

### **The keys of Peter and the doors of Paul**

If the keys of a row of houses were mixed together, it is very probable that not one of the housekeepers would be able to pick his own from the rest. The law of permutations and combinations, that troubled us at school, enables the locksmith to make so many variations in the wards of the key, that for practical purposes they can guarantee that a duplicate is impossible. When we think of a key therefore, we remember "*To every door its key*". True, in large business houses, the head of the firm holds a "master key" that opens all locks, but this is not surrendered to servants. A key moreover, is a small affair. Its importance is sometimes not appreciated until the safe door refuses to give access to the much needed money, or the house (where warmth and comfort can be enjoyed) cannot be entered by reason of the loss of the key.

Turning to the Scriptures, we find that the Lord Jesus Christ holds the master key. Standing in all the triumph and glory of resurrection He declares:

"I am He that liveth, and was dead: and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18).

He Who holds the keys of death holds the master key. This the Lord has surrendered to no man. He has two prominent servants, however, Peter and Paul. To Peter He gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, while to Paul He opened many doors of service, and the question we ask and seek to answer in this pamphlet is, "*Do the keys of Peter fit the locks of Paul?*" which shorn of figures of speech means, "*Is the Church of the Acts as ministered to by Peter all one and the same with the church ministered to by Paul!*" The importance of the enquiry lies in the fact that Paul is continually emphasizing that he had a dispensation and an apostleship to the Gentiles, and the confusion that exists in the church as a whole, and in the minds of individuals as well, looks very much like the result of getting into a wrong house, and seeking to bring together things that by nature are far apart.

Christ is the Head of every department in the purposes of grace. He holds the master key; that we gladly acknowledge, and do not here question. Let us, so far as space permits, look at the keys of Peter and the doors of Paul, to see whether the keys of the one fit the locks of the other.

#### *The keys of the kingdom of heaven.*

It is common knowledge that the gospel according to Matthew deals very specially with the kingdom of heaven. In the opening beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount we have two statements that bear upon the sphere of this kingdom:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" (Matt. 5:3).

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit THE EARTH" (Matt. 5:5).

If the kingdom of heaven means that its subjects will one day "go to heaven", upon what principle of righteousness and equity has God acted in deciding that the poor in spirit go to *heaven*, while the meek stay on *earth*? Should we not be nearer the truth if we said that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom on earth which will be ruled by the same Lord and laws as now obtain in heaven? and would not the prayer of Matthew 6:10 confirm this?:

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, *as it is in heaven*"?

John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sitting in that kingdom (Matt. 8:11), strengthen this view. It is in Matthew 16, at the close of the first section of Matthew's Gospel (indicated by the parallel words of 4:17 and 16:21), and after His rejection in His three Messianic offices,

shown in Matthew 12:6,41,42, that the Lord speaks of His church (a called-out company) as distinct from the nation as a whole, and gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter (Matt. 16:18,19).

The point we seek to press is that Peter used these keys in the Acts of the Apostles, and they are strictly confined to the church of the kingdom of the heavens, that remnant of faith which in apostolic times anticipated the full glory of the kingdom yet to be. This we can test by reading the Acts, the following notes drawing attention to outstanding features.

*The sphere of Peter's ministry.*

In Acts 1:8 the Lord indicated the sphere of the ministry of those associated with Pentecost, and in the Authorised Version it appears to spread from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. *Rotherham's* version reads, "the uttermost parts of the *land*", which removes all necessity for accusing Peter and the twelve of unfaithfulness, and reveals the true extent of their commission. The word is translated in the Authorised Version "land" 42 times, and "country" twice, and in the Acts itself it is rendered "land" 14 times.

On the day of Pentecost, after the baptism of the Spirit, and in the opening words of this new ministry, we should surely expect truth without prejudice. Let us watch Peter turning the key of the kingdom of heaven, and note some of the special wards of the lock that his key must fit. The first item that strikes us is that the objects of his address are always and only Israel:

"Men of JUDAEA, and all that dwell at JERUSALEM" (Acts 2:14).

"Men of ISRAEL" and "All the house of ISRAEL" (Acts 2:22,36).

"Ye men of ISRAEL ... ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you" (Acts 3:12-14).

"Ye are the children of the PROPHETS, and of the covenant which God made with OUR FATHERS" (Acts 3:25).

The God of Pentecost is:

"The God of ABRAHAM, and of ISAAC, and of JACOB, the God of OUR FATHERS" (Acts 3:13).

The resurrection of Christ and the shedding of the Spirit are focussed upon the "throne of David" (Acts 2:30,33). Such was the "church" of Acts 2:47, a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:17-21).

We still find the same wards of the lock in other chapters. In Acts 5:30,31 Christ is said to have been raised up by "The God of *our fathers*, to give repentance *to Israel*", and lest the reader should be tempted to say that this is but the outworking of Jewish prejudice, the passage continues:

"And we are His witnesses of these things; AND SO IS ALSO THE HOLY GHOST" (Acts 5:32).

which makes criticism a serious thing, and so far as the charge of his having acted under Jewish prejudice is concerned, Peter goes on to say that this holy spirit has been given by God to "all that OBEY Him" (Acts 5:32).

The first turn in the lock of the Gentile door was made by Stephen, who was promptly destroyed by the evil one, and Saul who heard his burning words and saw his shining face was destined as another Seth to bear that message on to its glorious consummation. Chapter 11 finds missionaries as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch, who however were:

"preaching the word to NONE but unto the JEWS ONLY"(11:19).

We must, however, retrace our steps, for Acts 9 and 10 are critical. In Acts 9 the same Lord Who chose Peter to bear the keys of the kingdom of heaven, now chooses Saul of Tarsus to bear His name before the Gentiles. Here we have for the first time in the Acts the Gentiles as an object of mercy. In chapter 10 Peter receives a warning, which

was used later to prevent the Jerusalem church opposing the new ministry of Paul. Peter makes his own attitude very plain. To Cornelius, a pious man, who prayed and gave alms, he said:

“Ye know how that it is an UNLAWFUL thing for a man that is a JEW to keep company, or come unto one of another NATION; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man COMMON or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

Peter here makes a series of important admissions:

- (1) He was still a man that is a Jew.
- (2) He was still under the law that made Israel a separate people.
- (3) He still looked upon all men of any other nation as common and unclean.

Each item is diametrically opposed to the teaching of Paul who taught that in the church to which he ministered:

- (1) There was neither Jew nor Gentile.
- (2) That the whole machinery of the law gave place to the new creation in Christ.

Those who continued in the apostle’s doctrine “had all things *common*” (Acts 2:44), yet they would not be seen in the company of a Gentile, and called him “common” instead. The words “keep company” indicate fellowship with disciples, as Acts 9:26 shows, where it is translated “join himself”. If Peter acted as he did when obliged to go to Cornelius, one wonders what would have happened to him had Dionysius the Areopagite “*clave* (same word) unto him” (Acts 17:34). By all tests it appears evident that Peter’s keys which fitted the doors of the kingdom of heaven (the kingdom of God on earth) would not turn the locks of the doors opened by the Lord for Paul.

As the outcome of a special call by the Spirit of God, and in entire independence of Jerusalem, the apostles Paul and Barnabas take the gospel to the Gentiles upon their return to Antioch:

“They rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had OPENED the DOOR of faith unto the GENTILES” (Acts 14:27).

Peter’s experience with Cornelius enabled him to break down the opposition exhibited by the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem by reminding them how that:

“A good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” (Acts 15:7),

which James explained as being in harmony with the prophecy of Amos, and related to the restoration of the tabernacle of David. Peter did no miracle when he stood before Cornelius, for miracles were signs of apostleship (Gal. 2:7,8, and 2 Cor. 12:12), and he was not the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas, however, declared:

“What miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12).

A great door was opened for Paul at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:9), and another at Troas when he crossed over with the gospel to Europe proper (2 Cor. 2:12), but Peter’s keys were of no service here. Then, when Israel were set aside, and Paul was made a prisoner of the Lord for the Gentiles, he prayed for the opening of another door, connected with his “bonds” and the “mystery” (Col. 4:3), which it is the aim and object of these papers to explain.