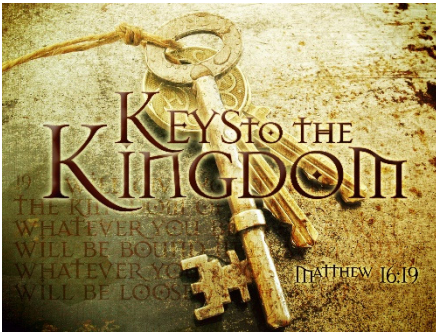


TO FORGIVE OR NOT FORGIVE

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ June 12, 2016



The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴ “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.” ⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.” ⁷ Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. (2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 13)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

This last Friday, the memorial service was held for the great American icon – boxer Mohamed Ali. He certainly made a name for himself in the ring with his talent and brash style, coming up through the ranks to become the undisputed heavy-weight champion of the world. But it was what he said and did, both during and after his boxing career was over that made him the philanthropic icon in the 20th and into the 21st century.

His death has sparked many to not only say kind words about him, but also to reflect on the impact that he had on their lives. His impact was significant on many people, and he was just one man. As Christians, our lives have been impacted by something much greater. This morning let us take a look at what has made such a great impact upon our lives as we dive deeper into God’s Word let us seek to understand the basic truths of the Bible.

The basic truth of the Bible that we consider this morning in our Core Christianity series is perhaps the least known basic truth in all the Bible, and it is what we call the Ministry of the Keys. It was Jesus himself who said, “**I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.**” A normal key has two purposes – to lock something and to unlock something. Despite this, there are many people out there who think the only job of the church is to forgive sins, or we might say “unlocking” the door to the kingdom of heaven. But would you be surprised if I told that you the Church’s job is also to not forgive sins, or to “lock” the door to the kingdom of heaven? Just like a normal key will both lock and unlock, the keys that Jesus gives both locks and unlocks the door to heaven. But why would we want to lock the door to heaven? That’s the question we want to answer this morning, and this is what the ministry of the keys is all about. TO FORGIVE OR NOT FORGIVE? That is the question.

1. What does this mean?
2. Who am I to apply it?

(1)

In order to understand this, we will consider the story from our first Scripture reading this morning. It's a story that happened during the life of King David, one of the most important kings in the history of Israel. And while there are many times when David's actions are put up on a pedestal as commendable, this is not one of those times. In fact, it's the very opposite. His actions are put on a pedestal not for commendation but for rebuke.

Maybe a month or two before this story took place, David was up on the rooftop terrace of his palace at night, he couldn't sleep. David glanced at the city of Jerusalem sprawled before him, and happened to spy a fair maiden bathing on her roof. Long story short, he found out this woman was married, and still he had her brought to the palace to sleep with her. He got her pregnant. He tried covering up his sin by bringing the husband home, hoping that he would sleep with her and think the child was his. When this didn't happen he had the husband killed, and took the woman, Bathsheba, home as his own wife.

Perhaps David even thought he got away with it, nobody would be the wiser. But God knew. And while God is long-suffering, he does not tolerate being ignored. David had ignored God's commands, and now David was ignoring his own conscience which told him this was wrong. And so **"the Lord sent Nathan to David."** Nathan was a prophet, a messenger of God, and instead of just coming up and telling David, "I know what you did," he instead opens up with a story. It's a story about two men – one rich and the other poor, one has great wealth and flocks, the other has only one lamb. And did you notice that the story took longer to describe the poor man's possessions than the rich man's?

Who can't help but fall in love with the poor man and the close relationship he has with his small little lamb. And who can't help but get furious at the rich man who thought nothing of destroying that relationship by slaughtering the lamb of the poor man. We can see why David reacted the way he did. When put to in an objective position, David could see clearly what needed to be done. The rich man needed to be punished. And it was only after David declared his verdict that Nathan the prophet said, **"You are the man!"** You are the one who stole the wife of poor Uriah, you are the one who wasn't satisfied with the many wives in your harem. You are the one who deserves to die.

Nathan confronted David with his sin, he didn't avoid it, he didn't talk around it, and yet he did it in a way that David was convicted. How those words must have struck David like a mighty sword to the heart, he had no excuses, no one to blame but himself. This is God's Law at work. All David could say was, **"I have sinned against the Lord."** He confessed his sins to God. And it was then and only then that Nathan said, **"The Lord has passed over your sin, you will not die."** Nathan came to David with the Keys to the Kingdom of God prepared either to forgive or not forgive David.

In what scenario would Nathan have not forgiven David? Well, Nathan didn't immediately come up to David and said, "what you did was wrong, but God forgives you." Likewise, had David not recognized his sin was wrong or not confessed his sin, Nathan would not have told David that his sins were forgiven. Why not?

Because they weren't! As long as a sinner sits in smugness over their sins, as long as a sinner thinks that their sins aren't so bad, or that it's not as bad as someone else, they are holding on to their sins. And it is God who says, **"the one who sins is the one who will die."** David reflects this in the 32nd Psalm that he wrote about this event in his life, **"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity."**

And how often have we found ourselves in the same position as David? It's easy for us to say we would never do something as despicable as David. But is that because we are really any better, or we have not been given the same opportunity? When we compare ourselves not against David, but against God's Law, and ask ourselves if we have ever been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy, if we have ever hurt anyone by word or deed, if we have been dishonest, careless, wasteful or done other wrong, we find we are just as guilty as David was. It's only natural to hide these sins, to cover them up, to excuse them away. But we must fight that natural temptation, and acknowledge our sin before God and one another.

It was only then, like David can we hear the comforting words of undeserved forgiveness. And maybe that's the best way to understand the Ministry of the Keys, whether TO FORGIVE OR NOT FORGIVE. If you ever feel like you deserve God's forgiveness, that is precisely the time when your sins are not forgiven. It is only when you feel like you don't deserve God's forgiveness that God's declaration of forgiveness should be proclaimed to you. We make use of these keys every Sunday at Grace. At the beginning of every service, we confess our sins, and receive God's forgiveness. We can be assured of God's forgiveness as if Christ himself declared it to us. And thus the kingdom of heaven is unlocked to us.

(2)

It may be easier for us to see how the Ministry of the Keys applies to the church proper, but does the Bible really call for me to use the keys to forgive or not forgive sins? After Jesus had risen from the dead he appeared to his frightened disciples in a locked room and said, **"Peace be with you."** And then he breathed on them and said to his disciples, **"Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven, if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

This is a right, a privilege, a responsibility you have as a Christian. You not only are able to have your pastor say to you, "Your sins are forgiven!" You are able to say that to others. This will obviously involve confronting others about their sins, something that is not very comfortable. In fact, you may even get the response, "Judge not lest you be judged!" It's true, we are not to judge someone's sins, but we are not judging them inasmuch as we are confronting sin. And yes, confronting sin will be uncomfortable, because no one wants to be accused of doing something wrong. But it is only in confronting a person and pointing out the error of their ways, alerting them that their relationship with God is not in a good place that they will hopefully realize how serious their sins are.

Just like Nathan was sent to David, we are being sent to the people around us. We have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, to unlock, and if necessary lock the door to heaven. But we do not do this with the attitude of a detective looking to frame the sinner, but that of a friend looking to rescue a friend from

the devil's grasp. Now it's one thing to be able to confront a fellow Christian with a sin, while it may not be pleasant, I would hope many Christians would have the reaction of King David, when they are convicted of sin, they cry out, "**I have sinned against the Lord.**" But for our non-Christian friends and relatives, it may take a different tact.

To many non-Christians, they probably wouldn't care much if you called them a sinner. And so instead it may be wise to talk to them from the perspective of their consciences, the law God has placed on their heart. For it is a person's conscience that convinces them that something is right or wrong. It is a person's conscience that says it's not fair that a convicted sex offender only gets six months in jail. It is a person's conscience that cries for justice when it feel like we've been wronged. And it is a person's conscience that convinces them when they are in the wrong. It is this conscience that we will seek to prick with God's Law.

It is only after the conscience has been pricked with God's Law that we can share with them the wonderful news of what Jesus came to do. This is not just something that a pastor can do, but you can do it too. For you too have been given the keys TO FORGIVE OR NOT FORGIVE sins. May we treat this as the great responsibility it is.

For many in my generation, we were not impacted by Mohammed Ali in as significant way as the generations that came before us. His last fight took place before I was born. The only significant memory I have about Mohammed Ali is when he lit the Olympic cauldron at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. But he did have an impact on many others in the 20th century, and that was just one man. As Christians, we have been impacted by someone much greater than Mohammed Ali. We have been impacted by the God-man Jesus Christ, who not only lived and died, but also rose again. He died and rose again to assure us that our sins were indeed forgiven. May this message impact you to go out and proclaim that wonderful news of sins forgiven to others. Amen.