

Matthew 16:19 Sermon (goes well with LD 31)

Studying Matthew 16, seeing Christ's teaching on the church – who she is and how she is built.

She is a confessing body.

In that atmosphere of confession, Christ sovereignly builds His church.

In that building, He builds the church invincible.

Amen?

Look through Scripture, see where Christ builds His church. Say "Amen." Or, if uncomfortable, just think "Yes" or "No."

Passages read from Acts 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8.

Some hesitation for some? Easier to think of Christ building His church when all goes well.

If we stand in an evangelistic rally, or a day in the park, or when the gospel is shared to a group of people in any setting – if many desire to learn more, and come to faith, and repent of their sins then Christ is building His church, and He is proving in that very act that HE is the One who sovereignly and perfectly builds His church.

But similarly, if we stand before a group with the Gospel, and they refuse to hear it, and the Gospel declares that, apart from Christ there is no salvation and by that declaration condemns them in their sin – and the people go away mocking, or insulting, or condemning these narrow minded Christians – tend to despair. Did the gates of hell prevail against the church?

Key – theme: In giving His church the keys of the kingdom, Christ shows that He invincibly builds His church both in the inclusion of repentant sinners and in the exclusion of the hard of heart.

Christ builds His church as His confessing people exercise the keys that both loose and bind – include and exclude.

1. What are the Keys
2. How do they work
3. What does this mean today

1. What are the Keys?

Concept of keys is quite simple. When you are given the keys to a house, they open and close the door to the house. When you need to get in there you open the door, and when you leave you close and lock the door so no one else gets in while you are gone. Keys open and close doors, and thus allow people to either get in or stop the wrong people from getting in.

Proclamation of the Gospel, and the application of that Gospel to the individual heart.

Catechism LD 31. Preaching and Church Discipline. Preaching – Q&A 84 – *The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to each and every believer that, as often as he accepts the gospel promise in true faith, God because of what Christ has done, truly forgives sin.*

The kingdom of heaven is closed however by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the anger of God and eternal condemnation rest upon them.

God's judgement, both in this life and the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.

Gospel testimony, and proclamation of the Gospel, with the application of that Gospel to the individual heart. Are you repentant? Walking by faith? This is what it means – enter the joy of the Lord.

Are you rejecting Christ? This is what it means.

Captured beautifully in 2 Cor. 2:15 **For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death. TO the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?**

Application – in the actual sharing of the Gospel personally. Given to the CHURCH as a CONFESSING body.

Create the ATMOSPHERE in which God can work. Church, homes – exercising keys – real authority.

The Kingdom can be opened whenever the Gospel is proclaimed. This has its formal outflow in the worship service, but it can happen with two people talking over coffee, or with people gathered together at a Bible study. Whenever the Gospel is taught, that when you turn to accept the promise of the Gospel in true faith, God will, because of what Christ has done, forgive all your sins and welcome you into His glorious kingdom.

Similarly the kingdom is closed when, in proclaiming and teaching the Gospel, unbelievers are told that as long as they do not repent and turn to Christ, they cannot be forgiven but remain under the righteous wrath of God. By doing this people are shown that they are outside the kingdom.

Discipline – same idea. Final remedy – excommunication. Declared to be outside the kingdom of God. Or, when repentance comes and they are restored and readmitted, they are declared to be inside the kingdom.

Before we go much further, be aware that when we handle the Gospel we are dealing with *great* things. Have you ever been given the key to a friend's house? Have you ever lost the key to a friend's house? Normally if one comes into our hands we try to keep it in the same spot all the time – we don't want to lose it because those keys represent a serious and important task that we need to carry out on their behalf.

Christ has given His church the keys of the kingdom. Through the Gospel you are actually opening the door to heaven...or you are closing it. And when the church exercises discipline upon a wandering member, the same truth applies – the kingdom of God is either being opened or closed.

2. How do the Keys Work?

What follows what? **Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven** – NIV and ESV footnote reads *or Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.*

Connection between heaven and earth. God has chosen to allow there to be a direct line between heaven and earth. Many of us have remote controls on our car keys. We push the button on the remote, and the doors of the car open. Connection between the remote and the car, similarly God has made a connection between His church on earth and His heavenly kingdom.

Question: What is that connection like?

Is it *determinative* or *reflective*. Is God promising to *endorse* whatever the church does, so His actions will reflect the actions of the church **OR** is God saying He will *guide* what the church does so her actions reflect His?

Important point – split in the church, Roman Catholicism and the place of Peter. *Determinative*.

We, more reflective.

That being said, *neither view is perfect*. Certainly want to avoid the idea that we can determine new truth or make new guidelines for who is in or out of the kingdom. Horrible – another Gospel!

That being said, the church doesn't ALWAYS get God's guidance right. (Roman Catholic errors when it was the 'only' church! Peter in Galatians 2 where Paul **withstands Peter to his face because he was to be blamed**).

Yet a real and true connection that, in the confessing church, is to be like a mirror.

What God determines, we act upon and, in acting upon it, bring people by God's grace into the kingdom.

Practical example. Know the Gospel. Someone comes to repent and believe, we can say, "Your sins have been forgiven."

Church – assurance of pardon. Reflecting that of heaven.

Same – church discipline. Know the Gospel in what it says about sin. Someone living in sin we can say, "You are not a part of the kingdom of God."

Point – that the church exercises an authority that, when followed according to Scripture, reflects the authority of God. Maybe even reflect is too soft a word: the authority of the church when carried out in God's name *mirrors* the authority of Christ.

Note – goes beyond. Also steward – **Isaiah 22:20-23**.

Therefore, when you live in the church of Christ, that confesses Christ, her voice has power!

3. Application for Today – What does this mean today?

Key is to see the text *in context*. Dividing this text over three sermons so far. That being said, have only covered a handful of verses and last week looked only at verse 18, and this week look only at verse 19.

Danger then is to see them separate from the context in which they are spoken. The teachings of Christ go together. There is a flow, and one sentence follows another for a reason.

Remember where we have come – confession as personal, with content, and as evidence of God's incredible blessing upon the individual Christian, personally.

Then saw the idea that, upon this basis of an open confession of Christ, and in the atmosphere where Christ's name is lifted high, and confessed, and the Gospel proclaimed – in that climate Jesus is pleased to build His church. And so we have a responsibility in our lives to confess Christ, and we do it in hope that He will use that confession to build His church.

The key we want to see this morning is that, right after this powerful proclamation that Jesus would build His church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it, Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom to Peter, and through him both to the disciples and, in reality, to the entire church. That body of confessing believers.

Connection – Christ will build His church, but He will do so both in the opening *and closing* of the kingdom through His people. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church when someone is coming to faith – but nor can the gates of hell prevail against the church when someone is hardening their heart.

The idea that the church has keys both to *include* and *exclude* from the kingdom does NOT negate that Jesus will build His church. To the contrary, Christ will build His church through these very keys – keys which will remove some from the kingdom.

Main theme, following on last week’s sermon, is that both in bringing lost sinners to salvation through faith in Christ and in declaring to unrepentant sinners that they are outside of the kingdom – in both of these things Christ builds His church.

Remarkable thing then – if we stand in an evangelistic rally, or a day in the park, or when the gospel is shared to a group of people in any setting – if many desire to learn more, and come to faith, and repent of their sins then Christ is building His church, and He is proving in that very act that HE is the One who sovereignly and perfectly builds His church.

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Because Christ will build His church not only by adding to her, but also by purifying her. By separating her from the world. BY showing that she is His special treasure – where others are not yet knowing that blessing, because they have not yet come to Christ.

Go back to the examples of Acts 2, 4, 5, 7, 8. Read what I didn’t read.

Keys function in the proclamation, but also the *personal application* of the Word of God to the individual soul.

Shapes how we look at Gospel ministry and Christian discipline. Sad in discipline, and we should be, but our sorrow should not lead us to question why God hasn’t built His church, or to think that this is the last context in which we would believe God could build His church. As tough as it is, here too Christ builds His church, but He builds her in a different way.

Why is this so key? We live in a church culture that has become embarrassed of hell. The culture of our world is a very inclusive culture. Can’t judge anyone, can’t say that anyone’s actions are wrong – we just have different opinions. Now there is wisdom, in interacting with people outside the church, in being careful and wise in our language and approach.

But if we adopt the views of the culture so much that we become embarrassed of the idea that God would *exclude* people from heaven, that He would punish the unrepentant in hell, then we’ve missed a key part of Biblical truth.

Sometimes God builds the church by saying “No.” No you are not good enough to enter My kingdom. No you can’t think that you’ll be fine when you die, if you haven’t turned your life over to Christ in repentance and faith. No, you cannot know the blessing of God as a loving Redeemer, if you have not first died to self.

This doesn’t mean we declare people lost forever. We of course hold out the promise of the Gospel to them even in their sin, and we hope that, in time, God might work upon the heart.

And when people yet refuse, and when hearts are hardened, and when we even see incidents like Acts 7 where, when Steven preached this Gospel and they rushed upon him and killed him, even then we recognize Christ builds His church...and there too the gates of Hades do NOT prevail against her. As hard of heart as they were, as angry as they were to hear that they could not enter the kingdom – they could kill the messenger but they could not kill the message. They cannot enter the kingdom of God unless they bow the knee to Christ – and should they do that, then no matter what their sin, the door will be thrown wide.

Two fold aspect to this kingdom – and in both Christ builds His church *invincibly and indestructibly*.