

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Matthew 16:13-19 (NT page 983)

Sermon

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The context of our passage is important in understanding the true meaning of PETER'S confession. His confession is important not only for Jews but for each and every one who has faith. Matthew wanted to emphasize that God is accessible to Jews and non Jews, hence the context and setting of Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi was in "pagan territory", near a grotto devoted to the worship of the Greek deity Pan. We also know that Herod had dedicated a temple for the worship of Caesar there. Thus it was hardly the most expected site for a divine revelation. The city was some twenty-five miles from the Lake of Galilee.

Then Jesus asked his disciples who the people think He is. They answered that most thought He is one of the prophets. It is interesting to note that only Matthew mentions Jeremiah. In some Jewish circles it was expected that Jeremiah would appear before the coming of the Messiah.

But then Jesus approached his disciples directly asking them who they think He is. Peter answered that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus then acknowledged that this confession could not come from Peter himself but would have been a revelation by God Himself.

And then Jesus said that on His confession of faith He will build His church and nothing will overcome it. Nothing will be able to destroy this faith that Peter revealed, not even death which was known as “the gates of Hades” or the underworld.

But Jesus also said something very important. He said that because of His faith, He is giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

The keeper of the keys was one of the most important roles a household servant could hold. A high official held the keys in a royal kingdom and in God’s house, the temple. The doors to the kingdom of God will be opened to those who have faith, while those who does not have faith, will not be able to enter into His kingdom.

Keys are very important to us too. Without them, we are lost. I am sure all of us will have experienced the sheer frustration of losing keys. Just last Sunday the boys and I had to spend a hour waiting for Nanda to appear after her church service just because I did not take a key for the Manse as I was leaving for church. I must say I vowed that I will make sure it does not happen again because keeping two boys occupied for a hour was not easy. At one point Rachel kindly offered us her home in case we were feeling cold.

Keys are so ordinary but they play a big role in our lives. Without car keys we cannot drive, without house or door keys we cannot enter or unlock any door.

TO carry keys can also have the underlying theme of power. It can be quite daunting when a property convenor hands over the "keys of the church" to you as a young minister with the intended meaning "not to lose it". And in some churches some people use "keys" to exclude others like for instance not to give certain people access to cupboards, and drawers.

We also know the practise in some cultures whereby youngsters when they reach a certain age are handed a "key" to symbolise that they are now regarded as adults. Apparently this idea originated from Roman times when youngsters were given the big responsibility to have access to the keys of the house at a certain age.

The meaning of our passage is clear: if we believe in Jesus Christ, and if live a life of faith, then we also have received the keys to enter into God's kingdom. Yes everyone who says: I believe is an important key bearer of the kingdom of God.

God indeed is gracious and loving to entrust us with the keys to his kingdom. And this is clearly illustrated through baptism. Although babies cannot yet understand it, God entrust them with keys as well. We know that in the early church baptism was an important entrance ritual, or rite of passage into the community of faith.

So every time we baptise, God hands over the keys to His kingdom. It is not something that we have to work for or something that we deserve. God gives it freely because of His unending love. All we need is to have faith.

But to carry these keys are a huge responsibility. You and I can be locksmiths of faith, providing keys for others who have not heard about the

redemption and resurrection of Christ and who have not confessed their faith. We can go out and through faith alone, give others the opportunity to share in the everlasting life. Or we can keep it for ourselves and let the rust set in without giving others any opportunity to see the living Lord. No – don't let your key get rusty – use it to the glory and honour of our Lord. Use it to change the lives of those who have no hope of an everlasting life. HELP others to see beyond the grave, to look beyond tragedy to see the Living Lord Jesus.

If you are sitting in church this morning and you worry if you will enter the eternal kingdom of God because of your personal circumstances, remember all that the Lord require is your heart, your confession that He is your only Lord and Saviour and your commitment to follow Him through faith. If you are sitting in the church and you feel that you are worthless, remember that God's loving grace is enough. And if you have forgotten about your "key of faith", go now and start using it again through your witness to the world that there is only One Saviour and that is Christ!

Nick and Jane, may you tell Joely of the "key of faith" that she received on this day. Show her your faith and let her follow Christ as you follow Him! Make your home a temple to the Glory of God. Let her grow up with the living hope that she too will inherit the kingdom of God just because of her faith.

And may all of us go out and remember what God has given us and let us share it with our world wherever we go. Let us show our "keys of faith" to everyone, let us rattle it so that people can hear we praise the Lord, let us put it down on each and every coffee table like a magazine for others to

read, let us take it from our pockets or handbags, AND let us through our witness of faith, hope and love persuade others to do the same!

Amen