

The Keys of the Kingdom

In Matt. 16:19, our Lord made a pronouncement of far reaching significance. He told Peter, "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." What message did Jesus intend to convey in this statement?

First, Jesus used the word *keys* in this passage in a figurative sense to denote the means of access. To give one a key was to endow one with authority. For example, during this period of history when Jesus was speaking, when the Jews elected a person to be a doctor of law, they placed in the person's hand the keys to the temple library. These keys gave the person access to the writings of the scholars and signified the person's qualifications to be a teacher of the law.

Second, when the Lord gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, he gave him the privilege of announcing the conditions on which all people would enter the kingdom. Peter used the keys on three occasions. On the Day of Pentecost in Act 2, Peter set forth and bound God's terms of forgiveness and salvation for all men (Acts 2:36-47). In Acts 10, Paul repeated these same terms and bound them on the Gentiles (Acts 10:34-48). In Acts 8, Paul set forth and bound God's plan for forgiving and restoring erring Christians (Acts 8:18-19). This plan of God for our salvation never changed at any time in all the pages of the New Testament, nor has it changed since (Jude 3). God has only this plan for all men (Acts 15:7-9).

Third, contrary to the belief of many people, the giving of the keys of the kingdom did not make Peter the head of the church. The Lord gave the power of binding and loosing to all the apostles (Matt. 18:18; John 20:22-23). The Lord did not give Peter some apostolic office that involved greater powers than the rest of the apostles. In his infinite wisdom, the Lord saw fit to bestow on Peter the honor of being the first to preach the gospel in the Christian dispensation (Acts 2).

Finally, the terms of God's salvation for us are the same as they were two thousand years ago (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; John 3:3-5). These terms, which Peter and the rest of the apostles announced and bound all over the known world, are the very same today. If we obey the Lord's will as set forth by Peter and the apostles, we will receive his salvation and be added to his church (Acts 2:47) and be "translated into the kingdom of the son of His love (Col. 1:12)." We appeal to you to obey the teaching and enter into the kingdom so richly supplied.