

### Unlocking Heaven With our Lips

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from The Living God, and His Son Jesus—The Christ, Who Gives you The Keys To His Kingdom, Builds His Church from the words of your lips, and Promises Victory over hell’s gates. ■

So— What’s the talk out there lately? What are you hearing? The King Of Heaven Wants to Know! Does That surprise you? Our King Cares about gossip?

People talk, don’t they? Are you listening? Jesus Asks His disciples: “Whad’ya know? What are... you ...hearing? What are people saying,” Asks Jesus, “about Me?”

Straight to the point: What are you saying about Jesus? Anything? ... Nothing? Who do you say Jesus Is? —That Is actually the single most vital and important question in the universe!

Fifteen years ago, a public opinion poll surveyed modern Israelis, asking them twenty questions about Jesus. Most believe His Hebrew Name is pronounced “Yeshu” (which is not a real name, but a corruption of the Name “Y’shu-a”). Medieval rabbis called Jesus a deceiver, even a sorcerer, so they refused to use His real Name; dropped a letter to form a Hebrew acronym: Yim-mach Shemo Ve-zikro (which means: “May His Name and Memory be blotted out”). That medieval “curse” was partially realized: “Yeshu” is how Jesus is known in Israel today. In the survey: 62% knew Jesus Performed some Miracles, 35% knew Jesus only as a “Jew who started a new religion”, but only 5% of Israeli citizens ever heard that Jesus Rose from the dead. Only 5%!

Jesus Asks This Question of all His disciples—“Who do people say that I Am?” Many say: He’s some kind of prophet (they said that in Jesus’ own day). Being compared to Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptizer was high praise—even proves —people believed a man could come

back from the dead! Many Muslims today would call Jesus a prophet—for that’s what the Koran calls Him. Many others around the world probably describe Him as someone who started a new religion called “Christianity”. Well: what’s that religion all about, anyway? Politics? Is it just about morality? Thomas Jefferson (and many others in his day) thought Jesus was a very good Teacher. So do Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians and many liberals who say He’s just a man; they scoff at the idea He Rose from the dead. How about: a good Example? Like Ghandi, Mother Theresa, or the Dalai Lama? George Washington chopped down a cherry tree but couldn’t tell a lie; Abraham Lincoln died for his country. Is that all Jesus Did?

“Who do you say that I AM?”, Asks Jesus: Of you, and me, and every person who’s ever heard His Name. No: His question is not “What do you think about Me?” or “Who do you THINK I AM”, but “Who do you (actually) SAY I AM?” What words actually leave your lips? How do you actually speak of Jesus to others? Are you ashamed even to say His Name? We might admit we go to Church; if we’re brave, perhaps we let a few people know we read the Bible now and then; to close friends, we may even admit we’re Christians. But how often do you say The Name “Jesus”? How often do you tell others in words, spoken out loud, that you actually believe He Is “The Christ”? And what’s That really mean, anyway? Do you actually know? No: it’s NOT His last Name! “Christ” comes from the Greek word “Christos”, which translates the Hebrew word “Meshiach” (or Messiah). “Christ” is a Title, a Job Description Of The One Who Died To Pay The Penalty For your sin and mine—the sin of all mankind for all time. The One God Sent To Save His people. “Christ” Means: The Anointed One. Meaning: Someone Dumped Something On Him. What Was That? The Holy Spirit! At His Baptism!

The Spirit *Descended* Upon Jesus As a dove, and John said, **“Behold: The Lamb Of God, Who Takes away the world’s sin!”**

Yet: What *do we* say: when Jesus’ Name is used as a casual curse? Usually: nothing. We rarely defend Jesus’ reputation with our own lips, even *speak* of Him much at all; much less *explain* what He Did (and Still Does) in this world. Even worse: we ourselves *misuse* His Name. He Commands us to pray– to call upon His Name in prayer –yet we don’t. Fact is: that means we *deny* His Claims upon us—That He *Made* us His Own In Holy Baptism. We *don’t want* A Substitute; just a Coach; not A Savior, just a fill-up or a short lift; not a Messiah, but a model. Which means (all too often): we worship an idol, and not Jesus. *Repent!*

Jesus *Builds* His Church—That’s What He Said. He Builds It; that’s not our doing! And: not on the character of a man like Peter or any human pastor, but on The Power of Proclamation. What you say! Spoken Words! When you *declare* with your lips Who Jesus *Is*, you *confess* Him To Be The One Who Rescued you from your own sin, and also –Savior Of the whole world. (Yes: God Established The Office Of The Holy Ministry: The Office Of The Keys –and we’ll get to That in a minute). But Jesus Doesn’t Want only ministers to tell people Who He Is. He Calls every Rescued person –every Baptized believer –to *make* This Good Confession. Speaking words from your lips about 1) Who Jesus *Is*, 2) What He *Did For* you and 3) *Why*. That *touches* human souls. Spoken words! That’s how The Holy Spirit Creates Faith! Calls, Gathers, Enlightens and Sanctifies Christ’s Body on earth, and Keeps It With Jesus In The One True Faith. It’s not something you can see –that faith is invisible. In a sense, then: Christ’s Church Is also invisible; but in fact: here you are! The True Church Is Where His Name is being proclaimed and where His Word is being taught in Its Truth and Purity. *Listen* to What The Son Of The Living God Said Himself In **Psalm 2: “I Will Surely Tell Of The Decree Of The Lord”**. So we confess what we believe: Jesus

*Died To Save* each and every person you will ever meet. ... Do you tell them That?

There’s someone you’re *thinking* of right now to whom you *could speak* those words. But we don’t; we’re silent. Why? In part, it’s because: we *don’t realize* how rich we *really are* –as Baptized believers. People Jesus *Rescued* from hell. From death. And from our slavery to sin.

That’s where today’s Epistle reading comes in: In his Letter to The Church at Rome, St. Paul said More than *could* be said in a single sermon. In fact: God Himself Says (right here!) to you: There’s Infinitely More Here to *know* about Me and My Gifts to you than you *will ever* know –than you can ever know! It’s literally Awe-Inspiring; *Amazing!* It Moves St. Paul to say Something He does not say anywhere else in the New Testament: –“**Oh!**”-- Like: “*Wow! Oh my! Oh Lord! O Great God Almighty!*”

His Riches Are *unsurpassed!* Imagine a great sand dune, an enormous gravel pit, filled full –not of sand or gravel –but gold coins. And: It stretches to the horizon! There’s no end to it! it’s bottomless–so deep! Be dangerous if you fell into it –you’d *sink* down under –you’d *drown* in These Riches. And: That gigantic pile of gold coins stretches *beyond* what you can *grasp* or *see* or *think* or even *imagine* – it’s only a drop in the bucket –it’s An Ocean, A Galaxy, Of Riches!

And get This: It’s All His! It All *Belongs* to our Heavenly King! **“Oh! The Depth Of The Riches and Wisdom and Knowledge Of God!”** **Oh, wow! Wow whee!** And that’s not all. It’s All His–yes. But He also Says: “It’s All yours. Here: Take It. Open It up. Come on In. Here’s The Keys. It’s All yours–and It’s All Open to anyone you let in. –and: Closed to anyone you lock out.”

The Key–The Key To The Whole Thing. Everything. All things. Heaven and earth –The Key To All Of God’s Riches and Wisdom –The Key to *Knowing and Understanding* God As Father, and The Son He Sent To Rescue us, and Be our King –The Key To Being Guided By God’s Own Counselor–The Spirit Who *Knows*

The Mind Of God Himself –The Key To Him Is ... –What?

Forgiveness. Forgiveness. That Unlocks Heaven and All Its Treasures. Right here on earth. Forgiveness Is The Key. The Key Is Forgiveness.

You Have That Key. With you now. In your heart, your mind, and your lips. How Did It Get there? Through Holy Baptism! And: The Holy Supper. And: from Spoken Words –preached into your ears! It Belongs to Jesus and His Bride–His Own Body, The Church. He Gave The Key to you– Forgiveness. You use It. Or: you don't. You hold It back, or you put It out there. To Bind or to Loose. To Catch or Release. To Imprison or Set Free. To Condemn or To Pardon. To Hold On or To Let Go. That's What It Is to Forgive –or: to withhold Forgiveness. It's The Key to Heaven. It Works Through Words. Words you speak. Your voice, your tongue, your lips. Speaking words. To unlock Heaven for someone. ... Or: ... not.

You are not free to forgive what God Does Not Want Forgiven. Or: to bind what God Does Not Want Bound. But: when you know The Will Of The Lord in the matter, you're not only free: you're Authorized, Empowered, Encouraged, yes: Commanded to speak That Forgiveness or Command. God's Own Comfort or Warning –In Jesus' Name.

Jesus Spoke Of Building His Church. From our words. Speaking out loud. Telling people: Who He Is. Then He Said: He Gives The Keys to His Kingdom to us –un-locking Heaven itself. But then He Said Something even more strange: He Said: **“the gates of hell shall not prevail”** against His Church. I've always been perplexed by this: How do “gates” prevail? They just stand there, don't they? How do they succeed or win out? ... Only when they remain closed. Latched. Locked. When the keys do not work –or worse: when they are not put to work –not even used. The only way the gates of hell can win is if we fail to unlock them with The Keys Jesus Gave us –if we refuse to forgive, and

fail to release people from hell By The Forgiveness Jesus Paid For With His Own Blood.

[\*\*Post-sermon Note <not preached> This means: The Church Is On The Attack against hell –not “on the defense” from it! \*\*]

That Forgiveness Is What God's Holy Spirit Uses To Transform our minds. And when our minds are truly Transformed, we no longer worry about fitting into the ways of this world. We're different. And we know it. To the world: you're weird. Strange. There's Something Different about you. Something this world desperately needs: Forgiveness! You are not like other people. Not guilty. Not ashamed. Not afraid. Able to resist temptation. Free of all that enslaves so many others. Eager to sacrifice your time, your energies, your ambitions, your personal desires, and your daily life: all you can accomplish in your living body as a gift –a continuing thank-offering in service to God and the people around you. You can even: speak words –to Glorify Jesus For Who He Is and What He's Done To Save you. Jesus The Christ: The Son Of The Living God.

*God's Riches and Peace  
–Which Pass all understanding–  
Keep your hearts and minds In Christ Jesus  
unto Life Everlasting. Amen.*