



Links Players

Keys to the Kingdom

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19, ESV)

Jack is back! Not as the player he once was, but as an eighty-two-year-old legend being handed the keys to Saint Andrews. Jack is now an honorary citizen of the “Auld Grey Toon.”

As most golfers know, Nicklaus won The Open three times. In two of those three wins ('70 and '78), he was handed the Claret Jug at the Old Course. This time, rather than receiving the “Jug,” he was handed “the keys.”

What we might have forgotten in this year’s celebration is the mishap just prior to the 2005 Open, the last time Jack would compete at The Open. You might recall, the Community Council of Saint Andrews failed to secure the backing of enough members, and the motion to give Jack the keys was defeated. That embarrassing moment is now rectified, and Jack has the “freedom of the town.”

Only three Americans—Benjamin Franklin, Bobby Jones, and Jack Nicklaus—are currently recognized as citizens of St Andrew’s. That is rare company, indeed. All three men earned this place of honor and, as it should be, are appropriately recognized for their achievements.

Being given the keys to something is no small matter. It indicates the owner’s trust toward the recipient of the keys. The underlying idea suggests stewardship. The owner is implying in the act of handing over the keys that the steward can manage the owner’s property. Further, the steward is entrusted with opening and closing the entrance into the owner’s domain.

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In today’s text, Jesus hands the keys to Peter. He is also handing the keys to those men who would be appointed as apostles. The “you” is plural. Peter is the leader of the band. Jesus is deputizing these disciples with the unique authority to open and close the door to Christ’s kingdom. Which is to say, these men are the stewards of the gospel.

Along with Peter, these men had their eyes opened by the Father to recognize Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” They have confessed their faith in Jesus as Messiah. Jesus will build his church on this “rock.”

In the ultimate sense, Jesus is the “rock.” There is but one firm foundation and that is Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected (1 Corinthians 3:11). In a secondary and derivative sense, the apostles are the foundation (Ephesians 2:20).

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Very few texts have been so misunderstood as this one. The “binding and loosening” entrusted to these men is an idiom that denotes authority. Jesus is saying to them, and the church by extension, that when one faithfully preaches the gospel that Jesus has entrusted to the apostles, that message alone, opens or shuts access to his kingdom.

This gospel proclamation first preached by Jesus, then revealed to the apostles by the Spirit, and faithfully written down in Scripture by these apostles under the Spirit’s inspiration, grants access to Jesus’ kingdom to those who recognize Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God”.

Today is the day of salvation for anyone who believes and confesses Jesus as Lord.

Prayer – Jesus, open my eyes to see what they saw—Jesus is God’s one-of-a-kind Son sent to save the world.

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Dennis Darville
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