

Advent 2020: “A Cry For The Christ On Christmas Day”

25 December 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome

Advent Candle Lighting: Cath Read

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 326 Love Came Down At Christmas

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Revelation 3:7-13

Reflection: *O Come, Key of David*

Sermon:

I. A Key

This is a book I have recently read and enjoyed, written by Chris Bleakley, on algorithms, titled *Poems That Solve Puzzles*. In the world of computers, code encryption is vital. Chris says, “*Traditional encryption methods . . . rely on an algorithm and a secret key. The key is a piece of information that is essential for encryption and decryption . . . The algorithm and the key must be known to the sender and the intended recipient.*” (page 134)

Normally when we think of a key, we think of a traditional key that opens doors, but in this case, the key is computer code. But the principle of a key is the same in both: the key opens access to something. An encryption code can open your message on What’s App; a traditional key will open the door to your home! Having the key also stops others from gaining access.

Therefore, in summary, the key performs a number of functions: it opens and closes, it grants access or it does not. The key has authority and power to grant those who have the key to enter. Have a key? Gain access. Have no key? Access denied!

As we continue our look at the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”, our verse today speaks of a key gaining access to heaven and stopping access to misery.

*O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery.*

II. The Key of David

The Key of David is an idea found in the Old Testament and New Testament. The prophet Isaiah in Ch 22 speaks of a situation in the city of Jerusalem where the current palace administrator has been doing such a bad job that he (Shebna) is going to be replaced by another (Eliakim). And Eliakim will be given authority to rule the city and temple, granting or denying access to whomever he chooses. Isaiah puts it this way: “*I will place on his shoulder*” - a way of saying he will have authority - “*the key to the house of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open*” (Isa 22:22).

Eliakim becomes a powerful figure in Jerusalem and does a good job, but sadly, when you read on, his family makes so many demands on him that he is broken by them and

eventually dislodged from his position. Isaiah speaks of him as a peg that his family “hang off” and it gives way. Like a climber depending on the pegs inserted into the rockface, it is a total disaster if it gives way. So sadly, Eliakim is not the key of David we need.

The New Testament is direct in telling us the Key of David is Jesus. Our reading from Revelation 3 to the church in Philadelphia has these words: *“these are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. “What He opens no one can shut and what He shuts no one can open”* (v.7). These are the same words Isaiah spoke of Eliakim. Here, they are spoken of Jesus. The key of David, for Eliakim, opened doors in Jerusalem and the temple. Jesus is the key who opens the way to heaven and closes the door to misery, as the hymn writer puts it. The key of David is Jesus; He opens the way to heaven and shuts the way to Hell.

III. The Key to Heaven

My most embarrassing “being locked out” story was one Christmas in Derry. I worked in the hospital, and just before the Christmas Ball with my date waiting for me to collect her, I nipped over to the shops and the ATM to get some money, dressed in my formal suit. I managed to get the money, but when I returned to the car, I saw the keys locked inside - a real disaster!

Sadly, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, they were removed from the garden of Eden and barred from entry again. When the people of Israel choose to disobey God, their punishment was exile in a foreign country, away from the temple where God was, powerless to get back because their lives were under the control of the political superpower. These are two biblical pictures highlighting being locked out of God’s presence. The reason: our sinful disobedience and the holiness of God are incompatible. His righteous justice resulted in our being denied access. How could God welcome those who were not righteous or just into His kingdom? What was the Key?

We have already determined that Jesus was the Key. But how can Jesus be the Key; or, what it is about Jesus that allows Him to be the key to heaven? The Bible’s answer is that Jesus was *both human and divine!* The Heidelberg Catechism is helpful and concise in its explanation.

Q16: Why must Jesus be truly human and truly righteous?

A: *The justice of God requires that human nature which has sinned should pay for sin, but a sinner cannot pay for others.*

We understand this need for justice. When we know wrong has been done, our human nature mirrors God’s nature, because we are created like Him. We also understand the penalty must be appropriate. A child stealing an apple does not require a prison term. Only a human can pay for human sin. Put bluntly, if you steal my car, I do not seek the punishment of your dog! Jesus shared in our nature and identified with us in the experiences of the fall, temptation, and suffering, but it was essential that Christ Himself *not* sin in this identification with us. Otherwise, He could not pay for our sin. Jesus had to be a man so that He could identify with us, suffering in our place and sympathizing with us in our weakness.

Q17: Why must He also be true God?

A: *So that, by the power of His divinity, He might bear the weight of God’s anger in His humanity and earn for us, and restore to us, righteousness and life.*

No mere human could bear and fully satisfy God's wrath. By nature, this wrath is infinite in quality. To bear the weight of God's wrath, it is essential that the Saviour be divine. To satisfy this wrath, He had to offer a sacrifice of such value that God would be pleased to accept it. Only Christ as God could bring a sacrifice of infinite and eternal value to God that would satisfy (propitiate) heaven's wrath and earn for us eternal life and favour with God. The divinity of Christ means that He can be raised from the dead (after conquering death) and therefore apply the benefits He has earned for us. Jesus had to be truly God so that He could satisfy God's wrath and secure for us true righteousness and life.

None of us can get to heaven without Jesus. Today, we celebrate the historical birth of Jesus who is revealed to us as the Key of David and the key to heaven. By opening wide the door of heaven, He shuts the door on Hell and misery.

IV. Application

What will it mean for each of us to pray, "O come, Thou Key of David, come"?

God knows each person's heart. He knows where we stand in relation to Him. If you hear the Holy Spirit telling you that you are locked out and unable to be in His presence because of your sin, please know He desires, indeed longs, that you would pray, "Jesus, thank you for being the key to heaven. Please come and open the way for me to life and heaven."

When we face the reality of the misery of this fallen world and wonder if there is any hope, I can confidently say there is! He has come as the Key who unlocks the door to heaven, He has dealt with the cause of misery on the cross. Jesus is the key that locks up misery. We must ask Him to "come, Thou Key of David" and help us trust Him in the misery.

When we experience the door of heaven opened by Jesus, we can rejoice, worship and recommit ourselves to Him. We follow Him, obeying His word with perseverance because we know He has come and when He comes again, all He promised will be ours. "Jesus says, "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you and open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and not denied my name" (Rev 3:8).

Let us continue to serve Him and one another into 2021. Let us cry for Christ this Christmas. He is the key to heaven and life eternal, our hope that shuts the door on misery.

*O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery.*

Praise: IPH 330 O Little Town Of Bethlehem

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: IPH 319 Good Christians All, Rejoice!

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.