



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 16:13–20, 18:15–20

Gospel of Matthew

“The Keys of the Kingdom of God”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, let's turn to Matthew chapter 16 for the reading of the Word of God, and we begin with verse 13 and read a section we read in our last study again with an addition through verse 20. Then I want to turn to chapter 18 and read just a few verses there. Matthew chapter 16 verse 13 through verse 20, and then Matthew chapter 18 verse 15 and following. Remember, the Lord Jesus is in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, north of the sea of Galilee in a secluded spot. It is evident that the nation has responded negatively to his ministry, and so now he will begin to teach the disciples in the light of his rejection and in the light of the age that is to come when he will be at the right hand of the Father and the church will be left here upon the earth.

“When Jesus came into the borders of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He saith unto them, ‘But who say ye that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, (*petros*

meaning a little rock or pebble) and upon this rock (this *petra*, this mass of living rock, this cliff) I will build my church; (and the reference we have said in our last meeting was to the truth of the confession, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God) and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And 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.’ Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”

Will you turn with me now to chapter 18, and we want to notice two things in this passage from verse 15 through verse 20. That we have two more mentions of the term church, and the three from Matthew 16:18 and verse 17 of chapter 18 are the only mentions of the word church in all of the Gospels, and then we want to notice particularly verse 18 in which there is extended to the whole church the power of binding and loosing. Beginning now with verse 15 of chapter 18,

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: and if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye (that is plural) shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my

“The Keys of the Kingdom,” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's bow together in a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for all that this first day of the week represents. We thank Thee for the encouragement that is given to us when we reflect upon the fact that the early church began to worship on the first day of the week after having spent most of their lives worshipping on the seventh day, and we recognize in this historical support for the significant ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself a satisfaction for sin, shedding his blood for sinners that we might have life, who rose on the first day of the week—an event so majestic, so significant—that those believers began to meet on the first day of the week to remember that their Savior and ours is alive.

We thank Thee for the encouragement and for the truth, and we pray that we may never as we meet Sunday after Sunday forget that we are celebrating the fact that he is alive. At one time dead but now alive forever more. |

We thank Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ. We pray Thy blessing upon the entire body and for all of the members of that true body of believers over the face of this globe. We thank Thee for the universal outreach of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in gathering his own people in from so many places so that some from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We thank Thee Lord for the privilege of proclaiming him in the city of Dallas and to people who live in other places through the ministry of this little church. We pray Thy blessing upon its outreach over the radio, over the tapes, and on the written pages, and for other churches that name our Lord as Savior. Lord we pray for each one of them as well. Bless them richly this day. We look forward to the day when we shall meet in heaven around the throne of the triune God.

We pray Lord for those who've requested our prayers, for those who are sick, some bereaved who need ministry from Thee. O God minister to them through the Holy Spirit, accomplish Thy will in their lives. Give healing where healing is desired. And we pray also that by Thy grace those who minister to them may minister effectively—the physicians, the families, the friends, we commit them all to Thee.

We pray now thy blessing upon us in this meetings, may the ministry of the Word of God, may the hymns that we sing glorify Thy name, we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today as we continue our exposition of the Gospel of Matthew is “The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” There is a large religious organization that teaches that she is the true church and that her members are to promise obedience to the bishop of Rome, who is taught as the successor of Peter, who was the prince of the apostles and Vicar of Christ. Her claims include the fact that Peter is the rock on which the church is built.

Now we have been talking about that text in our last study, and of course, there are things about that text that are extremely important for us, when, for example, the Lord Jesus said to Peter after his confession, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona, he gave us a great word concerning the nature of true blessedness. True blessedness does not consist in the advantages of birth. We all would like to be a Ford or a Rockefeller or even possibly a Howard Hughes descendant. That would be particularly significant today. But true blessedness does not consist in the advantages of birth. True blessedness does not consist in riches. It does not consist in a good reputation or the dignity of it, but according to the word of our Lord, true blessedness consists in the possession of the gifts of grace through Jesus Christ. Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona because flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God, but my Father who is in heaven.

And that text, of course, also stresses the fact that true faith is the result of the gift of God. When a man comes to the knowledge of spiritual truth it is because God has unveiled that truth to his spiritual eyes. The text, however, it is said by this organization, supports their claim that Peter is

the rock on which the church is built. And we have tried to point in our last study that when the Lord Jesus turned to Peter and said, I say also unto thee thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church, that he was not speaking about Peter as an individual man upon which the church would be built, but rather upon the confession that Peter had just made, the truth of it.

That is, that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and that the church is built upon him, which brings the Apostle Peter into harmony with the Apostle Paul, who said that there is other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ, and also with the Apostle Peter’s own later statements in which he says in 1 Peter, that it is Jesus Christ which is the rock, the *petra*—the mass of living rock, the cliff—the one who is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

We pointed out that it is the contention of that organization that we should interpret the text of Holy Scripture according to the unanimous tradition of the church fathers. But we saw that the church fathers did not agree with the interpretation that they promulgate, that the majority of them, the great majority of them, believed that the rock was either Christ or the confession, and the meaning is essentially the same. Even Augustine, the greatest teaching church father, said the rock was Christ. Jerome, the greatest scholar of the ancient Catholic Church and the translator of the Vulgate edition which has been the recognized edition of the Bible of that church, said the rock was Christ.

And we concluded then that Peter was not the rock but that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is the rock upon the church is built. We could never explain the existence of the Church of Jesus Christ today if Peter were the foundation. But if we assume that the Lord Jesus is the foundation, then we understand how, in spite of our frailties and failings and sins and mistakes and inequity and rebellion against God, the church still exists today. This church also claims that the Roman pontiff is our holy father. That’s a remarkable claim, for some of those men lapsed from the faith, and some of them have made some rather outlandish statements. Pius X made the statement,

“The Pope is Jesus Christ himself hidden under the veil of the flesh.” Pius XI said, “I am the Vicar of Christ,” which means that I am God on the earth.

Now this is striking in the light of the fact that some of them have lapsed from the faith. Pope Liberius lapsed from the faith and became an Arian in his Christology, which the early church had condemned, and others, too, departed from the faith.

This church also claims that the priesthood is a mediating, sacrificing priesthood today and that its powers have been handed down from the Apostle Peter and the Apostles. That claim originated with a third century father, but nevertheless, it is the claim of the church. The church also claims that the sacrifice of the Mass—which it is estimated, takes place one hundred thousand times on the Lord’s Day over the world—that the mass is the unbloody sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and so today he is still suffering through his sacrifice of the Mass. And yet the Scriptures say that he died once and for all a number of times.

This church claims that baptism removes original sin, that when an infant is sprinkled with water, original sin is removed. This church claims that justification or a right standing before God is secured by the observance of the sacraments of the church, rather than by faith in the Lord Jesus. And many of them have said in controversy with the Protestants that if men are justified by faith then all of the practices of their church would be only superstition and the opinions of men.

In the light of this, the Apostle Paul writes, “Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God.” And finally, just to conclude our brief discussion, this organization believes that the sacrifice of sacrament of penance—or confession as it is popularly known—gives forgiveness of post-baptismal sins, so that by going to the confession, my sins, after the removal of original sin in original baptism, may be removed through confession before a human priest who has the authority derived from the Apostle Peter to pronounce absolution or forgiveness for those who do confess and do offer those things demanded for penance.

Now it is the claim of this organization that Matthew chapter 16 and verse 19 supports their claims: “And 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.”

Now we admit that that claim, if it were true, would transform the nature of the Christianity that you and I are familiar with. If it were really true, then it would be probable that we should renounce our own faith and become a member of that organization in order to enjoy the blessings that they claim that they offer to men. You would expect, if this so important claim is made that the men who have made up this church and who have been most prominent in its history would all be in support of this doctrine, but such is not the case.

Tertullian, one of the greatest of the Latin fathers of North Africa said, “The keys were given to the church, not to Peter. Peter could not forgive sins,” Tertullian said. Origen said, “The power of binding belongs to all of God’s people, not simply to certain ones of them.” And even Cyprian pointed out that the rest of the Apostles were the same as Peter, endowed with a like partnership, both of honor and power. And he stated in his 27th letter that “The church was founded upon bishops, not upon a pope.” So let’s take a look at verse 19, and let us see for ourselves what this text does say. I think it would be helpful as we begin our study to give a brief review, a very brief review of some of the major interpretations that have been given of this text.

Now I have mentioned the view of this large organization, this Romanist view is that authority was given to Peter and to his successors to admit or exclude from the church. That is, on the authority of Peter and his successors, the Apostles and their successors, there is granted to this large organization the right to admit into the state of salvation or to exclude from the state of salvation.

A classic illustration of this doctrine is found in the conflict between Henry IV of Germany and Pope Gregory VII. This happened a long time ago in the 11th century, but it illustrates the application of this particular interpretation. During the period of conflict, Gregory sent greetings to Henry IV as his beloved son, and went on to state, but with the understanding that he obeys the apostolic see, as becomes a Christian king. And then after setting forth the policy of the church

relative to the matters that were at issue in Germany, the Pope went on to say, the edict is to be heartily accepted and obeyed, not only by you and your subjects, but by all princes and people who confess and worship Christ.

Well Henry was not prepared to yield to the Pope, and so he rejected the pronouncement, much to the Pope’s annoyance. And so he replied, and in his reply he addressed himself to St. Peter, and these are the words that he sent to King Henry IV. He said, “I deprive King Henry who has rebelled against thy church with unheard audacity of the government over the whole kingdom of Germany and Italy, and I release all Christian men from the allegiance which they have sworn or may swear to him, and I forbid anyone to serve him as king.” Now notice these words, “I bind him in the bonds of anathema, in thy sted (talking to Peter), and I bind him thus as commissioned by thee that the nations may know, and he be convinced that thou art Peter and that upon thy rock, the Son of the living God has built his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Now I’m sure that you’re probably saying, well that happened back in the 11th century, Dr. Johnson, and we’re living in the modern days. Well I only ask you in reply to study history. Now it is true that in this organization today there is great turmoil, for many of their priests are now denying the infallibility of the Pope, and many of the other historic beliefs of the church are being abandoned. That, of course, we consider to be good in the long run if that continues, but the basic position remains the same.

What does the Bible say about this claim? Well now, of course, it contradicts the Gospel of Matthew and specifically the 9th chapter and the 6th verse where the Lord Jesus claims for himself the power to forgive sins upon the earth. In the healing of the paralytic, he said, “But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.” So to convey his right of forgiveness of sins to Peter introduces a contradiction in the Gospel of Matthew itself.

And furthermore in the 18th chapter in the 18th verse which we have read in our Scripture reading, we have seen that there the power of binding and loosing has been conveyed to the whole church of Jesus Christ—not to the Apostles, but to the whole body of believers. And then we



remember throughout the rest of the New Testament that it does not know anything whatsoever about any power that Peter or the apostles themselves possessed to forgive sins. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Peter who was, I grant, first among equals among the apostles, when it came to the forgiveness of sins, expressly stated that it was not he who forgave sins but God who forgave sins.

Remember in the 8th chapter of the book of Acts when Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them, there were many great miracles that were performed and the Word of God received a wonderful response, so wonderful that when the statistics were sent back to headquarters in Jerusalem, they were a little bit surprised and perhaps a little disturbed about it. And so when the news came, Peter and John went down to Samaria to see what was happening down there. And when they were come, they prayed with the believers and the Holy Spirit was given by God as the apostles laid hands upon them in token of the fact that what had happened in Samaria was in accord with the things that the apostles had preached.

Now there was a man there by the name Simon [indistinct]. He was a sorcerer. He had made himself out to be some great man. He had put, no doubt, if there were newspapers, he had put big pictures of himself and announced on Saturdays or at appropriate times the fact that he would hold meetings, and he would perform his miracles and accomplish his work by his great preaching. He made himself out to be some great one, but he saw that there was something greater than the things that he offered, and so he thought that he would like to have the power of conveying the Holy Spirit to individuals by the laying on of hands.

And so he made contact with Peter's PR man, and they arranged an appointment at the Samaria Hilton, and when Simon went up to—it was in Room 470 that he was staying—and when he went up and knocked on the door, Peter ushered him in, and when Simon came in, he said, “Give me also this power that on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Spirit.” And Peter said to him, “Thy money perish with thee.” Now that is very sweet language, but this is very strong language in reality, and I hope you won't be offended. I do not mean this in an offensive way and I don't mean to be sensational or to wake up two of you who are sleeping, but I want you to know that

this statement, thy money perish with thee, is the exact equivalent of our expressions, to hell with you and your money. That’s what the Apostle said.

“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought Simon that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.” Incidentally, from this incident there arose the the practice of Simony, of buying spiritual blessing with money. “For thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God”—He did not say, and pray to me, and if you pray and offer the proper and appropriate gift I will absolve you from your sins—but he said, “Pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”

And lest you think that he meant by this, pray God and I will forgive you because I am God on the earth, in the 9th chapter, dealing with Ananias, he said concerning this man who was sick of the palsy, Ananias, “Jesus Christ maketh thee well, arise and make thy bed.” And he arose immediately. So the Holy Scriptures then make it very plain that the claim that authority was given to Peter and his successors to absolve from sin is not scriptural.

Now the Lutherans have modified this. They have claimed that authority is given to all believers to forgive sins. In other words, this text really is nothing more than the gospel applied to individuals. The Pietists in the Lutheran Church objected, saying that this idea of man forgiving someone else’s sin, this kind of chair of the devil, is contrary to Scripture and so they referred to this right of men, so-called, to pronounce absolution, any man, as a *Satanstuhl*, or a Satan’s chair—the chair of so-called forgiveness. But nevertheless, the Lutherans have come to believe that this text does give to every Christian who knows the gospel the right to forgive sins, providing the individual responds to that gospel.

Now I think that as the Lutherans have carried this out, it’s evident in their writings and in their theologies that they acknowledge that it is God alone who forgives sins, but that he forgives sins though the instrumentality of men. So that, for example if I were speaking to you and you were interested in the Word of God, and I should say to you, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ then you shall be saved, and you should say to me with sincerity, I do believe in the Lord Jesus, I have the

right to say, your sins are forgiven you, and it is I who absolve you from sins as an instrument of God. I think a great deal too much stress is laid on the human instrument by this interpretation, but it is not too far from the truth.

Other Protestant views have been that authority is given to Peter by this text to open the kingdom to the Jews as he did on the Day of Pentecost, and to the Gentiles as he did in Acts chapter 10 in Cornelius’s house by the preaching of the Word. Or, that Peter was made chief of the apostles by this statement, although his authority is not transmissible to others.

Now let me say this right here, that it is plain that even if this great church organization should be correct in the belief that the conveyance of authority is made to Peter, or that the Lutherans should be correct that this authority is conveyed to individuals, this authority under no circumstances is said to be transmissible. In other words, if authority were really given to Peter by the Lord, there is no indication whatsoever that that authority could be given to anyone else. Peter was unique. And if that is valid, only he should have had it.

There’s no support whatsoever, no text at all to which anyone could appeal but that authority is committed to the apostles and then to the successors and ultimately to the successors of the bishopric of Rome, and that the Roman Pontiffs have inherited this from Peter. That is all simply the fabrication of human minds.

Well, let’s take a look now at the text for a few moments, and we look at two or three of the important terms. Notice in the 19th verse in the first part of the verse that he says, and I will give unto thee, (singular) Peter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven. What is meant by the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Fortunately, in Scripture we have clues to the interpretation of Scripture. Generally speaking, we do not have to flee to other books in order to interpret the Word of God. It is a book that is interpreted by the analogy of faith. We interpret by the comparing of Scripture with Scripture. It is a book which is understandable as we study it by the Holy Spirit. And even the simplest mind can grasp the truths of Holy Scripture.

Now we have a clue to the meaning of “key.” In Isaiah chapter 22 and verse 15, and I’m going to ask you if you will to turn over to that passage and let me read just a few verses. We don’t have time to expound the whole passage, but I think that by reading a few of the verses we will notice the point. This text says that there was a man by the name Shebna who was secretary of the treasury, or over the treasury, in the messianic kingdom in Jerusalem. And in verse 20 of Isaiah chapter 22 we read, the prophet is speaking, “And it shall come to pass in that day that I, God, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: and I would clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”

In other words, through the prophet Isaiah, God announces that he was taking the authority of the messianic house from Shebna and he was committing it to Eliakim and the key is the sign of the possession of delegated authority in the messianic king’s rule. So that the key has become the symbol of authority, and here over the kingdom, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, authority in the messianic kingdom of heaven.

There is another text in the New Testament which gives us help in the interpretation, and it is Luke chapter 11 and verse 52. You may also remember, we won’t have time to turn to this text, that in the book of Revelation the Lord Jesus presents himself as the one who has the key to the house of David. That is, that he has authority over the messianic kingdom, the succession, the successor to the Kingdom of David.

Now in chapter 11 and verse 52 of the Gospel of Luke, the writer of this Gospel states, “Woe unto you, lawyers! (Or scribes—lawyers were scribes, scribes were generally lawyers, lawyers in the study of the word.) For ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.”

Now here the key is the insignia of the office of scribe. What then is the Lord saying to the Apostle Peter, putting these two things together? He is saying to Peter, in the light of your confession

that I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God, I am giving to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. That is, I am giving you authority in the kingdom of heaven, you are the scribe of that kingdom, and it is your right to authoritatively instruct and legislate in the kingdom. You have the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Now in the 18th chapter, that which was given to Peter because of his true confession of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, is given to the whole of the church, so that every single individual who is a true member of the true church of the Lord Jesus—I’m not speaking about the Presbyterian Church or the Baptist Church or the Roman Catholic Church or the Lutheran Church—but to all believers, true believers, whether they be in any of these local bodies, to them as a body has been given the authority to legislate in the kingdom of the heavens.

Now to legislate means to instruct with reference to entrance, to instruct with reference to the means by which we remain in fellowship with the Lord, to legislate in the kingdom. This morning as I was coming in listening to my my favorite radio broadcast, I listened to an exposition of the so-called Lord’s Prayer. It was the most amazing exposition. You notice the 13th verse, of course, ends in those familiar words, “Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.” Well after this expositor of Word of God had finally arrived at the clenching point in his exposition, he said, so instead of saying thine is the kingdom, we should really say, mine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. He had somehow expounded that text so that in the conclusion instead of giving the kingdom to God, he had managed to lay his hands upon the kingdom and said that it belonged to us.

Now I say that an individual who expounds the Word of God like that does not have a key in the kingdom of heaven. He has mistakenly and erroneously expounded the Word of God so that as a result of his exposition, what has come out is contradictory to the divine revelation. So Peter and his apostles and the whole church has been given the authority to instruct and legislate in the kingdom. That means that we have the right as true believers in the Lord Jesus to announce the conditions upon which a man becomes a member of the body of Christ and also those conditions by which he remains in fellowship in the church of the Lord Jesus.

Now that is a tremendous and extremely important responsibility given to the church. O how careful we ought to be that what we preach is the Word of God.

Now he says, “And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” These are technical terms, binding and loosing. They are derived from Aramaic expressions. The verb *asar* in Hebrew as well as in Aramaic meant “to bind,” and the verb *surab* in Aramaic meant “to loose.” So to bind was to forbid something and to loose was to allow something. So you see, legislation or legislative authority is referred to. Whatsoever thou shalt bind, that is forbid, shall have been forbidden in heaven. Whatsoever you shall loose, that is permit, shall have been permitted in heaven.

For example, the rabbis used it in this way, and this is one of their statements, which I thought was rather humorous. It has to do with Sabbath law. To them to take a hot bath on the Sabbath day, they, that is the authorities, they “bind” washing. That is, they forbid washing. You can take a bath, a hot bath, on the Sabbath day but you cannot wash. Washing, of course, would be work.

But what happens if I perspire in this hot bath? Is that work? No, the ruling goes on, and they loose, that is they allow, perspiring. [Laughter] So, on the Sabbath day you may take a hot bath but you cannot wash, but it is permitted that you perspire.

There is one last thing that I think we need to notice about this text, and that is the tenses of the verbs. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth *shall be* bound. Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth *shall be* loosed. I mention this because in Greek the construction is what we would call a rather rare type of construction. It is a perfect passive periphrastic. Now I know that is enlightening.

[Laughter] I’m sure that you after I say that, say well he must have have the keys of the kingdom of heaven and probably he’s living in heaven at the moment, because I don’t understand what he’s talking about. It’s not necessary that you do, except to notice that this tense is future perfect passive

Let me read this as it may be rendered. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. So you see, what this text then means is not that heaven ratifies the decisions of earth, looking down

seeing what we shall do, but rather that our decisions by virtue of the communication of the Holy Spirit whom the Lord gives to us according to his promise in the Upper Room discourse, our decisions are decisions that have had their origin in heaven, so whatever we bind shall have been bound in heaven, whatever we loose, whatever we permit, shall have been loosed in heaven.

In other words, the decisions of the church, whether they are decisions about entrance into the body of Christ or about continence in the body of Christ are decisions that must be in accord with the Word of God. All of the truth originates with heaven and comes to us as we rely upon the Holy Spirit in the guidance of the Spirit. As one of the translators has translated this text, “Whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven.” I mention this because the construction is rather rare and we should therefore give it its proper force.

Now then what does the text mean? Well, the Lord Jesus has just spoken about the foundation of the church in verse 18. He has said, upon this rock of the messiahship and Sonship of myself I will build my church. Now is it not the most natural thing to expect that having said that he is going to build a church, he should then speak about legislation in that church? So this text then means that the church is given authority to legislate according to the Word of God, to declare the terms of salvation, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and to define proper conduct in the kingdom, define those sins that prevent a man from sitting at the Lord’s Table, even though he may be a Christian, because he is out of fellowship with the Father in heaven.

I now understand, I think, why the apostle Paul spoke of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth, because it is the responsibility of the church to teach the truth and defend the truth, and that authority has been given us in this age by the Lord Jesus Christ. Great responsibility. We can see the historical outworking of it in the book of Acts as Peter stands up on the Day of Pentecost and announces the principles by which a man comes into the membership of that body to the Jews that were gathered there.

He said they were to repent and they were to be baptized for the remission of sin, and then in the 3rd chapter he loosed the lame man as he healed him and brought him to the forgiveness of

sins. In the 5th chapter he bound Ananias and Sapphira in the life of the church because of their disobedience and hypocrisy in their sin, a rather hard judgment but designed to impress upon us that it is an important thing that we remain in fellowship with the Lord in the Christian church. And then in the 10th chapter he announced the conditions of salvation to the Gentiles in Cornelius's house and said to to this man, give all the prophets witness that whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. In the 13th chapter, the apostle Paul takes up this responsibility and preaches in Antioch and Pisidia and announces to them the conditions of forgiveness, and so on down through the ages.

We conclude, then, that the Roman sacerdotal system has been bound by the Holy Spirit. It is forbidden; it is not in accord with the Word of God. There is no vitality and reality to prayers for the dead. There is no validity to the sign of the cross, the adoration of Mary, the adoration of saints or images, relics. There is no validity to the Mass. There is no validity to holy water. There is no validity to purgatory or the infallibility of the Pope. These are the inventions of the mind of man.

The church of Jesus Christ has been given authority to instruct and to legislate under the Word of God, and salvation is only in him who is the door. He said, “I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.”

B. R. Lincoln was an evangelist of a generation or so ago, and he used to tell a story of an experience that he had. He said he met a man once who said, “You can't get to heaven outside the Roman Catholic Church.” He said, why? And the man said to him, why Peter has the keys. He said, “Let Peter keep the keys, I've got the door.” [Laughter] And when a person has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, he does have the door by which a man may be saved. And we have the Word of God given to us to be our guide in the church of Jesus Christ.

If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to put your trust in him who has offered an atoning sacrifice that avails for sinners, and if through the Holy Spirit you have come to the conviction that you are a sinner, and if the Father has given to you



and conveyed to you the blessedness of the revelation that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, this salvation is for you.

May God the Holy Spirit speak to your heart and may within the recesses of your own personal life you say to him, I thank thee Lord that thou hast come to be the Savior of sinners. I am a sinner. Evidently I qualify. I do take Thee as my own personal Savior and stop trusting my good works in my church, my culture, my education, or whatever it is in which we may have put our trust and we start, I start trusting in Thee by the grace of God. So we invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus to come to him who is the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through him. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we again thank Thee for the clarity of the Word of God, and we praise thee that thou has given to the true church of the Lord Jesus the responsibility of legislation in the kingdom of the heavens. We praise Thee that Thou hast conveyed it to faithful men, and O God, keep us in harmony with Thy Word, that the things that are said on the earth may be things that have truly originated in heaven itself.

May grace, mercy, and peace be in—abide with all who have heard the message, and may the Holy Spirit work to the salvation of individual souls and the edification of the church of him who is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

We pray in his name, Amen.