

Matt. 16:19 The Keys of the Kingdom – Heavenly Authority Given to the Church

What an amazing and vitally important passage we have been considering about the Church of Jesus Christ! Over the past few weeks we have seen the CONFESSION of the Church as Peter says to Jesus “***You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.***” We have seen the FOUNDATION of the church, which is Jesus Christ Himself. We have seen the MEANS Jesus uses to build his church, namely the Word and the Spirit. Today, we will consider the AUTHORITY given to the church. Look at v. 19: “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**” I have two big areas of heavenly authority given to the church: 1) The Church is given heavenly authority to preach the gospel; and 2) The Church is given heavenly authority to exercise discipline. But, before moving to these truths, we must spend a few minutes on why I believe this text is speaking about heavenly authority given to the church.

The word “key” or “keys” is found only 8 times in the Bible, with different meanings. And only once do we find the word “key” or “keys” in the same context with heaven as we have here in v. 19. Jesus says to Peter, “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . .**” I remember when our kids were little, Caleb always wanted to get the keys from mama or daddy so he could be the first to open the door and go inside. Without the keys, he had to wait on everyone, and he wanted to get inside. And in some small way, this gave Caleb authority to be first into the house.

In the NT, a key implies authority to open a door and give entrance to a place or realm. In Luke 11:52, Jesus says, “**Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering**” Also, in Rev. 1:18 He says, “**I have the keys of Death and Hades**” indicating that he has the authority to grant entrance and exit from those places. So, Jesus is saying to Peter, I am giving you special authority from heaven.

Now, without saying too much here, this verse has proved to be very controversial, particularly between Catholics and Protestants. Catholics take this verse to mean that Peter was the first Pope and those who succeed him follow in this special authority. And this gets more complicated when we think about “binding” and “loosing” and forgiving sins. And this is a lot of power given to one man! And yes, this power was given to Peter. But, if we read the rest of the NT, we see that this power was also given to the apostles in general. In John 20:23 Jesus commissions the apostles and says, “**If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**” (For the Catholics, this verse is used to justify confession of sins to priests and those priests being able to say, “*your sins are forgiven.*”) And later in Matt. 18, speaking in the context of church discipline we see the exact same phrase of “binding” and “loosing.” Therefore, I believe this power was given to Peter. It was given to the Apostles. And, this authority was given to the entire church.

Now, this authority comes from HEAVEN. It does not come from the earth or “creation.” As Jesus says to Peter, it is not “flesh and blood” that reveals. It doesn’t come from man,

or from God's creation. Maybe a good example is an embassy. When we lived in Russia, we had some visitors from the USA and one of the girls lost her passport. What an ordeal that was! She couldn't leave the country without her passport. So, we went to Moscow to visit the US Embassy. And though not in the USA proper, the embassy was given authority to carry out the plans, the desires, the instructions of the US government. And I remember going there. There were two lines, one EXTREMELY long and another with just a few people, reserved for Americans. So, we were given special treatment as citizens. We entered quickly. And within an hour we walked out with a new passport, issued by the USA, though we were in another country. In the same kind of way, the church is an outpost, an embassy of heaven, with special authority (keys) . . . to open and shut and to bind and loose. With that being said, at the very least there are two truths under the umbrella of authority that I think we can take from v. 19.

1. The Church has authority from heaven to preach the gospel. The keys of the Kingdom of Heaven at least indicate our authority to **preach the gospel** of Christ, namely from v. 16 that **"He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God."** At the very first Christian sermon after Pentecost Peter takes the "keys" and says, **"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** (Acts 2:33-36). As we move through the Book of Acts we see the Apostles and other disciples preach the Gospel. And as we come to today, we still do the same. As believers, those who belong to the Church of Christ, we have this key to heaven.

What authority we have from God . . . to be given the very "keys" to open heaven! Think about it. The keys of the Kingdom are in our hands; and this, in such a way that when we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, namely that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We have AUTHORITY to say, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved"* and if you do, *"your sins are forgiven"* and if you do not, *"your sins are not forgiven."* **"He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son does not"** (1 John 5:12) If anyone is here today and has never believed on the Lord Jesus, turn unto Him. **"There is no name under heaven, given among men, where we must be saved."** The words that I preach, as long as they are true and according to God's Word, are the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is extremely important for us as a church. If the keys of the Kingdom are opened and closed through the preaching of the Word, then we must preach the word! We must make it our goal to do it in Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, knowing that it is the only way a person will be saved. This also has great implications for how we understand the fate of those who have never heard the gospel. There is no other way into the Kingdom, , no other "keys," except through the preaching of the Word. Paul understood this clearly when he wrote, **"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who**

bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:14-17). I am reminded of the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. **"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required"** (12:48). May God help us at GBC to understand this truth!

2. The Church has the authority from heaven to exercise church discipline. I don't get this truth directly from our passage. I get this from Matt. 18:15-20, where we find the same language of "binding" and "loosing" in the context of the church. Turn with me there. Jesus says **"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."**

Notice the context of these words. It is found in the context of discipline, and the proper way of handling sin among brothers and sisters. The concept of "binding" and "loosing" are the same in both passages. This construction is rare in the NT, and our English translation doesn't give us the full meaning. Most translations use the future by saying, **"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."** However, the actual translation should be: "whatever you bind on earth *shall have been already loosed* in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *shall have been already loosed* in heaven." There is a difference in meaning. It doesn't mean, "*whatever you do here, will then happen in heaven,*" or "*because of what you have done on earth, then heaven will do it.*" This is not the meaning.

The special point of using this tense is to show that the apostles would by their teaching and preaching "bind" and "loose" what had already been bound and loosed in heaven. For Christ's words were not his own, but those of the Father who sent him. The sense is that the apostles were to loose and bind what already had been permanently loosed (permitted) and bound (forbidden) in heaven. Go back to our embassy picture. Workers at the US embassy in Russia do not work and act on their own authority. They are only carrying out orders already given by the US government.

In the same kind of way, our marching orders have already been set in heaven. In the church we are not doing new things. Our marching orders are the **"word of Christ."** And where does he come from? He comes from heaven. God took on flesh . . . and in Christ, He has delivered his will to us. And He has told us what to do. This is authority! If we want to know what heaven is approving or disapproving, we go to the Word of God. Now, back to the idea of discipline. We have the authority if someone comes up to us and we ask them, *"Have you received the Lord Jesus?"* then we can say, *"your sins are*

forgiven.” When we ask someone, “*Have you received the Lord Jesus?*” and they say, “*No*”, we can say to that person, “*Your sins are not forgiven.*”

And, within the Church, we have the authority to say “*This is how God tells us to live.*” I can say to you, and we can say to one another, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.*” “*Do not be bitter toward them.*” “*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*” “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*” “*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*” Concerning the potential mate for marriage, we can say to one another, “*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*” I can say words like: “*Put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.*” “*Don’t scream at your children.*” “*Don’t roll your eyes, young person when your mother asks you to do something.*” “*When you are on the internet, don’t go to that site that brings disgrace upon the name of Christ.*” God says, “**Be holy, for I Am Holy!**” Brothers and sisters, we have the right (the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven) to tell our sinning brother or sister, “*You are forbidden to do that*” or “*You are free to do this.*” And this authority is already written in heaven, and “**whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven**” and “**whatever you loose on earth will be loose in heaven.**” We have authority from heaven to do and command what the Word of God, the Word from Heaven, tell us to do.

The implication for us here in this passage is this: we have the right as Church to practice discipline. This is authority from heaven. You’ve often hear the words “**judge not that you also not be judged**” (luke 6:37). We hear this from the world often. But, these words are not found in the context of the church discipline, but are general words about being fair in the way we judge. But, WITHIN the church we do judge in a manner of speaking. We judge with the authority of heaven. Let me ask, “*in what we do we judge.*” Well, think about Jesus’ great commission to us. “*Go to the ends of the earth, baptize those who believe,*” and then what? “*Teach them to obey.*” Well, what happens as Christians, those who make up the church, do not obey, but continue in their sin and do not repent. (A heart of repentance is always the key to a life of faith.) Well, thinking of our passage in Matt. 18 . . . if a person does not repent after numerous times, we finally go to the church, God’s heavenly embassy, and we say, with authority, “*If you are not repentant, we do not believe you are a brother or sister in Christ.*” “*Your sins are not forgiven.*”

What an amazing authority we have been given by our Lord who said to Peter, “**And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**” By God’s grace, May we preach the Gospel, and may we discipline ourselves according to the Word of God. To whom much has been given, much will be required.

So, as the called pastor of this church, I have the God given responsibility by God’s grace to make sure that we do our best to govern ourselves according to God’s Word.

As leaders (in our case at this time the LTT), with authority, we have the same responsibility. As we move toward more structure, polity, and membership here at GBC, we must test everything according to God's Word. As we adopt a church confession, a church covenant, and church constitution, we must be sure that what we present is biblical. And, because of the authority given to the church (ie. every member here in this body), you have the right to say, (when you believe leadership is moving away from God's word), "That's not right" or "God's Word doesn't say that."

Our head is in heaven. And, we are seated with Him. (Eph. 2:6). And, based upon his position in heaven, we have been given authority from heaven. This is special authority from the King of Heaven to his subjects. Adam did not fulfill his commission to rule the earth because of disobedience and sin. But, the 2nd Adam, the Lord Jesus, fulfilled this commission. And then, he did what no man could have done. He ascended to heaven, to the right hand of God, where all authority has been given. And now, this authority has come down to us, to 1) Preach the Gospel, and to 2) Exercise church discipline (guard the boundaries of the church. And the implications and applications are great for us.

(think of me giving a key to my house. Then, think of God giving a key to the heart – maybe in point #1)