

Matthew 16:13-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-16/matthew-1613-20/>

Jesus begins a significant conversation with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi. He asks His disciples about the Son of Man and who He is. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus commends His disciple for God's revealing this to him, and tells him that such bold faith will lead the church to overcome culture and Hades itself. Jesus also tells Peter that He will give him authority to act on behalf of kingdom of heaven.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21.

Matthew reports that *Jesus and His disciples came into the district of Caesarea Philippi* after they crossed the Sea of Galilee from Magadan, and ascended the roughly 1800 foot rise in elevation over roughly 25 miles across land. The area of Caesarea Philippi featured Mt. Hermon and two of the Jordan River's three headwaters.

Caesarea Philippi the capital city of the district of Gaulanitis. Matthew chose to identify the *district* by the name of its capital city. By telling us they came *into the district* of Caesarea Philippi, Matthew might be telling the reader that Jesus and the disciples came to the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi, but did not fully enter. Since Matthew's primary audience is Jewish, and his goal is to demonstrate to them that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of David, this might have been important, as an observant Jew would be defiled if they entered the grossly pagan areas of *Caesarea Philippi*.

When Israel first conquered the Promised Land, this region of Caesarea Philippi was included in the territory allotted to the half tribe of Manasseh (Numbers 32:39-42, Joshua 13:29-31). It was the northernmost territory in the Kingdom of Israel. Later Manasseh was renamed Dan.

But the culture of this region was long afflicted by Paganism. Even from the idolatrous time of Israel's judges (1100 B.C.), the city of Dan (near *Caesarea Philippi*) was renowned for its idol worship (Judges 18:6). Jeroboam (? – 909 B.C.), Israel's first king following its split from Judah built a golden calf in the city of Dan for the people to worship as God (1 Kings 12:28-31). Under King Ahab and his wife Jezebel it became a center of Baal worship.

Centuries later, during the Greek occupation (334 B.C. – 175 B.C.) the Greeks established the city of "Paneas" dedicated to their fertility god, Pan. Pan was often depicted as a debauched faun (half-goat, half-man).

At Paneas was a cave which, according to tradition, the Greeks named *the gates of Hades*. To them this meant the door or entrance into the underworld. It was called *the gates of Hades* because at the mouth of the cave was a whirlpool and a spring that flowed out of the cave's mouth. (This spring was one of the sources of the Jordan River.) It was at this site that they worshipped Pan.

Pan worship entailed a sacrifice and bestiality. Priests would offer a sacrifice to Pan by throwing a goat into the whirlpool at the mouth of the cave (the *gates of Hades*) from which the spring flowed.

Because of this gross paganism, an observant Jew would have to retain a sufficient distance, in order to avoid becoming defiled.

Sometime after the Roman conquest in 63 B.C., this territory was included in the kingdom of Herod the Great. He built a marble temple at the cave's entrance (the *gates of Hades*) and dedicated it to Caesar Augustus (who was the son and heir of the deified Julius Caesar). After Herod the Great's death, this region (along with the districts of Iturea and Trachonitis) were passed down to his son, Philip, who changed the name of Paneas to *Caesarea Philippi*, after Tiberius Caesar and himself.

This Philip also became the husband of his niece Salome (daughter of Herodias and another of Herod the Great's sons, also named Philip) who danced before her other uncle Herod the tetrarch, and was awarded the head of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). Philip added a separate temple dedicated to Jupiter (Zeus) and courtyards beside *the gates of Hades* to facilitate Pan worship.

The city later was renamed "Banias," the Hebrew version of Paneas, which is what it is called today. A visitor to *the gates of Hades* today can still see the ruins of the temples' foundations. They would notice hollowed-out niches carved in the mountain beside the cave where idols were displayed. Modern visitors would also see that the spring no longer flows from the mouth of the cave. This is because earthquakes have rerouted it since the time of *Christ*.

During *Jesus's* day, the culture of *Caesarea Philippi* was dominated by Roman Paganism. *When they came into this district*, *Jesus* had arrived at a place where *He* could teach *His disciples* undisturbed, and with an important teaching tool. It is unlikely that *Jesus* and the *disciples* would have gone to the temples located at *Caesarea Philippi* because it would have made them unclean. But it was in this *district*, perhaps on one of the several bluffs overlooking the *gates of Hades* that *Jesus* shared a most revealing conversation with *His disciples* about *His* identity and mission.

The topic turned to *the Son of Man*. In *Jesus's* day, the term *Son of Man* had three different meanings. It could be used as an expression for "someone," such as *A son of man*. It could be used as a reference to the prophet Ezekiel who used this label to describe himself ninety times. But it was also commonly understood to be a description of the Messiah. This use arose from Daniel's vision where he saw "One like a *Son of Man*... who was given... an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus asked *His disciples*, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The *disciples* gave Him four answers that *the people* said *who the Son of Man* was.

The first answer *some* said was *John the Baptist*. Herod the Tetrach had imprisoned *John* (Matthew 11:2) and recently put him to death (Matthew 14:1-12). *John* was *Jesus*' cousin. He was an eccentric whose strange appearance and fiery message called *the people* to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). *John* drew large crowds into the Judean wilderness (Matthew 3:5-6) and baptized them. *The people* who went to *John* were hoping he was "more than a prophet" (Matthew 11:9). They were hoping *John* was the Messiah. But *John* was not the Messiah (John 1:20). *John* was, however, the Messiah's forerunner who prepared the way before Him (Malachi 3:1).

Another answer that *others* gave for *who the Son of Man* was, was *Elijah*. *Elijah* (~900 B.C. – ~850 B.C.) was a famous prophet within Israel's Northern Kingdom during the reign of the wicked King Ahab. *Elijah* was known for performing powerful miracles in the name of God. These include prophesying the beginning and end of a severe famine that lasted three years (1 Kings 17:1 and 18:41), the raising of the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24), and striking the Jordan's waters to allow him to cross (2 Kings 2:8).

But his most famous miracle was his public showdown with 450 prophets of Baal when *Elijah* called upon God to send down fire to consume the water-soaked altar (1 Kings 18:19-40). The book of Kings also tells us that *Elijah* never died, "As they were going along and talking, behold, there approached a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And *Elijah* went up by a whirlwind to heaven" (2 Kings 2:11).

The prophet Malachi, who foretold of a Messianic forerunner (Malachi 3:1) also prophesied that *Elijah* would return before the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:4). The last three verses of the Old Testament have strong Messianic overtones and they mention *Elijah* by name.

"Remember the Law of Moses My servant, the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and strike the land with complete destruction."
(Malachi 4:4-6)

This prophecy caused many Jews to look for *Elijah*'s return as a sign that God's kingdom and His Messiah were coming. *Others* suspected that *Elijah* himself would be *the Son of Man*.

A third answer *the disciples* told *Jesus* about *who the people* identified as *the Son of Man* was the prophet *Jeremiah* (~650 B.C. — ~ 570 B.C.). *Jeremiah* was a prophet of the Lord who warned the kings of Judah of God's judgement. His fiery warnings against the kings of Judah were a source of constant friction (Jeremiah 1:18-19, 2:26; 8:1-2, 22:11-12) with the governing authorities. In return, *Jeremiah* was beaten and imprisoned (Jeremiah 37:15-16), thrown in a deep well (Jeremiah 38:6) and eventually exiled to Egypt (Jeremiah 42:1-7). When rulers of Judah ignored his counsel, *God* allowed Babylon to invade Judah, exile its captives, and bring an end to its evil ruler's reign.

Jeremiah is often known as the weeping prophet because he wrote the book of Lamentations, commiserating the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. But despite his many proclamations of impending judgement, he also prophesied hope and salvation (Jeremiah 29:10-14; 31:3-6; 32:37-42; 33:6-9).

Jeremiah also prophesied of the Messiah, calling the Messiah a “righteous Branch” or a “righteous Branch of David.”

“‘Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the Lord,
‘When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.
‘In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell securely;
And this is His name by which He will be called,
‘The Lord our righteousness.’”
(Jeremiah 23:5-6)

“‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the Lord is our righteousness.’ For thus says the Lord, ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.’”
(Jeremiah 33:14-18)

It may have been because of *Jeremiah*’s prophecies of judgment, deliverance, and the Messiah that *some* thought he might be *the Son of Man*.

Matthew summarized the *disciples*’ additional answer(s) for *who the people* supposed *the Son of Man* was as *one of the prophets*.

After the *disciples* gave answers about *who the people* said *the Son of Man* was, *Jesus* asked them a more personal question about Himself.

Jesus asked them *But who do you say that I am?* He was interested in who *they* thought *He* was.

The most outspoken of the disciples, *Simon Peter*, blurted out, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” *Peter* believed *Jesus* to be more than a great teacher and miracle worker. He believed *Jesus* was the long-awaited Messiah.

Christ is the English word for the Greek term “Christos.” Christos is the Greek word for the Hebrew term “Mashiach” which means “Anointed One.” “Maschiach” is transliterated into

English as “Messiah.” So *Christ* means “Anointed One” means “Messiah.” *Peter* had recognized that *Jesus* was the Messiah.

Given what *Peter* had seen *Jesus* perform, and how he had heard *Jesus* speak of Himself (Matthew 18:20; 11:1-19), it was hardly surprising that *Peter* believed *Jesus* was the *Christ*. What is surprising however is that *Peter* also identified *Jesus* as *the Son of the living God*.

Up to this point *Jesus* had hinted at this identity. *Jesus* had inferred that *He* was *God* (Matthew 9:2-6). *Jesus* had often referred to *God* as “your” or “our” *Father* as *He* did throughout the sermon on the Mount. But Matthew records *Jesus* as only occasionally calling *God* as “My *Father*” (Matthew 10:32; 11:26-27; 12:50). The Old Testament scriptures vaguely forecasts the truth that the Messiah would be *God*, such as (Jeremiah 23:2-3). But few if any seemed to have noticed this fact.

The title *Son of Man* also inferred divinity, when thought of in fulfillment of the Daniel 7 prophecy. Some Jewish sages recognized the possibility that the Messiah would be divine, and that might have stemmed from the period of oral tradition. But it hardly seemed to be a widespread view, as indicated by the disciples’ response to *Jesus*’s question as to who the people said *He* was.

But given their location near *Caesarea Philippi*, there is something else worth mentioning in *Peter*’s confession. *Peter* called *Jesus* *the Son of the living God*. The adjective *living* strongly contrasts the empty paganism long associated with the region and its dead idols displayed in the temples and grotto beside *the gates of Hades*. The true *God* is not like the pagan gods. *He* is not dead. *He* is *living*.

Peter also may have intended another meaning when he described *Jesus* as *the Son of the living God*. He may have been contrasting *Jesus* with the man whose temple Herod the Great built and dedicated there—Caesar Augustus. The contrast was this: *Jesus*’s *Father* is *living*. Caesar Augustus’ adopted father; Julius Caesar was not. When Octavian, (Augustus’ given name) assumed the title “Caesar Augustus” he claimed to be the *son of the* deified Julius Caesar. Once again *Jesus* is *the Son of the living God*. *He* was not, as Augustus claimed to be, *son of the* dead “god”—Julius Caesar.

Through *Jesus*’s question and *Peter*’s confession we see three important identities of *Jesus*. *He* is the *Son of Man* (Human). *He* is the *Christ*, the anointed Messiah (*God*’s prophetic King who would restore Israel to everlasting glory). And *He* is the Son of *God* (*God*, Himself).

And Jesus said to him, “Blessed [“Makarios”] are you, Simon Barjona. Peter’s given name was Simon and Barjona mean “son of Jonah.” The reason Jesus called Peter blessed was because flesh and blood did not reveal My identity to you, but My Father who is in heaven. In other words Peter believed this, not because he had discovered it on his own and not because a person told him. He knew it because God had revealed this to him.

Jesus continued speaking to *His* disciple *Simon*. And *He* may have enjoyed a chuckle at *Simon*’s expense. *I also say to you that you are Peter*. *Simon*’s nickname was *Peter*—the Greek word is

“Petros.” It is the masculinized version “Petras” the Greek word for *rock*. A *rock* is hard. It is immovable. *Simon* was nicknamed for his stubborn personality and hardheadedness. His obstinacy made him the last to understand something, and Jesus may have been laughing that Peter of all the disciples saw this, for he was so hardheaded and slow that only *God* could have *revealed this insight* to him.

But the positive aspect of being stubborn is that even though it may have taken *Peter* a long time to “get” an idea, once he got it, it would not easily be dislodged from his conviction or purpose. *Jesus* added *that upon this rock of bold conviction, I will build My church*. Conviction like *Peter’s* would be the foundation of *Jesus’s church*.

This is the first time Matthew has mentioned *church*, which is a translation of the Greek word “ekklesia,” which means to be called or gathered from afar. *The church* is the many different people groups who have believed upon *Jesus*, gathered into the Body of *Christ* as children of *God*. Like members of a human body, the members of the Body of *Christ* have diverse backgrounds, talents, and opportunities. But they are all united together in *Christ* from all over the world. The *church* is led by none other than *Jesus*. “Ekklesia” has less political or dominion overtones than *kingdom*. *God’s kingdom* is not of this world (John 18:36). But the *kingdom* of *God* will be brought to this earth at the end of the age (Revelation 20:4-10). Meanwhile, the principles and life of the *kingdom* of *God* flow into the present world through the actions and interactions of *God’s* people, His “ekklesia,” the Body of *Christ*.

Then *Jesus* added something really interesting about *this rock* upon which He would *build* His *church*. He said, “*and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*” There seems to be a double-meaning behind this statement.

The first meaning is a reference to the famous whirlpool and cave that was possibly already called *the gates of Hades*. Perhaps *Jesus* was on a bluff overlooking this cave, and turned and pointed to it when He made this statement to His disciples. This is the most immediate meaning to *His disciples*, given that they were in *the district of Caesarea Philippi* where the whirlpool and cave were located.

The gates of Hades was a physical feature that represented the surrounding culture of paganism. *Jesus* was saying that this dominant culture will not prevail against *My church*. The world system and death itself will not prevail. The Body of *Christ* and its message of “love your neighbor” is in a pitched battle against the paganism of the world, and its philosophy of “the strong exploit the weak.” *Jesus*, encouragingly, states clearly that “*My church* will win this battle.”

In a battle, *gates* are a defensive structure that protect a city from being overrun. The image *Jesus* is drawing here is that when Christians who make up *My church* have a *rock-like* faith as *Peter* did, the surrounding culture will not be able to resist the power of the gospel. Believers are to take the offensive into culture.

And as Paul later describes with the armor of God, Christians are to use “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” as their offensive weapon (Ephesians 6:17) when sieging *the gates of Hades* that surround and guard the godless cultures of exploitation. The way they are to storm

the gates is by speaking the truth of God's word as the Spirit leads. But as we speak truth according to the Spirit's leading, we are to remember that we are not called to judge (Matthew 7:1). There will be judgement, but it will be God that does the judging.

The second meaning of Jesus's statement regarding *gates of Hades* is a reference to His defeat of death. *Hades* was a commonly used Greek name for the underworld or place of the dead. In its broadest sense, *Hades* was like the Hebrew "Sheol" (1 Samuel 2:6; 2 Samuel 22:6; Psalm 30:3). It was the place where the spirits of the deceased went when their life on earth came to an end. In Acts 2:27, the Greek word "hades" is substituted for the Hebrew word "Sheol" in quoting Psalm 16:10.

Jesus emphatically defeated death when He rose from the dead (2 Timothy 1:10). And *Jesus* shares His victory over death and *Hades* with all who believe in Him (John 3:16). Death has no lasting authority or victory over *Christ's church* (Hosea 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:53-57). And *Hades' gates* cannot hold those who have been granted everlasting life in *Jesus* (Hebrews 2:14). Death and *Hades* have been defeated by *Jesus* and in the end, they will have no power over *His church*. Death has been sentenced, so to speak, and is on "death row." Death's ultimate destination is to be thrown into the lake of fire.

"Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire."

(Revelation 20:14)

This is the second part of *Jesus's gates of Hades* double entendre.

Jesus continued to speak to *Peter* telling him *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*.

In one sense this statement is personal and specific to *Peter*. Matthew shows us that it is specific because he uses a singular form of *to you* ("soi") in *Jesus's* address to *Peter*. This means *Peter* will *receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven* from *Jesus*. This *will* be a future handoff. *Jesus* did not tell *Peter* "*I am giving the keys to you right now.*" This handoff seems to have occurred after *Christ's* resurrection. It may have been when *Jesus* reinstated *Peter* after his denial (John 21:15-22). It may have been at the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). It may have been at *Jesus's* ascension (Acts 1:6-11); or on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

There is no scriptural record of *Jesus* using the exact language of this promise to anyone but *Peter*. However, *Jesus* said something functionally equivalent that was addressed to all the disciples:

"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

(Matthew 18:18)

This statement from Matthew 18 grants the same authority, without the mention of "keys." It is likely that *Jesus* added "keys" here since He was using the illustration of a "gate." When we consider *Jesus's* meaning about *the kingdom's keys*, and what *He* tells *Peter* he will do with

these *keys*; we can easily recognize that *Jesus* said similar things to other people all throughout His ministry. And so, while the wording of this profound statement is directed specifically to *Peter*, its principle is offered to everyone willing to follow *Jesus*. This becomes clear when we consider what *Jesus* said and meant by *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*.

What are *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* that *Peter* was to receive from *Jesus*?

Keys are a symbol of authority and a practical tool. The possessor of *keys* can use *the keys* to lock and store *whatever* he wishes for safe keeping. And the possessor also has special access to *whatever the keys* unlock.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven represent some type of authority. More specifically it is having authority within *the kingdom of heaven*. And more specifically still, it is the authority to *bind and loose things in heaven*. *Jesus* told *Peter* that he could do two things with these *keys*.

The first is that *whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven*. This means *whatever Peter* saves or lock up with these *keys*, *shall have been* saved or locked up (literally *bound*) *in heaven*. *Peter* has the authority to invest things *on earth* and redeem them *in the kingdom of heaven*. In other words, the moments, the resources, the actions that *Peter* binds and dedicates to God in his life *on earth shall have been bound* and saved *in the kingdom of heaven*. This may mean that *whatever* of this *Peter* does on *earth* will be a part of his reward in *heaven* as *Jesus* taught *His disciples* in *His* Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-4; 6:5-7, 6:16-18).

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

(Matthew 6:19-21)

But at the same time *whatever* things *Peter* binds *on earth* God will redeem as a blessing to everyone *in the kingdom heaven*, so that *Peter* does not only sow and reap for the benefit of himself, but also to others (2 Corinthians 9:8-15). When we obey God and follow *Christ's* example of serving others, God uses our behavior and actions to enrich *His kingdom*. *Jesus* is telling *Peter* that he will be granted *the keys* and awesome authority of *heaven* to live his life *on earth* in such a way that it will bless others for all eternity.

The second thing *Jesus* told *Peter* that he could do with *the keys of the kingdom* is *whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven*. Just as *keys* can bind and lock things away for safe keeping, they can also be used to unlock things for use now. *Jesus* was telling *Peter* that with these *keys*, he could have access to *heaven's* storehouses and loosen the things *of heaven on earth*. *Heaven* would be the equip and provide for *whatever* needs *Peter* had *on earth*.

Consider what *Jesus* taught *His disciples* on *His* sermon on the mount,

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be

opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”
(Matthew 7:7-11)

In telling *Peter* that He would *give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven*, *Jesus* was *telling His disciple* that he would have access to whatever he needed from *heaven* to accomplish *God’s* will on earth; and that *Peter’s* acts of love and service on earth would be eternally redeemed *in heaven*.

And while the Bible records *Jesus* saying this particular phrase about giving *the keys of the kingdom* to only to *Peter*, it provides numerous records of *Jesus* and *God* saying similar things to other people. The promise *Jesus* made to *Peter* is not unique to *Peter*. It is available to everyone who will take up their cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24-27).

Was there something special that *Peter* opened on behalf of the world, that might have caused *Jesus* to single *him* out in this passage? It was through *Peter* that God revealed to the Jews that *His* grace had been spread to the Gentiles. As *Peter* stated:

“Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.”
(Acts 15:7)

Peter was given a dream and calling, then preached the gospel to Gentiles in Caesarea by the Sea (a different Caesarea from *Caesarea Philippi*) at which time the Holy Spirit fell on them, showing that the gospel had been granted to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

But in spite of the Jewish *Peter’s* special calling to open the *kingdom of heaven* to the Gentiles, here are a few examples of when *Jesus* promised others *kingdom* authority or power:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3)

“Jesus answered them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.’”
(Matthew 13:11-12)

“Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”
(Matthew 18:18)

Jesus spoke this verse to *His disciples*. It is worth noting how the above verse is functionally identical to what *Jesus* told *Peter* that *the keys of the kingdom* will do for him. This similarity is

further evidence that *Jesus*'s main point is not exclusive to *Peter* alone; but rather it is available to all of *His disciples*:

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”
(Matthew 18:19-20)

“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.’”
(Matthew 21:21-22)

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”
(Matthew 28:18-20)

“...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8)

Jesus's promise to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to *Peter* is not unique to *Peter*. It is a promise to anyone who will take up their cross and follow *Him* (Matthew 16:24-27).

But the language Matthew uses to convey *Jesus*'s thought is quite interesting for other reasons. It is worth noting the active voice of what *Peter* does *on earth* against the passive voice of what *shall have been done in heaven*. *Peter*'s actions of *bind* and *loose on earth* are active, meaning he is the one who is actively doing these actions. But *in heaven*, the actions are done because of *Peter* but apart from *Peter*. *In the kingdom* these *shall have been* done on his account or at least on account of his actions.

In addition to the active and passive voices of these verbs are the aorist and perfect aspects they use. In Greek the aorist tense is the simplest form of a Greek verb. Its focus is the bare action or definition of the verb; “it happened and that’s done.” The perfect tense in Greek describes a completed action or event while it stresses its ongoing effects or consequences. *Jesus* told *Peter* that *whatever you bind* or *loose* now (aorist, it’s done) *on earth—shall have been bound* or *loosed* (perfect, it’s impact is ongoing) *in heaven*. The inference is that any definitive action of *Peter* has an immediate and ongoing effect in heaven.

These uses of the perfect aspect play with time and echo eternity. There is a past and a future component at work in them. Matthew’s phrasing of *Jesus*'s statement *shall have been bound/loosed in the kingdom of heaven* conveys these actions as though they *have* already been

accomplished because of what *Peter* will soon be doing. It is like saying the effects *have been* taking place *in heaven* before their cause occurs *on earth*. In other words, *God* has already *bound* and redeemed the things that *Peter* is doing *on earth in the kingdom of heaven*. It is similar to what Paul teaches in Ephesians:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”
(Ephesians 1:3-5)

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
(Ephesians 2:10)

But there is also a future component at play in these perfect aspects. The things *Peter* binds or loosens now *shall also have been bound in the kingdom of heaven* and their consequences or effects *shall* be unfolding *in the kingdom* forever and ever.

If we zoom back, we might think of these things this way. In eternity past *God* predestined *Peter* to do and perform good works for *His kingdom*; and in eternity past *God* planned to reward *Peter* for doing these good works and to give everlasting blessings to others in heaven because of *Peter's* good works. During *Peter's* present life he performs those works, of his own free choice, a choice that is real and genuine.

This surfaces the paradox between the Bible telling us of God's sovereignty over all things and *His* granting to human a genuine choice that is real. But it is but one of many paradoxes. God is One, but Three. God is spirit, but also human (in *Christ*). God is in time, but beyond time. These paradoxes are beyond our understanding. In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon calls probing into such questions “hebel” which means “vaporous” or “foggy.” We can't see clearly, because we are finite beings with eternity placed within our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Solomon's answer was to reconcile these mysteries through faith in God, as our creator and ultimately as our judge. Paul's answer is from Romans, where he says:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”
(Romans 11:33-36)

In eternity future, when *His kingdom* comes, *Peter* and others will receive everlasting blessings for what *Peter* did during his life, which was walking in the works that *God* prepared for him to perform (Ephesians 2:10).

Matthew then reports that after *Jesus* told *Peter* these things, that *He then warned the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ*. It was not part of *God's* plan for *Jesus's* identity as the Messiah or *the Son of God* to be publicly acknowledged through a direct testimony from *His disciples*. The people were to determine the nature and identity of *Jesus* from other means, such as the testimony of *Jesus's* works (John 14:11). There are many possible reasons *Jesus* took this route. One is to fulfill prophecy, as noted in our [commentary on Matthew 13:10-17](#). It is possible that *Jesus* desired to lead people away from their pre-conceived notions of how the Messiah would appear, and lead them to a new understanding through *His* works and testimony. It is also possible that *Jesus* was protecting His disciples from attack, until the proper time.

Biblical Text

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and *still* others, Jeremiah, or one of the *other* prophets." ¹⁵ He *said to them, "But who do you yourselves say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven." ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then He gave the disciples strict orders that they were to tell no one that He was the Christ.