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Caesarea Philippi (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg provides an overview of the role of Peter in the early Christian church as portrayed in the Bible. He argues that while Peter was a visible leader among the apostles, he was not necessarily the chief leader or head of the Church. Rather, Peter had special needs and was often restored despite his mistakes. Greg also discusses the concept of the keys to the kingdom, which represent authority to bind and loose certain actions, and argues that this pertained to the apostles as a group rather than just Peter.

Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 16. Last time we really had to break off in the middle of a verse, which is fairly unusual, although it's not too uncommon that we fail to take the passage that we're hoping to cover. It's very uncommon that we have to stop in the middle of a verse for lack of time.

Of course, with most verses, it's possible for us to run maybe a few minutes over time in order to make sure we finish the verse, but the problem is the verses in question are so packed with things worthy of comment that having talked about the first part of the verse at some length, and I feel like I couldn't have done a shorter treatment of it, I realize that the next portion of the verse also requires a lengthy treatment, much more lengthy than I could have really justified running the class over time last time. So, we're in Matthew 16.18. What I'd like to do, however, is read the passage beginning with verse 13 so that we can remember what we covered last time. Matthew 16.13 says, When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

He said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Then he commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ. Alright, now, we read last time and commented up through half of verse 18, where he said, And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.

That's where we left off, because it was necessary for us to discuss the possible meanings of this statement, Upon this rock I will build my church. I pointed out that the long-standing tradition of the Roman Catholics is that the rock upon which the church is built is a reference to Peter himself. And they would point out in favor of this, that in the early chapters of the book of Acts, Peter is very clearly the spokesman for the disciples, and generally the most visible leader of the apostles.

And therefore, this is a reflection of his special status that Jesus conferred upon him at this time at Caesarea Philippi, because Peter was able to first identify Jesus with conviction, even at this time of low popularity of Jesus. As the Messiah, and as the Son of God. Jesus said that this had been revealed to Peter by the Spirit.

Now, of course, there's nothing in the passage that suggests that Peter was seeing something more than the other apostles were. That somehow he caught this, and yet the Father had not revealed this to the other apostles. The fact that he is the spokesman for the rest, probably, it doesn't mean that he's ahead of the rest in understanding, but that he's just quicker to speak than the rest.

And he speaks knowing full well what their conviction is as a group. I pointed out that at the end of chapter 6 of John, Jesus said to the twelve, Will you also go away? And Peter again spoke up for them and said, Well, Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of everlasting life, suggesting that he was speaking for the rest of them. We are going nowhere.

We recognize who you are. And therefore, Peter, though he speaks out more than the rest, doesn't necessarily have more insight than the rest. He speaks as their spokesman.

And that appears to be true in the book of Acts as well. Peter's visible leadership in the book of Acts may be nothing more than a reflection of his temperament, which is visible even in the days of his presence with Jesus. I mean, Peter is the one who speaks out the most readily, most self-confident, most quick to speak.

And the fact that he continues to be that way in the book of Acts is no shift in anything that we've seen previous to this in the Gospels. He's also the quickest to speak out for the rest. In any case, I'm not wishing to deny that Peter had a central place of authority among the Apostles or that they deferred to him in some respect or looked to him to speak for the group.

It's clear that the early chapters of Acts do focus on Peter's ministry a great deal. Although, of course, by the time you come to Acts chapter 15 and the Jerusalem Council, Peter's authority is not special. He is appealed to by James, but it's quite clear that James is the one who makes the final decision about whether circumcision and Jewish law is to be imposed on Gentile Christians or not.

He does cite Peter's testimony along with that of others. Peter seems to be one of the many witnesses in the court, as it were, in the hearings, but James is the one who comes to the conclusion and sets the conditions for acceptance of the Gentiles, which means that Peter is certainly not given any recognition as the head of the church or the chief leader of the Apostles in that particular story in the book of Acts. And at other times we see, of course, Paul in Galatians 2 rebuking Peter and Peter apparently deferring to Paul in that.

And other things that would suggest that though Peter was a very outspoken leader in the church, he may not have been recognized as, generally speaking, the God-anointed leader of the group. Anyway, we don't need to conjecture about that because I have no objection to suggesting that Peter was a leader of the Apostles. He certainly is visible in the early chapters of Acts, but the question is whether he was visible in the way he was because of this special statement Jesus made.

Was this a special commissioning of Peter to be the leader of the church? If there ever was such a commission of Peter, I think we'd find it more likely in the passage in John 21 rather than here. In John 21, when Jesus had risen from the dead and met the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, three times he said to Peter, Do you love me? And we remember he said, Peter, do you love me more than these? And Peter said, Yes. And Jesus said, Well, feed my lambs or feed my sheep.

And three times he asked the question and gave the same commission, feed my sheep or feed my lambs. And the very statement, feed my sheep or my lambs, could be construed as Jesus making Peter the shepherd or appointing Peter as the leader of the church. I mean, the church is God's sheep and Peter would be therefore commissioned to be their shepherd and their leader.

However, the same passage could as easily be interpreted to apply, simply said that Jesus was restoring Peter to the position of apostleship, which he had no doubt, at least in the minds of some, forfeited by his denial of Christ three times at the time of Jesus' trials. Jesus had said, He that denies me before men, I'll deny before my Father which is in heaven. But when Peter three times denied Christ, he certainly would have brought some question upon his continued usefulness or even continued salvation.

And it is often thought that the reason Jesus asked Peter this question and said what he did three times is to correspond with the three times that Peter denied him and to basically say, I restore you to your former position. But what was that position? Was that

a position above the other apostles or was that simply a position among the other apostles? When he says to Peter, feed my sheep, is it possible that it was understood that the other apostles already had that duty and Peter was now being restored to his original position as one of them? He also is now being restored to leadership, but not necessarily leadership over the other apostles, but leadership of the church along with the other apostles. So even though Peter is sometimes spoken to especially, it may not be because of Peter's special privilege that Jesus was given, but because Peter had special needs or was especially outspoken or made mistakes more often and had to be especially restored.

Anyway, without trying to reflect negatively on Peter at all, I just don't think that there's much in this passage to justify the Roman Catholic contention that Peter and his successors, his bishops of Rome, are somehow today the heads of all the churches. And the shepherds of the entire church. What I suggested as a more likely thing, and it's a very common Protestant thing to say, is that the rock upon which the church is built is Christ.

Now that would not be the most obvious meaning of the passage as we read it in Matthew, and it would require possibly that we suggest that Jesus made a gesture toward himself when he said, upon this rock, meaning himself, I will build my church. There are those, as I pointed out, I'm simply reviewing because it was a long time ago we had this class, there are those who would say, well, the difference in the Greek words, Petros and Petra, would suggest that Peter is not the rock upon which it is built, but a bigger rock than Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, and that would have to be Jesus. Well, I would come to the same conclusion, but not by way of the same arguments.

I would say that in looking at what Paul and later Peter himself in his epistles say, that the standard understanding of both these writers in the New Testament is that the church is built upon Christ. Paul said, no other foundation can anyone lay but that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. He doesn't mention Peter even as being a secondary foundation after Jesus.

He just mentions Jesus as the only foundation of the church. It's true he does, in Ephesians 4, say that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which doesn't mean that now Jesus has been replaced by the apostles and prophets, but rather it probably means that the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, they were the builders. Paul himself said, I as a wise master builder have laid the foundation of the church in Corinth.

No doubt other apostles and prophets were seen as the foundation layers of the church. Therefore, Jesus as the foundation of the church was the foundation of the apostles and prophets, meaning that foundation which was laid by them, by their preaching and by

their ministries. They laid this foundation.

It was theirs. But Christ, again, is the foundation. Most telling of all is the fact that Peter himself in 1 Peter 2 talks about stones and rocks and even with reference to the foundation of the church, a perfect opportunity for him to make some allusion to his own special status in this case.

And he makes no such reference. Now, I mean, if Peter had said nothing about stones at all, we might just say, well, you know, in the small range of the books that he wrote, the few that he wrote, it's not surprising he didn't mention everything and that he might not have mentioned his priority over the church. It might not be too surprising, if not for the fact that he specifically in 1 Peter 2 does address the question of what is the foundation of the church.

He speaks about Jesus as a living stone. He talks about us Christians as living stones also built upon Christ, built up into a spiritual house. He quotes from Isaiah about how God will lay in Zion, that is in the church, for a foundation, a stone.

And Peter identifies that stone as Christ. And, you know, in all that discussion, there's not a hint that Peter thought that he was different than other Christians in terms of stoniness or in terms of his rock or foundational calling or whatever. So I am of the impression that Peter is simply an apostle, not the leader of the apostles.

And I do have a very high view of apostolic authority. But I don't know that Jesus is making a reference to that authority here when he says, upon this rock I will build my church. Since both Paul and Peter, who are the only guys who ever spoke about the question in the later epistles, they identified Jesus as that rock upon which the church is built.

In fact, Jesus himself seems to have done so earlier in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. And a man who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who builds his house on sand. Well, a rock is the foundation of the house that continues.

Sand is the foundation or the non-foundation of the house that doesn't continue. And the difference between the house on the rock and the house on the sand is that the one that is on the rock is the one that is built on the authority of Christ. That is, the acceptance of his commands and the following of them.

He that hears these commands of mine, Jesus said, and does them is like the man who builds his house on a rock. He is talking about the foundation of a Christian life being, of course, obedience to Jesus Christ, which suggests acceptance of his Lordship and his authority. So, again, there is nothing in the Bible elsewhere, outside of this passage, that

would suggest Peter as having a special role in this respect, but there is much in the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and even Peter himself later, to suggest that Christ is the foundation.

So, whether Jesus made some kind of a gesture or felt that his words should simply be understood without it, when he says, on this rock I will build my church, certainly the previous statements of Jesus and the later statements of the apostles would indicate that they understood this to mean that Jesus is the rock upon which the church is built. And he says, after saying that, in Matthew 16, 18, and we haven't commented on this yet, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. And then he commanded his disciples they shouldn't tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Now, these words that he spoke to Peter are full of mystery. When he says of the church, the gates of Hades will not prevail against it, what is the meaning of that? Well, there's three possible meanings that have occurred to people at one time or another, which is correct, is not entirely clear, but there is certainly one of the three that doesn't strike me as being as strong as the other two possibilities. And that is the first one that I ever understood when I was a kid and reading a passage like this, this passage was well familiar to me, but its meaning was not, when it said that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the church.

The word Hades is frequently called hell. In fact, in the King James, it is translated as hell. And to say the gates of hell and the King James would not prevail against the church, I understood to mean that the church would survive.

The church would survive despite the fierce attacks of hostile parties, the gates of hell I took to be the forces of darkness, the powers of the demonic realm and so forth. And to say that they would not prevail against the church suggested to my mind for many years that the church, when attacked by hostile powers, would stand up. It was sort of a fortress mentality I had, that the church was a fortress being battered on every side by enemies, but those battering rams of the enemies would not prevail against the church and the church would survive throughout history until the end.

Now, this may be a very true picture of things, but it is not a very true treatment of the passage that we are looking at. I am sure that seen as a fortress, the church is in fact a fortress that will stand against all attacks until the Lord comes back, but that is hardly likely to be the meaning of this passage. Because if that were what Jesus was trying to convey, he should have said something like, and the battering rams of hell will not prevail against the church, or the onslaught of the armies of hell will not prevail against the church, or something like that.

But he said the gates of hell, the gates of Hades. And therefore, and I didn't see this until

I was actually an adult and had read this many, many times until dawn, I was being, you know, wow, you know, gates of hell, what does that mean? People don't attack cities by using gates, they try to get through the gates, but the gates are not weapons of aggression, the gates are weapons of defense. And to speak of the gates of Hades, seems to suggest Hades not on the offensive, but on the defensive.

That the gates would not prevail suggested, at this later point in my life, that the church is on the offensive, the church is the one battering at the walls of the kingdom of darkness, and at the gates of the kingdom of darkness, and those gates were going to break open. There are a number of times in the Bible that we read of, you know, a city under siege, and finally the enemy gets in by breaking through the gate, or by having insiders who open the gate for him, or some other means. Of course, the gate is the weakest point in the wall.

And to maintain the gates secure is one of the most important things to keep the city secure from attacks. But if the gates are broken through, if the gates do not stand against the oppressor, then the city is likely to be taken. And to say the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church suggests that the church is the one doing the battering.

The church is the one on the offensive, making an attack on the realm of Hades. And that attack will be successful, and nothing will be able to stand against it. Now, I want to say this, if that is the meaning of it, I believe that that is certainly doctrinally correct.

I certainly have nothing against that viewpoint. It seems to be correct in terms of its correspondence with reality. Wherever the church has gone, the gates of Hades have had to open and release prisoners, and the church has been established, wherever missionaries have gone.

And though Satan and the powers of darkness often put up initial resistance, and even continuing resistance, the church wins. The church gets established and grows. And so we could understand the meaning of the statement in those terms.

There is one other possible meaning of it that is entirely different than either of the other two. You see, the two meanings I have suggested already, both cast the statement in the scenario of spiritual warfare. In the one case, it was seen the church as being attacked but surviving.

The other case is seen the church as making the attack and their enemy not surviving. But is there a possibility that there is no attack and no spiritual warfare involved at all in this passage? I don't know. Let me suggest at least what one commentator I read years ago suggested, that it seems not altogether impossible.

The gates of Hades might have nothing to do with the powers of darkness, per se. And

the reference to them not prevailing might have little or nothing to do with what we typically call spiritual warfare. Hades could be representative, could just be a way of speaking of the place of the dead, even almost synonymous with the grave.

And the picture may be that while it is true that all persons, Christian or non, do die and do go to the grave, or to Hades, and the gates close over them, as it were, and they are locked into the realm of death, that Jesus, by the power of his resurrection, will bring his church out of the grave. He will raise them up in the last day and the gates of Hades will not be able to keep them in. They are locked up, as it were, their bodies, locked up, subject to decay in the grave or in the place of the dead, and yet at the resurrection, those gates will be burst open, even as the tomb of Jesus and the stone could not contain him.

And that stone that was sealed over the opening to the tomb could not prevail against his purpose of walking out, so also that the church will not be prevailed against by death or by Hades or by the grave or whatever. O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? Paul says in one of his passages about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. And in Revelation 20 it says death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

Death and Hades linked together. Now that doesn't mean necessarily that they are identical, and it doesn't mean that Hades in this particular statement of Jesus means the grave necessarily. It is questionable, and that's all I can leave you with.

He may be saying that while Hades claims all persons, yet his church will escape the jaws of death, will escape the gates of Hades, as it were, when he resurrects them from the dead and they will have eternal life. They will not be forever subject and imprisoned in the grave. Now, to tell you the truth, although that would be doctrinally correct also, it is not at all as sensational as either of the other two suggestions, and it's almost a disappointment to those of us who revel in images of militant church spiritual warfare and so forth, because it kind of removes one of our favorite scriptures from the realm of that discussion.

But all I can say is I don't know which meaning is most likely to be correct. I will say this. I've always emotionally been drawn to, as I said, the second possibility, that it is the church that is seen as battering the gates of Hades, and Hades loses.

The gates don't stand up. The gates don't prevail against the church. And there's every reason to believe that that is a good interpretation, but it is not the only possible interpretation, and therefore we have to be a little bit... we need to pray about it before we get dogmatic about what its meaning is.

After all, Hades, under this interpretation, would have to be recognized as a symbol of the realm of darkness or of the kingdom of darkness. If we say the gates of Hades means the powers of Satan and so forth, well, then we have to find some way to make that

identification. Hades in the Bible is more commonly the place of the dead, not the place of the demons or of the devil.

The devil is sometimes said to be in the abyss, the abyssos, but Hades, as far as I know, is not the term that is used. In fact, even though Hades is the common term that is translated as hell, most often in the King James Version, the one place in the Bible that speaks of demons being in hell uses a different Greek word. In 2 Peter 2, where it says that the angels that left their first estate are confined in hell, it says in the King James Version, but the Greek word is not Hades, it's Tartarus.

The only occurrence of that Greek word in the entire Bible is the place where the demons are confined. So, in a place where Hades could have been used to be identified with the realm of the demons or something, the Greek text doesn't use Hades there. So, it's very hard to know for sure what justification we could have for identifying Hades as a symbol of the demonic realm or the power of Satan or whatever.

With the possible exception that we would have to say, in Hebrews 2, it says that he that had the power of death is the devil. Hebrews 2 and verse 14 says that Jesus, through death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Well, certainly the power of death would also be related to the power of Hades, and that might be enough to make the link.

But, I mean, if you just go through the Bible and look at all the times the word Hades is used, it much more often is associated with the physically dead persons who have died rather than, I don't know of any case where it's specifically linked to the demonic realm. And that is a link we would have to make if we're going to interpret this as some kind of reference to a warfare between the powers of darkness and the powers of God. And it is more common for Hades to refer to the state of the dead.

And if Jesus said, the gates of Hades will not prevail against my people, my church, there may be stronger arguments in that particular association for it being a reference to the resurrection. I can't say for sure, so I just give you this as something to chew on for the rest of your life and to die without certainty about, probably. But you will have certainty when you die that the gates of Hades won't prevail against you, at least.

Now, verse 19, he continues speaking to Peter, And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Now, the first question is, of course, what are the keys to the kingdom of heaven? And secondly, to whom are they given? And thirdly, what do they have to do with binding and loosing? And fourthly, what is being bound and what is being loosed? Now, if you didn't write all those things down, take courage, we're going to go through them one by one. First of all, what is the meaning of the expression keys to the kingdom of heaven? The fact is that the expression is not found elsewhere in the Bible.

This is the only place that talks about the keys of the kingdom. Therefore, we don't have a plethora of other verses that we could bring in to compare the usage and find out what is the common denominator that's always used in these verses and what is the common meaning in all these cases. We only have one case.

And whenever you have an expression found only once in the Bible, it raises a tremendous challenge in being able to identify exactly what it means, unless the phrase is so clear that there's no question. That is not the case here. What are the keys of the kingdom? One would presume that the keys, the imagery of keys is used to suggest unlocking.

And locking. That would seem to be a fair inference. Now, does that have any relevance to the gates of Hades? Now, the gates of Hades presumably would have locks on them.

Is there any connection here between the keys of the kingdom and the gates of Hades? Well, it's tempting to find something, but it's not at all obvious, because it would seem like you'd need the keys to Hades to open the gates of Hades, not the keys to the kingdom. It's not the gates of the kingdom of heaven that are not to prevail, and therefore the keys are there to open them. But you've got on the one hand Hades with gates and the kingdom with keys.

And it's hard to know whether there's supposed to be an actual flow of thought from one thought to the next as if one's consequent upon the other. I would point out that Jesus is said in the book of Revelation to have the keys of death and Hades. He says that in, I believe, Revelation chapter 1. Perhaps it would have been wise of me to find time to look that up.

Just so I could make sure that I could point it out to you. Maybe it's not chapter 1. I thought it was. Yeah, it is.

It is. Oh, here we go. It's Revelation 1.18. Jesus says, I am he who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.

Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and death. Now, this could hardly be identified with the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Hades and death and the kingdom of heaven are not the same thing. But it's interesting that if Jesus has the keys to Hades and death, it suggests that he can open their gates or open their doors, that is, their prison doors, and release people from the grave, from Hades and death. And this may be helpful in understanding what the gates of hell refers to.

Since Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, it may be because Jesus has the keys. He can open them and release those who are imprisoned in it. It seems at least a sensible suggestion, if not the only one possible.

Anyway, what I'm saying is that there are keys mentioned elsewhere, but not specifically keys to the kingdom. And so what does it mean that there are keys to the kingdom? Now, I'll tell you, again, the Roman Catholics make great use of this entire section here, especially verses 18 and 19, and their suggestion is that these keys were given specifically to Peter and to no one else. Because Peter made Jesus so happy on this occasion by giving the right answer to the quiz that Jesus gave him a privilege for all time that would be unparalleled by any, and that included having the keys to the kingdom of God.

This would be the ability to admit somebody into heaven or not into heaven, and this is no doubt where the imagery, entirely traditional, arose from where we talk about Peter at the pearly gates, you know, all the jokes about people going to heaven and discovering something to be different than they hoped, and it always involves the fact that they died and they met St. Peter at the pearly gates, you know, with the keys. All of this comes, no doubt, from the idea that Peter is the only person to whom these keys are given, and that the keys to the kingdom, apparently, are the key to heaven, and he can let people into heaven or not, and he's got that privilege. Now, let me turn your attention over to Isaiah 22, because there we have what Roman Catholics usually point to as sort of the background for this statement.

Isaiah 22, now I'm not here just to bash on Catholics, I'm just saying this passage we're dealing with is very strongly applied to established Catholic dogma, and without knowing what that argument is or whether there are arguments against it, we would be left unsure whether the Catholics are right about this or not. I believe they're not. And so, in verse 15 of Isaiah 22, it says, Thus says the Lord God of hosts, Go proceed to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house, and say, What have you here? And whom have you here that you have hewn a sepulcher here? As he who hews himself a sepulcher on high, who carves a tomb for himself in a rock, indeed the Lord will throw you away violently, O mighty man, and will surely seize you.

He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball into a large country. There you shall die, and there your glorious chariot shall be the shame of your master's house. So I will drive you out of your office, and from your position he will pull you down.

Now, before I read further, and it's necessary that we do so, we are not told why this man Shebna has fallen into disfavor. We know very little about him. He is mentioned in the book of Kings.

In fact, you may have encountered that passage already, where he and others go out and deal with Rav Sheka. In the days of Hezekiah, and that is the time of this prophecy, Shebna was a person who was a steward over the house of the king, of Hezekiah. And he plays a minor bit part in the story of the negotiations with Rav Sheka.

But anyway, the prophet indicates that God is upset with this guy, and he is going to toss

him. And his arrogance in building a tomb for himself among the kings in the high places is going to bring a shame to him and to his master's house and so forth. But then it says in verse 20, Then it shall be in that day that I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and strengthen him with your belt, and commit your responsibility into his hand.

And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Now, that would indicate that this man Eliakim is moving into the exact office that Shebna was being expelled from. Then verse 22 says, And the key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder, so he shall open and no one shall shut, and he shall shut and no one shall open.

I will fasten him as a peg in a sure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house. Whereas Shebna would become a shame to his master's house, Eliakim would be a glorious throne to his father's house. Now, the thing of importance here is, of course, in verse 22.

There is a mention of the key of the house of David. Now, we know that the position that Eliakim was given was that position which had been held by Shebna. Shebna, in verse 15, is described as a steward over the house.

This expression, steward over the house, is the exact expression in Hebrew that she used of Joseph when he was over Potiphar's house. So, it tells us something about the status and the authority involved. When Joseph was in Potiphar's house, we are told that he was made steward over everything.

So much so, he was given authority over all the servants, over all the possessions. His master trusted him with so many things that his master was entirely vulnerable to him. His master didn't even know what he owned, except the food that was put on his table at each meal.

Everything was entrusted in the hand of Joseph. He was the steward over all the house. That apparently is parallel to the position Shebna held over the house of Hezekiah.

And that position is now being given to another man, to Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah. And part of that job description, or privilege, is said to have the key of the house of David laid on his shoulder. He will open and no one will shut, and he shall shut and no one will open.

Now, this key of the house of David suggests that it is the key to the palace. The house of David was the Davidic dynasty. And speaking of opening and closing and no one being able to revoke his decision, suggests that he was given such authority that he alone could provide access, or debar from access, persons wishing to come into the house of the king, to come and appear before the king.

Shebna, and eventually Eliakim, had the authority to shut the way to the king's chambers, or to open them, and his decision was final. If he opened the way, no one could shut it. If he shut it, no one could open it.

He had the key, and apparently he had the only key. Very possibly the king himself may have had a key also, but this was a very trusted role. It made the king somewhat vulnerable, and it made everybody else, of course, subject to the whims of the man who had the keys.

Now, it is said by the Roman Catholics that when Jesus gave to Peter the keys to the kingdom of God, that that, you know, follows on this concept of the keys to the house of David. That he opens and no one shuts, and he shuts and no one opens. After all, didn't Jesus say to Peter, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loose in heaven? It sounds kind of similar.

And so they say Jesus was giving these very keys to Peter. By the way, they would point out that in this very passage in Isaiah, that there is a reference to Eliakim's father's house, and it says in verse 24, they, meaning the household of Eliakim, will hang on him all the glory of his father's house and offspring in the issue, all vessels of small quantity, etc. The offspring in the issue will benefit from this man's position, is what is being said here.

And they say that shows that there will be a succession. That the keys of the house of David are passed along in succession. And since these were given to Peter, then there was also a succession from Peter to his successors of these keys.

Now, anybody who has done any biblical exegesis will notice immediately the extreme strained nature of this kind of argument. There is absolutely no reference to succession of the key of David here. It does mention that Eliakim's offspring and his father's house in general will benefit from the nepotism that goes along with having a son or a father in a government position.

But there is no suggestion whatsoever that once Eliakim is dead, one of his sons is going to have these keys. There is not that slightest suggestion. The office is an appointed office.

It was not a dynastic royal position that was passed from father to son. At least if it was, there is no indicator in the Bible of this. Nor in history.

Therefore, that assumption is wrong in itself. But it is necessary for the idea of succession of the keys of the kingdom being passed from Peter to all his successors, the bishops in Rome. Now, let me say this.

I am not at all convinced that this passage in Isaiah 22 is intended to shed light on Matthew 16. There is in fact a place in the New Testament where Isaiah 22 is made

reference to. In other words, the New Testament writers are not ignorant of this passage.

They even think it is significant. However, they don't apply it to Peter. The application is made in Revelation 3. In verse 7, Revelation 3.7 says, this is Jesus speaking, To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says he who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.

Now, there can be no doubt that this is a quotation from Isaiah 22.22. There is no doubt whatsoever. You will have a cross-reference to Isaiah 22.22 in the margin of your Bible if you have any margins at all in your Bible. If it does not say that, it is strange.

Now, who then has the key of David? Who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens? Jesus. Jesus does. The position that the Roman Catholics want to give to Simon Peter is claimed in the New Testament only for Jesus himself.

And it is directly made by Jesus from his own mouth. That he is the one who has these keys. He is the one who opens and no one shuts.

Peter is not the one, nor any of his successors. Therefore, the whole argument from Isaiah 22 in favor of Peter and succession and authority, special place for Peter and that, it falls like a house of cards. But, the question then remains, what is the key? What are the keys to the kingdom of heaven? Well, before I answer that, I need to talk about to whom they are given.

Who are they given to? Well, in Matthew 16, Jesus says, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. So, they are given to Peter. He is speaking to Peter.

They are given to Peter. The question is, are they given only to Peter? Or is it again, since Peter is speaking up as spokesman for the apostles, that the promise made to Peter is simply that which is conferred on the apostles in general? Well, to decide that, we should look at how the passage goes on. He says, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. I would like to point out to you that this exact expression is used again by Jesus in Matthew 18, two chapters later. Now, here Jesus is talking to his apostles as a group.

There is not the slightest indicator that Peter alone is the person being addressed. In Matthew 18, verse 18, Jesus says, Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth concerning anything they shall ask, it will be done for them by my Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them. Now, these references, two of you, or two or three gathered in my name, is in close proximity with, I give you the power to bind and

loose.

And here the person who is given that power would seem to be all the apostles, and some would even say all Christians. Now, I don't know that we could argue that it's given to all Christians. Perhaps it is, perhaps it isn't.

But I think we could at least say that in this passage it's not confined to Peter alone. At the very least, all the apostles are given this same authority that is given to Peter. Now, one thing a Catholic friend of mine who I was debating this point with a few weeks ago pointed out from this passage was that, well, in Matthew 18, 18, although it does mention binding and loosing, it doesn't mention the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, only Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Binding and loosing might be done by other apostles or bishops or whatever, but only Peter was given the keys. Well, that's arguing from silence.

It's not necessary for Jesus to mention the keys of the kingdom every time he talks about the same subject, especially if he's talking about something that is essentially identical with it. In my understanding, and this is for every man to judge with validity for himself, in Matthew 16, 19, the keys of the kingdom are inseparably connected to the binding and loosing. What is binding and loosing, if you don't take it metaphorically, but confining or releasing? Chaining or unchaining? Putting a person into prison or letting them out of prison? Putting them in the shackles or releasing them from the shackles? This is what binding and loosing conveys, this idea.

And in all ordinary situations where a person is bound by another, unless it's with a rope, some lock is used and some key is necessary for the opening of the lock. It would appear to me that the keys that Peter is given are not the keys of access to the kingdom of heaven necessarily, although it may have that meaning, we'll have to talk about that a little bit more in a moment, but rather they are keys that are used for binding and loosing. Now, I'm not sure that the Catholics would disagree with that assumption, but the point is, I think that Matthew 16, 19 links the possession of the keys of the kingdom inseparably with the ability to open or close the locks, to bind or to loose.

How could one bind or loose if they don't have the keys necessary for the job? Therefore, while it is true that in Matthew 18, 18, in the second time that he speaks of binding and loosing to all the apostles, he doesn't in that passage mention the keys, I think it's fair enough to say they are implied. It is implied that if Peter had the keys so that he could bind and loose, then when he gave the other apostles the authority to bind and loose, it was suggesting they too had the keys. In fact, it is my impression that when Jesus speaks to Peter, in the passage in Matthew 16, that he is simply speaking to Peter as an apostle and saying to Peter what is true of all apostles, Peter simply being the most outspoken and the one who is getting the attention in this particular conversation.

Jesus is saying something that pertains to all the apostles, namely that they had the keys, that represents the authority to bind something and loose something. Now, that brings us to one of the more perplexing things in the passage in that what in the heck is being bound and what is being loosed? What does it mean to bind and loose? Once we've gone over all these details with a fine-tooth comb, I'll summarize the whole picture so you don't miss the forest and the trees, but there's a lot of opinions about this. Of course, one of the opinions most current among charismatics is that this is a promise that we can bind the devil and loose the devil, or demons.

In fact, it is often linked in teaching of charismatics and in teaching about spiritual warfare, it is linked with Jesus' talk about binding the strongman. He said in another place in Matthew 12 that unless you bind the strongman, a thief can't break into his house and take his goods. So, it implies that plundering the house of the strongman requires first that you bind the strongman.

Now, this taken together with the passage before us has been given as a reason for us in prayer or in spiritual warfare binding demons, binding the devil or whatever, so that we might plunder his house. While you can probably tell by the way I'm introducing that thought that I don't fully feel comfortable with it, I don't want to discredit it altogether. But let me just say this.

When Jesus said what he said about binding the strongman, I don't believe he was giving his disciples instructions that they should bind the strongman, but he was simply saying that his ability to plunder Satan's house proved that he had already done this. He had bound the strongman. He was casting out demons.

He was accused of doing it by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. He said, how can this be? He said, no one goes into a strongman's house and plunders his house unless he's first bound the strongman. Essentially, what he was saying is that by casting out demons, he was not working in cahoots with the devil.

He was plundering the devil's house. He was plundering the strongman's house and clearly that can't be done unless the strongman has himself been rendered incapable of resistance. And Jesus is saying, since I am doing this, it's clear that the devil has been bound by me, that the devil has been rendered incapable of resisting or else I couldn't be able to do this.

And so Jesus is not giving instructions about what we must do in spiritual warfare. He's basically making an announcement. I have bound Satan.

And then, of course, it remains to be asked, well, why then should anyone else have to do it? If Jesus did it, why would we have to bind Satan? Now, there may be an answer to that, but it's a good one. And I'll come to that in a moment. But I want to say that there is nothing in the context of Matthew 16 nor in the context of Matthew 18 where binding

elusive is mentioned.

There's nothing to guide us to a consideration of how we are to treat demons here. Nothing in the context would suggest demons are in view or spiritual warfare is necessarily in view except possibly that the gates of hell will not prevail against us if that's understood to be in the context of spiritual warfare. And that could be.

However, the passage in Matthew 18 doesn't seem to be talking about spiritual warfare. It talks, well, what is it talking about in Matthew 18? It's right after verses 15 through 17, which are very well known to us. Those are the passages that people always appeal to when there's a conflict that needs to be resolved.

If your brother sins against you, go to him alone. Between you and your brother, try to restore him. If you win him, great.

If you don't, go...