

Call to Obedience #462
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The Passing Of The Keys

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One of the greatest, yet most ignored passages in the Gospels is found in Matthew 16:13 to 17:7. This is also where Jesus said to Peter: *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...* (Matt. 16:19).

We speak and write much about the church, the church, the church. Yet, Jesus only makes three references to the church in all of the four Gospels combined, and there are only two references to the rebirth, but 86 references to the kingdom of God! In spite of this, the vast majority of believers know practically nothing about God's kingdom. That is embarrassing. Even many of the finest preachers and theologians hardly ever speak of it.

Let us first correct the misconception that Jesus gave the keys of the church to Peter. No, Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter as it says in these following two verses: *...That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...* (Matt. 16:18-19). The church is *...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone* (Eph. 2:20). It was the keys of the kingdom that were given to Peter to open a new age in church history on the day of Pentecost! Please notice that there is a distinct difference between the church and the kingdom. They are not the same. Both have different beginnings and different functions. The church consists of many: it is corporate and it is the body of Christ. It has imperfections, spots, wrinkles and blemishes that need to be removed. The church is the bride of Christ and Jesus will not come to the wedding until His bride, the church, is cleansed and made holy. In contrast, notice that Christ's kingdom is personal; it is within; it is perfect, never disappointing, never failing nor tiring. Praise the Lord!

The church needs the kingdom and the terms "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" are used interchangeably. The church cannot reflect Jesus Christ without her people possessing the kingdom. The measure by which her members have the kingdom of God within is the measure by which

the church is a light unto the world. You are either dying or dead if you do not have the kingdom. You cannot bind or loose without it. You cannot conquer without it. You cannot spiritually breathe without it. You cannot walk with God without it. Spiritual authority and spiritual maturity come through the kingdom. The Christian's life is a life lived in and through the kingdom. A Christian cannot live outside of the kingdom of God as a fish cannot live out of the water.

After being born again, you are on the threshold of the kingdom of God. Jesus said: *...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* (John 3:3-5). After being born again, you are first only on the front porch of the kingdom. You must then enter it and remain in it through self-denial.

Let me now ask you some questions:

1. How long did Jesus have these keys to His kingdom before He was ready to give them to Peter? It was 4,000 years plus 33 years of His own life amongst us. Can you imagine the patience and restraint of Almighty God and His Son, the Lord Jesus through all of these years? Jesus could have come much earlier and He could have given the keys to Abraham, Moses, Elijah, etc., but He gave them to Peter when the fullness of time had come. How great of a man was Peter?

2. Did Jesus give Peter one key or many? Many! Jesus gave Peter a bundle of keys, enough so that on the day of Pentecost, he could open every chamber of God's glorious kingdom to those who were willing to pay the price to possess it. Friend, there are so many chambers in the kingdom of God that it will take you more than a lifetime to explore them all.

3. In short, what is the kingdom of God? It is Paradise restored. Man lost Paradise when he disobeyed. The intimate, constant fellowship of man with God was broken when Eve yielded to Satan. But in Genesis 3:15, God told the devil: *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*. This is where God promised to go to war on our behalf in order to conquer sin. From there on, God promised to give man a greater Paradise than the first, now called the kingdom of God. In this kingdom, the Holy Spirit would be sent to dwell not only with, but also in His disciples (John 14:16-17).

Jesus preached the kingdom of God everywhere He went: in cities and villages, in the Temple and synagogues, in the fields and at the seaside. When

Jesus taught people to pray, the first petition He gave was: *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven* (Matt. 6:10). This speaks of the absolute sovereign reign of God in the lives of His people, because God's kingdom is the place where His people do what the King wants them to do. If you are not living in the middle of God's will, you are not in the kingdom. Jesus also told many parables describing the kingdom of God which introduces us to many of its chambers (see Matt. 13:1-58).

Perhaps we can best summarize the kingdom of God in the words of Paul: *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* (Rom. 14:17). When you are in God's kingdom, you are living righteously which allows you to go to heaven. When you have righteousness, you will have peace with God. Many churchgoers lose their peace and need constant reassurance that they are still saved. When you are living in God's kingdom, you will not have doubts about your salvation. You are convinced in your heart, for His spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:16). And because of this, you will also have joy no matter whether you are sick or well, rich or poor, in prison or free. This joy is not due to circumstances, but because you have become the dwelling place of God.

The Sermon on the Mount is a description of the kingdom of God. It describes living a life that is totally OTHER than any life lived in the kingdoms of this world. In the Sermon on the Mount, we learn that:

- The first are the last.
- The poor are the rich.
- The foolish are the wise.
- The weak are the strong.
- The empty are the full.
- The dying are the living.
- Losing is finding.
- Waiting is going.
- Leading is following.
- Giving is receiving.
- The nobodies are the some bodies.
- Submission is freedom.
- The persecuted are the blessed.

- Those with tears reap joy.
- The meek and lowly are rulers.
- The highest office is that of a servant.

And Jesus went about...preaching the gospel of the kingdom... (Matt. 4:23). And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Matt 24:14). And Paul dwelt two whole years...preaching the kingdom of God... (Acts 28:30-31).

Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter. And the first recipients of that kingdom turned the world right-side-up because they were willing to give their lives in order to keep the kingdom of heaven.

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