

“You are Opening Heaven’s Door”

Matthew 16:13-19 & Romans 12:1-2,4-8

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Prayer for Understanding Loving God fill us with your Spirit, your breath, your abundant life. Open our eyes to beauty, our ears to harmony, our hearts to love, our minds to wisdom and our souls to joy. Speak to us through your love letter to us the Bible and through one another. Amen

You are opening heaven’s doors. Dietrich Bonhoeffer proposed an alternative strategy of reading Scripture. Instead of questioning the Bible from your standpoint, Bonhoeffer challenges us to let the Bible question us. What doors of heaven are you opening for yourself? What doors of heaven are you opening for others? Bonhoeffer discovered that Scripture was questioning him, and the people of Nazi Germany, in their treatment of Jews, and this discovery led him to new patterns of thought and action. It led Bonhoeffer to write that “only the one who cries out for the Jews may truly worship singing Gregorian chants.” Who is God asking you to lovingly advocate for?

The good news of Matthew: **Matthew 16:13-19A MSG “When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, “What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some think he is John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” Jesus pressed them, “And how about you? Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Child of the living God.” Jesus came back, “God bless you, Simon, child of Jonah! You did not get that answer out of books or from teachers. God let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I am going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. “And that is not all. You will have complete and free access to God’s kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven.”**

In the Old Testament, it was believed that the Realm of Heaven came through the ark of the covenant, flowing into the holy of holies, flowing into the temple, flowing into the priests and then passed on flowing to all people. The temple was considered the belly button of humanity, and the cosmos, transporting all life and goodness from God to all.

Peter was learning from Jesus and accepting God’s grace. Jesus has just explained how some religious leaders were limiting the flow of God’s goodness by their failure to love all people always. Jesus then crossed every border to heal a despised, outsider, the Canaanite woman and her daughter. Next scripture states that **Matthew 15:30 “Jesus healed them all.”** No exceptions. No one left out. Even the religious leaders who refused to love certain people will be healed. God will heal everyone, so everyone is able to love all people, love always, and love in every situation.

This is the context of Jesus question, **“Who do you say I am?”** Peter recalls all his moments with Jesus, the compassion for everyone, the love for everyone, healing everyone, teaching everyone to love everyone. Peter has perceived how the goodness of heaven is flowing into everyone’s life and the earth through Jesus. Jesus is grace, peace, joy, and love. **Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Child of the living God.”** Christ is Greek for the Hebrew word Messiah. Christ and Messiah mean anointed one. God’s goodness flowing through Jesus into everyone’s lives. Christ means Jesus is living water who quenches the thirsts of everyone. Peter recalls the psalm of anointing. **Psalm 133 adapted:** *God’s anointing oil poured out on Aaron flows creating precious harmony. How wonderful and pleasant it is when people live together in harmony. Harmony is as refreshing as dew that sustains life on desert mountains. God’s anointing oil is pronouncing God’s blessing, life everlasting.*

Child of the living God means that God is alive, eternal, actively loving, healing, blessing, and pouring goodness into everyone and the entire cosmos. Child of the living God means that Jesus is God, embodying the essence of God, a conduit for God’s goodness, a bellybutton for the cosmos, love incarnate. To symbolize all of this, at Jesus’ resurrection the curtain in the temple was torn in two, Jesus transmits heaven to earth.

In short, Peter noticed goodness flowing into everyone’s lives through Jesus. Now Jesus tells Peter and everyone who notices God’s goodness who they are. Insert your name into Jesus’ statement. **And now I am**

going to tell you who you are, really are. *You are a rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. “And that is not all. You will have complete and free access to God’s Realm keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven.”* Every instant you perceive God’s goodness you open a door to heaven. Every instant you love you open a door to heaven. Every instant you are joyful, peaceful, and hopeful, you open a door to heaven. Every instant you care, share, and serve, you open a door to heaven. In every good thought, feeling, and action, you are expanding the love of the cosmos forever.

The phrase “**gates of hell**” refers to every form of death, loss, brokenness, separation, exclusion, imperfection, and incompleteness. God is giving us keys to overcome every form of death with everlasting, resurrection life. How are you using God’s life giving keys?

Peter was far from perfect. Peter was moody, impulsive, and had a nasty temper. Peter denied Jesus and coward in fear. Peter fell into the same trap as many of the religious leaders using human-made traditions to exclude some people. God had to go to extreme measures with visions and sending people to advise Peter to expand his love. God chooses to work through broken, sinful people, to take every spec of goodness and expand that goodness to bless the entire cosmos. We are all cracked pots unable to receive and enjoy most of God’s goodness; and yet, we can perceive a drop of goodness and that drop of goodness God is using to glorify all.

Peter taught that he was merely a single rock needing everyone’s rocks to be complete. Peter described it as we are all living rocks, becoming bonded together in love to form a spiritual house, a home where all belong and enjoy God’s goodness.

Who are you? You are a beloved child of God created in the image of God, a rock upon which God is bringing heaven to earth. What is God currently building upon you? What do you imagine God will build upon you in the future? God is giving you keys to heaven. One key is the key of grace to forgive and reconcile. Another key is compassionate love, understanding people’s needs, serving and enhancing their lives. Another key is peace to calm yourself and invite everyone into harmonious community. Another key is joy to celebrate God’s goodness. And you have unique keys that no one else has, that is bringing unique goodness to earth. Your uniqueness is essential to completing the glory of the cosmos. What are your unique keys?

The Apostle Paul wrote: **Romans 12:1-2,4-8 NLT** “**And so, dear siblings I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all God has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind God will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship God. Do not copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.**

Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

In God’s grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.”

You are a rock on which God will put together all people, so expansive with energy that not even death will be able to keep us out. You will have complete and free access to God’s Realm, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth. You are opening heaven’s doors. Amen