

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 16:19-20

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.” Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. (Matthew 16:19-20)

Matthew 16:19 is one of the key proof texts for the Roman Catholic Church in their effort to prove that Peter was the first pope. Their argument ultimately fails for a number of reasons.

But we must admit that there is something remarkable happening in this statement. Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of heaven. He announced its inauguration. He said that His miracles were proof that the Kingdom of God had come.

And now He says that He will give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that the exercise of those keys on earth will be matched in heaven. Jesus is using figurative language – there are no physical keys to the Kingdom of heaven – so what does He mean? The text of Scripture tells us.

TRANSITION: Let’s begin by understanding to whom Jesus gave the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. Then we’ll identify the keys themselves; what does He mean by “the keys of the Kingdom of heaven”? We’ll talk about binding and loosing, and the relationship between earth and heaven. Then we’ll bring it home and talk about the importance of this statement for you and I.

GIVEN TO WHOM?

Matthew 16:13-19

This passage begins with Jesus taking His disciples to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13). He asked them as a group,

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13)

They told Him what they had heard people saying:

“Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” (Matthew 16:14)

Then He asked them all another question,

“But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15)

Peter answered,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

At that point in the conversation Peter became the spokesman for the disciples as a whole. Jesus responds by saying,

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:17)

He said this to Peter specifically because Peter had answered, but Peter had answered for the group, and so the blessing applied to all who understood. For the record, Judas Iscariot could have accurately answered the first question, “Who do

the people say that I am?”, but not the second question, “Who do you say that I am?” I don’t know what he would have said, but it would not have been, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” That is a conviction that only comes from God the Father. Since Judas Iscariot remained dead in his sins, he never understood this. Peter could not have known that Judas did not understand this, however, and so he answered as he did.

Jesus directs His next comment to Peter personally,

And 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. (Matthew 16:18)

The rock upon which Jesus would build His church was not Peter himself, but Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Now Jesus continues,

“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.” (Matthew 16:19)

The context of the passage tells us that Jesus was not singling out Peter as a leader or giving Him some unique authority. The conversation began with all of the disciples, and then Peter became the spokesman for the group. Jesus continued with Peter as the spokesman. What He said to Peter ultimately applied to all of them, and to the entire church.

TRANSITION: Jesus promised to give Peter, and the other disciples, and the church, the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. These keys are obviously very

important.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

But what are they? Jesus points us in the right direction when He talks about binding and loosing. The keys of the Kingdom are not keys to a door, but keys to shackles and chains. Jesus is not talking about opening doors but freeing prisoners.

SLAVES OF SIN

To be a sinner at all is to be a slave to sin. Proverbs 5:22 says,

His own iniquities will capture him who is the wicked one,
And with the cords of his sin he will be held fast. (Proverbs 5:22)

Second Peter 2:18-19 says of the wicked (in words that seem to describe the current move to indoctrinate children into homosexuality and transgenderism),

For speaking out arrogant words of vanity, they entice by sensual lusts of the flesh, those who barely escape from the ones who conducted themselves in error, promising them freedom **while they themselves are slaves of corruption**; for **by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.** (Second Peter 2:18-19)

The Lord Jesus Himself said to Jews who claimed to believe in Him,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.**” (John 8:34)

FREEDOM FROM SIN

In the larger passage in John 8 Jesus says,

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth, and **the truth will make you free.**” [Anyone who recognizes their own bondage to sin will be thrilled to hear these words.] They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s seed and have never yet been enslaved to anyone. How is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?” [Unfortunately, sin doesn’t only BIND us; it also BLINDS us. Inevitably those who most need to be set free are the most offended when they are offered freedom.] Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin** [Everyone, without exception.]. And the slave does not remain in the house forever [There is a day of judgment coming; those who are still slaves to their sins will perish from the house, the Kingdom of God.]; **the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free** [That is, if the Son of God makes YOU a child of God], **you will be free indeed.** (John 8:31-36)

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM ARE OPPOSITES

Slavery and freedom are opposites. You can’t be simultaneously a slave to something and free from that thing. This is what Romans 6:21, 22 says:

For when **you were slaves of sin**, you were **free in regard to righteousness** [That is, righteousness had no claim on you.] ... But now **having been freed from sin and enslaved to God** [That’s the opposite condition: sin has no claim on those who are enslaved to God], you have your benefit, leading to sanctification, and the end, eternal life. (Romans 6:20, 22)

Now, these passages don’t use the word “key,” but I don’t think they need to. The keys of the Kingdom are used to bind and loose. Only spiritual bondage matters: are we slaves of sin or of God and righteousness? Only spiritual freedom matters: are we free from sin or free from God and righteousness?

Alright then – what are the keys of the Kingdom? They are what God uses to free us from slavery to sin and to join us, or bind us, to Himself in righteousness. The keys of the Kingdom

are the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation [we could easily say “freeing from sin and binding to Christ”] to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

TRANSITION: Jesus says, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” We’ve seen that the keys of the Kingdom of heaven are the Gospel which frees us from sin and joins us to Christ. But what does Jesus mean by the next phrase, “and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven”?

BINDING AND LOOSING

Matthew 16:19

Clearly, there is a relationship between what happens on earth and what happens in heaven. At first glance it looks like the work begins on earth, and is then matched in heaven. First glances can be deceiving, though. The Greek text makes it clear that the work begins in heaven, and is afterward matched on earth. Most English translations don’t make that clear, though. I think the reason is that the wording ends up sounding clumsy:

whatever you bind on earth **shall have been bound** in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth **shall have been loosed** in heaven (Matthew 16:19)

“Shall be bound” or “will be bound” just sounds better. The problem is that it’s not as accurate. The original language is clear that the binding loosing happens in heaven first, and then is matched on earth, and not the other way around.

WHAT IS JESUS DESCRIBING, THEN?

“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.” (Matthew 16:19)

When the Gospel is preached there are only two responses, faith and unbelief.

Peter preached the Gospel in Acts 2 and thousands responded in faith:

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men, brothers, what should we do?” (Acts 2:37)

Peter answers their cry of submission and faith this way:

And Peter said to them, “**Repent**, and 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**. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, **as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself**.” (Acts 2:38-39)

Using the word picture of Matthew 16:19, Peter promised that they would be loosed from their sins and be born again through the Holy Spirit. He didn’t make this promise indiscriminately; it is not for anyone who says they want it, but for “as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” That call is proven by the response of faith and the obedience faith produces to actually repent and be baptized in the name of the crucified and risen Savior.

We see the opposite in Acts 8. Philip the deacon (not the apostle) went to Samaria and preached Christ. The Spirit worked confirming miracles through Philip, and the people were astounded. One of those who saw these miracles was a man named Simon, who was a magician. Simon was very well known.

Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city

and astounding the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, “This man is what is called the Great Power of God.” And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astounded them with his magic arts. (Acts 8:9-11)

Even Simon claimed to believe, Luke writes.

Luke goes on,

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit had been bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Was Simon a new Christian who was mistaken about things? No; he was a false convert. How do we know? Look at how Peter responds.

But Peter said to him, “May your silver **perish with you** [Simon was under the judgment of God], because you supposed you could obtain the gift of God with money! **You have no part or portion in this matter** [there was nothing sanctified about Simon], for **your heart is not right before God**. Therefore **repent of this wickedness of yours**, and pray earnestly to the Lord that, **if possible**, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you [forgiveness was not guaranteed]. For I see that **you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of unrighteousness.**”

But Simon answered and said, “Pray earnestly to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.” [This isn’t humility, it’s pride; Peter urges Simon to repent, and Simon refuses.] (Acts 8:14-24)

So again using the word picture Jesus gives in Matthew 16:19, Peter “binds” Simon by declaring to him in no uncertain terms that he remained dead in sin and

unregenerate.

In both cases Peter simply announced what had already been accomplished in heaven. He assured those who believed on the day of Pentecost that they were forgiven and joined to Christ. He assured Simon the magician that he remained dead in his sins and under the judgment of God.

TRANSITION: So, where is Jesus going with all of this? Why does He talk about the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and why does He make it clear that what is bound or loosed on earth has already been bound or loosed in heaven? The answer is in Matthew 16:20.

DO NOT TELL ANYONE ... YET

Matthew 16:20

Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.
(Matthew 16:20)

What is the significance here? Simply this: Jesus never gives up the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. He maintains full authority over all creation, including the souls of men and women. There were people who would die between that day and when the apostles began preaching at Pentecost. By God's foreknowledge and wisdom, according to the good pleasure of His will, it was not for those people to hear the Gospel. The truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, was to remain only with those to whom the Father revealed it until the Spirit came and the church was born.

This emphasizes the fact that Peter and the apostles' use of the keys of the

Kingdom could only reflect what the Lord had already accomplished in heaven. Jesus never obligated Himself to honor THEIR will; rather He instructed them to honor HIS will by affirming only those who confessed Him as the Christ and repented of their sins, and informing the rest that they remained dead in their sins.

BRINGING IT HOME

What does this have to do with us today?

We have a tremendous privilege, you know. We have been granted the right to assure someone who trusts in Christ and repents of their sin that they have been forgiven and joined with Him for all eternity. And we also have the responsibility of telling those who reject the Gospel that they remain under the judgment of God.

Some will argue with us: “Who are YOU to judge ME?”

And we need to quickly acknowledge that we are nobody, and it isn't our judgment that is being passed. Jesus Himself says

He who believes in [the Son of God] is not judged; he who does not believe **has been judged already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

When we tell someone that they remain in their sins, it's not our judgment being passed, but God's.

Now, could we be wrong? Could we think someone is a Christian who isn't, or someone isn't a Christian who is? Of course. That's ok. When we affirm someone as

a believer based on their confession of faith we are doing no more than the Lord calls us to do. When we warn someone that they remain in their sins because they deny Christ we are doing no more than the Lord calls us to do. We have no power to save or condemn anyone. We have no power to obligate Jesus to save or condemn anyone. We are simply heralds, announcing what He requires us to announce.

Nevertheless, those who are wise will listen, especially when we tell them that we are concerned for their souls.