



13th Sunday of Pentecost

Are you sharing your kingdom keys?

Main verse:

"Jesus asked his disciples, "who do you say I am?"
Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."
(Matthew 16:13-20)

Main Point:

There are many jokes about Peter standing at the pearly gates.
Where did they all originate from? Actually, it is from today's passage.
Today we'll learn that every disciple of Jesus Christ holds in their heart the keys of the kingdom,
the precious message of salvation which can open the gates of heaven
to whoever will receive them.

Intro |

There is only one way to start today's sermon, and that is with a pearly gate joke.

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates.

"In honour of this holy season" Saint Peter said, "You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven."

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. "It represents a candle," he said.

"You may pass through the pearly gates" Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells."

Saint Peter said, "You may pass through the pearly gates."

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's panties. St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize?"

The man replied, "These are Carol's."

Now in selecting a pearly gate joke for today, there were many I could have chosen from.

Have you ever wondered from where in the bible they originated?

Well ... it is from today's passage ... when Jesus told Peter that he was going to build his church on him ... and give him the keys of the gates of heaven.

Wait! Have I got that right?

No? Well ... why didn't any of you call out – 'No, that's not what Jesus said!'

Well, let's step back and listen again to their conversation, and find out what Jesus was really trying to say.

Jesus asked his disciples, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* (Matthew 16:13)

Peter in his assertive manner exclaims: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."* (v 16)

Peter has finally got it.

The truth about who Jesus is has exploded in his heart, causing him to exuberantly declare a truth he knew at the core of his being.

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." (Matthew 16:17)

I really want to draw your attention to what Jesus is saying here, because his words lay the foundation for what will 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's heart through the gift of 'revealed knowledge'.

We must never forget that when it comes to the kingdom of God, there are two different kinds of knowledge.

The first kind of knowledge is one we are familiar with – it is knowledge gained through our five physical senses (what we can see, feel, hear, touch and smell) – this knowledge is processed by our brain using reason and logic.

But there is a different kind of knowledge. That is knowledge that is revealed to us by God.

Imagine there are two people 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 am reading the words of the living God'.

One person is trying to understand with their brain, 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).

That is how the Apostle Paul received the message of the Gospel. He said,

"I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by 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 said to Peter, *"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."* (16:18)

Point 2 | Upon the Rock of revelation knowledge that Jesus is the "Son of the Living God" Christ's church would be built.

It is this statement that inspires all the jokes about Saint Peter standing at the pearly gates.

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*"(v18b). What rock? Is it the rock of knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God? Or on Peter himself?

Here is where the Catholics and Protestants disagree. Roman Catholics interpret Jesus as establishing Peter as the rock upon which Jesus builds his church. That's why they regard Peter as the first Bishop of Rome and the first of an unbroken succession of Popes.

However, the Protestants understand Jesus words differently.

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.'

When you look into the language of Jesus words, you see the distinction between the two rocks. When Jesus says "you are Peter", he uses the word *Petros* which means a stone or rock in the masculine form. But when he talks of building his church "*on this rock*," Jesus uses the word *petra*, the feminine form.

This conveys the idea that Christ's church will be built on a rock foundation.

So putting it together, Jesus is saying that it is upon the 'rock of revelation knowledge that Jesus is Lord' that Christ will build his church.

I think this way of understanding himself as a rock really exploded in Peter's heart, because later when he wrote to the churches, he identified all believers as "*living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.*"(1 Peter 2:5)

But, why will the gates of Hades not overcome it?

The 'gates of Hades' is a reference to the place of the dead, or the unseen place for departed souls (see Job 38:17 and Isaiah 38:10).

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 to everlasting life.

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.*"(Matthew 16:19)

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

If you look at any Roman Catholic sculptures or paintings of Peter, you will often see Peter holding a pair of keys.

Peter is depicted in this way because the Roman Catholic church taught that Jesus was appointing Peter to hold the keys to the gates of heaven, choosing who would be admitted into heaven and who wouldn't.

But, that is not at all what Jesus was saying!

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

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

Keys are used to lock and unlock doors, either giving access or denying access to different places or domains. So, the keys Jesus refers to is the message of the Gospel, which Peter would soon be the first to preach – thereby unlocking or opening – 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?

Application | It is not only Peter who has been given the keys of the kingdom. Jesus gives the kingdom keys to every person who receives the same kind of revelation knowledge enabling them to perceive who Jesus truly is.

In a few weeks we will hear Jesus say to all the disciples *"whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven"* (Matthew 18:18).

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

So, my question is, 'with whom will you share your precious keys?'

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

But if we share with them the keys of salvation that we've been given, we are opening the door for them to receive the gift of revelation knowledge for themselves.

With whom will you share your precious keys?