

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven... Are Still Available Today!

--A Bible Lesson by Richard Sprague

Jesus was talking to Peter in **Matthew 16**. After Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said to him in verse 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." (NIV)

It has become very clear to me, more than ever before, that those keys were revealed to Peter when Jesus gave the apostles the words of the Great Commission. We shall look at the three records of the commission as given in **Matthew 28:18-20**; **Mark 16:15-16**; **Luke 24:45-49**. These are the New International Version but the King James and other versions include them as well.

In **Matthew 28:18-20** we read, "(18) Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Mark 16:15-16 tells us that Jesus said, "(15) Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. (16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Luke 24:45-49 includes these thoughts, "(45) Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (46) He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, (47) and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. (48) You are witnesses of these things. (49) I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'"

Jesus taught the apostles many things during the three years that he "went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."

Matthew 9:35 The apostles were with him all that time, hearing Jesus teach and preach, and watching him as he healed the sick. They had many opportunities to hear Jesus preach, as illustrated in **Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7** when He gave what we call "the Sermon on the Mount". There is much doctrine there for the apostles to hear and accept. They also heard Jesus give many parables about the Kingdom of Heaven as found in **Matthew 25**, among others.

It is normal for a person to give final instructions to his workers when he is going on a journey. This is what Jesus was talking about when He gave the Parable of the Talents in **Matthew 25:14-30**. The owner was going on a journey so he instructed his servants as to their duties while he was gone. When the owner returned, he asked the servants to give an account of what they had done in carrying out his instructions. You read it and see what happened as the owner found out what had been done, or what had not been done.

Now Jesus was ready to leave on a journey to be with His Father in Heaven. He gives His faithful followers some last-minute instructions about what they are to do while He was gone. He expects them to do what He tells them to do. When He returns, will He find His followers faithfully carrying out His final instructions?

It appears to me at least, that those final instructions contain the **KEYS TO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**. I say that because I see them being used by the Apostle Peter when he preached that first sermon as recorded in **Acts Chapter 2**. This was after the Holy Spirit came to guide them in establishing the Kingdom that Jesus said would 'come with power before some who were standing there, would die.'" **Mark 9:1**

What Are Those Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven?

Jesus established that He had the authority to tell them what they were to do while He was gone. That was His first statement: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." **Matthew 28:18**

The very next word, "therefore" refers to what He had just said. What He is about to add to that has the power of His authority behind it. As we "go and make disciples of all nations," we do so because He has the authority to tell

us to do. The “disciples” we are to make will become the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. But, for that to happen, we must use the “keys of the Kingdom” that Jesus gave to Peter. Any other works keys will not open the door to that Kingdom.

Do you remember the Parable of the Good Shepherd? It is found in **John 10:1-18**. In verse 1, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.” What does He mean when He says, “by the gate?”

We find in **verses 7 – 9**, “(7) Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth I am the gate for the sheep. (8) All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them, (9) I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved.’” It is obvious that this “sheep pen” relates to the Kingdom and Jesus is the only way into that Kingdom of Heaven. **John 14:6**

Since Jesus was going away, He gave Peter the keys that open the way through the Gate to enter the Kingdom. We must therefore understand what those keys are if we are to “make disciples” who are the sheep that belong to the Good Shepherd.

Making disciples is the function of all who are disciples of Jesus. A disciple is a person who disciplines himself according to the teaching of the one he is following. We let our lives reflect the One whose teaching we follow. Jesus made many disciples who followed Him and lived in harmony with His teachings. The twelve apostles were the core group and in Jerusalem after Jesus ascended to Heaven, there were 120 that stayed there (**Acts 1:15**) until the Holy Spirit came “to remind you of all that Jesus had taught.” **John 14:26**

The “KEYS” are in the “COMMISSION”

Mark 16:15-16. Verse 15 repeats the same “Go” command that Matthew includes. Making disciples is done by preaching the Good News. The “Good News” is the news that “the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.” **Luke 24:46**

That is the Gospel of which we are not to be ashamed. **Romans 1:16** That message is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentiles.” It is what Paul describes in **1 Corinthians 15:3-7**. There, you have one of the KEYS that will open the door for entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the key of BELIEF, otherwise known as FAITH. Mark includes it in his Great Commission and he quotes Jesus when he says “Whoever believes - - - will be saved.” BELIEVING THE GOOD NEWS IS ONE OF THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM.

Now look at what Matthew also included that the disciple makers were to do in making disciples. Jesus said it, “....

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Mark also tells us that Jesus included baptism along with “believe”. “He that believes AND IS baptized will be saved.” This, it seems to me, makes baptism become one of the KEYS along with believe. That is what “and is” means. Now we must go to what Luke tells us that Jesus said as he put it in his account of what the final instructions of Jesus included. **Luke 24:47**, “and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Did you see another KEY in that verse? I did and it was often referred to throughout the four Gospels as being expected for anyone to be accepted by God. It is REPENTANCE and is required of anyone who would enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Did Peter Use These Keys in His Sermon in Acts 2?

It only takes a few minutes to read this entire chapter. His sermon is found in verses 14-36. Did Peter preach the Good News that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised from the dead? That message is the KEY to the whole matter of entering into the Kingdom. Yes, Peter did preach the Good News. Note verse 23, “This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” There you have the KEY to the whole matter. The Good News was preached by Peter. See also verses 29-36.

This sermon so convicted the crowd that they asked what they needed to do. Verse 38 tells us that Peter used two of the above-mentioned keys that Jesus had said should be preached. He said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Peter continued to “warn and plead with them” and we see another KEY in that they “accepted his message and were baptized.” That means they BELIEVED what Peter had preached about Jesus and OBEYED it. The result was there were “about three thousand added to their number that day.” They entered the Kingdom of God through the gate of Jesus by using the keys to the Kingdom as preached by Peter.

The next thing we read about these new “sheep”, is they began to learn to be disciples by devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching, learning to discipline their lives according to what Jesus had commanded in Matthew’s account of the Great Commission, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The fact that their sins were remitted, or forgiven, means the blood of Christ was there as they were “baptized into His death” as **Romans 6:3-14** says. See also **Colossians 2:6-13**. For a more complete reading of how important baptism is as a key to entering the Kingdom, find in my posts the study of baptism as it appears in the New Testament.

Without a doubt, Jesus made it one of the elements that is KEY to receiving Him as our Good Shepherd and as the GATE into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this same “pattern of preaching” that the apostles used to spread the Good News throughout the entire Roman Empire during those first 100 years of the Gospel age. Are preachers today using the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven as Jesus directed in His final instruction?

PRAY WITH ME: Father in Heaven, In Jesus’ Name I pray your Holy Spirit, Who gave us the Scriptures, will open OUR understanding of the Scriptures as the Spirit did with the apostles about what we are to preach to the lost so they can be the sheep of the Good Shepherd. In Jesus’ Name, Amen!

See **Luke 24:45** and make this your prayer as you study the Word and preach it to others.