

Twisted Scriptures - Who Has the Keys?

Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction

- In March of 2013, Catholic clergy from around the world gathered at the Vatican to choose the next pope. One of the clergy to arrive was Bishop Basilius of the order of Corpus Dei from the Italian Orthodox Church. He arrived with a small entourage of priests to assist him. **PP** He mingled with several other cardinals and bishops right outside of the Sistine Chapel before heading to the gathering place for the secret meetings to choose the pope.
- After about an hour of congregating with the other clergy, several armed guards approached Basilius, questioned him, and then escorted him and his entourage out of the Vatican. You see, even though Basilius had initially made his way through security, chatted with the other cardinals and bishops, and posed with them for pictures, he wasn't actually a bishop, and none of his entourage were priests.
- His real name is Ralph Napierski. He's not a bishop, he's a German blogger. There's no such thing as the Italian Orthodox Church, and there's no Catholic order called Corpus Dei. But for almost an hour he fooled security and all the other clergy into thinking he was one of them as he looked the part, acted the part, and said all the right things.
- As we continue our Twisted Scriptures series today, we're in the middle of our mission's month. And today we're going to be looking at a verse that is very often used for evangelism and we're going to unpack how it is subtly twisted before we straighten it out and learn what Jesus is really addressing.
- First, **PP** we're going to look at how its twisted. So as you turn to **Revelation 3**, let me pray.

Twisted

- **Revelation 3:20 PP** "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."
- There are several ways this verse is twisted, but I'm only going to be focusing on the main one.
- Countless evangelistic tracts purporting to explain the gospel have used this verse, and such celebrated evangelists as Billy Graham have made this verse one of their key texts in their call to the unbeliever to be saved.
- "Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart." They plead, "And if you would just open the door and accept Jesus into your heart, you will be saved".
 - You see, this verse is used to promote a gospel that places all of the emphasis on making a decision for Jesus, praying a prayer, asking Jesus into your heart and 'getting saved'.

- Using this verse this way skews what Jesus was really addressing in this passage. He's not saying that all someone has to do is open the door of their heart to Him and then their good to go.
 - In fact, Jesus is addressing a church of people who had all seemingly professed to accept Christ. They had all seemingly 'asked Jesus into their hearts'. And yet Jesus is still speaking to the Laodicean 'Christians' in these very strong terms.
- So what is Jesus saying? Well, here's the long and short of it: **PP**
 - This is a message, in particular, to those who have been self-deceived and led astray by religiosity and have not submitted to Christ as Master and King, or are holding back parts of their life from His ownership and control.
 - It's a message to those who have the appearance of a Christian, but they keep the keys to their kingdom instead of submitting to God's rule and reign and joining His kingdom.
 - These Laodiceans, who called themselves Christians, looked the part, acted the part, and sounded the part...but they were frauds that Jesus was exposing and then giving a second chance at really understanding the gospel.
- Let's dive into the passage and unpack the words of our Master, and as always, we begin with context. **PP**

Straightened – Context

- **Revelation 3:14** "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.'"
- Sadly, we don't have time to dive into these names of Jesus – suffice to say, they remind us that Jesus is the one who sees us clearly and who speaks truth into our lives through the Holy Spirit. And here, He is dictating a letter to John to the church in Laodicea.
- Laodicea is the very last of the churches addressed and unfortunately for them, they're the only one for which Jesus doesn't have a kind word. So the tone here is pretty strong. So forgive me if I start to get a little strong in my delivery, when we preach we're always seeking to reflect the tone of the passage.
- Well, how did it get to this point?
 - Laodicea was a strategically important city located at the intersection of the two trade roads **PP**
 - It was destroyed in AD 16 by an earthquake and then rebuilt and the area stabilized by Rome. It had to pipe water in through an aqueduct system, which was the city's one drawback, but otherwise it flourished under Roman rule.
 - As it flourished it developed three main industries:
 - First, because of its strategic location at the trading crossroads, **PP** it became the main financial banking center of the region

- Second, the lands immediately around the city had a unique type of sheep **PP** that grew soft, raven-black wool that was used to make expensive clothing for nobles and other textile products
- Third, a nearby medical school **PP** produced a world-renowned eye salve that was used to cure all kinds of eye ailments
- These three industries allowed the city to become exceedingly wealthy. At some point, **Colossians 1:7-8, 4:12-13** tells us that it was evangelized by Epaphras, one of Paul's disciples.
- However, a devastating earthquake again destroyed the city in AD 60, killing many of the inhabitants. But this time, instead of relying on the Romans to rebuild, the city was able to rebuild itself with its great wealth.
- From that time to the writing of Revelation, the city continued to grow in wealth and over the decades a new generation of those who called themselves Christians emerged. As we'll now see, Jesus shows them that their **PP** condition isn't good.

Straightened – Condition

- **Revelation 3:15-17** “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”
- Ouch. I mean, what more devastating thing could Jesus say to a ‘church’ of His ‘followers’?
- In scripture, ‘works’ always reveal one’s true faith. (see **Matt 7:16, Rom 2:6-8**). Though salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, our works prove the genuineness of our faith.
- **James 2:14 PP** “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”
 - The answer, of course, is ‘no’, because faith without a life that reflects that faith isn’t real faith. It’s not true submission to Christ as Master and King.
- These are the types of people that Paul talks about in **2 Timothy 3:5** when he describes those “who [have] the appearance of godliness, but [deny] its power” (see also **Romans 10:2-3**).
- This is the Laodicean church...a ‘church’ of people who call themselves Christians but have not actually submitted to Christ. They’re ‘Christians’ by outward appearances, and nothing more. Just like ‘Bishop Basilius’. **PP**
- Jesus says that these people are “neither cold nor hot”, they’re just blah...as lukewarm as the water that flowed into the city that no one wanted to use. The Laodiceans knew exactly what Jesus meant by this because they experienced lukewarmness every day as they had to either heat up their water or cool it down to make it useful for something.

Lukewarm water was useless to them. Kind of like salt that has lost its saltiness in **Matthew 5:13**...it's only fit to be thrown away.

- Jesus was saying that these were a people who weren't filled with spiritual passion or a desire to truly serve Jesus as their Master and King. They're content to just float along calling themselves Christians, going to church, throwing money in the plate – a lot of money due to their wealth, praying when they needed something, 'being good people', but always remaining in control of their lives.
- And they're useless to Christ. Not only were they self-deceived and not really saved, they had no power within them. All they could ever hope to accomplish was superficial, human-sized results that brought no glory to God.
- This church left such a bad taste in our Lord's mouth, He said to them "I will spit you out of my mouth." **PP** The word 'spit' (Gk. *emeō*) means to vomit from contempt and disgust.
- These words echo the warning of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when he cautioned his hearers of what He would do to those who were outwardly religious but hadn't submitted to truly following Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. **PP** The 'Jesus is my homeboy Christians', the 'Big man upstairs' Christians, who really don't care to actually follow Jesus as Master. Jesus says of such people.
 - **Matthew 7:21-23 PP** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"
- **John MacArthur PP** says, "There is no one further from the truth than the one who makes an idle profession but never experiences genuine saving faith. No one is harder to reach for Christ than a false Christian."
- **John Stott** adds, **PP** "Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth-century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion."
- Why is this? Like the church in Laodicea, it's all about control and submission to Christ's authority. It's about either handing Him the keys to our lives and joining His kingdom, or trying to keep control for ourselves.
 - Laodicea was comfortable – lots of wealth – and the people there – including those who called themselves Christians – were comfortable practicing a 'form' of faith but had never actually submitted to the mastery of God in their lives. They were

quite comfortable being their own masters...and that's not true faith and submission.

- Jesus knew exactly what he was saying when he called them poor, blind, and naked. They trusted in their riches from their banks instead of trusting in Jesus, and so though they thought they were rich they were poor.
- They healed their eyes with the special eye salve from the medical school, yet they were spiritually blind.
- And they clothed themselves in the finest wools, yet they were spiritually naked.
- They were happy to pray a prayer and profess their trust in Jesus, but really they only trusted in themselves and just wanted the salvation that Jesus promised, without actually submitting their lives to being His disciples.
- And let me just pause right here and say that the reality is that this is true of many of those who call themselves Christians today. Even right here in this church. I know, because that used to be me. I grew up here in Cornerstone. Pastor Tim was my youth pastor. I knew all the answers, and genuinely believed them, and I think I was a pretty 'good kid.'
- I was baptized and made a profession of putting my faith in Jesus that I truly meant. But I had no idea what the meaning of really being a disciple of Jesus actually meant, and I kept control of my life as best I knew how. I did what I wanted to do in secret and put on my nice little Christian façade every Sunday and played at following Jesus.
- Listen people, I'm passionate about this message because I firmly believe I was bound for hell until Jesus taught me what it meant to truly be His disciple and submit control of my life to Him. And it's my prayer and hope that if that's you, that the Lord's message to the Laodicean church would wake you up too.
 - Ask any of the pastors here what our greatest concern is and we'll all tell you it's that there could be someone who sits in these seats every week that is self-deceived and Christian in name only...just like the Laodiceans...and not do anything about it.
 - Hopefully that's not you. But it really could be. If it is, please listen to the words of Jesus. He's calling you out of your façade into a true relationship with Him.
 - And if you're genuinely following Jesus, we've got to be constantly evaluating and listening to the Spirit's call to submit everything to Him, to hold nothing back...to let Him have every part of us.
 - I can't tell you how hard this hit me these past couple weeks as I've been praying and preparing for this and the Holy Spirit was showing me areas that had yet again fallen under my 'control' that I wasn't giving Jesus the keys to.

- But how do we do that? How do we give Him the keys? Thankfully, Jesus doesn't just bring the hammer and then drop the mic and walk away. Jesus shows them what the cure **PP** for their condition is because, praise God, He's a God of grace and mercy. Amen.

Straightened – Cure

- **Revelation 3:18-22** "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. **PP** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"
 - We don't have time to break this down. But just skimming the surface we find that Jesus wants the Laodiceans – and us – to see where we get our true riches, our true healing, and our true covering from. It's not from anything we can do ourselves; it's not from the Laodiceans' banks, sheep, or eye salve; it's not from something that we can control and earn on our own.
 - These things only come from Jesus when we humbly submit to Him and trust in Him not just to save us, but to transform us, and invite us into His kingdom work giving us a purpose, all as we await His return when He'll restore all things.
 - That's the whole gospel. Not just that we pray some emotion infused prayer and ask Jesus into our hearts. But that we truly go to Jesus for everything and receive all of the things that He's promised us as His adopted brothers and sisters as we allow Him to be the Master and Lord of our lives in all things.
- Look at **verse 19** - Jesus truly loved this church and Jesus loves all of us. In fact, He loves us enough to speak a sharp word to snap us out of our deception so that we would see the true state of ourselves when we don't submit to Him.
- Just like a loving parent he reproves and disciplines us, not because He's being a jerk, but because He loves us and wants us to finally start following Him with all we are. No more playing around. No more facades, no more holding on to the things that we want to keep in our control.
 - He hasn't abandoned even this, the worst of the seven churches, and He hasn't abandoned us. He continues to call out to us to submit to Him, not just in an emotional moment, but for our entire lives as we follow Him and learn from Him and become more and more like Him as we go wherever He leads us.

- But we'll only be led if we allow Him to lead us. And this brings us to our twisted scripture in **verse 20**, **PP** "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."
- The Laodiceans claimed to be followers of Jesus, they had even moved in to Jesus's house and called themselves His church. Yet, they had barred the door to their master and wouldn't let Him in. They refused to give up control and remained content in their wealth and comfort apart from Christ. Jesus isn't painting the image of some wayward vagabond who's looking for a place to stay. 'Oh please let me in?' No, he's banging at the door of the house because He's supposed to be the one who owns it, and the servants are keeping Him out.
- Yet, the master did stand at the door **PP** incessantly banging against it (the Greek (Gk. *krouō*) for 'knock' means incessant banging), waiting for them to open up and let Him in. He didn't walk away.
 - He yearns to take His rightful place as the Master of the house, the Lord of the Church, and take control back so that His power would go forth and the Holy Spirit could move us to do mighty works in His name to the Glory of God the Father.
- That's what this verse is about. Not some nice little image about accepting Jesus into your heart so that you can merely be saved. No, it's so much more than that – it may start there, but it can't end there. We've got to get away from that anemic gospel and see that Jesus desires to be our Master so that we can have a deep and genuine relationship with Him, so that we can eat with Him and enjoy His presence and His power in our lives.
- Be zealous and repent Jesus says in **verse 19**. As we do that we hand over the keys to our kingdom and let Him take control. If you call yourself a Christian and yet you've locked the door to Jesus's control in your life, you are not a Christian. I don't say that flippantly or to try to scare you. I say that, because that was me. I was a self-deceived "Christian" that had no idea what it meant to be a real follower of Jesus, to truly be His disciple.
 - Praise God for His grace and mercy in my life. That He continued to pursue me and taught me what it meant to truly submit to Him. And praise God that He continues to teach me and empower me so that I can continually hand over the keys to Him.
- Now you may be wondering, well, what does it mean to truly submit and follow Him? Well, let me teach you what it meant to be a disciple of someone in Jesus day. **PP** These are drawn directly from the 1st century writings of Jewish Rabbis explaining what they expected of their disciples.
 - And remember Jesus was a rabbi. And it is disciples, not converts, that Jesus charged us to make (**Matthew 28:19-20**). So what's a disciple?
 - First of all, **PP** a disciple was someone who memorized their teacher's words

- Second, PP a disciple learned their teacher's traditions and interpretations of scripture
 - Third, PP a disciple imitates their teacher's actions
 - Fourth, PP a disciple was taught to raise up other disciples
 - Fifth, PP a disciple submitted completely to the will of the one whom they followed
- I'm just going to list these here and I hope and pray that you meditate on them and let the Holy Spirit use this truth to convict and transform you. Ask yourself, am I doing these things...am I seriously pursuing Jesus in this way?
 - If I'm not then there's something off, and I need to ask the Spirit to help me correct it. This isn't some legalistic rubric of what we need to do – because if we turn it into legalism it's still dead religion. These 5 things are simply what Jesus expected of His disciples.
 - And if you don't take seriously what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, then you're no different than the Laodiceans. But if you want to learn, God will teach you through His Spirit.
 - Our God is a God of grace and mercy and He's calling out to us who are deceived and not truly submitting to Him. Whether that means our faith is a façade or it means we're saved, but holding something back, Jesus is saying 'it's not too late'.
 - When we submit, we'll find that we have life and have it abundantly by the grace of our God. We'll dine with Him and enjoy His presence and power in our lives as we walk confidently not just in our salvation, but in the knowledge that He will continually transform us, and invite us into His work until He returns and restores all things.
 - The Greek PP word for 'eat' (Gk. *deipneō*) here in **verse 20** refers to eating the last meal of the day, the evening supper. God is calling out to us so that He can come in and have fellowship with us, but we have to recognize that this is the last meal; the time is short and the long night of judgment will fall upon us unless we repent and turn to Christ with zeal; we as His disciple and He as our Master.

Conclusion

- We can't be like Ralph Napierski, the German blogger who pretended to be a bishop but was kicked out when his ruse was exposed. You know how they figured out he was a fraud? Upon closer inspection, though close, the clothing he wore was off. It was clothing that he acquired, not that had been given to him. On top of that, he failed to submit to the proper authority when he arrived and so they knew he was a fraud because he didn't follow the instruction set before him.
- We can't wear clothes of our own making, or rely on the riches or wisdom of this world. We can't keep the keys to our lives under our control. PP Listen, it's time to turn the keys

over to Jesus, and let Him have full control of our lives; that we'd be clothed in the forgiveness and control of our master.

- If you say you're a follower of Jesus, then you've been bought by His blood on the cross (**1 Cor. 6:20**). You aren't your own, you belong to God. Give Him the keys and let Him take His rightful place as Master of your life. Be His disciple and follow Him with the zeal that the Holy Spirit produces within you.
- By God's mercy and grace He's calling out to us, knocking on the door of the house that we say He owns. Will you hand over the keys? I pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, and by the grace of God, every one of us says, 'it's all yours Lord'. Amen. Amen.