

## The Keys of the Kingdom

*Jesus said that “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”. Matt. 16:19*

This is a very significant text, because the Church has used it historically to keep people in bondage to church service. Fear is a potent motivator, and more so when heaven is at stake.

Some say that the keys were given to Peter the Rock, to whom Jesus spoke. Others say that they were given to the Church. Either way, the keys are obviously spiritual, and that which they open is also spiritual.

The power to loose and bind is also given to the Church in Matthew 18:18, followed by the promise to do whatever they will agree to ask – (Matt. 18:19) “if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”

Some see this text as power to get anything from God as long as there is agreement. The power to loose and bind is still connected to heaven and earth in this text, but the keys of heaven are not mentioned here.

After His resurrection, when He made His followers to be apostles (leaders whom others would follow), He again spoke of power which they would have, but in very different terms. “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” (John 20:23) The Keys of Heaven are not mentioned here. Neither is *heaven and earth* or *loose and bind* – rather *remit and retain*, as pertaining to sin.

Today we see the many ways in which the church has taken these texts and related them to sin and heaven and blessings.

If Peter had the keys of the kingdom of heaven, then apostolic succession, as taught by the Roman Catholic Church, would give these keys to every pope in history, and they would now be in the hands of the present pope, who could use these keys to open heaven for people by forgiving their sins. The confession booths are thus justified on this basis. The priest who hears the confession represents the pope with the apostolic keys.

The pope is the vicar of Christ on earth. There are also some church officials who are called vicars. A vicar is one who vicariously stands in the place of another. Jesus left this present world to go to His Heavenly Father in heaven, leaving others to take His place. He gave to His vicar, or vicars, the power to

use His name in His absence and settle disputes within the church community. If the keys were given to the church, then church perpetuity (perpetual), as taught by the Protestant Church, would give these keys to every church in history, and they would now be in the hands of the church to determine the requirements to enter the kingdom. The church, not the pope, is the vicar of Christ in this case.

Whether or not the pope is the vicar or the church is the vicar, or both, all depends upon whether God chose, called, and sent, or if it is only presumed. Anyone can represent anyone without permission – without being sent. This was a problem long before Christianity came on the scene. False prophets abounded in Judaism and in Christianity.

### False Representation

A prophet is one who represents God and speaks for God to the people. A false prophet is one that claims to speak for God, but is not sent by God. Wherever there is divine activity, God is speaking and false prophets will arise. We see this with Moses and the church in the wilderness when he was challenged. Does God only speak to Moses? We see God make a covenant with a nation which will represent the glory of God on earth. We see God sending His prophets to the nation, but all are rejected, while false prophets are accepted. God identified the false prophets and declared that He never sent them. Jesus is the only prophet sent by God with a forerunner to announce His arrival and to point Him out to the people. But Jesus claimed a greater witness than John in all the prophets of God which the nation had slain – as well as signs and wonders.

Jesus was leaving kingdom business in the hands of His disciples, whom He is sending to the very people who killed Him, and whose ancestors had slain all of God’s prophets while following false prophets. Jesus warned the church about false prophets, and Paul said that they would arise from inside the church to lead away disciples for themselves. (Acts 20:30) We should not be surprised to see this very thing occurring in apostolic succession and church perpetuity. In each case, there is the claim of vicar and viceroy,<sup>1</sup> both acting and ruling for Christ on earth.

The rulers of Israel presumed to sit on Moses’ seat and rule with Moses’ law. Jesus exposed them as false prophets with no authority to speak for God. They were loosing and binding things on earth, but God in heaven had not sent them; therefore, what they said on earth had never been said by God in heaven. The things that they were loosing and binding on earth were not loosed and bound in heaven.

Jesus had been a prophet sent by God, His

<sup>1</sup> A vicar is a person who acts in the place of another; a deputy. A viceroy is a person ruling as a deputy of a sovereign.

Father, who spoke on earth – the very Word of God in heaven. Now Jesus is sending His disciples to speak the words of their Father which is in heaven. Just as the words of Jesus were not His, but from God in heaven; likewise, they would speak for God on earth – the very words of God in heaven. Whatever they said on earth was said in heaven. It is very difficult to observe the pope and the church and believe that they are sponsored by God in heaven.

In the book of Acts we see heaven confirm what the apostles said and did with signs and wonders. The rulers of the Jews sat on Moses' seat, but heaven never confirmed what they said or did, remitted or retained, loosed or bound.

Jesus' kingdom is a new and different kingdom from that of Moses, where the rulers of Israel presumed to rule. Jesus is giving all power and authority to the church to rule in His absence. The Breath of God, which they received, put the kingdom in them, but they were to wait until Pentecost for power to serve the God of heaven on earth.

The rulers of Israel sat where Moses sat. Now the apostles will sit where Jesus sat. They will represent Him on earth. They are the vicars of Christ on earth, with the witness of God in heaven. What the rulers had bound on earth had never been bound in heaven, but these apostles are true prophets of God as in the days of old. What Moses said on earth had come from heaven. What Jesus said on earth had come from heaven, but heaven was never bound by what the rulers said. The church will now speak for God on earth as a deputy for Christ and will rule in His kingdom as a co-regent<sup>2</sup> with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus is saying in Matthew that He will establish the church and give it power of attorney after His death. In John, chapter 20, Jesus is returning from the dead with His kingdom and appointing the church as vice regents to reign as co-regents with the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> This commission deputized the church to represent Christ on earth as priests and kings (spiritual) in His kingdom.

### **The Great Commission**

The commission given here by Jesus to His disciples has been labeled "The Great Commission", and is still considered by many to be the calling for the church today. It would be more biblical to call this commission "The Messianic Commission", because that is what it was all about. Jesus was the King of the Jews, and if He is alive, then the kingdom has come.

John declared the kingdom to be coming very soon, and Jesus taught His disciples to pray and expect it. This kingdom coming was good news, which is

<sup>2</sup> Regent - regal, reign, rule. Acting in the place of a king or ruler; member of a governing board.

<sup>3</sup> Vice-regent - a person appointed by a ruler to exercise his power and authority; a deputy.

Co-regent - reigning together.

what the word "gospel" actually means. Jesus commissioned His apostles to take the gospel to the Jew first. Later He called Peter to go to Cornelius, a devout worshiper of God. Then He called Paul and commissioned him to take the gospel to anyone and everyone.

The gospel had first been preached by Moses and the prophets. The gospel was this: that a man like Moses would come with redemption, and the seed of David would reign on God's throne. This was an expected gospel message by all Israelites who knew Moses and the prophets.

When John, the forerunner of Jesus, came to the Jews with the gospel, it was a message that they had hoped to hear, but John was not the first with a messianic gospel. Many had come to the Jews claiming to be the seed of David which Moses and the prophets had foretold. But time and events would prove their claim to be false. They were all unable to establish a kingdom and reign on earth. Some had succeeded in gathering many followers, but when they were killed, their disciples were scattered. This is why many were skeptical of John and Jesus, and preferred to wait and see if the kingdom came. This is how the kingdom becomes the litmus test for the gospel. It is true if the kingdom comes, and a false gospel if the kingdom does not come. This is also how the kingdom relates to Israel and faith. They possessed the oracles of God where the gospel was preached. Therefore, if they believed the word of God, they expected a Messiah king to establish His kingdom.

When Jesus was crucified, the skeptics were justified and His followers were horrified. This does not affect anyone's faith in God or the scripture. They still believe Moses and the prophets, but they no longer believe that Jesus is the Christ. They no longer have a message of good news; they no longer have a gospel for the Jews. There is no kingdom coming at this time to invite anyone into. What good are keys when there is no kingdom to enter?

The Resurrection of Jesus changes the hopeless faith of all His followers. While the Messianic gospel was expected, the Resurrection was not. They now assume that the resurrected King will soon establish His kingdom. Their expectation has been revived. They may continue to preach the gospel. The Messianic Gospel related to a Messianic kingdom to expecting people.

Jesus had warned everyone that His kingdom was spiritual – that life in His kingdom was spiritual life, and bread in His kingdom was spiritual bread, and warfare in His kingdom was spiritual warfare, and the dwelling place for both God and man in His kingdom was a spiritual habitat. Such a kingdom was a mystery to those who were spiritually blind.

A key is used both to shut and to open, but there was no kingdom until Jesus returned from death.

Since the kingdom was spiritual, it could not be observed like a carnal kingdom, where you could say, “lo here and lo there”. No such boundaries exist in Jesus’ kingdom. The kingdom came with the Breath of God into their hearts, but they continued to expect the kingdom to come. They preached the Resurrection of the Christ, but not the resurrection of the church. They preached the gospel (of the circumcision) to the circumcision who believed Moses and the prophets, but now must believe in the Resurrection also, if the Gospel of Christ is to be good news.

### A Much Greater Commission

The commission to Israel ended when God no longer sent apostles to Israel, but began to appoint apostles to other people. Jesus said that there were other sheep that were not of the Jewish fold which would be called into His fold to be fed by Him. Paul claimed to have such a calling from Jesus and began to invite non-Jews to follow the Seed of David – the Christ of God. This caused great dissension in the church and became a major matter for the church to decide. We see the pillars of the church using their apostolic power to loose or bind this church matter that divides the fold.

Paul’s Gentile commission is so different from the original Jewish commission that many question his apostleship. This puts Paul on the defensive, seeking to prove that Jesus had sent him to non-Jews. Since the keys of the kingdom had never been used to bring in pagans, Paul seemed to be unauthorized in going to the Gentiles. The church confirmed his apostleship and accepted his converts as followers, but Gentile Christians could not join Jewish Christians in synagogue and temple worship.

When the door of the church was opened to Israelites, it was a door of faith, because all who heard and believed could enter. Likewise, when the door of the church was opened to Gentiles, it was a door of faith for all who heard and believed. Therefore, the key to the kingdom was believing, and the result was receiving the Spirit which had been promised.

The keys of the kingdom were given to the original apostles to call the Jews, and then the keys were given to the Gentile Apostle Paul to call the Gentiles. This is a much greater commission, because it includes everyone, whether Jew or non-Jew. It has no boundaries or limitations, like the first commission, which was to the Jew first. Paul calls everyone without regards to race, religion, or gender, and the called are all saints (sheep) in the same fold.

The kingdom of Christ is not of this carnal world, rather, it is spiritual, and of God and His world. This kingdom was given to the apostles on Resurrection Day by the risen Messiah of Israel. They were commissioned to go out into the Jewish world and call on Jews to believe and receive the Spirit into

their hearts. This would result in a Jewish church (assembly) which would witness for the Messiah in Judaism. They were given power and authority in Jesus’ name relating to matters of the Christian kingdom. They had no power and authority over the kings and kingdoms of this present world.

The first commission of the church was to the descendants of the First Covenant, which were now in tribute to Rome. They had deputy power to provide the signs and wonders which were expected by the Jews, but no power whatsoever to free from the iron fist of Rome.

When the gospel went out to the Gentiles, no one knew what it meant or how to worship and live the Christian life. They never expected from Paul’s gospel a revived Davidic empire or deliverance from Roman rule. They were taught a new hope in a new covenant where redemption was out of Adam instead of Egypt and life was with God in Christ.

God was seeking to co-reign with the Christian in both the Jewish and Gentile commission, but only in matters under church jurisdiction, not in matters of state, under the jurisdiction of the kings of this world. Jurisdiction relates to the range and sphere of authority and power. There exists political power in the kingdoms of men which Moses and Joshua had because they ruled in an earthly kingdom. But the apostles only had religious power, because they ruled in a spiritual kingdom.

In the fourth century, Constantine the Great became co-emperor with Licinius; then he became the supreme Caesar, having all power and authority – both political and religious. His title of Caesar gave him political power and his title “Pontifex Maximus”<sup>4</sup> gave him religious power. As Caesar, he had political jurisdiction, and as pontiff he had religious jurisdiction over all the religions of his kingdom – both pagan and Christian. His predecessor, Diocletian, had used *pontifex* power to persecute Christians while favoring other religions. Now Constantine will give religious freedom to all religions.

Jesus had given the church jurisdiction over matters of faith; now archbishops from city-states in every province of the empire can speak for Jesus and Christianity. They can agree to bind the church to the empire for such power and authority is under their jurisdiction. Constantine is Caesar and pontiff; therefore, he can speak for the empire concerning both church and state matters relating to his kingdom. Pontius Pilate had declined power over Christ and sought to set Him free, but Pontius Caesar now desires to serve Christ with his pontiff power. Does the church need this power and jurisdiction?

The church should be a servant in citizenship to the state- not a client sponsored by the state. The

<sup>4</sup> Pontifex - a member of the supreme college of priest in ancient Rome. Maximus - supreme pontiff.

bishops with the keys merged the kingdom of Christ into unholy matrimony with the kingdoms of this world. The power to loose and bind heavenly matters is now under the jurisdiction of those with power to loose and bind matters of state. History reveals that soon the power to loose and bind state matters was under the jurisdiction of those with power over matters of faith. What began as a spiritual kingdom with jurisdiction in the heart has enlarged its border with jurisdiction upon the kingdoms of this world, and the imperial church is born.

### Conclusion

We have to ask and consider if the Caesar is called of God to bring his throne into the kingdom of Christ, or called of God to bring himself (heart) into the kingdom. Likewise, we have to ask if the bishops are authorized to accept an earthly throne into the kingdom of Christ.

Constantine continued as Pontifex Maximus and also as Caesar, wearing his royal robe until his baptism and death in 337 A.D. After baptism, he wore baptismal white until his death.

In 380 A.D., Emperor Theodosius made belief in Christianity a matter of imperial command. This reminds us of a similar edict by a head of state in the days of Daniel. Can a person become a Christian by obedience to command, or does one become a Christian by obedience to what he believes (faith)? Can faith be enforced with fear? Should power be used against the will of God? Against the will of man? We must have answers to such questions if we are to understand these keys to Jesus' kingdom. What could they loose and bind and what were the boundaries of their jurisdiction?

Church history and tradition have given to the church and to St. Peter the keys of the kingdom, and have made the kingdom to be heaven. But the kingdom of Christ was in them, and the key was faith, which unlocks the heart to let Christ come in.

The Kingdom of Christ is in the Christian church, which is endowed by God with all power and authority to exercise its commission in this world. The people church of the first century became the steeple church of the fourth century. The pontiff Caesar of the fourth century became the pontiff pope of the Dark Ages, reigning with the state and over the state, with emperors and over emperors – reigning over Vatican states in Europe with crusades to bring Jerusalem under its dominion. The Jerusalem above is already under the dominion of Christ, for it is the capital of His kingdom, where He reigns on the throne with His Father.

The Reformation was rebellion against pontiff power, with many leaving the steeple church, challenging its claim to divine authority. The people church which Jesus built is now a steeple church which

man has built. A church endowed by God is now a church endowed by man, claiming access to the grace of God.

If you lived upstream at the head waters, you could control the flow of water for life to those below and to your own profit and advantage. If you made people to believe that you could open the flood gates of Living Water supplied by the grace of God, they would knock on your door seeking access.

When people began to read the Bible in their own language, they discovered that every individual Christian is a priest and only Christ is the pontiff. Every individual Christian has the keys of the kingdom, with access to the grace of God. The keys are, in fact, the endowment. Why would one seek for that which he already has? Why would a priestly Christian ask St. Peter to let him in when the kingdom of heaven is already in him? Why would a priestly Christian want membership in a steeple church when he is already a member of the Body of Christ? The letter to the Hebrew Christians began with the history of "God speaking on earth through His prophets, and speaking on earth through His Son, and now speaking from heaven through the church". Thus, the church was to continue to let God speak on earth.

God had begun His career in journalism by writing upon stone, then papyrus and parchment, and now He writes upon the hearts of Christians, to be read by everyone. They have exclusive jurisdiction over the testimony of God and should always speak the Truth in word and in deed.

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