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THE KEYS OF THE
KINGDOM

by

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"The Protestant Faith"

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THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

The central theme of the message of Jesus was the kingdom of heaven. He began His preaching proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The theme of His parables was the kingdom. It is important then to find out what our Lord meant when He spoke about the kingdom of Heaven. The first thing to note is that the word 'heaven' in this phrase simply is a reverential way of referring to God.

The second thing to note is the meaning of the word 'kingdom'. In modern English it always refers to a place, that is a territory, but in the Hebrew and the Greek, the languages of the Bible, kingdom does not mean a place but the activity of kingly rule. We ought not then to identify the kingdom of God with the church. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven He was referring to God's sovereignty and kingly rule as exercised in the universe. Jesus took as the subject matter of His teaching the way God rules and governs. This is a theme of great importance, and it has some features about it which are extraordinary to our way of thinking. For example, whoever would have thought that God's kingly rule was exercised through allowing Christ to be crucified at the hands of wicked men. No wonder the disciples were mystified when they first heard that this was God's way of ruling, and yet how wonderfully the event has already justified God's way of ruling through the victory over sin at Calvary; and it will become plainer still in the future when Christ comes in His glory. This will be the final justification and manifestation of God's rule.

Because of its importance and because of its unusual features, we are not surprised that Jesus should have taken as the chief theme of His ministry the kingly rule of God. Many of His parables illustrate the way God

exercises His sovereignty in the world. Thus in Matthew chapter 13 there are several parables which begin "The kingdom of heaven is like", which means 'the way that God exercises His sovereignty and governs the world has the following features'. Thus Jesus taught that God's way of ruling is like a grain of mustard seed which is hardly noticeable in its beginnings, but grows and grows and grows till it becomes quite a tree; or again, it is like a net cast into the sea into which good and bad fishes are collected. The separation and assessment only comes at the end.

One of the most interesting statements that Jesus made about the kingdom of God was when He said to Peter (who had just acknowledged Christ's Messiahship), "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." (Matt. 16:16-19). What are the keys of God's kingly rule which our Lord here entrusts to Peter?

To possess the keys of the kingdom of heaven would mean to possess a knowledge of the principles according to which God exercises His sovereignty and kingly rule. Now it is true that to Peter and to all Christ's disciples was this gracious knowledge given. Where Jesus says "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". A man is only able to act in a way which heaven endorses when he has been given a knowledge of the heavenly way of doing things, that is, if he has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

It is a remarkable and humbling truth that God has

revealed to us His mind, so that we are able to bind and loose in a way that He will ratify. In the scripture we have an infallible and inspired word of God permanently recorded, and equally important we have in the gift of God's Spirit within us a mind able to interpret aright the written scriptures. We know the mind of the Lord, for we have the mind of Christ through His Spirit. What a wonderful privilege this is!

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