



The Keys of the Kingdom

"The keys were promised to Peter, and not to successors of Peter, if it were possible for him to have them in such an office; which none but the most stupidly ignorant of the scriptures would venture to affirm.

The custody of the keys by a successor of Peter is the most farcical assumption that ever poor crazy mortals were guilty of. When we come to see what the keys of the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven are, we shall see at once that the very use of them for the first time operates upon Peter's own possession of them, as the telling of a secret to all the world does upon his power over it afterwards by whom it was told"

— *Elpis Israel, page 197.*

TOURISTS who walk the streets of Rome soon realise that innumerable buildings in the city are owned by the Roman Catholic Church. A common emblem which is seen above the entrance to such buildings is a replicate likeness to the papal crown, below which are featured two crossed keys. This symbol is intended to represent to the ignorant masses, the authority which the papacy claims to bear as holder of "the keys" to "the kingdom of heaven." This same symbol is elsewhere incorporated into Roman Catholic architecture, and appears in books and on documents.

The doctrinal power associated with this symbology is unmistakable: They affirm that only those who are members of the Catholic Church can rely upon the pope to "unlock" the "door" that will permit them to safely enter "the kingdom of heaven." This infers that it is necessary to submit to papal authority or remain forever condemned to the eternal fires of hell.

This aspect of the Roman Catholic religion — which is contrived to establish papal power over the salvation or

condemnation of all mankind — is founded upon a misconception of Christ's words to Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." (Mat. 16:19). Since the Catholic Church claims that Peter was the first pope, and that all other popes are in a direct line of divinely appointed descent from Peter, it is claimed that the "original keys" which were given to Peter are delivered into the possession of every reigning pope.

The importance of this subject may be gauged by the fact that Brother Thomas devotes some twenty pages to refuting this claim, and to establishing the true significance of Christ's words to Peter; an understanding of which will open the eyes of men and women to some of the most vital aspects of the gospel message, whilst at the same time ridding them of any delusions which may have been nurtured in their minds through the pompous and unscriptural claims of the clergy.

Fallibility of the Papacy

Papal privileges claimed in regard to the "keys of the kingdom" are diametrically opposed to the teachings of Scripture. Brother Thomas explains the

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purpose of the “keys”: “The mystery of the kingdom, then, has been made known, and we find that it had relation to the sufferings of Christ; and repentance, remission of sins, and eternal life in his name, to the Jews first and afterwards to the Gentiles” (pp. 196-197). Hence, it is said of the apostle Paul that,

“as his manner was, [he] went in unto them [Jews in the synagogue] and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:2-3).

From this brief statement it is evident that to comprehend the significance of “the keys” to the kingdom it is necessary to understand who Jesus was, why it was necessary for him to suffer, why God raised him from the dead, and how he became *the* Christ (lit. Gr.). The long succession of popes have remained ignorant concerning the nature and sacrifice of Christ and the purpose Yahweh will realise through him. They fail to apprehend that he was both Son of David and Son of God (and not the second member of a fictitious triune God). For these reasons alone it is not possible that the so-called “infallible” popes have any means of unlocking the true gospel to their followers.

Paul repeatedly affirmed his position in relation to drawing men and women towards the only “entrance” into “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior” (2Pet. 1:11). He stat-

ed the truth to king Agrippa: “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles... King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?” (Acts 26:22-23, 27).

In referring to the prophecy of Daniel (9:24), Brother Thomas declares: “When the ‘point of time’ drew nigh for ‘the finishing of the transgression, the making an end of sin-offerings, the making reconciliation for iniquity, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness,’ Jesus, who had been anointed the Most Holy, the sealed prophet of the Father, and fully confirmed as Messiah the Prince, selected one man of the twelve (who had the least reason to exalt himself above his brethren as ‘prince of the apostles’), as the depository of the keys of the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God. This highly honored individual was Simon Peter, son of Jonas...” (p. 197).

Peter’s Full Conversion

Such is the weakness of the flesh, Peter had “denied his master with oaths and curses.” His Lord, however, did not cast him aside because of his shameful failure. He knew what was in the heart of every man (Jn. 2:25); he was aware that the Word would work in Peter, to cause him to become transformed into a man of sound knowledge and perception, totally dedicated to the cause of his Master. The Lord addressed Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lk. 22:31-32).

The Satan spoken of by the Lord in this passage was a figurative term to represent the powerful and ruthless Jewish religious leaders, who would gladly have scattered and destroyed the band of believers in Jerusalem. The pressure they mounted against Christ resulted in "the shepherd" being smitten, and "the sheep of the flock scattered abroad" on the night of his betrayal (Mat. 26:31; cp. Zech. 13:7). Together with his fellow-apostles, Peter had been overcome with fear and terror as the events of that night erupted violently around them like a dreadful nightmare, creating a bewildering situation which was beyond their comprehension.

The Lord had exhorted Peter: "When thou art converted (*epistrepho*, "to turn again; to turn one's self unto"), strengthen (*sterizo*, "to set fast, fix firmly; make steadfast") thy brethren."

Although this was a reprimand to one who felt quite confident of his standing in the Truth, Peter duly submitted to this exhortation with the greatest humility. The proof is found not only in his later words and actions, but in his spiritual attitude: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder (*lit., a fellow-elder*), and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you (cp. Jn. 21:15-19), taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1Pet. 5:1-3).

The Lord promised Peter that he would be appointed to fulfil a special office: "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 shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mat. 16:19).

No Entry Without Key

The interpretation placed upon these words by the Roman Church is beyond credence. To suggest that anything the pope decrees to be law on earth must also be respected as law in heaven, is outrageous and blasphemous. In this passage, as in ch. 18:18, the Greek text has the passive participle, and should be rendered "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth *has already been bound in heaven...*"

With these words the Lord told Peter that everything he would proclaim and teach in the name of the risen Christ, to "unlock" the means of entry into the kingdom to both Jew and Gentile, would be precisely in accord with the divine, or heavenly, Will. In other words, Peter was required to speak forth the Word of God.

A key is used to unlock a door. The door will give entry to a place otherwise inaccessible. Without *the correct key* there can be no means of entry.

It is claimed that the popes have had handed down to them from Peter a "set of keys." The pope of the day carries these around with him; but where are the doors and locks which the keys have allegedly been designed to fit? Like the doctrine of the trinity, it is "a great mystery." No one seems to know the answer!

Quite apart from the absurdity of the papal concept of "the keys of Peter," there are the simple Scriptural facts of the matter. Brother Thomas says: "The keys were promised to Peter, and not to successors of Peter, if it were possible for him to have them in such an office... The custody of the keys by a successor of Peter is the most farcical assumption that ever poor crazy mortals were guilty of." He then goes on to show that once Peter had used the keys, as he began to do on the day of Pentecost when the gospel was publicly preached for the first time in the name of the risen Christ, the way to

the kingdom of God was opened, and all who responded could find entrance thereto. Moreover, once the door had been opened to some, they were able to show the way to others. "All the world" may have found and followed "the way," if they had a mind to do so.

To suggest that none gain admittance to the kingdom of God unless some kindly pope feels disposed to use the "keys" on their behalf, provided they please him, is to place the pope above God. Only a person who is "drunk" with the "wine" of the apostasy would succumb to such ungodly theology (Rev. 17:2; 18:3).

Teachers Who Remove "The Key"

Brother Thomas presents an impressively valid line of reasoning: "Had Peter, instead of using the keys, hid them till his death-hour, and then imparted them to a single person, this individual might truly be said to have 'succeeded to the keys.' But this he did not, dared not, do. He communicated them to such multitudes of Jews and Gentiles that they became the common property of the world." He then states that only men devoid of the Truth and moved by impure and ungodly motives would "conceive of the possibility of a transfer of the keys of the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to a successor; especially to such a succession of impious impostors as the prophets of the Roman See" (pp. 197-198).

A number of references are then made to the significant usage of the word "key" in Scripture. The reader should consider such passages as Isa. 22:22; Lk. 11:52; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1). In these passages the word "key" is used in relation to knowledge, power, discernment, authority.

The word "key" may be scripturally understood as relating to: the *knowledge* of the Word; the *power* of the Word in action; *discernment* of the vital issues in preserving the Truth, together with the dangers and chal-

lenges of the times; the *authority* of the Word, which should be spoken forth without fear or favor.

Where were these commendable attributes to be found in Israel when the Lord began his ministry? Brother Thomas says that "the unhappy condition of the Jewish nation at the appearing of Jesus" was due in large measure to the fact that those who should have been teachers, by word and example, had "taken away the **KEY OF KNOWLEDGE.**" The Lord said of these men who abused their positions: "Ye entered not in yourselves [to the kingdom], and them that were entering in, ye hindered" (Lk. 11:52).

Relating such pitiable conditions to the modern world, Brother Thomas says that "all the nations at the present time" are in the same state, "against whom the kingdom is shut by clerical traditions."

The Noahic Era A Warning for Today

The long and largely undistinguished history of Israel provides a grave warning to the Brotherhood. How easily "the key" to the saving power of the gospel may be "taken away" — firstly through weakening the point of doctrine, then casting it aside as being of little importance.

In these present evil days the ecclesiastics struggle for survival against pressures from within and without. According to the Son of God, these are days antitypical of the days of Noah (Lk. 17:26). Of that epoch, Brother Thomas remarks that "a spirit of liberalism had arisen among the sons and daughters of Seth, the result of an expiring faith." How did such an appalling falling away occur? "It is probable that the precepts and example of the sons of God had considerably modified the original impiety of the Cainites so as to bring things to a similar state to that observable in our day. Sects between whom there were no more dealings in their begin-

ning than between the Jews and the Samaritans, are now so liberal that they agree to be silent upon all controversial topics for which they once contended to the death, and to recognize one another as brethren in the Lord! Thus, if they ever had the truth they have suppressed it by a tacit compromise, and have become highly respectable, and singularly amiable and polite; so that they 'have need of nothing' but to enjoy the good things of the world within their reach" (p. 118).

It is not simply that these were the reasons why, in the days of Noah, all but eight souls entirely lost the "key" to a perceptive knowledge and understanding of the Truth. The greatest danger is apparent in *the mode of thinking* that led to such disastrous consequences. And if these present times are the antitype of the days of Noah, should not the Lord's warning be understood as conveying a prophecy which indicates that *the same mode of thinking* will be apparent within the ecclesial world at the epoch of his second coming?

Brother Thomas quotes the words of Malachi: "The priests's lips should keep knowledge, and Israel should seek the law at his mouth" (p. 198). But what "words" were the priests uttering in the days of Noah? And where were the people who should have been flocking to their leaders to learn how to grasp and prize the Truth?

What of today?

Study The Scriptures

The "key" to understanding the purpose of Yahweh, revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures, had been lost by the Jewish religious leaders in the days of Christ (Lk. 11:52; cp. Acts 26:22-23). They were in a state of ignorance concerning the two basic doctrines of the Scriptures: *The Atonement* and *God Manifestation*.

Now, all prophecies concerning the

coming of the seed of the woman in the nature of fallen man had been fulfilled. All the types and shadows had become substance and reality. The Messiah, Son of David and Son of God, had died and been raised to heavenly glory at the right hand of his Father. His first earthly mission had been accomplished in perfect harmony with the will of his Father. Who, then, would be charged with revealing the truth of these things?

The most important "key" of knowledge ever to be delivered into the hands of men was ready for imparting to both Jew and Gentile.

Peter was commissioned to use the "keys" — first to the Jew and then to the Gentile — that the light of the one true saving gospel might be shed abroad upon men and women everywhere, provided they had "ears to hear."

Let the reader take careful note of Brother Thomas' observation: "Oh, that men could be induced now to devote themselves to the study of the scriptures, without regard to articles, creeds, confessions, and traditions!" This earnest plea reveals that he did not consider himself to be the founder of a new religious sect, or one to be elevated as an inspired authority. He appealed to men and women to "study the scriptures" and acknowledge no other source of authority. His entreaty has continued to be voiced abroad for almost one and a half centuries.

How many will be numbered with him in the day of the Lord's appearing?

— John Ullman.

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