

THE PARABLE OF THE KEYS

by S. Michael Wilcox

Once there was a little boy and a little girl who loved Jesus very much, and he loved them. They were kind and always told the truth, and whatever Jesus wanted them to do they tried their best to do.

"You may come to my house," Jesus told them one day, "and there I will give you a gift."

They put on their best clothes, made sure they were clean, and went to Jesus' house.

It was a beautiful house, and it made them feel beautiful too, just to be inside it. They met Jesus, and he gave them his gift. It was a key -- a *wonderful* key.

"Take care of this key," he said. "Put it next to your heart. Don't let it tarnish or get rusty. Always keep it with you. One day it will open a wonderful door. Whenever you wish, you may return to my house, but each time I will ask to see the key."

They promised him they would, and they went home.

They returned often to Jesus' house, and each time he asked if they still had the key. And they always did.

One day he asked if they would follow him. He led them to a hill covered with green grass and trees. On top of the hill was a mansion in the middle of a beautiful garden. Even in their dreams they had never imagined anything so magnificent.

"Who lives here?" they asked him.

"You may," he answered. "This is your eternal home. I've been building it for you. The key I gave you fits a lock in the front door. Now run up the path and put your key into the lock."

They ran up the hill and through the garden to the front door.

"If it's this beautiful on the outside," they said, "it must be even more wonderful inside!"

But when they reached the front door, they stopped. It was the strangest door they had ever seen. Instead of one lock, the door was covered with locks, hundreds of locks, thousands of locks. And they had only one key.

They put their key into one of the locks. It wouldn't fit. They put it into another. It didn't fit that one either. They tried many different locks. Finally they found the one that fit. They turned the key and the lock clicked. But the door wouldn't open.

They ran back to Jesus. "We cannot open the door," they said. "It is covered with locks, and we have only one key."

He smiled at them and said: "Do you think you will be happy living in your mansion all alone? Is there anyone you would like to live with you there?"

They thought for a while and then answered, "We would like our families to live with us."

"Go and find them," he said. "Invite them to my house, and I will give each one their very own key. Soon you will have many keys." They rushed out eagerly to find their families. They found their fathers and mothers, their brothers and sisters, and all their cousins and brought them to Jesus' house. Just as he had promised, he gave each one a key. When all had been given a key, together they returned to the great door of the mansion.

Now they had dozens of keys, but there were thousands of locks, and the door still wouldn't open. They needed more keys.

Once again they returned to Jesus. "We have brought our families," they said. "But the door still won't open."

"Do your parents have a mother and father and brothers and sisters?" He asked them. "Do you think they will be happy living in the beautiful mansion without them? If you look hard enough, you will find many, many people. Bring them all to my house, and I will give each one a key."

They looked very hard, just as Jesus had told them. They found mothers and fathers. They found brothers and sisters. They found grandmas and grandpas and great-great-grandmothers and great-great-grandfathers. They found aunts and uncles and nieces and nephews and cousins.

They found them in big cities. They found them in tiny villages. Some lived by the seashore. Some lived on the open prairie. Some lived near the mountains. Some lived far across the ocean. And some lived close, just over the next hill.

Some were blacksmiths and some were farmers. There were cobblers and tailors and fishermen. There were teachers and mechanics and shopkeepers.

Some were tall with strange-looking hats. Others were short and wore wooden shoes. They spoke different languages and came from many different countries.

They found some with long blond hair that hung far down their backs in braids. They found some with short red hair that stuck straight up and had to be hidden under a hat.

The boy and girl searched until they had found everybody and all their families.

They brought all the fathers and mothers, the brothers and sisters, the aunts and uncles, the nieces and nephews, the grandmothers and grandfathers to Jesus' house. Inside he gave each one his or her own key.

Soon all the families were gathered before the great door. There was a lock for every key. They turned the keys, but the door remained closed. There was one final lock, a great big one right in the middle of the door, and no one had its key.

The boy and girl returned to Jesus. "We have found all our families," they said. "But the door still won't open. We're missing a key and don't know where to find it."

Jesus smiled, put his arms around them, and gave each one a kiss. "I have the last key," he said, and he held it up. It was bright and shining and beautiful.

"This is the key of my atonement," he said. "Am I not a member of the family? Do you think you will be happy living in your mansion without me? Do you think I would be happy living without you? Now that you have found the whole family, all my brothers and sisters, all our Father's children, together we will enter our eternal home, for home will always be where families live and love together."

He took their hands, and the whole family opened the door, entered the mansion, and spent an eternity of happiness together.

"In my Father's house are many mansions," Jesus said. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and *the way ye know.*" (John 14:2-4; emphasis added.)

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