine.

This is by no means an exhaustive list or examination of the keys received by Peter. It is our hope that the ones presented here are illuminating and whet your spiritual thirst to dig in and search for the hidden treasures waiting in Acts 1-12, I Peter, and II Peter. These areas are a mother-lode of keys to the kingdom of heaven!

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