

“Keys to the Kingdom”  
Mark 8:27-29; Matthew 16:13-20  
(Preached at Trinity, February 1, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We’ve been looking at the all-important question Jesus asked His disciples.  
"But who do you say that I am?"  
It is a very personal question demanding a very personal answer.  
Peter’s answer is the most important answer that a man can give. "You are the Christ."  
"The Son of the Living God"  
To this Jesus pronounced His blessing:  
**Matthew 16:17** "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven."
2. As we’ve examined aspects **Matthew 16** that are absent from Mark’s account we read,  
**Verse 19** - "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. <sup>19</sup> "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."
3. Tonight I want us to focus on this verse, another difficult verse that has often resulted in controversy throughout the history of the church.  
**Matthew 16:19** – "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
4. What did Jesus mean by the “keys of the kingdom” and to whom were they given? And what is meant by binding and loosing?
  - a. Since the Reformation, it has been recognized by both Catholics and Protestants that the authority of the Roman Catholic Church rests upon the interpretation of this verse.
  - b. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the “keys to the kingdom” point to the church’s power to forgive sin. To “bind” or forbid and to “loose” or permit points to the authority of the church to declare what the Law of God allows or forbids.
  - c. These keys were given to Peter and his successors as the popes.
  - d. This led ultimately to the infallibility of the papacy. It also led to the priesthood standing as the mediator between God and man with the people having to confess their sins to the priest and the priest declaring absolution.  
In essence, salvation is held in the hands of the church.  
There have been great abuses of the doctrine – for example, the sale of indulgences.
  - e. It leads to both legalism and libertinism since the church has absolute authority to declare right from wrong, binding and loosing.

- I. What did Jesus mean by the “keys of the kingdom” and to whom were they given?
- A. Keys point to authority
1. The keeper of the keys has the power to open and close – to shut-up and lock or to unlock and open.
  2. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for locking up the truth from the people. As teachers they had the duty to open the truth of God’s Word to the people. Instead, through lies and deception they shut up the truth and made it unavailable.  
**Luke 11:52** "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."
  3. Isaiah wrote of the permanence of the throne of David, ultimately fulfilled in Christ. He said this King would hold the key of the house of David. The one holding the key would have the authority to open and shut.  
**Isaiah 22:22** – “Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open.”
  4. We also find this same terminology referring to Christ in Revelation  
**Revelation 3:7** – “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:”
- B. In **Matthew 16:19** Jesus is applying the authority of the key to opening and shutting the Kingdom of God.
1. We’ve already seen that this cannot refer to Peter alone.  
We cannot dismiss that Jesus is speaking to Peter  
**Matthew 16:18-19 NAU** - "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. <sup>19</sup> "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."  
    - a. “I will give YOU the keys” - “you” is referring to Peter. But not to Peter individually but to Peter making this grand profession, “Thou are the Christ.”
    - b. First, to the Apostles but ultimately extending to the church—to you and me. It is applied to all those who make the glorious confession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

**HOW?**

    2. First, the Apostles were given authority to go and establish churches throughout the world. They were given the authority to teach and govern the church of Christ on His behalf.
    3. Second, through the proclamation of the gospel – We hold the keys of the Kingdom through the work of evangelism. We make bold proclamations.

**Acts 2:38** – “And Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

**Acts 3:19** – “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you,”

**Acts 4:12** – “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”

4. All who hear and believe shall be saved – the doors opened  
All who refuse to believe shall be damned – the doors closed  
<sup>KJV</sup> **Mark 16:15-16** – “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
5. In this way we are declaring who will be saved – we hold the keys to Kingdom. We open the entrance to heaven through the Gospel. If we do not preach they will not be saved.  
**(Rom 10:14 NAS)** "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"
6. We hold the keys by preaching Christ and Him crucified  
This generation of pastors has the power to lock the doors of heaven by keeping their mouths shut. They must preach. God has endowed them with the authority of the gospel.
  - a. Woe unto them if they withhold the gospel  
**Luke 11:52** – “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the **key** of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.”  
**1 Corinthians 9:16** – “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”
  - b. If we fail to preach we are in essence locking the souls of men out of heaven  
**Romans 10:13-15** – “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?  
And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”
7. Although not all Christians are called to public ministry and public preaching the Great Commission is given to the whole church. All of us are to proclaim the Good News.

How many fathers are locking their children out of heaven?

- II. This can also refer to the great authority Christ has vested in His church. Not in the sense that the Roman Catholic Church claims power. But there are several ways the church *does* possess the power to open and close the Kingdom.
- A. We must make one point of clarification here
1. When we speak of the Kingdom of Christ we are speaking of a realm greater than any one particular church
  2. A local church is but one small part of our Lord's Kingdom but they are given jurisdiction over a group of people who are a part of the Kingdom. And every Christian should be a part of one of these local churches.
- B. The Church has been granted discernment to examine the professions of new converts
1. Churches have a duty to seek a regenerate membership.  
J.L. Dagg - "The churches are not infallible judges, being unable to search the heart; but they owe it to the cause of Christ, and to the candidate himself, to exercise the best judgment to which they are capable"
  2. This is the meaning of our Lord's words in John 20 as He spoke to all of His disciples:  
**John 20:21-23 NAS** – "Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." <sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> "If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained."  
These verbs are in the perfect – "have been"  
When the church is functioning under the leadership of the Holy Spirit her pronouncements reveal what has already taken place in heaven
  3. In this way we have the delegated authority to declare who is bound in sin and loosed from sin based upon how the sinner responds to the Gospel and by the fruit of repentance.
    - a. God has given to every believer His Word as the supreme standard by which we may judge the testimony of others.
    - b. God has given to the elders particular discernment as those given watch over the souls of God's people.
- C. The church has been granted the great authority of discipline. This is consistent with the teaching of Matthew 18:17-18  
**Matthew 18:17 NAS** - "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. <sup>18</sup> "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
1. There certain standards of conduct that the church must demand. There are also certain types of behavior which are inconsistent with Christianity. A unrepentant sinner must be removed from the community of believers.
  2. When the church takes this action it is recognized in heaven as long as it is done in harmony with the Word of God. When a person is wrongly excommunicated by the church the Lord welcomes him.

3. We have the power to declare those living inconsistently with the Christian faith  
 The Apostle Paul demonstrated that church had this authority of binding and loosing. Paul did not act apart from the church but in conjunction with it.  
**1 Corinthians 5:4-5 NAU** - "In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

#### Conclusion:

1. This has been the consistent teaching of the Christian Church.  
 Heidelberg Catechism:  
 Question 83 – *“What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?”*  
*“The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut against unbelievers.”*
2. As God’s people we must see this as a great responsibility placed upon us.  
**Matthew 16:19** – “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
3. God has given us the keys to His Kingdom. We **MUST NOT** use them to shut the doors that no one else may enter. We must boldly proclaim to all men, “Repent and be ye saved.”