

The Keys and Open Doors

Revelation 3:7-13

By [Dr. Douglas F. Kelly](#)

Well, it has been a great joy to be back here at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson. Every time I come back I realize in a sense how much we gave up when we left—or requested to go home because of elderly members of the family needing my attention—but we left a great deal of our heart here in Jackson, and particularly at this church. And we cannot thank God enough for all that this church has meant in the spiritual lives of our five children who are now grown, who look back on this place as their true spiritual home. And we just thank the Lord for you and feel one with you. Sometimes I feel when I come down here “I don't know if I want to go back or not!” but it's great to be in your presence.

And I thank Ligon for his wonderful welcome, and praise God for the ministry you have. He and Derek and the others really have fulfilled dreams I had for this church and far beyond it. Ligon has given me a little bit better welcome than I got about three years ago at Princeton Seminary. I was at an international Calvin conference, and there was a Korean professor of theology whom I taught here in Jackson maybe twenty years before. We had on name tags, and I saw the Korean gentleman looking at name tags, and he came up to me and said, “Professor Kelly! I have been looking for you, but your face has aged so much I couldn't recognize you.” Well, he had another compliment in the morning. I was going to breakfast on the Princeton campus, and I heard behind me (I recognized the voice), “Professor Kelly! Professor Kelly!” I said, “Yes?” He said, “You gave a good speech last night. It was far better than I expected.” You let me know, Ligon, how it was today...I don't know....

Anyway, I'm thrilled to be at this Missions Conference because that is one of the characteristics of this First Presbyterian Church for many, many years, this tremendous burden for missions and for reaching out. And with that in mind I want to turn to the last book in the Bible, Revelation, chapter three. I'm going to read a few verses and then add one more verse. Revelation 3:7:

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not

denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Now on this concluding day of our Missions Conference I want to set before you as best I can Jesus Christ in His capacity as the keeper of the keys: that He has the keys to open every door that God the Father Almighty wishes to be open between now and the end of time.

I was a little boy at the time, and I don't remember it too clearly, but I vaguely remember when then General Dwight Eisenhower was handing over the reigns of responsibility in Paris, I suppose of NATO, after having seen through successfully World War II and a handful of years, and there was a big ceremony at the Champs-Elysees in Paris as General Eisenhower would leave this post. And he was given the keys to the city of Paris—the keys to Paris. It was of course a way to show honor and appreciation for this man and for this country that had done a great deal to make the liberation of France a reality. And that has been the case through the years. Sometimes a distinguished person who has served the British nation one way or another is given the keys to London or the keys to Edinburgh. It's a great honor. You have the keys, theoretically, to open and shut the doors, and we recognize that you should be doing this.

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ has the keys, the only keys that really matter. I want to read to you Revelation 1:18—why He has these keys, how He got these keys. The risen Jesus is speaking to the beloved Apostle John:

“I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen;...” [It's a covenant word: *so be it* — God's covenant is fulfilled.] “...Amen; and I have the keys of hell and of death.”

The Lord Jesus Christ has the keys. How did He merit these keys that open every door and shut every door that ought to be shut? It is because Christ is the eternal Son of the Father, and in the wonderful plan of God He took on human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the fullness of the time, Christ, the Father's eternal Son, became a man, in every way sharing our humanity except for sin. St. Augustine said: “He became what He was not [namely, man] without ceasing to be what He always was [namely, God].” The God-man...and He was

born of the Virgin Mary and brought up, and He lived a holy life. He fulfilled all the terms of the covenant which our ancestor Adam should have fulfilled and did not. He broke it, and because of his breaking the covenant you and I have to taste of death and what lies beyond it.

But Jesus kept all of God's covenant, which basically is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself." That's what the Law means. That's what the covenant means. God made us to love Him and to love one another, that's the point. But we don't. So this Son of God comes in our place, in our room and stead, taking on our human nature, and He loves God with every fiber of His being, and He loves people, loves sinners to the uttermost, loving them to the end. He keeps that covenant.

And then it says here (I just read it to you in Revelation 1:18 — "I am He that liveth and was dead..." A large part of His authority to exercise these keys I going to be talking about this morning is because He died in our place to pay the penalty of that broken covenant. The wages of sin is death; the soul that sinneth, it shall die; without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.

God's holy character requires that He cannot deviate from His own integrity, and that means He must deal with sin (which is a contradiction of His character), and so Jesus stands in our place. The infinite, perfect Son of God—the choir was singing the introit from the beloved Handel's *Messiah*: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." He is truly worthy, and His sufferings are so worthy that all you need to be forgiven for every sin of your life, every failure, every place that you dishonored God and hurt other people, Jesus' sufferings are so mighty and so very worthy of the Lamb in the place of His people that God looks upon you, if you ask for mercy and forgiveness, and He sees the bleeding wounds of His Son, and He says "You are pardoned forevermore."

And in dying for sin He takes on the powers that lie on the other side of death, and He breaks them wide open. I remember old Dr. James S. Stewart of Edinburgh that taught me in his later years — great preacher — he said in class, "When death took on Jesus of Nazareth, it took on too much!" Yes! And He blew it apart from the inside out, so that our physical death has no sting in it, no terror in it, no snake venom in it...that was all drained out in Christ on the cross of Calvary. And instead of being a horrible thing leading us on into judgment and separation from God, and the horrors of a God-less existence, is an open passageway filled with light and our heavenly Father's house. That's what He did with death. So He says, "I have..." [in verse 18, Revelation 1] "I have the keys of hell and of death." He won those keys.

And then I read to you here from the message to the church at Philadelphia, and I take it as a principle that is true for every true church, that this Lord Jesus Christ has the key of David that shuts and opens. He shares that key with His believing church. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the risen One, has won the keys, and He

is...almost I think of Him as somebody that has a bunch of keys and is rattling those keys...the risen Lord Jesus Christ is rattling the keys and holding them out to this congregation, this church, this morning: 'Here are the keys. Here are the keys. And you can enter into supernatural effectiveness in rolling back sin and wickedness and having people saved, and transforming families and towns and cultures. If you will use these keys, I will be there before you opening all the right doors and blocking other doors to keep Satan off your case.'

It is wonderful to think how actively our Lord Jesus Christ has been using the keys, particularly the last 50-60 years. I have never seen anything like it. We from United States of America and British Isles and Western Europe can sometimes feel downhearted when we look at the...not this church! Thank God it's full!...but so many churches that are empty. I'm often in Europe. Studied there eight years, I reckon. Lived there eight years. And I know the beautiful Gothic and Romanesque cathedrals that would hold three or four thousand people, and on a Sunday morning maybe fifteen or twenty people file in for a little service. Sad. To a large degree we are living in a culture that increasingly, through such things as political correctness, rejected basic Christianity. It seems like the door is closed. It's not totally closed, but it's...we feel it's been moving in that direction. In what we might call "the Western world"—sometimes people call it the Northern realm...the wealthy world has been moving away from God, and the fire on the altar seems to have been going out. And yet that is far from the whole story.

A scholar in Pennsylvania, Philip Jenkins, wrote a book that some of you would know of. It was published at the end of 2001, entitled *The Coming of Global Christianity*. And this book shows how Christ has been using the keys so actively the last half of the twentieth century in a way that, as far as we can gather the statistics, the growth of Christianity seems to be larger (if you take into account the non-Western world...that is, what he calls the *Southern realm*: Africa, South America, much of East Asia)...there's never been such growth in evangelical Christianity and men and women getting saved coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, as far as we know, since the Day of Pentecost. And Philip Jenkins discusses this very thoroughly. I don't remember exactly and this is a guess, but I think something like 10,000 people a day are getting saved and coming to Christ somewhere in Africa. Every day! And I've seen again this extrapolated into the future. I don't remember how long, but in a few years if this continues Africa will certainly be the most Christian continent in the world. Probably that is why Islam has been so upset. They won't tell you this, but they are very, very worried about the huge numbers of conversions to evangelical Christianity in Africa and Indonesia the last number of years.

So it is in China. It's very hard to know exactly what's happening in China because the churches are mostly house churches and have to exercise discretion in order to survive, but we know at the end of World War II—really '49, when Mao kicked out the western Christian missionaries—it's believed there were either about a million or a million and a half Christian believers somewhere in

China. Nobody knew for sure, but probably that many. And then, I remember I was in a seminary myself back in the '60's in the days of the purge — the Red Guards and all those awful things — and many responsible Christian leaders wondered if all of the Christians in China, that million and a half that you had in '49, had they all been killed? Would there even be the remnants of the church in China, if it ever opened up again? And under President Nixon certain things happened and it did open up, and now we can go back and forth. And I have a son that is frequently in and out of China. And I had a colleague when I was at RTS/Jackson, Dr. Enoch Wan, a brilliant Chinese scholar, and I learned a lot from him and also from a book I've recently read by a Chinese house church leader, Brother Yon. And from what I gather — I don't remember the numbers and I won't give them — but somewhere in the thousands...maybe not as many as Africa, but not that far off...a few thousand every day, it would appear, are being converted to the Lord Jesus Christ in China.

Now, we've never seen — certainly not since the Protestant Reformation and really since Pentecost in the early expansions — we've never seen such an ingathering of Christians as is now going on in various parts of the world. Let me bring out this point. Philip Jenkins in his book, *The Coming of Global Christianity*, makes one thing perfectly clear, and that is where you have churches that are expanding, where men and women are getting saved, where the culture around them is cleaning up...being transformed...and by the way, in Uganda where there are a lot of Christians, particularly Anglicans, but others, in the last five or six years (though it's been given no publicity) AIDS is rolling backwards. HIV situation is getting much better in Uganda, and it hasn't been generally reported because it's the church that's done it. But anyway...we don't care who gets the credit. Where people are being saved, coming to Jesus, in every case Jenkins shows that those churches believe the Bible to be the word of God written. They believe that it's true from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. That's characteristic of all these places where men and women are being converted in Africa and China. I know there are denominational differences, all kinds of things, but they believe that God has spoken in His word; that we're not the judge over the word, but it's the judge over us. We're not the masters of the Bible; we are to submit to it, and God graciously speaks a true word to us to show us the way through death into everlasting life. In other words, where the church is going forward you have a supernatural worldview: that men and women realize that because God exists, of course miracles are true! Of course we're in supernatural touch with a higher realm through prayer and faith! Of course God is changing lives if people will ask Him to do so!

On the contrary, and Jenkins shows it, in what he calls the Northern Realm (much of America, British Isles, and France, Germany, and all that — places, I love them all) much of the church tried to be sophisticated and decided it was above the word of God and could stand in judgment: some parts of the Bible you could believe, and if other parts went against the theories of the intellectual culture, then you didn't believe those parts; and maybe Jesus is just a good man,

but not really God; maybe we're not even sinners, and don't need a blood atonement. Such things as that.

All right, what's the results of that? What are the results of turning away from believing the word of God to be true and Jesus to be God's way to the Father? The results are the churches grow cold, they empty, they're powerless, they have very little influence on the culture for social righteousness and personal holiness; far from sending anybody out to get people saved, they're wondering how they can maintain the building a few more years!

Well, I want to say this. Jesus has wondrously risen from the dead. He's alive right now. He's there working with us through His word, through His Spirit, and He is offering us the keys if we believe in Him. If we look to Him in faith and we say with blessed prophet Isaiah, "Here am I, Lord; send me." Jesus offers us these keys.

We're asking you to support the mission effort of this church, to help in a very generous (indeed, sacrificial) way with the Faith Promise Offering. We're asking others of you to consider if God wants you to go a while, that you go; asking everybody to get involved in the praying. You know the hymn we'll be singing at the service tonight, *O Zion, Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*:

"Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious;
Give of thy gold to speed them on their way;
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious;
All that thou givest, Jesus will repay."

And Jesus is saying, 'Yes, beloved church, you believe in Me. You know Me; I know you. I'm giving you these keys, and you can be part of the biggest movement since — I don't know... Protestant Reformation, maybe the Day of Pentecost. When you go out there with the message, I'm going ahead of you, and I am going to put an invisible key in these cultural doors and they will fling wide open, that you can get in there with My message.'

Now let me say this: Sometimes we might think (it's the devil making us think it), "Well, if God wants to do it, He can do it. He doesn't need us. He doesn't need us going. He doesn't need this money. He doesn't need this prayer and these missionaries. He can do it.'

Well, wait a minute! How did our Lord Jesus Christ raise the dead body of Lazarus in John 11? We know that the Christ is the second Person of the Trinity. He has all power in heaven and on earth. Of course He does! But when the Lord Jesus Christ is going to raise Lazarus from the physical dead, Lazarus' body was beginning to rot after four days in that Middle Eastern heat. Jesus speaks a human word, a human sentence that the crowd that was there — Mary and Martha and the rest of them — could hear. He uses human words and human

action: "Lazarus! Come forth!" The mighty power of God never removes the need of going there and speaking those words, and Lazarus, a dead man, he heard it. Jesus said, "Roll away the stone." And he came out, alive.

We go in obedience to the Lord and speak His words. And the risen Christ who is all the time watching over His church, interceding for us, praying for us, strengthening us, helping us, surrounding us, protecting us...Jesus put forth His resurrection power and flings the door open, that our little words (based on His word) will become supernaturally effective to accomplish everything God Almighty wants done in our generation.

Oh, well! What a tremendous opportunity we have! We can give; we can before God, decide what we're going to do in this place; we can pray for them. Some of us will probably want to go or send our children, send others. And as we're going, I hear the risen Jesus walking around and the keys are rattling in His hand. They're rattling, they're rattling! And He's putting them in this door, and He's putting them in that door, and you never need fear that if God sends you somewhere, and the church positions you and the saints are praying, and you're right with the Lord to go to that place, you never need fear but what the risen Lord will be there putting forth His power, and you and those you commission and send will get through it, and it will be wondrously, supernaturally effective. God doesn't ask us to do the work of God. He knows we cannot raise the dead. He doesn't ask us to. But we can speak the word, and we can be available, and we can be there, and God will use that word to raise the dead. And I'm calling on you, my beloved, dearly beloved brothers and sisters, to ask the risen Christ what He wants you to do this morning to be used to open many a door, and we shall all rejoice together around His throne because we were with all our resources and heart available to Him.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the church.
Amen.

[Congregational Hymn: *Our God Is Mighty, Worthy of All Praising*]
[Dr. Duncan]:

As we prepare to give God's tithes and offerings this morning, I want to challenge you to make a commitment to give through Faith Promise to missions. It's one of the desires of our elders and deacons that our whole congregation would be committed to giving to the work of God's mission here and around the world through Faith Promise giving. All of us know that we have a responsibility as members of this church to support the work and worship of our church to the best of our ability, and that means giving and supporting the church through our regular ministry budget. That whole ministry budget is about the Great Commission. It's about supporting the work of worship, discipleship, and outreach. But our Faith Promise commitments, over and above those commitments to the support of the work of this local church, go wholly, only, and

directly to the work of the gospel here and around the world. Think of it as a *heave offering* from the Old Testament, where God has given us so much, and we so desire — we really desire what we just sang, we really desire to see all earth's peoples declaring Him to be their everlasting King and Savior. We really do long to see more than anything in this world 'from earth's wide bounds and oceans' farthest coasts, through gates of pearl stream in the countless hosts, singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost — praise ye the Lord! Praise ye the Lord! We really long to see 'the King of glory passing on His way' while men and women and boys and girls from every tribe and tongue and people and nation name Him Savior and Master. And if we do, let's pray like we do, and give like we do, and prepare to go.

[The Anthem: *The Spirit of the Lord*;

Presentation of Tithes, Offerings, and Faith Promise Commitments]

[Dr. Kelly]:

Now will you bow your heads to receive the benediction.

And now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost rest upon and abide with you all until the day break, and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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