

In Mt 16:19 we find Christ giving to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Now, when we think of keys I am sure that we think of a small metal key like our house or car key. But the kind of key that was used in the Roman world in the time of Peter was a wooden key so large that it had to be carried around on the shoulder. Seeing the kind of key that was used in a different light makes me think about the possible meanings of that key Peter was given.

In one sense, perhaps, we can see that Christ has given Peter a set of keys in which he can try to open the hearts of the people of the world. We have all put our own brand of lock on our hearts, and we think that only we have the power to open and close it. But God has a few master keys that perhaps can do the job. One of these is the tremendous love and sacrifice of God's Son Jesus Christ. This is the one he hopes will open your heart. But he also has one which offers great spiritual riches in a beautiful land called heaven, where there is no sorrow, and if these don't work, he may finally try the key which threatens eternal damnation. But if none of the keys work after trying again and again, he will simply go away. He respects us enough that he will never break down the door. We must respond ourselves to his keys.

Then, of course, we know that in a more obvious sense the keys of Peter are the keys to salvation, the plan that God has given through Christ and the apostles to open the straight gate which leads to eternal life. G.K. Chesterton wrote some words about this idea of the key which I hope you will find as interesting as I did. First of all, he said that a key was something that has a definite shape, and its usefulness depends entirely upon its keeping that shape. The Christian creed is above all the enemy of shapelessness. Second, the shape of the key is in itself a rather odd shape... it is in a sense arbitrary, (but) it either fits the lock or it does not. It is useless for men to stand disputing over its shape, saying that he would like a simpler key. The shape is fixed by God's will so that it will open the door. Thirdly, it has an elaborate shape. We may complain that it is so, but we forget that the problem of sin is a very complicated problem with a whole maze of holes and corners, and so the solution must also be somewhat complex. Finally Chesterton says that indeed there is only one thing about the key that is simple, and that is that it opens the door. And this is all we really need.

When by responding to the great grace of God, allowing him to open the door to our hearts, we are able to make use of the key which opens the door to life everlasting. We read in Rev. 1:18 that Christ has another set of keys, but these open the door to death and Hell. We will either be locked up in death or allowed to enter into life. The choice is ours, we must respond, and by this we will be able to use the keys of heaven.