

Acts 2:38

What a feeling of dismay and fear must have engulfed Peter's audience as his words pricked their hearts: "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified..." as is evidenced by their cry: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:36, 37). A similar example would be Joseph's brethren who were afraid Joseph would mete out deserved punishment to them after their father's death (Gen. 50:15-17). Joseph allayed their fears and forgave them, thus they were recipients of Joseph's grace (Gen. 50:19-21). The grace of God was also available to the Jews; Peter replied: "Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 2:38).

It was not coincidence that Peter was the one who answered their question. When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, He questioned His disciples about whom men said He was, and who they said He was. Peter's confession is familiar to all: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God..." (Matt. 16:18). Jesus called Peter "blessed" and said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). While all the apostles were told that what they bound or loosed on earth would be bound or loosed in heaven, only Peter was promised the keys of the kingdom, but more about that later (Mt. 18:18).

The statement "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" literally means "whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven" and tells us that God, not Peter, determined what was to be bound and loosed. But Peter and the other eleven apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will. Peter was not infallible in life, but he was in word when he was moved by the Spirit.

Back to Peter's "keys." A key unlocks (or locks) a door; that door may be literal or figurative. Teachers in Jesus' day "took away the key of knowledge" from the people (Lk. 11:52). They prevented them from arriving a proper understanding about Jesus. Teachers today are doing the same thing. Peter's "keys" would unlock the door to the kingdom of God, allowing people to enter it. Of course, in this instance the "door" is figurative. God chose Peter to be the first to tell Jews what they must do to enter the kingdom, and He chose Peter to be the first to tell Gentiles

the same. Some years later Peter reminded his brethren, "Ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles might hear the word of the gospel and believe..." (Acts 15:7). He has reference to Cornelius' conversion (Acts 10, 11).

Make no mistake about it, what Peter told both Jews at Pentecost and Gentiles in Caesarea were keys to the kingdom (Acts 2:38; 10:47, 48). The kingdom was "opened" to both, and they were free to enter it. This tells us that the kingdom of Christ on earth is not future, but presently exists; for how could either Jew or Gentile enter that which did not exist?

Jews on Pentecost were told they were to "repent and be baptized unto the remission of their sins" (Acts 2:38). Jesus had placed baptism as something to be done that one might be saved; Peter was only "echoing" what Jesus had commanded him and the other apostles to preach (Mark 16:15-16). Gentiles were commanded to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and, because God is no respecter of persons, conditions of pardon both to Jew and Gentile were (are) identical (Acts 10:48, 34). Years later, Peter wrote to Gentile Christians and told them "Baptism doth also now save you" (1 Peter. 3:10, 21). Since Peter's "keys" allowed men to enter the kingdom of heaven, the instructions "repent and be baptized" are equivalent to the New Birth; for by being born again one "enters the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5).

Joel had prophesied, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32). Peter said, "Repent and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). When one is baptized, he is "calling on the name of the Lord" and is saved, just as Paul was promised he would be, for Ananias was sent to tell him what he must do. "And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 9:6; 22:16). Despite all efforts on the part of men to deny that baptism has anything to do with salvation, the Holy Spirit says it does. Through baptism we are buried into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). Through baptism we are baptized into Christ, and thereby put Him on (Gal. 3:26-27). Through baptism we become a part of His one body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 1:22f).

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom; he used them on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius. The "keys" STILL work. Have you tried them?

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