

Sunday (August 27):

## The keys of the kingdom of heaven

**Scripture:** *Matthew 16:13-20*

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

At an opportune time Jesus tests his disciples with a crucial question: *Who do men say that I am and who do you say that I am?* He was widely recognized in Israel as a mighty man of God, even being compared with the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. Peter, always quick to respond, exclaimed that he was *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. No mortal being could have revealed this to Peter; but only God.

Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD), an early church father comments on Peter's profession of faith in Jesus:

Peter did not say "you are a Christ" or "a son of God" but "**the** Christ, **the** Son of God." For there are many christs [meaning *anointed ones*] by grace, who have attained the rank of adoption [as sons], but [there is] only one who is by nature the Son of God. Thus, using the definite article, he said, the Christ, the Son of God. And in calling him Son of the living God, Peter indicates that Christ himself is life and that death has no authority over him. And even if the flesh, for a short while, was weak and died, nevertheless it rose again, since the Word, who indwelt it, could not be held under the bonds of death. (FRAGMENT 190)

Jesus plays on Peter's name which is the same word for "rock" in both Aramaic and Greek. To call someone a "rock" is one of the greatest of compliments. The ancient rabbis had a saying that when God saw Abraham, he exclaimed: "I have discovered a rock to found the world upon". Through Abraham God established a nation for himself. Through faith Peter grasped who Jesus truly was. He was the first apostle to recognize Jesus as the *Anointed One (Messiah and Christ)* and the *only begotten Son of God*. The New Testament describes the church as a spiritual house or temple with each member joined together as *living stones* (see 1 Peter 2:5). Faith in Jesus Christ makes us into *rocks* or *spiritual stones*.

Jesus then confers on Peter authority to govern the church that Jesus would build, a church that no powers would overcome because it is founded on the rock which is Christ himself. Epiphanius, a 6th century Scripture scholar who also translated many early church commentaries from Greek into Latin, explains the significance of Jesus handing down the "keys of the kingdom":

For Christ is a rock which is never disturbed or worn away. Therefore Peter gladly received his name from Christ to signify the established and unshaken faith of the church... The devil is the gateway of death who always hastens to stir up against the holy church calamities and temptations and persecutions. But the faith of the apostle, which was founded upon the rock of Christ, abides always unconquered and unshaken. And the very keys of the kingdom of the heavens have been handed down so that one whom he has bound on earth has been bound in heaven, and one whom he has set free on earth he has also set free in heaven. (INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPELS 28)

The Lord Jesus offers us the gift of unshakeable faith, enduring hope, and unquenchable love - and the joyful boldness to proclaim him as the one true Savior who brings us the kingdom of God both now and forever. Who do you say he is to yourself and to your neighbor?

"Lord Jesus, I profess and believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are my Lord and my Savior. Make my faith strong like Peter's and give me boldness to speak of you to others that they may come to know you personally as Lord and Savior and grow in the knowledge of your great love."

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