



Who holds the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven?

Exodus 1:8-2:10 | Psalm 124 | Romans 12:1-8 | Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus asked his disciples. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Matthew 15:16

Slide 1 | Intro | A Pearly Gate joke

The Pope arrived at the pearly gates and Saint Peter greeted him and quickly told him that it was very difficult to get an audience with God. The Pope said he did not mind because when he was alive he had the same problem.

They chuckled together over this and Saint Peter said he realized the Pope was probably anxious to know a few things judging from the number of times he prayed for guidance.

The Pope agreed saying that he had always wanted to see the original manuscripts of St Paul's letters. So, Saint Peter showed him to the room where the original manuscripts were stored. He left the old man there to study them and soon forgot all about him.

A while later he heard a great wail coming from the room.

Saint Peter went to investigate and found the Pope in an awful sweat. Saint Peter asked the Pope what was wrong and this loud pitiful voice replied,

"Oh NO! it says C-e-l-e-b-r-a-t-e NOT c-e-l-e-b-a-t-e!!!"

Today we read a passage which has confused theologians, not about celibacy, but about 'rocks' of all things!

Actually from just 8 verses arise a myriad of questions ...

- What did Jesus mean when he called Peter a rock?
- Did Jesus say that he was going to build his church on Peter?
- Why did Jesus give Peter the keys of the kingdom?
- What are the keys of the kingdom?
- What does it mean that Peter is now able to bind and loose things on earth and heaven?

Well ... how on earth am I going to cover all these in just 15 minutes?

If we step methodically through Jesus and Peter's conversation, we'll find that we can indeed answer them all –

and we'll learn that all the jokes about Saint Peter guarding the pearly gates – are a misunderstanding of what Jesus was really trying to say.

So, let's begin:

Jesus asks his disciples, **"Who do you say that I am?"**

Peter, in his assertive manner exclaims,

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

Peter's finally got it. 'the penny's dropped', 'the light has turned on' – The truth about Jesus identity has exploded in his heart, causing him to exuberantly declare a truth he knew at the core of his being – it is the kind of knowledge that Jesus hoped all his disciples would have, but so far, Peter was the first to make it public!

Slide 2 | Point 1 | Jesus commended Peter for perceiving a special kind of 'knowing' called 'Revelation Knowledge'

Upon hearing Peter's insightful declaration, Jesus responded:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

I really want to draw your attention to what Jesus is saying here, because his words lay the foundation for what will shortly follow.

Jesus is saying that Peter received the knowledge of his true identity NOT from any earthly source, not through reading books, not through human teachers, not through scientific evidence – rather God the Father revealed it to Peter through the gift of 'revealed knowledge'.

It is important for us to consider two different kinds of knowledge. Knowledge is gained through our senses (what we can see, feel, hear, touch and smell) and processed by our brain using reason and logic, OR knowledge can be received in a totally different way – it can be revealed to us by God.

Consider this: Imagine two people are reading the Gospel. One tosses it aside uttering, *'it's all rubbish, I don't understand a word of it'*. The other person however, devours every word and exclaims, *'truly I'm reading the words of the living God'*. One person is using their brain, and trying to understand what can only be spiritually discerned. The other, through the Holy Spirit, is given the power to perceive the very truth of God (see 1 Corinthians 2-3)

The Apostle Paul also received the message of the Gospel in this special way, for he wrote to the believers in Galatia, **"I want you to understand that the Gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ."** (Galatians 1:11-12)

So, Peter's grasp of Jesus divinity came from revelation, rather than from logic or rational conclusion.

Then Jesus continues,

Slide 3 | Point 2 | Upon the Rock of Revelation Knowledge that Jesus is the "Son of the Living God" His church would be built.

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Now, we are beginning to see where all the jokes about Saint Peter come from.

But, was Jesus really saying that he will build his church upon Peter?

It all depends on what the 'this' refers to.

"and on *this* rock" (v 18b). What rock? Is it the rock of knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God? Or on Peter himself?

Catholics and Protestants have divided sharply in their interpretation of which 'rock' Jesus was referring to. Catholics interpret Jesus as establishing Peter as the rock upon which Jesus will build his church. That's why they understand Peter to have been the first Bishop of Rome and the first of an unbroken succession of Popes.

However, the Protestant interpretation is quite different.

They [and you'll be pleased to know I believe they're right] believe the rock, to which Jesus is referring, is the special kind of knowledge which inspired Peter to make his confession – it is called the 'Rock of Revelation Knowledge.'

You see there is a distinction between the two rocks that Jesus mentions—**"you are Peter"**, (or *Petros* is a stone or rock in the masculine form), while **"and on this rock"** (Jesus uses *petra*, the feminine form, conveying the idea of a rock foundation) to describe upon what his church will be built.

Jesus is saying that upon the Rock of Revelation Knowledge that 'He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God', he will build his church.

I think this revelation really took off in Peter's heart, because later when he wrote his circular letters to churches, identifying all believers as **"living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple."** (1 Peter 2:5)

Every person who receives the gift of revealed knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, becomes a 'living stone' in the church of God.

Why will the gates of Hades not overcome it?

The 'gates of Hades' is a reference to the place of the dead. So, when a person receives the gift of revelation knowledge that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Saviour, death no longer has any power or authority over them. For they have been delivered from the power of death into everlasting life.

This is the victory over death Paul was referring to when he wrote:

"Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

With the understanding that Jesus is talking about knowledge revealed by God, the true meaning of Jesus remaining words is unlocked.

He continues, **“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.”**

Slide 4 | Point 3 | The keys of the kingdom of heaven is the message of Salvation

If you look at any Roman Catholic art of Peter, whether it be a statue or a stain glass window or a painting, you will usually see Peter holding a pair of keys.

Why? Well because the Roman Catholic theologians believed that Jesus was saying Peter would hold the keys to the gates of heaven, choosing who would be admitted into heaven and who wouldn't.

But, is that what Jesus really meant? I don't think so.

Let's think for a moment, what do the 'keys' represent?

In both the Old and the New Testaments keys represent power and authority (Isaiah 22:22, Revelation 1:18, 3:17).

And we know that keys are used to lock and unlock doors. So, the keys Jesus is referring is the message of the Gospel, which Peter would soon be the first to preach unlocking the gates of salvation.

Do you remember Pentecost? Peter was the first to stand up and address the crowds in Jerusalem. In preaching the message of the kingdom he unlocked the doors of salvation to the Jews (Acts 2). Then later, he preached the message of the kingdom to the Samaritans and in the process used his keys to unlock the doors of salvation to them also (Acts 9). Later again, Peter preached the message of the Gospel to the Roman Centurion, opening the doors of salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

But, is it only Peter who holds these keys?

Slide 5 | Point 4 | It is not only Peter who has been given the Keys of the Kingdom. The Keys are given to every person who receives the same kind of revelation knowledge enabling them to perceive who Jesus truly is.

During Jesus earthly ministry, he gave the same authority and power to all his disciples. In Matthew 18 we hear Jesus saying, **“and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven”** (18:18).

So, anyone who receives revelation knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God holds in their hands the keys of the kingdom: that is - the precious and authoritative message of salvation.

Slide 6 | Application | You also hold the keys of the kingdom, the message of salvation. To whom will you share them?

And how powerful are these keys!

If we withhold the message of the Gospel from someone, we are literally closing the doors of heaven to that person.

On the other hand, if we preach the message of the Gospel to a person, we offer them the precious keys of the kingdom, enabling them to receive the gift of the revelation knowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.

As we pray, let us visualise the enormous power we hold in our hands. We have not only been gifted with the revelation that Jesus Christ is Lord, we also hold in our hands the keys of the kingdom – the message of Salvation.

To whom will you offer your precious keys?

*Our Lord and Saviour, I pray the same prayer which Apostle Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus: that you may give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that I may know him better. I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened in order that I may know the hope to which he has called me, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (see Ephesians 1:16-19) May I be bold and courageous and offer the precious keys of the kingdom – the message of salvation – to whoever you ask me to share them with. **Amen.***

Reflection Questions:

1. Think about the concept of 'revelation knowledge (knowledge that is revealed to you by God). Sometimes we describe this kind of knowledge as "I just know that I know."
Think about a time when while you were reading God's word, something just stood out to you – like a light turned on! This is when God revealed something into your heart. When was the last time this happened?
2. Spend some time visualising yourself holding the 'keys of the kingdom – the message of Salvation'. Now ask the Lord to reveal to whom he wants you to give those keys?

DAY 6	God's redeeming love is for me!	29th August
<i>The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. Psalm 145.14</i>		Further study: Psalm 146
“ <i>It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people.</i> ”	The love of God is richer than we think. There is God's universal love for all he has made (see verse 8). God also has a redeeming love for all those he saves. He is near in a different, heightened way to all those who "call on him in truth" and "fear him" (verses 18–19). Without this saving faith we will be lost eternally (verse 20). Finally, there is God's yearning love for all who are broken and fallen. "The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down" (verse 14). It is a mistake to say he loves everyone uniformly or that there is anyone on earth he does not love. God's love is as beautifully and brilliantly multifaceted as a diamond.	
Lord, since it is you who feed us and you who meet our needs, ordinary human labour such as farming, cooking, and knitting have great dignity. They are means by which you love your creation. Help me to sense that dignity so I can do the simplest of tasks to your glory. Amen.		



Tim Keller's "The Songs of Jesus"
A Year of Daily Devotionals in the Psalms has been used.

This is a devotional resource created for
Southlakes Anglican Church community.

www.southlakes.org.au



Week 5: To whom will I share my set of Kingdom Keys?

DAY 1	You answer me in my distress	24th August
<i>When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me. Psalm 86.7</i>		Further study: Psalm 25

“
Give your strength to your servant; save me from my distress.
”

This is a psalm of King David, and he is surrounded by enemies attacking him (verse 14). The psalms provide a prayer book on how to face life when it seems out of control. David feels solitary, defenseless. He responds by reminding himself over and over who God is. He most often calls God "Lord," the Hebrew word *adonai*, meaning "sovereign." David is drilling his own heart to remember that God is in control. Questions: Discern how many of your most difficult emotions, bad attitudes, and foolish actions come from losing your grip, at that moment, on who God is.

Lord, I am constantly asking you to give me your strength, to change me and heal me. But nothing is more empowering and life transforming than simply adoring you. Inject the truth of your wisdom, love, holiness, and sovereignty down deep into my heart until it catches fire there and makes me new. **Amen.**

Application: Recall a recent incident in which an emotion got the better of you. In what sense did a feeling of things spiral out of control – stir the incident in which your emotions were spiked?

DAY 2	Why I praise the Lord	25th August
<i>Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant. Psalm 135.3</i>		Further study: Psalm 144
“ <i>I know the greatness of our Lord – that our Lord is greater than any god.</i> ”	Why should we praise God? We should praise him because he is good (v 3). But we should also praise him because it is good; it brings us true pleasure (v 3) because it fits our most fundamental longings and created nature. And we should praise him because, astonishingly, in his grace he finds us good. He regards us as his treasure (v 4), a profoundly comforting claim. Finally, we should praise him because he works all things together for good (v 6; cf. Romans 8:28). You are surrounded by his love!	
Questions: In what way do you feel you are surrounded by God’s love?		
Lord, I praise you that whatever you will is good—because you are good. And I praise you that this is no affront to my freedom but rather its grounding. I can’t, ultimately, mess up my life, because you are in charge, and because you love me. Amen.		

DAY 3	I pray for the oppressed	26th August
<i>By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. Psalm 137.1</i>		Further study: Psalm 138
“ <i>May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I fail to remember you.</i> ”	In Babylon the exiles sought the city’s peace (Jeremiah 29:4–7), but when captors asked them to sing psalms as entertainment they refused. They would not relativize the claims of their faith. The songs of Zion are not cultural artifacts but the story of God’s saving plan. Their cry, asking that the oppressors get what they gave others, startles us. But we should not close our ears to the pain of the oppressed of the world. Christians also know that Jesus became an infant who was also eventually crushed by oppressors. He received the punishment injustice deserves. So Christians can forgive and pray for reconciliation.	
Lord, I urgently ask help for your church today. We are invited to “be religious” but only on the culture’s terms, only if we grant that our faith isn’t the truth as revealed by God. Help us to serve our neighbours and lovingly insist on the Gospel? Help us, O Lord. Amen.		

DAY 4	Praise and honour to God alone	27th August
<i>Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name goes all the glory for your unfailing love and faithfulness. Psalm 140</i>		Further study: Psalm 140:8
“ <i>I know the Lord will help those who are persecuted he will give justice to the poor.</i> ”	David prays for protection (verses 1–5). While he takes practical measures to guard himself, he acknowledges that only God can keep him safe (verses 6–8). He asks God to be himself and establish justice in society (verses 11–12), bringing down those who exploit and oppress. By the end of this prayer, David’s confidence has grown (verse 13). David prays to change the world. He prays that the plans of the exploitative and violent will not succeed and that the poor and downtrodden will be lifted up—and we should pray for the same thing. Affecting world events through prayer is not wishful thinking; we influence the course of current events through appealing to our Father in heaven to intervene.	
Questions: What current events do you need to pray for?		
Lord, help me to remember that you have promised that we “do not have because [we] do not ask” (James 4:2). Forgive me for sinning against many of my friends by failing to pray for them. Use my prayers to do good things in the world. Amen.		

DAY 5	The Lord is my righteousness!	28th August
<i>May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing. Psalm 143.10</i>		Further study: Psalm 146
“ <i>Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting in you!</i> ”	In psalms David often claims “blamelessness.” The impression is that he thought he was sinless. Not so. David professed innocence of the particular accusations against him. But he knew that if God were to try him for his whole life he would not pass. Here he confesses that no human beings are righteous before God, not even the best ones (verse 2; Romans 3:10– 18). He is not only saying that everyone sins but also that everyone is lost. But wait! How can David ask God not to bring him into judgment (verse 2), when a judge who justifies the wrongdoer is an abomination (Proverbs 17:15)? Only the cross would reveal the answer (1 John 1:9–2:2).	
Father, I praise you for the beauty of salvation—that justice was served and yet sinners redeemed, that you can be both just and justifier of those who believe (Romans 3:26). Simply help me to adore you for this. Amen.		