

LD 31; Psalm 95; John 3:16-21; The Keys of the Kingdom I. Preaching as a Key II. Discipline as a Key

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom do you give the keys to your house or the keys of your car? Who do you give the power of entrance to? I imagine the you give only trusted members of your family your keys because those who hold the keys have the power to let people in. The purpose of keys is twofold- to let certain people in and also to keep other people out. I remember back when we lived in Canada that the RCMP sent out a memo reminding people to lock their doors in order to keep unwanted people out. Not that might seem self-evident! Of course, you have to lock your doors to keep unwanted people out. Well today we are going to find that not only do our homes have locks that are opened with a key- so also does the Kingdom of God have a gate that only a key can open. In Mt. 16 Jesus gave Peter and the apostles the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. These keys are to be used for binding and loosing- or as we would put it- for letting in and keeping out. For opening and closing the gate into the kingdom. Last week as we considered the Lord's Supper, we did not focus on QA 81. But QA 81 really sets the stage for us today by asking, who should come to the Lord's Table? Who is invited to come, take and eat? Added to this- who is not supposed to come to this table? Who is forbidden from communion supper? Today we answer these questions as we consider the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. These keys are 2- the preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline. With both keys we will see an opening and a closing. These keys represent power and protection. Power- similar to the way that keys are used to start cars. And protection- in that keys are used to lock doors. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ gives the keys of the kingdom to His church for the making of disciples.

I. Preaching as a Key

In our first point, we will consider how preaching is given to the church for use as key. Now as we consider these keys, we remember that preaching and discipline are divine mandates. In other words, preaching and church discipline are not human inventions. No, it is by these means that Jesus builds, governs, protects and discipline His sheep! Jesus uses preaching and discipline to make disciples! We

start with preaching which is the most general and broadly applied key. With preaching, this key is used first of all to open the way to the kingdom of heaven. Now remember that preaching is the power of God unto salvation- faith comes by hearing the word proclaimed. Preaching is the opening and applying of God's word to His people. So how does preaching open the way and throw wide the door of the kingdom? Well, as QA 84 says, the kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and declaring that everyone who accepts the gospel in faith is truly forgiven. In the preaching of the gospel, there is a truth that declares good news. With the arrival of Jesus, there was good news of great joy for all people. Why? Because a Savior had been born- namely Jesus! The one who will take away the sins of His people. We can break this down a little bit more. What is the promise? If you repent and believe, you will be saved! What is the basis? The foundation for this salvation is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and Him crucified. What is the benefit received? Forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. We read this earlier in our text from John 3:16- "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus was sent into the world that the world might be saved through Him!" That is the good news that we find in the Scriptures- and this is the comforting truth that every pastor must declare! Ask and it will be given to you- seek and you will find! Or as John 6:37 puts it, Jesus will never turn away one who comes to Him. So it is in preaching that you hear the good news of a way in which you can be saved and made right with God. As Paul did so also, I proclaim today! I plead with you- be reconciled to God! Trust in Jesus Christ- look to Him and you will receive the blessings of life everlasting! It is my privilege to declare this truth to you- and to proclaim this promise of good news! But preaching is not always the good side of this news. Preaching is not only a promise of blessing. In order to preach the full council of God, the church must also hear about the other side of this coin! There is also a danger that is present- a woe and warning that must be heard. As QA 84 continues, the kingdom of heaven is closed when it is publicly declared that unbelievers remain under the wrath of God. Remember that keys not only are used for opening, they are also used for closing and locking! In preaching this truth is also declared, if you refuse to repent and

believe you remain locked out of the kingdom of God! You are like one of those virgins whose oil ran out- locked outside of the feast and cast out into darkness. God's wrath and judgment remain on you. For those who stubbornly rebel- who harden their hearts and stiffen their necks- there will be no forgiveness! Rather these will receive everlasting death and destruction! So to the rebel and the hypocrite I say- repent! Flee from the coming wrath! Today is the day of salvation and there is still time! As our text in John 3:18 continues, whoever does not believe is already condemned. "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" is not only the title of a sermon written by Edwards- it is also the state and condition of all men who will not humble themselves in the presence of the almighty God! So as you can see, both heaven and hell are on display today! Choose you this day whom you will serve! Both justice and mercy are woven onto the pages of Scriptures! There are two paths- two road! The broad and easy path leads to destruction while the narrow path leads to life! It is a pastor's task to teach and explain this truth- to apply God word to various people in various states! I have to tell it like it is. Both kinds of people can be found in the church! Make no mistake, there are both believers and rebels who attend church! God's word speaks of comfort and peace to those who have place their humble faith in Jesus Christ! But God's word also speaks of warning and woe to the hypocrite and unbeliever! In this way there is a message for everyone here! There will be no secrets on the last day! You need to know where you stand! As we read from Psalm 95: Today, if only you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts! Rather believe and you will be saved!

II. Discipline as a Key

In our New Member's course, we spend some time talking about the Marks of the True Church. How do you know which church is a true and faithful church? The marks of pure preaching, right administration of the sacraments and Christian discipline are the 3 marks that every true church will have. These marks are necessary for the purity of doctrine and belief as well as purity of practice and right living. And when it comes to the Kingdom, preaching always comes first. But if the preaching hits a hard heart- if an individual refusing to repent- if a person's life does not fit in line with their profession- then what? What

recourse do we have? Well, the church is also given the key of church discipline to press the promises of the Word closer to home. So in our second point we consider discipline. Now church discipline is more focussed and individual than preaching is in general. And although discipline sounds negative to our ears, it does have both a negative and a positive use. As I said in the first point, Jesus uses these keys to make disciples. In fact, the words discipline and disciple are connected. To discipline is to teach and instruct while a disciple is one who follows the teaching of other. The way in which church discipline works is the reverse of preaching- where preaching opens then closes; discipline closes then opens in QA 85. In this way, the Kingdom of God is shut and the rebel sinner is locked out of the Kingdom and removed from the church as well. Now these steps of discipline are outlined for us in Mt. 18 when it comes to private matter. First the sin is brought up between the two of you, then a witness is taken along if the sinner refuses to repent. And if that person still refuses to repent, the matter is made known to the church by way of the elders. If after repeated admonition and rebuke the sinner refuses to repent, the extreme remedy is excommunication. The unrepentant, hardened sinner is excluded from the church and bared from the sacraments. The way in which the sacraments work as a key is this- those who refuse to meet the necessary marks of a Christian are then barred from partaking of the Lord's Supper which signifies union with Christ. Now this is not a punitive act- the church is not being mean and picking on the sinner. No, there is a very specific reason and goal here. The reason that the Lord's Supper is withheld from the unrepentant sinner is so that the sinner might see what they are missing! In order for the gravity of the sin to be felt and seen! So for the sake of the sinner they must be pricked- pinched by having a blessing taken away. Added to this, church discipline must be practice for the sake of the whole church as well. In I Cor. 5, Paul compares a brazen sin to that of leaven. As yeast spreads, so sin if left unchecked spreads within the church. So the purity of the church as whole is also at stake. Now to be clear, we are not dealing with matters of election and the hidden will of God. When it comes to discipline, we are dealing with fruit- making judgement based on what we can see. The elders of the church are not divine and all

knowing. But as Jesus said, you will know them by their fruit. So those who live wicked and rebellious lives are simply living out of the wickedness that lives within their hearts. Church discipline means to expose this wickedness with a goal of repentance and reconciliation! The goal of church discipline is to get the sinner to see their sins and repent! As QA 85 concludes, such persons when they promise and demonstrate genuine reform are received again as members of Christ and His church. We find this playing out in the Corinthian church. In I Cor. 5:5 there is a wicked member of the church who is delivered over to Satan. He is cast out of the church for his scandalous, sexually immoral behavior. The hope, Paul says, is that in his being cast out for a time his soul might be saved in the end! What we find in II Cor. 2:7 is this, one who had caused great pain and turmoil in the church was received back into the church. He was forgiven and comforted- welcomed and the love of the church was reaffirmed! So both the excommunication and reconciliation of a sinner was evident in the Corinthian church. So the goal of discipline is that the sinner would repent and be reunited with the church. This reunion would take place only after the sinner promised and demonstrated his change of heart and life. The validity of their repentance and the steadfastness of their conversion would be tested for time, but the sinner would be forgiven and restored to the church. In this way the key of discipline that once locked out the sinner would be used to open the door to welcome him back in again. They would be restored to the church and welcomed to the table of communion once more.

To conclude, keys are useful instruments but they have to be used! Just as leaving your car and your house unlocked invites trouble, so also a church without keys is defenceless! Both preaching and discipline are testaments of God's love- the Father disciplines the son that He loves. Jesus Christ wants you to know where you stand! The Keys of the Kingdom are powerful and are given for our protection. So that church would be kept safe from the wolves and the need for faith and repentance made clear to all. Jesus Christ gives the keys of the kingdom to His church for the making of disciples. So may these keys be properly used here- and more than that- may we all respond to their use with faith and repentance!